

Work and Family Harmony: Toward a New Paradigm

Jeff Hill, PhD, associate professor of marriage, family, and human development, BYU

From Sierra Leone to Indonesia, Zimbabwe to Malaysia, Congo to Georgia, and Argentina to Dubai—we come from different climates, cultures, political persuasions, and religious faiths. What is so remarkable about this group is that we all share the intense desire and passion to strengthen the natural family. In an epoch where the family is attacked from many quarters, it is refreshing to meet so many influential and competent souls that seek the family as part of the solution and not part of the problem in the world.

I am delighted to speak about a subject of great professional interest and personal passion. The topic of finding harmony between one's occupational pursuits and family life is of professional interest because it was the subject of my PhD dissertation, it has been at the heart of my corporate studies in forty-eight countries during the past ten years, and it is the focus of my current research agenda as a professor at Brigham Young University's School of Family Life. It is of personal passion because my wife and I have been married for a quarter of a century and together we share the challenging responsibility to both provide for and nurture nine children, age three to twenty-three. Many ask us why we have so many children. The answer is—we just love them so much and cannot imagine our family without any of them. We have been blessed to provide for a large family, and we believe the best contribution we can make to our community, nation, and the world is to raise healthy and caring children. So we do it.

I know that you feel the same about the members of your families. As we ate lunch yesterday a delegate from Zambia was summoned away with an important call on his cell phone. He came back with a smile. It was his eleven-year-old child calling to make sure he had arrived safely and just wanting to chat for a moment. A delegate from Sierra Leone took a moment to call his wife to tell her how beautiful the mountains were here in Utah, and how they reminded him of their home. We all love our families. We all want to do our best for them. But sometimes we struggle to juggle the demands of a professional career with our responsibilities in the home.

My wife and I have tried diligently to have a career and a family life in harmony with each other. For ten years I telecommuted for IBM. I worked from my home office in Logan, Utah that was located more than two thousand miles from my business office in New York. Working electronically from home enabled me to live in a quiet community, forgo

the stressful commute each morning and evening, and be with my family more than ever before, while being one of the most productive members of my department. However, working with so many children at home gave new meaning to the words, "harmonizing professional and family life."

Colleagues often did not realize I was working from home. Nor did my management want people to know that I was working away from the office. When they dialed an IBM number in New York, it rang in my basement home office in Utah. I tried to be professional but sometimes this was a challenge. Let me share one humorous story that appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* after I was interviewed for an article on telecommuting. One morning while I recorded my daily voice mail greeting, my wife Juanita was folding clothes in the laundry room across the hall. My six-year-old daughter Emily had just taken a shower upstairs and could not find the clothes she wanted to wear. She came downstairs draped in nothing but a towel. When Juanita saw her, she said in a loud, giggly female voice, "Look at you. You have no clothes on." After several colleagues commented with a chuckle about my voice mail greeting, I listened to it and this is what I heard:

Male Voice: This is Jeff Hill with IBM Global Employee Research

Giggly Female Voice: Look at you. You have no clothes on.

Male Voice: I'm not available right now . . .

(*Wall Street Journal*, 24 September 1997, B1)

Parents the world over struggle to adequately provide for and/or nurture their children. In developing countries many anguish over how they will obtain adequate food, clothing, and shelter for their offspring. According to the address we heard from Ms. Mariam Yunusa, one billion people live on less than one dollar per person per day. My heart cries out, my eyes weep with the conviction that something must be done to alleviate the physical suffering of children in those families where even the most basic needs are not met.

On the other hand, the developed world is moving through an era of unparalleled material prosperity. Sweeping technological progress coupled with rapid globalization makes it easier for parents in these countries to provide the physical necessities of life for their children. However, the quick pace and sheer quantity of paid work outside of the home, generally performed by both parents, makes parents struggle to have sufficient time and energy to adequately nurture their offspring. In this dissonant world, it is difficult

to find time to teach children values, show them how to work, read to them, help them with homework, play games with them, enjoy the beauties of nature at their pace, or to see to their religious instruction. Though few children are starving for food in the developed world, many are starving for the tender nurturing hand of a loving mother and father within the natural family.

