

CHAPTER 6

Balance



In *Oh, The Places You'll Go*, Dr. Seuss writes, “Step with care and great tact and remember that life’s a great balancing act.” This is good leadership advice as well. Achieving and maintaining balance is arguably the most important thing a leader does. Like a tightrope walker performing without a net, balance is essential for a leader’s success.

Achieving balance isn’t easy, and what constitutes balance is generally in the eye of the beholder. Importantly, for our purposes, balance doesn’t mean weighing things equally. For example, if a leader must balance A and B, it might be appropriate to assign a weight of 90 percent to A and 10 percent to B. Too often, when the word *balance* is used, people think of a scale in which weight on the right side must equal the left. However, depending on the issue, the scale might be balanced appropriately without the two sides being level.

We also can't balance the same way at every instance. Seldom will a leader be able to maintain the same balance over time. Instead of achieving instantaneous and perpetual balance, our goal is to motivate leaders to achieve appropriate balance in multiple areas over time.

BALANCING FAMILY AND CAREER

The need to balance family and career is not limited to leaders. This is a challenge for all career-oriented individuals. If I hadn't known this sooner, I would've learned it from teaching millennials. The most frequently asked question of the guest leaders visiting the leadership class was how they balanced family and career. A CEO of a major corporation responded, "It cost me my first marriage." Another CEO said, "I am the poster child for how *not* to balance family and career. Don't use me as your role model. No success at work is worth failure at home." Two days later, he was in divorce court for the second time.

Nearly every leader meeting with the class said it's a challenge to balance family and career. Several, however, shared how they maintained a healthy relationship with family members while being effective at work. They emphasized the importance of being there for moments that matter to family members and prioritizing family over career. Chris Lofgren reminded the students, "Your work will never love you back!" Mike Duke told them, "Healthy families lead to healthy executives." John Roberts said, "You are going to do a better job if your personal life is right."

Judith McKenna told the leadership students, "On work/life balance, everyone must find his or her unique way. Never judge people who have made decisions different from yours. When you see someone whose life balance seems out of sync, ask how you can help. . . . There are different times in your life where your balance has to be different and you have to recognize what and when they are."

When John Roberts realized he needed to be proactive regarding

responsibilities at home and at work, he asked his wife to share with his executive assistant dates and times of important events for their children; after they were placed on his calendar, he treated them like a business commitment. In fact, when he shared this the first time with the students in the class, he turned to me and said, "I will not be here later than 7:00 p.m. My son is playing in a baseball game, and I'm going to be at the game." And he was!

Early in his career, Roberts staked out his claim to family being a higher priority than work. He and his family were vacationing at the beach when he received a phone call from the CEO informing him a plane was on its way to pick him up and transport him to Atlanta, because he was being promoted to president of one of the company's major divisions. Roberts told the CEO he needed to discuss the promotion with his wife before he would agree to accept it. After discussing the situation with her, he called the CEO and said they agreed he should get on the plane (which had already landed and was awaiting him). Because the only clothes with him were chosen for vacationing at the beach, after arriving in Atlanta, Roberts purchased clothes for his first meeting with the team he would lead.

Roberts always takes phone calls from his wife, no matter what he might be doing. He reminded the students that if someone is not happy at home, it's unlikely the person will be productive at work. Roberts has prioritized family over work throughout his career, and he encouraged his team members to do the same. Often, he arrived very early at his office, left during the day to attend family events, and returned to the office to work late into the night. This was a common practice among the leaders who visited the class.

Greg Brown only missed one of his son's 215 basketball games, and that was because the game was rescheduled to a time that conflicted with a meeting he had with Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon. Brown told the students he considered rescheduling his meeting with Sharon, but his staff persuaded him otherwise.

Admittedly, not everyone is in a position to do what Roberts and

Brown did. Military officers who met with the leadership class were deployed overseas and unable to be physically present when their children had significant events. Fortunately, technology is available that allows for leaders' family members to see and hear them.

Donald Smith responded to a student's question about how he balanced family and career by saying, "I don't! I rebalance." Smith said there are times when the demands of business are so intense you have to sacrifice being with your family, so he and his wife made sure their children understood the sacrifices every member of the family made in order for Smith to be successful at work. He and his wife were able to build memories, not mansions. They took their children on extensive vacations during which Smith was totally invested in his family.

