The following are my notes from when I served on a university panel event for new assistant professors for which I was asked to share my perspectives on how to be successful on the tenure track. I decided to focus on specific strategies, many of which apply to other careers and career stages.

Take home message:

\* Life can’t wait until after tenure \*

So aim for habits and strategies for long-term success and fulfillment rather than aiming for tenure as the goal. You can’t deny tenure is there, so do keep it in mind as you make strategic choices, and use it as an opportunity to frame your vision of the scientific contribution you want to make.

What does this mean practically?

1) Strive to work smarter, not longer. Focus on the most important things, and develop habits that help you do this efficiently.

2) Strive for balance – Balance generally is not achieved every day. It is not necessarily achieved every week or every month. But it should be though of as a “moving average” on a weekly to month or two basis. More than 3 months out of balance is too long!

Strategies for working smarter/prioritizing

(scholarship/teaching-service-outreach /networking etc.)

* Do think about what you WANT. Learn to say no early. Don’t just say yes to favors OR opportunities, because both take time and have opportunity costs.
* Everything is negotiable.
* Don’t commit within 24 hours of being asked to do something. (Also don’t send angry email within 24 hours!)
* Decide WHEN a decision needs to be made. Put it on your calendar, and don’t be tempted to make the decision earlier than that. This helps you gather more information, lets your subconscious weigh the options, and brings the most creative solution (see John Cleese talk on creativity: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VShmtsLhkQg> - the key part: 12:30 onward, and the last 4 minutes or so provide excellent advice for advisors)
* When you do say yes to something, budget the amount of time it will actually take (e.g., giving a talk requires prep, travel, AND time to catch up on 200 emails and everything you missed while you were gone). When you say yes, update what you have done on your CV all the time, and look at the tenure package requirements/your goals list as you do so.
* Think about 1 yr, 3 yr and 5 yr goals, and check in with those goals periodically, especially when you finish something or when you feel overwhelmed and don’t know what to focus on.
* Give yourself freedom to experiment and try creative/crazy ideas (maybe 10% of your time, or maybe a project a year?)
* Integrity is everything (your scientific reputation, and also the ethics of how you treat your research team and colleagues).

Strategies for balancing life outside vs. work for long-term success

(e.g., health, family, travel, what you love)

* In the long term, health and family come first, so invest in them early and often. Most of us are planners, but realize that when it comes to health and family, you can’t always plan.
* Work on the most important science/scholarship every day (even if it is just thinking about it for 15 min while you bike to work). This keeps you moving forward, makes it easy to pick up where you left off, and reminds you why you love the autonomy and creativity of your job!
* Schedule time for life and take advantage of the flexibility of academic/research job (e.g., work from home 1 day per week and don’t break the writing-at-home date with yourself. Schedule exercise and good food. Schedule meetings (e.g., with students) back-to-back. Post your schedule on your door, and close the door when you have deadlines and need to avoid casual interruption.
* Consider long-term flexibility of the job, too: e.g., during the young kids stage I planned to scale back on fieldwork and international travel and scale up on lab work and giving high-impact talks that require shorter/easier trips. Agree to take a tenure clock extension for maternity leave, whether or not you end up using it (and tell your chair that to avoid bias he/she should send you a letter requesting that you take leave and extension, which you can cite in your request to the university).

How to accomplish this and stay sane?

Don't do it alone!!!

* Choose collaborators, mentors and projects that you personally enjoy and that align with your values. Talk to collaborators before committing and know the landscape and expectations. Just like it is important to fill your lab with the RIGHT people, not the right NUMBER of people, it is important to fill your professional dance card with the right people.
* Networking is not a bad word. It is about interacting with, learning from, strategizing and problem solving with people you like and admire. Build both “vertical” network in your field (i.e., senior colleague mentors), and peer network in and outside of field (i.e., colleagues at similar career stage).
* If you have to ask, “will you be my mentor,” it is probably not a good match for mentorship. Instead, seek advice of several senior colleagues whom you respect. They are mentors. Each mentor can help you navigate areas related to his/her particular strength(s) (e.g., teaching, advising, administration, lab management, leadership, research grants, university politics, unpleasant professional interactions with others, etc.).
* Peer mentoring is probably the single most effective thing that has contributed to my success and happiness on the tenure track (see this article <http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_magazine/previous_issues/articles/2012_03_16/caredit.a1200032> and in the book Every Other Thursday (<http://www.amazon.com/Every-Other-Thursday-Strategies-Successful/dp/0300510845#>).
* Seek mentors – senior mentors and also peers – who can also be your advocates, and share your accomplishments with them so they can help promote your strengths to others.

Seek moments of happiness/thankfulness every day, and have fun.

* Strive to focus on the best qualities of others. E.g., ignore a colleague’s egomania and focus on his/her creativity and generosity when it comes to brainstorming ideas and giving feedback to students.
* Promote others (students, peers, etc.). It feels really good and helps build relationships, even if once in a long while you might get burned.
* 99% of the time it is not worth getting angry/upset, though sometimes you can’t help it. Remove yourself from the situation if possible. Roll your eyes (in private)/ go for a run/ pet your cat/ have a beer. Table it to discuss at your peer mentoring group meeting.

Advice from my peer group:

* Learn to say no early.
* Don't be in a rush to fill lab. Important RIGHT people, not right NUMBER of people.
* Don’t just add deadlines. Schedule in the actual time needed for the event (like travel for seminar)
* Friend in your department, senior prof
* Block out writing time and don't cancel
* Don’t just make UW happy. Also what is needed to be successful in your field. Figure out who your “boss” is (funding agency? Book publisher?)
* If kids, structure projects to keep momentum with collaborators etc that can help. Do the thinking before baby arrives. We are all planners, but can’t predict family situation at all!

Jerry Huang “HIPPO”

Health

Integrity (scientific reputation, also how you treat your team)

Passion

Prioritize – family first, 1 yr plan, 3 yr, 5 yr plans

Outside the box