

# WORK & FAMILY LIFE

BALANCING JOB AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

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Practical solutions  
for family, workplace  
and health issues

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Having some phone-free, electronic device-free family fun.

## Creating guidelines for a tech-healthy family

By Janell Burley Hofmann

**A**re your kids and teens head-down over electronic devices or glued to their games more than you'd like? Do you know who your children are talking to and playing with online? Are you guilty of your own chronic use of technology and worried about the behavior you are modeling for your kids?

We're all trying to establish some boundaries for and guidelines on the pervasive use of electronic devices—and no wonder. Many of us are part of a generation of parents who bridge the “before” and “after” of media technology. We have the benefit of insight and wisdom gleaned from our more or less tech-free past. But we have no one ahead of us leading the way to our tech future.

### Slow tech parenting

The pitfall many parents succumb to is believing that the rules have changed somehow because technology has. But that's not the case. We have to identify those principles and values that underlie our parenting cornerstones and apply them to technology. The technology will continue to change—but the teaching of self-respect, integrity and responsibility should not.

I call the search for a balance between technology and traditional interpersonal relationships “slow-tech parenting.” Slow tech fosters real time, personal connections and interactions in our everyday experience rather than allowing technology to dominate our family habits and lifestyle.

### Why balance is so important

Yes, technology is wonderful. It makes our lives easier, enhances our communication and streamlines many of our efforts. But finding balance is as vital to “tech health” as it is to other areas of health and wellness such as fitness, sleep and nutrition. We need to think about this and talk about it at home with our families.

For example, when kids are playing electronic games, they are *not* getting fresh air. They're not reading books, having face-to-face interactions with peers or playing creatively. Videos, computers, apps and portable games are here to stay, but let's not forget the value of simple play with board games, building blocks and bouncing balls. These traditional activities are all about taking turns, reading, imaginative play and laughing together.

*Continued on page 2...*

### For younger children

There's so much available to our little ones in portable electronic form. But if we let them take their Kindles and iPads everywhere—restaurants, family visits, daily car rides—when they're young, it will be much harder to break that cycle when they're older and using technology with more independence.

There's nothing wrong with saying to a seven year old, "The tablet stays home when we go to Nana's house. We will be visiting, not gaming."

I know that many parents use tablets as a "babysitter" or distraction to keep young kids quiet and occupied. And that's okay sometimes. But think of it this way. Even the worst meltdowns, the longest lines and the most boring experiences are part of everyday life—something our kids need to learn. The world can't always be comfortable, catering to and entertaining us.

### For older kids

Teaching tech etiquette is a new item on the parenting to-do list. For example, I feel strongly that, even in the face of great temptation, kids and teens need to resist the urge to use their personal technology while visiting someone's home or meeting someone for the first time. Not doing so says "disinterested," "bored" or "rude," which they may not feel at all.

Maintain the same behavioral standards for your child online that you do offline. If you do not want your child to use certain language or call people names, do not allow it on a screen.

If you teach your child to be kind to others and to not lie or be deceitful, it's important to apply those beliefs to technology, too.

We have all seen rude and other bad behaviors related to the use of technology, often in a public setting. Talk to your kids about what they've noticed as well—and help them to develop a critical perspective. Use these situations to come

## A Sample Smart Phone Contract

Here's the contract that iRules author Janell Burley Hofmann wrote—and her 13-year-old son agreed to—when he received an iPhone as a Christmas present.

