

Six Areas In Which To Develop Margin

Ever wonder why some days you seem to handle things better than other days? Why, on a Wednesday, you can deal with a particularly stressful situation, but on a Thursday that exact same situation can push you to your limits? The answer can be summed up in one word. Margin.

Margin can be defined as the space between our load and our limits. It's the breathing room we all need in our lives. It's the buffer between where you are on your rope, and the end of your rope. When a person has margin in their life, they can weather the storm. They can get pushed toward the end of their rope, but still have enough left at the end to hang on. But when a person is at the end of their rope, they have no margin. One little thing can push them past the edge. And they fall. Hard.



The need for creating and maintaining margin is especially true for pastors and Christian leaders. Pastor and author Wayne Cordeiro, in his book *Leading On Empty*, noted that serotonin (that natural, feel-good hormone) replenishes us during times of rest, and fuels us when we're working. But if we don't replenish ourselves, our bodies replace serotonin with adrenaline. But adrenaline was designed for emergency use only. If we run completely on adrenaline day in and day out, we will sooner or later burn out.

The solution is to maintain margin. Since maintaining margin is so critical to leading a healthy life and ministry, here are 6 key areas in which to develop and maintain margin:

Schedule

Allow for *extra* time in your schedule to deal with unexpected issues that may arise. When something unexpected comes up and you're called on to deal with it, you can say "Certainly! I've got the time."

Financial

Dave Ramsey and other financial planners encourage people to develop and maintain an “emergency fund” to handle unexpected bills that suddenly come up. Car repairs. Medical bills. Home maintenance. Create a savings buffer. Plan ahead for those financial burdens that come up unexpectedly.

Emotional

Fill up before it's too late. Talk to a friend. Read an encouraging book. Seek wise advice from a therapist. Take a mental vacation to fill your emotional tank.

Relational

Intentionally invest relational capital into your key relationships. Your spouse. Your kids. Close coworkers. Create enough relational margin so that the relationship can handle major stress, and still survive.

Spiritual

One's spiritual life can be thought of as a cycle of breathing in and breathing out. There's a definite rhythm to it. A distinctive pace. A person must first breathe in the grace of God before they can breathe out the goodness of God. Do whatever it takes to create enough spiritual margin to maintain the rhythm of breathing in God, and breathing out God.

Physical

Exercise regularly. Eat healthy. Rest intentionally. In Hebrew thought, a new day started in the evening, so the first thing people did for the day was rest. Then, they'd work. Try adopting that mindset. Rest to work, don't work to rest.

Pastor and author Bill Hybels has written and spoken about the need to constantly refill your “replenishment bucket.” He says the best thing you can bring to your church, your team, or your family is a filled up bucket. And the Apostle Paul wrote about overflowing with hope, overflowing with thanksgiving, overflowing with joy. So examine these six areas of life. Do whatever it takes to create enough margin to be able to handle the tough times, and maybe build up enough reserve to have excess! Then you will be able to echo the well-known words of King David, “You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.”

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