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-???

1st date with my partner: Spring 2012
Bought a house: May 2013
1st child: December 2013
2nd 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.
Time-management

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 for me!), 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 also part of life
  • Maximal efficiency as the only goal is for machines
  • 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

Contributing theories on why:
1. Inertia / used to the hamster wheel
2. Colleagues know your passions and make corresponding requests
3. Whole system selects for those aiming for peer recognition
What do you want people to say about you at your retirement party?
Now 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 peoples’ viewpoint
My old life
The reason I don’t miss my 20s more is because 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, ...
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 4:30PM ~95% of the time
  • But I work 80-90% of the time after the kids go to bed at 7:30
Anticipate tough decisions

• Two careers? Who handles the next fever or stitches?
• I regret not chaperoning a field trip 3 years ago
• Favorite memory of the last month: buying a baseball bat
• 17-hour day tomorrow because I want to get home

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

My school 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 while I’m here
- 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 exchanged
  - Decide your exchange rate
  - This is for both work and life
Thanks!

Discussion!