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Weaving Together Family and Work

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Tips to help you cope with job and family demands, exercises that assess whether you are happy with how your work life and family life are woven together, and ideas for creating an action plan.

Today approximately 423,000 Montanans are employed. Married, single, divorced, young and old are striving to manage the work and family aspects of their lives. We often think about this as “balancing” work and family. Another way to think about it is “weaving” work and family together. They are both part of our identity and life.

Women and work

Women, like men, work outside the home for a variety of reasons. Certainly the main reason for work is economic necessity. Families often have difficulty living on one salary. Women also work for self-fulfillment or to pursue a career. In addition, however, a woman’s decision to work is based on attitudes about working women and, if she is married, her family’s feelings about her working outside the home. Women, more so than men, cycle in and out of the workforce depending upon the needs of their families. After the birth of a child women may work part-time or find work they can do from home. They are more likely than men to adjust their work schedule or leave the workforce in later years to assist aging family members.

Working outside the home is good for many women. If they desire to work outside the home, it

can help them to be physically and emotionally healthier. Studies find that work helps increase a woman’s self-esteem and gives her a sense of control in her life. Work helps her family economically thus reducing financial stress.

Men and work

Traditionally we have had an expectation in our society that men are the providers for their families. Although women experience more work and family conflict, men also experience difficulty in weaving together work and family. For men, excessive work time is the main reason for work and family conflict. Men often are not as involved with their families as they would like to be, because there is a cultural expectation that work comes first.

Being involved with family work is good for fathers. Studies find fathers who are involved in caring for their children have higher self-esteem and satisfaction in their parental role. These same fathers often feel they have too little time for their careers, and that family responsibilities interfere with their jobs. So dads, too, are trying to balance and weave work and family together.

Marriage and work

Families have changed since the 1960s, with more wives and moth-

ers working outside of the home. Women’s employment outside of the home generally has a positive rather than a negative effect on marriage.

Women generally take on a “second shift” when they work outside the home. The first shift is their job at work, and the second shift is their family work. Although men are doing more family work than they have done in the past, women, whether married or cohabitating, still do the majority of household tasks for the family. The key for couples is that they are satisfied with their arrangement of work and household tasks and feel that each spouse’s contribution is equitable. Therefore, the family work and household tasks may not be evenly divided between husband and wife, but the workload is perceived as equitable.

Researcher Dr. John Gottman found that married men who do housework were happier and more involved in their marriages. These men were less distressed, less lonely and in better physical and psychological health. Wives generally appreciate husbands’ help with household tasks.

Weaving together a pattern that works for you

It would be ideal if we could choose when and where we work,

but that is not the case for most of us. Instead we need to determine how we can best weave our home and work responsibilities together so that we are satisfied with our situation.

Following are some exercises that may help you assess your work and family responsibilities and make plans for changes if you are not satisfied with your situation. If you are married or have a partner, you may want to complete the exercises individually and then compare notes.

How many hats do you wear?

One challenge in weaving together work and family is that we have many roles to fulfill or “hats to wear:” mother, employee, son, brother, sister, church member, softball coach, youth leader, etc. Sometimes all of these hats can cause us to have role strain. When we have too many hats we have role overload. This is called the “too many hats syndrome.”

Our hats can also clash with one another, causing role conflict. For example, you want to attend your daughter’s softball game but your boss needs you to work that evening. Your role as a parent is conflicting with your role as an employee. Below you can assess your “hat” situation.

List all of the hats (roles) you wear:

Do you feel you have too many hats, too few, or just the right numbers of hats?

Write down any hats you would like to change:

Add these “hats”

Eliminate these “hats”

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
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<hr/>	<hr/>

Make a plan for how you can change these hats

Write down a target date to have this completed

Revisit your “hats” on that date to assess your progress

Spilling over: Family to work and work to family

Have you ever gone to work in the morning and had difficulty getting started because you are thinking about things at home, such as your son needing to get a school project done, or when you can take your mother to her doctor appointment? Have you gone home in the evening and been grumpy with your spouse or partner because of something that happened at work? This is called spillover. We have spillover at times from home to work and from work to home. It takes time for us to adjust our “hats” between the two worlds in which we live. If we have severe issues happening at work or at home they can easily spill over, causing us to be less effective in our roles.

