


Material





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In today's material world, we strive to succeed and accumulate wealth. But there is more to life than making money and gathering goods. Many of us, in fact, deal with issues of business and wealth strictly on our own terms. We dream of becoming our own bosses, we try to balance the demands of work and home, we face ethical dilemmas. We also recognize the importance of education and how helping others brings more than material rewards.

It's often a juggling act, but true success requires a commitment to constantly improving ourselves and society. The following stories examine these issues of the material world, and their impact on our lives.

A Question of BALANCE

The opposing forces of work and home catch many families in the crossfire

By Gary Pallassino

The alarm dutifully sounds at 6 a.m. Mom and Dad drag themselves from bed and take turns in the bathroom before waking the kids. Ensuring that each child is washed and dressed—with various degrees of difficulty determined by age and amount of sleep—leaves just enough time for a hasty breakfast and a final check of lunches, backpacks, diaper bags, and other paraphernalia. Each child is deposited at the appropriate baby sitter/day care center/school, and then it's off to a full day of work. Eight hours (or more) later the cycle is reversed, with an hour or so of "quality time" thrown somewhere into the mix.

Sound familiar? According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, 30 million of the country's 54.9 million married-couple families have working husbands and wives. In families with children under 18 years of age, 91 percent of

fathers and 67 percent of mothers are employed.

A rash of recent media reports suggests Americans are worried about the time spent away from their families. Is there really such a thing as quality time, and does it make up for the hours your child spends in someone else's care? Will you come through the door one day to discover your children gone and replaced by young-adult strangers? And what can be done about it? Must it

come down to making a choice between career and family?

"I don't know if you can make that choice or not," says Norma Burgess, chair of the Department of Child and Family Studies in SU's College for Human Development. "The economic situation within our society suggests that most people have to live on two incomes, so it's not as much of a choice as it used

to be. But there are some options in terms of how you use the time you have to develop strong family relationships. I think there is a significant number of families who do prioritize family and work."

Mellisa Clawson, a professor in SU's Department of

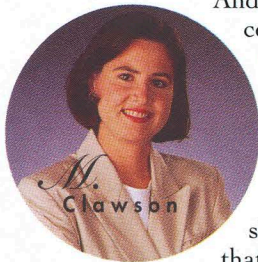
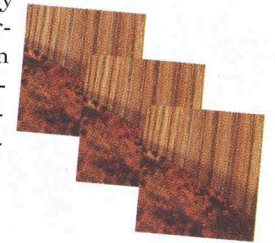
Child and Family Studies who conducts research on family and day care contributions to children's development, says many people are overcome by the competing demands of work, family, and personal lives. "It's very easy to not see your home life as one-third of your life, to put that on the back burner. There are tangible outcomes to getting ahead in your job, but what does it mean to get ahead in your family?"

Linda Stone Fish, a professor with the College for Human Development's Marriage and Family Therapy Program, says time is the working family's main headache. "Families take time and so do jobs or careers," she says. "When the children are young, couples convince themselves they will have more time when the kids are older, but when the kids are older, they realize this is not the case. They exchange ear infections

for car pools, and middle-of-the-night feedings for middle-of-the-night jitters because their 16-year-old is still out."

Clawson says parents may confuse quantity with quality when it comes to spending time with their children. "If I'm very stressed, it's not going to do much good to spend four or five hours with my child because my heart isn't in it. However, if we set aside maybe two hours where we pick out some of our favorite books or go for a walk, that's going to be much more meaningful. The time you spend needs to be enjoyable, happy, and productive for both parents and children. It shouldn't be done out of guilt."

Stone Fish says quality time helps children form positive attachments to the adults in their lives. "For a baby, it is feelings of love, consistency, limits, and of course all the feeding and wiping, etc. As children get older they also need play time, teaching, and socialization. How long this takes no one knows. Each parent and each child is different. But I will tell you that attachment is absolutely essential. Children need to know that what they do has an impact on someone they love. They need to want to please their parents. Parents deserve to have warm and loving times with their children. But this cannot be prescribed in terms of time. You simply need to be around a lot."



Day Care Dilemma

According to the latest U.S. Census Bureau statistics, 9.9 million children under the age of 5 need care while their mothers are working. While 48 percent are cared for by relatives, the rest are in day care centers, nursery schools, pre-schools, and baby sitter's homes.