Leaders whose jobs require extensive travel are faced with a particular challenge. My son, John, has been a consultant since 1992. Many years, he was on the road or in the air an average of four days a week. He built up over three million miles with Delta Air Lines. Having acquired firms in England, Germany, and South Africa, his travel was not limited to the US. There were times when he was away from family for weeks at a time. But in spite of his travel, his family unit is one to be envied. How did he do it?

Of course, he gives most of the credit to his wife, Julie. His parents agree! However, several things he did produced strong relationships with Julie; his daughter, Emma; and his son, Austin. Mindful of the need to have quality time with each family member, he schedules date nights with Julie and fun times with Emma and Austin. White makes sure his family members are on his calendar and consciously makes memories with his children. He makes sure to communicate with each family member regularly. He and Julie talk at least once every day; his inability to do this with his children is more a function of their availability than his—collegians!

Emma loves the theater, so White takes her on trips to New York to attend Broadway productions. Austin loves to hunt, so he takes him on hunting trips in the US, Argentina, and South Africa. As a family,

they take trips to Europe and go on safaris in Africa. White is process oriented and considers balancing family and career an important process to be managed. When a student asked how he balanced family and career, he responded, "I'm not perfect at it." Where Donald Smith referred to his approach as rebalancing, White called his *harmonizing*. He said, "When I'm home, I'm home."

Greg Brown, John Roberts, Donald Smith, and John White III had something in common: Their wives didn't work outside the home. They had a partner who carried the bulk of the load of caring for children. The same was true for me. Mary Lib deserves the credit for the successes of our daughter, son, and me. Many family units are not structured this way.

When children are involved and both parents work outside the home, balance becomes doubly important and challenging. Not only must each parent balance work and home responsibilities, but they must balance distributing work at home. In olden times, perhaps a couple of decades or more ago, it was common that husbands did the work outside the home while the wives did the work inside the home. Today, the responsibilities of partners depend more on the individual situation each faces. With increasing opportunities for women and glass ceilings being shattered in numerous organizations, more men are choosing to work from home and care for their children. New opportunities are spawning new solutions to old problems.

Mary Pat McCarthy told the leadership class her husband gave up his career in banking to become an at-home dad. They concluded it was the best solution for their family when they adopted three children.

While interviewing Marillyn Hewson, former chairman, president, and CEO for Lockheed Martin, David Rubenstein learned that her husband retired and became an at-home dad when their sons were three and six and she was relocated from Marietta, Georgia, to Fort Worth, Texas. What was planned to be a one-year experiment turned into the best long-term solution for their family.

One guest leader met with the leadership class accompanied by her

husband and three children. Her husband is a civil engineer; he supports her career by working from home and taking care of their children.

I frequently assigned a Harvard Business School case study for students to analyze and discuss. The Alex Montana case study provided an opportunity for the students to focus on balancing family and career. It always resulted in a lively discussion. The views of the students differed, generally along gender lines. Below is an abstract for the case study:

Alex Montana sat at his desk pondering the career decision before him. Alex was director of the North American division of ESH Manufacturing, a \$4.6 billion, Cleveland-based company with operations on three continents. ESH's CEO had just offered Montana a promotion to global vice-president. Normally, Montana would have jumped at such an opportunity, but he worried about its impact on his already strained personal life. Since his last promotion, he had trouble balancing an increasingly demanding workload with his responsibilities to his wife and daughter at home. Montana felt pressure to accept the promotion. His boss expected him to accept; in fact, his boss had emphasized that he had no second choice. He had always dreamed of making it big in the business world. Success in this new role could put him in the running for COO and, eventually, CEO. But at what cost?¹

Complicating Alex's situation, his wife, Maria, was pregnant and counting on Alex being available to assist with their daughter, who was struggling with epilepsy. Maria cofounded an architectural firm, which was quite successful, and postponed her professional pursuits because of their daughter's health condition, but she was anxious to reengage in the firm. Finally, the global VP position required extensive international travel. What should Alex do?

After lengthy discussions, the students coalesced around two options: either decline the promotion and risk being fired or accept

the promotion and find a way to handle the situation at home. Interestingly, the male students tended to favor Alex declining the promotion, but the female students tended to favor Alex accepting the promotion.

