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I

Finding Life Harmony *as We Struggle to Juggle*

*The happiest people I know are those whose life-styles center around the home. Work is very important, and success in one's profession or business is also essential to happiness, but remember what we say so often: "No other success can compensate for failure in the home."
—N. Eldon Tanner (1978, p. 2)*

“THE Family: A Proclamation to the World” teaches that we are responsible to both provide for and nurture our families in the context of the gospel of Jesus Christ (First Presidency, 1995, p. 102). Being fully involved as a spouse and parent on top of adequately providing and being a reliable employee can feel like a burden. “As we meet with Church members around the world, one challenge seems universal: having enough time to do everything that needs doing,” stated Bishop Keith B. McMullin (2002, p. 94).

As we struggle to juggle our employment, our home duties, and our Church callings, we may often feel out of balance and stressed. We may wrestle with deciding whether to work late or to leave on time to attend a child’s activity. We agonize about whether to miss out on a previously

planned family outing because an unexpected church assignment has come up. We wonder if we should stay up late to go the extra mile in preparing a Sunday lesson or to go to bed and get much-needed rest. Sometimes it seems like work, home, and church are in a tug-of-war, fighting for our personal time and energy. Juggling may eventually exhaust us and cause us to lose interest in the very things we love most. We may even begin to feel inadequate, pessimistic, and discouraged.

Perhaps it is beneficial to view the situation from a different perspective. Recent social science research proposes that work, family, and other life domains can actually be complementary—not competing—priorities. Success in the work place often contributes to one's success outside of the work place and vice versa. Data from a large, multinational survey reveal that relationships and social interaction, physical and psychological benefits, and improved skills are examples of aspects of work that can enhance home life and vice versa (Hill et al., 2007). The key to harmony is to invest our time in activities that enhance multiple domains that we value in our lives.

This concept of enhancement utilizes a music metaphor and has been called *life harmony* (Hill & Anderson, 2004). Just as the different voices in a well-composed piece of music unite in harmony, the different facets of our lives can be coordinated in peace. Using the perspective of life harmony, we no longer see work, family, and church as fighting for our scarce time. We see mortality as a great symphony with the many different voices in our own lives united harmoniously to the glory of God (Hill & Martinengo, 2005).

There is no one formula for creating greater life harmony because each individual faces different constraints based on local economies, job opportunities and policies, family situations, cultural settings, and personal preferences. But there are a variety of strategies that can help individuals in any circumstance. Employing any of these strategies can help us experience greater joy as we bring the demands of job, family, and church into greater harmony. In this chapter we focus on seven suggestions: (a) enhance energy, (b) increase quality time, (c) learn to bundle, (d) focus on the most important things, (e) work flexibly, (f) simplify your life, and (g) center on the Savior.

Enhance Energy

A self-report questionnaire taken by employees among 10 state agencies recently revealed that it is the depletion of energy—rather than time spent on the job—that is the main factor in whether a person feels like there is conflict between work and the rest of his or her life (Carlson, Kacmar, & Stepina, 1995). It is very possible that 50 hours per week in a job that is invigorating may have a less negative impact on the home than a 40-hour per week job that is depressing. When an individual feels that employment is sapping strength, there is little energy left for service at home or in the Church.

One suggestion to increase your energy without reducing work hours is to make a list of all the things you do at work that either drain or energize you. To create more work-family harmony, see if you can arrange to do the energizing things right before you go home so that you can carry more of that energy home to your family. For example, perhaps you are an engineer who loves design work and hates paperwork and meetings. You could choose to get onerous paperwork tasks done earlier in the day, and save the energizing design work for the hours right before you go home.

