

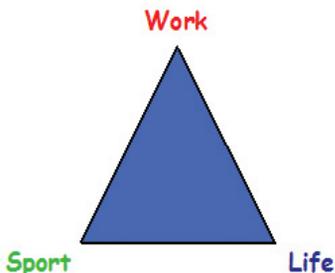


## Inside the Blue: The Balancing Act

Work-life-sport balance is a healthy life position that facilitates happiness and satisfaction in our personal, professional and recreational endeavors. Although it will not guarantee happiness at home, productivity at work or an Olympic medal, a work-life-sport balance sets the conditions for an athlete to maximize their opportunities and minimize distractions on the firing line. Airman-marksman, like most athletes, face this challenge everyday. How do I succeed in my sport and manage my other competing priorities? In this article, Airmen will explore "The Balancing Act."

### Understanding Work-Life-Sport

#### The Work-Life-Sport Triangle



**Work-life-sport triangle:** If an athlete shifts their focus toward any one point on the triangle, they do so at the expense of the other two. Because each point of the triangle has an equal opportunity to off-set the work-life-sport balance, the athlete must consider how much time is spent in any one area.

### Balance

As a concept, work-life-sport balance may be viewed as an equilateral triangle where one point of the triangle represents an athlete's work, the second his or her life, and the third their sport. If competitive shooting is the athlete's profession, the triangle may appear as work, life and recreation with the third point representing a hobby or something the athlete enjoys doing in his or her

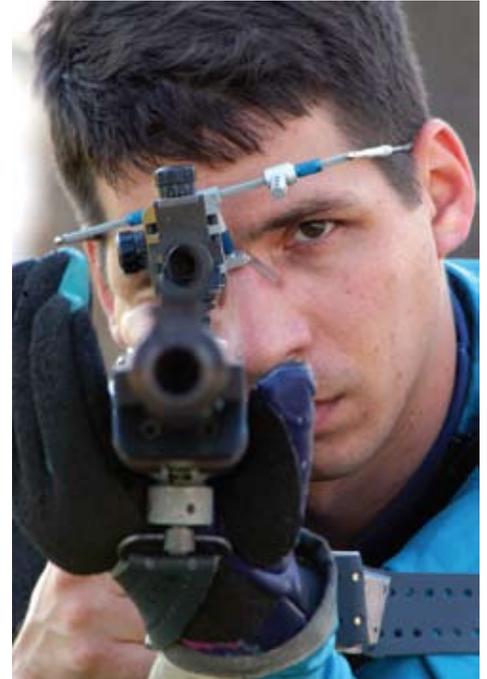
free time. In either case, the triangle represents three broad focus areas that compete for an athlete's limited time. It is used to illustrate how shifting focus to one area may limit opportunities in others. Ideally, a successful athlete's focus would remain in the center of the triangle with his or her attention equally divided among the three focus areas. However, competing demands will oftentimes force the athlete to shift their focus to reach their goals.

When balancing priorities, the athlete can use this triangle to understand the relationship among competing interests. If an athlete shifts their focus toward any one point on the triangle, they do so at the expense of the other two. In other words, if more attention is given in one area, expectations in the other two may need to be adjusted as the balancing act is a zero sum game. Coaches and athletes must recognize that adding more time to one area may require an offset in another. As the triangle shows, shifting focus to one area draws attention and time away from others. Achieving a work-life-sport balance is about setting priorities and making informed choices that bring an athlete closer to his or her goals.

### Take the Balance Test

Understanding work-life-sport balance helps athletes set realistic goals and adjust expectations based on their work, life and sport priorities. Ideally, an athlete will maintain a perfect work-life-sport balance and reach their goals without any substantial sacrifice. In reality, veteran athletes will tell you success does not happen by chance or without some amount of sacrifice. Athletes should evaluate their willingness to make sacrifices for their sport and understand how their level of commitment influences their ability to achieve their goals. For example, staying home while their friends go out on the town may be the price the athlete has to pay to get the most out of the next day's training session.

The Balance Test is an interesting co-



**Maj. Mark Gould, team captain of the Air Force International Rifle Team believes: "A solid work-life balance is critical to a shooter with competing priorities. My duties as an Air Force officer require a significant investment of time so I manage my off-duty affairs closely to allow me to compete in my sport. Setting priorities and managing my time carefully allows me the opportunity to balance my personal life, career and competition goals." (U.S. Air Force photo by Jason M. Webb)**

nundrum. To what extent is the athlete willing to shift focus toward their sport and sacrifice in other areas? If the athlete chooses a perfect work-life-sport balance, he or she may not meet the demands necessary to excel in their sport, but the athlete may find success professionally and personally. On the other hand, focusing on their sport may limit career opportunities and impact the athlete's social life, but it may give the athlete the opportunity to compete and win. What is the athlete willing to sacrifice to achieve their goals? Objectively and honestly evaluating priorities will help an athlete pass this test.

