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## The Juggling Act: Prioritizing and Setting Goals

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FS 870



# **PRIORITIZING AND SETTING GOALS**

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

# THE JUGGLING ACT: PRIORITIZING AND SETTING GOALS

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What is an average day like in your household?

It probably is filled with many activities and responsibilities.

We often hear ourselves and others remarking, "if only I had more hours in the day" or "where did the day go?" We feel overloaded by the end of the workday, anticipating the weekend "to catch up around here." We soon discover that the weekend isn't long enough to get everything done either.

Your household may include parents and children, you and your spouse, or you as a single, employed parent or single person. Undoubtedly you struggle with the realities of too much to do with too little time in which to get it all done. The situation is especially difficult for families with dependent children. Parents experience a variety of stressors depending on the age of the children living at home. Other difficult times are when you find yourself responsible for others who are dependent -- parents, adult children, relatives, or even friends.

The constant drain on time is only one element of the juggling game. Another reality is the complexity of everyday living. No matter what your situation, there are forms to fill out, decisions to be made, and, inevitably, something which breaks down at the least convenient moment. Beyond this, you are told that you need to be aware of what's going on in the world around you, be involved in your community, and be responsible in your work.

Is it any wonder that many of us experience role-overload on a regular basis? One woman put it this way, "Some days family life consumes you; on other days it is work that is the most demanding." Our roles are not always in sync.

# CONFLICTING ROLES ARE A CHALLENGE

Take a few minutes to list the various roles that you play on a regular basis (employee, boss, parent, cook, friend, family financial manager, caregiver of elderly relative, housekeeper, spouse, transporter of children, volunteer, and so on). Some conflict between the demands of family-oriented roles and work-related roles can be expected. **This "interrole conflict," as family professionals label it, is a major challenge of balancing work and family.**

Those who have studied balancing work and family suggest that, in order to manage conflict between the demands of family and work, it is necessary to prioritize and set goals. Before doing that, however, you need to analyze the roles you play.

## ANALYZE YOUR LIFE ROLES

As an adult, you experience life in three domains. These three domains could be called **THEY** (your work and community life), **WE** (your family life), and **ME** (your leisure time).

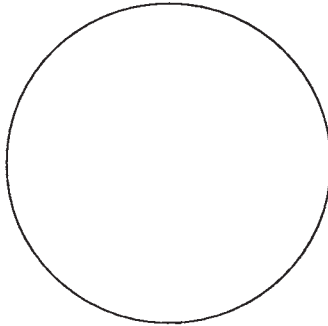
Dr. Joan Comeau suggests that you assess the balance of these domains by picturing your nonsleeping time as a pie. The pieces of this pie are in competition for your energy and time.

### **THEY – ME – WE**

**THEY** involves your role as worker, whether it is homemaker, farmer, school teacher, or business person. The amount of time you spend in social and service organizations, church events and responsibilities, and community betterment activities also are part of this domain.

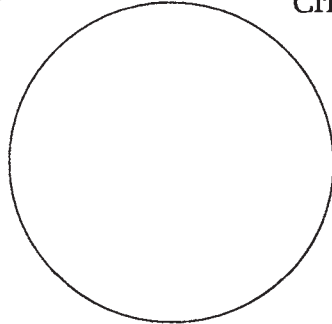
**WE** is the domain which involves you in important relationships with family and friends. These are people for whom you hold some obligation and responsibility such as child rearing, companionship, or caregiving for an aging parent. Through this domain you also may receive personal support.

**ME** is personal leisure and usually is the most neglected domain. Due to overwhelming demands from family and work, we often ignore our need for managing our own health and well-being. Leisure involves everything from physical exercise to enjoying a warm bubble bath or reading a book. There are times when **THEY** or **WE** activities, however, fulfill the needs of this portion of life. For example, a family outing or religious activity can provide the needed "spark."



How it is

Compare your list of roles to the THEY, WE, and ME domains. Estimate what portion of your waking hours over the course of a week is spent in each of the three pieces of your time pie. Using one of the circles, divide the pie with lines according to your estimate. Use the second circle to illustrate how you would *like* the balance to be.



What I'd like

It is important to realize that daily or weekly imbalance is natural. Crises, major events, and deadlines will cause the pie to be divided differently at any given point in time. Overall, to keep life manageable, your pie should be fairly well balanced.

## CATEGORIZE AND PRIORITIZE ACTIVITIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Look at each of the three domains in your life. Which activities and expectations are really necessary? Which are optional?

Should some expectations or activities which are not productive be eliminated or modified? Expectations generally are stated in absolute terms using *shoulds* and *musts* such as "Cookies should be homemade" or "I must attend all of my children's school activities."

Looking back at your list of roles, identify your activities and expectations in each of the three domains. Distinguish between those which are optional and those which are necessary. The following chart provides examples and will help you to get a picture of your situation.

### DOMAINS:

	THEY	WE	ME
Necessary	<i>get to work on time</i>	<i>discipline children</i>	<i>exercise</i>
Optional	<i>bring home projects</i>	<i>bake cookies</i>	<i>watch football all weekend</i>

You probably will notice more necessary items associated with THEY and WE than with ME. This does not mean that the ME domain is not important; rather, you may need to realign your expectations to establish some necessary ME priorities. Likewise, some of the necessary THEY and WE activities may be moved to the optional category.

# SET GOALS FOR FAMILY, WORK, AND LEISURE

As you look over the chart, consider which optional activities and/or expectations you can drop, delay, or modify.

After analyzing your present situation, make plans to alter the things that are changeable in order to reach a more productive balance between family, work, and leisure.

List your goals for the coming week and year in each of the three domains.

## My plan for my family domain:

This week \_\_\_\_\_

This year \_\_\_\_\_

## My plan for my work domain:

This week \_\_\_\_\_

This year \_\_\_\_\_

## My plan for my leisure domain:

This week \_\_\_\_\_

This year \_\_\_\_\_

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