

THE WAR BETWEEN CAREER AND FAMILY - THE BATTLE CONTINUES

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During the better part of my corporate business career, I have witnessed the expanding conflict between job and family demands, particularly parenting. Over the past 15 years there has been a widespread recognition that corporations are increasingly demanding more than a "pound of flesh" from employees at all levels. Whether this issue was exacerbated by the recession that ended several years ago, it is hard to say. But it leads to one inescapable conclusion: Hours on the job, whether at the desk or at home, have increased dramatically and are increasingly contributing to dysfunctional family issues.

Increasingly we read that "Grade A" professionals are receiving a "D" or "F" as parents. Too often, we see more children of successful professionals suffering a range of emotional and health problems than children of "less successful" parents. Let there be no doubt that a conscientious professional's long hours and career-enhancing characteristics -- such as perfection, impatience and efficiency - can be interpreted as criticisms of their children's behavior and performance. What does that do to their self-esteem?

As much as they may deny it, corporations, both large and small, contribute to the problems of parenting. Organizations undeniably foster conflict between work and family and sometimes this is done consciously through a muted threat -- "if you want to get ahead here, you've got to make sacrifices." Other times, it is done inadvertently by simply creating a set of demands and pressures on professionals that automatically conflict with family responsibilities and personal time. How may school plays or Little League games can be missed until we are not missed any longer?

Yes, profit and growth motives remain the key differentiator between successful and less successful corporate structures. This increasing pressure arises primarily from the expanding focus on achieving organizational goals and objectives to the exclusion of personal goals and objectives. After all, most corporations are measured acutely by various publics more so than ever before.

Certainly in recent years many companies have advanced telecommuting, flextime, day care, etc. With the tight labor market of today, it was and is innovative. However, the pressures of business have still required more hours on the job and a kilo-loaded bag to carry home for many.

It is quite clear that fiercely competitive market conditions and goals for survival have strongly influenced professionals to spend more time on the job. Hence, the past positioning of corporations to show concern for their employees' emotional balance and wellness is more obscure today than it was in the past. Although this issue continues to be critical, those corporate executives wearing the largest number of epaulets are no longer articulating their concern for the long term survival of the professionals following in their footsteps. These same senior executives are being subjected to the "hot seat" of sustained performance. And they, too, are spending less time in both their parenting and marital relationships even if they describe it as quality time .

Is there a solution to this issue of familial atrophy? In my view, not in the short time. To be successful today and often to keep one's job, it is essential that the professional march to a more rapid drum beat than has ever been played before. Unfortunately, you can't avoid looking over your shoulder. The parade may pass you by. Who said management-by-fear is extinct in a democratic workplace?

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