### Managing Competing Priorities

The United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) is a case study for balancing

priorities and time management. Cadets are under pressure from multiple angles and must quickly learn to balance academic, military, athletic and spiritual priorities. Maj. Robin Orth, a former USAFA Assistant Rifle Team Coach and eight-year veteran of the Air Force International Rifle Team explains: "Work-life-sport balance is critical to an athlete with competing priorities. During my tenure with the Academy's rifle team, one of our biggest challenges was working around the Cadet's schedule. Attention to detail and discipline were key factors in allowing the Cadets to compete and win because every minute of their day was accounted for. Like other Air Force shooters, a Cadet's first commitment is to the Air Force; everything else is second. Cadets who were unable to balance competing priorities did not remain on the team."

An athlete's success at the USAFA is the product of a deliberate plan executed with full knowledge of the commitment required in all areas. For Cadet-athletes to succeed, they must carefully balance competing demands to achieve professional, personal and athletic goals. If Cadets focus their attention exclusively on training for their sport, it would be difficult to sustain the other areas at an acceptable level. In essence, this is a Cadet's balancing act. "At the Academy, success is not all about shooting, or all about grades, or all about military performance; it requires a balance from all angles." Maj. Orth, a four-time NCAA All-American in both air rifle and small bore, continued. While most athletes will not face this type of pressure, the Cadet's example is useful to determine ways to achieve a work-life-sport balance.

### Improving your Performance

Maintaining a work-life-sport balance may improve performance by allowing the athlete to control life's competing interests through informed decision-making. Countless stories exist of Olympians who made substantial personal sacrifices to reach the medal stand. To succeed, each athlete undoubtedly made sacrifices to balance their competing priorities. Some Olympians postponed personal and professional opportunities in order to reach a higher priority athletic goal. Since it is impossible to be all things to all people, an athlete must make informed choices based on their own priorities and accept performance results commensurate with those decisions. Athletes should consider the following areas as they seek to balance their work, life and sport:

**Determine your priorities.** Sit down and carefully think about your priorities. What is most important to you? Is it winning an Olympic medal, finishing a college degree, achieving a promotion at work or spending time with your family? Knowing where you are trying to go is the first step in getting there. Determining your priorities will allow you to make informed choices about which areas will support your goals and how much time you can devote to each area. For USAFA Cadets, graduating is the highest priority.

**Make informed choices.** Now that you've determined your direction, you need to figure out how you will get there. If you intend to focus on your sport, what discretionary areas are you willing to eliminate? If you choose to give equal attention to all areas, will you be satisfied with the outcome? Is spending time with friends more important than training? Is taking an extra college class more important than a trip to a national competition? Will accepting a promotion at work impact your ability to travel? Make a decision consistent with your goals and press forward. As full-time Airmen and part-time competitors, Airmen must make decisions with the Air Force mission in mind.

**Maximize your opportunities.** You've determined your priorities and made choices, now maximize the use of the time you've set aside. Guard your time carefully and resist adding new items on your to-do list. If you only have one opportunity to train each week, how can you best use this time? Is your range time a social opportunity or a training session? Do you work efficiently while on the job to avoid bringing work home? Make a good faith effort to use your available time for its intended purpose. Recognizing the importance of opportunity, the Air Force considers "excellence in all you do" as one of its three core values.

**Ask for help.** Successful athletes are not islands unto themselves. Seek assistance to manage your time and take advantage of your support network to help you meet your goals. Mobilize your friends and family to assist you and include them in your activities. Let them share your experience and see how committed you are to reaching your goals. When you succeed, you'll be ready to thank your biggest supporters. In addition, countless resources are available on

the Internet to help you; a quick query of "work-life balance" will produce thousands of results. As leaders, shooting team Airmen are charged with taking care of and developing our people; seek a mentor to help you reach your goals.

**Take time for yourself.** Remember to take care of number one. Exclusive focus on any single area may be counterproductive to an athlete's physical and mental health. Athletes will always have competing priorities to contend with so have a flexible plan to help manage them. How you deal with competing interests will help you reach your goals. By law, military members have 30 days of annual leave and good leaders ensure their Airmen use this opportunity to reset physically and mentally. Learn from this example and schedule time to rest and relax.

### One Final Shot

Work-life-sport balance is a key contributor to an athlete's success. An objective review of your life position and an honest self-assessment will help you achieve the proper balance based on your individual priorities. Balancing your work, life and sport priorities is an intensely personal matter as a single solution cannot possibly account for all circumstances. However, appreciating the need to balance competing priorities will enable an athlete to seek a solution to meet his or her requirements. Each athlete must perform their own balancing act. What are you willing to do to achieve your goals?

Until the next competition, the Air Force Shooting Team challenges each of you to maximize your opportunities through work-life-sport balance and pursue excellence in all you do. If you have any questions about the Air Force in general, please visit [www.airforce.com](http://www.airforce.com) for more information.

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*Inside the Blue is a running series that looks at international shooting sports from an Airman's perspective. Master Sgt. Julig is a member of the Air Force International Trap Team and he is presently assigned to Bolling Air Force Base, Washington D.C. The views expressed in this article, unless otherwise indicated, are that of the individual author. They do not purport to express the views of the Department of the Air Force or any other department or agency of the U.S. Government.*