

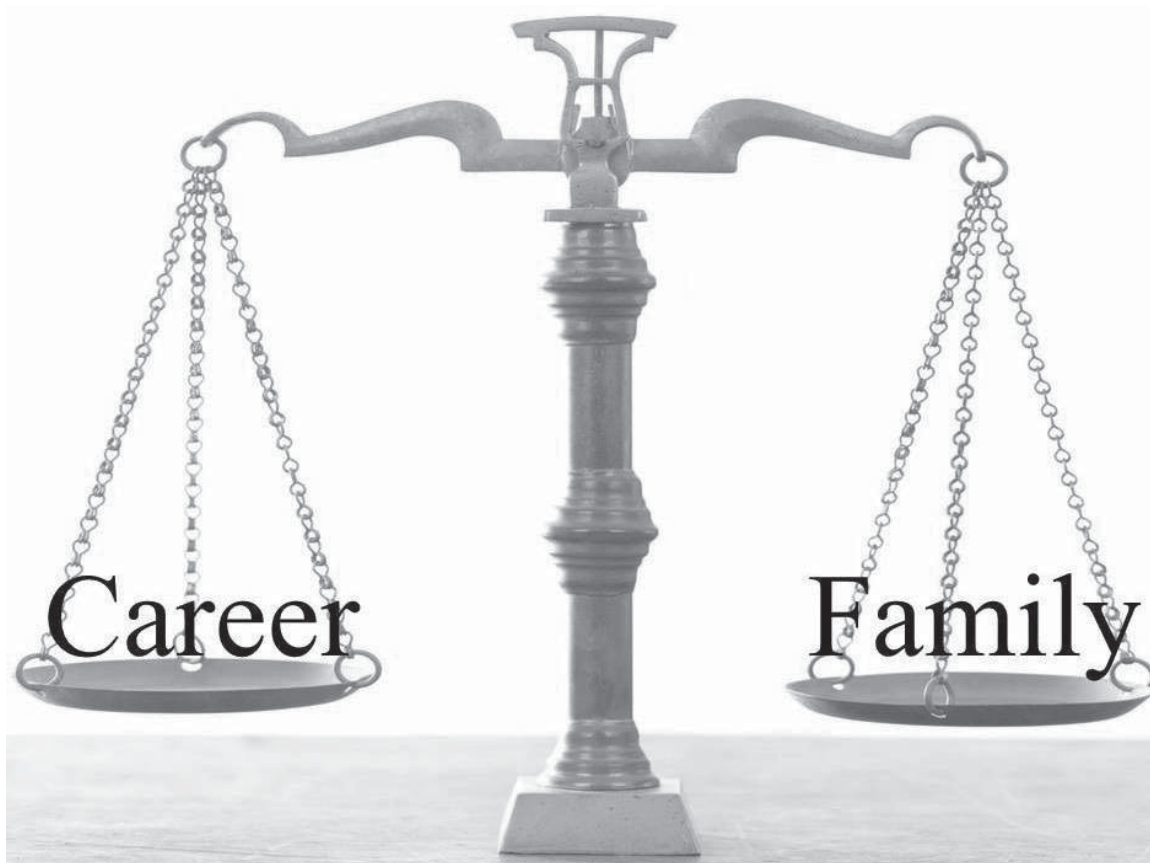
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**BALANCING CAREER AND FAMILY:
PREVENTING BURNOUT**

If You Cannot Change It, Don't Worry About It!

by Harry N. Boone, Jr.

The editorial article is usually one of the last things that I prepare for an issue of *The Agricultural Education Magazine*. As I read and “edit” the articles for this issue, I find myself agreeing with the advice and in many situations, feeling that I need to take the advice to heart in my personal situation. No, I am not on the verge of “burnout” but the authors offered suggestions, even at this stage of my professional career, I feel that I can use.

If I had to use one word to summarize the advice in this issue it would be “balance.” Balance your professional career and your personal life. Make sure that you plan time for your spouse, your immediate family, your extended family, your faith, and yourself. Along with the “balance” in your life, develop effective ways of dealing with the stress in your career and personal life. If you accomplish these two tasks, you will be on your way to a long, healthy and happy life.

In about the fourth year of my career as a high school teacher I encountered a very stressful period. A number of circumstances had developed that resulted in a very stressful situation. I had just assumed the Department Chair for a five-teacher, 200 plus student program. Our annual fundraiser, a concession stand, had a bad year. Administrators were changing procedures for transporting students on field trips and other program activities. Being a young teacher, I was taking many of these issues personally. In fact, the stress started to affect my health. During this stressful time I stumbled on a few concepts on which I have tried to build my professional career.

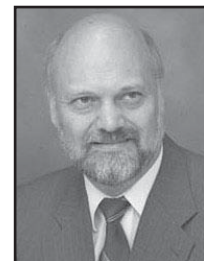
Leave your work at the office. During the day I would do everything that I could to be the best teacher possible. I am not saying that I was a great teacher but I gave it my best efforts. I would come in early, stay after school, and work when needed on weekends to train teams, work with the FFA, prepare lessons, etc. When I left the school I tried, and was somewhat successful, at leaving school work at the office. By clearly separating my personal life and work, I reduced the level of stress in my life. This does not mean that you don't share the highlights of your day with your spouse and family. This simply means that you do not bring home hours of work that keep you away from your family.

If you can change the situation, take appropriate actions; if you cannot change the situation, don't worry about it. This has been my personal philosophy for most of my professional career. During my lifetime I have been around a number of people who “worry” excessively about situations in which they have little or no control. In some situations I have seen this worry take a toll on their health and to some degree affect their ability to function as a professional. Be careful, there can be some unexpected consequences of practicing this philosophy. This method of stress reduction can be viewed by some, even those close to you, as a “lackadaisical don't care” attitude. To avoid this negative reaction you must communicate your thoughts and feelings to these individuals.

Make time for your family. Don't spend your entire career “raising” your students at the expense of your spouse and your children. With an active agriculture program it's easy to get involved in numerous activities

and build an active professional calendar. You need to develop a family calendar that takes into consideration sporting events, musical recitals, etc. that your spouse, sons and/or daughters are involved. Give these activities priority as you schedule your professional activities. Occasionally you will have to give priority to your professional calendar, but in most situations, the personal calendar should be first. Keep in mind that in most family situations these are once in a lifetime opportunities. Most of the professional activities occur on an annual basis.

These concepts have been the cornerstones to all three phases of my professional career (high school agriculture science teacher, research and evaluation specialist, and college professor). I have not been perfect in their implementation, but they have been central to establishing a balance in my life. I encourage each of you to read the advice presented by each author in this issue. Reevaluate your personal situation and, if necessary, take the needed steps to establish “balance” in your professional and personal lives. You will benefit from this activity, as well as everyone with whom you come into contact.



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Balancing Life and Work: Is this Reality?

by *Jamie Cano*

If you are feeling overworked and finding it more challenging than ever to juggle the demands of your job and the rest of your life, you are not alone. A lot of people are having difficulty finding balance in their lives because there have been cutbacks or layoffs where they work or they may be afraid it may happen to them. But even if you do not have much control over the hours you have to work, you can ask yourself: In what other ways am I bringing greater enjoyment into my life? Focus your time and attention on things you can control.

The balance between work and life can be a tenuous one, but your long-term happiness and health depends on it.

Having a work life balance is your best bet to ensure happiness at work and at home. Certainly, there is plenty of research that suggest that companies and organizations expect more work from fewer employees especially after the large layoffs and downsizings that have occurred over the past few years in many companies and organizations.

Sometimes the biggest hurdle to achieving the right balance for you is a resource that we can't buy more of: time. If time is the main culprit preventing you from achieving a work life balance, first do an inventory of

everything you are doing that you could do better. Look at eliminating time wasters at work and at home that will free up time that you can use for more beneficial endeavors.

Everyone faces the issue of time management at one point or another, but as more and more people deal with working at one or more jobs, fighting long commutes to work, managing a household, attending school or other training, raising children, responding to increasing work and time pressures found in the shrinking workplace, and dealing with aging parents, the days often seem to last long into the night and vacation and leisure time seem to be consumed with issues other than

relaxation and personal fulfillment.

A recent study of more than 50,000 employees from a variety of manufacturing and service organizations found that two out of every five employees were dissatisfied with the balance between their work and their personal lives. The lack of balance is due to long work hours, changing demographics, more time in the car, the deterioration of boundaries between work and home, and increased work pressure. Are you among the 40% of employees that are dissatisfied with the balance between your work and personal life?

How much is work invading your personal life, and how much of your personal life is affected by the stress of trying to balance all the many responsibilities in your life? You have probably heard the old adage that money can't buy happiness, but not having money certainly does not buy happiness either. Your job obviously provides you with income, but no job is worth throwing away your personal life.

At the end of the day, if your job requires you to work long hours and/or weekends that disrupt your personal life, you might either need to figure out how to get the proper work life balance or decide if this is the right job for you. Here are some suggestions to help you get the proper work life balance:

1. Improve your time management.

Do you waste time at work that could otherwise be spent on productive tasks? If you spend 20 minutes per day in the smoking area, 20 minutes talking sports with colleagues and 20 minutes making personal phone calls, there is 1 hour you have wasted. Do not procrastinate. Look for ways to improve your time management and organizational skills.

2. Ensure you are doing everything you can to remedy the situation yourself.

Do you take work home with you even though you really do not need to? Is everything at work a crisis to you? We sometimes have a tendency to make mountains out of molehills and make things bigger than they actually are. Not everything is a crisis

and not everything needs to be treated as being critically important. Learn how to distinguish between tasks that need to be done now and things that just need to be done at some point and don't require you to drop everything else.

3. **Speak with your supervisor regarding your situation and possible remedies.**

A good supervisor will understand the need for a work life balance and will help you achieve it. Do you require an additional staff member to help you with your workload? Could some of the work you are doing be done by other individuals? Write down options that you and your supervisor can consider and discuss them together to figure out how to move forward.

4. **Change jobs.**

Some companies and organizations work their employees harder than others, that is a reality. Before looking for a new job, ensure you have done everything you can to achieve a work life balance and that

your inability to achieve it is not your fault. It would be a disaster to switch jobs and then find out you face the same (or a bigger) problem with a new employer.

