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It might seem early in my life to think about work-life balance, but PhD life is very full and quite stressful at times. As I talk with friends who have already graduated, the work load and pressure appears to get even stronger as we continue with our careers. However, learning to balance our professional and personal lives, and creating habits to achieve this very difficult balance, should start early in our career, when we are students. This balance is important for optimal functioning in both aspects of life and discipline is vital to achieving and maintaining this balance. Often we are ready to accept that discipline is important for the work life, but if you can also be disciplined with your personal life, then the chance of job satisfaction and life fulfillment increases.

**Time management** is one of the most important qualities that I try to develop for work-life balance. I've noticed that when I better organize and plan how to divide my time between activities for a specific day, and prioritize weekly and monthly goals, then this allows me to accomplish what I need to do. This in turn also helps me to be more effective and to reduce my stress. I organize my work for the week every Sunday night and try to make sure that I have everything that I need. I pay special attention to what time of the day I'm most effective at doing a specific activity. For instance, I seem to be more focused during the morning or at night, so I try to make space for writing during those times. I find it most difficult to write in the afternoon, so I try to find activities that involve moving (processing samples, cleaning glassware, etc.) or that do not involve as much critical thinking, but that will still help me advance with my work (entering data, organizing data for analysis, etc). It is helpful **to know yourself** and make work schedules with activities distributed in a way that works for you.

While doing my best at my work, I always make time to practice **self-care**. Exercise and healthy eating are essential parts of my life. If I am not healthy, I cannot do the work that I love, so why would I not take care of myself? Since many health issues are related to poor eating habits and lack of exercise, I've decided to use healthy eating and exercise as preventive actions to reduce risks of overwhelming stress and future illness. Additionally, exercise is my time for myself, it makes me feel more active and full of energy, which helps me get more work and studying done. Finding a hobby that you feel passionate about can also be a nice way to find work-life balance. It is great to love your job, but you can also do other things that complement your life and give you happiness besides your job such as hiking, biking, dancing, painting, playing or listening to music, volunteer work and so many more! There are so many things to enjoy in life!

**Make time for family and close friends.** After a long day of hard work or unexpected difficulties, sometimes I find myself feeling discouraged at the end of the day. However, sometimes it just takes 15 min to cheer me up when I'm talking with my mom, dad, brother, or a

close friend. Talking with them about anything and maybe laughing a little bit can be so refreshing. Also talking with them about what happened during the day can help you get some of that stress out and even allows me to get some good advice.

This brings me to another important point, which is to **seek inspiration and advice from professionals that you admire**. These people have so much more experience and their insights can be very helpful. Not only can they help you solve problems, but they can also remind you of qualities that you admire, which you would like to develop yourself in order to be a better professional.

Accept that the joy of life goes beyond pleasant emotions. Hopefully, we have all chosen careers we love. This should make it easier to enjoy our work. However, there are times when we absolutely love what we are doing, but there will also be times that we have to do things that we don't like and we don't feel so happy. This is a natural part of being human, and hence a natural part of the work life. On discouraging days, I like to go back and revisit my original motivations, my goals, and the reasons that brought me to where I am. This really helps me keep going and overcome the difficult days with the hope of a better day to come.

## **BIO**

Odney Alvarez-Campos is a PhD student working with Dr. Evanylo in the Department of Crop and Soil Environmental Sciences (CSES) at Virginia Tech, Blacksburg. She is originally from Costa Rica, where she received her BS degree in Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources Management from EARTH University. She moved to the United States for an internship at the Everglades Research and Education Center in Belle Glade, FL and started her MS degree under the guidance of Dr. Daroub in the Department of Soil and Water Sciences at University of Florida, which she completed in May 2015. Since the beginning of her graduate studies, Odney has been lucky enough to study what she likes the most, which is the use of organic amendments in sustainable agricultural systems and their effects on soil properties and water quality. When she graduates with her PhD, Odney would like to have a job where she can contribute to the sustainable management of soil and water resources in agriculture.

Odney enjoys being active mainly through dancing, hiking, and walking where she can see the sunset. Although she misses her family in Costa Rica, she is forever grateful with the opportunity that she had to study in the US and the great people that she has met during her journey.