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THE FAMILY COUNCIL: A MODEL FOR CORPORATE  
LEISURE TIME PLANNING

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ABSTRACT

The family has undergone change. The most important concern is how to improve family conditions. A family council will help families to better focus and help each member better understand the other's position. The council will help provide a structure and a format for decision-making which will provide a forum for democratic input from all members.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the role of family leisure time in corporate American families requires an awareness of the evolution of leisure within the context of the family and an increased recognition of the relationship between work and family leisure. The corporate American family has encountered an increase in the amount of nonwork time, as well as the variety of nonwork activities available to the family. With the increase in the availability for both nonwork time and activities, the corporate American family is faced with the need to implement a decision making method which synchronizes the activities of each family member, and

facilitates the coordination of work and family leisure. The intent of this paper is to recommend a decision making process, the family council (10, 12, 13, 42, 43), which, it is posited, enhances the probability that decisions made, relating to family leisure/recreation, will be derived in such a way that the greatest amount of satisfaction for all involved with result.

#### WORK AND FAMILY LEISURE: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

During the past several decades, leisure has become increasingly important to individuals, couples and families.(7, 21) In fact, Gagnon and Greenbalt (15) have suggested that, "One of the characteristics of advanced industrial societies is that work as an activity (rather than as a source of income) has grown less important emotionally in people's life." Attempting to account for the shift in attitudes and values regarding leisure, researcher-theorists have cited different hypotheses and theories [e.g., compensatory hypotheses (16, 47), similarity hypothesis (2), reference group theory (6), opportunity therapy (19), and exchange theory (22, 44) and variables [e.g., socioeconomic (4, 24) family of origin (25), present family life style (37, 39), family size (23)] as influencing the relationship between work and leisure. What can be derived from the research to date is that the psychoemotional gratification derived from leisure activities has replaced that which was previously derived from work. In other words, leisure has become more than a mere diversion from work; it has become the context through which we fulfill many psychoemotional needs for ourselves and others (e.g., respect, affection, interdependence, and mutual awareness and understanding).(31)

The colonial family The functions of the colonial family integrated all aspects of work and leisure (1). The primary functions of the family during the colonial times included the: (a) economic function; (b) religious function; (c) educative function; (d) leisure/recreational function; (e) protective function; (f) status-conferring function; (g) procreative function and (h) personality function.(28) Thus, traditionally, the family was an economic as well as a social unit; work, leisure and home life were one.

Even though the functions of the colonial family included leisure, joint family activities, to enhance the relationship between husband and wife, and between parents and children, were basically ignored. "The arduous conditions of life, the detailed division of labor within the family, and the emphasis on economic productivity did not encourage concern with the quality of the emotional relationships between spouses" and parents and children.(28)

Historical trends effecting attitudes and values regarding family leisure This multifunctional family lifestyle did not remain in effect, however. Several historical trends impacted on society's conceptualization of the heightened role that leisure played in family life.(37) The first was the decentralization of the functions of the family. Empirical documentation relating to the fact that the

traditional functions of the American family had been placed outside of the family was first presented to President Hoover's Research Committee on Social Trends and published in 1934.(34) While Ogburn and Tibbits implied that the decentralization may have adversely affected the family organization, thereby promoting pathological symptoms therein (e.g., divorce, juvenile delinquency, etc.), they also suggested that the decentralization contributed to an increased focus on companionship and relationships. Research since that of Ogburn and Tibbits (34) has supported the latter notion.

As urbanization and industrialization freed the family from its multifunctional responsibilities, husbands, wives, and parents, and children were freed to cultivate relationships with one another.(36) "Couples became concerned with their happiness, seeking personal growth and fulfillment".(28) Thus, with most of the functions of the family placed outside of the family context, the family became increasingly companionship oriented (28) and joint leisure activities were noted as contributing to the well-being of the companionate lifestyle.(38)

The second major trend was related to the increase in the amount of nonwork time available. While it is generally accepted that individuals, couples and families are taking pleasure in mutual leisure activities (e.g., camping, traveling, skiing, etc.), research indicates that, in reality, the amount of time available for leisure is curvilinear. "Primitive societies have the most nonwork time; with increasing industrialization the amount of nonwork time declined, but it has recently increased among certain segments of the most highly industrialized societies".(7) De Grazia (9) suggests that the concept of nonwork time can be best understood by separating it into two categories: free time and true discretionary time. Free time refers to time which is committed for the purpose of traveling to work, caring for the needs of family members, etc. On the other hand, discretionary time is uncommitted time which is available to the individual, couple or family to plan leisure activities.

