

# **ADVENTURES IN MEDICINE**

**Career & Life Planning**

# **Survival Guide**



*Job  
Transition*

*Discovery Resource*

**ST-10**



**Your Work-Life Balance Guide:**

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Raised in a family of physicians, Iris Grimm understands the difficulties of balancing a personal life while maintaining the dedication and hard work needed to build a thriving medical practice. Her personal experience, along with degrees in business management, communication, corporate and personal coaching, led her to create The Balanced Physician Program.

She provides individual and group coaching programs, as well as workshops and presentations to thousands of physicians on topics such as work-life balance, leadership, effective communication and physician wellness. Her advice has appeared in numerous medical publications including *American Medical News*. When not training people, she trains dogs and enjoys hiking in the mountains with her own dogs.



## In This Stage: Job Transition

Adventurers know that keeping your balance is critical. Without balance, reaching the goal could be impossible.

Is your life in balance? **MOST LIKELY NOT.**

These years of training have been intense. While this has been necessary to learn important clinical skills, many physicians can't sustain that sleep-deprived, 24/7/365 lifestyle without becoming anti-social, obsessive, and, well, rude. While you could be a great clinician, people won't like you. Not pretty.

But a new day dawns. Within a few months your job will be under contract, your new home and community set, and your transition into practice beginning.

Recapture **BALANCE.**

You can't just flip a switch. You need to define your work-life balance, then learn ways to set good habits and protect your priorities. Some say the next 24 months will set the tone for the rest of your life.

It's time to get a life again.

### CONTENTS

Welcome to the Other Side (Almost) .....	2
Work-Life Balance: Why Should I Care? .....	2
Stress Control.....	6
Setting Boundaries .....	8
Simplifying Your Life .....	10
Developing a Healthy Attitude.....	11
Networking.....	12
Action Checklist.....	14



## Welcome to the Other Side (Almost)

Congratulations! You made it! You are about to embark on the next monumental phase of your medical journey – the actual, real-world experience as a certified and credentialed practicing physician.

At this point, one of the biggest **MISTAKES** practicing physicians make is to keep moving full speed ahead. Oftentimes, their goal is to become a successful and affluent physician: build a practice, pay off debt and provide financial security for their family. And of course, they want a better work-life balance, but many don't know yet what that could look like. Does this sound familiar?

Getting ready for your first job is a big deal. You are transitioning from a follower position into a leader position. You will have your own team that you manage and lead. You will be responsible for bringing in patients and for delivering treatments. You want to make sure you are building strong relationships with the hospital administration, staff and other physicians while balancing all that with your desire to lead a happy life, build a family, buy a house, have a social life, so on and so on.

The question becomes: How do you **MENTALLY, EMOTIONALLY** and **PHYSICALLY** get ready for your first job as a practicing physician? This stage answers this question by helping you define work-life balance for yourself, teaching you how to achieve and maintain it, and giving you the opportunity to create a networking strategy and build an advisory team to help you navigate through business, professional and personal aspects of your new life.

## Work-Life Balance: Why Should I Care?

Many people think that work-life balance is a 50/50 split of their time devoted for work and for personal life. Actually, it has less to do with time but more to do with **ENERGY**. Burnout and fatigue can adversely affect one's ability to practice medicine, especially with respect to errors and level of patient care. In light of these elements, it's important to make proactive decisions about work-life balance.

Work-life balance represents contentment with one's personal and professional life. It is that place where you find middle ground, where work feeds your personal life and personal life feeds your professional life. It is something you must pay attention to every day, because work-life balance is based on your values, priorities and everyday choices.

### MISCONCEPTIONS THAT LEAD TO BURNOUT AND DISSATISFACTION

**Hard work will get me where I want to go.** Working hard and long hours may lead you down a path of financial success and professional recognition, but it can also lead you towards personal destruction. To achieve a well-balanced life, the focus should be on working smart versus hard. Working smart includes

taking time out to reflect on your life and career priorities and goals. In addition, it's imperative that you take care of yourself which represents the most expensive instrument in your medical practice: **YOU**.

