

Dual Careers vs. Dueling Careers: Engineering the Two-Profession Household

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Abstract

Balancing professional and personal obligations is a continuing challenge for today's educators. Two-income families are particularly common among new faculty, where partners are required to share all the duties of family life. This paper presents the methods used by one professional couple to share the responsibilities of raising children, maintain a home for the family, and balance the professional needs of each working spouse. The authors represent a fairly typical example of a two-profession household; she is an Assistant Professor of Civil Engineering at the University of Arkansas, and he is a Global Marketing Executive for Lucent Technologies.

A successful dual-career relationship doesn't just happen, it takes planning and even engineering to ensure successful careers for both partners and a fair and equitable distribution of necessary tasks in the home. While all potential conflicts cannot be eliminated, a methodical approach to prevent potential problems has proved successful for the authors of this paper. After 14 years of marriage, one child and a dog, both careers are thriving, and the house is (usually) clean.

The paper will present the methodology used by the authors to achieve successful dual careers rather than dueling careers. Included are decision-making processes, goal-setting procedures, and suggestions for utilizing both for optimal balance between personal and professional responsibilities. The choices made by the authors regarding career paths and personal priorities will be shared in the hope that their experience will prove beneficial to others dealing with shared responsibilities in two-profession households.

I. Introduction

When reading this paper, the question that may come to mind is “Who *are* these people?” and perhaps “What qualifies them to give me advice on how to manage my life?” These are fair and relevant questions. We are two working professionals who are striving to make a positive difference in our respective professions, have a thriving family life, raise a great child, be active in our community, and enjoy our leisure time (such as it is) to the fullest. In short, we want it all, and we want it right now, as do our friends in similar circumstances. We have no special qualifications to give advice except that we are frequently told that we manage our lifestyle well. After 14 years, we have worked out a system that works for us and we welcome the opportunity to share our methods with others.

Melissa Tooley is an Assistant Professor of Civil Engineering at the University of Arkansas. As is typical for new engineering educators, she teaches an average of two courses a semester, conducts research, and travels to conferences to network and present research, averaging about a week to two weeks per month out of town.

Michael Tooley, a Global Marketing Executive for Lucent Technologies, has been in the telecommunications industry for eight years. For the last 6 years, he has telecommuted, working at home on a full-time basis and communicating with his base office and others on his team by telephone or email. His position involves some travel, usually about a week to two weeks per month.

Having introduced ourselves, we should state that the suggestions contained herein are just that - *suggestions* that have worked for us. We hope that they will help other working couples to balance their professional and personal lives. The reader is advised to pick and choose what may work for their particular set of goals and circumstances. Also presented are ideas that have proven useful for other working couples. What are not presented in this paper are tips for being a better professor or executive - there are other sources for that type of advice. It is assumed, furthermore, that couples implementing our suggestions are at a professional-level income, because some are somewhat expensive. However, we consider it money well spent.

II. Engineering the Two-Profession Household

One thing is certain - successful two-profession households don't just happen. It takes good engineering, planning, perseverance and sometimes mule-like stubbornness to make it work. The first step in engineering better balance into our lives was to define our family's goals. There are a number of ways to do this, but we just sat down and talked about it until we reached consensus. During the discussion compromises were made on both sides. The list of goals developed for our family is as follows, in no particular order:

- Raise a great child (a daughter, Kathryn, who is now 9 years old)
- Have a happy marriage
- Be successful in our careers
- Have an active social life
- Grow as individuals.

Obviously, this list could vary greatly for different households. For example, staying in shape may be more important to some couples than socializing (we have only recently been able to free up time for exercise). In engineering problem-solving terms, this list could be considered the "requireds" in the problem-solving process. The "givens" are simply the realities of life for the stage of development that the partnership is in.

The "solution" is, of course, what this paper is all about. There are a number of policies that we have adopted, and procedures that we have implemented, to ensure that our priorities take precedence in the ways we spend our time. The objectives that we use to meet our goals are broken out into the following categories:

- Hire out household/yard tasks
- Communicate/cooperate
- Get a life
 1. Maximize time spent with the child
 2. Have fun
 3. Socialize with others
- Make lifestyle changes to facilitate priorities as necessary.