Where is the corporate American family in regards to nonwork time? It is suggested that even though the corporate American family has experienced an increase in the amount of nonwork time available, it is also a fact that job demands, especially those related to retention and promotion, as well as other competing outside sources (e.g., PTA, children's extracurricular activities, etc.) necessitate a complex regimentation of time. What this means for the corporate American family is that nonwork time must be sufficiently regimented and family member's schedules synchronized so that joint family activities can be instigated.

The third trend was the shift in values from the work ethic toward an acceptance of leisure as an important goal for individuals, couples and families. With the decentralization of family functions, work became increasingly more important than activities associated with leisure. The attitudes and values governing society's perception of the role of work and leisure in family life, during the time of urbanization and industrialization, were predicated on Calvinistic attitudes and the Protestant work ethic, both of which placed a high value on work and work related success; whereas leisure was valued only if it contributed to

work success.(7)

A paradigm shift occurred when the strong emphasis on work, as the primary source of psychoemotional gratification, declined. A paradigm shift refers to an alteration in the frame of reference used to organize perceptions, attitudes and values.(40) Burch and Taves (6) describe this paradigm shift by stating that attitudes toward leisure have "shifted from celebration of labor completed, to refreshment so that a labor may continue more effectively, to what seems to be the development of property rights in set amounts of non-work time." This shift also resulted in a deemphasis on work as the primary source of psychoemotional gratification and an emphasis on leisure.(7) Thus, the change in the attitudes towards work, concomitantly effected the attitudes regarding leisure.

#### BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY LEISURE: A NEED FOR A DECISION MAKING METHODOLOGY

The amount of family leisure experienced by the corporate American family is not only impacted by the fact that it has less nonwork time than other segments of society, but it is also a residual claimant on time.(30) This is true even though considerable research has noted the relative importance of joint family time (38), while other researcher-theorists have suggested an increase in family leisure activities.(7, 21) Competing sources from outside the family (e.g., extracurricular school activities, job demands, etc.) have contributed to the fact that family members are spending less time at home. Most devastating is the fact that as individuals become less involved in joint family activities, the more likely it is that they will perceive greater reward and satisfaction from outside the family context than from within. One example is referred to as workaholism, a malady associated with the corporate American family. Lamanna and Reidmann (26) define a workaholic as an individual "whose work life has taken over such a large portion of his or her identity and time that it interferes with physical health, personal happiness, interpersonal relationships, and often effective work performance itself." Paradoxically is the fact that the "love affair" formed with the job does not necessarily increase the individual's level of satisfaction with her/himself and/or the job.

Workaholics rationalize that work demands are usually high and that success necessitates that they "must" spend their time and energy working (for varying explanations regarding workaholic behavior, see 18, 26, 29). While demands of any profession may be great, it must be recognized that each individual decides how and where to invest his/her time and energies. Healthy individuals "find abundant energy for anything to which they are highly committed".(26) Marks (29) supports the comment of Lamanna and Reidmann by suggesting that when individuals state that they "just don't have time," what they are really saying is that they are not as committed to that activity.

One side effect of workaholism is a disorder referred to as "leisure phobia".(26) Individuals with leisure phobia experience extreme or

inappropriate guilt when they aren't accomplishing a task which is "productive." These individuals have an inhibited ability to enjoy leisure time.(18, 26)

What can be concluded, is that urbanization and industrialization increased the likelihood that some segments of the American family would have more nonwork time and therefore, more discretionary time for leisure activities. However, the corporate American family is under considerable pressure from conflicting sources inhibiting its ability to integrate leisure activities into its lifestyle. In addition to the usual pressures upon American families to give sufficient time and energy to: (1) earn a living; (2) carry out home managerial functions; (3) sustain a quality marriage; and (4) rear children (if such are present), they have the added burden of greater regimentation of time, due to the fact that in today's economy they must work harder and produce more in order to maintain their position. If they intend to advance, then expectations regarding performance and production increase.(8, 14)

What is evident, is that value clarification, prioritization, and effective time management are essential if a balance is to be achieved between work and family leisure. It is proposed that such balance can only be achieved through the conscious implementation of an effective decision making methodology.(17) It is suggested that the family council is one method whereby values and priorities can be evaluated in an ongoing fashion, time synchronization can take place so that family members are spending more time in family leisure activities, and that demands of work and family leisure can be balanced.