Another way to increase energy is to choose to make time to do things that are personally renewing. Physical exercise often creates physical energy. Peaceful music may soothe the soul. Talking to a friend can be energizing to some. A short nap is often invigorating. Having a few minutes alone in quiet solitude can rejuvenate the heart. Taking time for rejuvenating activities may appear to only add more to a to-do list full of high-priority tasks, but such moments can add the extra physical and spiritual strength we need to accomplish everything. Even the Savior took time for this kind of replenishment (see Matthew 14:23). It is important to see personal renewal as an investment instead of a waste of time.

Commuting to and from work can also be a time of energy renewal rather than depletion. One mother reviews scriptures she has memorized as she walks to work. She arrives on the job with a clear and active mind.



Physical exercise creates physical energy and can be personally renewing. Tamra Ratieta, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

Another parent, a father, listens to conference talks as he drives home from work. By the time he greets his family he has forgotten about aggravating experiences during the workday and is ready for his most important work. After the incessant staccato of many jobs, we often need a peaceful *largo* for renewal before returning to our home.

An often-overlooked method of increasing energy at work is prayer. We are repeatedly counseled in the scriptures to “pray always” (see 2 Nephi 32:9; 3 Nephi 18:15, 18; Luke 21:36; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; D&C 10:5; 19:38; 20:33; 31:12; 32:4; 61:39; 88:126; 90:24; 93:49–50), but prayer may be forgotten on the job. Indeed, we are counseled in the scriptures to “cry over the flocks of [our] fields, that they may increase” (Alma 34:25). One father has related that he prays frequently at work, sometimes on his knees and sometimes silently and is blessed with spiritual light (energy) that guides him in how to be more effective in his job. As the Spirit helps him solve work problems, he feels he has more time and energy for his family and church service.

As we open our minds to better see ways to enhance energy, we may discover activities that foster harmony in our lives without requiring additional time. We may find ourselves with less fatigue, conflict, and stress while actually doing more. Additionally, we may find that as we seek physical and spiritual renewal, we allow ourselves access to the enabling power of the Atonement, helping us on a day-to-day basis to accomplish more than we thought we could on our own.

Increase Quality Time

All time is not created equal. In seeking to obtain life harmony we must find ways to put each moment to its best use. When Elder Oaks (1975) was in his third year of law school and involved in church responsibilities, he had to make the most of limited time with his daughters. He recalls, “My favorite play activity with the little girls was ‘daddy be a bear.’ When I came home from my studies for a few minutes at lunch and dinnertime, I would set my books on the table and drop down on all fours on the linoleum.



Praying at work increases energy and effectiveness. © Luca Bertolli.

Then, making the most terrible growls, I would crawl around the floor after the children, who fled with screams, but always begged for more” (pp. 7–8). No doubt this was quality time spent!

In his occupation as an airline pilot, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf was required to travel away from home for long periods of time. He found family harmony by seeking quality time. His son Guido remembers, “When Dad returned home, we played, we talked, and we laughed together. . . . That was quality time!” (Nelson, 2008, p. 19).

Family mealtime is a great opportunity for high-quality time. President Ezra Taft Benson (1987) taught, “Happy conversation, sharing of the day’s plans and activities, and special teaching moments occur at mealtime because mothers and fathers and children work at it.” A recent life-harmony study of a parental subsample of US IBM employees revealed that regular family mealtime protected individuals from conflict between work and family life when they had to work long hours (Jacob, Allen, Hill, Mead, & Ferris, 2008). In addition, extensive social science research has documented that regular family mealtime is associated with less adolescent risk for a variety of internalizing behaviors such as depression, weak self-esteem, suicidal thoughts, attempted suicide, withdrawn or distressed behavior, and behavioral problems (Eisenberg, Olson, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, & Bearinger, 2004; Fiese, Foley, & Spagnola, 2006; Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001).

To be together for mealtime is a challenge, especially in large families. It requires careful planning. One family holds a family council each Sunday and carefully selects a dinnertime each evening when everyone can be there. The time varies according to the activities of the week. Another family chose to share the big meal of the day at 3:00 p.m. each afternoon, right when the children came home from school. In this family the father came home early from work for dinner with the family, and then finished his workday at home, via telecommuting.