5. **Change careers.**

Certainly this is drastic, but some careers are known to demand more than others. In some cases, even if you have done everything you can to achieve a work life balance; your career might simply prevent it from happening. I know some people who have changed careers and taken less money and responsibilities, but are happier for it. Your priorities might determine whether or not this is an option.

Conclusion

The balance between work and life can be a tenuous one, but your long-term happiness and health depend on it. No job is worth ignoring your personal life. Before achieving a work life balance, you need to take stock of your life and see what you can do to make things better. Look for ways to improve your time man-

agement and organizational skills and do not procrastinate. Do not make things more difficult than they need to be.

If you still cannot achieve a balance that you are happy with, consider looking for time management and organizational management help. There are tools and training courses you can use to improve your time management and to help you get organized, which will free up time that you can use to find a work life balance which will make you happy.



Dr. Jamie Cano, the November-December Theme Editor, is an Associate Professor of Agricultural Education at The Ohio State University.

Upcoming Themes

January February

Agricultural Education Magazine Potpourri

Many times potential ideas for articles do not fit the proposed themes. This is your opportunity to submit an article that does not fit a theme. This issue will also allow the Editor to publish "extra" articles that were cut from previous issues because of space.

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March April

Going Green with Agricultural Education

Many times local agricultural education programs are leaders in implementing new ideas/technologies into the local community. This issue will explore ways local programs are incorporating "green" techniques into their curriculum.

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The Balancing Act: How Can it Be Accomplished to Prevent Burnout?

by Paula Faulkner and Patreese Ingram

The job of being an educator is both demanding and challenging (Croom, 2003). As stated in an article in the AAPU (2011), “The work of faculty is—by its very nature—virtually unbounded. The article further states that:

activities, and Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAEs). Each of these responsibilities requires long hours if one expects to be successful in their career. “*Agriculture teachers draw upon physical, emotional and intellectual resources in order to be effective in the classroom*” (Cano, 1990).

When a job becomes too demanding and/or challenging, one

their academic responsibilities with family responsibilities, universities have implemented policies such as parental and family leave, stopping of the tenure clock, and temporary teaching load redistribution for faculty of newborns or newly adopted children. One university (Texas A&M University) has implemented a unique program called *Aggies on Call*, a support system which maintains a database of students who are willing to provide one-time immediate assistance on short-notice to help faculty with such needs as child care, yard work, or house sitting.

The question is posed, “How do faculty balance work and family while preventing burnout?” This article will explore the personal world of two agricultural educators and how they deal successfully with the demands of teaching while remaining healthy and taking care of family.

Paula Faulkner

Paula Faulkner is an assistant professor and enjoys her career because it is one she dreamed of doing as a small child. Paula states that her interest was based on her mother and other relatives being educators. It’s in my genes. I started out as an elementary teacher and then transitioned to middle school before arriving in post-secondary education. Being a teacher allows me to give back such a small portion of what was given to me. It is impossible to do anything alone and who would want to? I have a lot of support.

Being a university professor is very demanding. At any given time, I could have more than 100 students enrolled in my courses, which

Learn to balance your home life and work.

In addition to teaching classes, advising students, and serving on departmental committees, faculty members are expected to keep abreast of developments in their fields of specialization by engaging in original research and scholarship, participating in activities of one or more professional societies, and to read the latest research studies produced by their colleagues. There is always a new question to ask, further analysis to complete, or another issue to discuss. (p. 1)

Finding an appropriate balance between an academic career and family responsibilities can be challenging. Teachers often find themselves working well beyond a 40-hour week as they supervise student projects, coach career development teams, prepare lessons, and evaluate student work (Staquadine, 1990). In addition, many agricultural educators have added responsibilities for planning and implementing FFA ac-

may feel the effects of ‘burnout.’ The term ‘burnout’ originated from the effects one experiences from overwork, exhaustion and frustration. The researcher, Herbert Freudenberger, a psychologist, coined the term based on his experiences while operating a free clinic for drug users and indigent persons (Croom, 2003). Maslach and Jackson (1981) later defined burnout as a condition characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and loss of a sense of personal accomplishment.

So what causes burnout? Croomer, who studied 411 full-time professors nation-wide, found that battling bureaucracy and struggling to meet high expectations for themselves contributed to burnout (2010, June). Lackritz (2004) in a study of 265 university faculty members determined that burnout shows significant correlations with numbers of students taught, time invested in various activities, and numerical student evaluations. To help faculty balance

means many assignments to prepare, students to counsel, assignments to grade, community service to provide, along with research to conduct. You get the idea. I love the interaction and how a student responds when they grasp a new concept. That is what makes teaching so gratifying when a student *gets it*.

We all need balance in our lives regardless of the type work we do. If anything those of us who have professions requiring a lot of mental work may need it more. I've always thought that recovering from mental fatigue was more difficult than physical, but that may be questionable because physical fatigue could bring on mental fatigue. In short, we all need balance, all of us.

There is also a downside and that is being unable to close the door to your office or classroom and say, "This is enough for the day." Studies have shown that stress can be detrimental to one's health (Wiley, 2000), thus I strongly believe it's important to relax. I find exercising, traveling and watching television as ways of relaxing. I also find it very rewarding to spend quality time with family and friends and just laughing, as other great stress releases.

Balancing career and family can be non-existent if one is not careful. It's very easy to put one's career first, but at what cost? I am single and do not have children, so balancing family and career can be very difficult. People have a tendency to think that because you are single there is no need for balance or that your life is one dimensional. Nothing could be further from the truth. If anything, it's more important to have balance. I do and can get "talked" into so many tasks just because I don't have an immediate family. This is something I find difficult to refuse to do; however, I must get better or else I will sacri-

fice my health by not paying attention to the signs of stress. I would like to stress that we all need relaxation in whatever form is appropriate.

John Ewing

John Ewing is an assistant professor of Agricultural Education. He has a wife and three young children ages 6, 3, and 11 months old. When asked how well he considered himself doing when it comes to balancing family and work life on a scale of 1 = poorly to 10 = perfectly, John rated himself as 7.

He states that within the last year he has started to figure out things better. *"I am starting my 5th year now. If asked this question in my first 3 years, I would rate myself much lower. I have started to figure out what my wife and family requires of me and what my job requires. I've started to understand that I can delegate more. I do not have to do everything myself. John has developed some strategies to help with the balancing act.*

One thing I have learned is to say no sometimes. Earlier in my career, I was reluctant to say no. Colleagues would suggest various workshops I could attend, presentations I could make, and other opportunities in which I could participate. I always said yes. Now, I've learned to be more discerning about where I put my time and energy. Now I ask myself if this "opportunity" is going to benefit my development, my students, or my department directly. I make more informed decisions about what to participate in.

He has also learned to organize his day and prioritize better. He has also become more familiar with resources that are available to him. *"If there is a topic that I want to cover in my class and there is a colleague who is an expert in that area, I am*

more willing to call upon that person to speak in my class. The colleague enjoys doing the presentation and it saves me from spending a lot of time to prepare on a topic that is not my area of expertise."

The biggest frustration for John is time to communicate with his wife. *"In the fall term, when my schedule is more structured, she knows when she can connect with me. In the spring term, however my schedule is quite varied from week to week. My wife's ability to connect and communicate with me becomes more difficult."* Another frustration is helping his colleagues understand that sometimes he cannot be available to work with them. *"It may be that I need to leave for a couple of hours to attend my*

(continued on page 10)



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Dr. Patreese Ingram is a Professor in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA.

Serve as a Principle-Centered Individual

by Ryan M. Foor

July, 2002: I was the new agriculture teacher. Had to plan lessons. Had to have an officer retreat. Had to plan to take students to National FFA Convention. Had to begin thinking about preparing Career Development Event teams. Had to plan for officer and chapter meetings. Had to fill out paperwork for my new job. Had to find a place to live. Excitement and uncertainty flooded my emotions as I began my career in agricultural education...

Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989) is widely referenced in leadership courses and leadership development programs. I had not read the *7 Habits* until I started conducting state FFA officer leadership training through the National FFA Organization. While I like to read, I got bored with the text. Coincidentally, a friend suggested *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* by Covey's son, Sean (1998). A few weeks later I found the *7 Habits for Teens* on a bargain table at a bookstore for less than \$10 and picked it up, remembering my friend's advice. For some reason, Sean's explanation of the *7 Habits* made more sense to me...perhaps because I spent five years working with youth in the high school classroom.

The *7 Habits* came alive to me as I conducted state FFA officer leadership training and used examples from my life to illustrate the *Habits* to the individuals I worked with. At the same time, I saw the *7 Habits* strengthen in my daily activities as I started my position as a faculty person. One of the big take-aways for me was to consider my life mission: my principles that direct my day-to-day living.

Thinking back to my experience as a high school agriculture teacher, I am afraid that I allowed my work to define who I am. Sometimes I still feel that way, and while it's a good thing to enjoy work, it is equally important to have life balance and not tip the scales with the work load. Covey's notion of principle-centered living is an excellent reminder of how to re-center and search for life balance in an effort to prevent burnout.

Define yourself by your principles.

When I started teaching high school agriculture, I was 22 years. Fresh out of college, I was still figuring out life. Many agriculture teachers can relate to the long days, nights, and weekends I spent at school that first year. I was five hours from where I grew up and single; my life quickly became my job. Fortunately I made friends with fellow teachers and was brought into their circle. I also became active in church activities which provided social connections in addition to spiritual growth. My new groups of friends and acquaintances allowed for other activities outside school, but I was still at school, taking students on trips, and taking care of other program related tasks more often than not.

I don't regret spending the time to provide positive learning experiences for students, but as I reflect on those years, I wish I had reorganized my time. I didn't go home as much as I should have and now that I am 1500 miles away, the five hour drive home seems insignificant. My sister was a senior in high school and sometimes I still feel guilty for missing her senior year chapter FFA banquet and role as the wicked witch in "The Wizard of Oz" in the annual school play. FFA activities were my focus and at times,

classroom instruction lacked rigor, while SAE was non-existent

Now as a university faculty person, recognition of my principles serves me well, as it would have when I taught high school. One of my current struggles is managing my time. As a high school teacher I knew exactly where I would be each minute of the day in the eight period schedule. Even though I don't teach as many different classes today as I did as a high school teacher, my days are filled with student advising, research activities, administrative duties with our graduate program, and meetings. If I am not careful, the days can get away from me without much productivity occurring because I do not have a set schedule. *Balance* is an important principle that I keep in mind with my daily schedule. The notion of balance helps me regulate my day to be mindful of time I spend on unscheduled tasks. I find that I am able to leave at a reasonable time to spend time at home and time with friends.