These objectives have proven invaluable in helping to meet our family goals at this stage of our lives, with relatively new and demanding careers and an elementary-age child. Some of them help in more than one area. It should also be pointed out that goals and the objectives used to meet them might change over the course of a relationship. Of course, different families will have different goals and objectives - these are just the ones we have defined for ourselves.

Hire out household/yard tasks

In the “traditional marriage”, the husband was the breadwinner, bringing home the income the household needed to operate, and perhaps also performing large maintenance tasks such as lawn care. The wife’s responsibilities included raising the children and ensuring that the household ran smoothly. The wife, generally speaking, made sure that the kids had clean clothes to wear, that dinner was on the table, and that there were groceries in the pantry, and ran all the necessary household errands. The traditional tasks of both the husband and the wife are extremely important in ensuring a successful household.

With a two-profession household, there are essentially two breadwinners. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for either of the partners to manage the household in the way that the traditional wife did, or even to manage the traditional tasks of the husband. So, we have elected to hire out as many household tasks and errands as we can. We have a cleaning service come in every other week, and a yard service that takes care of mowing, weeding, etc. A dry-cleaning and laundry service picks up our clothing and delivers it back to us twice a week. Because both of our schedules are flexible, we can usually work out shuttling our daughter around to her activities, but we do know other couples who have hired after-school help with much success.

We eat out a lot. This is a great break and a welcome chance to spend some quality time with family. Find out which restaurants offer take-out and keep their menus at the office. On days when cooking is not an option, pick one out, call in the order, and pick it up on the way home. Enjoy pizza. When cooking at home, cook in quantity and freeze in single meal size containers for another day. When we bake chicken or cook a roast, we use the leftovers for meals for several days. For example, leftover pot roast gets chopped up and barbecue sauce added and becomes sandwiches the next night. Leftover chicken is used for pasta or salads.

The rewards of hiring out household tasks are many. The time it frees up for both of us can be directly applied to all of our goals. For example, we have more time to spend with our daughter, each other, and our friends. We can concentrate more on our work than on laundry, and have more personal time for ourselves. We justify the expenditure by reminding ourselves of what

our time is worth. We calculated our average hourly salary and quickly determined that the rewards far outweighed the costs.

Perhaps the greatest benefit is that there is no longer conflict over whose turn it is to clean the bathroom or mow the lawn. The opportunity for conflict over equity in performing household tasks has been largely eliminated.

Communicate/Cooperate

The potential for schedule conflicts is high with two professional careers in one household. Flexibility and a sense of humor are imperative. If there is a conflict affecting the family schedule, we have found that arguments (or, as we prefer to call them, “spirited discussions”) about whose meeting is most important are never constructive. Rather, we try to determine which of our schedules has the most “give” or we develop an alternative. This is definitely tricky but is usually possible. However, it is far better to prevent these conflicts before they happen using good planning.

The importance of communication and cooperation cannot be overemphasized. It is easy to get so caught up in the rigors of modern life that these two principles are forgotten. In our case, we have regularly scheduled time for communication, and we have a system for cooperation.

Because we have a child, it is difficult to communicate about family issues in the evenings. We schedule lunch together at least once a week. The advantages are twofold - it gives us some time to ourselves without having to obtain a baby-sitter, and it gives us time to talk. We both keep Daytimers, and we use these lunches to coordinate family activities, including who is responsible for shuttling our daughter to and from her various activities. We also plan our family activities in advance, and schedule around them. We both keep personal and professional to-do lists in our Daytimers, and add or subtract from them during our lunches. When we leave to go back to work, we know who is responsible for what, and have had a great opportunity to enjoy some time alone together.

Weekly lunches are also a good time to keep each other up to date on our respective careers. An informed spouse is much more likely to give extra support in unusual circumstances. We find that a better understanding of the successes, pressures and trials of each other’s careers results in a higher level of respect for each other as people. It also makes it easier to understand work-related stress and how it can affect our relationship and carefully constructed schedules.

We also utilize e-mail to keep each other informed. For example, if one of us finds out about a disruptive event such as upcoming travel, we send a short e-mail message to the other so that it can be put on their calendar. Sometimes it is hard to remember to share important information in a timely manner otherwise, and early notice is extremely important.

