

Equinox: Moving from Imbalance to Equilibrium

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Celestial motions control the daylight hours, the tides, and the seasons. Twice a year, the sun crosses the equator, on or about

March 20 at a point called the vernal equinox, and on Sept. 23 on the autumnal equinox. The vernal equinox marks the point where the extremes of winter give way to the disorder of spring, a mix of longer days, warm breezes, and the colder weather of the past season. It is a predictable point when the center of the sun can be observed to be directly above the Earth's equator.

It is a common perception that the equinox is the perfect balance between day and night: 12 hours of light and 12 hours of dark. In reality, the day is longer than the night.

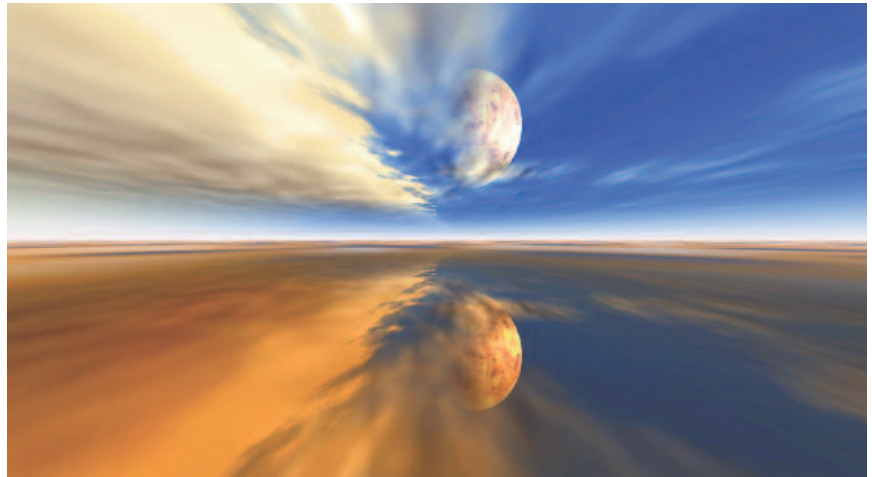
Due to the Earth's atmosphere causing light to refract or bend, we see the sun a couple of minutes before it actually rises over the horizon. Add the daylight that persists after sunset, and the day of the equinox is longer than the night.

You might also assume that the number of days from one equinox to the other—spring to autumn, or autumn to spring—is identical. It is not. The autumn-to-spring half is shorter. This imbalance exists because the Earth's orbit is not a circle but rather an ellipse, and the spinning of our planet on its axis is not uniform, nor is it fixed in space.

The movement or precession of the equinox is a wobbling motion around the earth's axis. The motion is caused by the differential gravitational forces of the sun and the moon, a phenomenon that has existed throughout the ages.

Precession is regenerative, shifting and moving forward in a struggle between gravitational force and the momentum caused by the Earth's rotation. It is a restrained and controlled pattern of imbalance that requires continual adjustment to sustain the balance of the universe.

Certainly we should all strive to obtain balance in our lives. For most of us, balance is an elusive state of well-being. If we think about it at all, we ask what does it really mean and how do we know when we've achieved it?



Necessary Imbalance

Sigmund Freud first suggested that imbalance is part of the human condition. We cannot exist in perfect balance all of the time; otherwise, nothing would get done. Imbalance forces readjustment and learning new responses for evolving situations.

Achieving balance among work and family, personal time, economic fears, and life's overall complexities can be a significant challenge. We submit ourselves to tremendous mental and physical stress when we think we must strive for perfect balance.

Like the earth, we can benefit from introducing a little imbalance into our lives.

It takes the imbalance of many factors to create a livable environment, and much like the path of the earth, the more challenging the forces, the more powerful the effect.

The concept of work/life balance has shifted significantly in recent times, with greater emphasis on psychological satisfaction with work and nonwork roles. Research has shown the absence of balance tends to create conflict as we seek to fulfill commitments in both areas. Too often, the minimum expectation is perfection, creating a high probability of dissatisfaction with our lives.

The struggle often occurs because of the many things we try to balance, let alone the many relationships we try to maintain. Add to this the almost unattainable goals we seek to achieve. Our culture predisposes us to not only desire success and accomplishment, but everything else, too. In reality, life is about

setting priorities and making trade-offs.

Having a balanced life is not about dividing our time equally among all the different parts of our life. Nor is it a state that can be achieved and frozen for all time. Work and life are like a kaleidoscope, with the many pieces shifting all the time. Balance is an ongoing, deliberate set of decisions that make the journey of life much like the turning of the earth. Balance is an accumulated possibility for any given situation.

There will always be intrusive events and competing and unequal demands upon our time. Work-life balance will vary over time and the right balance for you today will probably be different for you tomorrow. For a single person, balance will be different now than when you marry, or if you have children. Balance will shift again each time you start a new career and when you are nearing retirement.

In the real world, balance is not a static experience; it is a readjustment in response to our surroundings. As life intervenes, bringing both positive and negative forces, imbalance becomes an important part of forward momentum. It is a perpetual journey of discovery, adversity, and development, during which balance isn't the goal, but a way of describing the outcome. The objective is to achieve balance over the long haul.

Newton suggested "an object at rest tends to stay at rest and an object in motion tends to stay in motion with the same speed and in the same direction unless acted upon by an unbalanced force." Like people, objects tend to keep on doing what they're doing, a natural tendency to resist changes. Inertia results and forward movement is less likely to occur.

Incentives disrupt and shatter inertia, whether in the form of personal goals, unexpected forces, or influences of family, work, and the economy. The disruption creates an imbalance between doing nothing and doing something.

The incentive is important in fashioning ways to adjust, to cope, to work with the imbalance, using it to move forward. Stephen Covey focuses on the power each of us has to decide what is most important in our lives, to take responsibility and to commit to organizing our lives around our priorities and to shifting our needs to meet changing demands. The key is to view the imbalance in your lifestyle as an opportunity; a perceived negative situation may result in your greatest growth and satisfaction.

Returning to Equilibrium

The equinox then is about returning to equilibrium. Each new spring season offers a persistent intervention into our lives that reinforces our connection to the greater natural cycle. We have an

*Life is like riding a bicycle.
To keep your balance you must
keep moving.*

Albert Einstein

instinctive enthusiasm for cleaning, changing habits, and making different choices. We seek to transform our lives, our closets, our bodies, our diets, our jobs, our relationships, and our intentions. We throw our environments into imbalance, a necessary and desirable possibility if we are to cultivate balance in our lives. ■

Resources

Covey, S. 5th Ed. (2004). *Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*. Free Press.

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