Too often we focus on the great gaps and differences between the so-called developed and developing worlds. When we focus on children we will see that we have more harmonious interests. In both worlds, fathers and mothers love their children deeply and want the best for them. Children everywhere require physical, emotional, and/or spiritual nurturing. They need powerful advocates in both worlds. We all must work together to strengthen the family. Our children deserve it.

I would invite you to listen with two sets of ears. Listen with the ears of a distinguished leader and see if there is anything you can glean from my talk that would help you to strengthen families within your sphere of influence. Secondly, listen with the ears of a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, or wife, to see if there is anything you can glean that would strengthen your own family.

Assumptions and Beliefs About Family Life, Paid Work, and How They Interact

We all have basic beliefs and fundamental assumptions that guide our thoughts, feelings, and actions. One meta-assumption I have is that when we make beliefs and assumptions explicit, it is easier to have dialogue. As I have observed of the UN, all parties involved would benefit by making their assumptions more explicit. Then, perhaps, they could converse more constructively.

The procreation and nurturing of succeeding generations is best accomplished within the natural family, one centered on the voluntary union of a man and woman in the lifelong commitment of marriage. The natural family provides the most optimal environment for the healthy development of children. Certainly there will always be many who, for various reasons, are not able to reside within the natural family. However, I believe that public policy should facilitate, or at least not hinder, the establishment and maintenance of households based upon the natural family. The single most effective action a government can take to enhance a country's economic development, is to strengthen the family within that nation. The single most effective action a company can take to enhance its position in attracting, motivating, and retaining the best talent is to create a flexible workplace where its employees can successfully harmonize responsibilities of work and home. Economic policy, both corporate and governmental, should be crafted to allow the family economy to flourish; what is good for the family is good for the economy.

Metaphor of "Harmony" Between Work and Family

My wife and children and I love music. Some are more talented than others; all are more talented than me, but we all like to sing and play diverse instruments. The other day I had just come home from a hectic day at a work and wanted some peace. I opened the door and was overwhelmed by a loud cacophony of sound. Abby boisterously fiddled away in the laundry room. Aaron blared out jazz on the trumpet in his bedroom. Hannah enthusiastically bowed her way through a beginning cello book in the living room. And dear Emily turned up the volume of our electric piano as she raced through the hymn "God Speed the Right." The dissonance was earsplitting and heaped added pain to my headache. I had to leave.

A few days later I had a different experience. The children joined several others in our living room to sing and play Handel's great "Hallelujah Chorus." This time Abby's violin sent shivers down my spine. I enjoyed Hannah's tenor line on the cello. Instead of playing the piano, Emily sang alto. As Aaron's trumpet punctuated the grand finale, I could not restrain tears from streaming down my face while my voice cracked as I attempted in vain to sing with the rest. The harmony of this experience brought us closer together as a family.

"Balance" is a predominant metaphor for work and family life. As we struggle to juggle our jobs and our home life we think of ourselves as "walking a tightrope" or involved in a "balancing act." We often feel "out-of-balance" and, like the first example given above, sense dissonance in competing aspects of life. We grapple with when to work late on an important project or when to leave early to attend a daughter's soccer game. We agonize about whether to postpone a family vacation because a business deal is looming, or an unexpected UN meeting has been called. With a "balance" metaphor, work is the irreconcilable nemesis of family.

There's a better way to think about this. Stewart Friedman has come up with a fresh idea. In an intriguing *Harvard Business Review* article, "Work and Life: The End of the Zero Sum Game," he and two colleagues maintain that work and family life are actually complementary, not competing priorities. Success at work often contributes to success in one's family and vice versa. I would maintain that success in the families of a nation contributes to the economic success of those countries.