Shelley Simpson, who faced similar choices early in her career, met with the students just prior to their discussion of the case study, but none of the students thought of using her solution. When Simpson was pregnant with her second child, she and her husband decided to employ a relative as a nanny for their children. For them, when it came to who would continue working, it was not *either/or* but *and*, or *both*. Simpson's career flourished.

Simpson makes sure she is there for her children's special moments. She also expects people on her leadership team to do the same for their children. To the leadership class, she said, "Be there for your people in their major life moments."

Too often, people tend to pose problems as binary choices and ignore the possibility of other options. Chris Lofgren told the leadership class he loved to turn *either/or* choices into *and* solutions. Basically, Lofgren tasked people with finding a way to have your cake and eat it, too. When it comes to family and career, don't think of it as a binary choice; look for ways to achieve both.

Several guest leaders emphasized the need for the students to go into work situations with their eyes wide open. Some organizations are family friendly, and others are not. They encouraged the students to avoid putting themselves in positions where they won't be able to achieve their desired balance in family and career. They also encouraged them to involve family members in making decisions regarding the balance of family and career.

Adriana Lopez Graham told the students that, when she was responsible for international IT for Tyson Foods, she had always explained to her children her reason for traveling to another country: helping provide food for hungry children in the specific country. When friends asked her children why their mother was not attending an event at

school, they'd say, "Mommy is feeding children in [insert name of country]." They were proud of what she was doing; they felt their sacrifice was helping others. Family members of military leaders react similarly when a parent's assignment prevents attendance at children's events.

BALANCE IN ACTION

Issues requiring balance must be dealt with simultaneously, requiring the leader to be a juggler on a tightrope.

Emotions

Balancing emotions doesn't mean being emotionless. It means controlling your emotions and using them to increase your effectiveness. General Mattis notes in *Call Sign Chaos*, "A commander has to compartmentalize his emotions and remain focused on the mission. You must decide, act, and move on." Showing emotions can be valuable in the right situation and under the right circumstances. Coming across as uncaring and unsympathetic won't serve you well. Likewise, your passion can energize followers and convey your commitment and the importance of the task at hand.

Psychologist Paul Eckman identified six basic emotions: anger, happiness, sadness, fear, disgust, and surprise.² Leaders experience all of these emotions, as well as many combinations.³ The challenge is in displaying a balance. Your expression, body language, tone of voice, and actions communicate your emotions, intentionally or unintentionally.

When you show disappointment, satisfaction, excitement, love, contentment, joy, contempt, or pride in achievement, it can affect the morale of followers. It's challenging for followers to be productive when you appear constantly disappointed. If you've worked for someone who is never pleased with what you do, you understand fully the power a leader's emotions can have on a worker's performance. Likewise,

working for a person who's affirming can yield positive performance. Being balanced is vital.

Balance highs and lows. Celebrate successes but don't go overboard, and don't lose sight of the long-term objective. Likewise, don't throw a pity party when failures occur or when things don't go the way you want. Hall of Fame collegiate basketball coach John Wooden didn't want his players to make a big deal out of winning a game because he wanted them to send signals to opponents that winning was expected.

As the authors of *Primal Leadership* note, emotions are contagious, and the most contagious emotional signal is a smile. There are times when a leader needs to wear a smile even when there is every reason not to. Laughter and smiles can impact resonance significantly among followers. So, as Donald Smith was told by one of his colleagues at Tyson Foods, "Screw a smile on your face, regardless of how you feel."

Short Term and Long Term

A continuing challenge is balancing what is best for the organization in the short term and what's best for the long term. The challenge exists for all organizations, but it can be acute for publicly traded businesses. Depending on the mix of investors' objectives, significant pressure can exist for a CEO to maximize short-term profits. However, every CEO knows an adherence to such a policy will lead to difficulties down the road and, for many firms, it will occur sooner rather than later. However, ignoring short-term profits while pursuing long-term profits is likely to result in disaster. Why? Because there is more uncertainty (and less accuracy) in long-term forecasts than in short-term forecasts. Furthermore, a lengthy sequence of poor short-term profits can prevent the firm from existing long term. Balance is needed.

Peter Drucker notes in *Managing the Nonprofit Organization* that balancing the short- and long-range requirements of an organization is one of the leader's key tasks. This entails paying attention to details and the big picture. He likens it to paddling a canoe. If the right and

left hands aren't balanced, you'll wind up going in a circle or following a zigzag course. Drucker also notes the need for leaders to balance concerns for the organization with concerns for individuals, as well as balancing caution with risk and acting quickly with acting slowly.