We have found that car trips and long airline flights are excellent opportunities to catch up on those big topics that we never seem to have time to discuss. We always take pencil and paper, and a laptop, and take full advantage of uninterrupted time away from televisions and ringing

telephones. We have used this time to plan family vacations, plan for Kathryn's college expenses, and discuss long-term goals. Some of the questions we ask ourselves are

- Are we happy?
- Are we focused?
- Is our time spent doing important things (things that help us achieve our goals)?
- What would we do if we won the lottery?

Be a professional asset to each other. Because each of us has difficulty remembering names, we have a "no introduction rule." At company functions (or social ones, for that matter), if we haven't introduced our spouse to the person we are chatting with within a minute or so then the spouse is to introduce themselves, thus saving the other from having to admit that they don't have a clue what the colleague's name is. When attending an event for our partner's work, we ask about appropriate attire, topics for conversation, etc. It is amazing how often people unwittingly undermine their spouse's stature within their workplace. Again, communication and cooperation are the keys.

We also strongly recommend the development of a mutual family budget and joint accounts. Both partners should contribute equally to retirement funds, household expenses, and college funds for the children. We have found that mutual accounts foster a sense of working together rather than a his money/her money mentality in family financing. The budget should be developed together and be fully committed to by both spouses. We also recommend a financial advisor to determine good investments, retirement plans, and tax advantages for professional couples.

The other key elements of cooperation are flexibility, compromise, and equity. Because we like to do child-related errands and activities ourselves, changes in each other's schedules can necessitate last minute juggling. Sometimes we have to compromise and find someone else to take care of getting our daughter where she needs to be, or one of us adjusts our schedule if possible. Compromise and flexibility will not work, however, without equity. If one partner is continually being asked to compromise and change their schedule, then permanent alternative arrangements must be made. Also, one partner's de-stressing activities shouldn't add to the other partner's load. For example, the de-stressing activity shouldn't make the spouse unavailable for the whole weekend on a regular basis. This simply wouldn't be fair.

Get a Life

Quite frankly, it is important to us to have a life beyond work. Of course, this would mean different things to different people. Having a life, to us, means spending as much time as possible with our daughter, having fun together, and having a social life. We have more recently added the desire to get ourselves back into good physical condition.

We decided early on that it was important for both of us to be directly involved in Kathryn's activities. For us, this meant picking her up from school ourselves, shuttling her around to her various activities, and being home with her as much as possible on evenings and weekends. We

like to help her with her homework as well. Because of our flexible schedules and some of our other lifestyle decisions (to be discussed in a later section), we have largely been able to do these things. Of course, there are still times when Melissa has to teach a class, Michael is out of town and Kathryn develops the croup, but most of the time we are able to work things out by communication, cooperation, flexibility, and well-organized Daytimers.

Many times we can combine (or multi-task, if you will) spending time with Kathryn and having fun together. More than anything, we love to travel and eat out. We include her in both wherever possible. Because we both travel with our jobs, we are always on the lookout for good mini-family-vacation opportunities. While one is in meetings the other sees the local sights with Kathryn. In breaks between meetings or in the evenings, we all sightsee together. Because we build up frequent flyer miles with our work travel and through a frequent-flyer credit card, we do this a couple of times a year without paying for airline tickets. When Kathryn can't travel, we accompany each other on business travel if our schedules permit. This gives us precious time alone together and also personal time (when the other is in meetings). We have found that it is quite possible to take full advantage of the networking opportunities of professional conferences, attend all necessary sessions and meetings, and still have a little time to enjoy the area together. Sometimes, depending on the conference, this is best accomplished by extending our stay past the conference or arriving early.

Although we have both been quite involved in church and community volunteer work in the past, we now limit our volunteer activities to those that directly involve Kathryn. For example, Michael coaches Kathryn's fourth-grade girl's basketball team. Melissa has focused her volunteer efforts to those at Kathryn's school. This enables us to spend time with Kathryn and still make a difference in the community. After Kathryn has left home there will still be plenty of time for community volunteer work, and we fully intend to get involved again at that time. Since Kathryn attends parochial schools, our volunteerism for her school activities helps our church as well. This is working parent multi-tasking at its best!

