

FamilyEXPO²⁰⁰²

STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE & FAMILY

A one-day parenting seminar full of effective and practical ideas and strategies

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An Edited Transcript of the Presentation by
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on

Life Balance: Finding Peace and Harmony in a Busy Life

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I would like to start with a story. It's called the Siesta.

An American investment banker was at the pier of a small coastal Mexican village when a small boat with just one fisherman docked. Inside this small boat were several large yellow-finned tuna. The American complimented the Mexican on the quality of his fish and asked how long it took him to catch them.

The Mexican replied, "Oh, only a little while." The American said, "Why didn't you stay out longer and catch more fish?" The Mexican responded with, "I have enough to support my family." The American then asked, "But what do you do with the rest of your time?" The Mexican fisherman said, "I sleep late. I fish a little. I play with my children. I take a siesta with my wife Juanita. I stroll into the village each evening where I sip wine and play the guitar with my friends. I have a wonderful life."

The American scoffed. "I am a Harvard MBA and I could help you. You should spend a little more time fishing and then with the proceeds buy a bigger boat. With the proceeds from the bigger boat you could buy several boats and eventually you could have a fleet of fishing boats. Instead of selling your catch to the middle-man you could sell your catch directly to the processor, eventually opening your own cannery. You would control the product, the processing and the distribution. You would need to leave this small coastal fishing village and move to Mexico City, and then Los Angeles and then New York, where you could run the enterprise."

The Mexican fisherman asked, "But how long will that take?" To which the American replied, "Fifteen to twenty years."

"But, what then?" the fisherman asked. The American laughed and said, "That's the best part. When the time is right you can announce a IPO and sell your company stock to the public and become very rich. You could make millions!"

"Millions? And then what would I do?" the fisherman questioned.

The American said, "Then you could retire and move to a small, coastal, fishing village where you could sleep late, fish a little, play with your children and take siestas with your wife - stroll into the village each evening, where could sip wine and play the guitar with your friends."

Sometimes we just follow the wrong goals. We don't know what's really important in life. We don't have our priorities right. The fundamental principle of finding peace in a busy life is to know what is real. What is it that is real? Then follow what is real. Follow what is really important.

I'd like to have you think for a moment. If you have a pen or a pencil I have a couple of questions and I would like you to sketch down the answers. I would like you to answer this question: At the end of your life what will you say were your most important accomplishments? So, as you are looking back on your life, what do you hope will be your most important accomplishments? They could be in any area of personal or professional pursuits. It would be what you would hope if all your dreams came true. Along with that, what would you be honoured for? - which would relate to what your accomplishments would be. You will be remembered by whom for what? You will have made contributions in the areas of what?

The answers to these questions are very important. They are the heart of what peace will be. Now, just for a moment I will pretend you are one of my classes and I want you to close your eyes for a second. I would just like to see by a show of hands how many of you mentioned something to do with family? Now we're at a Family Expo so its not to surprising that most of you raised your hand and that family was something that was very important. As I do this with other groups, family is important to most groups.

A lot of research shows that peace comes when you spend your days, your time and your energy on something that you value. Isn't it interesting how in some situations you can go for hours and hours and days a week, you can spend all types of time and you feel invigorated because of it. Whereas other times you will fall asleep in just a short amount of time or you will be angry and frustrated.

Let me use singing as an example. Individuals singing can have experiences where we feel great and feel satisfaction and sound good, but when we sing with others in harmony we produce a fuller sound and it isn't just an individual experience, but a group that came together. That's what we need to do with our families. We need to be able to have those types of experiences that bring them together.

At Brigham Young University I have students who have very little life experience. They are looking forward to having a very happy family life in the future. I have them do an assignment which is to write a three or four page paper, just specifically describing what their family life will be like if all their dreams come true. They come back and they have really unrealistically wonderful views of how things are, but then we do the second part of the assignment.

In the second part of the assignment we have a fish bowl and in the fish bowl are 35 crises that families typically face in the course of life - and they are serious things. There are things like - the spouse runs off with another person, or there is a divorce, or a child is born with spina bifida, or a spouse loses a job. I tell them that the research shows that on the average a family will have three of these kinds of problems in their lives. Some of those are self-inflicted but other times things happen that is nobody's fault - they just happen. How you harmonise those trials into life has as much to do with happiness as trying to get the right techniques or learning the right things. Now I know many of your are struggling with problems and sometimes they are harder than you can bear. My heart goes out to us in those kinds of situations.

My business is to the study the interface between paid work and family life. That's what I was paid to do at IBM and what I study as a research professor at BYU. Trying to answer the question "How do you provide for and nurture a family at the same time and with harmony?"