The essential question for a CEO is how much weight to give the short term versus the long term. The answer, as usual, is that it depends! It depends on the firm's mission, strategy, the mix of investors, the overall economy, and the governing board. In general, it's important to be consistent; mixed messages regarding short-term versus long-term priorities are not welcomed by the investment community.

Dwight D. Eisenhower asked in his 1961 address to the Century Association, "Who can define for us with accuracy the difference between the long and short term? Especially whenever our affairs seem to be in crisis, we are almost compelled to give our first attention to the urgent present rather than to the important future."

Named for him, the Eisenhower matrix can help balance time spent on important and urgent (short term) matters with important but not urgent (long term) matters and to delegate responsibilities for dealing with unimportant matters.

	URGENT	NOT URGENT
IMPORTANT	Q1: ACT	Q2: PLAN (SCHEDULE)
NOT IMPORTANT	Q3: DELEGATE	Q4: DELETE

The Eisenhower matrix.

Eisenhower used the matrix as a tool to manage his time as a leader in the military and as POTUS. Quoting an unnamed university president, Eisenhower said, “I have two kinds of problems, the urgent and the important. The urgent are not important, and the important are never urgent.” From my years as chancellor, I understand perfectly what the unnamed university president meant.

Chris Lofgren reminded the students about the importance of knowing what is important, a concept that had been passed down to him by his father. Following it is vital when using the Eisenhower matrix. Everyone is given 24 hours in a day. Some spend their time; effective leaders invest theirs. Focusing on the majors not the minors, being discerning, and maximizing the return on your investment of time and attention are essential.

Predictability and Unpredictability

Several guest leaders, as well as authors of leadership books, have emphasized the need to avoid predictability. In *Beware Those Who Ask for Feedback: And Other Organizational Constants*, Richard Moran advises leaders to “get people’s attention occasionally by doing something out of character. Don’t be 100 percent predictable.” *Keep them guessing* is a message delivered by many, but your followers still need to be confident and comfortable; they can’t be worried all the time about impending surprises. A leader should be predictable at least 95 percent of the time. But unpredictable actions should occur at unpredictable times. A leader is responsible for maintaining tension in the organization at an acceptable level. Being unpredictable is one way a leader can increase tension.

Transparency and Secrecy

A leader must decide how much information to share with the leadership team, the overall organization, and the public. The decision depends on the kind of information being shared. The leadership

team should not expect a leader to share everything with them. Information should always be shared on a need-to-know basis. I've been in situations where a leader overshared information in the name of transparency and in others in which critical information was withheld from the leadership team. Such approaches cause the team members to lose trust in the leader.

Information sharing can be quite complicated. There will be times when one or two members of the team need to know something, but the other members don't. When the leader shares information with those who need to know, a level of trust must exist among them to ensure the information isn't shared outside the group. If trust is violated, broader issues will develop.

Internal and External

Leaders deal with internal and external demands. As UA's chancellor, I had to address the needs of a broad range of constituents, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, trustees, elected and appointed governmental leaders, business and community leaders, sports fans, and media representatives. Effectively balancing internal and external demands was a constant challenge for me and for my scheduler.

Because some leaders are better equipped to deal with internal demands, they delegate the responsibility of dealing with external demands, but you should never *ignore* them. The same is true when you're externally focused: You must still pay attention to internal demands. Determining the correct balance of attention is a dynamic process. The correct balance today might not be the correct balance tomorrow or next month.

To avoid always greasing the squeaky wheel, someone must monitor the time a leader spends dealing with internal and external demands. If you cannot rely on an assistant to monitor you, then you must monitor yourself. A disciplined approach is required. There are some balls a leader must not drop.

The Eisenhower matrix facilitates balancing internal and external demands by assigning demands to appropriate quadrants. Both internal and external demands must be included to ensure that nothing falls through the cracks.

Deciding and Delegating

As a leader, you should neither make every decision nor delegate every decision. There are certain decisions only you should make, especially those affecting personnel who report directly to you and those affecting the future of the organization. Leaders of schools and universities had to make the difficult decision of how to respond to COVID-19. I was relieved I wasn't UA's chancellor during the pandemic, but if I'd been in the position, I would've made the decision I thought was in the best interest of the students. It's the kind of decision a leader cannot and should not delegate.