Since Kathryn is older now, we are enjoying our chosen sports and are trying to get back into shape (there are unfortunate side effects to all that eating out!). Melissa plays tennis, and Michael plays golf. There are several benefits to having a sport besides the obvious physical benefits. Sports are great stress-reducers and provide private time for each of us. Of course, couples might enjoy exercising together, but separate sports works best for us for now. That way, when one of us is working out, the other can spend some private time with Kathryn. A long-term goal of Melissa's is to learn to play golf - previous efforts have not been too satisfactory - but this is not a priority while Kathryn is at home.

We have found that socializing with others has a positive effect on our relationship. We cultivate friendships with other two-profession couples (preferably with children Kathryn's age) and entertain a lot. We enjoy everything from throwing small formal dinner parties (which we do rarely, granted), and raucous football watching parties where everyone brings an appetizer, to barbecues where everyone brings a side dish. Children are included, and Kathryn has developed great hostess skills. Since everyone works, they want the kids to be included. We will typically

provide movies in Kathryn's room and games for them to play. When things are too hectic to entertain at home, find restaurants that can accommodate larger groups and meet friends there. We cannot overemphasize how important it is to nurture friendships with others that share common interests and challenges. They will provide support when "working parent guilt" strikes and reassurance is needed, and can provide helpful tips on how they work things out. In addition to the social aspect, there are practical benefits. When a last minute problem arises and neither of us can pick up Kathryn from school, friends can serve as an invaluable resource. When they need us, we help them out as well. We have even traded child care on days that school was out and worked out carpooling to school events, and it has proven to be a lifesaver.

It is also important to have quality time for the two of us alone. As previously discussed, we take at least one trip alone together every year, even if it is just for a long weekend. We have found that time alone must be scheduled in advance, because it will never just happen on its own. For those times when we have an adult function to attend or are going out alone, we hire baby-sitters. We cultivate good baby-sitters, especially those who drive. We pay them higher than the going rate, and give them lots of advance notice whenever possible. If treated well, they will drop other plans to baby-sit. This can be invaluable, especially if a last-minute crisis erupts and child care is needed on short notice.

Having extolled the virtues of mutual friendships and quality time, the importance of individual friendships should be mentioned. We each have good friends that are ours alone. Again, lunch is a good way to keep up with our personal friends, as the time is not taken away from family activities. These friendships remind us that we are individuals, and give us room to grow.

Make Lifestyle Changes as Necessary

Periodically, we reevaluate our lifestyle to see if we are on track with our long-term and short-term goals. In engineering terms, this ongoing process could be considered Continuous Improvement. This has resulted in some major changes in the past, and has reaffirmed that we are doing the right thing in some cases.

For example, when our daughter was born, Melissa was a consultant and Michael was new to AT&T. We quickly realized that our desire to spend more time with Kathryn was going to be difficult with our jobs. It has always been, and continues to be, extremely important to us to be directly involved in Kathryn's activities, and to take her to her doctor's appointments, music lessons, and other activities ourselves. When Michael was offered the chance to go to Northwest Arkansas and take a home-based sales position, we jumped at the opportunity, and Melissa went back to school to obtain her Ph.D., which was something she had always wanted to do. It also gave us the flexibility we needed to spend more time with Kathryn. She still went to a pre-school program, but Melissa was able to pick her up by 3:00 PM most of the time. Graduation into a faculty position presented lifestyle balancing challenges similar to the ones experienced in consulting. Melissa initially accepted an Assistant Professor position at a large Research I institution. While she enjoyed the atmosphere, students and faculty, there were concerns about keeping a healthy balance between work and home. We had just begun to consider hiring an after-school caregiver when Melissa received a call from the University of Arkansas to consider

returning there. While the tenure requirements at the two institutions are similar, Arkansas has much smaller classes, family nearby, a shorter commute, and a lifestyle that better fits our goals. Melissa was happy at her first university in a professional sense, but it became clear after reviewing all our goals that they could be better met in Arkansas. (Because Michael telecommutes to New Jersey, it doesn't matter to him where we live.)

Our current arrangement (he working from home, she in academia) also works very well in the summers. When Kathryn was younger and Melissa was in graduate school, we enrolled her in a pre-school program for half-days in the summers, and she took care of her in the afternoons. Now that she is older, she appreciates more variety in summer activities. We enroll her in day camps and workshops of one or two weeks duration, all summer long. If we have a gap between activities, we work it out so that one of us is available to fill in. If that is not possible, we arrange for a baby-sitter to take her to the pool (which is usually all Kathryn wants to do in the summer anyway). So far it has worked out quite well. She gets a "real" summer, and we get a happy child.