1. It's my phone. I bought it. I pay for it. I am loaning it to you.
2. I will always know the password.
3. If it rings, answer it. It's a phone. Say hello, use your manners. Do not ever ignore a phone call if the screen reads "Mom" or "Dad."
4. Hand the phone to one of your parents promptly at 7:30 pm on school nights and 9 pm every weekend night. It will be turned on again at 7:30 am.
5. It doesn't go to school with you. Have a conversation with the people you text. It's a life skill. Half days, field trips and after-school activities are a special case.
6. If the phone falls into the toilet, smashes on the ground or vanishes into thin air, you are responsible for the replacement cost or repairs.
7. Do not use this technology to lie to, fool or deceive another human being. Do not involve yourself in conversations that are hurtful to others.
8. Do not text, email or say anything through this device that you would not say in person.
9. Do not text, email or say anything to someone that you would not say out loud with their parents in the room. Censor yourself.
10. No porn. Search the Web for information that you would openly share with me. If you have a question about anything, ask a person, preferably me or your father.
11. Turn it off, silence it, put it away in public. Especially in a restaurant, at the movies or while speaking with another person.
12. Don't send or receive pictures of your private parts or anyone else's private parts. Don't laugh. You may be tempted to do this one day.
13. Don't take a zillion pictures and videos. Live your experiences. There's no need to document everything.
14. Leave your phone home sometimes. It is not an extension of you. Learn to live without it. Be bigger than FOMO (fear of missing out).
15. Download music that is new or classic or different from what millions of your peers are listening to. Expand your horizons.
16. Play a game with words or puzzles or brainteasers every now and then.
17. Keep your eyes up. See the world happening around you. Listen to the birds. Take a walk. Talk to a stranger. Wonder without Googling.
18. You will mess up. I will take away your phone. We will sit down and talk about it. We will start over again. I am on your team. We are in this together.

up with family rules for public use of phones and digital devices.

For example: put your phone in your pocket when you're walking. Sit on a bench to text, search or scroll. Instead of having a long conversation other people can hear, say, "I'm on the bus (or in a store). Let's catch up later."

### For kids of all ages

I hear stories about a child making a mistake, getting caught up in a situation online and waiting too long to turn to a trusted adult. Make sure your kids know that they can come to you, no matter what the circumstances are.

Say it again and again. "Talk to us, come to us. We are here

for you, no matter what. There's nothing we can't get through together. I might not like it, there may be consequences, but I will always be here for you."

### For the whole family

My family now schedules free time away from technology—daily at meals and before bed and weekly on family visits, hikes and other activities. We hold each other accountable, too. The kids say to me, "Mom, eyes up! I was asking you something." We also have an open time for texting on weekend mornings.

Give everyone in your family a chance to detox from electronics. Start with one day or an entire

weekend. Don't make it a punishment. Instead, fill the time with device-free family fun and talk about it when it's over.

Discuss what was hard or easy for everyone and how you used the time when you would have otherwise been plugged in.

### For us as parents

Setting boundaries around technology allows us to be fully present in whatever we're doing. If I'm helping my daughter with her homework and trying to text a friend about a health issue she's having, I'm not truly present for either of them. I think of it as a practice in mindfulness. If I'm cooking dinner, I don't update Twitter or check my work email one last time.

Here's some other advice for parents to think about.

- Don't let work follow you home and invade every corner of your family life.
- Put your phone away sometimes. Just go and leave it behind!
- Don't get lost in the phone zone constantly telling kids to "wait" and "hold on" while you do something more pressing online.
- Stay still when your kids talk to you. Really hear them when they speak. Look into their eyes and give a thoughtful response.

■ Use text messages for unemotional information such as "I'm leaving now to pick up the kids. Be there in 10 minutes." Instead of texting, talk in person to the other parent in your child's life about health issues, family finances and parenting concerns.

■ Have some boundaries. Get used to saying things like: "Tomorrow is a better time to talk" or "I only have five minutes." Then stick to it. ♦

—Adapted from the author's new book *iRules: What Every Tech-healthy Family Needs to Know about Selfies, Sexting, Gaming, and Growing Up* (see *We Recommend* on last page).

# Choosing the best movies for children

**Q**We read about Common Sense Media for the first time in this newsletter. Thank you! Our kids are in middle school now, and we've used this online guide since they were in preschool. Because there's such a glut of products out there, it helps a lot to have other parents and experts who understand child development weigh in on the best ones.

You should tell your readers that now there's a Common Sense for Families seal of approval for family-friendly movies.

—H.T., Seattle

**A**Thank you for telling us about this important new effort on the part of Common Sense Media.

The aim of the seal is to give parents and others very clear signals as to what's in a film—and perhaps to increase the availability of family fare in the future.

"We're basically saying we want the film industry to think more about families," says James P. Steyer, chief executive of Common Sense Media.

