

Ways to Balance Work and Family Life



Every common person has responsibilities like bread to earn, children to raise, home to keep together, and a host of other commitments to spouse, extended family and community. Considering there are only 24 hours in a day, only so much is going to be done. Besides the dream of cloning ourselves, what else is available so as to make the day run a little smoother and hopefully leave some time for each important part of our life? This article highlights upon some essential items necessary for work and family life balance for women.



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Work and family are both central to our way of life. To find a balance between the two is a key issue for every man, woman and employer. In urban India today almost 50% of the families have both husband and wife as earning members. Generally when adults in a family add children to their family they become more traditional in how they divide their workloads. The tasks are generally divided between the husband and wife on the basis of their genders rather than on the basis of their interests and abilities. However, in order to successfully balance multiple roles, adults may need to become even less traditional than they were before becoming parents.

Managing numerous and complex work and family roles is a source of stress for many of us. Stress comes from two primary sources namely, role strain and spillover. Role strain occurs when the responsibilities of one role interfere with performing other roles. For example, a job that requires long hours or excessive travel may have a negative impact on a partnership or a parenting role. Spillover is when the conditions and relationships in one area of our lives affect us in another area. For example, inflexible work hours, an overbearing



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supervisor, or a less-than-positive work environment can have negative impact on our family life. On the other hand, an unsupportive partner, inequalities in the division of household chores and child care, significant health problems in family members, or changing child care arrangements can have a negative impact on our work.

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The different processes that one can work upon and which in turn can help to evaluate oneself, one's life and make changes to balance work and family life are as follows:

1. Clarifying Values: Values guide our actions and are usually the result of our life experiences. Clarifying our values is one key to managing work and family demands. A value is defined as a "principle, standard, or quality considered worthwhile or desired." Most of us know some of our values, but sometimes important values remain unknown. Often, we do not acknowledge many of our values we hold until we enter into new roles or experience conflict. The values we hold but are not aware of can often contribute to our feelings of stress; we can understand and ease this stress by becoming more aware of our values.

Some of our values may be in conflict with each other. For example, one may believe it is important to work early and believe it is equally important not to leave home until the kitchen is clean. Unexpected delays, or mornings where everything just takes a bit longer, could prove very

stressful until we examine these values and think about how they interact. Modifying or prioritising our values can be one way of easing role strain. Areas where we might have strong values may include housework, meal preparation and meal times, child care and house maintenance, the quality and quantity family time, money, education and so on.

2. Start With a Plan: First focus is to be laid on family. Secondly, focus is to be laid on business plan. This is because our ability to keep moving on in life depends on the solid foundation at home which in turn boosts a person and makes all his or her action worthwhile.

3. Build a Team and Support Network: One should ask for help and allow oneself to be helped and contributed to. One should get one's children involved— work together as a team. Recruit friends, family, neighbours, bosses, work colleagues, etc. and ask for their support. Create back-up and emergency plans; always have a contingency.

4. Setting Realistic Goals and Expectations: Goals are important in our lives. They help us to define how we should use our time. We can set our goals like: "I want to be a manager by the age of 30". Or "I want to finish my college before I have children". Our values underlie our goals and give us the urge to move towards achieving those goals. The values underlying these goal statements might include a high regard for achievement and education. Goals may be concrete, like the two examples laid above, or they may be relational, such as raising responsible children, building supportive friendships, or cultivating deeper understanding of ourselves. In order to ease role strain we can choose to put some goals on hold, let go of some, and modify others.

5. Understanding Work-Family Issues: Perception, attitudes and expectations are also important in understanding work-family issues. These often take the form of assumptions about the way things ought to be done or the way we expect people to behave. These usually come from our values and may be harder to identify than our goals. Attitudes and expectations that do not fit with our needs today can also create conflict and stress. Many of us have high expectations about being everything to everybody, performing all of our roles well or being "perfect". Frequently, "supermen" or "superwomen" burn out or feel exhausted, irritable and angry. We can think about our attitudes and expectations and choose to change or modify those that no longer support us.

6. Setting Priorities and Managing Time: Setting priorities in our life is very essential for bringing about effective time management in our lives. Managing work and a household, finding time for family activities and friendships, and having time just for us is no easy task with multiple roles and responsibilities. When we account for all we need to do in a day, many adults have only one or two hours, at the most, for “leisure” time. But very often these leisure hours are spent doing what we think needs to be done instead of what we want to do. Even when we are efficient in using our time, we may not be effective to do the right things. Often, we do not plan and schedule our activities that move us towards those goals which are not concrete. Goals that focus on the development of people-our relational goals- may be harder to have master activity plans because they are day-to-day processes that are harder to identify and schedule. Here is one way to manage time effectively and efficiently. First we set our goals and then we ask ourselves these questions:

- How do my expectations either foster or interfere with reaching my goals?
- Am I balancing my concrete or “material” goals with my relational or “people” goals?
- How will I know when I have reached this goal?
- What do I need to do today to reach this goal?

7. Letting Go and Understanding Control: Another important area to ponder over is what it means to be in control. Many times we feel we have more control if we do everything ourselves. However, this can hold us back from achieving our goals.

