

Balcony Time

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I could feel the emotional overload as he described the expanding pile of tasks before him. Everything on this youth worker's to-do list screamed "URGENT." He shook his head in frustration, "I'll never get it all done!"

He was just beginning to understand.

Effective youth workers know that they will *always* have too much on their plates. What is astonishing to me is not that almost every youth worker I know has too much to do but that so many of them are surprised by it.

Far too many of us are like the five-year-old taking her 100-pound dog for a walk. Driven by unpredictable, yelping demands, we feel incapable of doing anything to move our ministries in any direction. Our work becomes reduced to a series of erratic steps that takes us nowhere, each step a random replica of the one before.

The few who have stepped off of this treadmill have one thing in common: They almost all practice what I call *balcony time*.

In balcony time, we step out of the wild, rushing current of *doing* ministry and step into a place where we can actually work ON the ministry. It's the principle that Tom Watson, once president of IBM, understood well when he said, "We didn't do business at IBM, we built one." (Michael Gerber, The E Myth p. 70).

The youth worker who stays out of the balcony will be perpetually driven by other people's agendas and be a likely candidate for premature burn-out. It is in the balcony that we find the leverage to move our ministries forward; it is in the balcony that we move out of a victim mentality and into the mindset of a leader; it is in the balcony that we learn to say no to the secondary priorities in order that we can attend to the most essential ones.

I know what you're thinking: "Balcony time sounds great, but exactly *how* do I do it?" You can begin by carving out a block of at least four hours of balcony time this week. Promise yourself that, during this time, you will not answer the phone, respond to emails, plan this week's programs, or accomplish anything on your bulging urgent list.

During your time in the balcony, you might, for example, develop strategies for achieving your ministry's 3-year objectives (or work on a process to create three-year objectives); you might develop a list of potential leaders to recruit, develop job descriptions for leaders, or schedule time to meet with (or find) your own spiritual director.

Balcony time is not the same as Sabbath time or devotional time. The balcony is the place where we take a look at our calendars to insure that our Sabbath time and quiet time is protected. It's not the place to work on this week's top priorities; it is the place where we determine what those top priorities are. It is the place where we make the hard decisions about what things will simply not get done in a given week.

Show me a youth worker's schedule, and I'll show you the future of his or her ministry. Without balcony time, the future will just be an older, more tired version of what they see right now.

So climb on up. The view may just surprise you.

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