Academics should choose their positions wisely, in keeping with their goals. If spending a lot of time with children is a priority, a smaller institution may be a good choice. In our case, a conscious decision to have Michael work out of the home was also extremely helpful. There are many professions that can operate this way, and we highly recommend it. Some of the hassles this takes care of are:

- someone is home to let in cable guy/appliance repairman/handyman
- someone is home if the child gets sick
- someone is home for teacher's meeting days and snow days
- there is greater flexibility for sharing necessary errands
- someone is home to talk to the yard guy and the housekeeper
- someone is home when the UPS man delivers packages.

It also provides a tax write-off for the area used as the home office.

If possible, have family within a reasonable distance. This contributed greatly to our decision to relocate back to Arkansas. We have one set of grandparents four hours away and one set eight hours away. Traveling together would not be possible if they weren't available to keep our daughter, as we are not comfortable leaving her with a baby-sitter for extended periods of time. The proximity of family is also helpful when we both have to travel at the same time, which does happen occasionally. If having family nearby is not possible, then create a surrogate family by nurturing friendships with other families.

Now that Kathryn is older, she is enrolled in a daily after-school program at her school. This gives her a chance to play with her friends, do her homework (which we go over with her later at home) and just generally be a kid after school. We recommend that children be enrolled at a school with a great after school program because it does make life easier. She has to be picked up by 5:30 PM, and Melissa picks her up on the way home from work.

We try not to overload Kathryn with after-school activities. For example, she is in the school choir, which practices after school. She then goes to the after-school program. She carools to her art classes and we pick her up from there. Michael coaches her basketball team, so he gets her there and brings her home. We try to limit extracurricular activities to three at a time and minimize the amount of carpooling and shuttling around that is necessary during working hours.

Having lived in several different houses, from historic turn-of-the-century bungalows to brand new, we strongly recommend as low-maintenance a house as possible while seeking tenure and raising children. The one we currently live in is less than five years old, all brick, no wood to paint at all, and lots of "hard" floors. Someday we may have a historic house again, when Kathryn is grown and full professorship has been obtained, but in order to devote the proper amount of time to family and career now we would rather minimize our maintenance time and budget.

Low-maintenance is a good idea also when selecting pets, hairstyles, clothing, transportation, and other necessary items. We have failed miserably in selecting a low-maintenance pet, as ours is a standard poodle that thinks she is human, but there is still a chance for those who have not yet chosen one. We recommend relatively new, reliable transportation that is unlikely to break down, with four-wheel drive for those times when the weather is not cooperating.

Minimize commuting time! Try to live, work and play in a limited area. This should be a major consideration for job offers - would there be a long commute? This is a huge time-eater and should be minimized as much as possible. Also, to further reduce time spent in the car, we bought a house convenient to Kathryn's school and Melissa's workplace. Kathryn's school is right on Melissa's way to work, so she takes her in the morning and picks her up in the afternoon.

While sometimes difficult, we strive for equity in our careers. Thus far, Melissa has relocated Michael twice and he has relocated her once. If opportunity knocks, consider long-term goals before making a decision. We have thus far managed to better both our situations every time we have relocated.

Learn to say no! Melissa, especially, had a tendency to overcommit herself until there was little time left for family. The goal setting process has proven to be helpful in determining whether a proposed activity is in line with our current goals. As ridiculous as it may sound, we used role-playing to teach her how to say no. Michael would pretend to be someone from the various organizations that she is involved with, and would ask her to chair an event or a committee. She would practice saying no. Believe it or not, it made saying no when it actually happened much easier. If there is a partner in a relationship that is overcommitting themselves to the detriment of their goals, we highly recommend role-playing in this manner.

Schedule time for fun now! After necessary monetary obligations have been met, such as bills, and retirement/college fund deposits, we take some of what is left over and enjoy ourselves. We travel, and try to create memories for our daughter and ourselves. We take a family vacation every year, whether it is renting a house on the beach or a houseboat on a lake, and just enjoy

each other. This recharges our batteries so that we can be more effective parents and professionals. Professional couples can go to the movies, hike in the woods, canoe a river, or just do whatever works best for their families and each other.