For many years the primary metaphor for studying work and family has been the BALANCE metaphor. How do you find balance between work and family life? The metaphors we think of in our own life are very influential, and in fact if you want to be happier in life you can redefine your life metaphor. The Balance metaphor has a few problems because it's based on a scarcity of time.

The basic solution is to find the right amount of time to spend with your family and the right amount of time to spend at work and if you find that balance, why then, maybe you will be happy.

A professor from Rutgers recently released a study on balance in life and found out that the people who were balanced were actually quite unhappy. Those that had more commitment to work than family were even more unhappy. Those who had a greater commitment to family than to work were the happiest. Now, the problem with this is that it assumes a zero sum game. That is, what you give to work, you take away from family and vice versa.

A musical metaphor is better than a balance metaphor - finding harmony between work and family. If you have a harmony metaphor then peace is available even when you are very busy. If you think of your life as a symphony that you compose, there will be some times in that symphony where you are very fortissimo and all of the instruments are coming in together and it's crazy, but it's wonderful. Now if you were writing a symphony you would not write one where it was all that way. You would need to punctuate it with largo sections where it was more peaceful and contrite so there could be some counterpoint. So as a director and composer of your own life you need to think of the instruments or roles that harmonise versus those that are dissident and be aware of those roles. Remember that tempo, dynamics and genre are all important. The pace that we have in western society is just too fast. It makes it more difficult to find harmony and peace.

Let me share with you some ways to create harmony. The first is to create energy. In my field, researchers have found that time is not the most important variable - energy is. The most important thing is the amount of energy that an activity consumes or creates. So the more that we can reduce energy depleting activities the better. What are some activities that you just do not look forward to, that you would just as soon as do without? What are some of those activities that you do not really need to do?

The second way to create harmony is to increase energy-creating activities. Each of you has certain things that you're excited about, that bring you energy. They're something that you just love to do. I have an activity like that, it's called jogging. I love to go for a jog in the morning. I love to go for a run for about half an hour or 45 minutes. There is no place closer to God than when your out about five miles, I guess that would be about 8 kilometres and the endorphins are pumping through your system. It's just like a transcendental moment. If I jog for half an hour it literally gives me an hour and a half of energy.

A few years back I had several important positions that were taking a lot of my time and Juanita just got frustrated and she said, "How could you have time to go jogging when you have all of this to do?", and I said, "I don't have time not to go jogging. I need the energy." Now Juanita and I have found that we can walk together. It provides couple energy for us. We are able to take that time and exercise and have more energy for our relationship.

Sometimes though we need to look after one another and our energy. One moment in my marriage comes to mind. We were in Atlanta and I had just been promoted with IBM. The first five years I was with IBM we lived in three states. That's what IBM stood for "I've been moved". I had the most wonderful career assignment. It was a make-a-career project. It would take just about six months to get it done, and so I was working twelve hours a day, six days a week. At the time Juanita had just had our fourth child, and so we had four children that were 8 and younger. This job was so exciting I was on a high, most of the time.

Now, I left home about 6 o'clock in the morning before the kids were up, and I'd get home at 8 o'clock at night, just in time to kiss them goodnight. And then of course I was tired, so I'd hit the sack a little while after that. Something happened in that year of 1984 that changed my life. We

bought our first PC1 computer with 16k of memory and one floppy disk of 160k of memory. No hard drive.

One morning I was up at 5 o'clock getting something done on the computer and I noticed a document file that was entitled Depression. I thought that's an interesting title because I did not create it. So I opened it up and there was a description of my wife and the feelings that she was having. She felt it was just too hard. She had no support. We had moved away from all family and friends. I recognized that her energy level was way down. My energy level was way up. So we visited about this. I had about two months left there and so I could not abandon the project, but I could do some things differently. I asked her, "What do you love to do more than anything else?" I was hoping she would say going out with me or something like that. But what she said was she liked to play baseball. She liked to go to the library and she liked to read. So we struck a deal that Thursdays were her days. So I would come home at a reasonable hour on a Thursday, about 5 or 6, and she would just take off. That gave her some energy and even just looking forward to that event gave her energy. So as you look at your life, find those things that create energy and then look to your spouse and your children. What are the things that they love that bring them energy? How can you facilitate them having those kinds of experiences?

As we were driving on the Gold Coast yesterday I had the idea that it would be an energy-building experience for my daughters to go bungee jumping. I knew that would give them some energy, and indeed it did. I got it on video when they came down, and they were just on the top of the world. Along with this energy, the research shows us that those that are the happiest are a little bit unrealistically optimistic. They think, "Well, we can just pull this off!" I would give that as good advice. Be a little bit unrealistically optimistic about your relationships, about your future, about what could happen.

