



for Balancing School and Family Life

School administrators face daily battles to balance their work expectations with their family and personal needs. They constantly must wrestle these difficult questions: How does one fulfill all the requirements of the job while still making family a priority? What about time for hobbies and vacation?

The Scriptures make it clear that we have a God-given responsibility to treasure and protect our family. Consider this counsel by the Apostle Paul: “Anyone who does not provide for

their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8, NIV).¹

Ellen White is also clear about the distinction that is to be made between our work commitments and our family responsibilities: “There is no more important missionary field” than our own home.²

No matter where we are serving or what we are doing, each of us has been called to make our family a priority that is second only to God. So, why is it so hard to put family before work? How does one measure, manage, and

balance the competing priorities of God, church, community, ministry, family, and self? Why do so many school administrators feel guilty when they say “No”? What practical techniques can you use to make sure you take care of your family and yourself?

An administrator’s schedule is unpredictable, unrelenting, and unstructured. Rarely a day goes by that he or she will not have to deal with unplanned issues and emergencies. This constant addition of unexpected items to already hectic schedules can lead to

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unstructured days and untold stress. There is constant pressure to produce reports, plan ahead, attend committee meetings, and meet missional objectives. Unlike hour-time workers, the administrator has to plan his or her own schedule around a few givens and many unknowns, and still find the time to gather the necessary information to make tough decisions.

In addition, with the economic challenges currently faced by so many educational institutions, the principal may have to pick up extra duties that would ordinarily be performed by a support staff. However, despite the chaos and lack of adequate staff, administrators can achieve greater control than they may think possible.

It is often the unexpected crises that create time-management issues. The administrator must try to squeeze these daily “emergencies” into his or her “free time.” But where is this free time when the principal is rushing to and fro all day—classes to teach, paperwork and e-mails to attend to, meetings to attend (with parents, pastor, and board members, faculty, students, and the Rotary Club!), mentoring new teachers, curriculum planning, making arrangements for a variety of school events including religious-life activities, supervising lunch and recreation, and so many other recurring tasks.

Administrators often find it hard to deal with all the shame and guilt they feel (and that people heap upon them) if they fail to respond immediately to everything that appears to be in their job description. Their very natures make them people pleasers, caretakers, and servants. They want to please their constituents and conference superintendents. They want their students and teachers to be happy. Their job is to

serve, and failure to do so produces tremendous feelings of guilt. Administrators want to help everybody, but the job never ends. There are always more people who need help.

Unfortunately, the church and its institutions actually reward the administrator’s failure to put his or her family first. Work addiction is the one kind of dysfunctional behavior that gets rewarded. The more time one spends at school or in the office, the more kudos he or she receives. No one gets a plaque for balancing his or her personal and professional lives!

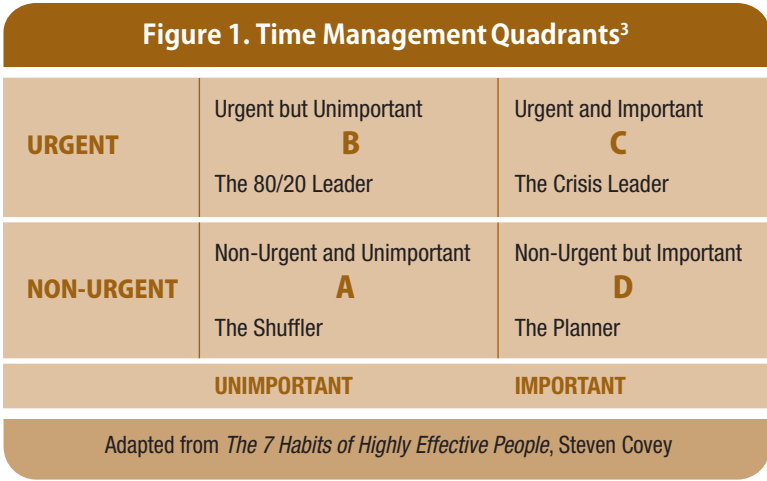
Claims on your time can be classified in terms of urgency and importance. These can be sorted into four categories as shown in the four quadrants of Figure 1. In order to understand how to balance the urgent and the important, let’s begin by defining the quadrants:

A: Non-Urgent and Unimportant—Here we find demands on the administrator’s time that are trivial, unimportant, inconsequential, and irrelevant. We could easily label this “The Junk Mail Quadrant”! In this quadrant are the leaders who get inundated by mountains of trifling minutia that demand their attention.