They expect to grant the seal to as many as 10 family-oriented movies a year.

Steyer notes that last summer was not a great season for family films. "If we help them sell more

great stuff, that's good," he says.

The first Common Sense for Families seal—a green, black and white circle, with a check mark—went to the Walt Disney movie "Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day" starring Steve Carell and Jennifer Garner.

It's based on a children's book written by Judith Viorst and illustrated by Ray Cruz that tells the story of a boy coping with nearly everything that can possibly go wrong in one lousy day.

About 30 million users a year check commonsensemedia.org for ratings and reviews of films and other media. ♦



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This is your column. We invite you to send questions about work and family life or tell us how you solved a problem that you think a lot of people face. Write: Dr. Susan Ginsberg, Work & Family Life, 305 Madison Avenue, Suite 1143, New York, NY 10165. E-mail: workfam@aol.com.

## RESEARCH REVIEW

# A search for the meaning of wisdom

**W**isdom is both a life-long quest and elusive concept. What is it really and how does it play out in our lives as we get older? Is the saying "older and wiser" a truism?

If you define wisdom, as many psychologists do, as the ability to maintain positive well-being and kindness in the face of life's challenges, it becomes one of the most important traits a person can have to age successfully. And there's been a lot of recent research on this subject.

University of Florida sociologist Monika Ardelt created a 39-question scale measuring three dimensions of wisdom: cognition, reflection and compassion. In her studies, individuals who showed high wisdom had better coping skills and were more active than passive in dealing with hardships. Wisdom was seen as an "ace in the hole" that can help even severely impaired people find meaning, contentment and acceptance in later life.

A major impediment to finding that wisdom is "not liking yourself" enough because you're not the person you used to be. "Wise people," says Dr. Ardelt, "are able to accept reality as it is, with equanimity."

Another group of researchers with the Berlin Wisdom Project in Germany pored over ancient and modern literature in their effort to define wisdom. They concluded that there are two kinds: general and personal. General wisdom involves un-

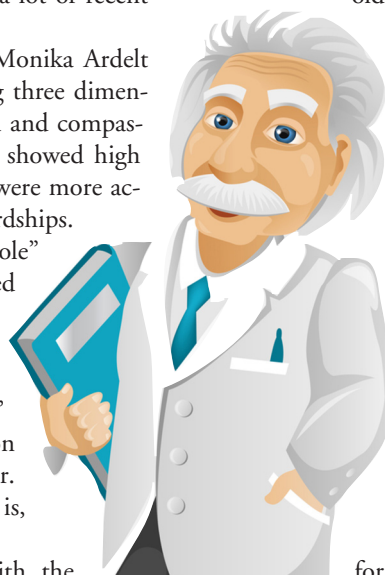
derstanding life from an observer's point of view, which makes you a reliable advice-giver. Personal wisdom, on the other hand, involves deep insight into one's own life, one's family history, one's historical era and an awareness of life's ambiguities.

Wisdom in this sense may be rare, says life span psychologist Ursula Staudinger, PhD. But in old age, it's better to be positive about life—and older people skew that way, she says.

"They are more likely to look back on their lives and say that events that occurred were for the best. They recognize the negative both within and outside ourselves and try to learn from it."

Simplifying one's life in old age is yet another sign of wisdom, says neuroscientist Vivian Clayton, who's been exploring this subject since the 1970s. She emphasizes that giving things away when you're still alive is not the same as giving up.

The key, Dr. Clayton says, is for older people to set goals that match their interests and abilities. Continuing education can help. For example, she recommends classes in guided autobiography or life review as another way to strengthen wisdom. ♦



## Study details risk to infants put to sleep on sofas

**O**ne in eight cases of crib death (SIDS) occurs among infants who were put on sofas to sleep, and a new study reported in the journal *Pediatrics* identifies some of the significant factors in these deaths.

To begin with, most occurred among infants age three months or younger. And the new study found that parents were more likely to lay their infants face down on a sofa than in a crib.

There's also a fallacy that "if I'm awake or watching, SIDS won't happen," says Dr. Jeffrey Colvin, a pediatrician at Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, and lead author of the study.