But even the simple day-to-day adjustments between home and work need to be attended to. For example, to get adjusted to work each day try going around the office and saying good morning to each person. To adjust from work to home, use the time spent driving home to adjust from being an employee to a mother and wife or a father and husband. Another idea is to literally change from your work clothes to different clothes in order to move from your work role to your family role. How do you handle the transitions?

Write down how you change “hats” when you get to work.

- Next write down how you adjust to the change from work to home.**

- If you currently don't do this, think of some ideas that you will try:**

How are we balancing and weaving?

The next exercise will help you determine how well you are managing work and family. Circle the number that best describes you. If you are not married or in a relationship, skip the questions that do not apply.

- 1=Never 2=Sometimes
3=Frequently 4=Almost Always)**

Job Satisfaction

Overall, I enjoy my job	1	2	3	4
Most of the time I enjoy going to work	1	2	3	4
I am satisfied with my work schedule	1	2	3	4
My work schedule works well for my family	1	2	3	4
Having a paycheck helps me feel good about who I am	1	2	3	4
I am satisfied with the number of hours that I work	1	2	3	4

Relationship satisfaction

My spouse/partner and I have time to relax together	1	2	3	4
My marriage/relationship is stronger because of my job	1	2	3	4
I have energy after work to do things with my spouse/partner	1	2	3	4
My work allows me to have an identity outside of my relationship with my partner/spouse	1	2	3	4
I find enough time to see friends when I am not at work	1	2	3	4

Parenting Satisfaction

My job helps me to have a better relationship with my children	1	2	3	4
I usually have the energy to be a good parent when I get home from work	1	2	3	4
I believe that my children are proud of me as a worker	1	2	3	4
Working helps me to set a good example for my children	1	2	3	4

Satisfaction with Family Work

I am usually able to get my household chores done	1	2	3	4
I have the energy to do the work around the house	1	2	3	4
I have found ways to complete my household tasks even though I am working	1	2	3	4
I am satisfied with how my spouse/partner and I split our household tasks	1	2	3	4

Now total your score. Lower scores mean that you are experiencing conflict and spillover between work and family. If this is the case for you, go to the next section and work on a plan to better weave your work and family life together. If you have a spouse or partner, you may want to complete this section together.

What are the major problems that you are currently experiencing?

- Lack of time with family
- Lack of time for friends
- Lack of time for work
- Lack of time for self

What resources do you have that might help?

- Personal (e.g. your satisfaction with your place of employment) _____
- Employer (e.g. an employer who allows a flexible schedule) _____
- Family (e.g. family members who take turns preparing dinner) _____
- Community (e.g. a family physician with evening office hours) _____

Steps to take to change your current situation:

Step 1: Identify the change you want to make:

Step 2: Brainstorm ideas to make the change:

Step 3: Select the idea you like the best:

Step 4: Decide how you will use the resources listed above: _____

Step 4: Implement change. By what date would you like to accomplish this goal?

(Be sure to revisit your plan on this date to see if you have accomplished the goal or need to revise the plan.)

Take a Joy Break

One idea to help you weave your work and family responsibilities is to make joy breaks during the day. These are short breaks that can help you relax and get reenergized to complete the tasks you need to do.

First, think of some 5-minute “joy breaks.” For example, you might leave your desk and walk down the hall to say hello to a co-worker. At home you might stop doing family work and sit down for five minutes to read the paper. Make a list of these joy breaks and set a goal for yourself to try at least one joy break each day for the next week. Next, think of 30-minute joy breaks. This might include taking a walk, having coffee with a friend, enjoying the sunshine by sitting outside or reading a book. Make a list of 30-minute joy breaks and set a goal to try them.

Summary

Weaving together our work and family lives is necessary for many individuals today. There is no “one way” that works for everyone. Parents may want to work opposite schedules if they are unable to locate quality child care. A single person caring for elderly parents may prefer a split shift so that he or she isn’t gone for long periods of time during the day. A couple may prefer a more traditional work schedule. You may want to start a family-owned business.

Weaving work and family is stressful. Take care of yourself by monitoring your diet and stay away from fast food and junk food. Remember to ask family and friends for help. Finding a formula that works for your situation is the key.

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