Bedtime may also be a time of extraordinary quality. Children rarely want to go to sleep when parents want them to, but will often give parents undivided attention at bedtime. In an experimental study consisting of

405 mothers and their infants or toddlers, it was found that having a consistent bedtime routine led to better sleep for children and a better mood for their mothers (Mindell, Telofski, Weigand, & Kurtz, 2009). Parents can read or tell stories, pray, cuddle, sing songs, read the scriptures, and do many other things. This is also an ideal time to teach the gospel. The peaceful feelings associated with bedtime stay with children throughout the night. Likewise, these bedtime interactions with children may be just what a parent needs to forget the frustrations of the day and to sleep peacefully.

The specific ways to increase quality time are many. One may focus on creating time for carefree play with the children, carefully plan a time when all family members can be available for family dinner, or make it a priority to be available during the bedtime hour. The specifics may vary, but the principle is the same: when we make the effort to engage in meaningful activities with those we care about, we create harmony in our lives.

Learn to Bundle: Do Two or More Things at the Same Time in Harmony

Bundling, according to life-harmony research, is when one activity simultaneously serves purposes in two or more aspects of life (Sandholtz, Derr, Bruckner, & Carlson, 2002). Successful bundlers are often able to do two or more things at the same time in harmony. In many cases, each facet of a bundled activity is of greater value than if it were done as its own activity. For example, when a couple chooses to walk together, they may get needed exercise, relax and be rejuvenated, share ideas about Church callings, express their affection, talk about their children, brainstorm solutions to problems at work, and so on. This one bundling activity is of great value because it may contribute to many facets of life.

A few years ago my wife gave me a tandem bicycle for my birthday. This proved to be our best tool of bundling ever. We often ride together on a bike path up a beautiful canyon next to the Provo River. By doing so, we



Bundling can also include doing chores together and having fun as a family when the work is done. Matt Reier, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

can both get as much exercise as we want. We stay close, so it easy to talk to one another and strengthen our marriage as we exercise. We are invigorated by the beautiful scenery on the trail. We greet and sometimes talk with members of the community. This list could go on and on. Riding a tandem with a family member accomplishes so much more than riding alone.

Another example of bundling is when a parent takes a child with them to run errands. A mother may take her child with her to purchase groceries. While shopping she has the opportunity to connect with her child one-on-one and engage in relationship-building conversation. She can also teach principles of provident living by showing her child how to save money by comparison shopping.

In today's world, many parents transport their children to school, sports practice, and a myriad of other activities. This may be an excellent time to bundle travel time with meaningful conversation. Elder Robert D. Hales (2010) counseled parents, "As you drive or walk children to school or their various activities, do you use the time to talk with them about their hopes

and dreams and fears and joys? Do you take the time to have them take the earplugs from their mp3 players and all the other devices so that they can hear you and feel of your love?” (p. 95).

We may also bundle church service time with family time. A bishop with a young family in a ward with numerous widows related that he brings one or more children with him each time he makes a non-confidential visit. The widows have learned to love his children and the children are able to see their father ministering.

When we do two or more things at the same time in harmony, we give that time period greater value. As we examine our lives, we will find many such activities that will enable us to struggle less with juggling and claim greater harmony in our lives.

Focus on the Most Important Things

Bundling does not always work. There are many times when it is better to set firm boundaries and not let paid work's *basso profundo* overpower the gentle melodies of home life. Keeping the Sabbath day holy may be a key to focused harmony. Bob Egan, a successful IBM executive, told my work and family class at BYU that he made a promise never to work on Sunday, and he never has. He said it feels good to tell his children, “Sunday is a special day, a day different than other days of the week. Daddy doesn't go to work on Sunday.”