"Finding quality day care — meaning well-run, adequately staffed facilities with age-appropriate activities — is critical," says Burgess. "In many cases quality is equated with expense, so being able to afford the kind of quality you would really like is sometimes difficult. Then the matter becomes whether employment outside the home is worth the expense of getting quality child care."

Recent articles in publications such as *Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report* raise serious questions about child care, deeming only 20 percent of all care as high quality.

Clawson says poor training and low pay are major problems in the day care world. According to the latest figures from the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, median weekly earnings of full-time, salaried child-care workers are \$260. The bottom 10 percent of these workers earn less than \$130 weekly.

"A child care worker does not exactly hold the most prestigious job in our society," Clawson says. "Along with their being underpaid, that brings a lot of other problems, like rapid turnover. Some of the centers I've studied have over a three-month period a 50 percent turnover rate. And that certainly has implications for children because they cannot develop a secure attachment to a teacher, or at least by the time they start to, that teacher is gone."

Families can find quality day care if they do enough research, she says. "Parents go into a center and they might be impressed by the state-of-the-art toys, but they don't



always realize there are many other things to look for. One important aspect of a child's day care experience is the parents' level of satisfaction with it. If a parent is dissatisfied, that's going to have a negative effect on the child's development and experience." Most communities have child care councils that produce checklists for parents to use when evaluating a child care provider, she adds.

Clawson says day care does offer some benefits for children. "Research shows that children in day care tend to show more autonomy," she says. "It can introduce chil-

dren to peers, particularly peers of other racial or ethnic groups. It certainly is an experience that can broaden a child's world."

Burgess says more issues pop up when a child reaches school age. Like it or not, schools have taken on more child-rearing responsibilities than ever. "There are some serious issues with that because you may not like what your child is learning in school," she says. "Some parents spend an inordinate amount of time 'untraining' their children in what they have learned socially at school. You have different and competing influences on your children once you put them in a setting with other children. The good behaviors and the negative behaviors will all come together—you have to weed them out and sort through them, figure out which ones you like and which ones you don't. School is a dynamic place, and you have to somehow continue to influence what children get during those eight hours they're away."



are people who strive to be home with their children, both men and women who see that role as a very important one."

Balancing work and family, she says, is like having three jobs: you fulfill your duties at work, you take care of your home, and you raise your children. "They are not always equal—you can change jobs, you can move to a different house, but your children are always with you. So you have to make some conscious decisions about where you want to put your time. During certain periods children need guidance, supervision, training, nurturing, and support. And they don't wait for you to leave work or until you clean the house—they grow up."

So how do you prioritize? Look at your children's immediate needs, Burgess says, because if you don't, they'll interrupt your other work anyway. "It's difficult to do that, depending on the type of job you have. If you're flexible, you can sometimes be with them or participate in their activities during the day."

Stone Fish says the key to coping is compromise. "The saying is, 'I do it all, I just don't do any of it well.' Many parents cut back on their work schedules so they can spend more time with their families. Many decide to go slower on career tracks."

Wendy Cohen '70 raised two young daughters, Stacey and Dana, alone in New York City while working full time in the demanding field of public relations. "I always felt that I was juggling balls, and every once in a while one would drop to the ground," she says. "You just kind of pick it up again. You have to keep them all juggling equally or else you lose them."

Cohen performed her act for about seven years before deciding to change careers. "I was working 50 to 60 hours a week, and then I'd come in bleary eyed," she says. "I wasn't spending enough time with my children. So I got a real estate license and formed my own company where I built spec houses out on Long Island, and my time was a little more my own."

Cohen eventually remarried, immediately gaining two more daughters, Heather and Pamela, who were 7 and 5 at the time. Cohen again decided to put the needs of family before career; she sold her business and stayed home with her children. "It was more important for them to have me around," she says. "I felt that all these kids needed my attention, and they've been getting it. With four, you're definitely going in different directions, even at this stage. We have one in college, one out of college, one in

Striking a Balance

The recent book *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*, by Arlie Hochschild, sparked fresh discussion about the work-family balance. Hochschild proposed that jobs have, for some, become an escape from the pressures of home. In her research at a company known for family-friendly policies, she found many women choosing to put in long hours even when they were not required.