**Work-life balance and career advancement cannot co-exist.** Many people think that they have to give up their sense of balance to achieve success. We know that success without work-life balance is not sustainable long term and is very expensive. The price for that kind of success can be divorce, strained relationships with children, health issues, burnout, premature end to your medical practice.

**My clinical skills are the only skills I need to be successful.** Clinical skills are the foundation of your medical career, but they are not the only determinant of your success. Like any other professional, your success is determined by a combination of your interpersonal and self-management skills and your clinical skills. This doesn't mean that clinical training and education can be neglected, but the best clinical skills cannot be truly leveraged without appropriate interpersonal and self-management skills.

## PRINCIPLES FOR A BALANCED LIFE

**Work-life balance is personal and ever changing.** Work-life balance is a state of living that is very personal and changes with personal preferences, circumstances and ambitions. It is closely connected with one's values. For example, for a single person in their twenties with little financial obligations, the definition of work-life balance is most likely different compared to a thirty-something who is married with children. What works well for one person might not work so well for someone else.

**Don't let the first year become the norm without evaluating work-life balance overall.** During the first year as a practicing physician, your definition of work-life balance might be completely different compared to someone who's been practicing for 10 years. There are things that you will encounter throughout the first year

### TRAILBLAZERS

"I wished I would have attended a program on work-life balance 25 years ago. I had to go through all the drama — divorce with three young children, burnout, medical malpractice lawsuit — before I realized that I needed to focus more on my personal well-being and life balance."

"I never paid any attention to work-life balance until I turned 49 years old. I rarely made it to 7 p.m. family dinners and missed many of my children's school activities.

At age 49, I was at the point of burnout, and I had to make drastic changes. Now I'm more content with my life. I triage my work, I take at least two vacations a year, and I always make it home for dinner with my wife.

The children left for college a year ago and I regret that I didn't make family life a bigger priority early in my life."



ROADBLOCK

## Fatigue and Burnout Can Cause Poor Decision-Making

Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion combined with a sense of low personal accomplishment. At this point, there are few studies about burnout in residents or its relationship to patient care. A cross-sectional study<sup>13</sup> using an anonymous mailed survey to internal medicine residents (n=115) at a university-based residency program determined that 87 of the 115 (76%) met the criteria for burnout. Compared with non-burned-out residents, residents who reported burnout were more likely to self-report providing at least one type of **SUB-OPTIMAL PATIENT CARE** at least monthly (53% versus 21%).

Young physicians who sacrifice their personal lives during training, believing they will reap the rewards of a balanced life after graduation, often find themselves without skills to clarify and prioritize values or to develop a personal philosophy that integrates professional, personal and spiritual domains.

that may cause you to go outside your comfort zone (e.g., learning new procedures and protocols, building a patient base, getting to know your peers and staff members, becoming familiar with the politics in the organization), so you may need to invest more time and energy until you have the confidence and knowledge of the new job, responsibilities, procedures, etc.

Our goal in this stage is to increase your **AWARENESS** of work-life balance and encourage you to define what it means to you so that you have a target to work for. The first year or two as a practicing physician might be a bit off-target, but you still want to make sure that you are juggling all the balls that are necessary for your personal well-being and professional performance. They may be not as high as you want them to be, but you definitely want to keep them in the air. And make sure you are regularly reflecting on your satisfaction in work and life so that you won't get off-target too much.

**Every prize has its price.** It's commonly said that anything worth having is worth sacrificing for. Everything we do or choose comes with a cost, whether it's opportunity, time, effort, happiness or money. All too often when we make decisions, we don't weigh the costs. Be sure you consider what you are willing to sacrifice to experience a balanced life with healthy success.

