



The best of both worlds

It may feel like fantasy, but it could be within your reach

If you're worried that your business is keeping you away from your family, you're not alone. According to the Families and Work Institute, 60% of working parents feel considerable conflict between the demands of work and time spent at home. Throw in the added responsibilities of being the boss and any kind of balance between work and family starts to look like an elusive dream.

Life Coach Carole Sandberg first meets many of her clients when they feel they're buckling under the pressure of trying to be all things to all people.

"They tend to think they need help with managing their time, but it's rarely that simple," she says. "Often, the real problem is that they haven't sorted out their core values. They're striving for success without really knowing what that means to them."

An ideal life

Working out what you really want isn't always as easy as it sounds. Sandberg helps by having her clients write about their ideal life as though they were already living it. In a realm where anything is possible, they're often surprised by what pops up as being most important to them.

For instance, from believing that you need to spend more time with your family you may realise that what you really need is more fun with the family. A simple rethink about what you do when you *are* at home could be all it takes to turn the problem around.

Sandberg then helps her clients develop a plan. "It doesn't occur to most people that a plan for balance and fulfilment in their lives is every bit as important as a business plan," says Sandberg. "But we all need a sense of direction, and to know that we're working towards the kind of success we really care about."

Charting a different course

Four years ago, Mike Selby was struggling with his own definition of success. On the surface, he had it all. His marketing consultancy, *Selby on Strategy*, was thriving. He had the right house, the right cars and two young children at the right schools. Yet he was haunted by the feeling that something was missing.

His wife suggested he needed a challenge that had nothing to do with business or possessions. He settled on sailing his 34 foot yacht single handed from Sydney to Hamilton Island.

“That trip was a turning point for me,” says Selby. “Away from my business and my family with nothing to do but think, I couldn’t help but review my priorities. It didn’t take long to realise that what was missing from my life was my wife and kids.”

As soon as he returned to Sydney, he began to make changes. The first was to spend time with his children every morning, making breakfast for them, then driving them to school.

“I just started saying ‘no’ to meetings before 9.30am,” he says. “It’s funny, people who wouldn’t have any qualms about rescheduling a meeting for another business commitment find it hard if they’re doing something with the kids. But what’s more important in the long run?”

A real family business

Selby now incorporates the family into as much of his life as possible. This includes his second business, locating and supplying Australian Grand Touring cars.

“‘Australian Muscle Cars Sales’ is pure indulgence for me – but it’s fun for the rest of the family, too,” Selby explains. “For instance, we’ve just come back from a weekend in Tasmania where I combined picking up a great car with some focussed family time.”

Selby acknowledges that having an established business gave him freedom he could have only dreamed about when he was starting out. Even then it took him a while to trust that the world would keep on turning if he did things differently.

“The people who feel under the most pressure are the ones who believe they’re stuck,” says Sandberg. “But there’s always something you can do. You may not be able to achieve your ideal immediately, but a series of small changes can make an enormous difference over time. It comes back to the personal plan. Until you know where you really want to go, there’s not much chance you’ll get there.”

10 ways to start balancing

- 1. Write a plan for personal success.** There’s no way round it - everything you want in your personal life needs to be down on paper.
- 2. Set realistic goals.** If you can’t spend as much time as you’d like with your family right now, make this a goal with a series of achievable steps along the way.

3. **Let non-essentials slip.** You have your plan. You know what matters. Turn a blind eye to things that don't.
4. **Get help.** Enlist the family, hire extra help – you really can't do everything yourself, so why waste time trying?
5. **Communicate.** The much-vaunted family dinner may not be feasible at this stage of your life, but that doesn't mean you have to miss out on the day-to-day exchanges that oil good family relationships. Use the phone, fax or email, or write a note to tuck into a lunchbox or stick on the fridge.
6. **Stay well.** Make sure you include exercise and eating well in your personal plan. Why not kill two birds with one stone by taking up a sport the whole family enjoys?
7. **Be in one place at a time.** When you're at home, don't fret about work. When you're at work, don't fret about home. Both deserve your undivided attention.
8. **Spend time with people you like.** It's often easier to let down your family than to say 'no' to dutiful drinks with an acquaintance or client.
9. **Keep one diary.** Write details of school concerts, speech days, sporting events and other activities important to your children in your business diary so you won't forget to fit work around them.
10. **Be spontaneous.** Busy families need structure and organisation, but too much can be stultifying. When you see an opportunity for fun, grab it!