



Gaining More Balance Between Work and Family

One of the most common questions I hear is, "How can I be successful in my career and still be the kind of family member I want to be?" Some people write to me about their children, their garden, their marriage, their business, their house—they are simply overwhelmed.

I have always believed that we should govern our lives by our compass rather than our watch. For most of us the trick is not to cram one more task into an over-stuffed life but to make our choices based on our enduring principles.

This is where a personal and family mission statement comes in. Your mission might be a few words scribbled on a restaurant napkin, or it might be a family constitution you have crafted and refined over the years. A mission statement teaches us when to say no and how to say yes.

When we have no mission statement, we are pushed and pulled by the demands of life. When we have a mission statement, we can set a steady course. Let me give you an example:

I have a friend whose personal mission is to serve. Because he is very educated and insightful, he imagined that he might be a prominent writer or a famous consultant. While he has been working on and waiting for those opportunities, many people have come to him for advice. He counsels with them and encourages them. He has helped many people. But he still is not famous. When I asked him if he is ever disappointed, he replies simply: "Nope. My mission is to serve. I am serving."

Sometimes the fulfillment of our mission turns out differently from the way we expect. But if we keep a clear vision of our core principles, we will do the things that matter most.

Effective management of our lives must accompany our vision. I have written much about life management. We can be proactive. We can draw on the energy of the group. We can delegate. If we are to be effective we must be wise.

Yet the two biggest problems for most people in balancing work with family is that they fail to schedule family time and they let what family time they have be stolen by time-wasters. Every week, every month, every year we can schedule in family fun, family reading, family outings, family dates. We can honor those commitments.

When we have unexpected time together, we can be sure it is not squandered on mindless television. We can take a walk, read a book, bake a cake, or simply sit and talk. By being alert for precious moments together, we can be sure none of them is wasted.