# Balance business and family responsibilities

Getting a new business off the ground and managing it on a day-to-day basis can be extremely demanding. It is even more challenging when you have family responsibilities to meet, such as bringing up children, caring for a child with disabilities or looking after parents with health problems.

Failing to juggle work commitments and domestic responsibilities successfully can give rise to feelings of stress and guilt. The key is to establish an optimum work-life balance, which enables you to maximise your quality of life while meeting all your commitments in the best way you can. This can often involve you and others having to make compromises.

Establishing a more favourable work-life balance requires you to recognise what your values are. These are how much importance you attach to your family, friends, self, lifestyle and work.

There are many steps you can take to achieve a more favourable work-life balance. These include organising your time more effectively, getting help from others to lessen your load at home and work, exploring the care options available to you and creating greater professional flexibility for yourself and others. You need to begin by considering your current circumstances.

## 1 Find a better work-life balance

1.1 Consider all your commitments.
Take into account all of your work commitments to yourself, your business, clients and, where applicable, your business partner(s) and employees.

Think about your commitments to your domestic relationships.

Also consider your life goals and how much time you need to commit to achieving these.

1.2 Analyse how you spend your time.
In a vertical column write down everything to which you currently devote time. This might include partner, children, relatives, self, social life, domestic chores and work.

Next to these write how many hours you devote to each in an average working day. It might also be useful to consider how you spend your weekends - especially if you normally spend these working.

Create an accurate picture of how you spend your time.

1.3 Identify a more favourable work-life balance.
Assess the data. Identify things to which you're devoting too much time or things to which you would like to (or should) give more time. Consider whether you are living up to all of your domestic and professional responsibilities.

Think about how your commitments are likely to change. For example, your children might be coming up to school age or your elderly relatives might need more care from you.

Remind yourself about your values, priorities and goals. Think about why you work - primarily for financial reasons or are there others?

Against your existing categories create new figures that you believe would give you a more ideal or favourable work-life balance.

Compare your ideal work-life balance with the way things are now. This will show you where and by how much you need to restructure your time.

Although not all changes will be possible straight away, think about practical things you can do to achieve a more favourable work-life balance.


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## 2 Manage your time in the home

2.1 Sit down with your family regularly and plan ahead.
Run through your business diary commitments and work out how they impact upon your family.

Give family members sufficient notice of forthcoming work commitments.

Ensure that important family events (eg sports days, Christmas concerts and medical appointments) are written into your work diary. If applicable, make sure work colleagues know about these.

2.2 Do as much as you can in advance.
For example, on a Sunday prepare a week's worth of evening meals and put them in the freezer, or make packed lunches the night before they are needed.

Keep a stock of greetings cards for all occasions.

2.3 Organise your time by writing lists.
Whether at work or in the home, writing daily or weekly 'to-do' lists can help you to prioritise tasks and ensure that you don't forget anything.

2.4 Allow for crises such as illness or unexpected deadlines.
Build flexibility into your working week (see section 7).

If you live with a partner, make sure they are familiar with special tasks you undertake regularly, for example, any medication you give to your children.

You also need to have a strategy in place if an unexpected work deadline arises. For example, you might need to be able to rely on someone else to do the school run.

2.5 Go for quality if you can't have quantity.
If you only have limited time to spend with your loved ones make sure it is spent well. For example, play a game with your toddler rather than watching TV.

When you cook a full meal in the evening, eat round the table (not the TV). Family dining is known to improve communication and harmony between members, which adds value to the time you spent cooking.

2.6 Make the most of your weekend.
If applicable, ask your partner to look after the children. Part of the bargain should be to return the compliment.

If possible, try to make childcare arrangements so that occasionally you can spend the weekend (or part of it) just with your partner or friends.

## 3 Involve your family more

3.1 Make sure responsibility for household duties is shared.
If you live with a partner (or if your children are old enough) they should be helping to maintain the home. They might be unaware of specific details (for example, what day the bins are emptied), so explain everything thoroughly.

Learn to let go. You need to trust others to take on domestic tasks.

If neither you nor your partner has the time to carry out certain domestic tasks, you should both assess your work-life balance. Alternatively, consider hiring a helping hand (see section 4.1).

3.2 Draw up a rota for household chores.


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Determine which tasks each family member enjoys most and accommodate these if possible. Make sure everyone lends a hand.

Give positive feedback and don't expect things to be done exactly as you would do them.

Establish a regular time when everybody can discuss domestic arrangements and use these to bring up any issues about people not pulling their weight.

3.3 Get others to make compromises.
Others, including your partner, need to shoulder their fair share of domestic duties - and this will probably mean compromises.

If you have a partner, maybe they can rearrange their work hours so they are able to take your children to or from school.

Flexible working laws, which apply if you have young children, may help (see section 9.1).

