

## HOW I GET MY WORK-LIFE BALANCE RIGHT

**By Edwin Choy**

**Co-founder and Director of Centre for Fathering**

Edwin is a pastor, and the co-founder and director of the Centre for Fathering. He gives regular talks on family life covering topics on marriage, parenting and work-life issues. Married for 18 years, he is a father of four, aged 14, 11, 7 and 5 years old.

If you are looking for a perfect model of someone who has mastered the art of balancing work and life, mine is hardly a model for you. Time is always a precious commodity and there is always too much to do. We will perhaps never achieve perfect balance in work and life but it is possible for us to order our lives so that what's important has our adequate attention.

My personal journey in maintaining work-life balance begins with the realization that a right philosophy in life makes all the difference in how we live our lives. If we get the foundation right, we will have an upright structure. As busy people in this fast paced society, we can be easily swept by all kinds of demands in life. Most of what we do unfortunately are not the most important though they may appear most urgent. But if we periodically review our life in the light of our life goals, we will have a better chance of enjoying some of the fruits of those goals.

The roles I played, just like anyone else, is varied. I am a father of 4 active children and husband to a wonderful wife. I have a full time pastoral job with a church and I am also the co-founder and director of Centre for Fathering. These responsibilities alone are enough to keep me busy. In order to maintain balance, I have at the onset determined that the three most important priorities in my life are: family, professional development, and individual growth. These are the three legs of a stool and if one is lopsided, the stool becomes unstable.

As for family, there are several practices I keep that helped me maintain a bond with my wife and children. Some rituals are significant in helping me stay connected. I try to eat together with my family as frequently as I can. On the average, I'm home for dinner about 4 times a week. These are good moments with my family. Whenever I can, I pick

the kids from their school and also bring them to the park to cycle or roller blade after dinner. Putting them to sleep is also another significant ritual that helps in bonding.

There are definitely moments when I am unable to fulfil these rituals. But as long as I stay committed, the children understand. I also try to take leave when they are having their holidays so that we can do some fun things together. Recently I had an interesting experience of taking care of the kids and the household all by myself (we have no maid) when my wife went on a holiday to Chiangmai to visit some close friends.

Rituals that help me stay connected with my wife are equally important. Having an early breakfast together, sending SMS messages to each other during the day, calling each other to touch base, helping her with some house chores are some ways we stay connected.

As for professional development, I ask myself at different stages in life if I will be fulfilled with what I am doing. I make long term plans and pursue them vigorously. At age 30, I packed up my whole family and went for a 3-year further studies stint in the US. At age 37, I probably experienced my first midlife crisis and decided that I need to do something meaningful for the society. And so I set up the Centre for Fathering (CFF). Now, I am vigorously pursuing the idea of setting up CFF Living Resources to look into pre-marital, marriage enrichment and work-life issues. But whatever I do, my family is still my priority. I have made it a point that my time with family must not be compromised.

One way I stay passionate about my work is by constantly envisioning possibilities. I enjoy dreaming new ways to effectively promote the cause of CFF and when the ideas have taken shape/concretized, I will work on them till they are accomplished. I also enjoy creating interesting family life programmes, some of which are unique in the region. By staying passionate about work, I am fulfilled professionally.

As for individual growth, I have to make space in my life where I can do things that I enjoy or have time alone to reflect on my life. I have this passion for nature. I enjoy bird watching at Khatib Bongsu or Sungei Buloh or Central Catchment areas. I also

enjoy reading about birds and nature. These days, my bird watching sessions often get pushed to a corner with the demands of work and family. However whenever my life is cluttered, I know that I need time alone to reflect and review my life goals. That's when I make intentional nature trips to unwind and reflect.

It would be hard to say that I am always sitting on a balanced 3 legged stool. It is more accurate to say that I am constantly struggling to balance on that stool. At the same time, I keep things in perspective by acknowledging that there will be times when I am busy and there will be times when I am not. I am also aware that I go through different stages in life which means the needs and demands change. Raising infants and young children is different from raising pre-teens and teens. My involvement with my children has to be redefined. My career also goes through changes. I am more concerned about 'meaning' in recent years. That means that as long as there's food and shelter, I do not get unduly stressed by the ailing economy.

To conclude, I want to share with you a wisdom, which has guided me. Socrates once said: "An unexamined life is not worth the living." Hopefully, we can all live intentional lives and not be pushed here and there mindlessly. Our work will be gone with our strength and mental abilities but our families last generations.