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The Incredibles: Leading the Way to Have It All

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THE INCREDIBLES: LEADING THE WAY TO HAVING IT ALL

Meet Jane and Ted. Jane and Ted are successful partners at their law firms. They have families they see every night. They have employees who enjoy working for them. They feel on top of their workload – well at least some days. Other days, they don't feel quite as successful; some days in fact are quite challenging. But Jane and Ted have figured out a different approach to get where they are today. Through trial and error, they have figured out the skills it takes to rethink how to accomplish both their personal and work goals. Jane and Ted are what we call *integrated leaders*. To achieve this required practice, vision, and skill. These skills are not necessarily simple, but as we'll show below, they are all doable.

In the following pages, we'll introduce you to three real life Jane and Teds, lawyers who have sought to minimize what can feel like the “win-lose” equation of success at work and success in creating time for life. Instead of capitulating to the either/or choice of demanding work or an alternative career to make time for family, these three lawyers took the more challenging path of holding on to both their career and life goals while moving ahead to become equity partners – leaders who are also responsible for business development in their firms. We'll show you how this choice led to the development of 21st century leadership skills, skills that enables them to meet both their personal and professional objectives.

INTEGRATED LEADERSHIP TAKES SKILL

Integrated leaders like Jane and Ted use 21st century skills: a mix of skills that enable leaders to be more efficient and leverage relationships to help balance workloads. Leaders develop these skills through significant trial and error as they navigate the constantly changing landscape of work and home.

21st century skills are differentiators. The combination of being more efficient, increasing the level of interdependence, and setting effective boundaries is what makes integrated leaders so competent. In fact, it is their desire to live the ‘and’ of work and home that gives them the impetus to learn the skills required to achieve this balance.

These skills don't magically appear; Jane and Ted didn't just arrive in their leadership positions with these skills. It took the motivation to have both aspects in their lives to get them over the hurdles that arose along the way. And as you will see, not only have these skills benefited our heroes, they've also benefited their organizations.

21ST CENTURY SKILLS DEFINED

What are 21st Century Skills? From our work with integrated leaders, we've identified twelve essential professional skills that facilitate this effectiveness. They fall into two categories:

1. A desire to do more with less time thereby increasing **efficiency**. Efficiency is getting the 'right' things done in a timely matter.
2. Fostering **cooperation and interdependence** to develop others and collectively share the workload. Too often people get caught by a belief that they must do it all themselves. In contrast, 21st century leaders quickly learn that the key to their own work/life balance is developing interdependence to create an environment primed for collaboration.

| Understanding the 21 st century skill set: Do more with less time | |
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| Skill | Definition |
| 1. Self-Discipline. (fundamental) | An ability to focus on the present moment and get work done despite distractions. It allows you to focus on your most important work, even if it isn't your favorite work. It enabled these pioneers to keep on reaching for their goals, even when they encountered challenges along the way. If you don't have self-discipline, you can ask others to help hold you accountable. |
| 2. Plan and prioritize. | Deciding among competing priorities, finding win/win solutions wherever possible, planning steps to achieve long term goals and identifying which short term goals may have to be let go using objective criteria. Tradeoffs are inherent in senior level jobs. One needs to understand and directly communicate these tradeoffs to those involved, including spouse and children. Shifting from the short-term 'emergency focus' prevalent today to a longer horizon allows one to move away from reaction into responsiveness. It enables making investments today for longer term benefits. |
| 3. Anticipate the future. | Anticipating events that impact either life or work, planning long-term to manage these events pro-actively, and balancing these plans with others on the team. It also includes making those investments and setting up structures that can provide more flexibility and be leveraged later such as taking time to build a practice so that one can find win-win flexibility both internally and externally. |
| 4. Create quiet focused work time. | Scheduling specific times in one's calendar to enable reflection and to think more strategically v. being hyper-focused on 'getting things done'. Quiet time is highly creative and allows for rejuvenation, and contemplation. Requires the self-discipline to not book this time with short-term 'urgencies' and to avoid checking email/answering the phone. Building this time into employees' schedules fosters motivation because they can increase control over how they use time. |
| 5. Use technology strategically. | Using technology as a means to pro-actively manage workflow. Provides flexibility and accessibility through the use of an administrative assistant, voice mail and email. Enables checking in at set times v. constantly. Allows for managing remotely and sharing information across physical boundaries. Requires the ability to turn technology off and create time at work or while working remotely for focused work time with minimal disruptions. |

