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Balancing Work and Family

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For a few years now we have given a presentation under this title at the STMA Conference, building upon Mike's understanding of the turfgrass industry and its challenges, and Lisa's career as a Licensed Professional Counselor. We also draw upon our own experience as a dual career couple married for 26 years. We continue to learn from our attendees' great tips in this never ending quest to balance work and family, and we share a few of those strategies here.

Jobs in the sports turf industry are very stressful on both professional and personal fronts. Supervisors, coaches, players, and owners can have unrealistic expectations. You may not have the budget, the equipment, or the labor force to meet the expectations of these groups. And no matter how hard you work, expectations can be shattered by the realities of Mother Nature in a matter of minutes. And perhaps the person that is most important in meeting expectations is YOU – the sports field manager. There is no more passionate group of people than sports turf managers, and their passion and commitment to excellence often result in very unrealistic expectations of a personal nature when it comes to the job. With these pressures, it is easy to overlook the basics in maintaining healthy relationships with your spouse and family. Below are some suggestions for maintaining healthy relationships that we have learned from our own personal experience and from your colleagues in the sports turf industry.

Define rituals that matter to you and your family. Rituals create connections and connections are critical to relationships. Rituals require intention, coordination, and commitment by multiple parties. The ritual at the Goatley house has long been dinner where we sit as a family at the table every night possible (Lisa found some research data from the counseling field that showed that

eating meals as a family resulted in children having better grades, lower incidences of truancy and drug use, and being better adjusted). Even though Mike travels a lot for his job, he maintains the evening meal ritual by texting photos of what he is having for dinner that night. Hence, we still share meals, even when Mike is out of town. What rituals best fit your family? Perhaps meals don't work, but maybe it could be 'game night' or 'pizza night'. Maybe your ritual can be established for homework, bedtime or at breakfast? Find something that becomes your ritual and stick to it. And even if you are away from the family, find a creative way to still participate in the ritual.

Bank positive time. Think of this as essentially establishing your very own rainy day fund that considers personal capital rather than financial. There are seasons in your job that are by nature very busy and seasons that are less busy. During times that are inherently less busy, focus on spending more time participating in family activities when you may have greater flexibility to do so. There are also seasons in your relationships. Some life stages are more busy, such as starting a career and raising a family. These life stages often overlap with competing priorities. So as you climb the career ladder, it takes a conscientious effort on your part to bank the positive time for your spouse and family. Positive time doesn't have to involve

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exotic vacations. It often can be as simple as meeting for lunch. And if married, designating some of this banked time specifically for your spouse is very important too.

Create special connections and then stay connected.

One terrifying trend is the number of marriages that fail after 25 years. Why does this happen? At 25 years, the kids are typically out of the house and the husband and wife essentially don't know each other anymore because their lives have revolved around the children. Therefore, couples need to be very careful in creating their own special connections. There are lots of ways to establish connections. One very simple way that we stay connected is through the wallpaper on our smart phones. This gets updated once a year with a photo of us or our family from our most recent vacation. Think about how many times a day you peer at your phone, and what better way to think about your loved ones than to see their picture as the wallpaper on your phone? Then, when that picture jogs your memory, take a moment every now and then to contact your loved one. It might be a quick phone call at lunch or a text message. Find a way to connect with your significant other during the day every day.

Another strategy to stay connected is to engage in meaningful activities as a couple. For many years, we taught the 2nd grade sacramental preparation class for the Catholic Church we attended, both in Mississippi and then in Virginia. These were great opportunities for us to live our faith together, set an example for our kids, and support our church all at the same time. Think about how many opportunities there are for you and your spouse to do some great things together as a couple.

Another strategy that a lot of sports field managers already do is to involve your spouse/family in what you do. Invite them to your work. When possible, perhaps you can arrange to have your family come to the STMA Conference with you to combine work and vacation together. And the sports field manager should be sure to show interest in their spouse's work as well.

The myth of quality time. Couples are very happy when dating because they spend so much time together doing mutually enjoyable activities. Then, marriage comes along and you don't get to do as many of those fun activities any

more after having kids. A relationship requires quality time, but there also is a certain quantity of time together that is important. That concept of balance returns as you try to figure out what are the right amounts of activities for the family. We made the decision that our children would pick out one or two extracurricular activities that they would be involved in and that we would not spend all of our time on the road shuttling kids back and forth to that day's activity. We think they have turned out just fine and are not scarred for life because they didn't play every sport or instrument on the planet. Each family has to make their own choices in this area, but try to determine what is that balance between priorities and commitments.

Do the right thing.

This tip is much easier said than done! When you work in an industry that is all about determining winners and losers on the field, it is hard to accept the fact that sometimes you might win the argument, but lose the war. Don't keep score and debate about who has done more. If something needs to be done, take care of it without worrying about whose job it was. When you are in an argument with your spouse, no one wins. And don't wait for your spouse to change, you start first.

Remember the important dates.

This one is particularly important for all of the guys. Most women have an innate ability to remember the birthdays of nieces, nephews, second cousins once-removed, and so forth. Make sure that important dates are marked on your calendar. Electronic calendars make it easy to combine and share your schedule, reducing opportunities for miscommunication and hurt feelings. It is likely that a sports turf manager's job calendar will overlap with some important dates on the family calendar. It is very important that these conflicts on the calendar be understood well in advance so that there are no hard feelings about missed events or miscommunications.

Be present.

The digital age has us more connected with the world than ever before, and probably more disconnected with each other than ever before. When you spend time with your spouse and family, make sure that you are present in those moments. How many times in a day do you see friends, couples, or families gathered together, but instead of talking they are peering at their smart phone rather than engaging with each other? Are you one of those people

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too? It is an easy habit to get into and it is a hard habit to break, even for a moment. But make a conscious effort to disengage from the digital world and be present with your family when you can spend time together.

Does your personal life need help? A good sports field manager would not hesitate to work with a consultant on improving their sports fields. A licensed professional counselor can serve that same role as a consultant in your family life. Counselors are often overlooked as resources by those in male-dominated professions; counseling simply is not a strategy many consider. However, consulting with a good therapist can be the difference between happiness and frustration in your personal and professional life.

The greatest gift? That would be giving someone your time. When you give your time you are giving a portion of your life that you will never get back. No one at the end of life ever says that they wish they had worked more. What we do regret are the ways that we neglected relationships and missed opportunities to connect with the people who are most important to us. You have the opportunity now to make some changes that could make all the difference in your world.