The study found that most parents shared the couch with an infant and fell asleep. They often put the baby between themselves and the back of the sofa, thinking it was safer, but it's easy for an infant to get wedged in between the parent and sofa.

"Infants need to sleep alone, on their backs and in a crib, and it doesn't matter if it's for a nap or overnight," says Dr. Colvin. ♦

# Forget the myths...middle age is a good place to be

**A**re middle-age baby boomers having an identity crisis? Just the opposite, it seems. A research project, now in its 20th year, has found that Americans in midlife—between ages 40 and 60 especially—have a greater sense of well-being about family, work and life than at any other time in their lives.

“It’s not the period of high anxiety we’ve been led to believe,” says psychologist Orville G. Brim, PhD, who led the initial phase of the Midlife Development in the U.S. study. “On balance, the sense we all have is that midlife is the best place to be.”

## Myth of the midlife crisis

Dr. Brim and his team have challenged stereotypes about midlife crises such as the empty-nest syndrome and menopausal distress. Other researchers are looking at stress factors unique to midlife, signals that could help predict a healthy middle age, and early signs of cognitive decline. They too are reporting mostly good news.

To begin with, the notion that most people go through a midlife crisis lives on in the public imagination, but it is *not* supported by research data. Fewer than one in four participants in the Midlife Development study reported a “crisis” and, of this group, the majority tied it to specific events that had nothing to do with aging or anxiety about aging.

Younger adults experience more frequent day-to-day stressors (such as fights with spouse, work deadlines) while middle-age adults report more “overload” stressors (juggling too many activities at one time). This isn’t surprising since many older boomers are part of a sandwich generation that is caring for children at home as well as older relatives.

But researchers say that these stressors still don’t add up to a midlife crisis.

## On the plus side

Middle-age adults report having a greater sense of control over different parts of their lives. Many have come through bad marriages and career struggles. Their kids are grown. They enjoy being “empty nesters.” And a raft of new books and blogs encourage them to revel in their role—*Empty House*, *Full Mind*, *Refeathering the Empty Nest* and *Fun Without Dick and Jane*, to name a few.



Lots of older boomers are feeling good and enjoying their lives.

Many boomers say they’re in better shape than they were 10 years ago, and some say they’re in the best shape of their lives physically, mentally and financially.

Midlife adults score higher on measures of cognitive functioning than they did when they were 25. They showed improvements in verbal and numerical ability, reasoning and memory. The only decline was in perceptual speed—for example, the ability to quickly decide if two zip codes are identical.

## On the search for meaning

Researchers also shot down the myth that when people hit their 40s, they feel a sudden desire to find new meaning in life. In her book *The Search for Fulfillment*, Dr. Susan K. Whitbourne explains that we gradually evolve in our values, beliefs and insights as we

go through life. There is no single point or age at which people become aware of their values or lack of values.

## Still hard to predict

As a group, however, middle-age adults are highly diverse and hard to predict. A sizeable cohort say they enjoy their jobs and want to work as long as possible. Or, if they do retire at 65, they don’t want to give up work entirely.

things that make her feel young in mind, soul and spirit. And all of the new brain research confirms that “novelty” is a key to staying sharp (see our October 2014 front page). Pogrebin suggests:

**Go someplace new.** Put yourself in unfamiliar circumstances where you can see the world in a new way or gain a heightened sense of awareness.

**Do something new.** It doesn’t need to be a big deal. Sit in a different chair. Change radio stations. Take another route home.

**Learn something new.** Study a foreign language. Learn to play a musical instrument. Teach yourself to do something new online.

**Test yourself in a new way.** For example, make your next vacation a hiking trip. State and national parks and trails are easily accessible. And check out what’s happening in your own community. For example, Detroiters are turning out by the hundreds and thousands for “slow roll” day-long bicycle rides.

**Make a long-term commitment.** Do something you have always wanted to do. Organize a community beautification project. Fix up a place in the country. Build your dream house.

**Do something that makes you feel really alive.** Introduce a new challenge in your life. Some people decide to run a marathon in their midlife years, for example. And don’t worry about what other people think—do it for yourself.

