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My Work/Life Balance Lessons

By George Kane

With five children now grown or in college, I still find I don't have a lot of time on my hands. When I work long hours, the hours at home are never long enough, and yet that's the nature of our business.

I've observed three work-life balance stages in my own career and see them playing out in the Pittsburgh business unit now. My wife works at Turner, too, and we're in what you might call the "more mature, empty nester" stage. The other two include the families with younger children and the young single employees.

Each group has its own work-life balance needs related to its life stage. I remember what it was like to be in those other stages, so I'm sensitive to their needs. I try to be as accommodating as possible, keeping the work environment informal and supporting people when they need to arrive late or leave early to attend a teacher conference or school activity.

When it seems appropriate, I share what I've learned about work-life balance either by setting an example or through conversations. Here's some of what I've learned through two tours at Turner and many years of self-employment:

Learn to plan. To make sure I don't overlook or minimize something important, I plan for it, whether it's an upcoming family event or tomorrow's activities. List-making is part of this. At the end of the day, I make a list of what needs to happen tomorrow or in the next few days. It helps me stay on track.

Use your sense of humor. Laughter is good for your health and can do a lot to relieve the stress that comes with this business.

Remember that there's always tomorrow. Ours is a business where you just don't finish your work every

Recipes for Life

The challenging times we are traveling through will test many of us more than we have ever been tested. There are however, important life recipes already in your cookbook which you can and should use to nourish and strengthen yourself along these uncharted paths. (Reading time 180 seconds).

Last year's holidays were the most gastronomically satisfying for me **ever**. My wife outdid herself with an array of entrees and sides and desserts that I never want to forget. Her newly introduced apple pie, for example, got better with every bite, going from the best *apple pie ever*, to the best pie ever to maybe the *best thing I have ever eaten*.

The variety of great food and company made for many "Mom and apple pie" moments with my wife, our two daughters and our oldest daughter's fiancé – all of us full, content and surrounded by love. And although there were only 5 of us physically together, there were others who contributed in a very important way to our delight. They had shared a recipe.

As I looked at the beckoning buffet of leftovers one evening, I asked my wife where she had acquired the recipes. "Oh", she said, "The pecan pie recipe came from Linda. The broccoli casserole from your Mom. The Kentucky bourbon pie was Lucille's. And the chocolate cake was my Mom's."

Some of those she named were no longer living, but in many ways they all were with us in the joy of those moments. They had helped create them. Parents, in-laws and the wife of a former board member had all added to the happiness and satisfaction of our holiday. They had passed on recipes that created contented moments and delicious smiles across multiple lifetimes.

As I would reheat some broccoli casserole or steal a forkful of pie from the tin, my mind kept coming back to those who had given us the recipe. At that very moment something they had passed on was making my life better, and would do so again many more times in the future. Thinking of them made me thankful and happy.

It also got me thinking about what other life recipes had been passed on by family, friends, mentors, and even strangers who had benefitted our family's appetite for life in other ways. It made me consider as well, what recipes I was passing on.

I realized my Mom's recipe for life was a mixture of steady, predictable, caring reliability. Even in her later years, she was always there with a warming meal and a quiet, comforting, loving presence. That was important nourishment. My wife said her Mom's most important life recipes were "A good work ethic and not to be a complainer." The big meal my Dad served up was "Don't wait for things to happen – go out and make them happen."

We all have been given positive recipes for life from a variety of people who have come and maybe gone from our lives. We have also suffered through some ugly ones that produced less than satisfying results. But just having recipes in your cookbook doesn't do anything for your palate. It's which recipes you decide to cook up that makes the difference.

What Are Your Life Recipes?

So pause and ask:

1. **Should I change the recipes I am serving up in my life right now?** Am I nourishing myself on the best personal and professional habits and attitude to face these future challenges as they unfold?
2. **What recipes will I serve up and pass on to others?** There are many, many people who, by your example, you influence in small and big ways. They take in how you handle yourself. Friends, children, parents, siblings, colleagues at work; even strangers in brief encounters. Will they take away the aroma of courage, the taste of optimism, the consistency of strength under pressure?



day. It's important to recognize that many tasks will carry over to the next day. It's part of the construction continuum.

Be clear on your work-life balance priorities. It's not enough to have priorities for work – you need them for life, too. Because of this, when I close and lock my office door, I try to leave the job behind that door. Thinking about work all the time will interfere with my personal priorities.

Like what you do. No matter what you do for a living, if you don't like your work, it's harder to live with your work. If I didn't enjoy my job, I'd struggle to achieve a good and healthy balance. That's because there'd be too much emphasis on work and not enough on life, and my unhappiness with my job would have a negative impact on my personal life. Because I like what I do, it's easier for me to put in the time required.

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Quotes from Aristotle

“The ideal man bears the accidents of life with dignity and grace, making the best of circumstances.”

“We become just by performing just action, temperate by performing temperate actions, brave by performing brave action.”

“You will never do anything in this world without courage. It is the greatest quality of the mind next to honor.”

“The greatest virtues are those which are most useful to other persons.”

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”

Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC) was a Greek philosopher.

Just like the instructions for baking a delicious chocolate cake, our good life recipes, will be passed down again and again...for generations. Unfortunately, so too can bad ingredients and combinations. Because others who are very meaningful to you are observing and learning from your example, your life recipes are important...and that makes you important. What you do and HOW YOU CHOOSE TO DO IT is important. And that's never truer than in the face of adversity.

So think about and commit to the ingredients of your character that you will now let dominate your life. Determine which values, skills and emotions you will use to take control as the challenge of the future unfolds.

Will your recipe call for solid judgment, clear and realistic insights, strong ethics, and positive self-reliance? Or will apprehension or fear or some other unnecessary negative ingredient ruin the dish? Will you avoid adding the bitter taste of the blame game directed at yourself or others? And will it take into account that you are nourishing not only yourself, but also serving up a very important meal for others.

Let's use these challenging times as a motivation to commit to serving up the best ever of ourselves. Whether it is a recipe for honesty and integrity or for strength in the face of adversity, deliver the best within you.

By doing so you will nourish a full and rewarding life for yourself, no matter what your external environment has in store. In addition your worthy recipes will find their way into the kitchens, homes and lives of those you love, those you care about and many more you may never know.

Consistently reflect and pass on the best of your life recipes **now**, when they are needed most.

Jim Bird
Publisher

E-Tip: Cook Yourself Up a Better Life

Block 1 hour in your calendar to ask and answer these questions. Should I change the recipes I am serving up in my life right now? Am I nourishing myself on the best personal and professional habits and attitude to manage a changing future? Should I serve up more or less of certain values and behaviors? Once decided, write frequent reminders in your calendar over the next 30 days to prompt your new and improved recipes for life. (See the accompanying article for more details).