"I think all of us can recognize instances in our lives when things at home aren't going as well as they might," says Clawson, "so we run to the office or turn on the computer and try to immerse ourselves in something we're working on. My own research and experiences suggest that it's not really deliberate, that most parents are doing the best they can. When they're not able to spend enough time with their children they feel guilty about it."

"It is OK to not want to be with your children all the time," says Stone Fish. "They certainly don't want to be with you all the time. If you never want to be with them you have a problem and should do something about it, like talk to your family or get some help."

Burgess thinks most parents still choose to be at home when they are able. "It depends on what people value most," she says, "because there

once heard it said that you never hear of anybody looking back on their life and saying, 'Oh, I should have worked harder.' But you hear of a lot of people saying, 'If only I had spent more time with my family.'

~Wendy Cohen '70

A Question of BALANCE

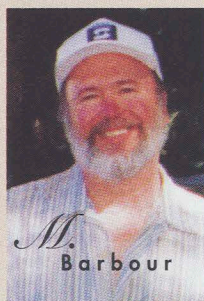
high school, and one just finishing middle school. And four cats and two birds."

Cohen found time for volunteer efforts in her adopted community of Plantation, Florida, and at SU, where she recently became a trustee. She took up pottery and sold her work, mainly earthen- and stoneware bowls and platters. When her daughters had grown, she went back to work, this time as a travel agent.

"I have no regrets about not working," she says. "I found it difficult in today's society that people judge who you are by the title that you carry. And very often when you meet people, the second question they ask is, 'What do you do?' I struggled with that, because I didn't like to be judged that way.

"I once heard it said that you never hear of anybody looking back on their life and saying, 'Oh, I should have worked harder.' But you hear of a lot of people saying, 'If only I had spent more time with my family.' I guess that's the philosophy I developed a number of years ago, because I was in a fortunate enough position where I could do that. I didn't want to look at them one day and say, 'Wait a minute, who are you? I remember you as little kids and you've grown up and I missed being a part of all the steps that it took you to get from there to here.'"

Making Choices



For Michael Barbour G'86 and his wife, Susan, who have had all five of their children attend the Bernice M. Wright Nursery School at SU, striking a balance between work and family meant giving up one full-time income as long as they had a child under 3.

Michael is an assistant professor of English at Le Moyne College in Syracuse and an adjunct professor at SU. Susan also teaches English at Le

Moyne, as a part-time instructor. "The way the schedule has worked out is that one of us is always home," Michael says. "We always have a child under 3 at home, because we have so many kids."

The decision to have someone stay home came early for the Barbours, with the birth of their first child, Alec, in Washington, D.C. "Susan and I met as theater majors at Catholic University—we were both doing master's degrees there," Michael says. "And the idea was that we were going to be actors, scholars, all that stuff, in theater. When Alec came along, we decided that D.C. was not necessarily the place we wanted to bring him up and that acting was not the stable sort of situation for bringing up a child. One of the things that really affected everything else, I guess, was that a friend of ours gave us *The First Three Years of Life* by Burton White, and we became pretty much convinced that spending as much time as possible with your children until they're 3 is optimum. "It was an easy choice for us, because at that time we



were just starting out. We had little money, so the decision to go ahead and stay poor wasn't hard."

Twins Rosalind and Jessica were born two years later, followed by Fiona and then Danny. Le Moyne's English department dovetailed the couple's schedules so one of them could always be home with the children. Michael says Danny, now 3, attends Bernice Wright twice a week, giving his parents a brief respite and allowing him to socialize with children his own age.

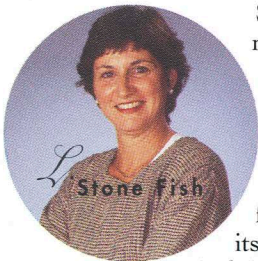
"Because I work part time, we've both had time to be involved in the kids' schools and volunteering," Susan says. "The nursery school is set up so that parents come in and are active assistants. That was great for us because not only do you get to be there, you know a parent is in the classroom every day."

The Barbours' balancing act has not come without sacrifice. "I have always worked part time as a college instructor, so I haven't gotten a Ph.D., I don't have tenure, and I don't get paid that much," Susan says. "But on the other hand, we feel like we've traded money for time, and time is really valuable. What would we buy with the money I would have made working full time that is of more value to us than time with each other and the kids?"