Miscellaneous

Streamline holiday activities and gift buying. We have increasingly ordered gifts over the Internet and from catalogs. We send out a lot of holiday cards, and enclose a newsletter to friends and family every year (with apologies to Miss Manners). A list is kept from year to year in Melissa's Daytimer with names of people to buy for and what we got for them. We also shop throughout the year, and mark the purchases in the Daytimer as obtained. This concept is also useful for kid's birthday parties. For example, we once found a great special on kid's portable cassette players with headphones (only \$10!) and purchased five of them. We then took them home and wrapped them (well, sort of wrapped them - we only use gift bags) and had gifts ready for the next five birthday parties Kathryn attended. This practice is a big time-saver for wedding presents as well.

Since there is never any time for clothes shopping, we order from catalogs that offer uniform sizing (such as Land's End or LL Bean). Those that have specifications for their clothing and accessories are more likely to be true to their sizing chart. We take our measurements, order our size according to the chart and it almost always fits. Kathryn enjoys catalog shopping as well.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, we have found that it is sometimes okay to go to bed mad. If we are having a spirited discussion and are not coming to any kind of consensus, it may be that what is really bothering us isn't what we are arguing about. For example, after a particularly bad day, we are much more likely to overreact to a relatively minor problem. After a good night's sleep, we are able to recognize what is really bugging us and talk more constructively. Even the most well organized, communicative and cooperative two-professional couple will have bad days! When these happen, get some rest and we have found that things always look better in the morning.

There are a few other suggestions we have collected that have worked well for others we know, and that may be useful to the readers of this paper:

- It is helpful to minimize clutter in the home and office. We wouldn't know, as we are constantly fighting the stacks of stuff that seem to accumulate everywhere. Those who have successfully accomplished this swear by it, however.
- Dinner cooperatives are a wonderful idea as well. To form a dinner coop, three families of the same size and taste in food get together and agree to cook for each other. For example, one family might have Monday, one Wednesday, and one Thursday. The Monday family cooks enough for all three families and delivers it to the other two. On Wednesday and Thursday they eat what the other families have prepared.
- For other working professional couples who are unable to work out the kind of flexibility we have engineered into our schedules, it would be absolutely necessary to hire someone as an interim caregiver from the time the children are picked up from school until the parents

arrive home from work. The most successful arrangements seem to be those where the caregiver picks the children up from school, runs them to their various activities, helps them with homework, tidies up the house, keeps up with the laundry, and gets dinner started. We have considered this on several occasions, but are fortunate thus far that we have been able to take care of the items related to Kathryn ourselves, and hire out the rest on a regular basis.

- Another option for pre-school age children is live-in or nanny-type care, which we have never used. We had positive experiences with carefully chosen day care facilities and pre-school programs, but we do know others who developed wonderful relationships with the caregivers of their very young children. The main key to the success of in-home care is being able to absolutely trust the caregiver.

III. Conclusion

As previously stated, it takes engineering to make a two-profession household work. *It is possible to have it all, just not all at the same time.* After we defined our goals, it was clear that some desirable activities like community volunteer work, church and professional committee work, and even exercising on a regular basis would have to wait until Kathryn was older. The historic house will wait until after our careers are further along. These are the types of sacrifices that we are willing to make for the sake of creating the greatest possible level of success in our careers while doing the best we can as parents and partners.

The key to success, in our opinion, is deciding what the “requirements” are for the relationship at a given stage of development and setting up the “solutions” accordingly. Be stubborn about sticking only to those activities that enhance the success of meeting the defined goals. Communicate often, on a regularly scheduled basis, and be flexible and cooperative with each other. Develop systems for organization, and use them together. Don’t hesitate to spend money to free up time and enhance productivity. Cultivate a support network, whether it is made up of family nearby or friends. Create opportunities to have fun as a family and as individuals.

We sincerely hope that the suggestions in this paper will help others in their quest to balance work and family. The types of conflicts we have experienced are going to be experienced by more and more new engineering educators as the face of academia changes and two-profession households become the norm. As the tenure bar rises ever higher, it becomes increasingly important to have an organized, focused approach in balancing our personal and professional lives.

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