

# Balance your life

Learning to say yes to yourself, and no to extra jobs, can be great for you... and the farm

By Helen Lammers-Helps

Choose your own favourite way to end this sentence. “I’ll slow down when...” Maybe you’ll say “when the crops are in,” or “when the crops are off.” Or how about “when the books are done,” or “when Dad’s treatments are over,” or “when the kids are older?”

Somehow, whatever you say, or however often you say it, it never seems to happen, which means it’s time to take a hard look at your work-life balance. Of course you sometimes need to go full tilt for a stretch. Every farmer has to, but making full throttle your only speed over long periods of time can have serious and sometimes disastrous consequences.

When stressed, we may experience headaches, back pain, neck and shoulder tension, insomnia, depression, weight gain, diabetes, and high blood pressure. We may become irritable and our relationships can be strained.

Maybe, you say, you can live with that. It’s all for the good of the farm.

But when we subject ourselves to ongoing stress, we make more mistakes, the quality of our decisions drops off, and we have more accidents too.

None of those can be good for the farm.

Saskatoon life coach, Pat Katz recites the mantra: “If we can’t set limits, our bodies will do it for us.”

Unfortunately says Katz, we often don’t recognize the early indicators that such a process is underway. And if we don’t make changes, that stress can lead to a heart attack, stroke, divorce, or a complete mental breakdown.

This isn’t a new problem but we still aren’t doing very well at solving it. In fact, research at Carleton University has shown the problem is getting worse, says Katz.

There’s another challenge too. We often think that the stress of farming falls mainly on the shoulders of men,

and it’s true that it can do just that. But finding work-life balance can be even more of a challenge for women who often wrestle not only with farm responsibilities but with the bulk of child care, elder care, and housework on top of their careers, says Port Coquitlam, B.C. business coach Pam Paquet.

Yet instead of attacking the problem, farm women often reach for band-aid solutions, Paquet adds. “We reach for the Tylenol or the sleeping pills, book a massage or take a vacation. Unfortunately, none of these tackle the real problem.”

Women need to set boundaries, says Paquet. She encourages women to write a job description for themselves for both work and home and to not take on jobs that aren’t their responsibility. Says Paquet: “They need to say ‘here’s what I’m willing to do.’ And that could be different in different seasons.”

Elaine Froese, a farm family coach in Boissevain, Man. agrees we need to be more intentional with our time. “Otherwise we get caught in patterns and habits that don’t serve us well,” Froese says. One of her rules for keeping work from taking over her life is that she doesn’t work on Saturdays and Sundays, which includes not answering the phone or sending emails. “That’s my time,” Froese says.

Froese also starts her day with a workout. “I need to look after myself first,” she explains.

Froese’s iCal calendar program, which came with her Mac computer, is a useful tool for keeping her life balanced. “It’s colour coded according to the type of activity. I can see at a glance if there’s not enough self-care in there,” she explains.

Unfortunately exercising, eating healthily, getting enough sleep, socializing with friends and doing hobbies — the very things that help us combat stress — are usually the first things to go when we are too busy. Sometimes you may have to

be creative with your time management, says Froese. She and her husband wanted to spend more time together but they also needed more exercise so they bought a kayak instead of a motor boat.

Paquet says more women need to adopt that kind of thinking. Women can suffer from Super Woman Syndrome, believing they can do it all and be available to everyone all the time, says Paquet. There’s a tendency to keep taking things on, even when they know they’re already overburdened, because saying no creates another burden — guilt.

Paquet encourages people to prioritize their jobs by assigning an A, B, C or D rating and focusing on the most important jobs. Then she suggests looking at which jobs you can delegate or hire someone else to do. For example, can you hire someone to clean the house? Can you set up a carpool for soccer practice?

People often have trouble letting go of things that others could do, continues Paquet. Her rule of thumb is that if someone else can do the job and get it right 75 to 80 per cent of the time, then it’s a good investment to hand it off.

For Deb Calverley of Deloraine, Man., who works full time as an accountant with MNP and manages 12 employees in two offices, having a good housekeeper helps keep her stress in check. Her husband Dennis is a grain farmer, which allows him to be home during the busy tax season from February to April when Calverley is hardly around. “He runs the boys to their activities and he is a good cook,” she says. But, she adds, “he doesn’t really like to clean.”

Calverley strives to give it her all when she’s at work, but then to leave work at work. She also plans downtime every year by renting a cabin where there’s no Internet service.

When full-time RBC senior financing specialist Amanda Hammell and her hus-



## Resources

Take the Work-Life Balance quiz on the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety website at:  
<http://www.ccohs.ca/healthyworkplaces/topics/worklifebalance.html>

Find life tips on the Canadian Mental Health Association website at:  
<http://www.cmha.ca/mental-health/your-mental-health/worklife-balance/>

Check out articles available on Pat Katz's website at:  
<http://www.pauseworks.com/library/>

band Steve, who is also a township councillor, built their new dairy barn three years ago they chose to go with a robotic milker. It gives her husband more flexibility, which helps them juggle their busy household, says the mother of two young daughters.

Hammell and her husband also make a conscious effort to have a date night once a month to keep the lines of communication open. She and her husband also send emails to each other. "Communication is very important," Hammell says. "Misconceptions can escalate."

A support system is also a key to their success in juggling family life, careers and farming. "We have friends and neighbours who can be called on to help us out in a pinch," she explains.

Hammell also recognizes that she can't control everything. "My husband and I do things differently and that's OK. My way is not the only way," she says.

And she's had to accept that there are days where not everything will get done, she says. "And it's OK to throw a pizza in the oven for dinner sometimes."

Learning to let go of perfectionism is essential, agrees Beverly Beuermann-King, stress and wellness expert from Little Britain, Ont. "You can't do it all," she insists.

Some people need to learn how to take time off. They've grown up hearing "idle hands are the devil's workshop" so they need to learn to give themselves permission to take a break. Understanding that a pause is an investment requires a shift in mindset.

"Too often a pause is only used as a reward when the work is done," agrees Katz. "The problem with that is that too often the work is never done."

Katz advises her clients to start by developing a micro-pause habit. For example, when you are working at your computer, set a timer to remind yourself to take a break and stretch every hour. When you are driving, take a deep breath and stretch your shoulders at all the red traffic lights. Once you've built these micro-pauses into your day, she encourages her clients to work up to 10-minute mini-pauses.

Beuermann-King emphasizes there is no "one size fits all" when it comes to creating a balanced life. It's about finding tools that work for you.

Froese agrees. The important thing to remember is that life is lived in days and moments that become months and years, says Froese. "Ask yourself what you need to start doing. And ask yourself what you need to stop doing." **CG**

## AVAILABLE BACHELOTTES



At 39, 5'6 138 lbs I have my life in order, I have great girlfriends, a nice home, my wonderful canine companion, and I am very successful at what I do. Money is no concern for me, I am healthy in great shape, look good in

blue jeans, I've been told I have a nice booty, but I have a personality & brains too. I love sports, I enjoy being out on the water on a summers day, with the sun shining. I love chilling at bar with great food, watching a game too. Love motors sports & motor cycles, I was previous a model for a major beer company, but now that I am older & wiser all that stuff is only fun once in while I am looking for my soulmate. I like to cook, I enjoy dancing & yes I do attend church. I give back to my community & believe love conquers all. Mirander Lambert is a lady I admire.



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