

Expectations and Worklife (Im)Balance

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Recent Worklife News

- **NSF Career Balance Initiative:**

- Delay/suspend grants for up to 1 year at no cost so researchers can fulfill family obligations
- Award Supplements for research technician stipends to maintain labs while PIs are on family leave
- Allow STEM researchers to do virtual reviews for grants to reduce travel
- Support research to assess effectiveness of policies aimed at retaining women in STEM
- Encourage academic institutions to extend tenure clock and allow dual career hires

Recent Worklife News

- **Nat'l Longitudinal Survey of Youth by US Dept of Labor (ASA, K. Leupp, U Wash)**
 - 1,600 women, 40 years old, married, in US
 - Working moms generally have lower rates of depression than stay-at-home moms
 - Supermoms who think work and home can be blended with relative ease have higher levels of depression vs. moms who expect to forego some career or parenting aspects to achieve worklife balance
 - Message: Expectations are key

The Role of Expectations

External Expectations...

- Women are told they can do it all
- Most workplaces are designed for employees without family care responsibilities
- Most men don't cut back on employment hours to accommodate family care

The Role of Expectations

Internal Expectations...

- Women who expect to combine work and family without many tradeoffs are more likely to think they've failed when they struggle to achieve this ideal
- Supermoms have higher expectations of fairness, so they may be more frustrated with division of household chores
- Guilt over not being able to manage work-family balance may increase depression

The Key: Manage Expectations

- Managing your attitude and expectations is the key
- Acknowledge that you'll have to make sacrifices in one area for the other
- Realize that its hard because its hard...its not personal...its not *you*
- Let go of the guilt if you have to do work when you are at home or work late
- Its okay to want it all as long as you realize you can't have it all

6 Rules for Managing Expectations

• Find your Work-life **Fit**

- “Balance” is the guilt word...it implies that everything is on an even keel and if you give to one side, you take from the other
- “Fit” implies that what works for me might not for you
- Find one thing to fix...but just one, not ten...like getting up 10 minutes earlier for some peace in the morning or creating a better transition from work to family in the evening or hiring a maid to help with the housework or getting your spouse to pick up the kids three days a week

6 Rules for Managing Expectations

- **Don't feel bad about doing something you want to do, even if you're swamped**
 - In general, working moms are happier than stay-at-home moms
 - BUT having things that are important in your life outside of your children/family is the **critical factor**
 - Sometimes being a parent/child/spouse is tough, sometimes working is tough, but you'll feel healthier mentally if you've got something else going on
 - So...volunteer, take up a sport or hobby... do something you want to do and don't feel guilty

6 Rules for Managing Expectations

• Own Your Choices

- Women question whether they should be working...men don't
- Nagging questions about whether you are making the right choices are guilt triggers
- Men are more involved, in general, with their kids/family but they don't question their role
- Women earn 44% of family income but still question their role as breadwinner
- Resolving the question about whether working is the right thing for you to do will increase your comfort level about working

6 Rules for Managing Expectations

• Use a Two-item To-Do List

- Expectations are the critical lever for depression
- Guilt comes from an expectation that doesn't come true
- If you have a 20 item To-Do list, you feel like you have to do it all – you are exhausted by work *and* by home...it makes it hard to be where you are at the moment
- Make a Two-item To-Do List and no more...

6 Rules for Managing Expectations

- **Ask Yourself “What’s Important Now?”**
 - You have decades to be a parent/spouse/child
 - You don’t have to do everything at once
 - Some things have time limits...they expire!
 - Decide what’s most important to do now...things that you won’t be able to do later
 - Focus on the things that you won’t get another opportunity to do, make them a priority

6 Rules for Managing Expectations

• **Make an Expectation Adjustment**

- When you feel guilty or depressed or worried, ask yourself:
 - “What am I expecting that isn’t coming true?”
 - “Why isn’t that happening?”
 - “In five years, what will I regret?”
- Try to change the things you’re going to regret
- Adjusting your expectations - how you view the situation and what you want – so they align with reality and possibility is half the battle
- Staying stuck with expectations that aren’t coming true leads to depression and guilt

Questions?

- Galinsky, Ellen, Mind in the Making
- “Supermoms at Higher Risk for Depression,” Huffington Post PARENTS, Sept. 30, 2011
- ASA Press Release: Less Depression for Working Moms Who Expect That they ‘Can’t Do It All’, American Sociological Association, Sept. 30, 2011
- “Michelle Obama announces new NSF undertaking to improve work-life balance and STEM careers for women,” OpenSource.com, Sept, 30, 2011