Perhaps the musical metaphor of "harmony" more richly captures what individuals do to effectively manage the demands of work and families. It's empowering to think of ourselves as the composers, lyricists, orchestrators, and performers of our lives. It may give us inspiration to find, as illustrated in my story, a peak experience where we bring together challenging aspects of life into a great symphony of mortality.

Using the harmony metaphor, questions of work and family are not necessarily: "How can I limit my work time so that

I can balance my family life?" or "How can I get out of the house more so I can have more time at work?" Other, more helpful, questions come to mind: "What am I learning at work that can help me have a better family?" or "Are there possibilities for overlapping work and family time with harmony?"

Potential for Harmony and Risk for Dissonance in the New World of Work

The new high tech of work and its ongoing metamorphosis has important ramifications for families. Let me share a personal example of how e-commerce positively affected my family. I had been invited to present at a meeting in conjunction with a special session of the UN in Geneva. I desperately wanted to share the trip with my wife Juanita to celebrate our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. However, the least expensive ticket I could find cost three thousand dollars, much more than our family could afford on a professor's salary. But, after some exciting online bidding, I found a round-trip Lufthansa ticket to Geneva from skyauction.com for only \$651. Because of e-commerce I was able to share the beauty of Switzerland for a week with my wife, which strengthened our marriage and I'm sure had positive ripple effects on our children.

Disturbing Trends in the New World of Work

However, not all of the consequences of the new, hi-tech world are in harmony with the family. I would like to speak about three disturbing trends and three encouraging trends from the new world of work related to fostering harmony in the home. What I say applies primarily to the developed world, but also to the developed world because the work patterns of the new world are already finding their way into developing countries.

Paid Labor Requires Longer Working Hours and is More Intrusive to Family Life

Paid labor requires longer working hours and is more intrusive to family life. In the new world of work: the realities of a global economy, extensive downsizing by large corporations, new work-facilitating technologies, and the advent of e-commerce combine to lengthen the work week for many employees. This trend is particularly pronounced in the U.S. A recent survey documented that from 1992 and 1997, the average U.S. work week increased from forty-three to forty-seven hours, equivalent to an additional half-day of work per week (Bond, Galinsky, and Swanberg 1998). Last year, a UN international labor organization study (*Fortune*, 10 January 2000) revealed that with an average of 1,966 annual work hours per capita, the U.S. surpassed Japan as the developed country with the longest work hours.

Not only are we working longer hours, we are working in a way that is more intrusive to family life. In hi-tech global

companies, employees are often provided with cell phones, pagers, fax machines, and laptop computers to enable instant communication anywhere in the world. These portable communications devices can interrupt the flow of precious family processes at any time, on any day, and in any place.

A couple of years ago I took my wife and three of our children to Hawaii for an eight-day vacation. I brought my laptop with the thought I could log on a few minutes each day and keep up with my e-mail. Well, a few minutes turned into a few hours. Even when playing with the kids in the surf I would be thinking about work. Then, my IBM boss firmly demanded (via e-mail) that I join a very important 9:00 A.M. conference call. I replied that I would but after hitting the "send" button, I realized the 9:00 A.M. call in New York would be at 3:00 A.M. in Hawaii. Sitting in on that tense call in the wee hours of the morning I asked myself, "What am I doing? I'm supposed to be on a vacation!" After the call I locked up my laptop and crawled back to bed. I truly enjoyed the next five days with my family and returned to work renewed.

David Lunsford at Dell Computer summarizes, "More and more the boundaries between work and life are being blurred by technology—pagers, cell-phones, e-mail." Many of these advancements compromise the quality of their time by being tethered too tightly with an "electronic leash" (Hill 2000). Certainly a disturbing trend in the new world of work is that many are working longer hours and the nature of the work is more intrusive to family life.