Delegation and division of work is essential to accomplish one's needs and wants. As we think about change in this area, or act differently, we may encounter unknown values or unexpected perceptions or expectations about how work



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should get done, and what work should get done.

Even though we may want to reallocate home or work tasks, we find ourselves resistant, as if we stand to lose more than we gain. Understanding the emotional satisfaction we get from performing certain tasks, and the power attached to some responsibilities, are important aspects of effectively delegating or dividing tasks.

8. Planning and Communication: Planning and communication are central to all change. Here are some other ideas to help balance work and family.

- Hold family meetings
- Keep weekly or monthly schedules that schedule time for both concrete and relational goals.
- Be willing to revise plans when they do not work or changes are inevitable
- Understand what we can control and what we cannot.
- Keep a sense of humour.
- Remember that effective management is not a static event but a continually evolving process.

- Keep work at work
- Keep home at home
- **Find a reliable child care:** Children are to be kept in capable hands. The parents should feel comfortable and confident in the caregiver. If one is feeling ambivalent about leaving one's child in the caregiver's custody it should not be shown as the child at any age will pick right up on it. One should feel proud when one finds someone who fits into one's needs. One should get involved with one's child's care providers by communicating frequently and observing interactions between caregiver and one's child.

9. Let go of guilt: Guilt is one of the greatest wastes of emotional energy. It causes one to become immobilised in the present because one is dwelling on the past. Guilt can be very debilitating. By introducing logic to help counter-balance the guilt, one can stay better on course.

10. Establish Limits and Boundaries: Boundaries are an imaginary line of protection that one draws around oneself. They are about protecting one from other people's actions. Determine for oneself what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour from other people. Boundaries and limits define how one takes charge of one's time and space and get in touch with one's feelings. They express the extent of one's responsibilities and power and show others what one is willing to do or accept. Without limits it is difficult to say “no”.

11. Be Flexible: One should forgive oneself when



One should forgive oneself when things do not get done. Understand that with children things change at a moment's notice. Be ready and willing to assume responsibility for any of the tasks that need to get done at any time. Never get too comfortable, because as soon as one gets to think that things are under control, they change!

things do not get done. Understand that with children, things change at a moment's notice. Be ready and willing to assume responsibility for any of the tasks that need to get done at any time. Never get too comfortable, because as soon as one gets to think that things are under control, they change! Also, realise that in order to achieve success many women have had to give up their original goals and substitute new ones with different but equal challenges. Negotiate for what one needs in life.

12. Achieve an Integrated Life: Things are to be kept in perspective. Harmony needs to be created in one's life—a mixture of work, family and friends. It is to be remembered that there is no single formula for balance. It is a personal decision as to how a person wants to combine spouse, children and career.

Work and Family Balance of Women in India

Combining a family and making a career, especially for Indian women, is still a challenge. I would like to investigate and find solutions as to how women can combine a job and have a happy family life. Part time jobs, flexible working hours, job sharing or telework are options open although such opportunities in various professions are few.

Fast Track and Mummy Track: Today the comparative advantage that used to exist between men and women has almost disappeared. Women's natural advantage in taking care of small children and physical strength required has become less and less important for most jobs. Yet this is not reflected in the workplace, where generally men get the better jobs.

In essence, the self-fulfilling prophecy may emerge in the way employers recruit and place employees. They think they will get more out of a man, because he will not be committed at any time to childcare, and therefore, he will be more likely to be placed on a 'fast track' in the employment structure of his employer's organisation.

Women on the other hand are provided to a career path by work arrangements offering mothers certain benefits such as flexible hours, but denying other opportunities for advancement in the organisation.

If a woman is a mother of a small child and a

working woman too, then before the child's arrival generally no problem is faced in balancing family life and professional life, provided there is adequate support from the family. But after the child's arrival, the priorities get changed. That means the first priority goes to the child and the second priority is given to the mother's professional life.

Thereafter, comes a setback in the woman's professional life. Generally the woman also being a mother prefers 9 to 6 job and no weekend workings even in case when it is urgently required professionally.

Adequate part time jobs or jobs for which 'work from home option' is there are not found in various important professions in India.

Soon the growth in the professional life of the mother is set back and she is unable to provide as much time and effort as required for the jobs in corporate world as can be provided by her male counterparts. This may lead to frustrations in job field.

On the other hand she feels guilty of not providing sufficient time to her child, which is his or her right.

Therefore, it is very difficult to manage work with family. In this regard, her partner should be co-operative otherwise it is even more difficult to handle and balance both work and family.

In most of the corporate world, adequate maternity leave is not provided pre and post natal period. Many women require complete rest during pregnancy period due to biological reasons but many organisations do not entertain such long pre-natal leave. Secondly, post-natal period is also very insufficient being only three months in most organisations. Things become even difficult if the child is born in a nuclear family which is very common as most of the working class have to shift to new cities in search of better opportunities. Child daycare facility is very rarely provided in corporate world leaving the children and the mother at the mercy of maids or private day care centre.

Being professionally qualified, it is not advisable for the woman to sacrifice her career totally and concentrate only on her family life. If this is true in Indian society, then it is to be thought of, as so many professionals qualifying are females and they are also future mothers. ■