

# Balancing Life

By: Renee Lakes, Lincoln Middle/High School

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## **Background That Led to Your Inquiry:**

I had been the principal at Western Wayne Elementary School since the fall of 2005. In November of 2016 the principal of Lincoln Middle/High School, which is in the same school corporation, decided that he would resign effective January 1, 2017. I was asked to transfer to the middle/high school starting January 4, 2017. After a lot of research, thought, discussion, and prayer, I accepted the position and all of the new challenges it would bring. As a wife and a mother of 5 very active children ranging in age from 20-6, I began to wonder how I could balance family life and the time commitments my new position would place on me. Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to analyze how I was spending my time both at home and at school and monitor my stress level to bring a better balance to my life.

## **Statement of Your Wondering:**

With this purpose, I wondered if bringing a good balance between the different aspects of my job and my home life will impact my leadership?

## **Methods/Procedures:**

To gain insights into my wondering, I collected some baseline data to see a sample of how I was spending my time. I feel the most important and enjoyable part of my job is that of instructional leader. In my new role I found that I was spending most of my time on management not on instructional leadership. I made a conscience effort to schedule time everyday to visit classrooms and provide feedback about instruction to my teachers. I also enlisted the help of my secretary to make sure that I didn't let anything interrupt those scheduled times. At home, I started scheduling time to myself and time for prayer and reflection. I found that this helped me be fully present for my family and my school.

To collect my data I categorized the types of activities I spent my time on each day and created a spreadsheet with a column for each category. Each day I would reflect on my data and list the number of minutes I spent on each category. I started with a two week baseline where I didn't change anything. After that baseline data, I analyzed it to see where I was spending most of time and why and then put some changes into place. I then continued collecting data in the same manner to see if my efforts were making a difference.

When I analyzed the data, I calculated the percentage of each day I spend on each category and then set goals to either increase or decrease in each category. As I made goals I would put events on my calendar to remind me to spend more time doing the things I wanted to increase my time on. I did this after the first two weeks of collecting baseline data and then again at the end of each day and the end of each week over the next four weeks.

## **Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:**

As a result of analyzing my data, three important things I learned include: 1) I was spending a significant percentage of time with my family but when I dug deeper I was pretty generous on what I counted as "Family Time". 2) At school I was spending more time on management than I was on instructional leadership. 3) I was

not allowing myself permission to take time to myself and it was making me grouch and not able to handle stress very well.

I was spending an average of 24% of a 24 hour day in the category of "Family Time." That number looks pretty good but when I dug deeper I discovered that I was counting driving to and from school, sitting on the couch working on school work with my family in the room, and time with my kids in my office before and after school while I worked as "Family Time." That time should be reserved for times that I am fully present for my family and that was not the case. I now am spending less time in the "Family Time" category but it is higher quality time and that is better for all of us.

At school, I was spending more time on management than on instructional leadership. I was allowing the things that often pop up in a school day to take precedent over my scheduled instructional leadership times. I had to learn that it was okay to say that I didn't have time to talk to someone or take a call immediately but instead allow myself to schedule a time to talk with someone or take a call. I needed to take charge of my schedule instead of it taking charge of me.

I was not allowing myself permission to truly take time to myself. I was counting time in the shower or time driving to a meeting as "Me Time". I found that if I took even 10 minutes a day to just sit and relax or crochet or call a friend with no interruptions, I was more focused and able to be fully present. This took some training for my family, especially the six year old. Once I explained the purpose of "Me Time" they were on board and the teenagers helped me with the six year old.

### **Providing Concluding Thoughts:**

I love the action research cycle! It is not scary or difficult in any way. It teaches you how to organize your thoughts and challenges in a way that help you work toward achieving your professional and personal goals. I learned that as a mom and an administrator that I need to be needed. This translates into me spending the majority of my time fixing problems for others that they could fix themselves with minimal guidance leaving me no time to focus on myself or my goals. I have learned the people can quickly become dependent on you if you allow them to. I have learned to say no and ask good questions to lead people (including my childrens) to solve problems on their own. I am still working on this one because it is so ingrained in me but I am happy to report I am getting better.

In the future I will continue to ask questions to guide others to solve problems instead of just taking everything on myself. I will work on coaching my teachers and my kids to solve problems without needing guidance from me. I will also continue to monitor my time and use my calendar to be sure that I don't fall back into old habits.

One of the tools I used to help me in my action research journey was the Justin Baeder 21 Day Leadership Challenge through The Principal Center. This challenge helped me streamline my management tasks so I have more time for the the things I really feel I need to spend my time on. The Challenge taught me how to schedule time for instructional leadership and provide effective feedback to teachers in a timely manner. Mr. Baeder also provided several tricks and strategies to manage paperwork and email so they don't become overwhelming. All of the things I learned while working on the 21 Day Leadership Challenge helped me focus my time on leadership and not just management.

## **References:**

Gordon, J. (2008). No Complaining Rule: Positive Ways to Deal With Negativity at Work. John Wiley & Sons Incorporated.

Lencioni, P. (2005). The five dysfunctions of a team: a leadership fable. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass A Wiley Imprint.

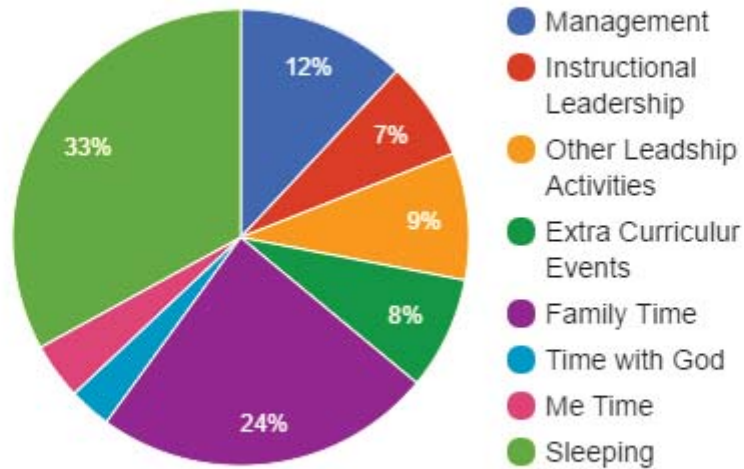
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Action Research Data

IPLI Cohort #4

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### Baseline Data 1-3-17 through 1-16-17



### Data from 1-17-17 through 2-3-17