Less Time Available for Family Relationships, and Time Available is of Lower Quality

A second disturbing trend is that less time is available for family relationships, and the time available is of lower quality. Parents who work longer hours have less time to be with their families. Compounding this parenting-time-challenge is the steady increase in the proportion of households with children where both parents work. In the U.S., the labor force participation rate of married women with children under six years of age increased from 19 percent in 1960 to 37 percent in 1975, and to 64 percent in 1997 (statistical abstract 1998). Similar trends exist in other countries. It is no surprise to discover that many families feel like they are experiencing a "time famine" (Hochschild 1997) and that employees have begun to value time more than money.

We are not only spending more time at work—we are depleting our reserves of personal energy in the marketplace, so that when we are home we are less emotionally available to family members. Many studies show that negative emotions at work "spill over" into the domain of the home. Employees in high stress jobs report difficulty "getting away" from work and being emotionally unavailable to their families, even when they are home. The new world of e-commerce with alternatively soaring and plummeting

stock prices can inhibit the development of peaceful feelings in the home. The “anytime-anywhere” office means that not only time, but the feelings of the workplace can intrude into the sanctity of the home at any moment.

Business Offer Corporate Counterfeit for Family and Personal Needs

Another disturbing trend is that businesses are beginning to offer a corporate counterfeit for family and personal needs. To enable employees to work longer hours and to find personal renewal on the job there is a growing trend to offer ways to fulfill more personal needs in the workplace, reducing the need to go anywhere else. Listen to this disturbing description from *Fortune* magazine of the “company town” in the new world of work:

Within the compound’s high wall, people laze on hammocks strung between pine tress. Others practice their jump shot on the gleaming basketball court, or hang around the putting green, horseshoe pits, or beach volleyball court. Cooks harvest oregano from the herb garden for the day’s meal. Free bananas are everywhere. And an array of services—bank, store, dry cleaner, hairdresser, nail salon—complete the self-contained community. Notes thirty-year-old Christine Choi, “You never have to leave the place.” (*Fortune* 2000, Part 1).

At such companies concierge services will do everything you need: buy groceries, plan your daughter’s birthday party or son’s bar mitzvah, complete house repairs, and drive your children to music recitals or football games.

Arlie Hochschild worries that this trend could leave public life increasingly barren, widening the gap between haves and have-nots, “It’s . . . denuding the real community outside the corporate realm.” Ilene Philipson, a clinical psychologist, says, “none of the people I see want to spend more time at home, because work has become all sparkly and glittery, and home seems kind of empty and colorless. It’s frightening to see what their lives are like (*Fortune* 2000, Part 4).” This counterfeit for family is certainly troublesome. Among the other disturbing trends discussed, this trend helps create an environment that leads to a fundamental weakening of the family.

Encouraging Trends in the New World of Work

Yet, not everything about the new world of work is disturbing. Three encouraging trends in the new world of work promote harmony between the needs to provide for and nurture a family.

*A Growing Recognition that Men,
as well as Women, are Involved in Family Life*

Many more people are understanding that men, as well as women, are involved in family life. Since the industrial revolution, the world of work has structurally removed the father

from the home during the week during business hours. The general assumption has been that women should take care of family life. In the business world, it was generally not acceptable for a man to respond to family needs while he was at work. For example, fifteen years ago I worked at an IBM headquarters location. I wanted to be involved in my children’s education. When it was time for a parent-teacher conference I knew it would be unacceptable to request time off during the day. So I took off my coat and left it on the back of my office chair, left my computer turned on, and left my hot chocolate at my desk. Then I snuck out the back door and went to my daughter’s school, knowing that if anyone stopped by my office they would think I was at a meeting.

However, in the new world of work things are changing. It is more acceptable for men to be involved in the lives of their children. Though women still have more household responsibility, increasing numbers of men are using work-family programs. Now the data, at least in the U.S., show that men are doing more at home (Levine and Pittinsky 1997; Pleck 1997). Findings from the National Study of the Changing Workforce reveal that in 1977 employed married women did 18.5 hours more housework a week than their husbands but by 1997 the gap had been cut by two-thirds, to only 6.5 hours more. (Bond, Galinsky, and Swanberg 1998). Encouragingly, men are significantly more involved in the lives of their children and the work of the home. If you believe it is best for children to have the influence of both a father and a mother, this is a positive development.