**Find new ways to give.** Giving experiences and relationships have a magical quality. Brush up on your skills to tutor a child in math or reading. Volunteer in a park, museum, school or nursing home. Support a political campaign or civic cause that means a lot to you. ♦

A smaller cohort that is both physically fit and financially comfortable say they want to retire early so they can “play” fulltime. Others look forward to starting their own business.

Midlife adults like to say “60 is the new 50” and are optimistic about their health, perhaps overly so. In one survey, a majority of participants from 45 to 62 reported good health was “within their control,” but only 25 percent said they were exercising enough or eating as well as they should.

## Feeling forever young

Letty Cottin Pogrebin, author of *Getting Over Getting Older*, is typical of many optimistic midlife Americans. She became an endurance hiker in her 50s after years of “thinking of myself as a wimp.” Her secret is to keep doing new

# 'Come to the party at our house...'

Teens love to entertain their friends, and there are many advantages to having a party at your house. You know where your kids are—and it's a great way to get to know their friends better.

Also, in many communities, young people don't have a lot of options for wholesome places to get together. Teenagers appreciate it when they can invite friends over and when their parents have a welcoming attitude.

## How to help teens entertain

Here are some suggestions from *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Parenting a Teenager*. (Don't be put off by that title.)

**Keep it small.** No more than 20–30 kids. Have your teen prepare the guest list and go over it together.

**No party crashers.** Make it a rule. There will always be a few kids who bring an uninvited friend, and that will require a judgment call on the spot. Just tell your child that if too many people show up, you'll have to close down.

**Decide on the hours.** Do this with your teen. Set a time for the party to start and a time when it will be officially over. This will help you answer other parents' questions and provide some added control.

**Be a presence, not a monitor.** Float in and out with food and drinks every once in a while.

**Invite another parent.** Ask a parent or couple to join you and help with chores. They may also know some kids you don't know.

**Alert your neighbors.** Let them know teenagers will be partying and tell them you'll keep the noise level as low as possible.

**No drugs or alcohol.** Remind your teen that if anyone shows up with either drugs or alcohol, he or she will be asked to leave.

**Stay put.** Make it a rule that teens who come to the party should stay. Their parents expect them to be there, and young people who leave and return may have had a drink someplace else or may be bringing back an illegal substance.

**Know the law.** It's against the law to serve, give, sell or deliver alcohol to a minor. You are responsible for your guest's illegal behavior, even if he or she was not under the influence of alcohol.

## If the party is at someone else's house

But *I'm Almost 13* author Kenneth Ginsburg advocates "preventive negotiation" with kids. For example, when you're discussing your daughter's plan for the coming weekend, give her some room to negotiate the arrangements: where she will be going, whom she will be with, an acceptable curfew, a plan to call and check in or to make arrangements to get home on time.

Young teens especially need to practice this give-and take exercise so they can develop increased responsibility for their choices. Just remember, it's up to you to set the limits and provide the structure.

**Call another parent.** If you don't know the people who are giving the party, get in touch with someone who does. Find out what "the scene" is likely to be.

Of course, calling people you don't know to ask about their party plans can be awkward. One way is to offer to help or provide food for the party. If it turns out the parents did not know about the party, they'll know now. And if they did know, they will appreciate your offer to help.

## Rules for teens to follow

**Clarify details.** How will your teen get to and from the party? Will he or she need your help? Make it clear that if your child leaves the party to go somewhere else—for



"Thank you...we have hungry people here!"

any reason—you must be called first. A call should also be mandatory if your teen wants to arrive home after curfew. And repeated requests to sleep over at a friend's house after a party may be a signal that something else is going on.

**On drinking and driving.** Remind your teen to *never* ride with anyone who has been drinking. Also, avoid a driving situation that involves a car full of teens. Tell your child to phone you (or any adult you agree on) at any time if she or he wants to leave the party—and there will be no questions asked.

**Have a nightly check-in.** This is a way to assure a safe return home when your children have been out, says Dr. Ginsburg. And it will help you get a good night's sleep.

