

Work & Family: Finding the Balance

By © June Kaminski, MSN PhD(c), 2001

The demands of work and family take their toll on many of us. A fine balance is needed to deal with it all. Find ways to keep the scales at an even keel without pushing yourself to the limit.

One of the hardest tasks we all face is finding balance in our personal and work lives. When kids are involved, the juggling act gets even tougher. High costs and social economics make it important for most parents to work. Both parents. For dual-career families, the balance between home and work is shaky at best. Luckily, many companies are aware of this issue and may have work-life programs in place to help their workers find balance in all aspects of their lives.

Quality daycare in the workplace, flexible schedules, job sharing and telecommuting are all results of employer-driven work life efforts. These certainly help, but there are still things you can do to better balance the different parts of your life.



You, Your Home, Your Work

In virtually every person's life, there are three life areas that need to be balanced: your personal self, your home life and your work life. To the average worker, all three of these areas are important. This is the main cause of stress and tension and downright fatigue that grows as you try to juggle all three at once. All three areas affect the other. If you go to your job after fighting with your spouse first thing in the morning, it affects your work. Likewise, if you have a heavy hard day at the office, it affects how you are at home that evening. If you go without sleep, both your work and your family may suffer.

The degree that you need to divide your attention between all three areas often depends on your age and stage of life. Young parents focus a lot on home life, often more than self and work. Parents with older children can usually focus more on their self and work and share the responsibilities of home life with their growing children. And so on.

Balance is a key ingredient of wholeness. It means an even keel, but not a static non-changing one. When you are balanced, you are anchored in your self. Aware of your purpose, plan and vision for your life and your family. It may seem too difficult, but life can be rearranged to allow time for everything that is truly important to you.

Balance Strategies

At work, look for alternative options that fit your lifestyle. Flexible scheduling, working from home or sharing a job line with another worker could be your ticket to balancing the work end of the teeter totter. At home, streamline tasks as much as possible. Spend time with your family to see how the work can be divided. Draw up a plan that includes all members and work together to both care for the home and family, and allow each member time for their self.

Self time is extremely important for life balance. Each day, do something nice for yourself. It could be as simple as a bubble bath



with candles and soft music. Or a quiet walk by a stream. It doesn't have to be elaborate or expensive. Just quiet, reflective and something that fills you with contentment. This helps you meet the demands of both your work and family life in a refreshed and energetic way.

Sometimes, gaining balance means learning to say the word, "No." If you are at a stage of life where demands are critical in all areas of your life, you have to spend your energy wisely. No taking on extra projects unless they are important for your career. Think twice before doing volunteer work or coaching the team if you are already up to your ears. You have to ration your energy to take good care of your family, your self and your career. There is only so much of you, and so many hours in the day. Neither your family or your employer needs a martyr. Take on only what you can do with joy and comfort.

We all walk a tight rope these days, gingerly working to keep a steady upper hand on our whirlwind lives. Keep your priorities straight. To be there for your family, you need to take care of yourself. Likewise, you need a solid career to finance your home and expenses. Your workplace needs you to be attentive and productive. And to feel good about yourself and your life, you need balance in all three areas. It isn't easy, but you can find that anchor of stability that helps you function in a balanced, grounded way. It'll take work, but well worth the effort.