Recognizing the principle of balance as a high school teacher could have helped me to approach my role as an agriculture teacher from my principles as opposed to the tasks I thought I needed to complete. Recognition of my principles and defining myself by principles could have helped me my first year because I was quickly on the path to burning out. I was constantly looking for new jobs and different teaching positions outside of agriculture.

As agricultural educators it is difficult for some of us to consider our personal identity apart from our role as teacher or FFA advisor. This can be especially difficult for single professionals who do not have a family to go home to each night, which

makes it easy to stay at school into the late hours. While it is necessary to “get the job done” from time to time, we must avoid making it a habit to work 12 hour days. Working long days with little activity away from our jobs can make it difficult to define ourselves separate from our jobs, which in turn can lead to burn-out. Discovering and recognizing our principles, like balance, can help us be well rounded individuals in our life pursuits: work, family, church, and citizen.

Balance can also help us achieve equality among the three components of the agricultural education program. Our roles should not define who we are; our principles should provide guidance for our identity. Unfortunately I am certain that my job has a strong influence on my identity, but I am cognizant of the notion of principle-centered living and continue to work on discovering, recognizing, and implementing my principles to my roles as a teacher, son, brother, friend, and colleague.

Live your principles through a personal mission statement.

Recognizing and implementing principles is tough. Covey’s (1989) second principle of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* is **Begin with the end in mind**. In order to know where you are going, Covey encourages developing a personal mission statement that serves as a personal motto or creed; a personal constitution (Covey, 1989). Many of us are familiar with the FFA Creed which begins, “I believe in the future of agriculture...” (National FFA Organization, 2011). What is the FFA Creed? It’s a statement of members’ beliefs about the organization, its nature, and purpose. A personal mission statement is similar: it is a statement of your beliefs about yourself, your nature and purpose.

I know I wrote personal mission statements in FFA activities through high school and college and probably have them stored in a Rubbermaid® tote somewhere, but I rarely revisited and reflected on my mission statements through college and during my time as a high school teacher. Writing a personal mission statement allowed me to reflect on my principles and beliefs. Collecting my thoughts, I realized the power of the activity. I ended with a definition of me that had no direct reference to my job, but examples of how I want to live my life and how I can apply my principles to daily life. Having a personal mission statement guided and directed me through tough times in graduate school (like writing a thesis) and has been a useful reference in my first year as a faculty person, especially when I make tough decisions, engage in tough conversations, and plan my day. My principles are reflected in my personal mission statement, which serves as a road map for my decision making.

I wish I remembered that I had a draft mission statement when I was teaching high school. I could have revised that mission statement and had it at the helm of my decision making as a teacher, friend, son, and brother. We get so wrapped up in our roles that we forget to take time for ourselves, which relates to Covey’s seventh habit: **Sharpen the saw**. I was not a very good teacher my first year and while the visibility of a personal mission statement wouldn’t have solved all of my problems as a first year teacher, it certainly could have provided me with positive direction and helped provide balance (a principle) to my roles. I was on a straight path to burnout that first year and while I wasn’t recognizing my principles or a mission statement, the principle of persistence kicked in, along with strong mentorship

from my cooperating teacher, teacher friends, and a super principal.

If you don’t have a personal mission statement, or haven’t looked at yours for a while, take time to draft a personal mission statement. I am certain that my first year as a professor would not have been as successful (at least in my eyes) if I was not aware of my principles and guided by my personal mission statement. I have a definition of me that guides what I do and the decisions I make. As agricultural educators, we wear many hats and serve in many roles. Often we get caught up in those roles and associated tasks and forget why we do what we do. The personal mission statement provides direction for our life’s work, including our family, friends, and teaching agriculture.

Whether a first year teacher or a 25 year veteran, in the high school classroom or the university lecture hall, we all experience moments of stress in our jobs. The ability to recognize those stressful moments and not fall prey to making them habit is key to preventing burnout. Recognizing our principles and enacting them through a personal mission statement is one strategy for providing balance in our lives: balancing career, friends, and family, even if we are single (don’t forget about the folks back home!). As we look to recruiting a new generation of agriculture teachers, living as well rounded, principle-centered individuals provides good role models for our students. If they see that we can manage all the tasks of teaching agriculture through principle-centered living, they may be more inclined to seek agricultural education as a career option. If we let our roles and tasks drive our lives and become defined by our work, not only can we lead ourselves to burnout, we also may portray a negative image of what it means to be an ag-

riculture teacher. Take some time for yourself, begin with the end in mind and sharpen your saw. Explore your principles...what are they? Enact your principles through a personal mission statement that will guide your role as a mother or father, brother or sister, daughter or son, friend, colleague, and as an agricultural educator. Serve as a principle-centered individual.

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Dr. Ryan M. Foor is an Assistant Professor of Agricultural Education at the University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

The Balancing Act:... (continued from 7)

daughter's school function, or that I need to completely block off some time to work on writing that journal manuscript." He is happy that his wife, having been a former high school agriculture teacher, understands the nature of the job and that it is not 8-5, M-F.

If he had to give advice to a new assistant professor who was just beginning his or her career in the agricultural education profession, "I would say learn to balance your home life and work. Try to learn early on those things that you need to do to develop as a professional and those things you do not need to do. And learn to say no sometimes."

Conclusion

As budgets get tighter and each faculty member is asked to do more, the need to balance career and family life will become more prevalent. It is incumbent on colleges and universities to assist faculty in this balance. And understand that stress is an individualized phenomenon, unique to each person and setting (Hudd, Dam-lao, Erdman-Sager, Murray, Phan,

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Life as Planned

by Sharon Lucero

It's an epiphany when you realize seventeen years later that you helped situate yourself in your current position and never noticed the speed at which it happened. You are hardly ever alone, you are working constantly, and you attend all major functions - family or work - by prioritizing. In your first school year, you remember how your principal told you not to burn yourself out, but everything spiraled. Today, you survive every change in plans and you tackle every hardship due to the wisdom gained from past mistakes, or successes. You ask people to let you know in advance, or you might not be able to attend. You live life out of a planner and it was the only way to balance family and work - to see the whole picture of your daily activities. So, you wrote or typed it in.

My life is just that - one big schedule.

It wasn't always in a well organized planner. Ten years prior to that, it was simply a school calendar and family on weekends as I started out on the career path that I so diligently sought for five years. In addition to my career my husband and I were raising two sons and a daughter while he was also building his career and eventually a trucking business. Work, school, and our young teens' lives formed our calendars.

When we first moved to Indiana, I thought I would not have a hard time finding a job in the Midwest. After all, I had worked for several companies, with the last as a contracted employee at a major United States corporation. Lots of training went into my employment with the company, and two promotions with a third offered at the end of three years should have

enhanced my resume, not to mention the accounting diploma received, and if I needed, the experience I had from working as a dental assistant after attending dental school could be of use.

Despite my credentials, I had to rethink life at the point when I was turned down because I was classified as overqualified, and companies would only hire me as a temporary employee at the start in a union state. Politics! After about six months as a temporary, I was hired as a permanent employee. Due to being a temporary

justified their attendance at school during the summer months. To top it off, all three were in band - a flutist, a clarinetist, and a tuba player. Living in sports all year long, attending school all year long, and participating in band all year long was challenging for them as well as to us and our careers. Then, eventually the oldest had the bright idea to find employment, which added to the calamity of our schedules. The other two thought it would be lucrative as well to their teen existence if vocational schools entered our lives - engineering and

My life is one big schedule.

employee at the start, however, I also labored in an old reliable field - waitressing. Forty hours of work covered in four days, from Friday to Monday, college classes during the week, a part time job at the start and full time after six months possessed my time without anything else missing a beat.

Friday night football games, wrestling meets that lasted all day, and other events that led our children down the same path of occupying every waking moment was cause for sheer exhaustion. We cultivated our patterns as a family unit with all three children working as hard as their parents. The kids even volunteered to attend summer school classes so as to create room in their schedules for other classes they wanted to take during their high school careers. Shocking! Isn't it! Summer classes were not the easiest courses, but it could be a physical education class that involved swimming, which they would rather take during warmer months. Not that we were against it, but these were the arguments presented to us that

cosmetology. Somewhere in between each one received a driver's license.

Considering the trucking business did not enter into existence until late 2001 and I did not start my masters until 2003, we were already in training for the future by the events that transpired between 1994 and 2000. All the kids were soon to be in high school together, but a turning point happened in 1995. My husband's boss decided to move the office forty-five minutes away, which in turn left me with the responsibility of pickups and drop-offs for the most part, or until the oldest child could drive. Pickups, drop-offs, attendance at sports events, college, two jobs at the beginning of our move to Indiana for the first two-and-a-half years, and my husband's job eventually moving led into my final year of college and a portfolio climax. Throughout college, whether I took 15 or 23 credit hours, I had to figure out how I was going to multiply that by three hours of study per credit hour to reap the benefits of education.

Did I mention where I found time to study? It's a blur.

And, I loved it – the busyness that is. Eventually we had an empty nest with our grown children at different colleges and I was in my last year of college when my husband's mom went into a coma. I was in my student-teaching semester and in the midst of creating a portfolio that no one would have the time to look at on the state level. We were the prototypes for a paradigm shift in teacher accreditation for future graduating classes. Nevertheless, I was almost finished. It was my mentoring teacher who called me to the phone, saying it was an emergency.

My husband's mom was in a coma. An aneurism was about to take her life. All activities stopped. All heartbeats stopped and breathing was on hold. To take a breath meant any one of us would have to exert ourselves in some scheduled event, some course, or some type of work. So our world stood still for about a week and centered on a mother and a grandmother. After a twenty-two hour, non-stop drive, whether it was a bodily reaction, nerves, or an act of God, she knew the last of her children had arrived.

Returning to Indiana after the services, everyone scattered about, back into the tunnels of life they were creating towards their bright futures. We were still supportive when the oldest decided to play college football, the other son started asking about sky-diving lessons, and when our daughter moved to New York for work. Finally, I graduated with my Bachelor of Science degree. That night after my graduation ceremony and party I walked over to my husband's armoire and hung my cords – both my graduation and honor cords. There they've been to this day. No argument would ever let me strip them from him.

