

Managing the Impossible: Balancing Work and Family

Ron Johnson, Ph.D. • Balancing Family & Work

<http://www.intheworkplace.com/apps/articles/default.asp?blogid=1935&view=post&articleid=13263&fldKeywords=&fldAuthor=&fldTopic=146>

In the best-seller *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*, Juliet Schor reported that work hours and stress are up, and family time and sleep are down for all classes of employed Americans. Working moms come home to a "second shift"; fathers find themselves juggling new and multiple work and family roles; and single parents are almost always on the brink of being overwhelmed. Industries overwork us or, perhaps worse, underwork us by making us "temps" or part-timers. Some workplace policies are family-friendly, but many are not. And many leisure activities do not promote real recreation and renewing space in our lives. Such work and family patterns can lead to stress, depression, and marital and family conflict. Moving from burnout to balance can be challenging.

As a thought experiment, imagine being a foreigner in our culture, where all the daily activities are unknown to you. Piece by piece, as you observe us working or raising our children, you discover the patterns and values of our lives by our "practices." What would you see about the "practices" of our work and family life? What might you think?

To better balance and organize our work and family life, a number of solutions have been suggested. Examples include:

- More efficient time management--making "quality time" by prioritizing, planning, and protecting blocks of time; buying others' time for needed services; developing smoother, more efficient systems (for calendars, shopping, eating, filing, etc.)
- Assuming ownership of your time--learning to say "no"; delegating (to family members, co-workers); using your "peak" time for your most important jobs; breaking down big jobs into doable increments; learning to recognize and act differently when things are out of balance.
- Reviewing the systems and traditions that orient you and order your life--asking how you understand, make and value family time, work time, community time, spiritual time? What goals and goods are you seeking? How does your culture view time (e.g., "time is money") and do you agree?
- Matching your practices to your values--how do you believe you should balance the time needed for family, work, God, self and community? Is your current way really working for you and others? Is your rhythm integrated with your deeper aims?

Such balancing requires the ability to recognize and juggle the multidimensional, multi-categorical responsibilities and opportunities of life. Our spiritual traditions offer us some important questions and some disciplined guidance. What is the meaning of money and time to us? Is our work an occupation or a vocation? Are we "selling

ourselves" too cheaply, or for a questionable end? What is the meaning of marriage, parenting, caring for our relatives, and family life to us, in this season of our life?

Traditional disciplines and virtues such as silence, solitude, generosity, worshipping together, eating together, and making a day apart (or sabbath, Hebrew for "pausing" or "ceasing") are offered as spiritual remedies. The rhythms of work and commerce are replaced by the rhythms of worship and recreation, for discerning our right relations to each other and to our world. "We need Sabbath, though we doubt we have time for it," says Dorothy Bass, in *Practicing Our Faith*. Without the protection of such spiritual customs or traditions, commerce and consumerism might invariably run without a "pause."

Such practices punctuate our life rhythms, and put our work in the context of God's work. They help us check and resist our various idolatries. We pause from doing and making to remember being and loving. Our spiritual wisdoms suggest that doing, remembering and resting form a deep and sustaining rhythm of life.

Ron Johnson, Ph.D.
Managing Director
Samaritan Counseling Center