B: Urgent but Unimportant—This is where most of us spend most of our lives. We devote 80 percent of our time to the mere 20 percent of activities that produces results. Our mission gets lost in demands that appear to be urgent but are often unimportant in the overall scheme of things.

C: Urgent and Important—This may seem like the best quadrant in which to operate. However, in this quadrant, the administrator is constantly in crisis mode. He or she plays the role of firefighter, rushing from spark to spark trying to extinguish the erupting flames. This is exhausting and unproductive, long term.

D: Non-Urgent but Important—This is actually the best quadrant in which to operate. If you deal promptly with important tasks, this may eliminate most of the non-urgent or crisis issues. In other words, learn to deal with the important before it becomes urgent! Focus most of your time and energy in this quadrant by planning, organizing, and prioritizing. Learning to operate in Quadrant D will save time that you can devote to your family and personal interests.



So, it is time for the church to give you, the administrator and minister of education, **permission** to set appropriate boundaries. But of higher importance; you have God’s approval to put your family first! So, how can you adjust your schedule in order to fulfill your God-given mission? Consider the following eight guidelines:

1. Differentiate Between the Urgent and the Important

Consider your leadership style in regard to time management. How do you deal with unplanned emergencies? Review the graphic representation in Figure 1. In which quadrant do you spend most of your time? How can you determine what is truly important?

2. Accomplish What You Have Been Called to Do, and Select Others to Hold You Accountable!

What is it that you have been called to do? Make sure your role, expectations, and job descriptions are clearly defined. If it's "not your job," then clear it from your schedule. Let others do their job, and you do yours. Do not co-opt someone else's ministry. Consider writing into the job descriptions of all of your staff the need for them to spend time with their families. Remember, you have the opportunity to be a positive role model for your teachers and support staff in making family a priority. Focus on the mission to which you have been called.

Asking another person to hold you accountable may be helpful as you evaluate and readjust your priorities. This could be a conference or union employee, a board chair, a pastor, or another person whom you regard as a mentor. You may need some outside help to review your schedule and time commitments. Record how you spend your time over the next 30 days. As you review your notes, begin by eliminating the things that are not necessary (Quadrant A) and find ways to operate more in Quadrant D. You may also want to engage the local school board and staff in dealing with some of the items in Quadrants B and C. This does not mean that you ask their permission to take time off . . . only that you keep them informed and involved in the process.

3. Set Limits on Time Devoted to Regular School Work

What is a reasonable amount of time for the educational administrator to spend each week doing normal school responsibilities? In one survey done by a pastor, lay people's estimates

averaged 82 hours per week. One lay member proposed that the school administrator should work 200 hours per week! How is this possible when a week has only 168 hours?

So, what is a reasonable amount of time for the administrator to spend on staff development, committee meetings, parent conferences, and other school-related tasks? Decide on a reasonable total and then have your spouse, your board, or your conference administrator hold you accountable. There will be times of the year or special events that may demand extra

you don't have to answer your cell phone every time it rings, nor do you have to bring work or your computer home. Use an answering machine to screen messages, and respond at appropriate times.

5. A Regular Schedule Makes Crises Easier to Deal With

If you maintain a regular work schedule, your family will be more tolerant when you must spend extra time to deal with a true crisis. The challenge, of course, is to define what constitutes a true crisis. Some things that at first glance seem like emergencies can wait!

Be honest with yourself—are there times when you have described a minor problem as a crisis because you wanted something other than events at home on which to focus your attention? If so, then counseling may be warranted.

6. Mentor Someone to Take Your Place

A major challenge facing the Adventist school system today is a shortage of educational administrators. You

can help the system—and yourself—by establishing a mentoring program.

Choose someone you trust, and train him or her to take your place. Identify others who have been called to do the work of ministry. Empower and train them to coordinate and lead programs and events. In this way, you are helping to build up the body of Christ. Remember, recognizing the gifts and talents of others and investing time in their training is a scriptural principle:

"So Christ himself gave the apostles the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ephesians 4:11, 12, NIV).