**Avoid the comparison game — you'll lose every time.** Everyone suffers in their own way with regards to achieving work-life balance. Spending energy wondering what you are doing wrong or why someone has it better than you is an energy zapper. Manufacturing all sorts of stories around why you have it so bad, and how everyone else is to blame, drains even more energy. All of us suffer, whether you are rich or poor, powerful or weak, beautiful or ugly.

### EXERCISE: WORK-LIFE BALANCE

1. Write down two areas to focus on over the next one or two years that bring you happiness or satisfaction and would create a more balanced life compared to your present situation as a resident. For example, you might consider family, friends, hobbies, recreation, fitness, spiritual activities, or your spouse or significant other.



There are several techniques that you can implement to achieve satisfied levels of work-life balance. We will highlight four of them: stress control, setting boundaries, simplifying your life, and developing a healthy attitude.

# Stress Control

The key to balancing your personal life with your desire to achieve, perform and earn a living is in controlling the stress in your life. It is impossible to completely eliminate stress, and truthfully, you wouldn't want to. The key is not to avoid stress altogether, but to control stress by avoiding its negative consequences. Stress can be anything — positive or negative — at any time and any place that creates pressure and takes you out of your comfort zone or routine — things that make you uptight. It is a mental illusion, an interpretation and a perception. What is stressful to one person is blissful to another. Most people only notice stress when the pressure becomes unbearable. Others have become so numb to the stress around us that they walk around like stress zombies.



**GUIDE POINTS**

### Effective Stress Control

- Increase your awareness of stress in your life.
- Determine what level of stress is acceptable for you.
- Eliminate any self-induced stressors that have a negative impact on you.
- Practice stress relief exercises that work for you, such as deep breathing, exercise, frequent breaks, etc.

The first step in controlling stress is to identify the causes of stress, which fall into two main categories: external and internal. External stressors result from uncontrollable or unpredictable events in our lives, while internal stressors are self-induced.

## UNCONTROLLABLE EVENTS

Physicians face numerous events that they cannot control. Although you may not have control over the situation, you have control over how you respond to the situation with your attitude and perspective. Examples of uncontrollable events include other people's rude behavior, decreased insurance reimbursements, outside pressure to keep targets, changes in the healthcare industry and family demands.

## UNPREDICTABLE EVENTS

Many times, unpredictable events may be even more stressful than uncontrollable events since they are so-called "**SNEAK ATTACKS.**"

