



My Work/Life Balance Lessons by Shannon Plogsted

My husband and I have three children – including twins – under the age of two and a half and we both work full-time. We don't have a lot of time for hobbies, and things can be a little crazy at the kids' bedtime, but through it all, we manage to get to work on time, focus on our jobs when we're at work, take good care of our children, and find a little time for ourselves and each other.

I'm not sure we could do this if both of us didn't contribute nearly equally. I drop off the children at daycare in the morning and my husband picks them up at the end of the day. We share the evening rituals – dinner, bath time, reading books – so that we have a little time to unwind together and manage the business of a family when the kids are asleep. Here are a few things we've learned that might help other working parents with young children.

- **Set a schedule and stick to it.** We operate with near-military precision. Our schedule includes waking the children up at the same time every morning and putting them to bed at the same time every night.
- **Change your expectations when necessary.** You can feel completely inept if you try to do everything as well as you did

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Say Goodbye to the Perfect Holiday...and Say Hello to the Happiest!

There is no time of year when the quote, "The perfect is the enemy of the good," is more appropriate than the holidays. Trying to make things perfect this time of year can quickly stress you to the point that you aren't having any fun at all. Instead, to make the holidays a time of great joy and personal warmth, forget about perfection, and go for the good and the happy. (Reading time 120 seconds).

Years ago at an important celebration for my father I wanted everything to be perfect. I was focused on the details, right down to the best positioning of the tables outside his home overlooking a lake. It turned out my father didn't like how I'd positioned those tables and told me he wanted them elsewhere. I objected, pointing out that the sun would be in guests' eyes, and other minutiae. He insisted, I resisted, and a heated argument ensued. As my father stalked off I realized how foolish I'd been.

I was more concerned about the perfection of the event, than the joy of the person it was celebrating. Duh! In an effort to make my Dad's celebration "perfect", I'd lost site of the purpose...for my Dad, family, friends and I to enjoy a good time together.

Similarly, this time of year, we need to remember that perfection is not the objective. Happiness, joy, love and affection are. Tweaking the focus of your actions, just a little, can multiply these outcomes for you and all those you care about.

Begin by making up your mind right now to focus more on positively connecting with PEOPLE and less on perfecting THINGS. If you'll do that, you will find that even though the things may not work out as expected, what you end up with is even better.

Certainly lots of things have to get done during the holidays. But your attitude and approach when you do them is much more important to thoroughly enjoying the holidays than having them turn out just right. And in most cases, the positive attitude and approach will end up producing a better result anyway...plus everyone can enjoy the doing.

"Let's all get in the car. I can't wait to see everyone at Grandma's house", is a lot better than, "Get in the car right now! You've already made us late!!" Better to be a bit late, but drive and arrive with a happy crew...than show up on time with a bunch of grumps.

"I don't have any shoes that match this outfit and my hair just won't do right. I don't know what to wear now?!" Listen up. Nobody is going to notice if you look just right. But if you are broadcasting a frown, sulking and stressing about your looks, almost everyone will notice. In general, if you are smiling, you'll look great.

"I overcooked the casserole and it's going to be so dry. I don't have the stuff for another side dish, and they'll be here in 20 minutes." Don't even think about going to the store. If you are barely available and are grumpy then your guests won't enjoy the meal or you either. Remember, the purpose is the People. You invited them and they are coming to spend time with you... hopefully relaxed time filled with smiles. The food is an accessory, and it will

before you had young children. Accept that sometimes the cupcakes for daycare are going to have to be store bought, not homemade.

- **Carve out time for each other.** My husband and I get a babysitter nearly every weekend so we can connect without family distractions. It makes a difference.
- **Be nice to your spouse.** It seems obvious, but things can get hectic when everyone's over-worked and over-tired, so don't forget that you need your spouse on your side.
- **Leave the job behind when you get home.** I focus on spending quality time with the kids instead of checking e-mail or taking phone calls. There are times when staying in touch can't be avoided, but don't let it be the norm.
- **Figure out how to make your job portable.** If you can work from home when one of the children is sick, you'll be a little less stressed out.

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do fine. Remember, dinner always tastes better when there is laughter in the kitchen.

During the holidays keep in the front of your mind WHY you are doing all these things. Isn't it to make yourself and those you care about happy? If so, the more you enjoy the effort, which you often do together, the happier everyone will be with the result.

So put some extra joy into just the doing – whether it's buying or wrapping gifts, cooking, or driving to relatives. Plan activities where the purpose is connecting with the people. Realize that the things being done are secondary.

Since my two daughters were three and four years old the three of us have been assigned the responsibility of breaking the bread for the holiday stuffing. We each get a stack of slices and a bowl to fill with just the right size pieces. The bantering over what exactly is the right sized piece usually evolves into cross table bread tosses into someone's else's bowl, then a toss into someone else's head, ("oh, I did that on accident") and, when we are really nervy, a bread attack on Mom in the kitchen.

This little shared task has created one of my most valuable possessions – the memory of fifteen minutes of bread breaking. I can hear the mocking cries of "Stop it". I can feel the smiles and affection. Being able to recall, at will, my daughter's voice saying, "When are we going to break the bread Dad?" is a personal asset beyond price.

The Holidays are about creating, growing and celebrating such moments. Enjoy them and don't worry about delivering perfection on time.

So to you and yours, from all of us at WorkLifeBalance, we wish you many special moments this season that will last and be treasured forever. May your tasks and traditions be especially filled with great warmth, laughter and love.

Jim Bird, Publisher

To view the Four Life Quadrants click here: [Big Picture](#)

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