

Navigating Family and Service

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Introduction

Serving others helps to bring balance and harmony to our lives. Stress management research has found that staying involved in meaningful service projects can be beneficial to our health. Finding a balance between giving service to others and taking care of ourselves is the key.

In West Virginia, Community Educational Outreach Service members give far more than the 144,000 hours reported. At the rate of \$17.19 per hour, their service in 2003 was worth \$2,475,360. This lesson explores where service fits in relationship to family, work, and self.

Navigating Family, Work, and Self

Navigating family and service means finding balance among all the priorities in our lives. The problem is where to start – the list is so long! Try dividing your priorities into three major categories: *family*, *work*, and *self*. It is easier to balance three major areas. The truest priorities of life fit within these three balance points.

Family is easily accepted as a top priority. Work is a daily necessity. Some things – spirituality, for example – may fit into all three categories.

The third area – the *self* – is the challenge for most people. It seems self-centered, and we think there are more important areas. However, *self* is critical. The best way to serve others is to take care of ourselves.

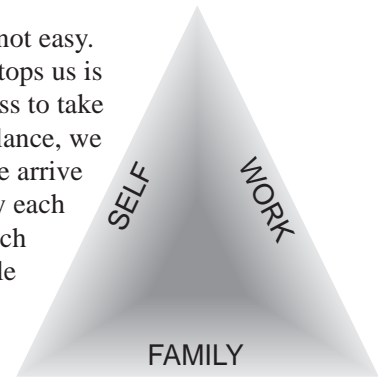
Although self includes service, there is a necessity for balance within this point. Some days we need to do something for our “inner” self – take a nap, exercise, meditate. Doing them will make you a better parent, friend, spouse, or co-worker. Other days, our “outer” self needs to be a priority, like calling a friend to cheer them up or volunteering with the food pantry.

Daily Balancing – Working the Triangle

Let’s consider *family*, *work*, and *self* as a triangle. It is stable because each side is independent of the other two but also supports the other two.

The danger lies in letting less important things get ahead of these priorities or neglecting one side of the triangle. Most unbalance is the result of bad habits. Working the triangle daily – setting one priority for each side each day – helps us to gain and maintain control.

It is simple, but it is not easy. The only thing that stops us is our own unwillingness to take the time. To be in balance, we need to think until we arrive at the highest priority each day for each side. Each priority may be a little thing – reading with a child, scheduling a meeting, or taking a walk. Write them down and do them! It changes our habits of thinking, brings clarity to our days, and trains our minds to consider all three sides each day.



Volunteering with Your Family

Navigating family and service means remembering that the triangle is connected! Volunteering together helps our children and grandchildren develop the habit. It strengthens families and communities and develops a new generation of dedicated volunteers.

Connecting Families and Community. Values like kindness, empathy, respect, friendliness, and tolerance are easily learned by experience. Benefits to families who volunteer together are:

- spending “quality time” with one another
- developing a common bond while doing something worthwhile
- getting to know family members in a new way
- gaining new respect for family members
- having a shared experience as a wonderful family memory
- accomplishing a goal together
- having something more to talk about

Choosing a Project. Start with a family meeting in which everyone participates. It may take more than one meeting. Make the following lists:

- current projects of family members
- everyone’s interests
- what we know how to do
- what we would like to learn
- service project ideas

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Use the “round robin” technique of going around the circle, giving everyone an opportunity to contribute. Next, everyone marks two favorites on the service project list. The item with the most marks becomes the family project. It may be good to start with a one-time project. Once the family is committed to a service project, take it seriously and follow through. This method also works great for clubs.

Volunteering with Your CEOS Club

When they volunteer together, CEOS clubs gain many of the same benefits as families. Service can strengthen the club and relationships among members. Volunteering together can attract new members. County projects help members get to know people from throughout the county.

Steps Toward Care of Self

Often the “outer” service aspect of *self* is overflowing. We may need to decide what we are not going to do or choose to do something later. The challenge is taking care of the “inner” *self*. We feel guilty when we manage to carve out some time to do nothing, to read a book, or to sit in silence. However, this is the only way to recharge our batteries and maintain balance.

Eliminate Time-wasters. Dealing with the daily time-wasters helps us to find time. Try the following:

- get up on time
- watch less TV
- consolidate tasks and errands
- reduce interruptions
- avoid busy work
- don't read junk mail
- edit your reading
- turn down some invitations
- use phone, e-mail, and computer effectively
- stop fussing

Taking Care of Self. Taking moments of time each day for ourselves helps to balance *self*, but maximum recharging occurs if we are able to block off large chunks of time for ourselves weekly or monthly. The easiest way is to schedule an afternoon or morning just like we would an appointment.

Start with doing nothing. Allow your mind to wander over a hot drink. Take yourself out to breakfast and let the next three hours unfold. With practice, you will learn what you need to do to take care of yourself. Whatever it is, just do it and give it your undivided attention.

Streamlining Plan

Consider these points to move toward having more balance among *family*, *work*, and *self*.

1. **Adjust your attitude.** You can change your life, but first you have to adjust your attitude.
2. **Prioritize and plan.** Make this a daily habit.
3. **Eliminate all that is unnecessary.** Don't clutter your life with possessions or meaningless obligations.
4. **Organize.** Get yourself, your things, and your schedule organized so that you can actually get things done.
5. **Work smart.** It is more effective to prioritize and use your time well than to work all the time.
6. **Volunteer together.** Create opportunities to make service a family affair.
7. **Take time for self.** Make time for yourself to keep your candle burning.

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Examining My Priorities

To learn if we are meeting our priorities, it helps to know how we are spending our time. For one week, make notes about how you spend your time and then consider changes you would like to make.

Time for	How I Spent Last Week:	How I'd Like to Spend My Week:	Changes
Family – Children			
Family – Extended			
Family – Care			
Work – Job			
Work – House			
Work – Commute			
Self – Care of self			
Self – Church			
Self – Community			