

Inspired  
Leadership  
for the  
YMCA  
Professional

# WAYP

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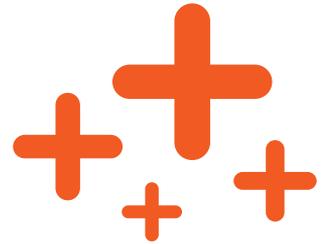
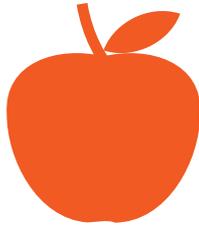
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# REFLECTING SPIRITUALITY

How your principled, caring leadership  
honors the uniqueness of every member.

▶▶ THE POINT

Professional success is tied to personal wellbeing.



# WALKING THE WALK

Here's how to improve your physical and emotional wellbeing in seven actionable steps.

By Sean Kelly

**H**ow is that work-life balance working out for you? We often hear that we've got to strike this elusive thing called "balance" between our professional and personal lives. Chances are, however, you've yet to find it. And that's because, in many ways, it just doesn't exist. As famed entrepreneur Richard Branson says, "I don't divide work and play: It's all living."



## THE BIGGEST TOLL IS on quality of life and the example you are setting for future generations.

**Sean Kelly**  
CEO and co-founder, HUMAN

YMCA professionals are just like most working professionals: stressed out and often eating foods based on convenience, rather than how they make you feel. According to a survey from the American Psychological Association, more than one-third of American workers experience chronic work-related stress. The result? Billions of dollars are lost annually due to absenteeism and medical bills.

The biggest toll, however, is on your quality of life and the example you're setting for members and future generations. As a YMCA professional, you want to be a good example to your members. Since optimal health is about the balance of mind, body, and spirit — and this is at the core of the Y's messaging and experience — how do you work on these things while also juggling your career and other commitments?

The key: You have to realize that your professional success is intricately tied to your personal wellbeing. Here are seven actionable items to improve your overall wellbeing:

**1. Rethink your snacks.** Processed food can cause you to feel anxious, foggy, and hyperactive. You can prevent these symptoms by eating whole foods, especially more fruits and leafy, green vegetables and avoiding foods with chemical additives. As Hippocrates once said, "Let food be thy medicine." The added bonus is that by fueling yourself optimally, you also set yourself up for professional success because what you eat is tied to how you feel and function.



**Action:** If you find yourself turning to a vending machine for a meal or snack, choose items that have ingredients you can pronounce. Remember WOLF: Whole, Organic, and Local Foods. Want something filling? Go for something with healthful fat and protein, like unsalted nuts.

**2. Find joyful movement.** Studies consistently show that while exercise may not lead to weight loss, it is a sure way to improve your health. Physical activity releases feel-good, stress-relieving endorphins. Instead of finding exercises to do for the sake of exercising, find an activity you enjoy doing. The "intrinsic exercise" movement espouses that we should do exercises that provide us with joy and make us feel good in our bodies rather than doing exercises as a means to an end (i.e. as punishment for eating).



**Action:** Find an exercise you enjoy by experimenting with different exercises and movements. Instead of seeking exercises that burn calories, seek movement that makes you feel good. You'll be more likely to stick to it and reap the health benefits.

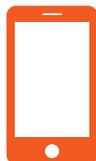
**3. Let technology work for you.** There are many fitness and health-focused smartphone apps that can make your hectic life a little easier. From apps that track your weight-lifting progress, to apps that find the right songs to match your running tempo, there is something on the market for everyone. Some of my favorites include:

**Everest** — provides step-by-step tips and encouragement from other users to help you reach your personal goals or "summit";

**Fitocracy** — this social-networking-meets-gym-time app helps you share your workouts and motivation with others;

**Fooducate** — allows you to scan a food item's barcode to find out whether it's healthful; and

**Gratitude Journal** — a mobile journaling tool that asks users to write down at least five things they're grateful for each day.



**Action:** Download a few free smartphone apps for fitness or health and test out which ones you like. You never know — these apps may be just the thing you need to keep you on the right track.

**4. Find your zen.** Meditation centers oneself, and to calm one's mind. A consistent meditation practice may help lower blood pressure and stress. The benefit of long-term practice is gaining the ability to control thoughts that can trigger stress.



**Action:** Try out a class, checking out a book on meditation, or simply finding a peaceful spot in your home or YMCA to sit in solitude and concentrate on just being and breathing.

**5. Prioritize “you time.”** We cannot be our best selves if we always put work and others before ourselves. As they say: Put your own oxygen mask on first.



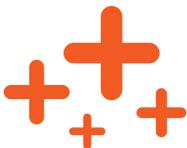
**Action:** Learn to say “no.” This can be very hard at first, but you’ll get the hang of it. You talk to your members every day about the importance of a healthy mind and body, but do you take care of your own? If you want to make sure you fit in workouts and meditation time, schedule it into your calendar and consider it a date with yourself that you cannot break. Give yourself the respect you would a friend or colleague.

**6. Get your zzzs.** Challenges, including work-related stressors, become magnified when you’re sleep-deprived. Adding insult to injury, your body’s hunger and satiation cues also get out of whack when you’re sleep-deprived, which can leave you feeling famished all day. Do yourself a favor and get at least seven hours of sleep each night.



**Action:** Always missing a reasonable bedtime? Schedule it into your calendar. Have trouble sleeping? Try meditating before you go to bed.

**7. Add, don’t subtract.** Studies show that it’s much easier to add a new task to an existing habit than to try to start a new habit. It’s also better to break down goals into small steps. For example, want to be able to do 50 push-ups and can’t even do one? Start by doing one push up after brushing your teeth and adding another every day. Before you know it, you reach your goal.



**Action:** Choose a small goal and add it to an existing habit. While it’s easy to get lost in the hustle of our lives, especially when we’re doing a job that serves others, we have to realize that our ability to lead is tied directly to how we feel in mind, body, and spirit. As a YMCA professional, you owe it to yourself, and those you work with and for, to make the time to fuel your bodies and minds optimally.



**Sean Kelly** is the CEO and co-founder of HUMAN — a socially responsible distribution source for wholesome foods via healthy vending machines, micromarkets, and more.

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