## THE FAMILY COUNCIL: A DECISION MAKING METHODOLOGY

### Family Decision Making

Although the relationship between family decision making and family leisure patterns is not very well understood, the area of decision making as it relates to relationship satisfaction has been well substantiated in other substantive areas of the family, such as financial planning, household management, child rearing, sexual interaction, etc. (see for example, 45, 3, 27). Extrapolating from research in other substantive areas of the family, these findings suggest that decision making is intricately interrelated with marital and family satisfaction.

In an attempt to clarify the decision making process, Turner (46) has suggested that a continuum exists from consensual to accommodative decisions within the family. "A decision where all involved feel equally committed and give equal assent is a consensual decision; a decision where agreement is reached by compromise, bargaining, or coercion is accommodative".(7) A third method by which a decision may be made is referred to as "de facto".(46) De facto occurs because "of failure to arrive at a satisfactory decision in time to carry out the desired behavior; decisions are made after the fact".(7) In that group, decision making is "a process directed toward unambivalent group assent and

commitment to a course of action or inaction" (46), the greater the communication in the family, the greater the likelihood that the decision arrived at will be consensual in nature.(7) Furthermore, it is suggested that the relative degree of satisfaction achieved by all involved in the decision making process is a function of that decision being derived in a consensual manner.

#### The Family Council: A Definition

A family council is a deliberative, regularly scheduled and parent led assembly of all family members, the primary purpose of which is to provide a forum wherein all family members may participate in matters concerning the family.

Specific purposes of the family council are, though not limited to: (a) serving as a medium through which individual family members can have input into decisions pertaining to family related goals and activities; (b) negotiating of family related goals and activities, in such away so as to enhance the likelihood that decisions will be arrived at in a consensual manner; (c) planning, calendaring and initiating the agreed upon family goals and activities; (d) synchronizing schedules so as to facilitate planning, calendaring and correlating family and individual activities; and (e) clarifying individual feelings and perceptions through the process of sharing values, beliefs and wishes, as well as complaints and suggestions.

#### The Family Council: Basic Assumptions

The family council is predicated on three basic assumptions. The first assumption is that joint family leisure activities, or in other words, those activities which necessitate a high degree of interaction and encourage communication, have the greatest probability of increasing family relationship satisfaction and enhancing family cohesion.(38) Family cohesion refers to the logical connection between individual family members, which provides the basis for uniting family members into a coherent, consistent group.

Secondly, joint family leisure activities are more likely to be engaged in if the family has a regular and consistent method of synchronizing time and decision making. Synchronization of time and decision making, within the context of the family, is most satisfactory if arrived at in a consensual manner.(46) It is suggested that individual family members will have greater satisfaction in the decision relating to time coordination and family activities, as well as more commitment thereto, if they have felt equal opportunity to participate in the decision making process and have given equal assent.

Finally, a democratic home environment permits all family members equal opportunity in the decision making process (11) by encouraging an atmosphere conducive to participation. The quality of the family home

environment is initially based on the amount of time dedicated to the evolution of the type of environment desired by the family. Thus, it is recommended that if a family is to facilitate a democratic environment, such that decisions are consensual in nature, regular and frequent opportunities to share beliefs, values, plans, wishes as well as complaints and suggestions, are necessary. (10)

### Steps in Implementing a Family Council

Briefly described below are 11 steps outlining the implementation of a family council (for more specific detail, see 10, 42, 43).

1. Family members must agree to meet at a regular specified time (weekly, bi-weekly or monthly) and place. Consistency in implementing this step is necessary so that family members can organize their daily schedules to include the family council and to plan to bring issues for discussion.

2. Negotiate the amount of time to be reserved for the family council. Dinkemeyer and McKay (10) suggest that 20-30 minutes is sufficient when young children are involved and that for older children, one hour is adequate.

3. Prepare an agenda prior to the family council which incorporates the goals and activities of the family, as well as issues individual family members would like to have discussed during the family council. The agenda should provide adequate time for, though not limited to: (a) family members to make suggestions about issues; (b) family members to bring up matters important to them; (c) resolving issues pertaining to the family or individual family members (e.g., job-distribution); (d) initiating and facilitating the formulation of family goals and activities; (e) sharing the progress made on family goals and reviewing family activities; (f) coordinating time schedules for the implementation of family activities; (g) recognizing the accomplishments of family members; and (h) implementing an immediate family recreational activity.