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. What is an appropriate hierarchy of priorities? When asked to prioritize God, church, ministry, and family, how do you rate them? Where does your family fall in actual practice?
2. How do you balance the urgent with the truly important?
3. How do you decide what constitutes a true "emergency"?
4. Is it easier for you to say "No" to some people than others? If so, what makes the difference?
5. Does saying "No" make you feel guilty? If so, why?
6. What can you change beginning today?

hours. But, when that event is over or the crisis has passed, reward yourself and your family by spending some much-needed time together.

4. Guard Your Boundaries

Set and lovingly communicate boundaries to your church family to protect your family time—and encourage them to do the same. A good administrator will always respond to legitimate emergencies, but first, he or she needs to define what constitutes an emergency. Be candid with your school family about how they can expect you to respond to various crises. Your clearly communicated responses will prevent misunderstandings and keep people from usurping your time.

Train yourself to accept the fact that

7. Schedule Daily Time With Your Family, and Take Your Vacation Time

When God created Adam, He declared that it was not good for him to be alone. So He gave Adam a wife—NOT a whole school family!

What does your calendar look like? Does it show that you have planned time with your spouse? It is just as important to schedule and honor this appointment as any other meeting on your calendar. A good formula to use in scheduling time with your spouse is as follows: Spend at least 30 minutes every night with your spouse, one entire evening each week, one day each month, and one weekend each quarter.

If you have children, it is important to make sure that your daily appointment book includes them. In addition to spending time alone with your spouse, you need to schedule time with the entire family. Make sure that your children feel they are valued and loved. When you are traveling, call home regularly and speak to each child.

Guard your family time, especially those precious mealtimes together.⁴

Well-known Adventist leader R. R. Bietz once told this story: When asked by his family to give them more time, he offered them his daily planner so they could fill in the time they wanted with him. They chose carefully, and he sacredly guarded the time agreed upon, even if it meant declining to chair an important meeting. Once a board member spotted Bietz's car near the beach and saw him playing on the beach with his children. This gave the church leader an opportunity to testify to his family and to the member that it was his responsibility as a husband and as a father to put his family first.

We often fail to give our own family the time that we are so willing to devote to other members of our church or school family. This indicates the need to reorder our priorities.

If you are single, do not allow others to burden you with extra duties because they think you have nothing to

do because you “have no family.” This is not an acceptable argument. For, whether you are married or single, have several children or none, you must make and take time for yourself. Doing so will make you a better, more energized, more focused and healthy leader.

When did you last take some time off? Schedule your next vacation today. You need to take time for rest and for spiritual renewal. Taking care of yourself will make you better able to serve others. Don't allow the busyness of life to squeeze out personal time. Recharge your batteries and refresh yourself. This is also a great time to recommit and reconnect with God. Follow Jesus' example: “The world's Redeemer. . . loved the solitude of the mountain, where he could hold communion with his Father alone. We read: . . . ‘And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.’”⁵

8. Learn to Say “No”

In a fascinating little book, *What Matters Most: When NO Is Better Than YES*, long-time youth worker Doug Fields offers this advice:

“You may be at a crossroads in your life and ministry, and the challenge of saying no is exactly what you need. So I want to challenge you now: The ‘good way’ is saying no—have the courage to walk in it and find rest for your soul. Is busyness really getting you what you want—or need? In the end, busyness makes us look important but cripples our relationships. Busyness feeds our egos but ultimately starves our souls. Busyness fills our calendars but fractures our families. And busyness props up our images and shrinks our hearts.”⁶

Fields shows how Christ modeled time management: “Jesus said ‘no’ to good things. He said ‘no’ to important people. Jesus left people unhealed. He didn't answer every question, go to every event, or meet everyone's needs.

He needed time away from his disciples. He needed space. Yes, he even needed sleep. He was 100 percent God and 100 percent human; therefore he had human limits. He needed solitude. He needed time to reflect and pray and nourish his spiritual life. It was this life-giving time of connection to the Vine that gave Jesus spiritual power and energy for His ministry to others. And I believe it was during those times of solitude that He was able to hear God's voice and know what matters most.”⁷

Implementing these eight principles will help put you on the track to a healthy and happy balancing act between school and family life. ✍



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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Texts credited to NIV are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.
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3. Steven Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989).
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