I do give some seminars on work and family and just one of the tips I give people is to use your commuting time as an energy-building activity instead of an energy-depleting one. Maybe, don't try to go home so fast. Put on some good audiotapes or music that brings you some energy while you're going home.

Another tip I give to people: If you want to strengthen your family - look at your job and find those activities that give you energy and choose to do those right before you come home from work. So that instead of being on a low when you come in the door, you are more on a high.

The next principle is to increase quality time. All time is not created equal and there are some times that are more valuable than other times. So a principle is to optimise a mix of your time. Wherever possible do your work when you are the most productive. Many more people now have flexibility in their work hours. Choose to do work when it is more productive to be done and choose to spend time with your family when it is more productive.

For example, I'm an early morning person by nature. I normally get up at 4 or 4.30 in the morning and I am excited about life. That is actually my most productive writing time - my most productive time to do a project when I have to think. I can work from 4 to 6.30 in the morning and get four or six hours worth of work done because I am just that much more productive at that time. Now, it's a highly unproductive time for my family. There is no one that wants to get up that early and so I am not sacrificing anything by working with vigour at that time. There are other times that are higher quality times for my children. You know bedtime is a very high quality time. When my daughter comes home from a date at 11 or 12 at night, that time when she comes in the door is a very high quality time. She is anxious to talk about things and making the effort to be there at that time is important. And crossroads times of all sorts are very good.

In 1989 I took a 6 month paternity leave from IBM. It was at the birth of our seventh child and so we both stayed home. Juanita took care of the baby and I took care of the other kids. It was a remarkable experience. I had never been home before when my kids came home from school. Never. When I saw them it would be 6 o'clock at night. I'd say, "Abbey, how was school?" and she'd say, "Fine." And that would be it. But when they came home at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, being home at that crossroads time, it was like a fire hydrant – they were just very willing to talk. I have a job now that allows me to be home at 3 o'clock for a day or two a week. It's very high quality time with the family members.

Another principle is that of shadow time. Shadow time is when you are doing two things at one time. When you do that you have to choose activities that go well together. I have this picture here of a husband and wife who are doing five things at the same time. They are walking the dog. They are exercising. They are getting some talking time in. She is saying, "I love you." And they are expressing appreciation for each other and building their emotional bank account.

There are a lot of activities that go together well. The principle is to seek harmony and avoid dissidence. Taking children on business trips is something that can work very well to have high quality time. We have adopted this slogan from a famous credit card slogan: Never leave home without them. Whenever we run an errand – going to do some shopping or something, we make sure that we take a child with us. Having nine children, it's precious for the children to have one-on-one time with a parent. So we take that opportunity to take them with us. Sometimes the talk that happens on the way to the store is worth more than the visit to the store itself.

Sometimes you need to focus on just one thing. One of my pet peeves is that in today's workforce, we don't have boundaries between work and family. It's not uncommon for someone to have a cell phone and that cell phone can ring any time of the day or night – or a pager – or when you work at home having a difficult time of getting away from the office. One suggestion is take your vacation and really get away from whatever your work is, so that you can focus completely on your family for a period of time.

I worked from my home for IBM for about 10 years. And every time I got a new manager I would have to train them that this was OK to do, because my office was in New York and I was working from my home-office in Utah. I got a manager that did not like this. She was actually trying to get rid of me any way she could think of. We went to Hawaii on vacation and she said to me that she wanted me to check in and answer e-mails every day. She asked if I could attend a meeting in New York at 9 am via conference call from Hawaii. I said that I would do it. Then I found out that it was 3 am in Hawaii. Sitting in the bedroom, hearing the surf through the open window and listening to this tense conference call at IBM where there is so much anger, I said to myself, "What am I doing? She is going to be mad at me anyway. I am just going to take this vacation." So I locked up the laptop and just refused to check any of my messages. We had five days then of bliss. It was very renewing. When I got home, sure enough, she was very mad at me. But she would have been at me anyway, so why worry about it?

Also listening is very important. When you're saying something that is important or being told something that is important, drop whatever else it is that you're doing. My wife loves to get things done. But whenever I start to talk to her she goes and starts doing something else at the same time – practising shadow time. But I want to look into her eyes, to read how she is feeling about what I'm saying. It's just really important, when it is time to listen to loved ones, to be focused on what they are saying.

