Time-Management and Work-Life Balance: Some Perspective(s)

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Me

• Rice undergrad 1993-1997
• Cornell grad student 1997-2003
• UW faculty 2003-???
  • Assistant Professor 2003-2009
  • Associate Professor 2009-2015
  • Professor 2015-???
  • Vice Chair/Director 2017-???

1ª date with my partner: Spring 2012
Bought a house: May 2013
1ª child: December 2013
2ª child: September 2015
The next time I'm asked to describe in what ways I've grown over my time as a faculty member, I'm going to respond that the most noticeable growth has been to my forehead.
Let’s go straight to some tips and tricks
Key perspective

Micro: Have productive days
Macro: Have productive years

*Despite correlation, neither implies the other!*
Micro tips

• If you have 90 free minutes, do not do 9 10-minute tasks
• Take searchable notes for next time:
  • 10% longer now for 50% shorter next time
• Don’t tweak the pretty pictures until you know you’ll use them
• Respond promptly and in a way that takes the item off your list
• Have a to-do list and figure out how often to check it
• Don’t do 80% of a paper review and walk away for 2 days
• What tasks can you do when you’re tired? (e.g., washing dishes)
Macro tips

• “The urgent vs. the important”
• If a 5-year-plan is too hard (hint: it is!), go for a 6-month plan
• Choose 2-3 things / year you’re going to do really well
• Choose 2-3 long-term research thrusts
• Re-teach classes and do better each time
• Work with the right (and right number) of grad students for you
  • Lead with hope, not with fear
  • Kindness and firmness both help
More tips?

• No shortage of time-management advice out there

• Most of it isn’t bad

• Wasting time is part of life, but make sure you’re *enjoying* the time you spend being unproductive
But how can I optimize the next 5 years of my life for the singular goal of getting tenure?
Tenure: Perspective from the other side

Tenure is not the goal!

• Derive happiness and value from solving important problems and educating others

• Focus on that + rest of today’s advice -> you’ll be fine

• If previous implication is false, you shouldn’t want tenure [!]
Okay, tenure *is* nice

How long would you endure misery to get tenure?

- Probably > 1 day
- Probably < 5 years

You’re in computing: The worst-case is not so bad!
Real-talk about the other side

Very unlikely you’ll slow down after tenure
  • Evidence: vast majority of your senior colleagues

I’ve heard 3 good theories on why:
1. Inertia / used to the hamster wheel [h/t L.S.]
2. Colleagues know your passions [mine]
3. Whole system selects for those aiming for peer recognition [h/t A.A.]
What do you want people to say about you at your retirement party?
Life and work-life balance
• You *do* have time to do *anything* you want

• You do *not* have time to do *everything* you want

• Successful work-life balance occurs if *you* are happy, even if your life doesn’t look so balanced from other people’s viewpoint [h/t M.H.]
My old life
The reason I don’t miss my 20s more is that I made the most of them for 19 years
My new life

• Was: bottles, naps, diapers, sleep deprivation, first steps, ...
• Is: birthday parties, swim lessons, playgrounds, Legos, Tooth Fairy, ...

[4 extremely cute pictures of my kids redacted for public posting of these slides. 😊]
When to have kids

• When you want them!
  • This is the most important decision of your life
  • It might take a while
  • There’s no going back and it’s the hardest + most rewarding thing
  • All times are “incomparably good/bad” from a work perspective
Juggling work + kids

• I can’t believe I used to say I was busy

• Figure out a plan for you
  • Academia is flexible outside of your lectures and some faculty meetings
  • I walk off campus at 4:30 95% of the time
  • But I work 80% of the time after the kids are asleep at 7:15
Anticipate tough decisions

• Two careers – who handles the next fever or stitches?

• I regret not chaperoning a field trip last year

• I pulled off making it to a save-the-whales pre-school breakfast last month

• 17-hour day tomorrow so I’ll be home when kids wake up Saturday

What will matter 5 years from now?
Gender bias and allyship

My department is mother- and father-friendly
  • Yours should be too!

But our society has work to do:
  • People laud me for missing a meeting to pick up my kids
  • Nobody has asked me today who is watching my kids back home
  • When I talk about my kids in class, it humanizes me without hurting my credibility

I can do little things to help
  • Example: First to decline a 5:30 meeting and state why without grandstanding
Encore slide...
What is money for?

• Basic necessities
• Luxuries
• Safety and security, including savings
• Effecting change, including philanthropy
• Buying time
  • Recognize where time/money can and cannot be swapped
  • Decide what your exchange rate is
  • This is for both work and life
Thanks!

Discussion!