

## Women's Media

# How to Balance Your Career and Family

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The biggest challenge many of us face is how to balance the demands of family, friends, and career. While we want happy and fulfilling lives outside of work, we have to make personal sacrifices in order to achieve our career aspirations. How do you balance those sacrifices so they don't greatly interfere with your personal goals? How do you fit roles such as wife, mother, and friend into an already hectic schedule? Since time is precious, keeping a balance between the two worlds can be a challenge. Fortunately, with proper planning, balance is possible. Several Fortune 500 corporate executives revealed their balancing strategies to me. They offer proof that it is possible to have not only a successful career, but a rewarding and enjoyable personal life as well.

## Set Your Priorities Early

The first step to achieving balance is to get your family to agree on what the priorities should be. Realize that business success often requires long hours and travel. In these instances, support from your family has to be there. Additionally, when children are involved, many people discover that they have to re-balance their lives so they have time to spend with the kids.

Ellen Hancock, Chairman and CEO of Exodus Communication, described both her personal and professional life as successful, but not necessarily balanced. However, this situation worked for her because she had the buy-in of each family member. As she explained, "There are sacrifices. But your friends and family, your spouse, your parents, all have to support the situation and have an understanding that, yes, this is important." Hancock went on to explain that her schedule did not always allow her to be as available as other women, but she managed to do what it took to keep everyone happy.

Hancock, like many others, made the decision that family was indeed a top priority. As such, they strove for new ways to carve out family time each day. They were aware that few people say at the end of their lives, "I wish I had spent more time at work."

Jean Hamilton, CEO of Prudential Institutional, used some of her business practices to make time for family. She said, "The time I spent with my family and friends was not what I wanted it to be. That's why I began to focus on ways to be more efficient with my personal time. I began to apply some of the efficiency tools that I learned from business. For

example, I got very aggressive about scheduling time with friends and family. Everything went on my calendar. That's how I dealt with things in business, so I did the same outside of the office. Using those kinds of tools helped me minimize the sacrifices.”

## **Consider What Is Right for You**

When placed in identical situations, no two people will make the same choices. Each person has to evaluate the event and then make a decision based on what is right for her at the moment. Just because an outcome worked for one person, doesn't necessarily mean it will work for another.

Prioritize your own commitments. Decide what is most important to you. Where do you want to spend your time and energy? How important is your career in the scheme of your life? How do you define success?

Mary Farrell, Managing Director, Senior Investment Strategist and Member of the Policy Committee for PaineWebber, Inc., decided to be available for global vacation travel. The decision affected her career, and she understood that. She didn't expect people to overlook her absences. Many others in her position would not have made such a drastic decision, but Farrell made the best choice based on her values.

Every day we hear of increasing numbers of people who reach the pinnacle of their careers and decide it's time to embark on a new stage of life. They quit their jobs, start a family, change careers, or take an extended leave. Others start businesses out of their homes so they can be with their families.

Some companies are reluctant to support a person's career advancement if they don't know the person's goals—both personal and professional. Therefore, once you know what you want, communicate it to your management and get support. If the company will not support your personal goals as well as your professional ones, then it's time to evaluate whether this is the right company for you.

Farrell searched long and hard for a company that would support both her career and personal aspirations. She worked at several firms before landing at one that was open to the kind of flexibility she needed. As long as the work was done, her boss didn't care if she went to the school play—and she managed to make it to quite a few. It took dedication to make up the work at the end of the day, but it was vital that she be allowed that kind of flexibility.

## **Balance Points to Consider**

Before you make any drastic changes to your personal or professional life, consider the

implications of each decision and how you plan to integrate the changes into your schedule. For example:

- What effect will having children have on your life?
- How much time do you want to take off when you have a child?
- Do you want to come back to work full time?
- What support systems exist to help you?
- Will leaving at 5:00 allow you to get your work done? If not, are you willing to take work home?
- How much control do you have over your workload?

Different jobs have different requirements. Farrell found that by moving to the research department she was better able to achieve her goals. What about your current position? Study your field to see if it meets your goals and aspirations. If not, it may be time to consider a change.

### **What's Your Balancing Decision?**

We all make sacrifices to get what we want. Most top executives do not sleep eight hours. Many of them work on weekends. These are choices they make in order to have what they want. Think about where you want to be in 10 or 20 years and what it will take to get there. What choices and sacrifices will you need to make today to achieve your goals tomorrow?

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