

*"Orloff and Levinson guide us in how to actively take control of what we can control with concrete strategies, mindfulness, and respect for ourselves."*

—EDMUND C. NEUHAUS, Ph.D., HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL AND McLEAN HOSPITAL

# WALKING THE TIGHTROPE

An illustration of a tightrope walker in a blue suit balancing on a thin wire. The wire is positioned over a large, textured yellow circle. The word 'THE' is written in large black letters, with the tightrope walker appearing to walk across the letter 'H'.

Solutions for  
Achieving Life Balance  
Without a Net

ERICA ORLOFF / KATHY LEVINSON

Authors of *THE 60 SECOND COMMUTE:  
A GUIDE TO YOUR 24/7 HOME OFFICE LIFE*

# Walking the Tightrope

*Erica Orloff*  
*Kathy Levinson*

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“The bewildering pace in which we live today seems contrary to a healthy rate of human development. Those in the know will come to an ‘age of reconciliation’ where we will create a balance between ourselves and other aspects of our lives, be it job, marriage, finances, or spirituality. *Walking the Tightrope* provides a stepwise guide to this change. The authors gently, through their own self-disclosure, support the reader in a realistic commitment to a balance of the ‘self.’”

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“What a large, therapeutic journey to capture life and its core . . . Not only are [the authors] clear and organized in [their] plan for balance, while simultaneously teasing through the fluff, but [their] personal vignettes of the numerous ‘insane Kodak moments’ we all share has given me room to breath, anew. I am comforted knowing my journey for balance is a shared world view.”

—Marcy Sirkin, Ph.D., Family Therapist

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*Erica Orloff*

*Kathy Levinson*



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*EO—For my mother, Maryanne Orloff, who somehow balanced three kids and work and even managed to cook gourmet meals while she was at it. I obviously did not inherit the cooking gene.*

*KL—For Master Kwon,  
a living example that through dedication, discipline, and passion  
comes excellence.*

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# PREFACE

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We all grew up with a dream that technology was going to make our lives better. The computer was going to make our jobs faster and easier. The fax would let us zip a memo across the globe in the time it took to dial a phone number. Email was going to let us keep in touch with friends and family members when we had no time to compose an old-fashioned letter or even to make a 10-minute long-distance phone call. We could give up playing phone tag and press the Send button instead.

What happened?

Instead of making our lives simpler, we are living in the first generation of the 24/7 millennium and all that concept entails. We're wired to the point of exhaustion; we're fractured and frazzled. We wear our cell phones on our hips and complain when legislation demands we get a hands-free headset for our car—when ten years ago we barely even dreamed of talking from the freeway. Our kids have cell phones, our boss expects us to answer email at 11:00 at night, and most of us take our laptops on vacation so we can wire in to the office in case there's an emergency. We're being instant messaged to death. And we're suffering from burnout. A lot of us wonder about that old Peggy Lee standard, "Is that all there is?"

Then September 11 happened. The unthinkable descended on our nation, terrorism hit our shores, and over 2,000 people left for the office or hopped on a plane never to return. Suddenly, we all examined words like "family time" and "balance" in a new light. For those of us who have had to board a plane post-September 11 for our jobs, the idea of leaving home became frightening. We were panicked and tired. Many of us talked about slowing down, taking time to tuck our kids in, soothe a child frightened by nightmares, pursue our dreams, find a deeper purpose in our lives, find something greater than ourselves to resonate with. We swore we would change . . . And most of us haven't.

As the economy slid into a recession, as the reality of having to make a living collided with the idea of more free time, we were just as wired as before. So are we a nation pushing closer and closer to burnout across the board? And what can we do about it?

## Preface

This book is about balance. It's about bringing yourself back from the brink of burnout and helping you connect to those things that are most important to you—whether that be hearth and home or an avocation or passion to follow a dream. We're going to bring six areas of your life into clear focus and help you figure out what you need to balance the following:

1. Your financial life
2. Your work life
3. Your relationships—with significant other, family, friends and professional peers
4. Your health
5. Your social world
6. Your spiritual life

Each chapter will offer a quiz and questions to help you see if you are “out of balance” in that area, as well as some incisive questions that will bring into focus what you *really* want for that area. Next we'll tackle some concrete, practical, real-life advice about how to attain balance. We also include a chapter on diagnosing when you're slipping back into bad habits and old routines that will lead you back into the 24/7 rut.

Most important, this book is about real life—yours and ours. We see the other self-help gurus out there. Sure, it would be nice to go off to expensive spas and ashrams and contemplate life, to be able to unhook and unplug. But the reality is that we need to UNWIRE our own inner selves. We have to be able to find balance within the realm of technology, to carve out a little space that is our own, without saying the heck with cell phones, email, and laptops. We have to be able to earn a living and in light of the fact that the dot.com explosion has gone kaput, it's less likely any of us will become instant millionaires—playing Lotto aside. We're back to building careers and success the old-fashioned way—with hard work, long hours, and ingenuity.

We can't pitch our cell phone into the toilet. We can't abandon our email. We *can* find some balance so that the “wired” parts of our life aren't overtaking the “unwired” parts, so that we actually find five minutes to take care of ourselves.

## Preface

You need this book if:

- ▲ You can't remember your last vacation, or the only vacation you've taken in the last year involved checking in with the office every morning and afternoon.
- ▲ You don't routinely take time out for yourself. Time out does not include "answering your email," returning phone calls, or anything connected to the office. Time out is pure unadulterated time for yourself.
- ▲ You watch six months go by and realize you haven't spent enough one-on-one time with the important people in your life.
- ▲ You show signs of serious career or emotional burnout, such as intense fatigue, poorly controlled bursts of anger or weepiness, insomnia, lack of focus, unexplained depression, feeling so stressed that you routinely have panic attacks or heart palpitations, and so on.
- ▲ You no longer "dream" about anything more future-oriented than what to make for dinner or when your next presentation is.
- ▲ Your travel or job demands are crowding out the hobbies, people, and ideas most important to you.

Maybe you never had a life in balance . . . maybe you did once but now you're so wired that it's out of control. The time is now to take it back. If there's one thing September 11 showed this nation, it's the fragility of existence. People who have serious illnesses or have come back from devastating crises often report how their lives flashed before their eyes. Sometimes they're never the same and they treat each day as a gift. But eventually, for many, that close-to-death experience fades in consciousness and it's back at work, back at the daily grind. Back to a life out of balance.

One final note . . . this isn't a passive book. It requires you to dig deep and answer many questions honestly. But by the end, you should be moving toward personal fulfillment and a life a little less wired.

**Erica Orloff**

**Kathy Levinson**

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