

Finding A Life Fit

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

This year started out like any other year. Very busy getting the school year started off on the right foot. I quickly found I was not sleeping at night, was becoming very irritable, and was not enjoying my job. My superintendent is a very supportive person and not one to overwhelm us with work. He is a firm believer that we need to have a separation of work and home life, that we need to leave for the day at an early hour.

I knew if I did not change something in my professional life, I would not be able to continue in this position. I truly love what I do and where I am doing it, but I could not continue the way I was going. Therefore the purpose of my action research was to figure out how I could better balance my life inside and outside of school.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered if I was cut out to be a principal. Early in the year I was finding I was only sleeping 2-4 hours a night. I was becoming very grouchy at home, as well as at school. I was beginning to wonder if I was going to be one of those principals that does it 3-5 years and then gets out. Something had to change. At the fall conference, I heard a few people from IPLI cohort #4 do a presentation on finding a balance. That is when I knew what I needed to do. I started out with it being about finding a balance, then I read *Culturize* by Jimmy Casas and he says you cannot create a balance. That trying to create a balance implies a 50/50 split and that is near impossible to do. Jimmy calls it needing to create a life fit.

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wondering, I purchased a Fitbit to begin tracking my sleep and my steps each day. I also took some time to reflect on what my habits were and what was causing me not to sleep. I realized that I was checking my email right before going to bed every night. There was always an email that caused me to dwell throughout the night. It might have been from a parent, a teacher, or my superintendent asking me to do something the next day. It did not even have to be anything negative, my mind just could not let it go.

The first thing I did was to email our staff and let them know I would no longer check my email after 5:00 PM at night and would not be checking it at all over the weekends. I told them if they need to get in touch with me after this time they should either text me or call me, that an email would go unread until 5:00 the next morning. In addition to not checking email in the evening, I started keeping track of the amount of steps taken each day, and started riding my exercise bike.

I collected the my data in a google spreadsheet. It was nothing fancy, but an area in which to collect my steps and miles I rode on the exercise bike each day. At the end of the day I would enter those two pieces of data into the spreadsheet and would then add them up at the end of each week. I allowed the Fitbit app on my phone to do the collecting of my sleep data. All data was collected from the end of November/first of December until first of April.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data I discovered two things.

The first learning I had was with no longer reading my email in the evening I was able to obtain a better nights sleep. I almost immediately realized a difference in my quality and duration of sleep. This slide (<http://tinyw.in/LTVX>) shows the difference in my sleep from November to April, as obtained from my Fitbit.

The second learning I had was that the more steps I accumulated (I had a goal of 60,000 for the week) and the more I rode my exercise bike, the more energy I had in the evenings. While I could not find a quantitative way to track that, I know I felt like doing more things around the house when I would get home from school.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

I started my project out a search for a balance of my professional and personal lives. Shortly after starting my project I began reading a book by Jimmy Casas called Culturize. Jimmy says in that book that trying to obtain a balance in your life implies that you will have a 50/50 split of your professional and your personal life. Jimmy says that you are never completely able to obtain that 50/50 split. There are days when your professional life will demand more of you and there are days your personal life will demand more of you. Jimmy says you need to find a life fit, not a balance.

I learned that by getting more sleep at night I was better prepared for the day the next day.

Increasing my activity level at school and at home created more energy for me at home to be actively involved in my personal life. The biggest increase in my accumulation of steps occurred during the school day. In order for me to do this it meant I had to get out of my office and into the building more.

One thing I wish I had done as a part of this program is to pause my inbox on my email. With using google mail there is the ability to pause your inbox. I wish I had looked into that option to see if I could pause all incoming emails to only arrive at a few times during the day. I would like for them to come in at 6:00 AM so I could check the emails from the evening, arrive again at 10:00 AM to check the morning happenings, and then again at 2:00 in the afternoon. One of my next steps will be to explore this option.

One other thing I wish I had done was to begin a weight loss program while doing this project. While my sleep improved and my activity level improved, I did not lose any weight. One of my next steps will be to begin watching my caloric and carbohydrate intake so I can create a healthier me.

References:

Casas, J. (2017) Culturize: Every Student, Every Day, Whatever It Takes. San Diego CA: Dave Burgess Consulting Inc.