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By Phil Holberton
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Family & Friends:



Staying Balanced

In this uncertain economic environment, I find myself running faster and faster just to keep up. Do you feel that way? My days at the office get longer and longer and therefore the time at home—with family and friends—gets shorter and shorter. If you are anything like me, when you do go home, you are still thinking about the office. This isn't always well received.

Staying balanced is a never-ending challenge as we wax and wane between intense focus at the office and a more relaxed atmosphere at home. Human resource professionals suggest those of us who are able to keep a balance (I could do a lot better!) between our professional lives and personal lives will experience the most rewarding aspects of both lives. The HR professionals spend a lot of time helping companies come up with ways for employees to structure their lives to achieve more balance, from working remotely to giving time off, etc. That's where family and friends come in.

"The only way to have a friend is to be one." —Ralph Waldo Emerson

And this takes time. But the investment in friends can be one of the most important investments of our life. After all, it's the quality of our relationships, not the size of our bank account, which allows us to experience the fullness of life.

"My father always used to say that when you die, if you've got five real friends, then you've had a great life." —Lee Iacocca

Developing friendships is not effortless. It takes time, but it is time we should be willing to invest as it feeds us emotionally when we may need sustenance the most. However, we must be there for others in their time of need as well. Being available to give unfettered feedback, or just being present to listen and acknowledge their anxiety can be of great help.

In this stressful time, we need to be able to turn to our friends and emote about the "state of the union." If

we haven't been able to build these friendships in the past, then we need to start today so that such supports are in place for the future.

Mentoring, one of those extraordinary benefits of being a leader, is where new friendships can be developed. For many business executives, this can be an opportunity to develop friendships outside your office. Watching and assisting another human being's growth is one of the most rewarding experiences any of us can experience. This may be slightly more than a friendship, but I submit that this process will help you grow as well. We often get from our mentorees as much as we give to them. Consider this as a way to develop friendships.

And of course, family is just as important as friends. I'm reminded of a story told by noted entrepreneur Desh Deshpande that we are all juggling balls to keep our lives on course. Unfortunately, our family ball is a glass ball and our job or business ball is rubber. If we drop the business ball, it will always bounce back. If we drop the family ball, it normally cannot be repaired.

"The family you come from isn't as important as the family you're going to have." —Ring Lardner

Long after our professional careers end, our family and friends will sustain us. It is very short sighted to preempt our families by overindulging our focus on our professional lives.

"Your family and your love must be cultivated like a garden. Time, effort, and imagination must be summoned constantly to keep any relationship flourishing and growing." —Jim Rohn

After it is all over and we hang up our cleats (professionally speaking), we want to have our friends and family and enjoy the richness that they offer. We won't be able to do this unless we are cultivating these relationships all along the line. ★