

It is amazing how many times in my life that big work events and huge personal events seem to overlap. Maybe this has happened to you. All is quiet, or relatively so at both your house and your job, then suddenly something huge happens at both! It's like the fates got bored and decided to amp things up on two fronts!

You may recall from earlier columns that I negotiated my very first president's contract from my oldest daughter's hospital room as she recovered from a potentially life-saving surgery. That was a huge interaction of work and personal life.

This week was another one of those times for me. For the past six months I knew when our accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) was headed to town to give us the once-every-ten-year affirmation of our accreditation. We have been preparing for over a year, writing a 125-page "Assurance Argument" with over 500 pieces of evidence cited. In some ways, we have been preparing for the last 10 years for this week – putting processes, policies, and procedures in place to create a culture of assessment and an emphasis on continuous improvement. Five peer-reviewers and one observer were on their way to Chanute from all over the country to confirm what we wrote was true. It was going to be a huge time for the college and for me as the president.

In May, I got a visit from my youngest daughters' long-time boyfriend. While Alayna was away on a trip, her boyfriend took that opportunity to talk to Jen and me about how we felt about him marrying our daughter. We were thrilled, of course, and gave our blessing. Chandler is a wonderful young man who adores our girl. You may recall from a previous column that I just married off my oldest daughter in April, so here we go again! Same song second verse!

Over the course of the summer we asked how he was going to propose and he decided to do it at the Kansas City Renaissance Fair this last Sunday and wanted us to be there to see it. Yes, the Sunday the HLC arrived. Oh no.

Thanks to some help from Vice President, Dr. Sarah Robb, I was able to see my daughter say "Yes!" to the big question and still get the HLC folks settled in for their Monday morning meetings. I didn't miss a single meeting with them.

Finding the balance between work life and personal life is always difficult. Many of us have had to miss a concert or a game that our loved one was in because of work. Conversely, we all might have had to move some deadlines around at our jobs or ask for help to cover for an absence in order to be with family. It is important to do the best you can for both your place of employment and for the people you care about the most. But that is often a difficult choice that can lead to regret.

We believe in a great work-life balance at NCCC. We give supervisors the ability to flex time with employees so they don't have to miss a kid's ball game or big life events. We have sick leave of course, but we also have a sick leave pool that employees can draw from for major health issues for themselves or their families so they don't miss a paycheck. We help pay in part for family health insurance. We also have a good amount of vacation days, and days we are closed, such as Spring Break, Thanksgiving Break, and Christmas Break.

Faculty can work from home for a small part of their workweek if they so choose. And we close the college on Friday afternoons to provide all employees more time to be with family (or in the case of kids in school, get a break from them as one mom told me), but we still pay 40 hours a week.

Have these initiatives taken a toll on quality though? It does not appear so at all. We conduct a national student satisfaction survey every other year including spring 2023. These latest results show an all-time high in student satisfaction in all areas – Advising, Financial Aid, Campus Climate, Services, Instruction, Registration, Safety, and Student Centeredness. In fact, all but one of these were above the national average! The data proves that, thanks to our wonderful employees and the great job they do, we can have a good balance with home life and great student satisfaction. We don't have to choose one or the other.

Lee Iacocca, the famed past CEO of Chrysler and developer of the Ford Mustang, once said, "I have been to a lot of retirement parties and I have never once heard the honoree say, 'I wish I had spent more time at work.'" My goal is that everyone who works at NCCC does not feel regret because of the things they missed due to the job. I know that is an impossible goal. I know work will have to intrude from time to time, but it's my hope that those times are limited thanks to the initiatives that we have put in place.

I was so happy to be there when Chandler popped the question to see my daughter's reaction. That was an immediate "Yes!" On the work front, the meetings with the HLC went well, but I won't know those results for another 2-3 months. There will always be times when I may have to choose between life events and work events and budget my time accordingly. But, thanks to help from others and work flexibility, we can often do both.

Congratulations Chandler and Alayna! I know you will be happy, as long as you find the right balance.

If you have any questions about this column, or anything else please email me at binbody@neosho.edu.