Understanding the 21st century skill set: Increasing effectiveness by leveraging interdependence and fostering cooperation

| Skill | Definition |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 6. Set personal boundaries. | Defining clear boundaries by saying no, going slow and saying yes to the areas that one can manage effectively. This is one of the most important but also challenging skills. It requires one to be assertive and state one's own needs while also considering the needs of the whole or thinking outside the box. It requires one to figure out how to get the work done in other ways (leading to the skills of relationship). |
| 7. Build strong relationships. | Building an internal and external network of others that interdependently support each other's work and life. Can be sounding boards for problem solving and support during challenging periods. Relationships across the hierarchy provide options to get work done effectively and offer opportunities for creative problem solving. Creates opportunities for mentoring and role modeling of the skills. Requires one to move beyond the 'I need to do it all myself' mentality and include others in the process. |
| 8. Create a sense of reciprocity. | Mutual support greases the wheels. It enables one person to cover for another when an unexpected issue arises. Creates a reinforcing loop creating stronger relationships based on trust and helps to develop resilience within the organization as employees learn to rely on each other. At home it enables one spouse to support the other during challenging times. |
| 9. Develop win-win delegation. | Understanding the skills and areas of development for oneself and one's junior employees enables effective delegation of work. Requires understanding of priorities, requirements, and development goals. Done effectively, leaders have more time to focus on strategic work they are uniquely qualified to do and offers an opportunity to develop the skills of more junior employees. Requires an upfront time investment which yields significant back-end, long-term benefits. |
| 10. Manage expectations. | Defining performance, setting clear expectations, and ensuring that these are mutually understood reduces unnecessary effort and the chance of over promising. Pro-active expectation setting helps maintain a motivating environment and ensures that the 'right' work is done in the 'right' amount of time. Reduces conflict by ensuring expectations are understood clearly from the start of the task. |
| 11. Be flexible. | Flexibility empowers others to meet expectations while being creative in how to achieve the goal. Flexibility is mutual: it's a manager allowing for the unexpected personal issue or it's the individual allowing for the late night client call. Flexibility allows the leader to adjust mid-stream when expectations can't be met due to unforeseen situations. It opens doors to new opportunities and new information. |
| 12. Set collective boundaries. | Determining as a team the priorities, the essential requirements, the areas that can be slowed down or ignored, and the areas that require more focus. Negotiating this across and within the teams develops buy-in, reduces conflict, and builds relationship skills within the team. Enables the team to work at a higher level of performance as they enforce and reinforce the boundaries that have been collectively negotiated. |

Individuals develop these skills to achieve their own goals, but the business also benefits.

Take technology. Technology is an enabler. At face value, it helps one be available regardless of location and time and gives one greater control over work tasks – precisely the type of flexibility that increases job satisfaction.ⁱ But, it also involves ‘finding the right balance to achieve optimal outcomes;’ⁱⁱ that is, one has to decide not to be ‘on’ 24/7 simply because the technology allows it. Integrated leaders decide when and how to use technology whether it’s scheduling specific times to check email each day, or working from home one day a week to maximize efficiency. The space provided by strategic technology use allows leaders to be more responsive because they are not reacting but taking time to think, creating uninterrupted work time, and prioritizing the ‘in box’ thus creating better client outcomes.

Translate this to business benefit: Is it better to dictate when/where/how people work or build their skills in determining how best to reach their goals? When individuals learn how to make these decisions themselves, it develops skills in self-discipline, planning, prioritizing setting expectations and boundary setting.

These 12 skills are precisely the skills that make effective leaders. In fact, according to IBM’s 2008 Global CEO Study, the Enterprise of the Future ‘is home to visionary challengers – people who question assumptions and suggest radical, and what some might initially consider impractical, alternatives.’ⁱⁱⁱ Integrated leaders are visionary challengers.

Our research shows that through the development of these 21st century skills, both businesses and individuals benefit and create work/life balance on their own terms. Let’s look at three examples of integrated leaders, all of whom are leaders who do business development alongside having a full life outside of work.

FORGING A NEW PATH

Meet Hannah. Hannah is the managing partner for a boutique law firm. Her husband has a career in music. Hannah and her husband are partners in creating a work-life balance that allows them both to be there for each other and their family. But they learned these lessons and built the supporting structures around them over time. Although Hannah’s long term goals were to work while also being actively involved with her family, initially it required her to focus considerable time on her work as she built a new practice within her firm. Hannah also built relationships within her work and life to support her. After children arrived, Hannah’s clarity about her family goals enabled her to negotiate an 80% workweek while she and her husband shared care for their child.

However, life never works in straight lines. Over time, this structure became burdensome and Hannah realized that even as an equity partner, her current firm was not going to support the growth of her niche practice. When an opportunity arose for the practice to be acquired, the transition enabled Hannah to once again recalibrate her expectations of work and over a period of time, enabled the new practice to expand while also moving towards her preferred family goals.