*Technology Offers Potential to Create
“Electronic Cottage” Friendly to Family Life*

A second encouraging trend is that technology offers the potential to create an “electronic cottage” friendly to family life. Twenty years ago the futurist Alvin Toffler wrote:

Watching masses of peasants scything a field three hundred years ago, only a madman would have dreamed that the time would have come when the fields would be depopulated, when people would crowd into urban factories to earn their daily bread. And only a madman would have been right. Today it takes an act of courage to suggest that our biggest factories and office towers may, within our lifetimes, stand half empty, reduced to use as ghostly warehouses or converted into living space. Yet this is precisely what the new mode of production makes possible—a return to cottage industry on a new, higher, electronic basis, and with it a new emphasis on the home as the center of society (Toffler 1980, p. 210).

Though technology can be highly disruptive to families, it can also facilitate family life. The frequency and use of telework has increased dramatically in recent years. It is estimated that there are more than eleven million employees

in the U.S. who telework (FIND/SVP 1998). At present, 55 percent of large companies offer telework and another 6 percent are currently considering its implementation (Galinsky and Bond 1998).

Let me share an interview I had with an IBM marketing rep in Phoenix, Arizona, who is also an involved father of four. Before IBM implemented a telework program, he worked ten to twelve hours away from home. His children were usually still in bed when he left for the office in the morning and when he got home he didn't have the energy to devote to quality parenting. Then, as part of a virtual program, he was given a laptop, cell phone, and pager. IBM closed his individual office and told him he could work whenever it made sense and that they now cared more about his results than where he worked. He described the harmonious change in his family life as the difference between night and day. He was able to write creative marketing proposals early in the morning while he was fresh and the rest of the family slept. When his children awoke he helped them get dressed, shared in a family devotional time, and fixed a hot breakfast. After getting them off to school he would often exercise, shower, and then get on the road to visit his customers after the stressful rush hour traffic had subsided. He would beat the traffic home in the afternoon, and do his e-mail from his den. This employee said that recently a competitor offered him a job at a much higher salary figure, but he chose to stay with IBM because of the flexibility of telework.

My research clearly documents that flexibility as to when and where work occurs benefits the employee and the employer. Recently, we conducted a survey in forty-eight countries and twenty languages with 59,000 participants. When asked what the company could do to better facilitate harmony between work and personal/family life, they did not respond that they needed or wanted more on-site daycare or other traditional work and family programs. They wanted flexibility as to when and where work was done so that they could be more involved in the lives of their loved ones. The survey results indicate that those who work electronically from home are more motivated, higher performers, have less difficulty managing work and family demands, and are more likely to stay with the company. Now almost 100,000 IBM employees work somewhere other than the traditional corporate office. The fact that the new world of work promotes this type of work arrangement is indeed encouraging.

Work-Family Programs Strategic rather than Accommodative

A final encouraging trend is that work-family programs in the corporate workplace are increasingly strategic and less accommodative. The intensity with which employees experience work-family-difficulty, coupled with labor shortages in critical skills, has changed the way many businesses look at the purpose of "family-friendly" programs. Instead of seeing these programs as primarily accommodating the idiosyncrat-

ic needs of a relatively small group of employees (e.g., working mothers), they are seen as part of a broad-based business imperative integral to company strategy for attracting, motivating, and retaining the best talent, men and women (Galinsky and Johnson 1998).