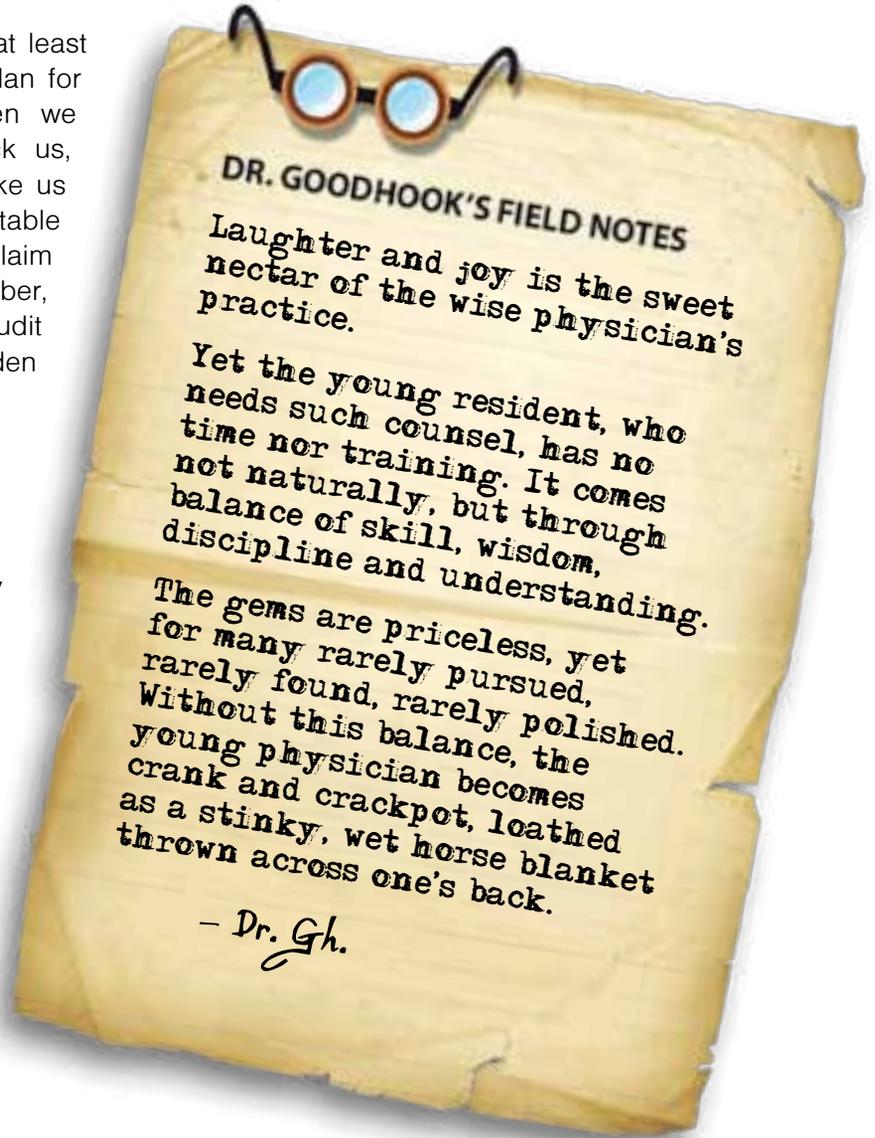
When it comes to uncontrollable events, at least we know they are coming and we can plan for them. Unpredictable events hit us when we least expect them. Suddenly they smack us, take away all our mental energy and make us shift mental gears. Examples of unpredictable events include a medical malpractice claim against you, sudden loss of a family member, IRS or RAC (Recovery Act Compliance) audit and unexpected complications or sudden death of a patient.

**SELF-INDUCED STRESSORS**

Most stress that we experience is actually **SELF-INDUCED**. The good news is that since we create the majority of our upsets, we can do something about it. This gives us a measure of choice and control that we do not always have when outside forces enter into the picture. Examples of self-induced stressors are neglect of relationships or family, workaholic behavior, perfectionism and unrealistic expectations.

**EXERCISE: WHAT'S MAKING YOU UPTIGHT THESE DAYS?**

Review the list of uncontrollable, unpredictable, and self-induced stressors. In the space below, list situations, events, thought patterns and behaviors that cause you to feel uptight.



Uncontrollable Events	Unpredictable Events	Self-Induced Stressors

### Reflection

- What impact do the listed stressors have on your personal and professional life?
- Is your stress getting out of control? Describe the feelings or emotions you're experiencing.
- What can you change about your situation, especially for items listed under self-induced?
- What action will you take to make this change happen?

## Setting Boundaries

Boundaries represent the way we allow other people to treat us. Boundaries indicate the level of conviction, respect and honor we show for our own needs. Inherent in this, of course, is that we know what our needs are and how to communicate them honestly to the people around us.

It is necessary to say no sometimes. You are the only person who can set boundaries, and you are the only one who can let others invade them. Managing commitments, requests, expectations, priorities, and decisions involves being willing to say no. Saying no isn't easy, especially for physicians, because they didn't go into this profession to turn down people who ask for help. Research shows that the overwhelming reason medical students chose medicine was the desire to serve others. They are anxious to serve and feel guilty if they aren't so that the word "no" often sticks in their throats.

Here are some tips to help you say "no" or "not now."

- Recognize that a desire to please often prevents us from saying no.
- Stick to your plan. If you have a written set of goals and priorities, this gives you a reason to stick to your course. ("Thanks, but I already have ...")
- Make sure you understand exactly what is being asked of you before you respond.

