

10 Steps for Managing a Full Life

Can you really have a career and a family and make it all work? I believe you can with the right mind-set and some strategies to help manage the range of responsibilities that goes with being a career professional and having a family. Take a look at the following areas and consider what might work for you and your family.

Step 1 Focus on What is Already Working Well

Start by focusing on the positive. Make a list of what is already working in your current situation. Maybe you have excellent childcare, or maybe you love your job, it's close to home, and so on. Perhaps your spouse is truly a partner in all of this. This list of the positive, working elements in your life is your critical foundation, your positive core. Recognizing these elements and appreciating them will help you make the most of the following strategies. For some, it may not be evident on the surface that anything is working. You might have to dig deep, but in all human situations there is something that works. Consider getting an outside perspective if you can't come up with anything as your positive core.

Step 2 Self-Care

Taking care of your self is paramount. As with all of the strategies presented here, self-care is going to mean something different to each person. The bottom line about self-care is that you have to be good to yourself. Eating right, getting rest, getting fresh air and exercise, doing activities that are energizing, treating yourself, are all examples of taking care of yourself.

When you fly, the flight attendant instructs you that in the event of an emergency, the oxygen masks will drop down. If you are traveling with children, place your oxygen mask on first, and then assist the child traveling with you. It only makes sense to take care of yourself first and then you have what you need to turn and take care of others.

Within your self-care strategy, again focus on what works for you now. When do you feel most energized, where do you experience the most joy? Who are you with, what are you doing when you feel relaxed and happy? What small treat makes the biggest difference? If you have trouble answering these questions, you have some work to do in this area.

Now that you are in the mind-set of self-care, and you realize that you don't have to do it all yourself, make a list with three columns:

1. Things that must be done by only me
2. Things that I do but could be done by someone else
3. Things that I don't know how to do or don't enjoy doing

When we try to do everything ourselves, we are not practicing good self care. Use this chart to determine if you can **D**elegate, **O**utsource, **S**teamline or **E**liminate any tasks to give yourself a **DOSE** of self-care!

Step 3 Delegate

At home, everyone in the family can and should have certain responsibilities. Everyone should pitch in and have ownership for what needs to be done in the home. One of the keys to properly delegating at home is good communication. Make sure that all family members have the same shared understanding of what is expected of them. This can be a fun way to bring the family together and foster teamwork. Family members should each have some input into the process. And be sure to recognize and celebrate successes. Have ongoing evaluation of how delegating is going in your home. Always focus on what is going right. Ask your family, "How can we do more of what works?"

Delegating is also possible at work. Consider who is available for you to delegate tasks to: an assistant, employee, co-worker, even a boss. Load leveling is a very important strategy in every workplace. You can look around and see that some people are fully engaged and challenged daily. Others are happy to do just what they need to in order to get by. Even if you are a self-employed sole proprietor, you have opportunities for delegating or de-selecting activities.

Step 4 Outsource Certain Activities

When outsourcing, you are hiring someone else to do a task. At home, hiring a housekeeper or lawn service are good examples. We first hired a housekeeper when I was in graduate school and my husband and I were spending our precious little free time together doing domestic chores. This gave us more time to enjoy favorite activities like playing golf or tennis. We also outsource lawn mowing to our industrious teenage neighbors. When our son is old enough, this will become his job. Paying a CPA to do your taxes and a financial planner to manage your portfolio are also examples of outsourcing.

Taking this approach helps you sort and evaluate the many different activities that you are responsible for and consider if there is a better person for the job.

Bartering is a variation on this theme. Instead of paying someone to do something that is better done by someone else, you would trade for something. For example, your teenage neighbor mows your lawn for you and you tutor her in math. When bartering be sure to trade something that is "work" for you for something that is "second nature", otherwise, you are simply trading one chore for another.

Step 5 Streamline Where Possible

Is there any way to reduce the amount of time spent on some of the items in your columns #1 and #2? I used to take the time to balance my checkbook to the penny. Now, with online banking we have visibility to checks and balances as they are updated, so I no longer see a need for balancing the checkbook. Online bill paying is so much faster than writing out checks, envelopes, stamping and mailing. Even the hairstyle that you choose can be an example of minimizing time on certain tasks.

Step 6 Eliminate Time Wasters and Energy Drainers

Your list is a good starting point for this strategy. Is there any activity that you can simply delete from your life? This might include saying “no, thank you” to some of the “opportunities” that come your way. Perhaps you have been volunteering for a certain cause and that activity is no longer joyful. Maybe it’s time to move on and let someone else take over. Volunteer selectively and beware of those volunteer situations that are not well defined and turn out to be much more involved than you anticipated. If you work outside the home, is there a way to reduce or eliminate commute time? Some jobs lend themselves to 100% telecommuting. Ask your company what your options are.

Within this strategy you might also evaluate any relationships that drain your energy. Is there a friend that calls daily and keeps you on the line for extended conversations that don’t contribute to your overall well being? You don’t have to eliminate this person from your life, but you might limit these calls during the week, for example, and talk with him or her only on the weekend. One-sided relationships can really take a toll on your energy and time.

Step 7 Build and Nurture Your Team of Resources

The ideal scenario is when you have a spouse that is truly your partner, and if that is the case, then you have hopefully recognized this in your list from strategy #1. However, this may not be the case for everyone, for many reasons. Single parents are more prevalent than ever, and even married parents may not count their spouse as a daily partner for a number of reasons.

There are many other people in your life that you can partner with and build reciprocal relationships with. These include other moms, your childcare provider, neighbors, baby sitters, and service providers. For example, participating in a carpool for getting the kids to school or other activities can be a time saver.

Step 8 Plan and Prepare

One mother recently shared with me that her single biggest daily challenge was what to feed her family that would be nutritious and well-received. If you wait until dinner time to decide “what’s for dinner” it’s too late. Dinner is just one of the many areas that you will manage more effectively through planning and preparing ahead of time.

Some of us are natural planners. Others of us have to work at this. Focus on finding a time-management system that works for you. We are all different. What works for me, might not work for you. Here a few tips for getting started:

- Have a master calendar with a two-month view, put each family member's activities in this central calendar.
- Put your "big rocks" in first, give priority to those things that are most important to you and your family.
- Develop a schedule and stick to it.

Step 9 Continuously Look for Flexibility Within Your Current Situation

Can you arrange to telecommute a day or two or an additional day? Is a reduced work week an option? Does your spouse have options to gain more flexibility as well? Are there ways to have more flexibility within your home structure? For example, maybe you've always done the grocery shopping on Saturdays, but the weekends have become even busier. Maybe you need to reconsider this routine and try shopping on Tuesday evening.

Step 10 Be Open to Change

Life is dynamic. A change might be needed in your childcare situation, living environment, home or office location, or maybe even your career. One working mother, a self-employed massage therapist, recently changed careers and is now an elementary school teacher. She realized that her massage business was completely out of sync with her family. When something isn't working, change it.

I can't say enough about this openness to change. This is absolutely critical to your success in "making it all work". If you want your life to be different, you can't cling to the current way. If the status quo was working, you wouldn't feel the need for making things better.

Making small changes using any one or two of these strategies will start to pay off quickly. Small differences start to add up, kind of like compounding interest. Which of these strategies sparked an idea in you? Where can you make the smallest change that would translate to the biggest difference in your ability to manage your busy life? Choose just one action to begin with and notice the difference that it makes.

For more information on how to apply these steps in your life, visit me at www.GetCareerFit.com

Brenda Bonin

Your resource for "Creating the Life You Want with a Career that Fits"