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The Family-Business Balancing Act

By Toddi Gutner | [Business on Main](#)

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Growing a business, like a family, takes serious commitment. We talked to 3 entrepreneurs who shared tips on successfully juggling family and business obligations.

An entrepreneur is a special breed: tireless, passionate and engaged. These qualities are necessary to drive an entrepreneur to succeed — usually against all odds. But what are entrepreneurs to do when they need to divide their energy and passion between a business and a family? The good news is, thanks to mobile technology, today's entrepreneurs are much better able to manage the ever-challenging work-life tug-of-war.

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their main way of achieving a healthy work-life balance, followed by scheduling time with family and friends (21 percent) and leaving their work at the office (11 percent).

Of course, the office is never far away for most small-business owners. Ninety-five percent work on weekends, and 97 percent use their mobile devices in the bedroom and at the dinner table. We checked in with three entrepreneurs to see what strategies they use to maintain balance in their hectic schedules.

Devices as leashes and liberators

Sara Arnell — CEO of Arnell Group, a brand strategy and marketing firm, and mother of three — says that “you can look at your devices as either leashes or liberators.” As a working mom who commutes, she relies on mobile technology to help her be a more productive leader who also stays involved in the important events happening in her kids' lives.

Thanks to smartphones, tablets, increased connectivity and advances in cloud storage and sharing, “I have the freedom of being connected,” says Arnell. But the downside is that the office never really gets left behind.

Arnell is aware that her children also use technology all the time, so she strives to set a good example by setting boundaries around when she is and isn't allowed to check into the office from home or a mobile device. “The one thing I always say is that we will social-network at the dinner table [not online]. ... As a parent, you need to set boundaries,” says Arnell, adding that no devices are allowed at the dinner table.

Work and life as one

Patty Kennedy — CEO of Kennedy Spencer, a communications firm, and mother of two young boys — isn't alone when she says that her work and life really aren't separate. “It's less of a balance beam and more like gymnastics tumbling. ... My life is not divided into parts, but overlaps,” Kennedy says, explaining that she goes from nursing to conducting conference calls to changing diapers and then developing business strategies.

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Her success centers on flexibility and the belief that “life in no way should affect my commitment to my clients,” she says. Kennedy extends the same work-life flexibility to her team. Her goal is to match “who she is with how she lives,” and she aims to have employees and clients who respect everyone's life stages. She doesn't try to hide or compartmentalize all the parts of her life.

Acknowledging that it may not be realistic to set concrete boundaries between work and life is an important step in creating a working environment that benefits you, your family and your business.

Team-building for support

Every entrepreneur can learn a thing or two from Jim Garland, president and CEO of Sharp Details, a corporate aircraft cleaning and detailing service. He

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recently returned from traveling around the world with his family for nine months. Realizing that his four kids were growing up fast and that he wanted the chance to get to know them, he figured the extended trip would be the perfect opportunity to connect with his family. "The nine months were amazing," he says. "I had virtually no business issues while I was gone, and my customers were psyched for me."

How did he do it? He put a great management team in place, which he built up over five years prior to the trip. "Don't be afraid to spend money to build your team, because what you might find is that you have a better business that gives you more freedom," says Garland. Unlike many entrepreneurs, Garland's aim was to grow his business to a point where it could continue without him.

He wisely says that "a lot of entrepreneurs get it backwards — they're so connected all the time, but they never engage their families." It turns out that since his return, his family has been spending more time together than before the trip.

Building a business that gives you the freedom to spend time with your family when you want to? That's work-life balance at its best.

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