He suggests starting the practice as early as possible so that it becomes an expected family rule. Even when your children are old enough to be out late, you can keep the ritual going with a simple "come in and say good-night" habit. And don't allow exceptions such as "I just forgot," "I didn't want to wake you up," or "I was too tired." ♦

## Resisting pressure from your teenager

If you hear the old refrains, "No one else's parents stay home when their kids have a party" or "everyone else gets to stay out until 2 o'clock," make your answers simple and direct: "We believe an adult should be on the premises during a party" or "other parents may let their kids stay out after 2, but we want you home in bed by then."

A key to handling teen pressure is to stay in touch with the families of your kids' friends. You can find out what's really going on and agree on what is and is not acceptable. You may find it hard to believe that teens want boundaries, but they do—and your child will be glad you're around if a party gets out of hand.

## Handling pressure from other kids

Talk to teens about what they might do or say at a party where other kids are drinking or smoking. A simple "no, thanks" is the best response, but it takes some self-confidence. You might also suggest these responses. "No thanks, I just don't feel like it." "I can't. I'm the designated driver." "I don't like the taste." "No thanks, I have to get up early." "No thanks. I'll get in trouble with my coach." ♦

# The challenge of going from peer to leader

By Bruce Tulgan

**Y**ou got the promotion. Congratulations! Yesterday you were a team member and today you're in charge.

When you are promoted from within, it's easy to make the mistake of thinking you already know everything you need to know. You have relationships with everyone and likely strong opinions about who's who and what's what.

Guess what? They have opinions about you, too. And *they* may include people with more experience than you—people who thought they should have gotten the promotion instead of you.

## Now you're the boss

All of a sudden you have power and influence in relation to people's livelihood and their ability to do work that's recognized and rewarded. Now you are the primary link between those individuals and the next level of leadership.

For those who report to you directly, you are now the key to helping them get the resources they need to be successful. And this shift will radically change your relationships at work.

Power does that—and the change needs to be handled with integrity, transparency, diligence, rigor, structure and substance.

## Don't soft-pedal a new role

Some managers try to soft-pedal their new authority: "Don't think of me as your boss. I'm still just me, just one of the team."

But that only works until there is a disagreement, an unpopular decision must be implemented or someone needs to be held accountable or called out for special recognition or reward.

I tell new managers: "Remember, you're the one who got the promotion. Live up to it. Own it. And don't let people make you feel bad about being the boss." Think of it this way. You have

two choices: to behave in such a way that your former peers will wonder *why* you became the new boss—or do such a good job that no one will ever wonder.

## When friends report to you

Many of us socialize with friends we met at work, and it can be hard to separate your role as the new boss from your role as friend. But that's what you have to do. Here are some suggestions.

**Decide which is more important.** If it truly is the friendship, maybe you shouldn't be the boss.

**Have ground rules that keep your roles separate.** Say, "Our friendship is important. So's my job. At work I need to be the boss. Outside work, let's try to leave that behind."

**Be a good manager.** Protect the friendship by making sure things go well at work. If you minimize those problems, you'll minimize potential conflicts.

**Accept that the parameters of your friendship have changed.** The work you and your friend share will become more and more the terrain of your friendship, and that's okay. With any luck, you'll find that what you share is both interesting and important.

Just be aware that as much as you try to separate your job and friendships, boundaries will not always be clear. Take care of your friendship by being a diligent, thorough manager—and hope that your friend will help you do that to the best of your ability.

## Coming on too strong

Next to soft-pedaling one's new authority, the most common mistake made by managers promoted from within is coming on too strong. Yes, you may feel like you need to assert confidence and strength and prove yourself right away. Take on any detrac-



*It's not always easy to move into a new role as the boss.*

tors. Show them who's boss. For example, on her first day as the team's new manager, one rising star (I'll call her Ms. Finance) pulled her team of 14 accountants and financial analysts into a conference room.

"I've been waiting for this day for a long time," she said. "Things are going to change. I'm holding everybody's feet to the fire. If you want something from me, you'd better be prepared to earn it. Any questions?"

There was a minor insurrection, and it took a long time to undo the damage. Ms. Finance quickly began to realize that things looked different from her new position. "I was really surprised at how much my perspective changed within a matter of a few weeks," she said.

