



# HOME AND WORK: A BALANCING ACT WORTH THE EFFORT

I started this edition's column with the intent on writing about service to the community. We, in our profession, are service providers. We also have an obligation to serve the community in other ways. Serving on a nonprofit board is a great start, as is collecting and distributing donations to those in need. Our Young Lawyers Section and members do those very things. I was ready to fill the pages with examples, but then, as so often happens, I got interrupted by life. The daily responsibilities of our lives, with all of the life-trials and tribulations that occur, and the need to balance our workloads as legal and community service providers and leaders are often difficult to manage. It was only now, during the most recent life interruption, that I realized it is important to let every member of our Section know: whatever issue you are facing, you are not alone.

So many things in our lives can cause a timing conflict with work: the birth of a child, buying a new home, the loss of a pet, soccer games, family reunions, a fight with a significant other, etc. The list is endless. The internal conflict arises when you have to choose: work or life. I wish there were a simple answer.

I have a 6-year-old and have been married for 16 years, but many times, I choose work. Mind you, it is never an easy choice, but for me, to have a good balance, I have to make choices in waves, in ebbs and flows. If I have motions deadlines or a series of depositions or a rather important substantive hearing, I choose work. That choice may be for a few days or may be a month, but it is a choice I make in advance. In doing so, I can prepare my life for the interruption. That does not mean that I ever have enough time to preplan meals or

how to get the kid to and from his swim lesson. It means, instead, that I prepare my son, my husband and me emotionally for any extra time away from home.

Similarly, there are spans of time that I can dedicate to life, to the T-ball games and homework and date nights. During each of those, I never give up on the other; I simply shift my observable priority. That is certainly not to say that a fevered child will not keep me home during a "work time." What is important is my choice and the choice not to have my identity solely tied to my job, a mistake of many new lawyers.

Because of my choices to give to life and to work, my identity changes by the individual who perceives it. To some, I am Shannon Smith, Chair of the YLS and member at Kay Casto & Chaney. To many others, I am simply "Scamus's mom." Or "Mr. Smith's wife." I love

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being all of those things, and I learned early in my career that the choice I make can be the difference between burnout/anxiety/depression and, well, not.

The choice is not always so simple, and it took me years to work out a good balance. In fact, there are days where I still question whether there is such a thing as a good balance. I see the battle of demands in my husband's life, as he, too, has to juggle career priorities in order to help provide for our family. But recognizing the need for balance — and that multitasking is a complete myth<sup>1</sup> — is the first step. The second step is taking a vacation. Hey, new associates in firms, it is okay to take a vacation. You need it for your mental and emotional well-being. Just do it. Once I learned that taking time off for me (and my family) was not a cardinal sin, my happiness for both my work and my life started to increase.

There are so many different hurdles, both wonderful and terrible, that can be thrown at you and knowing that you can, and will, get through each is just as important as knowing how. After having a baby, reading *Good Enough Is the New Perfect* by Becky Beaupre Gillespie and Hollee Schwartz Temple helped me let my guard — and many of my obsessive compulsive tendencies — down enough to power through the stress of how to be a mom and a full-time professional. After getting my mom's third cancer diagnosis, I sought help through friends and exercise. We seek help for our taxes, our wills/estate planning, doctors and tutors, to name a

few. There is nothing wrong with seeking help, professional or otherwise.

There are so many options for us. The best option, but one you may not really know about, for anything you may be encountering — stress, burnout, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, co-dependency/relationship issues, conflicts with colleagues or family, compulsive behaviors, codependency, grief, trauma — is the West Virginia Judicial & Lawyer Assistance Program (<https://wvjlap.org/>). WVJLAP can, and will, help with any one of those life hurdles and will do so confidentially. There is no harm in calling.

Whatever life — or work — throws at you, know that there can be balance. Take your first step to getting there. And then take a vacation.

As my last column ends, I would be remiss if I did not say that I am proud and honored to have humbly served as Chair of the Young Lawyers Section this past year. The chain of officers to come — with Linnsey Amores as my immediate successor — will leave powerful marks on our state and in our profession, and I cannot wait to see the success stories. **WVWL**

## Endnotes

1. Gotlick, Adam, "Media multitaskers pay mental price, Stanford study shows," *Stanford News*, <https://news.stanford.edu/2009/08/24/multitask-research-study-082409/> (Aug. 24, 2009); Napier, Nancy K., Ph.D., "The Myth of Multitasking," *Psychology Today*, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/creativity-without-borders/201405/the-myth-multitasking> (May 12, 2014).