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**BALANCING
RESPONSIBILITIES
AT WORK
AND AT HOME**

Cooperative Extension Service
South Dakota State University
U.S. Department of Agriculture

THE JUGGLING ACT: BALANCING RESPONSIBILITIES AT WORK AND AT HOME

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Achieving a balance between work and family presents a challenge for today's family. The influx of women into the work force; new lifestyles which combine work, family, and leisure; and the increase of single-parent and dual-career families have contributed to this issue. The daily responsibilities of family affect the role pressures of work. Likewise, the work role may affect family relationships. Communication and evaluation of your feelings are necessary to achieve a balanced lifestyle.

Each employed individual must learn to balance his/her needs and responsibilities in three domains: **THEY** (work and community), **WE** (family), and **ME** (leisure). Each domain may be competing with the others for one's time and energy. However, stability of the domains must be acquired for one to have personal satisfaction and to overcome feelings of guilt.

UNDERSTANDING MULTIPLE ROLES

Demands on the individual's time and energy outside of the home affect one's self concept and the character of relationships within the family. Many women strengthen the family income by working outside the home while retaining the major responsibility for homemaking and childrearing. It is becoming increasingly difficult, however, for both men and women to follow the traditional male-female role patterns which existed when women were not working outside the home. Our behavior has been influenced by the demands, expectations, and pressures that other people impose upon us. Our own perception of what we think we ought to be doing to fulfill a role also impacts behavior.

Readjustment in traditional roles results in stress for the family. Both men and women are experiencing "role expansion" as well as "role-overload," as in the single-parent family where mom is no longer present and dad must do the food preparation.

The move toward "role flexibility" is not easy for some individuals because they feel it's going against the norm. These people must realize that role changes are appropriate for today's lifestyle.

Families anticipating a role change need to discuss which roles are important to whom and what the change will mean for each of them. Family members are more likely to cooperate with role flexibility when they understand the reasons for role shifts and can see the benefits. For example, a mother's career may enable the family to participate in more recreational activities and have extras they could not afford otherwise.

ROLE-SHARING BENEFITS

The primary purpose of role-sharing in families is to prevent role overload for any one family member. Other benefits include developing a broader base of skills for family members, developing independence, gaining more appreciation for other family members as we do their tasks, and giving children the benefit of nurturance from both parents in a dual-career family.

Some of the same benefits can be obtained with role-sharing at the work site. For example, an employer and employee working together to meet a deadline may result in more appreciation for the others' role.

A benefit of role-sharing that often is overlooked is meeting one's own needs. The domain of ME is dependent on finding time for oneself to maintain personal satisfaction and well-being. If this component is neglected, consequences such as illness, irritability, mental blocks, and low self esteem can result. Therefore, it is necessary for an individual to coordinate with his/her spouse and/or family members to balance the home and work domains. This balance may be secured by using the following role-sharing strategies:

STRATEGY: SAY "NO"

Working individuals can find that saying "NO" to requests which use their time and energy can be rewarding. **Saying "NO" to someone else can be a way of saying "YES" to yourself.** It also frees you to spend time with individuals who are important to you. Anticipate that your "NO" response may not be accepted immediately. Strive to not back down.

STRATEGY: DELEGATE

This strategy can be beneficial, but it's a skill with which many individuals have trouble. You are already delegating some chores without being aware of it. For example, emptying waste baskets at work may be done by a custodian. In a family, children may be responsible for cleaning their bedrooms. **Delegating jobs will allow you to focus on a high-priority task,** while providing opportunities for other people to gain skills and have a sense of responsibility. Delegate tasks to family members, co-workers, friends, or hired assistants.

Children can contribute to the well-being of the family if they are assigned tasks appropriate for their age and knowledge. Learning new responsibilities is a gradual and continuous process. Youngsters will work at a different skill level or efficiency than an adult. Be certain that your standards are realistic and geared to their capabilities.

STRATEGY: CHANGE STANDARDS

It may be quite painful to give up your dream of the perfect house. However, letting some things slide may be necessary. **What can be eliminated, done less often, or completed differently depends on each person's and each family's values and priorities.** For example, family members may assist in folding laundry. But, their method of completing this task may be different than yours. It's important to accept this.

If a change impacts more than one person, it is imperative that a conference be held to discuss the issue. Consider the possibility of someone else doing the task or of changing the standards. Personal attitudes toward the change must be explored as well.

STRATEGY: NEGOTIATE

Communication is essential for this strategy to be successful. **Family members or co-workers need to identify -- individually -- specific behavior(s) they are willing to give up.** Review these behaviors and note the desired changes to be negotiated. Work on what can be traded in return. The bargaining process is only good if everyone involved is willing to uphold the change.

STRATEGY: PRIORITIZE

As precious minutes of the day are used or dollars are spent, we may or may not be reaching our goals. Our time, energy, and money are major resources for reaching these goals.

We, as individuals and as family, need to consider priorities if we are to meet our goals. Those things which are not done are the "tradeoffs" for the things which are done. Since resources almost always are limited to some extent, we are constantly making "tradeoffs" in how we spend our time, energy, and money. If outside help is hired, for example, we have to "tradeoff" dollars that could be spent elsewhere.

STRATEGY: COMBINE ROLES

There are times when various roles may be fulfilled simultaneously. For example, run community errands during coffee break or lunch break, or do laundry as you read your favorite book. Take advantage of this strategy to free time, resources, and energy.

STRATEGY: ROTATE FROM ONE ROLE TO ANOTHER

Be where you are. Leave the THEY role at work; leave the WE role at home. Periods of imbalance may result, but over time, role demands will be met.

STRATEGY: ELIMINATE A ROLE

If home and work responsibilities cannot be carried out to personal and/or employer satisfaction, it may be necessary to eliminate one of the roles. **Review your individual situation carefully.** The role of being a parent is difficult to eliminate, while the role of changing jobs is possible.

WELL-BEING IS THE REWARD

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Working through role issues and using role-sharing can have a positive impact on family and personal life. Achieving this balance will require the time, effort, and resources of everyone involved. However, the personal satisfaction and well-being obtained will be your reward.

For more ideas and information on balancing work and family, read other fact sheets in **The Juggling Act** series.



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