4. Although the family council is presided over by a parent, it is suggested that the conducting of the family council rotate among family members. Young family members can be assisted in the preparation of the agenda by an older sibling or parents. It is recommended, however, that an adult initially chair the family council so as to ensure the likelihood that younger family members will be instructed in the implementation of the family council by modeling the procedures.

5. Identify one member of the family to be the secretary, remembering that this position can be rotated among those family members able to perform the function, or encouraging an older sibling or adult to help a younger family member. The role of secretary is to keep minutes of the family meeting so that there is a record of "issues, plans, and decisions". (10)

6. During the family council, encourage family members to share new

ideas, calendar individual and family events, problem solve individual and family related issues (e.g., activity conflicts, job assignments, practicing times, etc.), review and offer suggestions relating to family goals and established traditions, etc.

7. Agreements arrived at during the family meeting are to remain in effect until the next family council. Violations of the agreements can be dealt with during the interim through the use of natural and logical consequences. (10)

8. Identify the individual who will chair the next family council.

9. Encourage members to make suggestions for the next family agenda (e.g., refreshments, family activity, issues, etc.). Members should also be encouraged to share suggestions during the interim with the individual chairing the next family council.

10. End each meeting positively by enhancing individual self esteem (e.g., recognizing strengths and accomplishments of each individual, as well as encouraging continued self-efficacy, etc.) and highlighting family successes (e.g., progress made and completion of goals, etc.). Encourage each member of the family to take a turn in sharing something positive about the other family members and the success of the family.

11. It is suggested that the family meeting lead naturally into refreshments and/or a family activity. This evolves naturally by ending the meeting on a positive note and reinforces the positive nature of family oriented problem solving and activity.

#### The Successful Family Council: An Example

Sorenson (42) determined that in order to hold an effective family council, a set agenda was essential. He recommends the following agenda be developed and implemented:

1. Calendar of family events includes specific times and dates for the family council and family activities.

2. Family goals help to promote family togetherness, family and individual self-esteem, family reliance, and family leisure activities.

3. Family finances include a set aside monthly family recreational stipend for family leisure activities and a family financial plan which helps provide for major recreational purchases.

4. Duties and responsibilities allocate and reallocate house and yard work.

5. Home management and development plans provide for work efficiency and project completion.

6. Projects and repair provides for up-grading and maintenance.

7. Education seeks to create optimal educational opportunities for each family member.

8. Recreation plans and implements specified family recreational activities.

9. Cultural improvement seeks to expose all family members to diverse cultural experiences.

10. Career development explores interests of individual family members.

11. Dreams provide a forum for idealistic leisure activities, frivolous purchases, exciting ideas, and extreme futuristic plans.

While using the above agenda, a successful family council is evaluated as one in which family members calendar leisure time activities, solve individual and family conflicts, review family goals and establish new family traditions. Each successful family council should include spontaneous high level communication, achieve consensus and end on a positive note highlighting individual and family successes. In corporate America, family councils may also be regarded as successful when families begin planning together on a regular basis.

#### CONCLUSION

Decentralization, along with urbanization and industrialization, has enhanced the likelihood that most segments of American society will have an increase in nonwork time. The corporate American family, in order to maintain its present socioeconomic status, must maintain a high level of job performance and productivity. As such, it is essential that the corporate American family regiment its time so as to accomplish the basic necessities. If the family wishes to include family leisure within its lifestyle, it is essential that the family incorporate a method of synchronizing the time of each family member, as well as one which allows for decisions regarding family leisure to be arrived at in a consensual manner.

Skolnick (41) suggests that the "feelings" of fun, love, and warmth provide the base for the unity of the 20th century American family. These feelings facilitate dynamic relationships, encouraging the promotion of strong emotional ties between individual family members, an orientation towards the enhancement of family traditions and an increase in joint family activities. (20) What has been described by Skolnick and Hill is what constitutes the foundation for family cohesion. To ensure the probability that such a foundation will be maintained Olsen, Russell and Sprenkle (35) indicate that planning precedes the necessary family action to accomplish specific family goals. Thus, it is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to recognize what is required for family cohesion. The sufficient condition is planning to incorporate those variables which will promote family cohesion. The authors posit that the

family council can provide the corporate American family with a method capable of initiating and facilitating joint family leisure activities, resulting in increased family cohesion and satisfaction.

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