



Talk of the Office

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BALANCING BETWEEN office and family

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ONE of the biggest issues that both employees and employers face is balancing between the demands from home and work. Making happy the boss or other colleagues at office and the spouse and other family members at home is not an easy task. As the family structure changes, people are more used to coping with various family issues. There is no question or doubt that the work-family balance is at the centre of many office arguments and talks.

Balancing is always a complex issue, and when it is about making a balance between the boss and wife/husband, the task involves intensive time management at first. Also, career paths, gender roles, financial values and many other factors are there.

Hidden values and models from cultures, original families and family structures and other elements have an impact on the choices in ways that people often do not expect to happen or realise, and that have some far-reaching upshots for the lives.

Like so many of the challenges and predicaments of life and work, balancing family and work has no easy solution. At least it is not something like one-size-fits-all. Every person and couple is unique and different, and has their own choices and needs.

Many couples complain that they have witnessed the downsides of their parents' trying to 'do it all' and ending up very much over-extended. And, still others expect to avoid the constraints of roles and experiences that are too slender or incompatible for them. Couples do

struggle with the comparative priorities of their principles and values -- family involvement, career and materialistic goals, own growth and contentment.

The most important thing to do about such a balance: homework, intentionality and dual decision-making are the key to generating and continuing the right balance for an employee. Many couples may experience awfully strong forces keeping them aside from the precedence that they would like to see in their family. If the balance is not planned aggressively, these other forces will exist. In absence of a clear plan and promise to maintain balance, time erodes and energy evaporates, for a family of one's expectation.

So the work-family balance is a procedure and it continues to evolve. It is never a static achievement. It is important to make some big decisions such as selecting professions and jobs, timing for having children and allocating duties, roles and responsibilities that will offer the chance for a proper balance. No body can set the time for the real task; it may take place on a weekly and daily basis, and even from hour to hour. This is where couples hold the line to look after family time or allow it to fade away, where they opt to take lead of a family opportunity or allow other main concerns to get in the way.

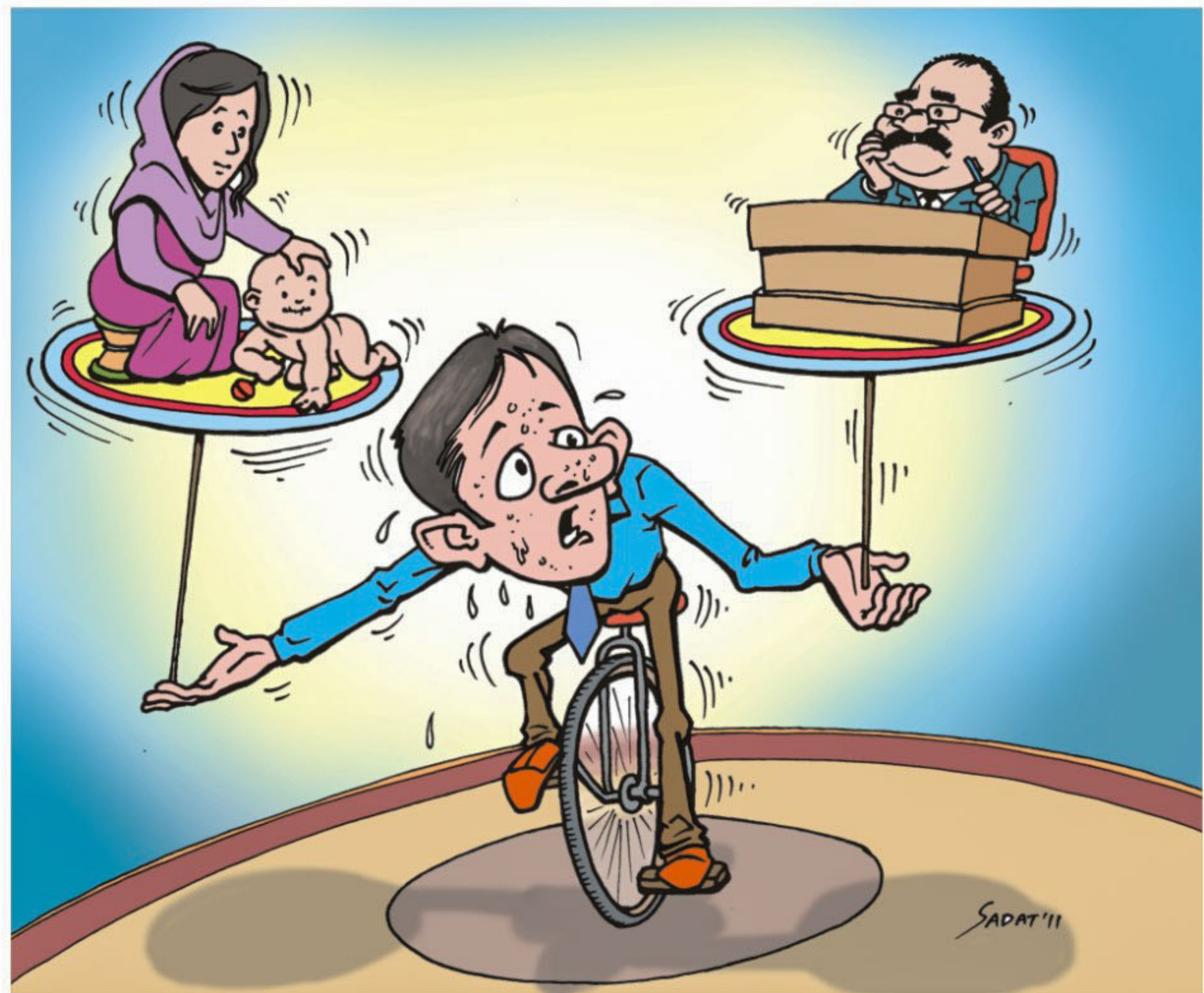
As the balance is a process and not any unchanging thing, people can and must fine-tune and adjust as needed. No decision, plan or approach can be static in this case. If it is not working or deserving, people can rethink and bring some changes. In fact, regular tactical tuning and openness to keep on target toward the main goals and