## 4 Get help on the home front

4.1 Consider paying others to carry out some domestic tasks.
For example, look into employing a cleaner's services a couple of times a week, or pay to have your laundry done. Obviously there is a cost implication, but it could be a price worth paying if it lessens your workload and makes you feel better.

4.2 Do some of your shopping on the Internet.
Save yourself the hassle of going to the supermarket, which can be particularly stressful when children have to be taken along.

The Internet can also save you time when it comes to buying gifts for birthdays or Christmas.

## 5 Explore your care options

5.1 Consider the full variety of childcare choices available.
These range from live-in nannies and au pairs to registered childminders, crèches and nurseries.

Take up offers of help from relatives and friends you can trust.

Do reciprocal child-minding deals.

*For more information on childcare visit the ChildcareLink website*

5.2 Find out about tax credits and benefits.
These can help with childcare costs.

*Read a guide to child tax credit on the SureStart website*

*Get to know more about benefits by visiting the Department for Work and Pensions website*

5.3 Take advantage of pre- and after-school clubs.
Many schools run pre- and after-school clubs.

In addition, find out about local school holiday clubs and other out-of-term schemes for children.

5.4 Find out about support for those who care for dependent relatives.
This could be an elderly parent, child or family member with disabilities.

Contact local social services to find out about support in your area. They might also be able to put you in touch with local carers' associations.


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## 6 Reduce the load at work

6.1 Keep your business goals realistic.
Don't set unrealistic goals and don't accept unreasonable demands from others. An unmanageable workload will increase your stress levels.

Be practical about the standards you set. Aiming too high will also create pressure.

Adapt your business development plans when foreseeable changes to domestic circumstances are looming. For example, put business expansion on hold if you're likely to have to devote more of your time to nursing a relative.

6.2 Delegate tasks whenever possible.
Assign responsibility for some of your tasks to others. This will reduce your workload and improve your chances of establishing a more favourable work-life balance.

Knowing when to delegate is a sign of efficient management - so don't be afraid to do it. Learn when to let go.

Make sure you can trust in the abilities of the person to whom you delegate, otherwise you could be making more work for yourself. Make your instructions clear and comprehensive. Institute effective lines of communication and build in hand-over periods.

6.3 Consider outsourcing some business activities.
You could place some or all of your accounting, recruitment or marketing activities out-of-house.

Find a reputable service provider, preferably one with expertise in serving businesses similar to yours. You need to have complete faith that the services you receive accord with best practice, that they are tailored to your individual needs and that they are delivered when you need them.

Always find out the cost and get assurance about service quality before placing any work out of house.

## 7 Create flexible working arrangements

7.1 Tailor your working hours to fit your domestic responsibilities.
Start work later so that you can take your child to school. Make up the time by having a short lunch break or finishing work later; alternatively, start work earlier so you can pick up your children from school.

Consider working longer days so you can fit your working week into four days.

Flexible working laws may help; see section 9.1.

7.2 Consider working part-time.
Obviously this will depend upon how much you need to earn and the demands your business places upon your time. However, working part-time can be the solution to demanding domestic responsibilities.

This can be a short-term measure, for example, if you have to nurse a sick relative. Your hours can be increased when circumstances change.

Improved time management, delegation, outsourcing, job-sharing or employing part-time or temporary staff can make your working part-time hours feasible.

Not all businesses have to be full-time. Part-time businesses can be profitable. The key is to set realistic business goals and to be certain that achieving them will generate sufficient income for you and your business.

Don't attempt to take on a full-time workload if you opt for part-time hours.


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7.3 Work from home when possible.
Unless your business is already home-based, consider whether any of your work duties could be carried out just as successfully at home. As well as saving you from the stress and time involved in commuting, working from home will give you greater flexibility. You might even get more done by having less interruptions than those you face at work.

Make sure your home is adequately provisioned, perhaps including a PC or laptop (with Internet, remote email/server access and software packages you use at work), printer, business line, fax machine, stationery, comfortable office furniture and sufficient space. You also need to make sure you have sufficient IT support.

An automatic re-direct system on your work-based phone will allow others to reach you at home. If possible, install a separate business line at home so that you can differentiate between incoming calls.

Know how many hours to work and stick to this. Otherwise work will spill over into your personal time.

Don't let domestic distractions interfere with your work. Remain disciplined and use your time efficiently. Make sure that others you live with know not to disturb you while you are working at home.

Recognise when you need to be in your place of work. Don't fall in to the trap of working from home all of the time. You could run the risk of losing touch with important business issues and feeling isolated.

## 8 Coping with stress

8.1 Keep a journal for a fortnight.
Log your mood swings, physical symptoms, sleep patterns and diet.

Analyse the factors that trigger feelings of stress. If you get to know these you can work on your responses and identify preventative measures.