Weekly family home evening is also sacred family time around which firm boundaries should be set. Outside friendships, work, and church service should not encroach upon this activity. This might be a great time to turn the phones off completely, avoiding even the intrusive buzz of an incoming text message. It is a time to say “no” to activities (however worthy they might be) that intrude upon having a faith-promoting family home evening.

Family vacation may be another time for muting work completely. In today's wireless world of smartphones, tablets, iPads, and laptops, it is easy to let work bring dissonance to the delicate tunes of vacation renewal. A few years ago, I took my wife and three of our children to enjoy the Big Island



Family time is more important than most other things in life. Matt Reier, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

of Hawaii for an eight-day vacation. I brought my laptop with the thought that I could log on a few minutes each day and keep up with my e-mail. However, the few minutes turned into a few hours each day. It seemed that even when playing with the kids at the beach I would become distracted by thinking about a work project or by becoming irritated because of something I read in an e-mail. It is true that where the mind is, the heart is soon sure to follow. A few days into our vacation, my boss firmly demanded (via e-mail) that I join an important 9:00 a.m. conference call the next morning. After replying that I would attend, I realized that the 9:00 a.m. call in New York would be 3:00 a.m. Kona time. Sitting in on that tense conference call in the wee hours of the morning, with the sound of the waves crashing in

the background, was the straw that broke this camel's back. I asked myself, "What am I doing? I'm supposed to be on vacation!" So after the call I locked up the laptop, put away the calling card, and crawled back into bed. I made a resolution from then on that I would throw off my "electronic leash" whenever I went on vacation (Hill, 1999).

Part of focusing on the most important things is recognizing that the family takes priority over other life domains. The First Presidency (1999) wrote: "However worthy and appropriate other demands or activities may be, they must not be permitted to displace the divinely-appointed duties that only parents and families can adequately perform." Sometimes we erroneously place Church service arbitrarily above family responsibilities. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf (2009) taught, "Even some programs of the Church can become a distraction if we take them to extremes and allow them to dominate our time and our attention at the expense of things that matter most. We need balance in life" (p. 60). Certainly our employment and Church callings are important, and should be fulfilled diligently. However, on occasion, we may need to remember what Elder Dallin H. Oaks (2007) counseled: "We have to forego some good things in order to choose others that are better or best because they develop faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and strengthen our families" (p. 107).

Work Flexibly

Research has consistently shown that those with workplace flexibility are better able to manage the competing demands of paid work and family life. Workplace flexibility is defined as "the ability of workers to make choices influencing when, where, and for how long they engage in work-related tasks" (Hill et al., 2008, p. 152). Some examples of workplace flexibility include telecommuting (working electronically from home), flextime (being able to modify start times, meal breaks, and ending times), part-time work (working reduced hours for reduced pay), and leave (taking time off without pay for family responsibilities).

A large body of research documents the benefits of this flexibility to both work and family life. For example, one study in a large multinational corporation compared 279 mothers working part-time in professional positions with 250 mothers working full-time. Those working part-time reported that they used their extra discretionary time to care for and nurture their dependent children. They reported less work-to-family conflict, as well as greater work-family success, childcare satisfaction, and family success (Hill & Anderson, 2004). Another study compared 441 telecommuters who worked primarily from home to 4,315 workers who worked primarily from the office. Those who worked from home reported greater job motivation, career opportunity, work-life balance, and personal/family success. They also reported that they were less likely to be thinking about leaving the company (Hill, Ferris, & Martinson, 2003). Several other studies have revealed that those who have workplace flexibility are able to work longer hours without experiencing work-family conflict (Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, & Weitzman, 2001; Hill, Erickson, Ferris, & Holmes, 2010).

