

Navigating Family and Service

*Judy Matlick, WVU Extension Agent, Jefferson County
Margaret Miltenberger, WVU Extension Agent, Mineral County*

Participants will learn:

- the balance points of work, family, self
- the link between self and service
- the benefits of volunteering as a family
- the steps for finding time

Introduction

Serving others helps to bring balance and harmony to our lives. Stress management research has found that being involved in meaningful service projects can be beneficial to our health. All people have to find their own balance between giving service to others and taking care of themselves.

Activities

Select one of these three activities to introduce the topic and to create a visual for the learners.

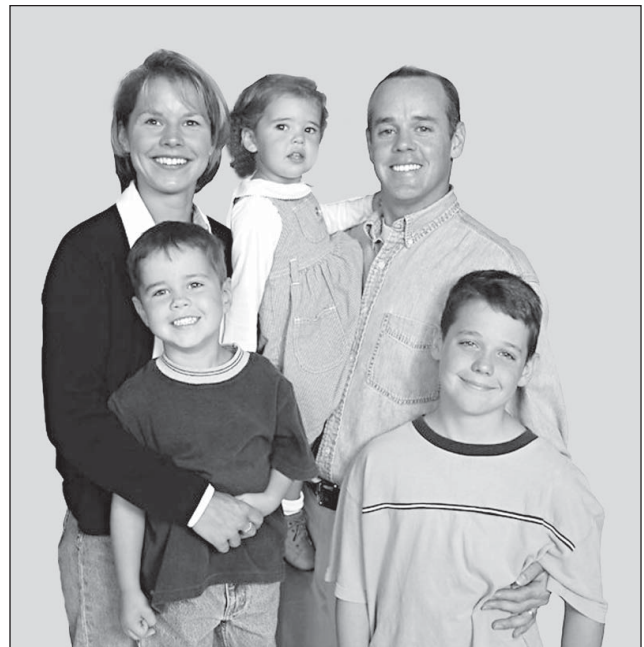
Juggling Balls. Start the lesson by juggling a ball and gradually adding more. Juggling one or two balls is easy; three can be managed, but having four or more starts to cause problems. Try adding a glass ball, which reminds us that some balls cannot be dropped. Each person decides what the glass ball represents: family, church, parents, work, and so forth.

Big Rocks First. Fill a container (glass is nice for a demonstration) full of various sizes of rocks. First, put the small rocks in and then add the larger rocks. Next, put the large rocks in and then add the small rocks. The container will hold more rocks if you put the large ones in first. This represents taking care of our priorities first.

The List. Participants create a list of all the things they have to manage. Then the group divides them into family, work, and self. Do this as a group to illustrate how we might do this for ourselves.

Volunteerism

We are a nation of volunteers. Each year, 84 million American adults volunteer, representing the equivalent of more than 9 million full-time employees at a value of \$239 billion. Nationally, nearly 90 percent of households



make donations. Almost 60 percent of teens between 12 and 17 years old volunteer. In West Virginia, CEOs members give many more than the 144,000 hours reported. In 2003, the estimated dollar value of volunteer time was \$17.19 per hour. Service is a part of most people's lives. This lesson will explore where it 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 areas: **family**, **work**, and **self**. It is easier to balance three major areas. The truest priorities of life fit within these categories.

Family is easily accepted as a top priority. Work is a daily necessity. Women who choose to stay at home have the challenging career of domestic management. Some items – spirituality, for example – may fit into all three categories.

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Understanding Self and Service

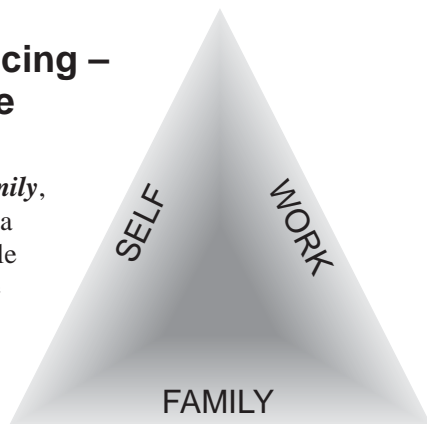
The third area – the *self* – is the challenge for most people. It seems self-centered, and we think there are more important areas. However, *self* is critical. The best way to serve others is to take care of ourselves and change ourselves for the better. As we increase our ability to serve others by taking care of ourselves, we enhance ourselves by giving service. Doing things for other people makes us better people, and it's okay to have their interest and our own improvement in mind at the same time.

