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IN SIGHT for Oregon Lawyers and Judges

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

FINDING MY BALANCE: PERSPECTIVES FROM A LAWYER PARENT

Work-life balance is the Holy Grail of professional parents everywhere, and no more so than with working lawyer parents. This elusive goal – the proverbial pot of gold at the end of the rainbow – is much discussed but seemingly just out of reach. We often read prescriptive platitudes about balance but seldom hear candidly from lawyers themselves about what works and doesn't work in their personal and professional lives. One attorney mom sat down with OAAP Attorney Counselor Kyra Hazilla and shared her thoughts about how she navigates these challenging waters.

What are your biggest challenges for balance?

Anything unscheduled or unanticipated. With a litigation practice and two kids, I have a lot thrown at me with little or no warning from people who generally view their need as urgent. Urgent and important are not the same thing. If I'm not careful and protective of my priorities, it can easily lead to a situation where I feel as if I'm being pulled in a thousand directions at once to take care of urgent tasks, but I'm not getting anything done that is actually important.

Losing perspective. As a civil litigator, I often am working and socializing within a very privileged and well-educated circle. Many of my peers are perfectionist, Type A workaholics. We're also pretty heavily invested in one of the most imposing societal institutions there is – the justice system. If I don't consciously expand my circle and my perspective, it can be easy to start thinking that how this small group sees things, lives, approaches problem solving, and how we

do things is the only real truth or reality. Getting involved at my kids' school, spending time with other parents and adults who are in completely different types of work, and talking to people about their paths can be really eye-opening.

What 2-3 things do you currently do to maintain or improve balance, and how do they help?

Prioritize. Saying no and focusing on what (1) is essential and (2) needs my personal attention. I highly recommend the books *Essentialism* by Greg McKeown, *Tribes* by Seth Godin, and *Overwhelmed* by Brigid Schulte.

Correct my perspective. Again, I have a book recommendation – *The Happy Lawyer* by Nancy Levit and Douglas O. Linder. I also love TED talks. The Work Smarter playlist and anything from Brené Brown will definitely give you food for thought. My last practice for correcting my perspective is to find a "downward comparison," that is, find someone whose situation is worse than yours in a meaningful way. This is basically the opposite of the Facebook effect where you go online and see all of your friends' awesome vacation photos with their perfect, clean, well-dressed kids. If you are feeling glum about your job, think about your friend who has been struggling with unemployment. The goal isn't to be mean-spirited; rather, it is to counteract the urge always to want more or something different from what we have. Then try a gratitude exercise. You can really start to get focused and appreciate all of your good fortune.

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Self-care. Ugh. This is a hard one even though it should be the thing we want to do first, right? Sleeping, eating well, exercising, getting massages, spending time with friends and family, dancing, listening to music, yoga, tennis, soccer, date nights, or whatever it is for you. The key for me in this department is finding something that (1) recharges me and (2) doesn't add to my stress in some other way. So, if all I have is five minutes, I might put on a song that pumps up my positive energy. If I'm feeling stressed about money, I'll exercise by going running instead of hitting a yoga class that I would have to pay for. If I've hardly seen my kids all week, I'll take them to the park to practice their soccer skills. Start small. Something is better than nothing.

Where do you find support in the legal community for parenting?

For me, the best support for parenting in the legal community comes from other attorney moms. Our profession has some unique demands and quirks. Other attorney moms get it. But (and this is a BIG but), we aren't all cut from the same cloth. And that's okay. One of the best things that has happened to me is that I've met and developed friendships with a couple of attorney moms who share similar values and goals with me. I find it very difficult to take advice from people I don't really admire personally. Usually, I just end up feeling defensive, combative, and sometimes defeated. So consider the source of any advice, and seek out sounding boards you can respect.

What are your future work-life balance goals?

Streamline and simplify everything. I feel as if I'm constantly struggling with information overload and paper and keeping track of my kids' events. I try to make sure that work and household routines are working for us as a family and that we're doing things that are important to us. It's so easy to spend time reacting that you never have time to take a breath. I want to have meaningful memories with my kids. I also want to be mindful of what I'm modeling for them about work-life balance.

Enjoy more frequent "special" everyday moments. I think back about strong childhood memories and I wonder, are we doing those things? Are we recognizing meaningful moments in our kids' lives? Are we really enjoying, for example, our kids' Saturday

morning soccer games or just running around with our hair on fire? Our kids will remember that we enjoyed them rather than being on the phone or running errands during the game. The real question is not what is the activity, but did it feel hassled or fun? Did we sit down and eat dinner together and actually talk, rather than just rushing around? Even if the rest of the week is really busy, creating space around those ordinary moments affects how I feel about the week.

Take more photos. Everything is moving so fast. I hear people saying all the time, "I can't believe it's already summer," or, "I can't believe my kids are already 12." We're so busy trying to get through what's right in front of us that it's hard to remember what happened each day unless you really pay attention. So it's partly about being mindful. I also find that taking pictures is a great way to remind yourself about what is special. I have a photo of my daughter on her birthday on my bulletin board, and it gives me a special feeling every time I look at it. Pictures mark what's important but can also give you an instant reminder and correct your perspective.

How will life be different if you accomplish your life balance goals?

My hope is that I will feel less fragmented and have more energy. I left a large firm to work at a smaller firm and then, ultimately, transitioned to a solo practice so that I could have more control over the impact that work has on my life. I had to go through this process of trying different things to figure out what works for me. Solo has been the best fit so far, but there are still things that are not perfect. I think of it like a marriage. You are constantly negotiating. It's like any relationship. You have to compromise, give and take. And all that is happening in the context of the rest of your life. Work is a big part of my life. I love what I do. But, for me, my work doesn't define me. I have an amazing family that I love. It is also important to me to be physically active and fit.

Ultimately, we are in a helping profession. It can be really hard to keep our needs separate from those around us. Our financial well-being is also tied up in how well we help people. So helping others becomes a means to provide for our own lives. That balance is tricky. I believe that I can be a good lawyer and help people without sacrificing the things that give my life

meaning.

People think that there will be some marker in life when it all becomes easier, such as your kids reaching a certain age. I believe that once something lets up, something else crops up that needs your attention (caring for aging parents, for example). There is so much about parenting that is dynamic. The needs of individual family members change. Our career needs also change. And the job market changes. Work-life balance is about figuring out how to deal with all that and be grateful.

How do you juggle your parent/professional roles and maintain both identities?

I try to take things as they come. If something isn't working, I try to change it. I don't worry too much about past "mistakes." We're all learning as we go, and nobody knows the demands of your life better than you. Instead, I focus on what I want and what is good for my family. I have an amazing husband. While he's a really great dad and is very involved with our kids, he's not a stay-at-home type, so he's really supportive of my trying to figure out how to fit my work into our life instead of fitting our life into my work. I do a lot of reading, thinking, and talking with my husband and friends about what we're struggling with and why. Balancing parenting and professional roles is really challenging. Establishing a legal career is complex. Raising kids takes stamina. Nurturing a marriage is hard. Doing all of these things at once is, hopefully, an opportunity for tremendous personal growth.

KEEPING IT ALL IN PERSPECTIVE