

PUBLICATION

Blowing up the Barrier Between Work & Family

Authors: Christy T. Crider, Tonya M. Grindon

October 18, 2012

Almost every attorney has felt the strain of balancing a successful law career and time with family. So many attorneys try to separate their lives by saying, "If I am at work, I have to be working, and if I am at home, I can't be dealing with work." We have found it works best to blow up all those boundaries. It's really not about segregating your life—it's about trying to combine things so you can do them all together. As equity partners of a large law firm with five children between us under the age of 12, we've learned a thing or two over the years about solutions. We recommend removing the barriers between work and home so that each complements the other. The following are our top eight practical tips for blowing up boundaries.

Christy Tosh Crider's Tips:

Keep a single calendar for work and non-work appointments. Work and family appointments are often of equal priority, so it can be beneficial to keep them on the same calendar. An Outlook calendar for the day might read as follows: 10 a.m. Appointment with CEO; 11 a.m. Stop by school on the way back to the office for lunch with the kids; 4 p.m. Deadline to file motion in Jones case. Keeping one calendar allows you to move seamlessly from work events to non-work events with equal priority.

Bank billable hours for more family time. Lawyers often burn out after repeated strenuous stretches of work with little pockets of family time in between. I recommend setting billable and non-billable hour goals for yourself and tracking them on a weekly or monthly basis. When you get significantly ahead of pace for the year (i.e., you've been having a particularly strenuous time at work), use those extra hours you've accumulated to treat yourself to some family time. For some, that may be picking up your child from school every day at 3 p.m. for a week. For someone else, you may have banked so many hours that you can take an extra impromptu vacation with your spouse. Whatever it is that gets your engine running outside of work, use your banked time for that.

Think outside the box on planning time that meets multiple priorities. I am the children's choir director at my church, which allows me to spend time doing something that meets two of my priorities: serving my church and spending time with my children. However, I got really excited when my children's choir decided we should sing outside our church to serve others and started making trips to nursing homes and assisted living facilities, which is my primary client base. Imagine the delight for both my children and my clients when the children sing old-fashioned gospel music in nursing homes around Nashville, Tennessee. Also, I have frequently enjoyed taking clients and their children along with my own children to events they would enjoy, such as the circus, a concert and even a monster truck jam.

Don't be afraid to work outside the office. I almost never miss 6 p.m. dinner with my family. These years are short. The children will be gone, and my career will still be here. However, after they go to bed at 8 p.m., it is not uncommon for me to get online and take care of an hour or so of work that still needs to be done that day. The same analysis applies for a midday event at my child's school, lunch out of the office with an old friend or an afternoon matinee with my husband without having to hire a sitter. These are all indulgences that attorneys can enjoy if they are willing to work at night or early in the morning at home to make up for the lost time.

Tonya Mitchem Grindon's tips:

Involve your children in your community service activities. Our profession requires a commitment to pro bono work and charitable activities in our communities. Many lawyers say, "I just don't have time to do these community and pro bono activities with all of my obligations to my practice and my family." Involving your family members in these activities, however, is a great way to give back and to spend quality time with them.

For example, I am president of the Nashville Humane Association (NHA) and volunteer at fundraising events and at the shelter. I always try to bring my children with me to help volunteer at the shelter, which allows them to spend time with me and with animals. I also have my children volunteer every year at the annual Mutt Strutt, a walk to benefit the NHA. They are responsible for handing out T-shirts to the walkers. They get a real sense of accomplishment and love seeing the dogs.

Another example is volunteering for Room at the Inn, a program that provides shelter in churches to homeless people. Twice a year, we are responsible for preparing sack lunches for homeless individuals to take the next day when they leave the church. My children make the list of what we will make for lunch. They go with me to the store to buy the food and then help prepare the sandwiches and sacks.

Including your children in these types of activities gives you time with them, you give back to the community, and your children get the opportunity to be involved in their communities in meaningful ways.

Include your family in your marketing activities. Business development doesn't mean just late dinners and trips out of town. There are ways to strengthen relationships with existing clients or develop new clients and include your family. I have taken my son and a potential client and his son to Tennessee Titans football games. I have taken my entire family and the family of a client to the circus and have taken my daughters and a client's daughter to a Taylor Swift concert. There is nothing better than hearing your client's child tell your client how great an event is. Your children will love it, and your client will love it because they are being treated to an event and getting to spend time with family as well.

Incorporate work time into family quiet time. While the kids are doing homework, you can also do your homework. I often sit on the sofa with the kids while they are doing their homework or reading quietly and I edit documents or complete my timesheets. Sometimes my youngest son will get his blanket and lie his head in my lap while I work. My secretary has commented on how my timesheets sometimes make her smile when my children have written love notes or created drawings on my documents.

Our Favorite Joint Tip:

Take your family with you on work-related trips to fun locations. A three-day conference in Orlando, Florida, in February at which Christy was speaking moved from "dreaded" to "anticipated" when she decided to take the kids and told them they were going to Disney World. When Christy had clients to visit in Colorado, a quick ski trip with the family made perfect sense.

Last year Tonya brought her oldest daughter to Los Angeles when our firm was doing a pitch for securities work for a public company. Her daughter's aunt, uncle and cousins live there, so she was able to stay with her relatives for the day while Tonya was working. Tonya also took her middle daughter to Chicago this year when she was speaking at a PLI Continuing Legal Education Seminar. Then they got to spend an extra day touring the city. She had a blast, and Tonya was able to have a wonderful trip with her.

These opportunities don't fall into your lap. They take careful planning and creativity, but you can make them happen.

