

## The Balancing ACTion: Building on the Past, Preparing for the Future

Ruth Rosenbaum, TC, PhD

In reviewing the year that is coming to an end and in planning for the coming year, the image of a balancing act has come to mind over and over. The examples are many: images of jugglers keeping six balls in the air, of working moms and dads trying to balance time for families, of managers shifting employees with varying skill sets. I was caught by how each image implied that what was important was the balancing itself. Then I realized that it was really not the balancing “act” but the balancing “ACTion” that was important, and that this ACTion was not one set of actions but many of them.

The challenge is not to become a balancer but rather to realize that in the action of balancing we are able to see not only the components themselves but also the ways in which they interact and nourish one another. The mother or father, the manager, all who try to reach balance hopefully reach this understanding. Indeed, the balancing ACTion creates a fabric that brings in other pieces of information, persons and situations, deepening our understanding of what we are supposed to be doing and how to do it.

A list of balancing ACTions comes to mind. Allow me to share some of them with you as you also look back over 2009 and envision 2010.

**The Balancing ACTion of Work and Reflection** – At first, it seemed that the balance was between work and rest but the more I looked, the more the balance was/is between work and reflection. By reflection, I mean the thinking about the why and how of the work. It is not just a question of keeping the work going but rather stopping and taking the time to consider what the work is supposed to be as we move forward. What is supposed to be kept and what is supposed to change...and then the how and why of the change.

**The Balancing ACTion of Light and Darkness** – The balance of light and dark exists on many levels. We are told that what we hear in the dark, we must speak in the light. But the opposite is true also: we must be willing to hear in the light, truly hear and then bring what we hear to those who dwell in the darkness, those who cannot see or chose not to see.

Light allows us to see with our eyes while dark allows us to receive from our other senses. When we pull back from the images that bombard us, then we are able to feel, to think, to hear, to sense in many other ways and at many other levels. It is surprising what we are able to receive when our senses are given the space, both physical and in terms of time, to function, to live.

**The Balancing ACTion of Acting and Re-Acting** – With so many images, sounds, noise, so much “information” coming at us, our natural response is to react. Yet the very word tells us that we are responding to something or someone rather than *choosing* what we are going to do and how we are going to do it.

Of course, there are times when reaction is necessary. When there is an urgent situation that requires us to intervene, to respond, to speak out, to act... then reaction is a good thing. We need to make sure our tendency towards “politeness” does not keep us from such reacting, responding or getting involved. In other situations, choosing how to respond will open opportunity and ensure that we are deciding for ourselves how and what we should be doing. Our actions should be based on our thinking, reflecting, discussion with others, etc.

**The Balancing ACTION of Taking Care of Others and Taking of Ourselves** – We need to decide if we are in this work of bringing about a more just world for the short term or the long term. For the short term, we can keep going when extraordinary time and energy is needed. When the short term is over, we can rest and recoup. We can restore ourselves. When we are in this for the long term, then the time for resting and restoring ourselves is harder to come by. So the challenge is to find ways to set aside time and space for that renewal. This is a challenge we have to meet if we want to last for the long term.

**The Balancing ACTION of the Usual Ways and Something New** – Over the years, most of us have found ways to do our work. There is a rhythm to the work as we take the steps we have usually taken for whatever we are working on. That rhythm, while allowing us to accomplish many things, can also lull us into not thinking about other ways to do our work...perhaps even better ways.

For example, work to bring an end to forced child labor in Uzbekistan has brought together in collaboration many groups which normally would be on opposite sides of the table. NGOs, members of the investment community, brands and others usually have different styles and different ways of assembling. But collaboration is very different from opposition. It is also different from negotiation. It is easy to define what we are against; it is much harder to define and work in a positive way towards the changes that are needed. This collaborative effort is a beginning and a model.

**The Balancing ACTION of Keeping the Work Going and Finding the Time and Ways to Bring New People into the Work** – Perhaps it is a measure of age, but it seems to me that we have to find ways to bring new and younger people into the work for systemic change for a more just world. Those of us who have been leaders for so many years must find ways to mentor, to train others to take our places so that the work is not dependent on us. In many ways, this means getting out of the way while others try their hands at leadership. Maybe things will change as a result...and that will not be easy to see all the time. But the work is not about us, it is about the people we serve.

**The Balancing ACTION of Charity, Advocacy and Systemic Change** – We all know that there are limits on time, energy and resources. We want to spend that time, etc. on bringing about change. The snag is that change takes time. So how do we support one another to keep the work for positive change going? How do we have something to point to when others ask what we have accomplished? Sometimes, the only thing we have to point to is that we have not given up. We do need to get better at supporting each other, and telling our stories about the change that is needed and the why of that needed change.

**The Balancing ACTION of Fear and Courage** – I have kept moving this Balancing ACTION to the end as this article was being written. Perhaps it should have been first but that is for you to decide.

In times of stress, of worry, of concern, it is easy to give in to fear and to allow that fear to paralyze us. What is much harder is to have the courage to continue, to not give up, to imagine the changes that are needed in so many places and at so many levels...and to work for them. If the future were just about me or us, whoever the me and us might be, well, then we could do whatever we want. But it isn't.

So we continue our balancing ACTIONS...stumbling here and there, but not giving up. Being part of the struggle for a more just world is worth it all.