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BETWEEN WORK AND LIFE THERE'S BALANCE.BUT DO YOU HAVE TO SACRIFICE CAREER GOALS TO GET IT?

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PHILADELPHIA There is one significant lesson Joe Oringel learned while a student at the Wharton School: leave the office by 6:30 p.m. to have supper at home with family.

"My family is important, and I make time for them during the middle of the day, between business meetings," said Oringel, a 38-year-old father of three and rising star at a top accounting firm in Charlotte, N.C. "During the times I am traveling, or have to work late, I call at key times like prayer time and bedtime."

Oringel graduated two years ago from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, which produced such hard-charging workaholics as Donald Trump and Warren Buffett. But for the last three years, the prestigious business school based in West Philadelphia has set up an innovative "work-life integration" course to show students how to juggle work, family, and community without sacrificing career goals.

"The big idea is that most people think ! work and the rest of life is antagonistic of each other, and that you got to find balance," said Stewart Friedman, the management professor who teaches the popular elective course.

"What I am focusing on is helping people think about themselves as leaders at work, home, and community so that their goal is to improve performance and results in all the different parts of their lives by looking at the whole."

Other business schools are starting to include courses that examine work-life issues in their curriculum. Harvard Business School includes work-life courses in its executive education classes but not in its MBA program. Such schools as MIT Sloan School of Management and the University of Connecticut School of Business address work-life topics in other courses. Stanford Graduate School of Business will offer a class next fall that examines how people integrate work and life.

Such topics are being taught in the classrooms because many professionals in the business world say they feel overworked and would like to spend more time on their personal lives. One recent study by the Families and Work Institute, a New York research group, indicated the pattern existed with all workers, with slightly more than half of Americans with jobs saying they feel overwhelmed by their work at least some of the time and a third saying that was always the case. A common solution to this feeling of imbalance is to trade career success for a fuller personal life. But Friedman, a former Ford executive, teaches his Wharton students a step-by-step process: Take an inventory of what is important in their work and personal lives, build support from employers and family members who believe in those goals, and experiment to find the best way to accomplish all of them.

Employers have an interest in helping their best workers integrate their lives, to avoid losing them to burnout. Jen Jorgensen, a spokeswoman for the Society for Human Resource Management, said the younger generation of employees places work-life balance as their number two concern, behind compensation.

"These are the people who will be taking over the workplace, so if an organization does not address these issues, then you can bet they will go to companies that will," she said. According to Jorgensen, nearly 60 percent of companies offer flextime programs and one-third offer full-time workers such options as temporary part time or telecommuting.

There is growing evidence that employers do not necessarily get more out of managers and others who spend the most time on the job.

A 2003 study by the Families and Work Institute found executives who worked just five fewer hours a week were happier and more productive than others who worked longer hours.

Other studies suggest Americans are working more than they have in the recent past. Behind that trend, said Bonnie Michaels, president of Management for Work and Family Inc., a Chicago consulting firm, is self-imposed pressure from fear of losing a job or from a corporate culture that still quietly stresses "face time" in the office, short vacations, and long hours.

Some analysts say a more basic factor is corporate pressure for greater productivity in the face of international competition, which globalization has intensified.

"In many ways, the very same skills that make you successful in our global economy being able to multitask, to switch skills and take interruptions that is what makes us overworked," said Lois Backon, vice president of the Families and Work Institute.

In the institute's study that detailed stress in the workplace, overworked employees said they made more mistakes and they were depressed. The study, which surveyed 1,003 wage and salaried workers, showed on average Americans took about 14 vacation days a year. Although slightly more women said they felt overwhelmed, the study indicated that men and women, married and single employees were about equally overworked.

So concerned are business, economic, and health leaders about an epidemic of overworking that Michaels and others are leading a broad-based campaign called "Take Back Your Time."

For three years, Friedman has been teaching Wharton students how to do that and preserve a commitment to a career.

His students in Philadelphia returned to class this month after being instructed to get co-workers and family members to tell them what was expected of them. Then, the students were to find creative ways to meet those personal and work expectations.

Keith Wells, 30, a financial coordinator at the University of Pennsylvania, told his classmates he was surprised when his pregnant wife said she wanted him to accompany her to morning doctor appointments. "I never knew it was an issue with my wife," he said.

Wells negotiated a deal with his boss to come in one hour later and leave an hour earlier to spend more time with his wife in exchange for sacrificing his lunch shift. The arrangement made his work day more hectic because Wells has less time to complete his tasks, but he is more energized at work and can spend extra time with his family in the morning, he says.

Like Wells, the other professionals in Friedman's class said they found it difficult to have such personal conversations with their supervisors, co-workers, and family members, but each student said it was refreshing and helped them substantially improve their work and personal lives.

Still, Friedman believes it will take a full generation for employers to understand that the most successful workers are satisfied with all aspects of their lives.

"The guys that are running companies now, a lot of them are what I call 'happy workaholics,'" Friedman said. But "you have to realize everyone does not share the same values as you that guy coming up could have the highest potential for being the next CEO of the company, but he may also have three kids and a teenager, and he is not going to give them up for you. And so, you have to figure out ways to flex for him, but do it in a way that will help you in the long run." Tatsha Robertson can be reached at robertson@globe.com.

SIDEBAR 1 :

HOW TO JUGGLE IT ALL

PLEASE REFER TO MICROFILM FOR CHART DATA.

SIDEBAR 2:

OVERWORKED AMERICA

PLEASE REFER TO MICROFILM FOR CHART DATA.

Caption:

PHOTO CHART

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