He too earned them alongside me – through all the lonely nights spent at home while I worked, the times I could not attend Sunday mass when I was scheduled early, or the nights I took for homework instead of intimacy.

That summer passed, and I was off and running into my first school year. It was in that first year that my principal noticed my work ethic and explained that he did not want me to suffer from burnout due to the work hours I was putting into journalism. I was the journalism adviser for the newspaper and yearbook, scheduling training sessions for photographers at events, working late nights to complete the yearbook that first, second, and even third summers. Sometimes my husband would attend football games and go to dances held at the school. He would even visit the staff and me at the school during work sessions, bring food, fix chairs, or hang pictures for me. I too would sit in his company's office on my days off sometimes and watch TV there instead of home – just to spend time together – even sleep in a chair. Other times, I would help him clean the office. We cleaned the indoor and outdoor of our home together, sometimes separate. Somehow, we understood that the only way to survive our busy schedules was to be part of each other's world, while maintaining a professional distance. We allowed each other to grow individually; it would not have worked out any other way. Though our children were starting to end their college years with graduation over a course of two-three years, spreading out to other states, and embarking on careers, as well as serious relationships, I was still using one calendar – the school calendar.

It was when I triumphed in May 2009 against all obstacles to obtain my Master of Arts Degree in Journal-

ism that I realized how much I had undertaken. I had taken all six years to obtain it, which was also the limit on obtaining the Masters but still pushing out a 126 page creative project. During that time, I was in the Indiana State Teacher's Association union, became a Minority Affairs Committee member, joined the discussion team, and attended district council meetings. I graded when time allowed – during prep, lunch, right after school, or weekends, and especially on the nights my husband worked late or traveled out of state for his work. To add to my list of responsibilities at school and home, I experienced a lawsuit from 2004 to 2009. I also watched my husband start up another business and move both companies to an industrial parkway on the other side of town.

To...this...day...I don't know how I have survived jumbling all events, but I know I became bold at one point with my family and work where my schedule was concerned. I had to. I was one person, and last-minute notifications would not suffice from either. Whether it was a birthday party, baptism, or babysitting, the family had to check my schedule first. It became worse when I decided I would embark on the next level of my education, knowing I was taking more of my family life away.

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Words of Wisdom: Golden Nuggets to Assist You on Your Journey

by Benjamin Swan

I recently gazed over the definitions of balance. I took away that one is balanced when he/she are reasonably steady, even when two opposing forces/factors are of equal strength/importance and stability is maintained. Another definition shares that one is harmonious when the parts of our lives together are satisfying; everything is proportionate so that the whole being is stable and at rest. Regardless of your years of service, the goal of this article is to make an impact on you now for an improved stable and balanced future.

I have been married now over 13 years and it has gone by so fast, which I believe is a good thing. I thoroughly enjoy my time with my wife and our three boys who are nine, four, and one. In no way am I a perfect husband and father, but I remember hearing from multiple people that the best thing I could do for my children was to love their mother. I know all three boys know how much I love their mother. I need to remember that the role of spouse is a higher priority than the role of parent.

I believe there are a couple of things people ought to consider before they make the ultimate commitment and are yoked to each other. I am not referring to the old ball and chain concept, but a commitment that involves supporting one another. We must make sure we are heading in the same direction and understand what the work and married life entails. We must each understand the career commitment and the industry in which we work. An agriculture teacher I visited recently said that he is so thankful his

spouse is involved in the agriculture industry because they each understand the importance of what the other person does. It works well for them. They are yoked together and moving in the same direction.

If you are not married or on the

weekly schedule to reduce surprises for my spouse. I have attempted this for my entire career, so I don't know any different, but I believe my spouse appreciates knowing what's coming up so she can plan accordingly. Living a chaotic and spastic life isn't fun. Try to plan it out!

Build in time that represents your
TRUE priorities.

verge of marriage, I highly suggest premarital counseling when you reach that point. Regardless of your belief system, make this a priority. Clergy and therapists often have counseled many couples at the end of marriages gone wrong, but they are also able to help you identify and talk through issues hopefully heading them off before they cause gigantic problems. I distinctly remember learning how to communicate expectations, work through finances, and develop a routine that both spouses can enjoy.

My goal is to share a couple of Golden Nuggets I have discovered myself or have been gifted along my journey. My goal is that you consider them and receive them yourself, no matter what profession you are going into.

Golden Nugget #1 - Communication

During my student teaching experience, the principal I worked with shared some valuable advice. He was aware I was a newlywed and over lunch he suggested that every Sunday evening I communicate the upcoming

Golden Nugget #2 – Spousal/Family Involvement

I have found that it is good to have your spouse spend time with your co-workers and students. You want there to be a connection so when you mention them, they understand who they are and they actually care about the students. When I taught high school we actually lived on our school farm and had many students visit us daily. We chaperoned events all across our campus and knew the students. We had the privilege of making an impact on many students on our campus as a team.

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The Other Four Letter Word

by Mary Beth Albright

I grew up on a farm, but I certainly did not set out to marry a farmer. I met my husband when we were both working on advanced degrees. We shared fairly similar career paths, as I was a 4-H educator and he was an agriculture teacher. We understood each other's jobs and were able to relate to each others' work lives and even commiserate about situations and daily headaches. As we got to know each other, I quickly learned that he also 'helped' on his family's dairy farm.

We feel blessed to have been given the opportunity to balance jobs, farm work, and our children.

This didn't alarm me at first; I was a farm girl, right? However, I quickly discovered that dairy farming was a whole different ball game and that 'helping' on the farm actually equated to a second full-time job with horrible hours and little pay. I jokingly (most of the time) refer to the farm as 'the four letter f-word.'

My husband and I were married in 2004, less than a year and a half after meeting one another. At the time, in addition to our busy careers and the farm, I was pursuing a PhD and was driving over an hour one way to classes. Early in our marriage I did the majority of the household chores including cleaning, laundry, paying the bills, and the majority of the lawn care. However, my husband helped with a large portion of the meal preparation. I did many of the household tasks while he was busy at the farm.

At the time, this division of labor was doable for both of us.

Anyone that has children can tell you that they change your life forever. My husband and I have found this to be true. In December 2008, I graduated with my PhD and we decided it was time to start a family. Our daughter was born in September 2009. Before we had children, we tried to plan summer camps, evening meetings, and other activities on the same nights/weeks; having children has forced us to do the exact opposite. We try to make sure our summer

camps don't fall at the same time, that we both don't have evening activities on the same day so someone can pick her up from the sitter's and be home with her in the evenings. This forced us to communicate our schedules more with one another than was necessary in the past. It was, and continues to be, a challenge. We still have many evenings where we both have something scheduled. Then, my mother-in-law is often called upon to pick our child up from the sitter's and care for her until one of us gets home.

After our child's arrival, it became more difficult for me to manage a full-time job, the housework, the bills, laundry, and the lawn. Thankfully, now our child is at an age where my husband can take her to the farm with him, which gives me an opportunity to get some things done around the house. I have also had to ask my

husband to do more around the house. I was adamant that something had to 'give' this summer, my busiest time of year as a 4-H educator, so we hired someone to mow the three-acre yard. Never in a million years did I think I would pay someone to mow my yard, but it's been a blessing.

Everyone thinks that as a teacher, my husband is 'off' in the summer. However, as an agriculture teacher who also advises the school's FFA chapter, he actually has a full year contract which means he works a lot of evenings and weekends throughout the school year and also works some during the summer, attending FFA camp and visiting the homes of his students. His work in the summer, coupled with his work at the farm means our daughter still goes to the sitter most days in the summer.

While we certainly don't pretend to have all of the answers, here are some of the things we've learned in our attempts to balance work, family, and farm:

Finding good quality, reliable childcare is a must.

I never really considered being a stay-at-home mom. It sounds bad to admit this, but I like working outside the home, and I really do enjoy my job and the relationships with my colleagues and the 4-H youth. Are there times when I feel guilty? Yes, I'm convinced that every working mother experiences a certain amount of guilt. However, my husband and I found a sitter who we love and who loves our daughter. This helps ease the guilt. Because of the demands of our jobs, we've also found that it's important to have back-up childcare. We have a back-up sitter who watches children full-time and other individuals who

can serve as backups to our backup. This has eased the panicky feeling that hits when the sitter calls early in the morning to tell you her children are throwing up and she can't watch our daughter.

Establish boundaries between work and home (and farm).

Admittedly, my husband and I still need to work on this. When I get home the first thing I usually do is check my email. I also check my email on the weekends, although I still haven't given in to having Internet on my phone. My husband spends a lot of evenings at the farm. This didn't bother me much until we had children. Now it provides more of a challenge (I'm trying to be kind with my wording). Often, when he is home in the evenings, he is entering farm data into the computer. The way the farm can take over your lives is why we (mostly me) refer to it as the four letter f-word. We live adjacent to the farm, which has its advantages and disadvantages but are both aware that establishing boundaries between farm and family will be a constant struggle.

Relax your standards.

Before I had children, my house was extremely clean. I still try to keep a fairly neat house, but I've given up the idea that my house will ever be as clean as it was before we had children. I've decided that it's a lost cause to try to keep the kitchen floor clean with a husband that doesn't take his boots off, a very furry cat, and a toddler. If I look back at my life and one of my biggest regrets is that I didn't keep my floor cleaner, then I really don't have much to fret about. I'm also admittedly not quite as driven in regards to my career as I was before we started having children. I still have several career goals and ambitions; the timeline for achieving

them has just been altered. If I have to wait a few more years to get that promotion, I'm OK with that.

Organization and flexibility is key

My husband and I are probably opposites in this regard. While organization is one of my strengths, I tend to struggle with flexibility. The opposite being true for my husband. As with many families, I tend to be the one to keep the family's 'schedule.' I am a planner and an organizer which are skills that have served me well when trying to balance life's demands. However, because of these characteristics, I often struggle when something interferes with my carefully laid out plans. My husband is not as organized as I am (or maybe he just hasn't had to be since I've fulfilled that role), but he is more flexible and laid back. We've both learned to be more flexible and 'go with the flow' since our daughter entered our lives. I'm convinced children have a way of knowing when it's one of your busiest days of the year at work and they purposefully plan to acquire some sort of virus on that day. Or, they know when you're desperate for nap time, so you can work on a project or so you can nap, and they decide they don't need a nap that day. As our daughter grows and develops, we know we'll have to continue to be flexible. One day, soon after she was born, it occurred to me, "How will I get her to and from preschool when we're both working." We try to think ahead but not become overwhelmed by the future. We try to keep in mind that the only thing constant is change. Although, I do still wonder how I'll get her to and from preschool.....

