

Earlier in my career, I worked in hospice. When sitting with people facing their death, I never once heard anyone wish they had spent more time at work. I often did hear people expressing regrets that they didn't devote more time to their loved ones.

There are increasing challenges to family life for those with demanding jobs. The number of hours Americans work per week has risen significantly in the past 20 years, while the amount of vacations and leave days has been dropping. Technology now allows people to take work home, and in many work contexts, it's expected that you will be available to respond to emails and texts outside of office hours. The traditional boundaries between work and family life no longer exist.

Given these challenges, here are some helpful tips and best practices to balancing work and family life.

1. A positive vision

Hold and nourish a positive vision of what *you* want from your family life. Don't let "being with the family" or "time with your partner" become a "should." Don't let your loved ones alone hold the value of relationship/family and turn them into a nag. Your feeling obligated, trapped and grumpy is no gift to anyone.

2. Good boundaries

Family energy is very different from work energy. You actually want to be present when you're with your loved ones (not sitting at the dinner table still thinking about work).

Work is basically endless and fills all available space. The key is to keep clear, inviolable boundaries around family time (i.e. definite periods of time where you do not take calls, text or check your email). Knowing that you might be interrupted at any moment leaves you and your family not fully relaxed. Even a brief call or checking your email is likely to set you buzzing and not present for some time.

IMPORTANT: let your work colleagues know your boundaries. They can help uphold them by not trying to reach you during these times and not expecting you to respond immediately to their texts and emails.

3. Rhythms

Family life, especially with children, thrives on rhythm and predictable patterns. Set regular guidelines, such as: no work calls after 6:00 p.m., no work between 6:00 and 9:00 p.m., no work on Sundays, Saturday afternoon family outings, or Wednesday date nights

4. Create transitions

When you re-enter your relationship or family space, you want to shift to a very different frequency from work buzz. It may be helpful to take some transition time between work and walking in the door – workout at the gym, take a walk, listen to music on the commute home, etc. After driving back from work, I used to park my car down the block and take 10 minutes to meditate and calm myself down so that I was actually present to greet my wife and children.

5. Regarding travel

Travel can be stressful on love partnerships and family systems. Leavings can trigger feelings of abandonment or resentment at being left with extra household burdens. The actual coming and going is jarring. In some cases, fewer/longer trips may be easier than lots of shorter ones.

Schedule in extra reconnect time with your partner and/or children upon your return. Come back ready to reengage. Rather than taking a red eye and coming home a zombie, it may serve everyone to have you stay an extra night and show up with good energy.

6. Agreements

Ongoing struggles around work hours, boundaries, household responsibilities, and travel can be very harmful to intimacy and relationships. Deal directly with differences. You and your partner negotiating a clear win-win will minimize much of the tension around family/work balance.

Make sure you are actually committed to the agreements you make. Out of a desire to avoid conflict, we often fudge, under-estimate or otherwise make agreements that we end up failing to deliver on. Once you make agreements, keep them *impeccably* – your trustworthiness and your relationship is on the line.

7. Intimacy

Love partners need to feel special and valued. The flame of intimacy dims when your partner feels like they are less important than work. It's also very unsexy to keep your partner waiting while you finish just one more email.

Many of you reading this are fortunate enough to have jobs that feel meaningful and with which you are highly engaged. While it can be challenging, it is possible to fully commit to giving your best at work while also being fully committed to a rich and fulfilling family life.