

PEOPLE SCIENCE

The art of managing others for R&D Scientists & those who work with them

APPLY MANAGEMENT MAXIMS TOWARD BALANCING WORK AND LIFE

Much media attention encourages working parents to seek work/life balance, the equal allotment of time at work and at home with family and friends. However, at work there are periods when we are at our normal pace and then times when we are frenetic. At work, we are not balanced in time and energy spent. We believe that equilibrium at work or at home cannot be sustained over time; equilibrium is neither feasible nor attainable. What's interesting is that you already have the strategies to move toward equilibrium.

What are these strategies? As a scientist manager, you are a master at time and project management, setting goals, following budgets. Apply these management maxims to allocate time and energy for life activities outside of work. Here's how.

Key Concept: Act tactically, think strategically.

As a scientist manager, it's your job to get the work done, meet deadlines and abide by budgets. Also you must be strategic, knowing how what you do fits into the larger business unit and organizational goals. As a working parent these two perspectives apply. For example, Baby didn't sleep through the night but six months from now Baby will. You can handle the day to day challenges of raising children while keeping an eye on the big picture. Children grow up and leave home. As both managers and parents, we must act tactically and think strategically.

Key Concept: Prioritize your family tasks.

At work, we prioritize projects and find resources to meet goals and deadlines. At home, having a list of family projects is good, prioritizing projects with family input is better. Written and shared family project lists are best. Remember this FDA warning: "If it's not documented, it didn't happen".

Enhance your family prioritization by saying "no" instead of an automatic yes. Explain to others that no can mean no, never or no, not now. Saying no allows you to say yes to something else. Another strategy is to use the language of negotiation: "If I do this... then you can do that..." To encourage your ease with prioritization give up on perfectionism. Strive for 80% instead of 100% perfection and see how less stressed you and your family are.

Key Concept: Pause during conflict and stress.

As a scientist manager, there are situations where conflict and stress are high. Invoking the "24 hour rule", not reacting until the next day to let things cool off, is one way to handle unpleasant work situations. In times of family and personal stress one solution is increased self-care or time to let life cool off. Self-care is all the things you do outside of work to rest, renew and refresh. Self-care means different things to different people. Giving yourself this personal time is not an indulgence but a necessity, directly proportionate to the amount of pressure we assume in our lives outside of work.

Key Concept: Find a working parent mentor.

A mentor is your career advisor, someone who guides you in getting promoted or increasing your organizational visibility. Mentoring is based on building a trusting relationship in support of your professional goals. Selecting a mentor who has a similar professional experience as you, the protégé, can help you avoid challenges and advance more quickly.

Using this same logic, working parents need to find other working parents as part of the support network. Sharing solutions for common family issues will save you time and aggravation. Being a mentor to another working parent gives you an opportunity to give back. Sounds like a win-win situation.

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