Being flexible in the workplace is very important, and there are so many opportunities now that are coming up. My research clearly shows that those individuals who work flexibly are more

committed to the organisation, are more productive, as well as better able to manage their personal and family life. In the US now, 55% of companies offer the option of working from home at least one day a week. Only 20% of employees, which adds up to about 11 million, work from home at least one day a week. As I mentioned, I worked from home for about 10 years for IBM. When I first did it I was one of 5 people in the company that worked from home. Ten years later, I just completed a survey, more than 100,000 IBM employees throughout the world work at least one day a week from home during regular business hours. It's something that's really a possibility that's just starting to take root.

Let me tell you an experience I had working from home. One particular time I was recording my voice-mail greeting like I did every day. At the same time my wife was folding clothes in the laundry room across from my home office. My daughter Emily was six at the time. She had gotten out of the shower, could not find any clothes to wear and came down stairs draped only in a towel. When my wife saw Emily she said with a loud giggly female voice, "Look at you! You have no clothes on!" When I listened to my voice-mail greeting after several people commented on it, what I heard was, "This is Dr Jeff Hill of IBM Global Workforce Diversity. 'Look at you! You have no clothes on!' I'm not available right now...".

There are a lot of things that you can do individually that will help you to have peace and harmony in your life and in your family life. Eating the right foods at the right time is important. We are what we eat.

It's important to have a good night's sleep so that you wake refreshed and this adds to better peace and harmony. Recent studies show that well over half of Americans are sleep-deprived. What's the definition of sleep-deprived? If you sit without moving for ten minutes and fall asleep, you are sleep deprived. So I can see some of you are sleep-deprived right here! The average American gets 6.7 hours of sleep per night but studies have shown that the average adult needs 8.2 hours of sleep, so we are one and a half hours short. The studies show that those who are awake 20 consecutive hours, which is easy to do, have the same reaction time as someone who has a blood alcohol level of 0.15. In other words, you are drunk if you stay awake too much! In the United States, more people are killed by people who fall asleep at the wheel, than are killed by drunk drivers. We do need to have sleep and it's a key to our finding peace and harmony in our busy lives.

Laugh heartily, it's healthy. Studies show that if you have three belly laughs per day, that you're much more healthy, that you're much more pleasant. You'll make a better husband, a better wife, a better father, a better mother. So laugh heartily.

Take a walk - walking is considered to be the perfect exercise. Juanita and I, when we have something to discuss, why we walk, and we find that's the best way of doing things.

Simplify your life. There is a group that's advocating voluntary simplicity. This group lets go of responsibilities, they let go of material possessions, more than is needful. So reduce the number of activities you do. Ask yourself, "What are the activities that I could give up?" to give yourself more time. Focus on your real priorities - what are the things that are most important to you? Spend your time on those. To do this you need to learn how to say no. Now some of you are pleasers. Whenever someone asks you to do something you just say, "Sure, I'll be glad to do that." You can't do that. There's not enough time to do everything. So being able to say no, to say no kindly, is an important skill. And let go of material possessions, compose a life of modest means and focused time.

The last principle I'd emphasise is: Spend your time building caring relationships. Don't invest your time in things. Invest your time in relationships that last - the relationships of family and other loved

ones, of those that you care about. Do something for someone else. Live while you have life to live. Love while you have love to give.

Also, resolve unfinished business. Unfinished business is when we have people whom we have not forgiven - that are still bothering us in our life. Maybe you had experiences with abuse or some other terrible things. We need to learn to let go of that and to finish that in an effective way. And remember life is short.

I'd like to conclude in the last 7 minutes here today with a story.

This last summer, well it's over a year ago now, two very important events came up in my life. The first was an occupational event. IBM approached me and asked me to do the largest work and family survey in the history of mankind. It would be in 48 countries, 55,000 invitees, just a wealth of data. As a professor, having that kind of a data set would make life very easy on the research for my job plus, I was very flattered that they would want me to do it. It was really the opportunity of a life time.

At a very similar time period, we realised that this would be the last summer that our family would be together. We had a son who had been abroad for a couple of years doing some church service and he was going to be home. We had another son who was about ready to leave. This summer was the last time we were going to be together, so we planned the granddaddy of all vacations. We planned 30 days to go more than 9,000 miles and to visit all of the eastern United States, up into Canada, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, visit all the American history sites and all the places that we wanted to see. We like to take vacations so it's not unusual for us to take a 15 passenger van and fill it up and just go places and camp for weeks on end, although this would be the most ambitious.

