



Too busy to get a life?

A demanding job need not be at the cost of family and quality living, says Domini Stuart.

If you feel you're working harder than ever, you're not alone. These days, just seven per cent of Australians stick to the traditional routine of nine to five, Monday to Friday. And, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 30 per cent are working more than 49 hours every week.

Business owners are invariably at the top the scale when it comes to sheer hard graft, so it's hardly surprising if you have time for work and little else.

Time management theories suggest you handle the problem by prioritising – but it's hard to establish priorities when work isn't the only demand on your time. Yes, it's vital that you have your proposal on a client's desk by 3pm – but what if that means you have to cancel the plumber and carry on living without hot water? Or that you disappoint your daughter by missing her performance in the school play?

Buying time

Sometimes, however well you organise your time, there literally aren't enough hours in the day. That's when you need someone to take over your 'to do' list – or, more sensibly, a list of what you don't want to do.

“Getting someone else to do things you dislike is doubly beneficial,” says psychologist Brian McCallum. “You're not only free to do more productive things with your time, you can also get rid of that nagging sense of dread.”

You might be able to make better use of those already on your payroll by honing your delegation skills. It can be hard to accept that people are capable of doing things as well, or even better, than you, but remember that most successful entrepreneurs aim to create a business that will run just as smoothly when they're not there.

Another alternative is using contractors to help with specific tasks. “Even if you have an accountant, you might feel overwhelmed by the pressure of getting your paperwork organised at tax time,” says McCallum. “Bringing someone in for a couple of days to

do the book work could free you to get on with your job or, even better, have a relaxing weekend with the family.

“I’ve done it myself,” he continues. “Once, when I was particularly busy, I found I was getting swamped by magazines and periodicals, and all of the other paperwork that floods into the office every day. It took someone else just a few hours to get it all organised – but it was time I just couldn’t spare. Afterwards, I was able to work much more efficiently.”

No more chores

As Director of Concierge Sydney, Julie Mather has made it her business to provide executives with quality time. She can help a business run more smoothly by implementing processes and procedures – and she’s just as ready to arrange a holiday, organise a dinner party, go Christmas shopping or co-ordinate renovations.

Her goal is to provide a complete support service by developing a personal relationship with her clients. “The more we’re trusted, the more we can help,” she says. “Rather than just being home to let in the plumber, for example, we can track down and organise the best person for the job. This way, clients can get a time-sapping chore off their hands with one phone call.”

There’s no limit to the services Mather will provide. “As long as it’s legal, moral and feasible, we’ll find a way to do it,” she says – though there is one area she prefers to avoid. “In a crisis, we will collect children from school or drive them to an appointment, but we would far rather help our clients find time to be there themselves. It’s what they want to do, and it’s certainly what the children are hoping for.”

Time to relax

When Rosemary Strong first called on Mather, she was running a home as well as a law firm, and fed up with having little time for anything else. “I enjoy my job, so work isn’t a problem,” she says, “but I really want to be able to make the most of my free time. Julie helps by taking care of things I don’t enjoy.”

Strong chose a concierge service rather than a series of contractors because she sees value in a personal relationship. “At the beginning, Julie helped me get organised and set up my home office,” she says. “Now we know each other better I can trust her to run it for me – along with organising the house cleaning, any household repairs and all of the other chores I’d rather not have to think about. She even knows me well enough to suggest things like a new restaurant or a special birthday present. She has some great ideas I’d never have time to research.

“I used to get home and feel depressed by being so disorganised,” Strong continues. “I had no idea what was in all the piles of paper on my desk. Now it’s all under control. I know exactly what needs to be done, and I don’t have to worry about losing track of something important. I can focus on my job, then really relax and make the most of my down time. Investing in quality time has made a huge difference to my life.”

Should you be investing in quality time?

Look for the signs...the need to get a life can creep up on you!

- The children don't even bother to ask whether you'll be at a sports carnival or speech night.
- You'd love a holiday, but you don't even have time to look through the brochures.
- Your partner isn't surprised by a 'one size fits all' birthday present picked up from wherever happens to be open when you're finally on your way home.
- You actively avoid your friends because you owe them all at least two dinner parties.
- You can't remember the last movie you saw at a cinema.
- When you're invited for a weekend away, you know you'll be too busy before you know the date.