Over the years I have personally used each of these options to facilitate work and family harmony. The strategy that probably helped the most was when I worked from home for IBM instead of commuting to and from the office each day. In 1990, I became one of IBM's first telecommuters. For nearly ten years, I worked from my home in Logan, Utah—more than 2,000 miles from my coworkers in New York. This enabled me to live in a quiet community, forego the stressful 45-minute commute each morning and evening, and be at home within earshot of my family for most of our waking hours. I found myself much more involved in the everyday activities of the home, and much more in tune with the individual needs of my children. I also found that flexibility and autonomy of telework enabled me to do my job more effectively and efficiently. However, working with so many children in the background sometimes made it difficult to maintain professional boundaries between work and home life. Let me share one humorous story that appeared in a *Wall Street Journal* article on telecommuting:

One morning while I recorded my daily voice mail greeting, my wife Juanita was folding clothes in the laundry room across the hall. My six-year-old daughter Emily had just taken a shower upstairs and could not find the clothes she wanted to wear. She came downstairs draped in nothing but a towel. When Juanita saw her, she said in a loud, giggly female voice, “Look at you! You have no clothes on!” After several colleagues commented with a chuckle about my voice mail greeting, I listened to it, and this is what I heard:

Male Voice: This is Dr. Jeff Hill with IBM Global Employee Research . . .

Giggly Female Voice: Look at you! You have no clothes on!

Male Voice: I’m not available right now . . .

(Shellenbarger, 1997, p. B1)

The many electronic tools available in the digital age opens up many possibilities for when, where, and how long work is performed. Most large companies and many smaller ones offer these flexible work options. Whether it is flextime, telecommuting, part-time work, or leave, a key component for achieving life harmony is to choose to work flexibly. Those who are successful at this see their life as a whole and choose to work when it makes sense to work and to be with family members when it makes sense to be with family.

Simplify Your Life

Voluntary simplicity—deliberately choosing to accumulate fewer possessions and engage in fewer activities—aids in creating life harmony (Brophy, 1995). Elder L. Tom Perry (2008) counseled, “In our search to obtain relief from the stresses of life, may we earnestly seek ways to simplify our lives” (p. 10). King Benjamin’s counsel is applicable to many of us today: “And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength” (Mosiah 4:27). In directing members to

follow this counsel, Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1994) challenged every member of the Church to give up one outside activity in order to have more time for the family. Many of us seek diligently to please and help those around us. Sometimes we agree to do too many things that are not part of our primary mission. If we really want to focus on those activities with value, then we need to learn how to kindly but firmly say “no.”

This may be easier said than done, especially for those of us who want to please others. I have learned a simple way to do this. When someone asks me to do something I respond, “Thank you very much for this invitation. I appreciate it. Let me think it over and I’ll get back to you tomorrow.” If, after consideration, I decide it is an invitation I’d rather not accept, I think of others who might want to do it. Then when I get back to the person I say something like, “I thank you again for the invitation, but with what’s going on right now I am not going to be able to accept it. However, you might want to contact Thom Curtis or Wally Goddard. One of them might be interested and they would probably do a better job than I would.” Using such a dialogue, I can say no without a twinge of regret.

In order to obtain life harmony, we must also look for a way to compose a life of modest means. We live in a materialistic world, and when we have too much we run the risk of obscuring the simple but powerful life melody we hope to compose. One important way to simplify life is to follow the counsel of the prophets to stay out of debt. Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin (2004) promised great blessings to those who pay an honest tithing, spend less than they earn, learn to save, honor financial obligations, and teach children sound financial principles.

There are many ways to simplify by planning together to reduce the number and time demands of out-of-home activities. For example, a father may choose to go golfing with the office group every other week instead of every week. A bishop may decide to reduce the length and frequency of ward leadership meetings. A Relief Society instructor may choose to spend a little less time making fancy handouts for her lesson. Youth may choose to reduce the number of extracurricular activities in which they are engaged during

the school year and the amount of time they spend hanging out with friends. Though the ways to do this vary, the principle is to reduce the time spent engaging in low-value activities.

