

Shifting From Work to Home By Marilyn Suttle



Your workday is over. It's time to go home. Shifting your energies from work to home is challenging. Work issues can distract you from being fully present with your family. Unfinished business, problems with co-workers, upcoming deadlines, dissatisfactions with

the job, or elevated expectations are just a few pressures that, left unmanaged, spill over into your family time. So, how do you close the door on one part of your life and enter the other?

- Address your shift from work to home. Do you come home feeling good only when the work day went well? Do the tensions of your day follow you home? Often negative feelings aren't safe to let out at work so the family gets the emotional dump from the day. Here are some tools to calm your nerves and leave the work day behind you.

- Before leaving work, take a few minutes to bring closure to your day. It's hard to let go of unfinished business. You can do it by focusing on your feelings. Before leaving work, look over your day. Do you have any feelings of frustration, anger, or resentment toward anyone? Do you feel satisfied, disappointed or overwhelmed by the day's events? By acknowledging the feelings that come up, you are in a better position to see your situation clearly. Tuning into the areas of concern helps to address the needs of the next work day, and brings closure to your day. When feelings are identified, they are more easily released.

- When leaving work, set up some symbolic rituals to transition out of the workday and into your family time. As you close the door to your office building or your car door, let it represent closing off that part of your life. Each time you hear that door close, it sets up a trigger. Triggers work. A dental hygienist once told me that if I tied a piece of dental floss to my toothbrush, I wouldn't forget to floss my teeth. After taking her advice, it's hard to forget flossing with that darn string dangling from my brush. Why not apply the same idea by putting a note in your car that says, "Transition time has begun."

- The car ride home is a great block of time to release and refocus. Be sure to bring enjoyable books on tape, play your favorite music and sing or place a fragrant potpourri in the car to pamper yourself a bit. If you need more time to unwind, consider making

regular stops at the gym for exercise. Stop at a book store or coffee shop for some quiet time to enjoy a magazine or newspaper on the way home.

- For many parents, the ride home from work includes picking up the kids from school or day care. If so, use your car time to reconnect. Often when you ask them, "What did you do today?" all you get back is, "Nothing." Instead of throwing a steady stream of questions at them, simply say, "It's so good to see you." Without the pressure of interrogation, the kids are more willing to open up and share their day with you. Kids respond well to, "Tell me about the best part of your day and the worst part." Start by telling the kids the best part of your day. Children don't like dealing with stressed out parents. By focusing on what went right at work, kids see working as a fulfilling part of life and your pleasant mood will be contagious. If your focus is always negative, children will see a career as something undesirable to be avoided. You are modeling for your kids what it means to be a responsible adult.

- Changing your clothes after work physically symbolizes removing work and slipping into family time. Water is a relaxer. Washing up represents washing away the tensions of work. Listen to the sound of the water going down the drain and picture the demands of your workday draining away with it. Do something physical. Stress can be released through physical activity. If you don't have time to take a walk or go to the gym, engage the family in a race against the clock to clean up or complete chores together. Sometimes the exhaustion of the day leaves you with no energy at home. Turn off the television, set the timer and take a fifteen minute power nap.

- Are you making a successful transition from work to home? Are you tasting your food? Do you tune out of conversations? Does your family complain that they only get the worst of you? When you catch workplace tensions spilling into your family time, give yourself a phrase that will bring you back. Phrases like, "family time," "no worries," or "tomorrow's soon enough" are quick reminders to stay present in the moment.

- If you insist on relaxing only when all your work is complete, you have to wait until the last day of your life for relief. There will always be that ongoing project. . . meetings to prepare for. . . problems to resolve. Give yourself permission to let go of the work day issues during family time. Set up time chunks that belong only to family time. Put away the brief case, stay away from the e-mail, let the answering machine pick up your calls while you nurture your loved ones and yourself. If work must be

focused on after hours, set up a specific time frame for it. Do not let it interfere with your three year old's tea party, or a heart to heart talk with your teen.

- At the end of the day, be sure to stop and appreciate yourself. Parents deserve a great deal of respect. Without your countless efforts to care for and support your family, both emotionally and financially, everything would fall apart. By setting up blocks of time to focus on your family, you will experience the most rewarding part of family life. Your children's childhood. Children go from 2 to 20 in the blink of an eye. Before you know it, they'll be off on their own. Allow yourself to experience it, before you wonder where it went.

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