



## My Work/Life Balance Lessons

By Chris Auer

Because my wife and I both work full-time at fairly demanding jobs, we learned early that we needed to be flexible and creative about how we managed the care and schedules of our three children, who are now 7, 11 and 12.

For example, when we both commuted by train, we chose a daycare center near the train station. When we stopped taking the train, we found a center closer to home. Once all three were in school, we had to shift from daycare to before- and after-school care. We now rely heavily on the programs offered through the Y near their schools.

While many working couples are fortunate to have assistance from family members living nearby, that wasn't an option for us until my father moved to the area about three years ago. He now helps tremendously by transporting the kids to and from after-school activities – transportation my wife and I wouldn't be able to provide because of our schedules. The bonus, of course, is that my children get to spend time with their grandfather. We know what a gift that is to all of us.

Here's what we've learned that has helped us maintain as much balance as possible as we've moved through different needs and phases of family life:

- **Don't kid yourself that it will get easier.** We were delusional for awhile, thinking it would get better as the children got older. We're actually juggling more now.
- **Understand that one plan doesn't fit every situation.** This is especially true as the children get older. The before- and after-school options available for my middle schooler aren't the same as

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

**“You stay in balance by getting out of balance.” Heeding this seemingly contradictory statement will take you a long ways towards creating a happier, more productive work-life balance with much less stress. (Reading time 180 seconds).**

Staying in balance is like steering a boat. From my Florida office I can see a lighthouse about two miles out to sea. Imagine you want to steer a small boat from shore to that lighthouse. Grasping the steering wheel tightly you aim the bow directly at the lighthouse and accelerate toward your destination. If you continue to firmly hold the wheel in the direction you have started, without making any adjustment left or right, will you arrive at the lighthouse?

No. What happens? Gripping the wheel you quickly find that the lighthouse is off to your left; so you steer left. Within a few minutes the lighthouse is off on the right; so you steer right. You continue this pattern of left-right adjustment until you get to the lighthouse. You stayed on course by getting off course. The same is true in life. You stay in balance by getting out of balance.

Now, the better you get at navigating, the less you get off course. By learning from your experiences and developing your skills you make small adjustments sooner. But for the rest of your life you will be making those adjustments. Your proper balance will always be changing. You will stay in balance by getting out of balance.

This is true not only for you as an individual but also for any organization you are part of. Your place of employment and the industry you are part of has probably changed more in the last five years than it did in the previous twenty-five. If not, expect it to in the next five. Companies can no longer come out with a product or service, find the best way to deliver it and conclude, “We are all set now. We just have to keep cranking it out. Let's hold tight to the wheel and plow ahead in this unchanging direction.” If they try, they will sooner than later find they are way off course. An organization's proper balance will always change. It stays in balance by getting out of balance.

To keep a productive and positive balance individually you must remember:

You can't be all things to all people at the same time.

You can't even be equal things to all people at the same time.

You have to recognize and accept these two simple facts to reduce much of the unnecessary stress and guilt in life. Don't expect to always be Superman or Superwoman or Super-mom or Super-dad. But that's okay, because on some days you can be super for different people at different times.

What you need to be able and willing to do is shift your mental emphasis for a little while – a day, a weekend, a week. To show you how this works, think of your life in these quadrants:

Work – Family – Friends/Community – Self

those for the two in elementary school.

- **Plan ahead.** As soon as I get the sports schedules and school calendar, I determine the events that I need or want to attend in the coming months and put them on my calendar. This makes a big difference in my ability to meet both my personal and professional obligations.
- **Communicate.** Once I know I won't be able to attend a school or work event, I let people know ahead of time so there are no unpleasant last minute surprises.
- **Take advantage of technology.** Before leaving work to pick up the children at their after-school program, I go online to check traffic reports and route myself accordingly.
- **Save time for yourself.** I take one night a week to do something fitness-related as a stress reliever. It's something I look forward to and enjoy.

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[Click Here to See a Visual of the Four Life Quadrants](#)

Consider which area you are most concerned about having neglected a bit lately.

To steer back into better balance decide right now to emphasize this area of your life tomorrow, or ideally all of next week. Make up your mind to give strict attention to the important people or projects in that quadrant of your life for the upcoming week.

Making that one quadrant your emphasis for the week does not mean you will be abandoning the other areas of your life. If you decide you are going to emphasize the self-quadrant and get back in an exercise routine it doesn't mean you will stop going to work. It does mean that when you can choose to stay at work an extra hour or go exercise, that you will pick up the gym bag and get on your way.

If you feel a little out of whack, pick a quadrant you need to emphasize to get back in a better balance. Now, take out your planner and write the name of the quadrant: Work – Family – Friends – Self...whichever one it is, on every day in your planner for the next week. Put it in all CAPS.

Now go a step further and schedule some specific things you will do next week with the people in that quadrant. Decide whether it will be a date or a meeting. And then when the time comes, be there...fully focused on them the people and activity you have chosen.

Benjamin Franklin did this. Every week he picked a certain area of his life, or relationship or personal characteristic he wanted to improve and emphasized it for a week. Businessman, writer, statesmen, founder of a new county...he credited much of that success to the method.

Why don't you give it a try for next week? Improve your balance by committing in your planner how you will shift your balance for the next seven days. Make that written planner commitment now and it will happen.

*Jim Bird, Publisher*

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

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