**GUIDE POINTS**

## Stress in Marriages & Relationships

An article<sup>14</sup> in *American Medical News* indicates that one of the most prevalent areas of stress faced by many physicians is personal relationships. Today's diverse physician population has pretty much the same problems that everyone else does.

But they are different in one significant way: Physicians tend to deny that they have problems — physical, mental or marital. Medical training inculcates an “us vs. them” mentality, says Michael F. Myers, M.D., a psychiatrist and author of the book *Doctors' Marriages: A Look at the Problems and Their Solutions*, in which only patients are allowed to have problems. “We forget that physicians are human, too.”

Due to the stresses of medical training and the early years of practice, physician marriages can face trouble early on. “The most common problems in the marriages of young physicians are not enough time together and not enough money. The two seem to go hand in hand, because the couple may be working extra hours to pay off educational debts. Male physicians are more prone to neglect their relationships and ignore warning signals of emerging problems.

“It's very common for men to not worry about their marriages unless the messages are coming pretty strongly from the partner or wife that there's a problem. They tend to rationalize: ‘That's what it's like being married to a doctor.’ Or ‘You can't have it both ways. You can't have all this money and a happy marriage too.’”

Female physicians' marital problems are in some ways the reverse of those of male physicians, said Dr. Myers. Women in general are likely to see themselves as the caretakers of their marriages, and women physicians are no exception. Thus the problems of married women physicians tend to stem not from neglecting the relationship but rather from trying to stretch themselves too thin.

## Setting Boundaries, continued

- Excel at a few things, rather than being average at many. Don't try to do everything.
- You have a right to say no. Remember that others may take you for granted and even lose respect for you if you don't.
- Be polite but firm in saying no. You only build false hopes with wishy-washy responses.

### REFLECTION

As you face your first year as a practicing physician, what career and personal life boundaries will you set in order to experience a healthy, realistic dose of work-life balance?

## Simplifying Your Life

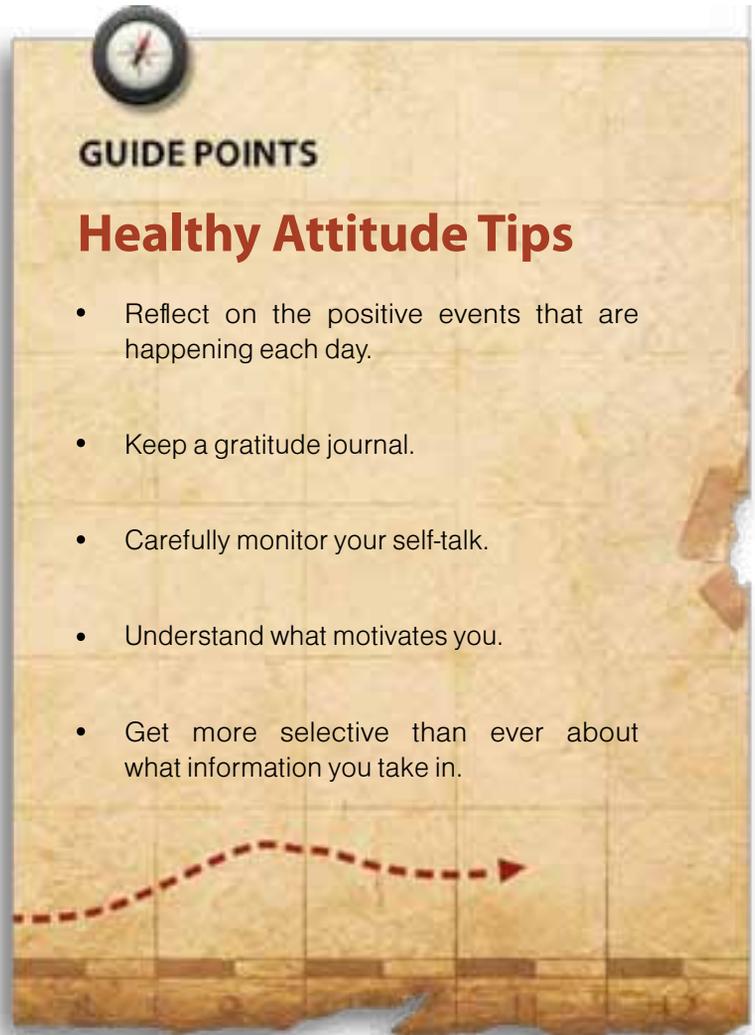
Starting out in your career takes a lot of energy and focus; therefore, you should allow for **SPACE** and **SIMPLICITY** in the other areas of your life. If possible, it's a good idea to take two or three weeks off before you start your new position as a practicing physician in order to regain energy and settle your personal situation.

