



WORK/LIFE **BALANCE**

Punchline or Practice?

Leadership Institute for the New Manager/Administrator
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Phil Kiraly, ICMA-CM
Village Manager
Village of Glencoe

Illinois City/County Management Association (ILCMA) President
847/461-1101 / pkiraly@villageofglencoe.org
www.linkedin.com/in/phil-kiraly-icma-cm-25016360

Congratulations! You've just accepted one of the best jobs in the world and are now a manager/administrator. While incredibly rewarding, dynamic and exciting, these jobs also require much from you and will test your ability to find time to be effective, present and focused in your role at work and at home. So, is there really a balance between your work and your life outside of work?

We have all had our own experiences with balancing the responsibilities of work and other aspects of our lives. But, as you've already realized in your new roles, being a manager/administrator is different than experiences you may have had in other roles. It's busier, broader, perhaps more exciting, but also lonelier. I hope to share some of my experiences, offer some words of advice, and look to you to share your own efforts to find harmony.

Balancing work

Our jobs will consume as much of us as we can give – and more. Being a manager/administrator means assuming tremendous responsibility, leading from the front, back and side, and always being “on”.

The early months in your new role can be the most difficult, most consuming, as you learn about the community, organization and its idiosyncrasies. We’re wired to say yes, especially when we’re new in a position.

Teams exist for a reason! Their skills, experience and efforts support you and the responsibilities you have.

Lines around work have been severely blurred. *Thanks, COVID.* Work from home. Work at work. Work at dinner. Work while working out. Work checking your emails in bed right as your alarm goes off... work, work, work!

Advice:

Communicate and set expectations. Talk with your Mayor/President and Board to understand their expectations and set realistic parameters. Discuss how you plan to communicate with your team and hear their expectations of you. Boundaries are important. Try to do this early in your tenure...don’t let bad habits set in.

Delegate wherever possible. Your team is a group of professionals eager to do well. Use them. Don’t say yes to every meeting; manage your time but be available to them; encourage them to support your work, and when you can, always support them in return.

Be realistic. It’s been said by every leader I’ve ever known – and it’s difficult advice to follow – **you really cannot do everything**. Be savvy, but say no when you can.

Put. Down. Your. Phone.

“If you’re here all day, every day, showing up early and staying late, I won’t be impressed. I’ll be concerned. Concerned that perhaps you have too much on your plate or aren’t managing your work, or, worse still, hiding from something at home. If you’re working 10–12-hour days every day, we’ve got a problem.”

Bob Franz, Retired Village Manager, Deerfield

(quote paraphrased from my final interview for Assistant to the Village Manager in Deerfield, 2004)

Balancing your personal life

Often, our relationships outside of work start to suffer as we assume new roles and responsibilities. Family and friends bear the brunt of missed events, parties, and special moments. You want to be present, but can you be?

Late meetings, short weekends and death scrolling your email/social media well into the twilight hours will build walls between you and those most important to you.

Our jobs can - intentionally or unintentionally - wire you to say yes to work, and no to family and friends. Sometimes you’ll feel like work must take precedence, and sometimes it does. But must it always?

Our teams are people first, employees second. Work to understand their needs/issues/concerns, and in doing so model behaviors that outline that you recognize their humanity.

Advice:

Work to say yes to your personal life! Your family will be there well after your job.

Be human and express your own humanness by showing your team that your personal life matters, and so should theirs. Allow yourself to place value on your family and personal life as primary responsibilities. Lead by example – responsibly

work to insert time for experiences outside of work. If an emergency comes up, stay home with a sick child or take time away to help a family member.

Communicate at home, and make sure those who depend on you and upon whom you depend on are aware of what to expect from your job – and know that sometimes the unexpected gets in the way. Don't take for granted that your absence will just be accommodated.

Being a manager/administrator provides you with flexibility. Go to your kid's school play or soccer game. Jump to the gym at lunch. Don't eat at your desk.

Put. Down. Your. Phone.

"The best job in the world for a parent is being a manager. Rely on your team, flex your schedule, and go to the soccer game or school play. You CAN do it! Your kids are only kids once and managers need to effectively use their time to be there for both their organizations but especially their families."

*Valerie Salmons, Retired Village Administrator, Bartlett
(quote paraphrased from a presentation in one of my MPA classes, 2003)*

Balancing Self

The person whose needs and feelings are most likely to be forgotten, overlooked, or dismissed is **you**.

Leaders cannot lead if they don't work hard to care for their own needs. Are you really going to be a better boss if you skip lunch/ignore that pain/wish away your mental stresses?

Not taking time off will always seem like the "right" move because you're so busy.

Sacrificing health – physical, mental, spiritual – won't make you a better manager/administrator. It will win you no awards. It will take an untold toll on you.

Advice:

Build a support team of people you trust who can help you work through problems and issues. Find and rely upon mentors (and HINT: those people don't have to be older than you or in the same profession!) Don't rely on your professional team to unload all your problems. Don't always rely on your family for this either.

Take the time you need for you. You can always – ALWAYS – find the time.

Don't skip meals, workouts, sleep, doctor's appointments, book clubs, concerts, movies, Netflix binges or anything you consider to be "you" time. These things will give you what you need to be well for your professional and personal life.

Take (all) your vacation time. Don't give in to the temptation that always working somehow makes you better.

Don't ignore the signs that your health may be suffering.

Put. Down. Your. Phone.

"Enjoy what you do in life. You only have one. Put your true self into your work. Channel the stress in productive ways but know when you're approaching your limits. Celebrate and acknowledge people that support you. Care for yourself and those you love. Take time away. Laugh with - never at - yourself because your feelings, needs and expectations are real and deserve to be felt. Oh, and Put. Down. Your. Phone."

Phil Kiraly, May 2025