What she should have done was to start out strong but with maturity and balance. Acknowledge her new role. Assume command. Accept the authority.

A new manager doesn't need to explain why she or he deserved the promotion. You don't have to justify your position. Instead, assume your new role and explain how you are going to operate as the manager.

Ms. Finance told me later, "I wish I had just said, 'I've been honored to be part of this team. Now I'm honored to be the manager.

We all have existing relationships [that] will change to greater and lesser degrees now that I'm your manager. I take this responsibility seriously. I'm committed to being really good at it. I am hoping you will help me.'"

## Start with good news

That would have made a much better start. Then it's time for the "Good news!" management message. And you should end that first team meeting by scheduling one-on-ones with every one of your new direct reports.

Always be aware that you don't know what you don't know. Ms. Finance learned from her early missteps and reflected later that coming from within gave her an advantage as manager, because she knew the operation and the people well.

"The big lesson for me was that I had blind spots," she says. "I needed to unlearn some of my assumptions and biases, and relearn the operation from a new perspective. In retrospect, I wish I had basically taken the approach of almost pretending I was a new manager coming in from the outside and starting fresh." ♦

—Adapted from the author's new book *"The 27 Challenges Managers Face"* (Jossey-Bass). For more information, visit [www.rainmakertalking.com](http://www.rainmakertalking.com).

## Stretch calves to help prevent leg cramping

Sudden, involuntary leg muscle contractions or spasms are common in people over age 50. They often occur at night or after any activity that your muscles were not used to doing. They can even happen when you stand up after sitting for a long time.

Physical therapist Davis Reyes, from Weill Cornell's Hospital for Special Surgery, says the precise cause of leg cramping is rarely clear. It could be muscle fatigue, nerve dysfunction, dehydration or the loss of essential minerals such as potassium. Diuretics may also be implicated. Arthritis can play a role too.

### What to do

If you have a sudden leg cramp, stretch the muscle, massage it and, if need be, apply heat to relax it. Sometimes just walking backward is enough to relieve discomfort in the short term.

To help prevent leg cramps from happening, Reyes says to: (1) Exercise regularly to build muscle strength and endurance. (2) Stretch regularly to keep muscles flexible. (3) Drink fluids throughout the day to stay hydrated and (4) follow a healthy, potassium-rich diet.

He suggests two exercises to stretch your calves. One is the wall stretch (lean forward, press into your heels and hold for 30 seconds). The other is the stair stretch (stand on a step with your heels over the edge, hold the rail and drop heels, and hold for 20 seconds, repeat 5-10 times).

If leg cramps persist, check with your doctor to figure out if there is an underlying medical cause. ♦

# 10 easy tips to keep you well and fit

**W**e all know what we *should* do. Eat more vegetables and fruits. Cut back on sugar, salt and saturated fat. Switch to whole grains. Exercise every day.

But how do we translate what we know into our daily decisions about food and fitness? Here are 10 of our favorite tips from the *Nutrition Action Healthletter*.

### 1 Buy cut veggies in a bag.

If you're too rushed to wash and cut your own, don't sweat it. Companies are glad to do it for you, and pre-cut vegetables don't cost that much more if you consider that there's no waste. Other options: buy your broccoli, carrots or other vegetables at the salad bar or frozen. Open the container, drop into a skillet or wok, add sauce. Dinner is served.

**2 Turn spinach into salads.** A nine-ounce bag of spinach makes three three-cup servings—each of which is rich in potassium, vitamins K, A and C, folate, magnesium, iron, calcium and fiber. All these nutrients for just 20 calories.

Any greens are good, but spinach is a superstar. There are lots of simple, easy recipes. For example: saute for a couple of minutes with garlic and chopped tomatoes.

**3 Buy sliced fruits.** You'll still pay less for pre-cut mango, cantaloupe and pineapple than you would for a fruit salad at a restaurant.



**4 Buy beans.** Swap the rice, pasta or potatoes for a side dish of beans or lentils. Bean salads and soups are an economical way to get a healthy protein-vegetable mix.

**5 Make junk food boring.** Don't stock your kitchen with five kinds of cookies, ice cream, pastries or

other sweets. Studies show that the more we see, the more we eat.