Other decisions should be delegated. As General Mattis learned, it's critical for leaders to "delegate decision-making authority or face paralyzing chaos."

My preference is for decisions to be made within the organization at points closest to their impact. However, you should always be aware of the decisions being made.

To avoid predictability, you should occasionally make a decision you would normally delegate and delegate a decision you would normally make. The latter provides an opportunity to develop leadership strengths within the organization.

Speaking and Listening

Because you're the leader, many will want to hear what you have to say on any and every issue, but you must listen before you speak. In a meeting with your followers, be the first to listen and last to speak. Donald Smith told the leadership class, "The answer is always in the room." He

listened to what people said about how to strengthen and improve the company. Smith believed people who are engaged with the issue have greater insight and understanding of what is happening and what needs to change. If the leader is the expert in the room, they haven't built an effective team.

Standing Firm and Yielding

There is a fine line between determination and stubbornness. I crossed the line too many times in my career. Knowing we can always improve, I didn't want to settle for less than our best in anything. Big victories didn't offset small defeats; I wanted to win every time. There was a period in my career when it was my way or the highway, the White way or the wrong way. I was so stupid. Why did it take me so long to grow up and get on track to become the kind of leader I was meant to be?

I had to learn to accept losing small battles in order to win the big ones. Too often, I found myself majoring in the minors. I finally realized that insisting on perfection in everything can be aggravating and demoralizing to followers who believe what they've done is good enough. It took years for me to finally accept that I should be satisfied with a 90 percent solution. The only way I could make myself do so was by promising to come back later for the remaining 10 percent. Because more pressing things always come up, I seldom returned to obtain the remaining 10 percent.

There are many things on which I am unyielding. Issues of integrity and inclusiveness, treating people with dignity, having zero tolerance for sexual harassment, opposing bullies, and living my core values are examples where I simply will not yield. For these, it really is my way or the highway. These are the hills I'm prepared to die on.

Being chancellor of a publicly supported university meant we received numerous Freedom of Information Act requests. In fact, we received so many we had to hire more attorneys. On two occasions,

I refused to provide the information requested by media representatives, resulting in court battles.

When the Walton Family Charitable Support Foundation made its \$300 million UA gift, legislators questioned the promises we had made. We also received a media request for a copy of our proposal. We refused, were sued, and prevailed in arguing that the proposal contained proprietary information and that its release would be beneficial to our competitors.



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I was also sued because I wouldn't release information related to our football coach. Controversies arose on a matter involving a football player, the head coach, the assistant coaches, the head coach's wife, parents, and fans. Frankly, it was a mess and required far more time and attention than it should have. Not only did I have to appear in court, where we prevailed, but I also had to appear before the Arkansas Supreme Court, where we also prevailed. My court appearances could have been avoided if I'd shared with the media how the matter was investigated and who performed the investigation. Because I concluded doing so would violate the privacy protection of UA employees, I refused.

Qualitative and Quantitative

In decision-making, instinct, gut-feeling, and insights are qualitative while data, facts, predictions, and forecasts are quantitative. In support of instinct-based decisions, Ralph Waldo Emerson writes in his essay on intellect, “Trust [your] instinct to the end. . . . It shall ripen into truth, and you shall know why you believe.”

For those who pride themselves on being quantitative decision-makers, it can be a struggle to step away from the data and decide qualitatively. It took longer than it should have for me to recognize I needed to balance qualitative and quantitative decision-making.

As Rubenstein describes in *How to Lead*, Jeff Bezos, Amazon’s founder and executive chairman, observed, “When you can make a decision with analysis, you should do so. But it turns out in life that your most important decisions are always made with instinct, intuition, taste, heart.”

Pam McGinnis said she relied on data and her inner voice. If the topic was one she knew more about, she listened to her inner voice; if the topic was one she didn’t know much about, she relied on data.

It’s easy to collect data. It’s much tougher to interpret it correctly. To avoid drowning in data, think first and collect second. Capture the tails of the distribution, the rare events, the outliers. Don’t base decisions on averages, because average situations seldom occur. At the same time, treat exceptions as exceptions. Remember, data are only visible in your rearview mirror; you need to look through the windshield to make decisions for the future. Objectively decide whether the past is indicative of the future. If not, you need to estimate future requirements.