There is also a growing recognition that employees learn things at home that are essential to success on the job. A noted organizational consultant said:

For a long time, executives assumed that if people were not so interested in the family we would have a lot better executives. And now they're saying we were wrong. The shifting metaphor from management control to leadership development presents the need for grasping the higher values of love, support, development, and concern. Leaders don't learn those things in the abstract, they learn them in the family. And I'm not talking about a metaphor. The actual context for learning what's most important in the organization is the family. And I would pronounce that as Truth, with a capital 'T' (Richie, 1 December 1992).

The encouraging trend is that when employers see it in their own self-interest to promote programs that enable employees to better harmonize personal and professional life, these programs are more likely to be developed, implemented, and supported.

Conclusion

Permit me to share a final personal example of work and family harmony that occurred last night while I struggled to put the finishing touches on this address. As I stared at my computer screen in my home office, I had writer's block. I had to bring this presentation together and nothing was forthcoming. My three-year-old son chose this moment to enter the office unannounced to ask if I would read him a story and put him to bed. The initial unspoken thoughts in my mind were something like, "Seth, can't you see I'm busy doing important things. Don't bother me now. How am I ever going to get this speech done?" These thoughts reflected the old paradigm, the balance paradigm, where his entrance was an intrusion, where he, as a part of my family, was taking away from my ability to get my work done. But before I spoke I looked into his deep brown eyes and realized that his entrance brought peace into my life. My words to him sprang from the harmony paradigm, "Seth, I'd be happy to read you a story and put you to bed. That's probably just what I need right now." I saved my files on the computer, and Seth took my hand and led me upstairs. We brushed our teeth together and got on our night clothes. Then we knelt by the side of my bed and prayed for God's blessings upon our family and upon my work. Then we climbed into bed and I read him a picture-book story, a new version of Aesop's fable about the tortoise and the hare. By the time I had finished he

had snuggled his head into my neck and had fallen fast asleep. My eyes were heavy too so I turned out the light and went peacefully to sleep myself. Hours later, my wife Juanita put Seth into his own bed and laid down beside me. This morning I woke up refreshed at 3:30 A.M. and was able to think clearly and write more of the feelings of my heart. Perhaps you have noticed my three-year-old's influence. It was a "win-win."

With the advent of the new world of work, there are trends that are both disturbing and encouraging to the family. I truly believe we are at a critical juncture. The interplay between providing for a family and nurturing children is changing more radically than at any time since the industrial revolution. We have the opportunity to construct a work world where the family can flourish. It is my hope we can create an environment where all people in the world can both adequately provide for their families, as well as have the time and energy to nurture their family relationships. However, this will take the conscious efforts of many.

I call on you to support those measures designed to strengthen the natural family as the fundamental unit of society and the basic building block of a strong economy. I invite you to use all of your time, talents, and energy to be part of that effort. I call upon us all to do our very best to provide for and nurture our families in harmony.

NOTES

Bond, J. T., E. Galinsky, and J.E. Swanberg. *The 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce*, New York: Families and Work Institute, 1998.

"The New Company Town," *Fortune*, 10 January 2000.

Friedman, S. D., P. Christiansen, J. DeGroot. "Work and Life: The End of the Zero-Sum Game," *Harvard Business Review*, 76, 6, 1998, pp. 119-129.

Hill, E. J. "Take All Your Vacation and Leave Work at Home," *Deseret News*. (Manuscript in press), 2000.

Levine, J. A. and T.L. Pittinsky. *Working Fathers: New Strategies for Balancing Work and Family*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1997.

Pleck, J. H. "Paternal Involvement: Levels, Sources, and Consequences," In M.E. Lamb (Ed.), *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, 3rd Ed., New York: Wiley, 1997, pp. 66-103.

Ritchie, J. G. Personal interview, 1 December 1992.

Shellenbarger, S. "Work and Family: These Telecommuters Just Barely Maintain Their Office Decorum," *Wall Street Journal*, 24 September 1997, B1.

The World Congress on Families, Declaration found at <http://worldcongress.org>.

Toffler, A. *The Third Wave*, New York: Morrow, 1980.