Support one another

This should be the easiest advice to follow. I know that somewhere in our marriage vows I pledged to support my husband in all of his endeavors

and I do try to keep that pledge. However, admittedly at times it is difficult to fully support his involvement with the farm because I know our lives would be simpler without that involvement. But those of us who married farmers know that the farm is something ingrained in their souls. While I've had many a moment where I wish the farm would vanish from the face of earth, knowing that this would crush my husband makes me take a step back and attempt to genuinely support his efforts toward making the four-letter f-word a success. It's what is best for him, so it's what is best for us as a family.

Clearly, my husband and I don't pretend to have all of the answers concerning balancing work and family. We still struggle and will continue to struggle with it on a daily basis. Often, just when we think we've got things figured out, something changes, and we're forced to reassess. We're in for another change in October 2011 when we will welcome a baby boy into the family.

We feel blessed to have been given the opportunity to balance jobs, farm work, and especially our children. During our struggles, we remember that while the days may be long, the years go by fast.



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Juggler? Can I Add That to My Resume?

by Rebekah Epps

While growing up and attending numerous state and county fairs, I was always amazed at the sideshow jugglers. I still remember there were jugglers who juggled balls, pins, bowling balls, and even the occasional chainsaw! It was even more exciting to see the juggler when they were on stilts. Trying to understand how one individual managed to keep all the items in the air while balancing and walking on sticks seemed exciting and completely magical to me at the time. As I reflect, their act wasn't that magical

place. I distinctly remember writing this amazing and engaging lesson plan for my first day of teaching school. I had completed my lesson, activity, and the flex activity within 30 minutes of a 50 minute class. I had 28 sets of eyeballs looking back at me waiting for more instruction or to rip me and my recently decorated classroom apart with such a large amount of "down time." Quick thinking allowed me to survive to teach another day.

Another major issue that agricultural educators juggle is balancing their personal lives, professional lives, spiritual lives, and health. One

ly realize they aren't superhuman and can't do it all. This is when being able to prioritize tasks becomes extremely important. Having a system can be as simple as asking yourself "Is this urgent? Is this important?" Doing so can minimize wasted time on tasks that may not be urgent and important at the time. Many tasks which need to be done, but aren't as important, can be delegated to others.

It is also important to prioritize family events. It is hard to think about more activities knowing that you have so many activities with your professional life planned already. However, making activities like family reunions, vacations, and other family functions a priority shows the individuals in your family they do come first.

Communication with your spouse is essential to creating balance.

Communicate

One essential activity to creating balance is communicating with your spouse/partner regarding the activities you have prioritized. This can include going over the schedule for the week so any changes in who may be picking up the children or caring for the animals can be covered. If you or your spouse/partner's work schedule is more erratic than others, a daily planning session to establish the following day can be more effective. Communication can also lead to sharing responsibilities of household duties. At last check, most men were not allergic to work in the kitchen and women were not allergic to yard work. Instead of making those distinct and historical gender differences, share in those responsibilities and value the work done by each other.

Blurring the Lines

While blurring the lines of tradi-

or different from the life of an agricultural educator.

It seems that the average agricultural educator is constantly being asked to juggle many different parts of their life. Agricultural educators, of course, must manage and juggle the everyday instruction that occurs in class. It takes planning and forethought to grow plants large enough and flowering before they can even be dissected as a part of a plant science lab. And I can assure you that no agricultural educator wakes up and decides to conduct a large animal science lab that day.

Not every agricultural educator can juggle the timing inside the classroom either. Many inexperienced teachers juggle planning for a specific amount of instruction that will take

key to remember is that just like the sideshow juggler, being able to balance or juggle all portions of your life is a process that is not easily mastered. It seems that when you think you have all portions balanced and revolving through the air perfectly, one little misstep can cause havoc. There are some steps that can be taken to help maintain all of the portions in balance.

Prioritize

Marian Thomas wrote that "The good news is superwoman is dead. The bad news is she left behind an entire generation of women who are still struggling to figure out how to balance home and work." The same can be said for any agricultural educator trying to be the superhuman. Most agricultural educators eventual-

tional gender roles is okay, blurring the lines between work and home can be a little more difficult to balance. Striking a balance sometimes requires evaluating where you expect the lines between work and home to be. Many successful agricultural educators have been able to blend their family into their work life. I have seen children of agricultural educators at Career Development Events long before they were able to compete. In fact, my son attended his first CDE at four months old. He didn't compete in the floral design competition, but it was important for him to begin learning to identify the plants as early as possible. Some states encourage agricultural educators to include their families at state conferences by hosting the conference at resort areas. Many FFA Camps offer discounts for family members of agricultural educators who attend.

Other equally successful agricultural educators do not blur the lines between their family and work life. They have drawn the boundary lines and are very adamant about not blurring them by having children or family members not attend CDEs, fairs, livestock shows, and other events. These agricultural educators are the ones who have made their personal life the highest priority and work to protect every minute spent in it.

Technology has made it very easy to blur the lines between professional and personal lives. With the ability to stay connected through emails, social media, and smart phones, many people find themselves checking messages, texts, and tweets more often than interacting with other humans. Agricultural educators aren't immune to technology addiction either. I was recently visiting with the wife of an agricultural educator and she shared their experiences with technology. Both of their smart cell phones are

turned off when they come home and remain off until the following morning. On weekends, unless he is at a show or other work related event, the phone is turned off the entire time. This enables them to spend time focusing on their family without any distractions. Now, this strategy may not work for everyone, but we all need a reminder that face time with family is more productive and meaningful than time with technology.

Identify a Help Network

No matter the amount of prioritizing, organization, communication, planning, and juggling; the occasional ball is going to fall from the air. Children are going to be sick, vehicles are going to break, and accidents will happen. When it seems that all of these things happen at once, it is important to identify those who can help. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (Cohn & Morin, 2008) determined 37% of people never leave their hometown while 57% have never lived outside of their home state. Knowing this, it is very easy for some to identify family members who can serve as their network of help. At the same time, the study determined that 15% of Americans have lived in four or more states during their lifetime. For these individuals their help network is much smaller than those who have never left home. It is essential to find those individuals in your life who you can contact when you need help. At the same time, you need to be able to return the favor as needed.

Take Time for You

With all of the juggling going on, agricultural educators are quick to ignore their bodies and health. Some of the most obvious signs of stress and burnout are ones we become way to accustomed to and assume they are a part of our lives when they don't have

to be. Some signs of burnout include chronic exhaustion, feeling overwhelmed, sleep loss, irritability, increase or decrease in weight, and self medication such as alcohol or drugs. Many agricultural educators who are facing burnout have a feeling of being stuck without knowing a clear direction to turn for help. Activities that agricultural educators facing burnout once enjoyed are often put off because of a feeling of hopelessness.

Some ways that burnout and stress can be avoided is eating well, exercising, and getting enough rest. It is extremely important that you take time for yourself daily free from technology or other distractions. Reaching out to people who are not in your professional network can be both relaxing and rejuvenating. I remember an agricultural educator who spent every Sunday afternoon playing golf with others who had no clue what he did for a living. He commented how relaxing it was to not to answer questions about his job or be the spokesperson for all things agriculture.

It is important for agricultural educators to have a hobby or activity that they can turn to outside of their professional life. Everyone is given personal days during the year, but very few of us use them all. Take those personal days and make them for you. It can be participating in your hobby or even learning more about an interest or activity. One of my best days was a "mental health day" where I finally finished reading the book that I had started months before.

Jugglers sometimes drop the ball. It is okay because it is a part of what makes them human. Agricultural Educators are no different. There are going to be times when not all balls are going to fly effortlessly through the air without some falling to the ground. It is important to remember that balancing your professional, per-

sonal, spiritual life and health are just like juggling—a process that takes time to master. With practice and diligent effort balancing it all becomes easier and you will find yourself juggling even more with ease.

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Life as Planned... (continued from 12)

I would teach college courses in the evening to help with expenses and started thinking about my doctorate. After my masters, I had told my husband that I would take at least a year off from furthering my education. I am now in my second year of teaching college writing courses. In addition, I am now on the ISTA State Board as an Affirmative Action Committee member. I finally attended my first Representative Assembly at the state level, and in the summer, attended the National Education Association Convention in Chicago. Throughout the years, I have attended other events such as a trip to New York with a colleague for the National Council of Teachers of English Convention, and while in college for my bachelor degree, I traveled to Monterrey, Mexico.

So, what did we do right? My husband and I promised a long time ago to each other that we would visit our parents during Thanksgiving and Christmas, and switch every other year. I wouldn't say that missing one Christmas is wrong, but before my husband's mom passed, the Christmas that had just passed was spent at our home when we were actually going to visit my husband's parents dur-

ing that time. Instead, we could never find an excuse that would suffice for why we didn't. Since we took our children with us during their school years, they were accustomed to being with family during those times.

Today, they practice the same tradition – that no matter what – we must visit our families; we must see them now and not wait until they are no longer with us. Our grown-up children and now their families either show up at one of our parents' home, or they stop by before they go to their other family's home. On occasion during Thanksgiving, while in New York City, we have attempted to attend the Christmas Spectacular event, see the Statue of Liberty, head to Canal Street, or something else as a large group. It takes a lot of time to schedule fairly. Despite our precision in timing and scheduling, what is fair for one is not always fair for another. So, we have to consider the event, my schedule, my husband's schedule, and who is traveling where to see what is the most economic means of transportation.

The only stagnates are my school schedules for high school and college classes. Everything else has to

operate around them, and my family knows it, especially in these times. All our jobs are important. I believe that was another turning point. When the economy went downhill, each person's job security became important, and everyone understood in our family. We have always given of our time and money. We reaped what we've sewn, and in return, our families work with us – with me.

"Family first, Mom," my oldest child said to me recently.

