

# idea corner

## **The Incredible Balancing Act**

“This is the third night meeting this week. When are you going to stay home? Why do you have all these meetings? Can you put on a program this Saturday for our group? Do you have to work again this Saturday? Can’t someone else do it? Can you serve on our advisory committee? If your clients call one more time this evening . . .” Sound familiar? As Extension faculty, we’re constantly faced with conflicting expectations from clients and the important people in our lives.

The need to set life priorities and integrate home and work roles into a lifestyle that’s supportive and nurturing for the Extension professional is part of a changing attitude about work. In

response to this changing attitude, the Maine Association of CES Faculty (MACESF) sponsored a two-day conference for Extension staff and their families to address the conflicts created by personal and professional time demands and to identify options for addressing those conflicts.

With child care provided, the conference served as a forum for family-connected and single faculty to share their experiences and articulate personal and professional expectations.

Within the first-day discussion groups, participants identified a range of options for addressing issues such as extended work hours and its impact on family life, client expectations that single faculty members should have more time to work evenings and weekends, two-income families trying to juggle busy work and family schedules while nurturing the husband-wife relationship, and the need for each of us to find alone time to renew ourselves.

From these discussions, participants expressed the need to set life priorities that are translated into time spent for self, a spouse, family, friends, and work. Participants agreed that if life priorities were clearly established, then decisions about personal and work time commitments could be more easily made and supported.

Through a series of career/life planning exercises during the second day, participants identified personal and work priorities, the skills and resources needed to realize those priorities, and the alternative strategies for making them a reality.

After developing individual action plans for achieving their life goals and exploring their fantasies, participants shared their plans with others who

offered support and encouragement for attaining those goals.

An evaluation conducted six months after the conference showed that the conference reached its objectives in providing an opportunity for faculty and their families to identify not only the issues and conflicts surrounding one's personal and professional roles, but alternative and realistic ways to address those needs. A majority of the participants noted that they've begun to implement their action plans that focus on ways to address the conflicts in their home and work lives.

On an organizational level, the conference has encouraged the creation of a task force of the faculty association that's exploring the need for and feasibility of alternative work arrangements in the Maine Extension Service.

As an organization that has a major goal of strengthening family life, the Maine Cooperative Extension Service will be supporting this goal as it becomes responsive to the changing needs of its employees.

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