

Balancing Work and Family

Effective Behaviors For Managing Multiple Roles

Demographic and economic changes will play major roles in shaping the 2000's workforce and the needs of working families. More women are employed outside the home, single parent families are on the rise, and demands from work and family roles are increasing. Both men and women are seeking balance to their work and personal lives. At the same time, many of us have high expectations of ourselves and our families, and feel guilty, frustrated, and worn out. We can't (or may not want to) eliminate all our roles, therefore, the key may be in finding ways to balance those roles. Here are 20 ideas for making changes and finding balance in your frantic life:

" Plan

Keep lists of ways to spend your time and money. Plan meals and post on the refrigerator. Use a family calendar. Buy household and school supplies in bulk and stock up on birthday presents and cards so you won't need to do last-minute shopping. Keep a spare set of keys with a trusted neighbor. Know yourself - - if you are a morning person, you should plan on getting 70% of your work done before lunch. Teach your children to plan ahead so they will have the necessary supplies for school projects. Allocate blocks of time and establish routines that will help simplify your tasks, such as laundry on Tuesday and Thursday, bill paying on Wednesday, clean-up session on Monday, etc. Routines create a calm structure in our hectic pace, and everyone knows what's expected each day.

" Organize

Organize your closet, your desk, your laundry room, your bathroom, your car, your bill paying area, your files, lay out clothes the night before, and teach your children to do the same. Have a special place in the house for keys, school supplies, lunch money, etc. It may take a little extra time up front, but it takes less time than searching for things you misplace. Keep a school file for each child. Handle paper only once. Open the mail near the trash can.

" Prioritize

There's always enough time for the things that are important to you. The key is knowing what's important. Chances are, if you make something a priority, you will also make time for it. Eliminate some of the unimportant things that clutter your life. Make a list of things to do each week, then give high priority items an **A**, low priority items a **C**, and those in the middle a **B**. Structure your activities around this list.

" Manage Your Time

Once you know what your priorities are, you will need to manage your time to make room for those priorities. Ask yourself: "What's the best use of my time right now?" One of the best ways to find more time for yourself and you family is to turn the television off - - it's a time waster. Think of

other ways you waste time. If you spend time looking for keys, shoes, or important papers, you may want to clean and organize your home and office differently.

" Manage Your Guilt

What do you feel guilty about? Even kids with stay at home moms do poorly in math or have behavior problems occasionally. Research shows that children of working mothers are actually more independent and more self sufficient. If their parents are happy - - children are happy. No one said that guilt has to go with parenthood. Do you wish you could spend more time with your kids? Research shows that employed parents spend just as much time with their children as stay-at-home parents. Make sure the time you do spend with your children is filled with positive communication and activities you enjoy doing together. Come to terms with your fantasies of "ideal" families. No one situation is perfect. The secret is to find one that best meets your needs and those of your child.

" Lower Your Expectations

Do you really need to have a spotless house? What's more important on Saturday morning - - cleaning the house for three hours, or taking the kids to the zoo? If you have set high expectations for yourself, eventually, you will not only be unhappy, but you will be burned out, over-stressed, and may suffer health problems. Try finding a "good enough" level or an "It's adequate" outlook. Not every task needs 100% of your energy. Does a report at work need to be six pages long when two pages will do? Does your house really need to be spotless every weekend?

" Let Go

You can't do it all. You can't be superwoman or superdad without paying a price. Look around your office or home to see what produces valueless work (dusting knick-knacks? - box them up for a few years). If you don't have time to bake something for the bake sale, donate money instead. Are you creating more work for yourself because you have an antiquated idea of motherhood? What activities can you let go of?

" Set Limits

Do you find yourself saying "yes" to every volunteer activity or overtime project that comes your way? Some people have trouble setting limits because they want to be liked, or are afraid of feeling guilty, or believe that they should do everything. As you prioritize, you will need to say "no" to less critical requests, tasks, and activities. Decide what you can do and cannot do, and learn to say "no." If your child is involved in activities away from home four or more nights a week, it may be wise for him/her to set limits, also.

" Delegate

You are not the only one who is capable of doing tasks at home and work. Work towards a division of labor. Make a list of activities and jobs that could be handled by someone else (kids, spouse, co-worker, assistant). Teach the other person how to do the job, then step back and let go. The windows may have a few streaks or the office mail may be done a little differently than you would have done it, but the job is done and it's probably "good enough". As you delegate, remember that you are helping someone else by teaching them to be responsible.