"I know; I understand," and I added, "You need to understand I need my job. So let me know in advance."

So this year I not only have a calendar at work, but I now operate out of an 8-1/2 x 7 in. spiral planner, a planner that has all of my high school, college, and union business, my professional growth dates as well as birthdays, anniversaries, and vacation times available to family. The planner reads "Take Charge of Your Professional Growth," but I know my family business is listed in that same burgundy planner. They are the ones that support my growth and say to me now, "When are you available?"

In Pursuit of Balance: Strategies to Keep Your Family, Career, and Sanity

by Jaime Castillo

How can we possibly be great parents, spouses, and friends; contribute effectively to our chosen profession; AND seek a few elusive moments within a long and stressful day to find “*me time*”? Achieving and maintaining a state of equilibrium in our quest to balance our responsibilities of family and career can be an overwhelming and draining task-if not perceived to be insurmountable. Beyond our daily family and career oriented tasks are the unscheduled time-depleting occurrences which can include things such as road closures, empty gas tanks (usually caused by someone in your family other than yourself), and searching for that one missing sock that your five year-old daughter *must* have for her first day of Kindergarten.

These occurrences usually happen at the beginning of your day as you struggle to get to work on time or make that important meeting for which you are expected to actively participate or present a recommendation. Then, once you finally get to work, your thoughtful spouse may send you a text (of all things) informing you that you have to pickup your children from soccer and golf practice in different locations across-town...AFTER WORK-so don't be late! Are you kidding me? What about dinner? This scenario doesn't even begin to adequately describe the excessive, stressful, and uncontrollable work demands placed upon us, such as abstract major-project details, declining budgets, deadlines coupled with unclear expectations, and limited rewards and recognition for a job well done. Failure to take a step back

and critically evaluating our work, family, and life demands may lead to burnout.

Maslach and Jackson (1981), in Croom (2003, p. 1), defined burnout as, “a condition characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and loss of a sense of personal accomplishment.” Although never confirmed through valid measures, I feel that throughout my professional career on occasion I have walked along the fringes of burnout. For this reason, and in line with Maslach and Jackson's definition of burnout, I have felt mind overload (I can't think/act/do anymore.), distanced myself from my peers and those I serve (I don't even want to be around you and/or your team and nothing you can say or do is going to make me feel better), and at the end of the day driving home feeling as if my biggest accomplishment of the day was placing a food order during lunch and finding my way home just in time to eat dinner, go to bed, and do it all over again the next day. This is not how you want to reflect upon your accomplishments at the end of the day for a sustained period of time. I would like to share my personal story with you so that you can get a sense of how a career-driven family-first minded individual has, along with my wife, implemented solutions to balance our family and my career while keeping OUR sanity.

In preparation for this article, I sought my wife's perception of our strategy to effectively create a stable and attentive environment for our children-three of them between the ages of 6-10, remain happily married, and contribute effectively to our chosen professions. Her answer was

simple; she claimed that she did everything and that I did nothing. Really? She finally broke and conceded some cooperative effort on my part (Hint: pick your battles).

What we have done after nearly 15 years of marriage was not the result of sitting at home with a life coach getting direction on how to manage our lives (not that there is anything wrong with seeking advice); we have created and implemented what we had to do to survive the life/work balancing act. My wife, although mostly a stay-at-home mom, travels out of state on the average of six nights per month for her career in the airline industry, plus an average of 20 hours per week volunteering at our children's school, and finally teaching an arduous fitness class three times a week. I, a supervisor in law enforcement, work an average of 10 hours per day; five days a week, coupled with a one hour commute each way.

Up until recently, I would normally arrive at home at odd hours, such as 4:00 AM, which would afford me the opportunity to catch a couple of hours of sleep and then wake up to spend time with my children before they left for school. Upon their departure I would go back to bed for a few more hours and leave for work just before they got home from school. On several occasions I have been assigned to various projects throughout the United States, with 2-3 days notice for up to eight months and as little as two months. Luckily, I am still welcome at home and my kids still call me dad. Here are a few strategies you may employ to help you with your own balancing act and maintaining your sanity:

Communicate on-going activities on a daily basis. Each day at the end of the day (or whenever our schedules allow, but everyday nonetheless) my wife and I spend a few minutes catching up on each other's activities and sharing what can be expected the following day. I call this the daily wrap and pre-brief. During the daily wrap I attempt to gain as much information possible about the occurrences in my wife and children's day. I very briefly describe my work related activities to my wife just so that she will have an understanding of what is occurring at work for me, such as a project or deadline. The reason for the brevity in describing my daily work activities is simple-what I do to gain fulfillment professionally and to earn a living is *work*, what is happening to my wife and children on a daily basis is part of my life. I don't confuse the two. I leave work at work - end of story. The pre-brief literally begins with, "what is going on for you tomorrow?" This allows us to gain insight as to each other's availability throughout the following day.

On most days prior to leaving our house to go to work, I leave my wife and children a brief written note prior to my departure. This helps me connect with them if I was unable to physically see them, while at the same time disconnect from them to begin winding-up for my daily work related tasks. Ultimately, effective communication with your family at the end of the day may help to alleviate some of the stressors in your work/life balance which may mitigate the onset of burnout.

Maintain a healthy lifestyle- Ok, maybe I am not speaking for myself here all the time, but one thing is for certain, for me, a quick jog at the end of a stressful day helps me relieve stress and boosts my energy and confidence levels. I can't imagine what it

would do for me if I went for a quick run on a regular basis.

Manage your tasks (not the other way around) - On most days I summarize my daily major project activities and accomplishments in the "notes" area of my daily calendar. Simultaneously I identify my following day's activities and break them down into smaller tasks or requirements. I do this for several reasons. First, by identifying my activities and accomplishments I am able to clarify project status or progress and adjust my upcoming activities accordingly. I am also able to identify key contacts or steps that may be necessary to accomplish what needs to be done. Second, feeling as if I am making progress is rewarding, i.e., self-accomplishment. Last, by identifying and breaking down my following day's activities allows me to focus on my family or non-work related items when I get home. Again, leaving work at work.

Answer the tough questions. What is your passion? Are you surrounded or led by those you aspire to be like? Do your organization's values match yours? What are you doing to promote your own self-development? A self-help article cannot answer these questions for you; however it can get you to start thinking about them. The next move is yours.

Clarify expectations- One of the hardest things for me to do is to walk through the door at the end of the day and hit the ground running, again. Can you go buy a gallon of milk? Is my homework right? Would somebody please give me at least five minutes to shed my work clothes and let me watch the news? Now let's look at this from another point of view. Wife: "I have been running around all day getting ready for dinner, picking up the kids, washing clothes, the least you could do is..." At this point I am thinking that the least and BEST

thing I could do is go back to work. But it never works that way. So what we have come to agree is that I need at least 5-10 minutes to decompress. A little secret, sometimes it takes me a little extra time to shed my work clothes and come back downstairs to hit the ground running.

Odds and ends- To avoid the mad rush in the morning ensure that your kids (you too) set out their clothes the night before. Make a dinner plan for each night of the week including an inventory of the required ingredients. As for the dishes and other daily chores, clarify expectations otherwise assumptions may add more stress to your evening. Find time for yourself to do what you like to do.

Balancing work and family is by no means a simple task, nor should it be taken lightly, especially when the end result could be burnout. If achieving balance to avoid burnout was simple we wouldn't be writing about it. There is no need however, by our own volition, to create situations where we contribute to our own demise. Now, go call your loved ones and let them know how you feel about them. Work will still be there when you get off the phone.

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Family, Faith and Agricultural Education

by *Brittany Elmquist*

We all have someone that we wanted to be like growing up – for me, it was my Grandpa Greene. Bill Greene was the father of seven children and the agricultural education instructor and FFA Advisor in Columbus Junction, Iowa. Grandpa Greene really did live by the FFA motto; in fact I was convinced that it was his own motto. Learning to Do, Doing to Learn, Earning to Live and Living to Serve – that is just what he did. Living by this motto is something we all can do and maybe within that find the balance that makes it all work.

I saw at a young age my role model with a rewarding career and an amazing family and knew that is exactly what I wanted. How did grandpa do it? I find it a constant challenge to raise a family and keep up the rigor of competitive agricultural education and FFA. A career in agricultural education is stressful, and then add a family and you only get more stress! Your personal demeanor about everything is being watched everyday at school and at home. I don't remember Grandpa Greene to be anything but positive, patient and kind. Burn-out doesn't have to happen if you find your focus and have a plan.

While not close to having seven children – my two little boys feel like seven kids some days! My husband, Joe and I have been married for seven years and have Lane, 3 and Leyton 2. Balancing family and a career is challenging but it can be done and done successfully.

In our classrooms we teach our students the three-circle model of instruction, FFA and Supervised Ag-

ricultural Experience and how they work together to give members the best opportunities. As teachers, we can take this same concept and make a model that gives us that balance that makes us the kind of teacher and parent (and all the other hats that are worn throughout the day) we all strive to be. My model is Family, Faith and Agricultural Education (FFA).

FAMILY – As we have always heard, family does come first. A teaching colleague, whom I respect greatly, stressed this concept to me more than once. A seemingly easy concept, which I struggled with. I “thought” that no substitute would be able to takeover class for a day let alone maternity leave! My students were coming first and my family second. I soon came to realize that “my kids” at school would be just fine, it was “my kids” at home that needed me.

Substitute teachers or guest teachers as I like to call them are very capable of getting students to where they need to be. For my first maternity leave I took the minimum of six weeks, which at the time was a tough adjustment. With my return to school I realized that my students were still there and doing just fine. So, with my second child, I took the maximum leave of twelve weeks and enjoyed every minute. A wonderful guest teacher of mine also told me (at least in Iowa) that after a certain amount of days they are paid more per day as a substitute to take care of things like grading, making copies, planning lessons, etc. It is hard for teachers to let go of control – but for your family it is more than worth it.

Communication with your spouse is also mandatory in balancing family and career! I asked my

grandma how grandpa raised seven children and taught agricultural education – her response, “he had a good wife!” I agree. I have a great husband. Family just naturally becomes a part of the agricultural education program – chaperone, guest speaker, laborer, paper grader, you name it my husband has done it! Including your spouse is a great way to spend time together for one thing, but then for them to see first hand what it is you do everyday and the connections that are made with students. However, including them in your program is a good thing, but you have to know when to shut it off. Some nights all I would do is talk about school, forgetting that my husband had a day of his own and neglected to even ask him about it. It is vital in any relationship to balance conversations – and leave work at work. Yes, work conversations will and should happen but remember there is a lot more to talk about.

