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## Life Has No Blueprints: Balancing Work and Real Life

Being successful at work and at home takes planning.

By Judith A. Stock

You work 60 to 80 hour weeks just to keep the business going. With no break in sight, you wonder how long you can keep up this pace.

You would love to participate in your family's lives more or even have some time to call your own. But since life comes without instructions, let alone a blueprint, how can you possibly figure out how to do it?

We don't even realize how much time we actually put into work, according to D. Quinn Mills, M.A., Ph.D., professor of business administration at Harvard Business School and author of *Having It All and Making It Work, Six Steps for Putting Both Your Career and Your Family First*. "Work for many people claims a disproportionate amount of their time and attention," he says.

That's a lesson that Paul Winans, president of Winans Construction in Oakland, Calif., learned the hard way. "In the summer of 1978, my wife Nina and I had an opportunity to visit my parents in New York," Winans says. "I was really busy and couldn't take the time away from work, so I sent Nina. Two months later my mother died."

"My focus on work was greater than anywhere else. I was doing all the things I thought a new business needed, including handling the accounting and preparing the proposals. I felt trapped and resentful," says Winans.

He explains that his focus rested heavily on his clients but "I didn't pay any attention to my well-being."

For Winans, his mother's unexpected death at age 58 became his catalyst for change, both as a business owner and family member. He realized his style of running his business was no longer sustainable. "I had to reorganize my priorities and become the most important person in my life," Winans says.

Nina Winans, a partner in the business, jumped in to help set needed boundaries that, among others, included no night meetings with clients. "If the client can't work with those boundaries, they probably won't be fun to work with anyway," she says.

When it came to the family, Paul admits, "I was going to stay busy unless I actually scheduled other things that were initially regarded as not as important."

As a result, he started putting camping trips with the kids and weekends spent in family activities on the calendar, just as if they were meetings with clients. And he treated them with the same sense of irrevocability and commitment.

### The Importance of Balance

A life lived in balance allows for both professional and personal objectives without sacrificing one for the other. In effect, it's having a master plan for living your life—creating the builder's set of blueprints that will be the basis for all other decisions as you build exactly the life you want on all levels.

"Having a balanced life is about health," says Alan Weiss, Ph.D and president of Summit Consulting Group Inc. in East Greenwich, R. I. It's about reducing the levels of stress that result from too much pressure without enough release—and the resulting damage on the individual's physical and mental well-being: high blood pressure, insomnia, muscle spasms, headaches, irritability, eating or drinking too much, and difficulty making decisions, for example.

Dr. David Shern, president and CEO of the National Mental Health Association, adds that 43 percent of all adults suffer adverse health effects from stress. "Many people don't realize the toll stress can have on their lives or that mental health is the key to overall health in

general," he says.

### **The other people in the equation**

Bill Medina, CGR and president of Medina Construction in Salina, Kan., knows more about the problems of a life out of balance than he wishes he did. Medina started his company with wife Peggy in 1976. Like many remodelers, he was working 60-70 hours a week, even after the company was well-established. He often left before his young sons were awake in the morning and didn't get home until they were in bed again at night.

"I worked most Saturdays, and on Sundays did office work at home," Medina recalls. "That was our life. Well, we really didn't have a life; it was all about work. *My work!* Peggy was trying to raise two boys by herself; we had no time together."

In the early days of his business, Medina had promised himself that he was going to be around for his kids. His own father, a career military man, "was always a good provider but was never there for us as we were growing up," Medina says. "No matter how often I would say to myself that I wasn't going to be like my dad, I was obsessed at being a good provider. The only difference was that I was home every night."

By the time the Medina boys were in high school, though, their father realized that time was racing past—and taking his plans for his family life with it. He had to make some tough decisions quickly, and he did—all of them geared toward separating work from home and Medina from work.

"The first thing we did was move the office out of the house into a building we purchased. The second big thing was that I cut my hours drastically and initiated a 6:00 curfew on myself." The result: Medina is now home for dinner almost every night. He rarely works in the evening or on weekends. And he is now in the second of a five-year program of selling his company and being completely out of it by 2009.

But even if the sale doesn't work out for some reason, "my role will be greatly reduced over the next three years," he says. He seems as determined to spend time with his family now as he was to build his company 25 years ago.

In fact, the entire family just returned from a cruise. "We got along great!" Medina reports, pleased with a vacation that could have been a week of arguing with bored teenagers who would have preferred to stay home with their friends. "I feel blessed every day that I still have a family and a business, because I was close—very close—to losing both."

Medina found his blueprints in time to build the life balance he needed. Check your own personal blueprint again. See where you are and measure it against where you want to be. If the difference is significant, you may be suffering from a life out of balance. Without attention to life's blueprints and careful construction of the life they outline, the most beautifully drawn plans in the world are worthless.

*Judith A. Stock is a freelance writer living in Granada Hills, Calif.*