The third balance point is self rather than “people,” or “church,” or “public service” because we are not in charge of these areas. But, we are in charge of what we do for people, God, and various causes.

The balance point of self includes service, but 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 us 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. Developing the habit of working the triangle daily – by setting one priority for each side – to bring balance. By narrowing down and naming the three balance point priorities, we begin to gain control.

It is simple, but it is not easy. The only thing that stops us from setting three daily priorities is our own unwillingness to spend the five minutes of thought to come up with them.

Each priority may be a little thing – reading with a child, scheduling a meeting, or taking a walk. To be in balance, we need to think until we arrive at the highest priority each day for each side of the triangle. 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

*“It is good to have an end to journey toward;
but it is the journey that matters in the end.”*

– Ursula Leguin

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

Engaging Youths. Youths who volunteer are more likely to volunteer throughout their lives. Volunteering supports a child's “asset” development, as identified by the Search Institute. Serving in the community one hour or more a week supports the external asset – empowerment – in a youth. It supports the internal assets of positive values including caring and equality.

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

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.

Support for Families of Divorce. Volunteering together is an opportunity for the noncustodial parent and child to share something special together. It is a chance to observe the child's personality and skills and to maintain communication. The child will get to know the parent in new ways. The project should be selected from mutual interests and the child's concern for a cause or a current activity.

Volunteering with Your CEOS Club

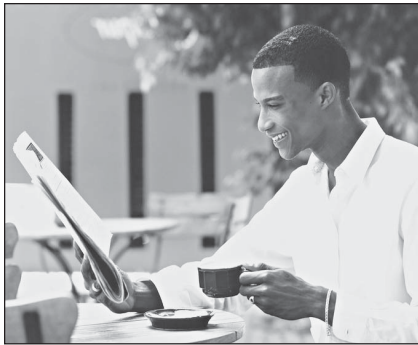
... "Can you imagine anything more bonding, more unifying, more energizing than working together to accomplish something that makes a difference in the world?" – Stephen Covey

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. If your CEOS club has been doing the same project year after year, it may be time for something new. Use the "choosing a project" outline listed above to generate new ideas that involve everyone.

Steps Toward Care of Self

For many of us, the "outer" service aspect of *self* is overflowing. We may need to decide what we are not going to do – drop an activity we no longer enjoy. We may choose to do something at a later time – serve as club president after our daughter's senior year.

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. To begin to take care of ourselves, we may need to do some housecleaning – letting go, clearing out clutter, and eliminating time-wasters.



Letting Go and Acceptance

"Give us the grace to accept the things that cannot be changed; courage to change the things that should be changed; and the wisdom to know the difference." – Reinhold Niebuhr

We waste much time and energy when our brains do not let go of things that can't be changed. Sarah Ban Breathnach writes, "Over the years I have discovered that much of my struggle to be content despite outside circumstances has arisen when I stubbornly resisted what was actually happening in my life at the present moment. When I don't continue to resist, but accept – a softening of my soul occurs."

Clearing Out Clutter

"Have nothing in your home that you do not know to be useful and believe to be beautiful." – William Morris

Mental and physical clutter can get in the way of balance. Training our minds to focus on our priorities helps get rid of the mental clutter. Organizing our space and eliminating unnecessary physical clutter help our days to run more smoothly. Ban Breathnach says, "I had never really considered how being disorganized beneath the surface had weighed upon my mind. But once I cleared away the clutter, I felt a wonderful sense of renewal, joy, and inner peace."

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

Usually when the distraction of daily life depletes our energy, the first thing we eliminate is the thing we need most – quiet, reflective time. We need time to dream, time to think, time to contemplate what's working and what's not so that we can make changes for the better.

Taking brief 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 or meeting.



Self is now a priority, and you carved out precious time. Now what do you do? If this is new, it will take practice. 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. It will be different for everyone – reading, lunching with friends, joining a Bible study, riding horses, swimming, participating in a stock market club, writing, golfing, practicing yoga, sitting quietly, knitting, learning Spanish, painting. Whatever it is, just do it and give it your undivided attention.

Family and Renewal

Some taking care of ourselves may fit with our family – bicycling, hiking, gardening, or watching movies, for example. Covey says, “. . . any renewal activity done together builds relationships as well.



Doing things together whether it is exercising, reading, worshiping, serving together makes families become more unified and connected as they join together in a shared expression of things that are important to all.” Consider developing renewal activities that can be shared together as a family.

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.** Learn to prioritize. Then make it 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. Incorporate simple, effective systems into your life so that you can actually get things done.
5. **Work smart.** Working hard is not the same as working 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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