Simplification is the process of purging responsibilities, outdated goals, physical clutter, draining relationships and boring tasks. Doing so allows you to free up mental space and to create room for new opportunities. The following are 10 steps for helping you simplify your life in anticipation of your new role.

### 10 STEPS TO SIMPLIFYING YOUR LIFE

1. Take some time to evaluate your current life honestly. Where is the "**CLUTTER**," and what is eating up your time, your peace of mind and your energy? Make a list, be specific and judge the negative value of these things, as well as the positive.
2. You have most likely gained a great deal from your frenzied pursuits over the past years. This includes both material things (like books, furniture and other possessions) and immaterial (like routines and pet peeves). Make a list of both. What are you willing to let go of? What are you not willing to part with?
3. Make a list of how much of your "busy-ness" is composed of "shoulds." Who or what is making you feel that you "should" do these things? How would you feel if you let them go?

4. Make a list of all of your current commitments: business, family, personal, financial, etc. What's your reaction to seeing them all in one place?
5. Make a list of your habits. Which of these drain you and add to the craziness? Which add value? Distinguish them well.
6. Refer back to your list of self-induced stressors. What could you do to eliminate them all?
7. Reorganize your schedule to increase efficiency, even if you don't eliminate anything. (Of course, deleting things is usually the best way.)
8. Analyze your current financial situation.
9. Armed with this information, make a solid plan to simplify.
10. Identify tasks or responsibilities that can be automated or delegated (e.g., automatic bill payment) to give you more mental space.



## Develop and Maintain a Positive Attitude

As a physician starting your career, you have big career goals, immense responsibilities and high expectations of yourself and of the people you work with. Additionally, your staff looks to you for leadership and guidance. The one thing that determines the level of your potential, that influences the fellowship, collaboration and performance of your staff, and that predicts the quality outputs with patients is your attitude.

Your **ATTITUDE** determines the level of achievement for your goals. It determines the size of your dreams and influences your determination and response when you are faced with new challenges. Nobody but you has control over your attitude. People can affect your attitude by misinforming you or making repetitive mistakes, but no one can control your attitude unless you voluntarily surrender that control.

No one else “makes you angry.” You make yourself angry when you surrender control of your attitude. What

someone else may have done is irrelevant. **YOU CHOOSE**, not they. They merely put your attitude to a test. If you select a volatile attitude by becoming hostile, angry, or disruptive, then you have failed the test.

Maintaining a healthy and positive attitude is one of the basics that success requires. The combination of a sound personal mission, personal philosophy and a positive attitude about yourself and the people you work with gives you an inner strength and a firm resolve that influences all the other areas of your existence.

