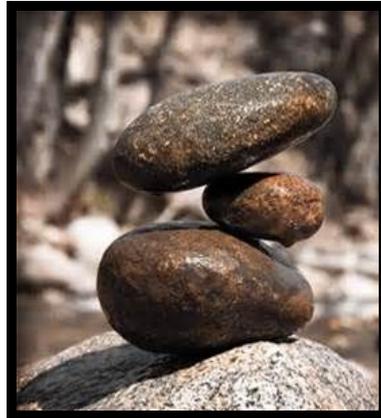


Summer Youth Employment Program's Monthly Publication:

The Road Map



Balancing Act

This month's issue takes a look at balance. The concept of balance is especially relevant during this season. It's easy to get out of balance financially if you celebrate the holidays and go overboard buying gifts. Or if you (like me) have a problem buying too many decorations each year. You may lose some balance in your diet and health with all the extra holiday parties and family gatherings. It's easy to lose balance between work and personal life if you're rushing to cram in a bunch of last-minute projects or assignments. And you may get out of balance in your relationships if you have tricky family dynamics put in the spotlight by the increased stress of holiday travel and celebrations. So it seemed this might be a good topic on which to shed some light.

This month's issue is a bit shorter, but I'll balance it out with a packed issue in January. No matter what your December holds, I hope this issue provides some insights and ideas that will linger into the new year. I can't believe we're already wrapping up this first half of the school year, but we are! Here's wishing you all a cheery, bright, and balanced winter break! See you again in 2017!

December Features:

Balancing Act: Intro

**Show & Tell:
Balance, Peace, and Joy**

Looking to 2017

Show & Tell: The SYEP Blog Page

Balance, Peace, and Joy

“Balance, peace, and joy are the fruit of a successful life. It starts with recognizing your talents and finding ways to serve others by using them.” ~Thomas Kinkade

How relevant and perfect is that quote for this month’s issue? It’s not just in line with the focus on balance. It also encompasses two major themes of the holiday season: peace and joy. No matter what your beliefs, traditions, or observances are for this month, these are concepts on which I believe we can definitely find common ground. Since the whole issue is about balance, I’m just going to take a quick look at that and then focus more on the other two.

Balance

Embrace change. Let me say the frightening part first: If your life is out of balance, regaining it is going to require change. Now, the word “change” is likely to throw me off balance on its own. But it’s like removing a band-aid: when it needs doing, take a deep breath and just let ‘er rip.

Get some definition. Before you go making too many major changes, take some time to define what balance means for your life. It’s going to be different for each person. A student’s idea of balance will be completely different from that of his or her parents, and a single adult will have a totally different definition from someone with a family. Define it for yourself, and then find some awareness of how that definition and the needed change might involve or affect those around you.

Draw some lines. Making changes will require you to form new boundaries and stick to them. This comes easily for some people. I’m not one of them. I always struggle to maintain boundaries. It’s not that you have to be inflexible at all times. Sometimes the lines will need redrawn again. The important thing is to keep your definition of balance in mind whenever you feel the urge to make those changes.

Peace

I believe that we can always find moments of peace in our lives, and that those moments can have a ripple effect on the world around us. The more peace ripples we manage to cause around us, the better our chances of starting a peace-filled tidal wave.

I write this as we come out of an election that has resulted in anything but giant waves of peace. The current political climate brings its own cloud of anxiety to those homes and family gatherings where ideals don’t line up and tempers are on high alert. For many, peace probably feels too big to go on a Christmas list. But, even amid the potential claustrophobic sense of being powerless to make a shift toward peace, hope lingers nearby - waiting to be invited in. Here are a few starting points I found for shining a light on hope and finding peace:

Let It Go. I don’t mean sing the song from *Frozen*, but if it helps I say go for it. Letting go is a huge part of finding peace. And it’s super hard sometimes. It’s one of those decisions we often have to make every day until it becomes an unconscious habit. I read an article recently that listed the benefits to *not letting go*. That was wild. The idea was that sometimes we hang on to a

hurt because we've found a benefit to keeping it. Maybe it gets us attention or allows us to maintain an air of superiority over someone else. Think about whether those things are worth the trade-off. I usually find - reluctantly - that they aren't.

Smile. It's amazing the difference this makes, especially when things seem out of control. Sometimes it's the last thing you feel like doing. It seems too insignificant to be worth the effort. How can something be too much and not enough all at once? Our minds do that sort of rationalization all the time. *X Activity* will require too much effort and won't make that big of a difference anyway. But we know those rationalizations are full of baloney. So go vegetarian with your rationalizations and cut out the baloney. Smiling is a very simple act of peace - if there's a pure intention behind it. Smirking and smugness do not count.

Don't confuse peace with happiness. Um, what? That was my response when I first stumbled upon this gem. If I'm happy then I must be peaceful, right? Eckhart Tolle says nope. His position is that happiness can be superficial while peace has depth. Buying something shiny can make me happy. But if I shouldn't have spent the money, the shiny thing will probably not bring me peace. Finding peace means we don't have to go to extremes when we experience the inevitable highs and lows of life. Being at peace means we aren't bound by the idea that we always have to be happy in order to be balanced. Just allowing yourself and others the space to not always NEED to be happy should feel like *letting go* (see what I did there?) of a giant weight.

Joy

The great thing about joy is that it's actually easy to cultivate. Listening to music, eating good food, creating something, or even just breathing fresh air can bring joy into the moment. But here are just a few other ideas:

Play. Buy a coloring book and some crayons. Do a game night. Babysit some kids. It's a good idea to share a playful experience with others when possible. The contagious laughter of a group of people might be the most efficient way I can think of to feel and spread joy.

Be randomly and anonymously kind. Do something that will bring unexpected joy to another person without having a reason or needing recognition. When I go through a Starbucks drive-thru and find that the person ahead of me paid for my drink, I have no guarantee that the person behind me will continue the trend if I do. I have no understanding of why the first person to pay for the next car's order made that choice. And I can't very well get out of my car, walk back to the person behind me and say, "I got this. You're welcome." I guess I could do that, but it would completely defeat the whole idea. And I'd look pretty ridiculous. And I'd probably get a litany of angry honks for holding up the line. Joy undone. But random and anonymous kindness can envelope the giver like a big joy-filled bear hug. Try it and tell me I'm wrong.

I hope these ideas are useful. I have to continuously remind myself about them as life happens to me and around me. And it's so important to remember that setbacks will pop up in our search for balance, peace, and joy. Some will deserve respect and attention; others will not. No matter what comes along the way, we can choose to look for hope and engage its energy for change. As always, thank you for reading. I wish you all a safe and joyful winter break and lots of balance and peace in the new year!

Looking to the New Year

We'll be back in touch after the New Year rings in. I've got a few exciting announcements in the works for 2017, and I can hardly wait to share them with everyone. For now, I'm keeping them wrapped up but be on the lookout for January's issue!

We will have another round for student applications in February, so don't worry if you missed the early application period this fall. We'll also begin our yearly process of interviewing and hiring the summer staff, so be sure to let us know if you or someone you know might be interested in working as a Coordinator next year.

I've been checking in with this past summer's participants and it's so great to hear that many of them have secured their own jobs this fall! It's bittersweet to think some of them won't be in the program next summer, but students working means the program is working. And that makes all the difference.

Thank you for all the incredible support throughout this past year. It's been a wonderful first year with the program for me, and I look forward to all the extraordinary things we'll be able to accomplish next year.

Have a safe, peaceful, joyful, and balanced holiday season and winter break!