Just as my husband is included in as much as he wants to be, so are my boys. They have both been adopted by my students as the program's mascots and are expected to be at certain events! My boys don't know any different and they are especially fond of the county fair and livestock judging contests. There isn't a day in class that I don't mention my boys (husband included!). My students understand just how important my family is and when I'm gone they understand why.

FAITH – “Everything happens for a reason.” That saying used to drive me crazy because there were times I needed a reason. Having faith is key in balancing the family and a career. This year, I started teaching in a new school district. I had been in my comfort zone for years and loved

my program. The agricultural program in the district in which we live in came open and a choice had to be made. As much as I was truly sad to leave a wonderful thing – I was excited about this new opportunity and wondered what the “reason” for the move was. I realized that change is OK and sometimes you might have to if it is what is best for your family. I have found my reason for this change in many ways. Being in the school district in which we live has brought my entire family much closer to the community. This summer I taught vacation bible school to the preschoolers in our church, which I wouldn’t have done before. We (my family) have been active in numerous community events and making connections with those that will be a part of lives for many years to come. Having faith and becoming a part of something whether it is church, community group or something else helps balance all areas of your life making you a well-rounded and grounded person for whom many look up to.

Having faith simply allows you to find your focus and move forward. And, those community projects just mentioned – I gained several resources that will be used in my classroom in a variety of ways. Those connections will aid in the balancing act of career and family.

AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION – This career keeps us moving and there is never a dull moment. Keeping up with the trends of agriculture and then education is one daunting task! We all know our curriculum, standards and the time requirements. There is never enough time in the day for all that needs to get done in an agricultural education program...however, we do have control over that. Set times that you are available at school for conferences, practices, lesson assistance and make

them visible to your students. If they know that you are only there from 7:30 AM until 4:45 PM – then that is when they (students) will be available as well. Long nights in the ag room are simply not good for balancing family. Make your “hours” visible for not only your students but as a reminder that you have to go home! Are there still those nights that longer

lected 3 weeks ago. Not that it should become a habit, but it is very freeing sometimes!

Utilizing students is another great way to help manage your time at school. Find that student who has an extra study hall and have them help set-up labs or make copies. You might also have a student inquiring about a teaching career, let them re-

Think about your family first,
then manage the rest of your goals
to compliment your family needs.

than 4:45 is required? Absolutely, but now there aren’t as many. And, because you are not at school as long as you could be your time at school has to be managed.

Organization is KEY! Keeping organized files and folders make things so much easier the next time around. I have also found that if my room is organized – I can be too and have such a better day teaching because of the atmosphere. If my room is organized, I can just teach and do what needs done instead of thinking about that pile of papers. Keeping organized is not just having files but putting them away at the end of the lesson. Piles build up and it becomes easy really fast to get out of the habit of staying on top of easy tasks. Tell yourself that before you can go home that your desk has to be cleaned off and things put away. Simple as that, right?! Staying on top of things has given me more time in the long run because I don’t have to “waste” a Sunday afternoon digging out and trying to re-order files and folders. It is also OK (at least for me) to just throw away that assignment you col-

search information for you or design a bulletin board. Students are willing to help and their professionalism might surprise you.

Time at home is priceless and I need to make the most of every minute at school, especially the sacred preparation hour. As much as I may want to just sit – I can’t. When given any amount of preparation time, use it. Asking for advice from other teachers in your school is very much encouraged, even though they are not directly in my content area they have wonderful ideas if you just start the conversation. Agricultural education instructors also like to share ideas and assist whenever and wherever possible – utilize each other! I love being able to be a part of such a wonderful network of people. If one doesn’t have what you are looking for it is guaranteed that you will be directed to someone who does. You’ve heard it before, don’t reinvent the wheel... use your resources.

Burnout is possible, but make a model that works for you and follow it. Each quarter make goals related to balancing your career and family

then do it! Ideas for goals to begin with:

- Weekend family camping trip
- Ask community members to assist with parliamentary procedure practices
- Find a student assistant
- Set office hours
- Introduce your family at a chap-

ter meeting

Make the goals work for you and your family. Just like I wanted to be like my grandpa, there are several that want to be like you – what kind of person do you want to portray? Think about your family because they come first, then manage the rest to compliment your family needs. Good luck *living to serve* your family and students.



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Words of Wisdom: Golden Nuggets... (continued from 13)

Golden Nugget #3 – Develop Balance

Build in time that represents your TRUE priorities. It is imperative to establish healthy boundaries and habits that protect personal time. Work will always be there, make time to be with your family, especially during breaks, where there is flexibility. An agriculture teacher I know had taught for 10 years without taking a vacation and was continuously busy during the summer with some activity every week, even though the terminal livestock show at the fair was over in late June. I simply asked the question, if the agriculture teachers are in charge of their summer schedules, can the events scattered across the rest of the summer be moved to either the beginning or end of July to create space for a time to recharge? The thought was well received and the teacher went on a two week vacation away from work. My friend was ecstatic about how much the family enjoyed time together and how refreshing it was.

Golden Nugget #4 - Take pride in your Marriage

Take date nights!! Let everyone know that your relationship with your copilot is important!! You are sending a valuable message to your children, to those you serve and to

those you work with! Be a positive role model for all of these people you live life with!! We know there are not a whole lot of role models out there; we are here to serve others! Consider what you want your life to look like when your career is over. Maintain the primary relationship that is there for the long haul.

Golden Nugget #5 – Be willing to share in the mundane tasks of life with a good attitude

Meal planning and chores when shared can keep the workload and time investment light for everyone. We discovered that developing a two week rotating menu made sharing meals together much easier and healthier. Using more free time on the weekend, we cook in bulk so there are premade meals for the week to come. This is one way we can spend more time together. Also, the two week rotating menu incorporates our preferences and we have a grocery list made that ensures all of the ingredients are available for the plan. Having a plan helps reduce the blank stares when you ask, “what do you want for dinner,” ending in eating out often. Plan it out together and enjoy yourselves.

My last tip involves organizing and sharing chores. We listed all of

the tasks around the house/property and separately rated which tasks we enjoyed doing. Then we compared the results. When we did this we realized there were some tasks that were natural fits for each of us. For instance, I thoroughly enjoy folding and organizing laundry for the household, but hate doing laundry. My wife is excellent at removing stains and keeping our clothing clean, but doesn't care for folding laundry like I do. Thus it made sense for the tasks to be done by those who enjoy them. As for the tasks we both don't care for, we alternate and do them together so they go faster.

Being mentally focused and in the moment with my wife and kids is every bit as important as it is at work (especially in this age of convenient media and technology). When I am able to do this, they don't feel cheated when the time comes to put in extra hours on the job.

As I conclude... I am definitely not the perfect spouse, but I have tried to implement these golden nuggets into our relationship to keep our marriage healthy as I continually try to balance all parts of my life. Thank you for the opportunity to share a couple of golden nuggets! Best wishes to you and yours as you continue on your journey!!

For More Than it is Worth: Burnout Avoidance Advice

by Kimberly Miller

Toward the end of my senior year in high school, my mother was engaged in a casual conversation with my high school agriculture teacher. She was, in fact, the proud parent of a daughter headed to college to study agricultural science and become an agriculture teacher. She tells me often, especially when I am sharing a story about a long day or challenging moment, what my high school agriculture teacher told her: teaching agriculture was not an easy job.

As I reflect on the past fourteen years, besides not believing that it has been that many years, I hold an abundance of both good and bad memories close to my heart. After all, it is the culmination of these moments and memories that make me the teacher I am today. But I also consider that these moments were built around experience; the ability to laugh publicly and cry privately about situations in and out of the classroom, and most importantly, listen to advice. As I reflect, I realize that I would not have avoided getting burnt out through fourteen years of secondary agriscience classroom teaching, FFA advising, team training, department coordinating, school farm managing, IEP meetings, department meetings, district meetings, advisory board and community supporter meetings, classroom observations (I know I have left things out) AND going back to school while teaching (deep breath) had I not taken to heart solid advice from those who had experienced what I had not.

Research has been conducted regarding teacher burn out and solid ad-

vice on avoiding situations that cause teachers to want to run for the classroom door screaming. Some studies help better understand teacher burn out (Chenevey, Ewing & Whittington, 2008; Croom, 2003; Necomb, Betts & Cano, 1986) while some recommend strategies for managing and treating different types of stress and teacher burn out (Farber, 2000) and others discuss specific factors that may cause teacher burnout, such as school site or classroom environment (Dorman, 2003). These studies, and many like them, are useful and thorough investigations of the problems that cause teacher burnout. They offer practical suggestions, based on research, on how teachers should manage stress and avoid leaving the industry prematurely. However, in many instances, simple advice from the experienced is solid enough data to pass onto the enthusiastic novice. Agriculture education is a learn by doing industry, and the “doing” part can sometimes simply mean listening to and considering advice and recommendations on creating situations and experiences that keep a teacher happy and moving forward in their career.

Film director Baz Luhrmann recorded a song, based on a column written by Mary Schmich (1997), in the late 1990’s called “*Sunscreen Song*.” In the lyrics, Luhrmann makes a poignant statement about advice:

Be careful whose advice you buy, but, be patient with those who supply it. Advice is a form of nostalgia, dispensing it is a way of fishing the past from the disposal, wiping it off, painting over the ugly parts and recycling it for more than it’s worth.

While not necessarily nostalgia-driven, the following advice evolves from several years of experience in the hopes that it too can be recycled and used by others to prevent teacher burnout.

Weekly Time and Activity Management is Key

How many days of the week do you go home within the hour that the last bell of the day rings? It is likely that, once you stopped laughing, you said none or very few. By remembering what day of the week it is and sticking to a weekly plan, agriculture teachers can leave relatively soon after that bell rings once in a while and enjoy an afternoon with the family, get out of town for the weekend, or just go to dinner and movie and forget about the world.