priorities is a trait of the couples who are content with their balance.

So it is also important to know when people will be able to find the right balance for them or when they will need to adjust and make a different plan. Finding the answer is not that difficult though it is different for different people. A good balance has some characteristics. A good balance will provide enough time for both work and family without expending a lot of efforts, so life feels relatively relaxed and contented. Enough back-ups will be there in a rightly balanced situation so that the officegoer can tackle with ease the minor emergencies like doing the groceries, taking the kids to tutors or taking a sick in-law to doctor. And the person will find him on the right personal and professional path for his future.

A number of important decisions reign over across the balancing process. One of the big balance decisions is when to become parents, if this is in their plans. Experts suggest allowing an adequate post-marriage attachment period with the partner before having kids, even if they have been together for a considerably long period before getting wed-locked. And experts recommend a minimum delay of one year before trying to be parents. There are other issues also, including reconciling personal, financial and career developments with preferred timing for having kids, and some biological imperatives.

Another key decision is whether both the partners will work, and the nature of their jobs. These decisions will be influenced by the financial and career goals of the man in the family, the amount of satisfaction he finds at work, his energy levels, and his willingness to take on huge



involvement in some aspects of their children's lives. In such a case, it is better to talk to both working and at home parents about the pros and cons they have seen.

There are some pro-work factors such as possible income, career stability and improvement, workplace intellectual and social motivation. The unfavourable factors include lesser time spent with family, exhaustion, and weekends dominated by domestic chores.

If the motives for working are basically financial, one should look carefully at the net benefit after deducting tiffin and transportation costs, work outfits and other work-related costs, especially if the salary is low.

A healthy balance also needs:

- Sharing housework with spouse;
- Joint decision-making by husband and wife;
- Valuing family as the highest pri-

ority over professional responsibilities and advancement;

- Deriving enjoyment and purpose from work;
- Prioritising family play and fun;
- Living simply, giving up some material amenities to reduce financial pressures and work hours;
- Proactive decision-making: "If you just define success as what you do at work, then that is all you will do. Whereas, if you define success as having a happy family and a happy marriage and [being] happy at work, then you make all those things happen."

Researchers found that individuals who talk with work associates about family and with their family about work are more content and higher functioning in both arenas. Organise division of labour and chores with your partner so that you each cover those tasks that are easiest and most enjoyable for you. Try to let go of the responsibilities your

partner has accepted or you have delegated to others. Try not to control or criticise. Take care of yourself first whenever feasible. You cannot do very effectively for others if you are depleted.

Always be professional at work. Arrive at work early; leave work on a strict schedule. Block out work when at home or confine it to strictly scheduled times. Minimize weekend work. Be prepared for family emergencies that call you away from work. Train subordinates to cover responsibilities when you are away from work.

These are widely accepted and prescribed suggestions.

It will be hard but necessary to accept compromising some of the targets to protect higher priority involvements and activities. These strategies are critical to maintaining a life based on one's true values.

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