Throughout this process, there was also reciprocity between Hannah and her husband. There were times when her husband picked up the slack when Hannah's work required more attention. There were times when those roles were reversed. The strength of the support between them gave them the ability to maximize flexibility and support each other. There were times when one of them simply had to prioritize work or family. But they never got side tracked from their longer term goals. In fact, now 3 years into her new practice, she is managing partner and she also takes turns with her husband being home afternoons to care for their children after school.

MAKING IT WORK

Meet Nina. Nina has a big job (equity partner in a large firm in the AMLAW 100). Her husband also has a demanding career as a doctor. Nina and her husband hired a nanny to help balance work and family, but they also took a team approach and equally shared responsibilities in the evenings and on weekends. Nina focused considerable time on work early in her career. However, as Nina puts it, 'a career is a continuum' and she and her husband learned to adapt as children and life came along with their careers.

One of the essential skills she developed was win-win delegation. Nina is an active delegator who builds strong relationships with the associates and partners to whom she delegates. Delegation takes up-front investment of training, mentoring and relationship-building to build the skills of others. But as Nina notes, the benefits 'keep coming back' and are 'so worth the costs.' Nina has realized benefits like staff development, an ability to get a lot done in a short space of time, the freedom to focus on more strategic aspects of the case, and the space to simply take some time off.

Nina learned to be respectful of her associates' time instead of assuming that the associate 'should' do the task simply because she asked. She created open communication including inquiring about the associate's availability and setting clear expectations about the work requirements.

In addition, Nina creatively broke down the task into appropriate parts to avoid unwanted duplication, ensure task completeness, and enable assignment of different levels of tasks to differently skilled lawyers. Nina often takes a large team to a client meeting, explaining the 'team' aspect of the work. The client sees higher quality work because the work is strengthened by the team aspects.

A key to Nina's success is approaching work not as an individual super star but instead as part of a team, where each member works together. Her firm's emphasis on teams and collaboration supports Nina's ability to be responsive to existing clients, delegate effectively and have energy for time outside of work.

LOOKS TRADITIONAL; ACTS RADICAL

Meet Kai. Kai is also an equity partner in a large firm with pressure to be in the AMLAW 100. Kai may look like many other partners: successful practice, stay-at-home spouse. But in reality, Kai acts quite radically. He gives weight to all aspects of his life and decides his priorities accordingly; that is, Kai's life is not all

work. He is the one who does the children's morning routine; he's a co-partner all weekend and is present for his family daily. Kai's committed to being there for his family when others have taken the easier path of letting work take over their lives.

Kai uses expectation and boundary setting to manage his work/life balance. Throughout his career, he has learned how to assertively set clear expectations about what he's willing and able to do while simultaneously being responsive. For example, if a client calls and says 'I need this report updated,' rather than ask 'by when,' Kai tells the client that he can have the report by the next morning, a time that is achievable. Consider it from the client's view: Kai has said 'yes' to the request and when he'll meet the client request. Rather than drop everything and re-prioritize, Kai determines what, when, and where. The client now knows when they can expect their report and feels that Kai has been responsive. A win/win. Kai manages his own workload and the client gets his/her needs met.

This approach has helped Kai build interdependent relationships enabling him to be successful at his work and in his life balance. For example, a conversation with a mentor gave him insight about his passion in helping more junior associates find their way. Relationships built across his career allow him to have multiple perspectives and flexibility as he works for a variety of other partners. The relationships help build his leadership skills as he has learned to work with many different work styles. They have also often led to business development. The connections made internally and externally to the firm open up new understanding and opportunities for finding ways to balance his desire to be with his family more and be successful at work.

What do you notice about all these stories? In each case, the individual goal of living a full, balanced life, led to creative experiments helping them develop 21st century skills. Over time they learned how to be responsive to clients, develop new business, delegate effectively and have time and energy for their lives outside of work.

Each solution was different. In particular, Hannah's solution in a small firm was different than Nina and Kai's. But each story shared the same important thread: an unwavering commitment to their lives outside of work.

Emulating the incredible lives of Hannah, Nina, and Kai is possible. Thanks to these integrated leaders who are showing us the way, there is a growing understanding of how it can be done. You too can create the environment that enables you to reach your life goals by developing the skills to create a more collaborative and effective workplace. Doing so may not just benefit you, it may also benefit your workplace.

¹ Golden, Timothy D, Applying Technology to work: toward a better understanding of telework. Organization Management Journal; Winter2009, Vol. 6 Issue 4, p241-250

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ IBM Global CEO Study: The Enterprise of the Future. An annual study based on conversations with over 1,000 CEOs and public sector leaders worldwide. 2008. IBM.

All pioneer stories are real and are built from ThirdPath's work with leaders over the last decade, finding new options for men and women to approach family, and new and innovative ways for everyone to redesign work and create more time for life.