The Bottom Line

Burgess sees a correlation between strong, stable families and a strong economy. "If issues in the home are not dealt with properly, they spill over into the workplace, increasing absenteeism and unproductive activity. The stability of family life has an impact on commitment to the job and to the employer. When you have happy parents, generally you have productive employees."

Burgess and 15 other SU employees serving on the Chancellor's Task Force on Benefits and Work-Life Issues are examining the University's benefits policies with an eye toward making them more family friendly (see related story at right).



Stone Fish wishes more employers recognized the impact of families on productivity. "Some are doing an excellent job, some are very family friendly, and others are in the dark ages," she says. "To be more family friendly, employers could give families more options. Choice is the key here; each family has particular needs depending on its own life circumstances. Some need medical insurance, some need child care options, some need flex-time options. These are personal decisions, and it would be great if parents had the choices to make."

Clawson says on-site day care facilities do wonders for productivity. "You can go down the hall and check on your children, maybe play with them during your lunch break, then come back in and get back to work. That would be especially useful or satisfying if you had a young infant or toddler."

Such facilities are becoming more common, she says, particularly in university settings. SU has two child care facilities on campus: the Early Childhood Education and Day Care Center and the Bernice M. Wright Nursery School.

Burgess thinks the quality of family life is a strong indicator of the overall quality of society. "It's something that

needs careful monitoring, the health of our families and what families contribute to the health of our society," she says. "Families drive society, and when they start to change, so does the society, for better or worse. We need to monitor society a little bit closer to examine some of the trends with our children, because they are the next generation, whatever we are to become. And if we don't train or support or teach them, we're in for a long retirement."



Exploring Family OPTIONS

Chancellor Kenneth A. Shaw has appointed a group of faculty and staff members to review Syracuse University's employee benefits and work-life policies—including family supportive practices—and recommend changes to existing policies, procedures, and benefit programs.

"Our current benefit program is a model that, in general, is competitive, but lacks the flexibility and choice our employees desire," says Neil Strodel, associate vice president for human resources and chair of the 16-member Chancellor's Task Force on Benefits and Work-Life Issues. After identifying opportunities for change, Strodel says, the task force will examine tradeoffs in the current benefit structure to achieve its goals with a net zero increase in cost.

Task force member Norma Burgess, who chairs the Department of Child and Family Studies in the College for Human Development, says the group is looking at different ways benefits can be distributed to be more responsive to employee needs. "I think one of the things that has been most fruitful is to look at the various life cycle stages for people within the context of the University," she says. "There are different needs at different times, so that for younger employees, being able to find child care might be a real issue. For parents of school-age children, tuition might be more important. Or you might choose to spend some of your benefits for other things, at your own discretion, rather than the University saying you have to do it this way."



Strodel says the task force continues a process begun by several studies, including a 1994 inquiry by Hewitt Associates that found SU employees desired more choice in benefits policies. That study led to the introduction of two new University health plans: Blue Point, a point-of-service package; and Orange Point, which is managed care.

"The Chancellor formed the task force because he felt the time was right for us to reopen and reexamine the issue of employee benefits," Strodel says. "The actual springboard for that to happen was increasing sentiment on campus for us to become more family friendly as a university. Once we started looking at family-friendly issues—and many of those issues involved benefits—we decided to take a broad-based approach and review benefits as well as work-life policies."

The task force began meeting in March. Members were chosen to represent diverse interests of the University community, including faculty, staff, male, female, underrepresented groups, and exempt, non-exempt, and union employees. The group hired Hewitt Associates for assistance and guidance.

Using a list provided by Hewitt, the group first studied the best practices of other institutions. "We analyzed the gap between SU's benefits and policies and those of others," Strodel says. "This provided a starting point." Over the summer, the task force discussed various types of benefits and tentatively decided which ones could be altered. Meetings will be scheduled with the campus community to discuss the task force's work. Feedback from those meetings will be considered before the group makes a recommendation to the Chancellor.

"In many ways, we are a family-friendly campus," Strodel says. "What we're doing is taking a compass check to establish our basic position and consider ways to become a more sensitive and caring institution."

—GARY PALLASSINO