Analysis must be balanced with intuition. No mathematical model can accurately predict the future.

In *Political Risk*, Rice and Zegart identify four types of information: indisputable facts, information that is knowable and known by the organization, information that is knowable but unknown to the organization, and information that is not knowable to anyone. They add, “Low-probability/high-impact events are especially tricky. It is always harder to anticipate unusual events than typical ones.” COVID-19 is a perfect

example. In balancing analysis and intuition, keep in mind that unexpected events can turn everything upside down. The key to achieving perfect balance is perfect judgment.

Breadth and Depth

To what extent should leaders become involved in the details of work performed by their followers? Once again, it depends! You must balance focusing on the big picture (breadth) and focusing on the little picture (depth).

Mike Duke likened himself to a pelican flying high above the ocean but quickly diving into the water to catch an unsuspecting fish. He outlined three benefits of working this way: It reminded Walmart associates to remain focused on the details in their areas of responsibility. It allowed him to keep up with the details of the business. And it provided an opportunity for him to get to know people working at various organizational levels. As a bonus, it also provided examples he could use when speaking to associates at other locations. Duke shared several examples with the students, including meeting with an unhappy Walmart truck driver, meeting with a waste disposal company to resolve an issue, and meeting with a Walmart supplier when the procurement person was late arriving for an appointment. Duke understood that little things can become big things if they aren't dealt with sooner rather than later.

Regarding oversight of the National Science Foundation, Frank Rhodes, president of Cornell University and chairman of the National Science Board at the time, told board members, "You are responsible for keeping your nose in and your fingers out." As a general rule, the same applies to leadership roles, although there are times when you must get directly involved. Doing it too much is micromanaging; doing it too little is a sign of indifference. Trust, but verify. The buck stops with you.

While serving as UA's chancellor, I encouraged aggressive recruitment of the brightest high school students in the state. The recruitment staff prepared a promotional piece, and they were about to send it to high schools throughout the state. I asked to see a copy before it was

sent. On the cover, it stated UA was the state's "penultimate" university. The staff person who prepared it did not know *penultimate* means next to last. Even worse, no one caught it before hundreds of copies were printed. *Penultimate* was changed to *preeminent* before it was distributed. Imagine the repercussions if the original publication had been mailed. Details matter.

When Adriana Lopez Graham was a graduate assistant working in my office, she showed me slides she had prepared for me to use in a meeting with presidents and chancellors in the Southeastern Conference. I asked why two pie charts on one slide were different sizes. She looked at them and said she thought they were the same size. I asked her to measure them. She was shocked to find they were, indeed, different sizes. Each time she met with the leadership class, she used the pie charts to emphasize the importance of a leader being willing to become involved in details.

If you're not careful, you can become bogged down in details. Little things mean a lot. If they're not dealt with, they can become huge things. Details matter.

Permission and Forgiveness

Very few leaders have complete freedom to do whatever they want. Failure has repercussions. When faced with a risky decision, will you ask for permission before acting or ask for forgiveness afterward? Even though I tend to be a conservative decision-maker, I often chose to ask for forgiveness, not permission.

Based on my tour of the state during the summer of 1997, I concluded we needed to raise UA's admission requirements and aggressively recruit the best and brightest students in the state. Other than the Sturgis Fellowship, which was limited to no more than six awarded to freshmen each year, the Chancellor's Scholarship was the most lucrative scholarship offered by the university. Forty-one were awarded to entering freshmen in 1997. At the time, each Chancellor's Scholarship paid \$8,000 toward a student's education, which covered tuition, fees, and room and board.

I asked the recruitment staff how many students would come if we announced that any Arkansas student who scored at least 30 on the ACT and had at least a 3.00 grade point average would receive a Chancellor's Scholarship. They said we could recruit no more than 150, so we made the announcement and budgeted for 150 Chancellor's Scholarships for fall semester of 1998.

In November of 1997, the recruitment staff informed me we needed to stop awarding Chancellor's Scholarships because more than 150 had accepted the offer for 1998. Instead of checking with the UA System president, I told the staff to keep recruiting. If we were going to have a crisis, I wanted it to be a financial crisis, not a crisis of integrity from not honoring our commitment. I asked how many freshmen would qualify for the scholarship. Although the staff were reluctant to provide a number, they assured me it wouldn't be more than 300. I added 10 percent to their estimate and approached the Walton Family Charitable Support Foundation, requesting \$1.5 million to support Chancellor's Scholarships. After I explained why we needed it, they approved the request, which resulted in a huge sigh of relief from me.