" Get Help

Getting help means hiring or paying someone to do some of your work. Think about how you can lighten your load. Choose tasks that you don't enjoy doing. Lawn care, cleaning service, tree trimming, personal shoppers, ordering groceries and having them delivered, paying a teen in the

neighborhood to run errands, take the car to be serviced, etc. If you have avoided paying someone to help lighten your load because of the cost, think about the costs of stress, burnout, not spending time with your family, etc. Your time is worth something, too.

" **Stop Procrastinating**

If putting things off is affecting your personal or professional life and you feel guilty about it, you are a procrastinator. First, determine why you put things off. Then, think about how you could break down some tasks into smaller parts and tackle the smaller pieces one at a time. Clean one drawer or shelf at a time, or file one stack of papers. One advantage to procrastination is that if we put something off long enough, it eventually may not need to be done. However putting some things off too long can cause bigger problems, such as ignoring a funny noise in your car's engine.

" **Anticipate Emergencies**

Have a back up plan for picking up your children if you're running late or have a sick child, etc. Ask yourself "What could go wrong here?", then have a plan just in case it does. Keep phone numbers of people who could help you out in an emergency. Have your office or desk so organized that you can tell someone over the phone where to find things if needed.

" **Adopt Positive Attitudes and Perceptions**

When was the last time you thought or said something negative about your job? About your family? Having a positive outlook on where we are in our life stage, can go a long way in reducing stress, reducing burnout, maintaining personal relationships, enjoying our children, and making us feel good about how our life is going. Make a goal to have five positive thoughts for every one negative thought. Enlist your co-worker and your family in this goal. You'll be surprised how much better everything looks. Remind yourself that negative emotions are draining - - get rid of them!

" **Spend Time With Your Children**

Assuming that you put your children as a high priority issue . . . don't just say it, show it! Establish a routine such as breakfast out on Saturdays, Tuesday night pizza, Friday night game night, Thursday night is kids cook night, etc. Include your children in household responsibilities such as grocery shopping (with one kid at a time) or use travel time for communicating with them..

" **Maintain Your Role as a Parent**

Maintain this role with the same preparation, time commitment, and professionalism as you would any important job or career. Prepare yourself by reading books, taking courses, attending seminars, and getting advice and information from friends and professionals. Plan and organize the job of parenting as you would your work. Parenting is a lot easier when you know what to expect, and have suggestions to survive each stage your child passes through.

" **Take Care of Yourself**

It's very important to take care of your needs, too. You can't be a constant care-giver. In fact, we are all better parents when we allow ourselves time to take care of ourselves (without feeling guilty). Taking care of yourself includes, eating right, exercising, getting enough sleep, being creative, spending time with adult friends, etc.

" **Nurture Relationships**

Finding the time to nurture relationships that are important to you is a must when you are trying to juggle so many roles. Relationships with people help us reduce our stress and provide us with the

energy to maintain a household, family, career, etc. Spend time with people who are positive and look on the bright side of life. It's important to seek out people who are supportive and upbeat, and sometimes it is necessary to avoid those people who consistently "pull or put you down."

" **Manage Stress**

Feeling that your life is in balance will reduce your stress. A good place to start is by identifying what causes your stress, how our body and mind respond to stress, and creating a plan to reduce it. Each of us needs at least three (healthy) ways to reduce stress. Create a personal stress management plan that will work for you. Start with the basics, exercise, eating right, and getting enough sleep.

" **Communicate Your Needs**

Don't assume others know how you feel. If you want your family to help out more around the house, ask them (in a nice way). "I need you to start dinner when you get home tonight" or "I can drive you and your friends to the mall tonight, if you will do two loads of laundry today." Use words such as "I would appreciate it, I need you to, or I would like you to . ." Leave notes for your older children about chores that need done, a concern you have, praise, and especially love!

" **Be Committed and Learn to Compromise**

This is a promise you make to yourself to learn all you can about yourself and find ways to balance your work and family life. Everyday search out ways to manage your time, your energy, organize tasks, clean, delegate, etc. Some ideas will work for you and others won't. Keep an open mind about managing your life. Put a U in five boxes of areas that you like to make changes in (start small). Write down five ideas that will help you do this.

When trying to manage work, family and your personal life think about this:

Five years from now, you may wonder:

"What do I wish I could have done differently?"

Focus your life around your answer!

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