

# 5 Secrets to Juggling Work and Family

Using your business smarts at home could save your life.  
Diane Paddison

Imagine you're at work and a coworker or client comes to you with a problem: a division of the company is underperforming, and they need to figure out why. After a few questions, it's clear that this division's resources are stretched too thin.

What kind of advice would you give? You might advise reorganization; prioritizing the most valuable areas of investment while eliminating or outsourcing others. It's a relatively basic evaluation that many of us do at work multiple times a day.

But what happens when that "underperforming division" is you?

At work every day you solve problems and plan strategically. When unexpected situations arise, you handle them. You look for creative solutions, you communicate your expectations and needs to your coworkers, and you delegate appropriate projects to others. Sure, you may not get it right every time, but you accept work mistakes as part of the learning process, you move forward, and you try to get better.

Sound about right?

The problem is so many of the smart, capable, powerhouse working women I know feel utterly inept once they step foot out of their offices. Their lives seem out of control and overwhelming because they are overstretched, and yet often underutilized. They beat themselves up over even the tiniest misstep, and they assume that others are judging them just as harshly.

We can all do more to manage our time and energy in life by using all the same savvy tools we would apply to any business problem.

We *can* do that, but most of us don't.

## The Problem with Being Everything

What gets in the way of being able to apply what we know at work into our personal lives? For many women, it's guilt. Or unrealistic expectations. Or perfectionism. Even fear of disappointing people.

When I get caught up with trying to do everything and be everything, I might get a lot done, but energy gets wasted, and, honestly, nothing gets done very well.

Business certainly doesn't have all the answers, but applying business principles can help you to make sense of your life. This is especially true for working mothers of young children. My friend Elizabeth Knox manages a successful career while authoring [books](#) and [articles](#) "on the side," and she and her husband are also raising two boys, both under three years old. Together, they attend a local church, and Elizabeth leads a 4word local group. A few weeks ago, she sat down for a [radio interview](#) on Rick Tocquigny's Mentoring Monday series.

As she puts it, Elizabeth is "smack dab in the middle" of some of the craziest times of her life. She'd be the first to tell you that she doesn't have all of the answers, and she certainly doesn't always get it right. But she and her husband are working together to try to do the best they can for their family.

What struck me while I listened to her radio interview was just how much their approach looks a lot like a savvy business model. Here's how it goes.

## **1. Communicate**

In hearing Elizabeth's interview, it was clear to me that she and her husband are talking through all of these decisions carefully and as a team. They both put family first, but they also feel called to their careers, and so they're figuring out how to make their lives work *together, in alignment with one another* ([Mark 10:6-9](#)).

We all have a team of some sort. Your team might include a spouse, other family members, child-care providers, or supportive friends. You can't assume that these people know where you stand and what your needs and goals are if you haven't told them. And you also need to know where they stand. The better you communicate back and forth with the members of your team (and most especially your spouse) the better you'll be able to tackle big decisions in a way that works best for everyone.

## **2. Prioritize**

When it comes to managing a full life, it is absolutely critical to know what your priorities are and to be able to focus on them. Matthew 6:21 reminds us, "Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be." For Elizabeth and her husband, that means prioritizing their "treasures": their family, time with God and church community, and their careers.

In this stage of their lives, they are trying to focus narrowly on these priorities, referring back to them whenever they have to make a decision about any new opportunities, invitations, or commitments. Together, they determined that for a few years while the kids were small Elizabeth would pull back on accelerating her career, and that meant shifting to a position where she could work three days a week and be home for two.

## **3. Minimize**

Once you've identified your priorities, you can (and must!) start cutting out the things that aren't the most important. Elizabeth and her husband consciously limit outside activities right now, and that means they spend less time volunteering or socializing with friends than they used to. As their boys get older, their priorities might change or their schedules might relax a bit. But for now, they are careful to commit to only what they can do within their priorities and their time constraints.

## **4. Outsource**

Any good business owner knows that in order for her company to fulfill its purpose and do what it does well, it can't do everything. That's why, when you order something from an online store, it isn't delivered to your door by store employees. Instead, those stores contract with a professional package delivery service. That way, store employees can focus on retail and not be distracted by the many logistical issues that go into timely mail delivery. Companies outsource like this *all the time*, and it makes sense for us to do it to!

For Elizabeth, that means hiring someone to help with the housecleaning, sending all her work clothes to the dry cleaner, and buying healthy family dinners on most nights that she works. She shared with me that she sometimes struggles with letting go of dinner in this way, but she has determined that time with her boys is critical; more important than it is for her to be the person who makes dinner every single night. Elizabeth outsources dinner when it serves her family because it helps her stay aligned to her priorities and make the most of her strengths.

What are you "handling" that might better be outsourced?

## 5. Consult Experts

Not all of these decisions are easy, even when your priorities are clear. When a business runs into a big problem that it can't solve on its own, it hires an expert to help. When Elizabeth runs into a tough problem, she seeks out a mentor-figure to help her get through it. I know a lot of people who hear the word *mentor* and think they have to have some sort of intense relationship with someone before they can go to them with a problem. But "consulting with experts" doesn't have to be very formal or time-consuming.

For Elizabeth, it's simply a matter of finding people who are doing well the thing that she wants to do well and talking to them about it. If you take the pressure out of the situation, there can be a real freedom and openness there to just ask questions, without fear of judgment or guilt over not being able to handle it yourself.

Seeking to lead a balanced life can be challenging at any stage. As a matter of fact, it's too challenging to let fear or guilt or perfectionism determine your course. Remember that God has brought you to this place, he has plans for you that are good ([Jeremiah 29:11](#)), he has given you all the tools you need to honor and serve him with your life ([2 Peter 1:3](#)), and he offers infinite grace for the mistakes you will make along the way ([1 John 1:9](#)).

Not sure where to start? Pray about it—bring the five tips I've given you here to the God and ask him to help you identify which areas of your life need some work.

Too often, we try to segregate our lives into different sections, keeping our "business side" away from our "family side" and our "church side." But God is just as present and just as instrumental in developing those business smarts of yours as he has been in developing the rest of your life. It's time to start using *all* the tools he's given you to lead the very best life you can.

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