



Balancing Work and Family

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Managing our daily 24 hours is easier some days more than others. Attempting to care for our bodies, getting proper rest, and maintaining a household is a full-time job in itself. Add in work and family responsibilities, and the task becomes even more challenging. Even though it is our choice how we use our time, we often become quite stressed attempting to manage it all.

A common contributor to imbalance between work and family is control. People often feel like they are losing control when one half of the work and home equation crowds out the other. When this occurs the overwhelming sense of our to-do list seems more important than the things that give us the greatest enjoyment. Priorities become mismatched and frustration, anxiety, and even depression gain momentum.

Out of Balance?

Our lives naturally fall out of balance from time to time. When this occurs we struggle to regulate our responsibilities and what we enjoy most. Taking the time to assess how things are going can give us insight to realign our priorities. This allows us to balance our time and make changes to reflect our values. There are several questions you can ask yourself to see if work and family life have fallen out of balance:

- Do you regularly set aside time to spend with your family?
- When you are with family, do you feel anxious or guilty about not working?

- At work, what triggers you to feel like you should be spending more time with your family?

Out of Balance Consequences

Failing to find the balance between work and family produces undesired consequences, such as a loss of energy. While you are at work your productivity level will suffer in the long run from overwork and the stress that comes with it. At home you may feel too tired to enjoy your spouse and/or children.

Another common byproduct of working harder is increased responsibility. It is easy to take on more than you can handle appropriately. Working long hours may also cause you to miss out on important family moments and milestones.

Strategies for Achieving Greater Balance

If you are feeling overwhelmed by your schedule or guilty about the imbalance in your life, be encouraged. This is a common problem; there are only 24 hours in a day and invariably some tasks and activities take longer than anticipated. Second, you are not destined to stay stuck in this cycle. The following strategies will help you move past an overcrowded schedule to a place of balance between attending to your responsibilities and that which you love to do.

For Work:

- **Scheduling** - Pay attention to your work commitments. Are there any adjustments you can make to free up more time for home? The most difficult tasks should be scheduled for when you are usually the most productive.
- **Distractions** - There may be times of the day you are more likely to be distracted or procrastinate. How could you use your time more efficiently during this period? Are you checking social media too often or reading emails at a less productive time? Prioritize to maximize your time.
- **Separation** - Leave work at work. The more you focus on work at home the greater the lines blur between both worlds.

For Family:

- **Values** - Write down what you desire most from life. What activities are important for you to do with your family? Volunteer work? Extracurricular sports? Determine what is non-negotiable in your life.
- **Say no** - Determine what your values are and practice saying no. This helps you avoid becoming overcommitted.
- **Care** - When schedules are cramped, proper self-care is less likely to occur. Do your best to eat healthy, get plenty of rest, and take time for what you enjoy most.

For Work and Family:

- **Organize** - Is your work space messy? Is your home cluttered? Taking time to organize will save you time and energy in the long run. As an added bonus, you will probably get more done in less time.
- **Teamwork** - Sharing responsibility is one way to lighten the load for everyone. Whether at work or at home, if everyone chips in to get the job done, stress will go down.
- **Rewards** - Plan at least one fun family activity a week. This will always give you something enjoyable to anticipate.
- **Positive** - Rather than feeling guilty about what you might need to give up consider all the benefits of a balanced life. Improvements in relationships and work performance are just two of the many positive changes that can occur.

If you are still feeling a lack of control between work and family consider asking a professional for help or even advice. Often, workplaces have Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) to guide you in these situations. Remember, life will happen. When it does, things will typically fall out of balance for a time. Stay positive. Use the knowledge you've gained, take a step back, and assess. Proper planning is always a good start to swing an imbalanced life back into perspective.