Some of the most useful advice I was ever given came from a college professor who recommended that Mondays and Tuesdays be the longest days of the week. Schedule after school meetings or activities, stay after school for a set number of hours to finalize the rest of the week’s schedule, get copying or grading done, or work on the school farm the longest at the beginning of the week. This professor went on to state that by Thursday, reasons for staying more than two hours or so after school should only be for FFA meetings and attending scheduled meetings with school site or district members so that Friday all you needed was some time to be sure you were on track for the following Monday.

Now I can’t say that I followed this advice to the letter, in fact for many years I waited until Friday to complete most of my grading, copy-

ing and farm work, but as time went on and I took heed to my professor's words, I realized it works. Work weeks became more worthwhile and gave me something else to look forward to at the end of the week besides getting work done. *Additional tips:* 1) some weeks it is simply impossible to leave on time on Friday, so make a different day of the week your early day; 2) do your best not to leave on your early day with an armful of grading to do at home as this defeats the purpose; and 3) as difficult as it is, remember that three day weekends, holidays, and winter/spring breaks are not subtitled "extra time to get things done." Manage your time, don't let time manage you.

Sometimes it IS a Family Affair

No matter what, pick one day of the week and call it family day. Go see a movie, go to the beach, go on a bike ride, plan a picnic, go to an amusement park, do some shopping or attend a sporting event. Something that makes that day special for your family. No fair planning a quick trip to school to get things done or bringing home extra papers to grade. If something comes up on the day that you and your family have planned an event, then pick another day of that week. Of course life is not perfect and compromises will sometimes need to be made, such as two evenings for one whole day, but your family will quickly get into a routine. One of the benefits of being an agriculture teacher is that your entire year is basically planned by September, so planning family time can be accomplished well in advance and you will all be able to start sticking to a weekly plan.

There are times however, when family and school obligations overlap and there is just no way around having to be at two places at once. These are the moments when everyone needs to go with the flow.

Consider slightly incorporating your work and family obligations. If you must be in your classroom over a weekend, vacation, or in the evening for something other than meetings, school, or professional obligations, bring your kids with you and make it special. My niece and nephew had their favorite desks in my classroom where they liked to sit and complete their homework, color, or watch a video on "the big screen." My husband taught my nephew how to hook up a gooseneck trailer to the truck bed; my niece loved to help feed the school flock of sheep. Everyone benefited. (*Side Note: Do your best to leave your children at home or hire child care when you have professional obligations. Its boring for them and distracting for you.*) Additional tips: 1) when kids come with you to school on non-school business days, give them a job or activity that is theirs every time they are there to help give the visit purpose; 2) recognize the young family members helping you with awards like junior honorary member, outstanding achievement, and outstanding service awards; and 3) take a few moments at a banquet or district meeting to acknowledge your family for their support

Try New Things

How many times have you delivered a lesson or lecture that you really thought could have been better? Ever attended a workshop or inservice and really liked what you heard or learned but never implemented anything in your classroom or with your students? Everyone likes things when they are new and improved and the same goes for lessons and classroom materials. Many times, just changing lesson content, refreshing a Power Point, trying new software, or adding a mini lab can add variety and depth to a lesson that bores you. Perhaps just switching the order that lessons are delivered can add pizzazz

to a common topic. When students respond differently, especially with more enthusiasm, so will a teacher, and vice versa. If you are teaching a new class, try meeting with several teachers who teach that course or similar courses and hold a curriculum sharing day. Everyone can benefit from collecting new lesson plans and ideas and will take with them a more refreshed outlook for their classroom.

When time and finances permit, take a class at a local university or community college, or a one day course on a specific subject. For instance, many craft stores offer afternoon floral classes. Online courses and programs offer an abundance of opportunities with the luxury of not traveling to a campus or external location. Check with your district or county education offices about courses that might be offered on how to incorporate new technologies into your classroom, like iPods, iPads, Google Applications, and web design.

Yes, taking classes adds extra work and no agriculture teacher needs MORE work to help prevent burnout, but enrolling in classes or a new degree program does shed new light on a daily routine and will provide new ideas for delivery of curriculum and classroom methods. If nothing else, this commitment will give you a reason to leave your campus on time one

(continued on page 27)



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On-line, Paperless Assignments: Quality, Ease, and Supports

by Nancy Grudens-Shuck

When I say, “on-line,” I am referring to my role as a teacher in a college of agriculture for two courses: (1) a distance education course where I rarely meet my students, and (2) a face-to-face course with a significant web-based component. When I say, “paperless,” I mean PAPERLESS. It has taken me a long time to get to this “place.” I would like to share how I create, assign, explain, receive, grade, and return written assignments to students all without putting pen to a single piece of paper.

What Does On-line and Paperless Look Like?

The simplest assignment is the essay, so I will describe how “on-line and paperless” looks in this case, although more complicated assignments work too. Students are provided directions and rubrics on a website. That means they can return to the instructions, and not lose them in their backpack. I also explain verbally and answer questions (via video or in person or via web-mail or discussion threads). Students may also return to these explanations, whereas verbal real time discussions are fleeting. Students are directed to create an MSW file, using a responsible file naming system that will serve them well in the real world (in other words, they are prevented from naming every assignment <ESSAY.doc>. For documents shared and co-written with other state and national FFA officers and advisors, and professional staff, proper naming is a sign of professionalism. Students upload their file (the assignment) to the website by clicking a link called “Assignment Dropbox.” I receive a time and date stamp for their upload automatically. I can, at any time, see who has submitted, and who

has not. When “time is up,” I download, rename, and examine their work. To grade, I “turn on” tracking features, and use comments and highlighting, and cut and paste features to provide legible (!), correctly spelled (!), and intelligible (!) feedback; and more of it. GREEN highlight means good. YELLOW indicates “needs work.” AQUA means possible cheating and they must *see me*. Finally, I upload to a site where they can fetch their file and grade when they have time; and the website keeps both graded and ungraded copies for comparison, if one so chooses to go the portfolio route. That’s how my system works in both courses. All together this fall 2011 semester I have 85 students in two courses that work in this way. A few get lost. Most are fine. But of course there are issues. There also are necessary supports that I could not succeed without.

Quality: The first question rightly asked by good teachers about distance and online technologies is, *Does the quality of their work, and my feedback, match what I used to do?* I will not answer that question in general terms for distance education. Other people conduct research in this area. But for my two areas of teaching, program planning and evaluation of agricultural and extension education (graduate level), and agricultural communications (upper division undergraduate), the students and I exceed quality standards using this process. Students learn additional skills in the area of electronic literacy that they will need for co-authoring grants and receiving edits from supervisors on reports. Job applications require uploading files. On the personal side, my hands are getting older, my spelling appears to be getting worse, and these shocking phenomena conflict with my values and standards for myself as a teacher. Students get

better feedback from me when I type and when I have spell-check and a few cut and paste phrases at my command. They also no longer receive paper copies that are crushed, coffee-stained, torn and re-stapled, ink-blotted, or butt-marked by my cat. Not that these things have ever happened but they could, theoretically, in my household.

Ease: After three years of a learning curve, I am able to grade faster electronically. I have had to learn how to coach students on non compatible software and have had to be clever about trouble-shooting file formats myself. These learning agendas were time consuming. For example, I wrote a “READ ME FIRST” document that suggests practical strategies for students to avoid inevitable frustrations, such as having access to two computers, one of which is land-line connected but not dial-up. Wireless is less reliable. Something always halts or freezes, and coaching early has helped to lessen the load of panicked emails in my inbox regarding frozen files and errors in uploading. As I learn, the in-box deluge has slowed.

I have learned to be flexible on due date times, and learned how to provide a grace period via the software. Experienced students have alerted me to features I used badly or failed to employ. These instances required extra humility on my part; emotional labor is an understated part of the learning curve.

I also spent time calibrating my home computers’ hardware and software with my institution’s. This has made a huge difference in my ability to grade at home as well as at work. Grading at home provides ease for me and my family’s schedule. I do not own a laptop, but one could take grading on the road, but compatibility is key.

And perhaps unexpectedly, my software program now supports an automatic plagiarism checker that has made my obligations in the area of academic honesty six times faster than in the past. This feature has proved especially helpful in teaching academic honesty and citation in my undergraduate communications course.

Supports: It is still true that institutional support may be the single most powerful factor in determining your wherewithal to rely on any new technology – whether online assignments or anything else. I rely on a lot of talented people who have remained employed and are valued at the institution. I have regular access to more than four friendly experts during the day regarding the software that my institution employs (WebCT, which is becoming closer in line with Black-

board™). Faculty and students are also offered workshops seeming all the time. I have three additional people in a central university unit who I can call with other questions. Thankfully, the software has improved every year. Also thankfully, we have stayed with the same software. The State of Iowa community colleges and high school articulation agreements have also assisted agricultural programs in particular to coordinate software. This means freshman and transfer students arrive at our college ready to move into the online environment more smoothly than in the past.

Would I Go Back to Grading Papers?

I am able to grade student-created evaluation forms, casual models, concept maps, visual and photographic

compilations, and other non-text work using a paperless process. Screen viewing even makes these assignments look better, in all their colorful glory – and sometimes animations. Printing a PowerPoint® presentation in “gray-scale” is less interesting and may not do the student’s work justice. Maybe, for thesis and dissertations, paper is better. But right now, technology is working for me instead of against me.



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For More Than it is Worth: ... (continued from 25)

or two days a week and do something that is to your benefit. *Additional tips:* 1) coordinate a monthly curriculum sharing day where everyone brings a lesson to share or a lesson they would like feedback on before using it in the classroom; 2) try enrolling in a course for yourself that has nothing to do with what you teach; and, 3) prioritize entire units of instruction for an improvement plan. Spend some time in the summer overhauling a single unit at a time. Once you discover how easy it is to revamp, rev up, and update your materials, your lessons will be fun again for both teacher and student.

Just do it

Agriculture teachers are an assiduous and persevering group of individuals who not only teach, but manage, train, lead and most of all care about their students and chapter members. We must do our best to prevent getting burned out. Be proud and stay calm. Do what you can to make

daily events work for you, your family, your colleagues, and your classes. When you need to, go home early, administer a shorter test, call it a video day, take a walk or a whole day off. Go back to school or just take a class or two, revise an old or borrowed lesson plan or unit, get involved in organizations that you are interested in outside of school or just take a vacation. Successfully avoiding burnout begins with a “just do it” attitude.

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Preventing Burnout:



Balancing Family, Faith, Work, and Self