When you feel stressed there are a number of quick and effective things you can do. These include breathing deeply, taking a short walk outside or having a cup of decaffeinated tea or coffee away from your desk.

8.2 Learn how and when to say no.
Don't shy away from refusing if you're asked to take on too much.

When necessary, disagree with another person's point of view. Hesitation will show a lack of strength and conviction. Be aware, too, that your body language and tone of voice can also make you appear weak. Use a calm voice to say clearly what you think.

If you feel pressured by someone into responding to a request, if possible, tell them you will respond when you have had time to think.

8.3 Wind down after work.
Listen to calming music on the journey to and from work. If you travel on public transport, read a magazine or book.

Leave professional concerns in the workplace and domestic issues at home.

Change into more comfortable clothes shortly after arriving home.

Take some time to sit down and relax before rushing to prepare meals or carry out other domestic chores.

Take 20 minutes' exercise three times a week.

8.4 Allow sufficient time for yourself.
Factor into your working week time for self-development, for example, learning a new skill.


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Do the same at home. Make time to watch a favourite TV programme, read or pursue a hobby. If applicable, come to a reciprocal arrangement with your partner about taking sole responsibility for looking after your children. This will create free time for you both.

Don't let others encroach upon time you set aside for yourself.

8.5 Look after your health.
Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet. Opt for energy-boosting snacks when peckish - avoid comfort eating or junk food. Keeping your blood sugar levels steady will provide you with a constant stream of energy. Binge-eating creates energy peaks and troughs.

Make sure you get sufficient rest and sleep.

Find time to exercise. A bicycle ride or long walk in the open air can work wonders, as well as providing an excellent opportunity to enjoy time with your loved ones (or some time by yourself).

*Read a guide to stress and tips on how to avoid it on the Patient UK website*

## 9 Manage other people's commitments

9.1 Meet your obligations under family-friendly employment law.
The law allows for paid maternity, paternity and adoption leave as well as further unpaid parental leave under certain circumstances (eg when parents have to look after children with disabilities).

Those on maternity leave also have rights to salary reviews, appraisals and promotions. They are protected against dismissal and redundancy on grounds of their pregnancy.

Providing an employee has worked for an employer for at least 26 weeks, by law the employer must seriously consider feasible requests from the employee for flexible working arrangements if the employee has a child under six-years-old. a child under 18 years old with disabilities or a care-dependent adult.

*For more information about the rights of employees visit the Acas website*

9.2 Introduce a range of flexible-working solutions
Different solutions will suit different people. There are a range of flexible-working solutions for you to consider, including:

- Having a flexi-time system.
- Allowing employees to go part-time or job-share if this enables them to better meet their domestic commitments.
- Term-time working arrangements for those with parental responsibilities.
- An annualised hours arrangement, whereby employees have to work for an agreed amount of hours per year, not a set amount each week.
- The facility for employees to work from home where feasible.
- Offering employees the chance to take career breaks.

*Read a guide to changing patterns of work on the Acas website*

9.3 Recognise different types of commitment.
Your employees' domestic circumstances might be unfamiliar to you, but they can present the same work-life balance dilemmas.

Interpret the term 'family' broadly. Step-parents do have parental responsibilities to fulfil and those in same-sex relationships can. They also can have legal rights as parents or guardians.


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Remember that a person's care commitments can involve extended family members (eg a partner's parents).

9.4 Apply flexible-working arrangements equitably.
Affording all employees equal treatment will protect you from charges of discrimination.

If feasible, offer flexible-working arrangements to those without family responsibilities.

9.5 Avoid a long-hours culture in your business.
Allowing others to achieve a more favourable work-life balance can improve productivity. It can also help employers to recruit and retain staff.

Allowing staff members (or yourself) to work excessive hours can have detrimental effects on health. Legally, employers have a duty of care to protect the health of their staff in their place of work.

## SIGNPOST

1. *Find tips for creating a more favourable work-life balance by visiting the BBC's website*
2. *The Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform also provides information about work-life balance*
3. *Businesses considering flexible working arrangements can contact Time4Balance on 020 8549 7949*
4. *Visit www.handbag.com/family/workingmums/work_sharingload/ to view information about sharing domestic responsibilities.*
5. *The Working Families website contains free, detailed guidance for implementing flexible working practices and childcare options, as well as factsheets covering benefits and tax credits. Furthermore, it offers work-life balance training and consultancy services. For further information call 0800 013 0313.*
6. *Get to know more about benefits you might be entitled to by visiting the Department for Work and Pensions website. The general enquiry line is 0800 88 22 00 (free).*
7. *Visit the HM Revenue & Customs website to learn more about tax credits.*
8. *Nurseries and childminders in your area can be found by calling 08000 960 296*


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