

Working Fathers Need a Little Tension

A new look at an old study sheds some light on the classic dilemma for dads: How do you balance career and family?

I'm sure you've faced the question: do I put more time in at work—to insure I keep my job, pursue career advancement, or expand my business? Or, do I drop whatever I'm doing and head home in order to be with the family? It's a never-ending tension: how much time do I spend where?

You'll be glad to hear about some new research, which found that the very challenge—the tension—that results from trying to give our best to both worlds may be actually helping us men—in both areas.

John Snarey of Emory University has done a unique study in which he's been able to examine the effect of fathers on their children.

The study is based on interviews conducted soon after World War II, and then periodically with the same men and their children over the next four decades. Based on the interviews, he ranked the fathers as “not involved,” “somewhat involved,” or “involved” fathers.

Overall, Snarey found that involved fathers “may have delayed writing a paper or put off some other project, but in the long run (the involved) fathers went *just as far* in their work as comparable men did who were less involved with their kids.”

In fact, fathers who were involved in two particular ways—in their children's mental development and their adolescents' social development—went further on average in their careers than dads who weren't.

As I consider this tension between time at work and our time at home, I like to picture a tent. The tent is held up by tension—one rope pulls one way to a stake in the ground, while another pulls the other way. If one rope isn't tight, the tent sags. And if one rope is pulled too tight, it also collapses. Without just the right amount of tension, the roof of the tent can't do its job.

Now—thanks to John Snarey—we have evidence that that very tension may be good for us.

Dr. Ken R. Canfield is founder of the National Center for Fathering, and served as NCF's president and CEO from 1990 through 2005. He is the author of *The Heart of a Father* and numerous other books including the award-winning *7 Secrets of Effective Fathers*.

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