We blew by 330 and landed at 492 Chancellor's Scholars in the freshman class of 1998. The 1,100 percent increase made all the difference for the university. In a meeting with faculty, a young humanities professor said he didn't approve of a lot of things I did, but he totally supported my recruitment of the freshman class. He said that, in previous years, when he'd asked a question on the first day of classes, no hands were raised, but this semester, thirty hands went up. I'm sure many of his colleagues didn't support what he said next: He was willing to forego a salary increase in order for us to continue recruiting such outstanding students.

The Chancellor's Scholars in 1998 began the transformation I envisioned for UA and the State of Arkansas. Based on what happened in other states, I believed what was good for a state's land-grant university redounded to the benefit of the entire state.

If you always ask for permission, the organization won't advance as rapidly; you have a better understanding of the ramifications of taking action than will the person whose permission you need. Fortunately,

my relationship with my leader, B. Alan Sugg, was strong. I knew Sugg had my back if I messed up, but I didn't want to put him in the position of having to defend me too frequently. I had to be judicious in opting to ask for forgiveness. Achieving the right balance is essential.

Amplification and Attenuation

In an undergraduate electrical circuits course, I learned, as the name implies, that an amplifier increases the power of an electrical signal. An attenuator, the opposite of an amplifier, reduces or dampens the power of an electronic signal. Team members receive signals from multiple sources, and some can be disruptive to their work. It can be challenging to keep the team focused on their goals and objectives. There are times to increase the pace and times to reduce it. Achieving the right pace is critical when effecting significant change within an organization. You must balance being an amplifier and an attenuator.

Jeff Bezos described his role at Amazon as its chief slowdown officer. When a decision is highly consequential, it's necessary to take the time to make the right one because it's likely irreversible.⁴

Balancing amplification and attenuation is not unlike balancing encouragement and discouragement. In achieving the right balance, you must be attentive to negative impacts of discouragement. Slowing progress without losing your team's enthusiasm requires that you communicate *why* the pace needs to be slowed.

Life

Leaders devote themselves to taking care of their followers but often forget to take care of themselves. Just as it's important to have a balanced diet, it's important to have a balanced life. Too many leaders ignore their health. They fail to undergo annual physical examinations; they don't exercise regularly; they don't set aside time for relaxation, sleep, entertainment, and meditation. If you aren't healthy physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, you're unlikely to be effective.

Don't let your job title be your identity. After serving as chancellor, I took a six-month sabbatical to prepare to resume being a full-time professor. Having served as an administrator twenty years (three years at the National Science Foundation, six years as Georgia Tech's engineering dean, and eleven years as chancellor), I needed to refresh myself in the subject areas I'd be teaching.

During this time, a Georgia Tech colleague asked what I missed most about being chancellor. I replied instantly, "Nothing!" My colleague laughed, and I said, "All of my thinking has been on what awaits me, not where I've been."

I wasn't kidding. I was going to be teaching two graduate courses. I tend to focus on the windshield, not the rearview mirror. My chancellor chapter was closed; I was already focusing on my upcoming professor chapter.

Several months later, the same colleague said he'd thought I would say what I had, but he'd wanted another colleague who was with him to hear it. After retiring, his colleague hadn't been able to stop dwelling on the past. Every day, he called his former executive assistant and asked for a report on what was going on at Tech. He was still identifying himself with his former position.

By this time, I had a better answer to my friend's question. I told him there were three things I missed about being chancellor: I didn't have a bathroom adjoining my office. When I wanted to go to Little Rock, I couldn't hop on the university plane; I had to drive. And I had to shovel my driveway when it snowed. I didn't miss the job of chancellor. I missed people I had worked and associated with. For me, it's always about people.

In the last session of the leadership class, I reminded the students they would be juggling many balls throughout their life journeys. Several balls are made of rubber, and a few are made of crystal. Philip Lader, cofounder of Renaissance Weekend, explained at the event that it's okay to drop rubber balls, but you dare not drop crystal balls. Crystal balls are health, relationships, faith, core values, and other truly important things in life; rubber balls are job titles, salaries, awards,

zip codes, and other status symbols. In the long term, rubber balls are far less significant than crystal balls. Crystal balls cannot be put back together again if you drop them. It's critically important to hold on to the crystal balls by having a balanced life.

