

Treat Your Family Like Your Best Customer

Written by Steve Marr
Thursday, 10 July 2003 01:00

Business owners and leaders sometimes struggle to balance the needs of work and family. The demands of the job can seem overwhelming, but you can keep your priorities in balance if you will treat your family the same way you treat your best customer. At the end of the day-and from an eternal perspective-which is more important, a customer or your family?

The apostle Paul writes, "If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8 NASB). Make a commitment to focus on your family, and take tangible steps to make it happen.

First, arrange to spend time one-on-one each month with your spouse and each child-and write the date and time on your calendar. Never cancel that commitment, even when pressured. Would you casually cancel a lunch with your best customer?

When you're at home, interact with your family, regardless of how tense or tired you may feel. Put down the paper and turn off the TV when your spouse wants to talk, or when your kids jump into your lap. If your top customer called to ask a question, would you place them on indefinite hold?

Determine in advance how many hours per week you will commit to work. Then communicate that commitment to your family and hold yourself accountable. Yes, there will be times when you'll need to put in some extra time at the office, due to an emergency or some unusual circumstance, but let that be the exception, not the rule. Controlling the number of hours you work each week is the first step toward maintaining balance. I would rather see a person commit to 55 hours per week, and stick to it, than make no commitment and work more than 80 hours. How many hours per week is enough? That's between you, your family, and the Lord. But if you cannot devote significant time each week to your family, you're working too many hours.

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A friend of mine was working late-past 9:00 PM- for several months in a row. Sometimes he went days without seeing his young daughter. One Friday night he noticed that she was sleeping with his picture in her bed. The next day, he asked, "Jill, why did you have my picture in bed with you last night?" She innocently replied, "Because I wanted to remember what you looked like." The convicting answer helped my friend to change his habits.

I advise executives to arrive at work 30–45 minutes early and stay 15–30 minutes late, and limit the workday to 9 hours. Effective leaders can accomplish a lot in a well-focused 9-hour day, and maintain personal balance long term. Life is a marathon, not a fifty-yard dash.

Keep work at the office. Taking work home, other than light reading, is typically a symptom of poor planning rather than necessity. Keeping work out of the home is a key step in managing your priorities.

Take vacations with your family-regularly. Not taking a vacation is a symptom of poor planning and a lack of proper staff development. Equip your employees to work effectively during your absence. Accept only true emergency calls when you're gone, and never initiate a call to check up on the office.

If you're on a work treadmill and can't get off, you're probably doing more work than the Lord intends for you to accomplish. A business owner who struggles 80 or 90 hours a week, week after week, month after month, year after year, should consider selling the business. Many of these folks would make more money and work fewer hours-with fewer headaches-if they would close or sell their business and get a job. I know many business owners who work excessive hours because of personal preference, rather than necessity. For many, an 80-hour work week is a choice-a poor choice.

Jesus said, "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" (Matthew 16:26 NIV). Don't forfeit your family for the sake of your business.

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