

Establishing and Maintaining a Work/Life Balance

How to have a successful career and a family life, too.

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Finding a way to balance your professional career and home life can be a true challenge, as most of us know. Our busy work schedules and our personal and professional obligations can be overwhelming. It is important to realize that balance is not only possible, but it is also essential to having a successful career and personal life.

The first step is to understand that the definition of a successful work/life balance is different for each person. A Google search for work/life balance yielded 36 million hits. Ask yourself what your professional and personal goals are. Then, you can take measures to attain them in a way that enables you to maintain your emotional stability and happiness.

WORK

Academics and private practice have their own unique set of issues and challenges, but some advice applies to both.

	sun	mon	tue	wed	fri
mom	Dinner with the gombergs-7pm			nails	
dad	Auto show AM-special day with stevie/ dinner wigombergs				
stevie		piano		tennis	
david		piano	School play practice		
aviva		Ballet			Sleep over

Figure 1. Post a weekly schedule of the family's activities.

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Know Your Limits

There are always going to be unexpected emergencies, so try to build some wiggle room into your schedule. Keep this idea in mind when you are planning your clinical and OR schedules with your office manager. Wiggle room will allow you to shift patients or OR time in the event of an emergency.

Staff

Developing a good relationship with all of your office staff is essential. Delegate and outline each individual's responsibilities. It is also important to cross-train your key employees so that someone who is on vacation or sick has a backup.

Priorities

Whenever possible, attempt to leave your work at the office. This effort does not mean that you are an uncaring physician or that you are unavailable if needed. Decide what is urgent and take care of it. Other things can be delegated, or they can wait until a less stressful time.

FAMILY LIFE

Marriage and children undoubtedly affect work schedules. You must take your family's needs into account. Several strategies will serve you well in this effort.

FOCUS ON LIFESTYLE

Communication

Be open with your spouse and clearly explain what your goals and needs are. You must come up with a plan that works for both of you. This effort will take sacrifice as well as understanding on both of your parts. A clear delegation of household responsibilities is imperative.

Calendar

Keeping track of all the personal and school activities of everyone in the family is hard. A calendar or open weekly template is a great way of highlighting important dates/meetings so that everyone knows what is going on and nothing is missed. Every Sunday, create a schedule of the week's activities that has a column for every person (Figure 1). Make a second schedule for the week that shows where mom and dad will be each day and what their professional commitments are. Hang both schedules in plain sight on the refrigerator. In this way, everyone will be aware of the week's events, and you and your spouse can figure out in advance how to get your children to their various activities.

Household Chores

In a busy household, everyone should help make things work. Create a lunch rotation involving the kids. Everyone can be assigned a day of the week when they make lunch for the family. Even the little ones can help by making something as simple as a peanut butter and jelly sandwich (It may not be gourmet, but no one will die!). Also consider assigning each family member one night when he or she clears the dining table, loads/unloads the dishwasher, etc.

Family Activities

Scheduling regular family activities is important. If having dinner together is not possible every evening, aim for at least once or twice per week. Consider a regular movie night. Plan a weekend trip to the park, mall, ballpark, or someplace your kids perceive as fun. Make an effort to spend quality time together. Consider planning a special day with mom or dad for each of your children to maintain a strong bond.

Extras

Keep children's birthday gifts for all ages along with gift wrap and ribbon in one of your closets. When you find out at the last minute about a birthday party that your child will attend, you do not have to run out to shop (Figure 2). You can also keep gifts on hand for other events such as engagement parties and baby showers. Keeping a case of wine in the house means you can just grab a bottle if you are heading to a dinner party.

Delegation

This valuable tool does not have to break the bank. Not having to pick up groceries or drive your children to various lessons can save you a lot of time and stress. Many people are looking for a way to make some extra cash and would be more than happy to help you with some of these things. Consider part-time help for a few hours a day to lessen the load of cooking, laundry, shopping, etc. Hire someone from the office to help organize and pay the bills. Being on time will keep the interest charges on your credit cards from adding up.



Figure 2. Keep a few birthday presents on hand for parties your children are invited to at the last minute.

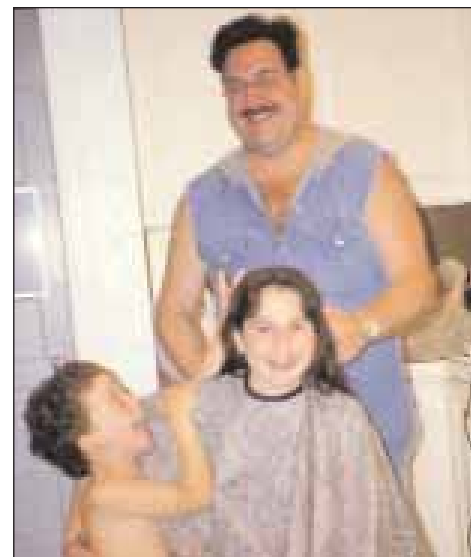


Figure 3. Have a family haircut night. Everyone gets a bath every 6 weeks whether he or she needs it or not!

“Do not forget to take care of yourself. Everyone needs a little ‘me time’ to maintain his or her mental well-being. ... Set aside an hour a few times a week for activities that keep you happy and whole.”

Consider asking someone from your church, synagogue, or other association to pick your kids up from school or take them to a karate lesson. You can return the favor on the weekend. This way, your child is not the last one waiting to go home after school or missing a lesson because you are running late at work again.

Arrange for the piano or violin teacher to come to your house for lessons to minimize your travel time. Consider having your hairdresser/barber come to your house on one evening every 6 weeks to cut everyone’s hair. It gets the job done and is lots of fun (Figure 3).

Yourself

Do not forget to take care of yourself. Everyone needs a little “me time” to maintain his or her mental well-being. Whether you spend it at the gym or the nail salon, at least set aside an hour a few times a week for activities that keep you happy and whole. This practice will make a huge, positive difference in your physical and mental health over time.

CONCLUSION

Know your limits. Realize that it is okay to say no and to delegate everyday household chores or activities that are cumbersome. No one expects you to be superhuman.

Be true to yourself and your family. Give of yourself, and you will get back so much more when your practice and household run well. □

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