

Managing Work and Life

Finding time for yourself and your family can be difficult when you work, but by assessing your priorities and managing your time, you can balance the many roles you play. This guide provides practical advice and tips on how to successfully manage your work and life, whether you are single, married or have a family.

Assessing Your Priorities

The first step in successfully balancing work and life is determining your priorities and then developing strategies that allow you to achieve them. To help you critically evaluate your work and life goals and values, reflect on the following questions:

- What different roles do I play (e.g., employee, parent, student, caregiver, homeowner, etc.)? Am I totally satisfied with each of my roles?
- What are my work, personal and family values?
- Are there conflicts between my values and my current lifestyle? What can I do to change this?
- What are my goals for personal development? Career? Family?
- What do I need to do reach those goals? Is anything preventing me from achieving my goals?
- What is my definition of success (e.g., career or monetary success; close, loving relationships with family and friends; making a contribution, etc.)? How can I achieve it?

These questions should serve as a guideline only; regularly take time out of your schedule to reflect on your goals and values, and do your best to achieve them.

“I work full time, have two children and care for my aging mother. I am so busy that it often seems like there aren’t enough hours in the day,” states Elizabeth. “Any tips on how I can better manage my responsibilities and still have some personal time left over?”

Time Management

Learning to manage your time properly can save you a considerable amount of stress—and give you more time to spend with friends and family. To help you manage your time more effectively, consider the following time-saving strategies:

- Make a “to-do” list. List the tasks that need to be done in order of their importance. Save other less pressing chores, errands and projects for when you have extra time.
- Plan ahead. Avoid waiting until the last minute to meet deadlines or fulfill obligations. Prepare your workspace for the next day; make to-do lists; lay out clothes; and pack briefcases, lunches and book bags the night before.
- Get organized. Keep all of your appointments clearly marked on one calendar and update it regularly. Schedule in work appointments, social obligations, birthdays, anniversaries, holidays and other important dates so you are aware of important events inside and outside of work.
- Use your time off to your advantage. Cook and freeze meals for the week; fill your car with gas; take care of your laundry/dry cleaning, etc., so you have more time during your work week.

Stress Management

Balancing your job responsibilities and personal life can cause tension and anxiety. However, the following tips may help you better manage stress before it becomes too overwhelming:

- Scale back your to-do list. Is everything on your list essential? Consider whether your expectations are realistic and scale them down to attainable levels if necessary. Accept that some things will not get done.
- Simplify tasks. Purchase food that is easy to prepare, combine errands into one trip, and set aside a block of time to do tasks (e.g., returning telephone calls, paying bills, etc.).
- Enlist the help of your family. Break up the household tasks and make them more manageable. For example, ask a trusted neighbor or friend to look after your child while you shop, or hire someone to mow your lawn. By getting the help you need, you can save time and concentrate on one task at a time.
- Prioritize your activities. If you feel overwhelmed with requests for your time and help (e.g., coaching your daughter's soccer team, chaperoning your son's field trip, volunteering for a local organization), choose those activities that are most important to you.
- Find "down" time. To do any job successfully, you need time off to think, prioritize and lift your spirits. Whether it's taking a bubble bath or exercising, make time to relax, re-energize and refresh your body and mind.
- Develop support systems. Emotional support can play an important role in relieving stress. Communicate and spend time with family and friends who are willing to listen and share both your joys and concerns.

- Seek help. If you feel particularly overwhelmed, join a support group or seek professional counseling. You can often find these resources in the Yellow Pages; by contacting community centers or religious organizations; or by asking your doctor or hospital for referrals to mental health professionals. Additionally, ask your benefits manager if your company offers an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), a counseling service that can help you deal with a range of life's problems.
- Take a stress management course. Local colleges, community centers, hospitals and clinics often offer seminar courses in how to most effectively manage stress. These courses teach you how to integrate breathing techniques, exercises, meditation and even dietary changes to help you minimize the physical and emotional effects of stress in your daily life.

Commuting

If you have a long commute to work, especially if you drive, the time you spend commuting can significantly add to your stress level, and use up time which might otherwise be spent on more productive activities. Consider the following tips to help you avoid the stress of daily travel:

- Use public transportation. If possible, take a bus or train to work and use that time to do paperwork, plan your day, relax, or read a book or newspaper.
- Allow ample time to get to work. Allow yourself an extra 15 to 30 minutes travel time each day as a cushion in case you run into traffic or other problems which may slow you down. Worrying about getting to work late only increases stress and tension.
- Carpool. Not only does carpooling save on gas expenses and help protect the environment, it can also reduce the stress associated with daily driving and allow you time to relax, read or work.
- Listen to audio books. Audio books, motivational tapes and music can make your commute more fun and relaxing.