POLARITIES

Leaders must constantly balance a host of responsibilities. It's important to achieve balance while multitasking and multiprocessing, which can be challenging.

As F. Scott Fitzgerald notes, "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function." Psychologists call this state *cognitive dissonance*. Dealing with paradoxes and conflicting ideas comes with the territory of being a leader. Conflicts will always exist in organizations, resulting in tensions between or among different entities. An example is a retailer wishing to increase profits and cut prices or Amazon wanting to increase profits but offer free two-day shipping.

When David Rubenstein asked Jeff Bezos about Amazon Prime's free shipping feature, he credited a junior software engineer with the idea. When the finance team analyzed the financial impact, it was shocking. His team recognized the economic impact of a customer purchasing a single, inexpensive item and receiving free two-day shipping. However, relying on heart and intuition, they chose to take a leap of faith and adopt free shipping. Bezos said, "All good decisions have to be made that way."

Chris Lofgren reminded the students that polarities like these are often presented to leaders as *either/or* propositions: "We can do this *or* we can do that." He emphasized the importance of finding a way to do both. If you can't, he said, then polarities are "not a problem to be solved but opposing tensions to be balanced and managed." Amazon was able to offer two-day delivery and increase profits; it was not *either/or* but *and*.

Lofgren's focus on polarities echoes the findings in *Built to Last*, in

which Jim Collins and Jerry Porras analyzed the habits of a number of companies they labeled as highly visionary. They identified “a key aspect of highly visionary companies: They do not oppress themselves with what we call the ‘Tyranny of the OR’—the rational view that cannot easily accept paradox, that cannot live with two seemingly contradictory forces or ideas at the same time. . . . Highly visionary companies liberate themselves with the ‘Genius of the AND’—the ability to embrace both extremes of a number of dimensions at the same time.”

Soon after becoming chancellor in 1997, I realized UA was either undersized or overscoped. In comparisons with other land-grant universities, UA had more degree programs per enrolled student. In a report to the UA Faculty Senate, I noted that the scope of our offerings was too broad for the number of students currently enrolled. I said, “For the University to become more efficient and effective, either the number of programs must be reduced or the size of the student body must be significantly increased.”

Anyone experienced in higher education administration knows that reducing degree programs is a huge and challenging undertaking. Also, as the state’s land-grant university, I believed it was inappropriate for us to reduce the scope of our mission. I opted to employ a two-pronged strategy to increase enrollment: increasing tuition and increasing admission requirements. Many people, including trustees and legislators, thought this was the opposite of what we should be doing. They believed increasing tuition or admission requirements would decrease enrollment and that doing both would be even worse. On July 20, 2000, at a meeting of the Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce, I’d said that asking for more education funding is an absolute joke. On August 10, 2000, I was summoned to appear before the Joint Performance Review Committee of the Arkansas Legislature and explain my remarks.

An article describing the session noted, “Rep. Mike Hathorn, D-Huntsville, spent more than 30 minutes criticizing White, even after he apologized.” Later, the article stated, “Hathorn said he didn’t understand how the university could raise standards and increase tuition while raising enrollment at the same time.”⁵

Obtaining UA Board of Trustees approval to increase tuition was not easy, but it was much easier than obtaining its approval to increase admission requirements. This was unexpected, because I told the trustees in my final interview that I'd be making such a request. The vote was seven in favor and three opposed. B. Alan Sugg, president of the UA System and a nonvoting board member, took the unusual step of speaking directly to the board on the issue.



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“In my seven and a half years as president of the UA System,” Sugg said, “never . . . has any issue been debated like this issue has been debated.”⁶ Little did he know what lay ahead for him and UA trustees. During my interview, I said I was a change agent. Maybe they didn’t believe me. It wouldn’t take long for them to learn I was very serious. Many more changes awaited them.

But the results speak for themselves. Overall enrollment was 14,384 when I arrived in 1997. Five years later, it was 16,035. Ten years later, it was 18,648. The enrollment in 2020 was 27,549. We avoided the Tyranny of the OR and embraced the Genius of the AND.