Center on the Savior

Perhaps the most important key for successfully orchestrating a life of harmony is to center on the Savior. President Howard W. Hunter (1997) said, “I am aware that life presents many challenges, but with the help of the Lord, we need not fear. If our lives and our faith are centered on Jesus Christ and his restored gospel, nothing can ever go permanently wrong” (p. 40). The concept of life harmony is embodied in the scripture, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). When the primary focus of our life is to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, everything else—employment, home, and church—falls into place.

We create harmony as we center on the Savior by building spiritual patterns in the home (Newell & Newell, 2005). There are many ways of doing this. Many families choose to start the morning each day by pursuing the pattern of reading and discussing the scriptures and holding family prayer. In addition, we have been counseled to hold a meaningful family home evening every week. Elder David A. Bednar (2009) gave several suggestions about how to center our lives on the Savior by being “more diligent and concerned at home.” He counseled parents to frequently bear their testimony in informal settings in the home. He also advised parents to be consistent in these spiritual patterns, for “our consistency in doing seemingly small things can lead to significant spiritual results” (pp. 17–20).

There are numerous other small and simple things that can be done to more effectively center on the Savior. Fathers’ blessings provide a way to partner with the Savior in rearing children in love and righteousness. Beginning and ending a sincere fast together as a family is another way to be centered. Parents can read faith-filled inspirational stories at bedtime



We can teach our children by example to center their lives on the Savior. One way to do this is through regular family prayer. Matt Reier, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

to help in this regard. Whatever the specific path, the key is to create an environment that centers on the Savior.

Summary

Finding harmony in our lives may appear to be an unrealistic ideal when it seems the best we can do is “struggle to juggle” our extensive demands. However, utilizing strategies such as enhancing energy, increasing quality time, learning to bundle, focusing on the important things, working flexibly, simplifying our lives, and centering our lives on the Savior can lighten the burden and bring greater joy and purpose in the work of life. As we seek life harmony, we are better able to both provide for and nurture our families and compose our lives into a magnificent symphony.

Appendix: The Mexican Fishing Village Story

Author Unknown

An American entrepreneur was standing at the pier of a small coastal Mexican village when a small boat with just one fisherman docked. Inside the small boat were several large yellowfin tuna. The American complimented the Mexican on the quality of his fish.

“How long did it take you to catch them?” the American asked.

“Only a little while,” the Mexican replied.

“Why don’t you stay out longer and catch more fish?” the American then asked.

“I have sufficient to support the needs of our home,” the Mexican said.

“But,” the American then asked, “What do you do with the rest of your time?”

The Mexican fisherman smiled and with a twinkle in his eye said, “I do a lot at home, señor. I play with my niños, lend a hand with the comida, and then take a siesta with my wife, Maria. After helping the kids with their homework, we stroll to the plaza in the evening where we

listen to the guitar and sing with our amigos. I have a full and wonderful life, señor.”

The American scoffed, “I am a Harvard MBA and could help you. You should spend a lot more time fishing, and with the proceeds you can buy a bigger boat, and with the proceeds from the bigger boat you could buy several boats, eventually you would have a fleet of fishing boats . . . Instead of selling your catch to a middleman, you would sell directly to the consumers, eventually opening your own can factory. You would control the product, processing, and distribution. You would need to leave this small coastal fishing village and move to Mexico City, then LA, and eventually New York, where you will run your expanding enterprise.”

The Mexican fisherman asked, “But señor, how long will this all take?”

To which the American replied, “Not long, maybe fifteen to twenty years.”

“But what then, señor?”

The American laughed, “That’s the best part. When the time is right, you will sell your company stock to the public and become very rich; you will make millions.”

“Millions, señor? Then what?”

The American said slowly, “Then you would retire and move to a small coastal fishing village where you could do a lot at home. You play with your grandkids, help with the comida, take a siesta with your wife, and stroll to the plaza in the evenings where you could listen to the guitar and sing with your amigos . . .” (Yen, 2002; Hill and Anderson, 2004, pp. 150–151).

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