

Tips on Achieving Work-Life Balance from Dr. Wilma F. Bergfeld

By Shilpi Khetarpal, MD

As a young physician, wife, new mother and full-time clinician, I constantly feel pulled in various directions. As much as I try to achieve work-life balance, I constantly feel torn between the two. I have always admired women who are highly accomplished in their careers while having a family. One in particular is Dr. Wilma Fowler Bergfeld, the founder and first president of WDS.

I've known her for over a decade now and have been fortunate to know her as a colleague, mentor, teacher and friend working alongside her at the Cleveland Clinic. Several of her professional accomplishments include first female president of the AAD, founder of the WPSA, past presidents of the North American Hair Research Society (NAHRS) and American Society of Dermatopathology. She has received honors and the highest awards from virtually every society she's been involved with. Not only has she been an incredible leader, she has led by example and inspired leadership in others.

Below is her advice to dermatologists, regardless at what point they are in their career, on how to not only succeed in leadership positions but also to achieve work life balance as well.

1. **Have passion for what you do**

"It is essential to actively participate in organizations both nationally and internationally," Bergfeld says. She also recommends saying yes to any invitation to participate in any organization you want to be involved in. "By always saying yes, you will have opportunities to be at the decision-making table for various organizations. This allows you to build skills and observe others. Most importantly, it allows you to see effective behavior," she says. Participation, participation, participation is the key. Believe in your power and dare to take a chance.

2. **Improve your leadership skills**

She recommends reading books on confrontation and body language. Frequently, body language sends a bigger message than what you actually say. Also by observing effective leaders, it allows you to incorporate effective techniques.

3. **Speak less, listen more**

"When you speak, you give up an important opportunity to listen. Learn to be introspective. Think, analyze then speak," Bergfeld says. Don't just give your opinion she says. Give yourself time to plan what you'd like to say, then when asked for your opinion, give it. Also if you speak too much, no one will listen.

4. **The box theory**

The best way to achieve work-life balance is to separate various aspects of your life. Bergfeld refers to it as the 'box theory.' Her 'boxes' are clinical dermatology, dermatopathology and home. She did not let the boxes mix, and during each time only did things in that box. "At home, I left work at work so I could be engaged," Bergfeld said. "Although it is very hard during those times in each box, but when I was at home, it was a great stress reliever, because I did not bring my work home." She believes at home, one needs to create an environment that is as stress free as possible. The best

way to do this is to work hard at your job, then when you're home, leave work at the door. At home, there are other issues she says. "I recommend having help and hiring people to do things for you," Bergfeld says. Admit that you will need help, especially child care and help with household chores. "It's essential to have the right child care, otherwise you will be unhappy and stressed at work. Also make sure you have a backup/emergency child care plan."

5. **Do something special for yourself**

No one will appreciate what you do, except for yourself. Do things for yourself Bergfeld says. Whether that's going to the hairdresser, shopping or other hobbies. Reward yourself for things you do for self-satisfaction. These things will make you feel good. Make time for yourself. Don't wait for someone to reward you, otherwise you'll wait forever she says. Exercise, do things to enhance your appearance, this will improve your feelings about yourself.

6. **Don't let others upset you**

"I realized this a long time ago, that if someone does something to upset you, it's THEM and not you," Bergfeld says. Be an independent person, which she says happens around the age of 40. "By that time, you'll be released from others opinions. You'll have confidence in your own decision based on the facts or matter at hand."

7. **Put yourself first**

The biggest thing is yourself, don't depend on others to make you feel good. You are the person that's responsible for how you feel and what you achieve. Take that responsibility and own it. Love yourself, you need to love yourself. You give opinions daily to your patients, you can give opinions to yourself, and you can change. If you feel you have a flaw, you have to recognize it, then change.