As it was lined up, our survey was going to finish in March. I could do all the data analyses and present the results to the IBM executives and be done at the end of April and then we could take off in the middle of May and go on our trip. But, as fate would have it, the survey was delayed and there were problems with the translations. We had 20 translations that we had to do. Again and again they were delayed - weeks and weeks. As it turned out, the survey and the time that I would be needing to do the data analysis would be taking place in the month of May and the month of June.

I was between a rock and a hard place. I was committed to do this job. It was something I really wanted to do, but I had committed to go with my family. It was unlikely that we would be able to have time like this together again, so what should we do? You know, there was just no solution to it, no solution at all. But then, I thought outside of the box, and I decided to draw my manager in on the problem. She was a nice person at IBM now (she had had cancer and that had mellowed her out to the degree that she appreciated what was really important in life). I just explained the situation to her and we brainstormed. We thought, "What can we do to get both of these things done?"

And so what we came up with is that instead of taking a 30 day vacation, I would take a 38 day vacation. How would that be the solution? Well, we would drive out to New York and IBM would pay for us to stay at the Hilton Hotel while we were in New York. I would work for a week, 80 hours, while my family went and saw the Statue of Liberty and a variety of things. Then I would proceed to go with my family on the rest of our trip, with the caveat that once a week, IBM would buy us a hotel room wherever we were, I would link in with the modem and I would work for 16 hours. And so that's what we did and we had a wonderful time. We were able to build a bond of unity that was very important.

Now I didn't realize how important that would be until on October 7th when Juanita said she had something that she needed to tell me. She said, "I've just come from the doctor and I have cancer." And we went to the doctor together and you can only imagine the feelings when he says, "Oh we're going to do the most that we can. We'll do everything that we can, but you have to be aware that Juanita only has a 50 per cent chance of living more than a short amount of time." We went through 12 weeks of chemotherapy and she lost her hair. Then we went through surgery and then we went through 12 more weeks of chemotherapy and then we went through 6 weeks of radiation. That just ended 4 weeks ago.

Through all of this we recognised what was most important. Had I known that we were going to have cancer, of course we would have taken the trip! There would have been no question! Had I decided to stay at home and work, thinking we'll do this vacation some other time, I would have been just devastated. We were devastated enough just with the news.

But I'd like to just take one more minute and share with you a few things that we learnt. Firstly, it's not what happens to you that determines whether or not you find peace and harmony - it's what you do with what happens to you. What we learned from cancer is to appreciate every day, especially the good ones, but even the not good ones. Every day is a gift. Don't waste a single day.

The second is to focus on what we can do and not what we can't do. When Juanita was in chemotherapy her immune system was so low that she couldn't go outside of the house. If she thought "Oh I can't go shopping - I can't do this, I can't do that" she would have been miserable, but she chose to think, "Wow! I get a chance to get our photo albums caught up. Oh I get to read to Seth for hours and there's no other commitments that I have to do." It put our troubles in perspective. Things that we were frustrated with before, we don't get frustrated about anymore, It's just not worth it!

We have more compassion for others. One time Juanita's immune system was so low that she had to go in and get shots to boost it so she wouldn't die from some little infection. She saw a homeless man walking down the street. In the past, she reported to me, she would have thought, "Why doesn't he get a job?" but when she saw him she just cried because she knew that things could happen that you have no control over. We have a lot more empathy and compassion.

The final and the most important thing is that we learn to trust in a Divine Power. There are some things that are just too hard. We can't figure them out, no matter how many classes or what we do, we just can't. And only the Divine Power has the answers.

In conclusion I would just like to share with you the words to a song. It's called "The Last Touch".

Their first touch was at 17 when they were alone in the park
and the moon was full, she was beautiful to him,
and her hair was long and her eyes were blue
and her skin was warm and she turned to him
and he thought that he knew what love was.

Another touch at 22 on their wedding night
and the stars were bright, she was beautiful to him,
and her hair smelled sweet and her lips were full
and her skin was warm and she turned to him
and he thought that he knew what love was.

And then again at 25 when the baby came
and the sun was high, she was beautiful to him,
and her hair was damp and her fingers shook
and her skin was warm and she turned to him
and he thought that he knew what love was.

Later on at 54, sitting on the porch
all the children gone, she was beautiful to him,
and her hair was grey and her forehead lined
and her skin was warm and she turned to him
and he thought that he knew what love was.

Their last touch at 85 was by her bed
and the moon was full, she was beautiful to him,
and her hair was thin and her eyes were closed
and her skin was cold and she turned to him
and he knew that he knew what love was.

After 68 years of laughter and tears,
he knew that he knew what love was.

It is my hope that we each can know what love is, that we might seek those things and make those
sacrifices necessary to imbue that love throughout our hearts.

Thank you very much.