**6 Follow the half-plate rule.** Let vegetables or fruit occupy more plate real estate than your protein or pasta, rice or potatoes.

**7 Snack healthy.** Open a bag of sugar snap peas, rinse and eat. Dip grape tomatoes, sliced carrots, bell peppers or cucumber in a little hummus.

**8 Switch hit** from tuna to canned salmon. It contains more omega-3 fats and is almost always wild. Switch to nuts and seeds instead of croutons in salads. Instead of snacking on cookies, rinse and eat some fresh blueberries.

**9 Work out to TV.** Do some strength training, biceps curls, crunches,

push-ups, lunges, you name it. And if you have a stationary bike or treadmill, you know where to park it.

**10 Wear a pedometer.** Aim high. Studies have shown that people who wore a pedometer boosted their activity by 27 percent. ♦

## How to relieve relationship tensions during the holidays

**T**he year-end holidays offer wonderful opportunities to renew your family connections. They can also set the stage for family and relationship conflicts. Here are some suggestions from psychotherapist Joel Pava, PhD, of Massachusetts General Hospital.

**Try something new.** Visualize a holiday in which you and your loved ones would be most likely to enjoy a relaxed experience, and try to make it happen. Be creative. Celebrations don't always have to include the same people, rituals or activities, especially if they have become sources of conflict.

**Plan ahead.** Arrange your schedule as early as possible, and let others know what you intend to do. Plan how to divide up holiday tasks. Arrange seating, accommodations and activities to minimize potential conflicts.



**Adjust your attitude.** Be realistic and maintain your perspective if something stressful happens. Keep in mind the virtues of love, gratitude and sharing.

**Be adaptable.** Limit the time you spend with cranky or otherwise difficult relatives and friends. Take time away from festivities for a walk, a soothing bath or another calming activity. And, above all, have a sense of humor.

**Tackle stress head on.** Some holiday stress is probably unavoidable. Suggest activities such as exercise that promote relaxation. Use your interpersonal skills to be a peacemaker. Divert conversations that tend to end in arguments. Distribute chores fairly. And, most important, use alcohol wisely. Excessive drinking leads to problem behavior in many people. ♦

# Technology should enrich family life, not rule it

Our children's lives are no longer limited to school, home and the playground. Kids are fully immersed in an online world that has its own etiquette, language and problems. The new book *iRules* shows us how technology can enrich family life, rather than dominate it.

Janell Burley Hofmann, the author, is a parent coach who writes about parenting and technology for the Huffington Post and has a weekly spot on National Public Radio on tech etiquette.

When she and her husband decided to surprise their 13-year-old son Gregory with an iPhone, Janell created a contract that she

expected her son to abide by.

Before outlining her 18 ground rules (see *Sample Contract in our front page article*), she wrote: "I hope you understand that it's my job to raise you into a well-rounded, healthy young man who can function in the world and co-exist with technology, not be ruled by it. Failure to comply with the following list will result in termination of your iPhone ownership."

The contract went viral on the Huffington Post, and parents everywhere were inspired. This led the author

to write this book, in which she elaborates on each rule, tells why she included it and suggests ways to implement it with children of different ages.

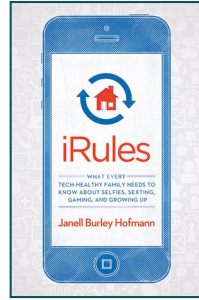
Hofmann encourages families to find a balance between technology and essential face-to-face human interaction, which she calls "slow-tech parenting."

Each family has to establish its own living, breathing contract for technology, one that suits the home, parenting style, children's ages and the types of technology they use. Hofmann believes that

if our tech values are consistent with our non-screen values, families will have a healthy compass for the use of technology.

Along with practical advice, her book is full of helpful questions for parents to ask themselves and their kids on every aspect of technology. Equally important, Hofmann talks about ways to set boundaries around technology, gradually start unplugging and make "device free" part of our family culture too.

*iRules: What Every Tech-healthy Family Needs to Know About Selfies, Sexting, Gaming, and Growing Up* (Rodale) is available in bookstores and online. ♦



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