Here are a few strategies to follow when you find your attitude declining:

- Recognize when you are having a **BAD DAY**. Everyone can have a bad day, even a doctor. If you feel you are about to lose yourself or explode, leave the situation and step into your office for a few minutes. Let your nurse or assistant cover for you until you return. Be kind to yourself.
- Recognize before you are **BURNING THE CANDLE ON BOTH ENDS**. Attitude and behavior typically decline when your personal needs are unfulfilled, (i.e., rest) or when the level of commitments and problems exceed available energy, time and resources. Taking time off, putting work in perspective and ensuring that you have a fulfilled personal life will boost your attitude.
- Recognize that there are several solutions to a situation. Many physicians can be high-strung and dominant personalities that sometimes can be difficult to handle. They become overpowering with their opinions, attitude and aggressiveness. Remind yourself that teamwork requires **TEAM EFFORT** and **TEAM INPUT**. It is hard to encourage staff's buy-in if the need to be in charge dominates.
- Recognize that your practice is a **TEAM**. You are a member and leader of a team with integrated systems to ensure that everyone can accomplish their job smoothly. You rely on your staff to keep the practice going, so that you can deliver quality patient care. Hold yourself to the same standards that you require of your staff.

## Networking

One common denominator that coincides with achieving success in life and career is one's ability to cultivate, build and maintain relationships. This requires that you start off on the right foot by planning and implementing a networking strategy. In stage 5, the topic of networking was covered within the context of finding a job. Here, networking pertains to building a **STRONG REFERRAL NETWORK**, building **RAPPORT** with patients and **ACTIVELY PURSUING** contacts and relationships over time.

To build a referral network, start by introducing yourself to referring physicians and develop strong relationships with them. Introduce your services to the community. Most patients are referred by word of mouth, other physicians or insurer networks; however, they won't refer you when they don't know you.

Next, you need to build a strong patient base. Getting to know your patients once they walk in the door is easy. Allowing potential patients to get to know you is another matter altogether. Think about what other services you have to offer to the community. For example, oncologists could offer support services, and cardiologists could give talks on avoiding heart attacks. Volunteering to give a talk on immunization may be a great way to introduce yourself to parents at a local school. You could also take advantage of health-related days of the year — like Child Health Day (June 6) or Diabetes Day (November 14) — to host an evening open house at your practice. Community members can learn more about the topic and pick up literature on your services.

### FIND A STRONG MENTOR

As a new physician, you have significant clinical knowledge, but you may not understand procedural issues such as using the hospital’s EHR/EMR system or how the practice schedules procedures. The best way to learn is to ask a senior physician to become your mentor and take time with you to discuss patient interactions, problems and questions. You may want to include nursing and administrative staff as well. Staff members can be a rich source of practice information and can help transition you into practice operations.

### BUILD AN ADVISORY TEAM

In the introduction to this guidebook, we discussed the importance of building an advisory team to assist you in the job search process. This also holds true as you continue your career. Finding and maintaining a group of people whom you respect and trust to give you career and life advice is critical to your success. Potential advisory team members include your spouse, significant other or a good friend, a physician mentor, and professionals such as a coach, attorney, insurance agent, financial planner and accountant.

### EXERCISE: ADVISORY TEAM WISH LIST

To help you establish your advisory team, first determine areas where you could benefit from the support of others, and note them in the space provided. Next, identify the qualities that are important to you for members of your advisory team. Finally, record some ideas for potential team members. If you know their names, write them down; if not, you can note something like “physician who’s been with the practice for 5+ years.”

<b>Areas where you could benefit from the support of others</b>	<b>Important qualities for advisory team members</b>	<b>Ideas for potential advisory team members</b>
<i>Examples: work-life balance, clinical skills, leadership skills, legal issues</i>	<i>Examples: experienced, trustworthy, reputable, knowledgeable, successful</i>	

10

COMPLETED

## Stage 10 Action Checklist

Make sure you have completed these tasks by the end of this stage:

- Determine concrete ways you will control stress in your life to minimize its effects.
- Set boundaries in your personal and professional life in order to maintain a healthy work-life balance.
- Develop a plan to delegate or eliminate responsibilities or tasks in order to simplify your life as much as possible.
- Create or maintain an advisory team for your career.

*"One must marry one's feelings to one's beliefs and ideas. That is probably the only way to achieve a measure of harmony in one's life."*

— Napoleon Hill