

## Dads, there's more to life than work

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My late dad was unable to be gainfully employed ever since I was in Primary Two because of his poor health. That led to considerable financial difficulty for the family. My experience growing up under such circumstances convinced me of the need to ensure financial security for the family.

When my wife Cynthia and I set up our family, I believed that one of my most important roles was being the financial provider. But like many other women today, she did not think her husband should merely be concerned with bringing home the bacon. She felt that a father should be involved in his children's lives. This was not only so that she could have a breather occasionally but also because she was convinced a dad's involvement was crucial to the child's development.

I am well informed of the research linking a father's role to many positive psychosocial outcomes for children. But at the same time, I am aware the world of work does not yet see dads as having a significant place at home. Men, it is often believed, belong in the workplace and should give their undivided attention there.

I remember vividly when my wife began feeling contractions during her first pregnancy; I had to attend a work function. My superior commended me for supporting the event despite what she highlighted were my "private family concerns". I felt good about the recognition.

On hindsight, I wish she had chided me for not staying at home with my wife at such a crucial juncture of our relationship.

I have tried to follow the middle path when it comes to dealing with work and family. I have resisted the suggestion of some of my seniors to shut my wife and kids out of

my life and concentrate on writing. At the same time, I have not bought into my family-life advocate friends' belief that good fathers should not take on full-time work so that they can be available for the family.

In choosing the middle path, I have not religiously followed the prescriptions of the work-life gurus. I bring considerable work home and I do not schedule strict times on my calendar for my family.

What I do, however, is to be very conscious about the need to spend time with them. Some people say you cannot have quality time if you do not invest quantity time. I beg to differ. I find that, since I do not have the luxury of lots of time with my family, I value each of these interactions.

I endeavour to spend some time each day finding out how each child has been doing. We talk about their day at school, friends, what they have been reading, watching and learning. Children seem very keen to share their stories as long as someone is interested in listening. Even when deadlines are fast approaching, at least for those few minutes, I shut off my many concerns and focus on what they have to say.

I reckon these exchanges with my children are the best moments for me to share the values, beliefs and perspectives that my wife and I cherish.

Every six months, we try to get away for a short vacation. It has been a hassle, especially since our boys are very young. For my wife and I, these holidays leave us tired. Yet, the time together as a family savouring the simple pleasures of life is very satisfying — it leaves us much to talk about after we have returned home.

People's priorities are shaped by their beliefs. For some, career success and ensuring they accrue copious finances is everything. Some men believe that, without a pot of gold at home, the wife and children are just not going to be affectionate in the long run. As they say: "No money, no honey!" But the truth is, love cannot be bought. It is in sharing life together that bonds of affection are forged. I have resolved that there is more to life than work. My children will be a greater legacy than any number of papers and books I will ever write.

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