Managing Overtime and Business Travel

Frequent overtime and business travel can make it more difficult to find time for yourself and/or your family. While you may not be able to change your schedule, you can ease some of the stress associated with overtime and travel by planning ahead and staying organized. The following tips may help you successfully manage your responsibilities:

- Share responsibilities with your spouse or partner. By coordinating your work schedules, you can ensure that household and family chores get done.
- Ask a neighbor or friend to pick up your mail and newspapers. The post office can also hold your mail while you are away, if you notify them in advance and fill out the proper paperwork. Contact your local post office for more information.
- Consider hiring a pet sitter or a dog-walking service to care for your pet if you often work late or travel for business. These individuals may also be willing to water house plants, pick up mail, and generally keep an eye on your home.
- Keep bottled water and healthy snacks (e.g., granola bars, raisins, nuts) in your desk or travel bag in case you are detained at work or required to travel unexpectedly. Healthy snacks will help keep your energy level up and help you avoid eating fast food while traveling.
- Pack your bags in advance with a second set of toiletries and other essentials to minimize packing time later.

Preparing Caregivers and Loved Ones

The following tips may help you prepare your loved ones and their caregivers when you have to travel for business:

- Make sure your caregiving arrangements are confirmed before you leave. By having a network of regular and backup caregivers, you will save yourself time and hassle if you have to travel on short notice.

- Leave emergency contact information with caregivers and the nearest neighbor in the event that you cannot be reached.
- Prepare caregivers with the proper instructions on house rules, medications, food, clothes and laundry, use of the car, etc.
- Inform all caregivers about your loved one's daily habits and routines.
- While you are away, call home on a regular basis to touch base with your loved ones and caregivers.

Managing Work and Family

If you have a family, managing work and life can be challenging—and often unpredictable. Here are some ideas:

- Make reliable child care arrangements. Find a dependable caregiver you and your child feel comfortable with. When choosing a caregiver, take into consideration your child's unique needs, your budget and your own scheduling needs, including overtime and travel. Make sure you have reliable arrangements for when you have to work late or be out of town.
- Make adult care arrangements. Caring for an adult loved one can be time-consuming and stressful, especially if you are working and caring for children as well. Take advantage of community services such as senior centers, meal-delivery programs, visitor services and transportation services or consider hiring home care (e.g., a homemaker, home health aide, personal care aide or certified nurses' aide who will care for your loved one at home, etc.). If your company offers an education and referral service, it can help you locate appropriate adult care arrangements in your area.
- Have a backup care plan in place. Have backup care arrangements in place in the event that your regular dependent care arrangements are disrupted.

- Ask your employer about flexible work arrangements. Some, but not all employers offer flexible work arrangements (e.g., compressed schedules, flexplace, flextime, etc.) to help employees better manage their personal and professional lives. Policies vary from company to company—and job to job. While this may be an option for some, it is not an option for all employees.
- Keep the lines of communication open. Talk with family members and caregivers regularly about expectations—who is expected to do what, and when—and adjust or prioritize as needed.
- Be positive. Remind yourself of the reasons why you work (besides the paycheck)—the mental challenge, the satisfaction of a job well done, the enhanced self-esteem.
- Make time for your children and your partner. Develop simple, meaningful rituals to celebrate family time together. For example, plan a special night each week to eat dinner together, watch a movie or just spend time together. Create a special bedtime routine with your children (reading stories, talking, playing, etc.) and spend time with your partner.
- If your company offers an education and referral service, it can help you locate appropriate child care or adult care providers and resources in your area.
- Eat a balanced diet. If your body has the right balance of vitamins and nutrients, you will have enough energy to make it through the day.
- Consider taking a multi-vitamin (with your doctor's permission). Vitamins are not a substitute for a balanced diet, but they can help make up for nutrients your diet may be lacking.
- Remember that it is just as effective to eat five or six smaller meals throughout the day as it is to eat three larger meals. If you don't have enough time to eat breakfast or lunch, have occasional nutritious snacks that are low in saturated fat, salt and cholesterol.
- Drink plenty of water. Most adults should drink between eight and 10 glasses of water per day to avoid dehydration.
- Exercise at least three times a week for a minimum of 20 minutes. If you don't have time for a formal workout every day, try to fit exercise in elsewhere—take the stairs instead of the elevator, park a few blocks away from work and walk the rest of the way, etc.
- Schedule physicals and dental appointments regularly. If possible, have your doctors send you reminder cards to avoid missing an appointment.
- Get enough sleep. Most adults need seven to eight hours of sleep per night—though it varies among individuals. Get enough to feel well-rested and alert throughout the day.
- Make a date with yourself. Write the appointment on your calendar—and use the time to try a fun new activity, or to do a favorite hobby that you haven't had much time for.

Taking Care of Yourself

Stress can take a toll on your health, career and personal life. Consider some of the following tips for staying healthy and taking care of yourself:

- Set aside some time for yourself each day to do something you enjoy, whether it's reading, meditating, taking a bath or simply watching television.
- From time to time, use a vacation day from work to spend time with family or friends, or just relax alone at home.

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