



# The WorkLife Balance

**In the demanding  
tourism and events  
industry, is it really  
possible to be  
fulfilled at both  
work and home?**

By Lisa Plummer  
Photography by Chris Savas



On Sept. 30, Marissa Mayer, 37, gave birth to her first child, just two months after she was named CEO of Yahoo, one of the country's largest and most well-known Internet companies. She faces two major challenges: one, turning around a languishing corporate giant as the youngest CEO of a Fortune 500 company, and two, caring for her new baby boy and learning to be a mother. Mayer spent a few weeks at home with her son (where she remained briefed on the goings-on at the office) before returning to deliver her first earnings calls and public remarks regarding the future of the company on Oct. 22.

Mayer's situation is extreme, but not altogether exceptional. Many new moms and dads return to work after managing middle-of-the-night feedings, wandering dreary-eyed into their workdays. And the new-baby stuff is only the beginning, as work commitments continue to conflict with personal ones. The meetings industry can be particularly challenging, with long work hours, extensive travel and demanding deadlines.

Mayer's story made headlines on the heels of a few other high-profile stories about women and work. An explosive cover story from the July/August issue of *The Atlantic* argued that women, especially those in high-profile positions, can't "have it all"—that is success in both the workplace and at home. That followed a cover story by *Time* magazine two months earlier with a mother breastfeeding her almost-



Americans work 137 hours more per year than Japanese workers, 260 more per year than British workers and 499 more hours annually than French workers, according to the International Labour Organization.

workers, 260 more per year than British workers and 499 more hours annually than French workers, according to the International Labour Organization. Even the 40-hour work week standard is becoming obsolete. Visual Economics, a website that analyzes financial data, conducted a study that shows 85.5 percent of U.S. working males and 66.5 percent of females work more than 40 hours per week.

How, then, do modern working professionals climb the career ladder while maintaining fulfilling personal lives? In the meetings industry, how do they juggle their work schedules with their family time and personal hobbies? Is true work-life balance really possible or is it merely a fantasy?

### Setting Boundaries

As a devoted husband and proud father of 11-year-old twins, Andy Longo, director of fraternity programs for Delta Tau Delta, has worked hard to build his career but doesn't apologize for setting aside time for his personal life. "To me, work-life balance is understanding that success and happiness are derived from a variety of pursuits, including work," says Longo. "Family, community involvement, hobbies and work collectively help create a balanced and fulfilled life. Ultimately, my job pays me to do a job that allows me and my family to pay bills and live, but having balance with other pursuits feeds the soul and leads to true contentment and fulfillment."

Longo is passionate about his work, which includes coordinating and overseeing five regional conferences and a biennial national convention, but he has found ways to maintain more balance in his life by maximizing his time at the workplace. Specifically, he cut back on site visits and began delegating them to other staff members. "I realized I didn't need to go see every hotel and I didn't need to do FAM tours," he says. "I could still make good decisions from my desk and from my computer using a network of volunteers and fellow meeting planners out there to help pick properties," says Longo.

**"I'm really enjoying my job, but I also need to make sure I'm not away too much. I do need to learn to sometimes say no."**

—Beth Hecquet, National Association of Sports Commissions

4-year-old that posed the question "Are You Mom Enough?"

Parents have always felt pressure to perform at both work and home, but recent workplace trends reveal a few factors that are making it more difficult than ever. A 2010 report by the Center for American Progress shows just how overworked Americans are, with employees in the U.S. reporting much higher levels of work-family conflict than workers in other industrialized countries. We work 137 hours more per year than Japanese



### A CLOSER LOOK: FINDING BALANCE



#### Travis O'Donnell

Regional Sales Director, Peppermill Resort Spa Casino

- **Age:** 28
- **Years in the industry:** 3
- **Number of children:** 4
- **Number of hours worked per week:** 40-50
- **Best advice he received when starting in the industry:** "Find out what really interests your clients, build genuine relationships and find ways to really enhance your client's experience in a unique way."
- **His advice for someone new to the industry:** "Have passion and dedication, and give 100 percent to what you're doing at that time, whether it be having a one-on-one meeting with a potential client or taking your kids to the park after work."



#### Beth Hecquet, CMP

Director of Meetings and Events, National Association of Sports Commissions

- **Age:** 36
- **Years in the industry:** 14
- **Number of children:** 2
- **Number of hours worked per week:** 40+
- **Former employers:** Amateur Athletic Union, Indiana Sports Corporation
- **Number of moves during career:** 3
- **Starting salary at first industry job:** \$18,000
- **Best advice she received when starting in the industry:** "Try everything. Don't not do something because it may not fit your niche completely or because that's not the job you think you want to have. If an opportunity comes your way to volunteer or work or plan an event that's out of your comfort zone, do it anyway and don't be afraid to fail."
- **Her advice for someone new to the industry:** "Don't be afraid to try anything and everything. Be open and realize that just because you take a job doesn't mean it's always going to be your job. There are stepping stones and dues to be paid."



#### Andy Longo

Director of Fraternity Programs, Delta Tau Delta

- **Age:** 50
- **Years in the industry:** 15
- **Number of children:** 2
- **Former employer:** Lambda Chi Alpha
- **Number of hours worked per week:** 37.5
- **Starting salary at first industry job:** Low \$40s
- **Best advice he received when starting in the industry:** "You have to be flexible, be ready for the unknown and know how you will respond to it. Be willing to change what you're doing mid-stream."
- **His advice for someone new to the industry:** "You have to have a balance. You have to take time for yourself."



#### Janine Chicourrat

General Manager, Portola Hotel and Spa

- **Age:** 47
- **Years in the industry:** 28
- **Number of children:** 0
- **Number of hours worked per week:** 50+
- **Former employers:** Kimpton Hotels, Northstar at Tahoe, Pebble Beach Company
- **Number of moves during career:** 3
- **Starting salary at first industry job:** \$12/hour
- **Best advice she received when starting in the industry:** "If you make a mistake, admit it, learn from it and move on. The important thing is don't be afraid to make a decision."
- **Her advice for someone new to the industry:** "First of all, take care of your health because you end up being far more productive in your work life. Secondly, if you're married, be respectful of that person. Make sure you carve out time for them or your family, depending on the dynamics. It's important you keep that in check and in the back of your mind."



According to a recent Ipsos/Reuters poll, one in five workers around the globe telecommutes frequently, and nearly 10 percent work at home daily.

As his career has progressed, Longo has found ways to make time for vacation from the office, but for some, the longer they're in their career, the harder it becomes to detach from it. "Depending on where you are in this business, it almost becomes a little bit addicting because you want to experience things and be there first-hand," says Janine Chicourrat, general manager of Portola Hotel and Spa in Monterey, Calif. Chicourrat spent many years working her way up the

ladder in the boutique and high-end hotel and resort industry, which meant lots of long hours on the job.

"You have all these high-end, special events that may fall over a holiday or during a time when most people are having their summer vacations, and you're there making sure that everything goes perfectly," she says. "Especially when you're young and growing your career, you do end up sacrificing your holidays and evening hours."

A recent research report conducted at Florida State University reveals that in this down economy, more people are questioning the value of work and the personal sacrifices they've had to make for the sake of their careers. Chicourrat can relate. She was in her early 40s, had never been married and had little life outside of work. "I thought, this is crazy. All I did was work," she says. So she quit her job, went to Croatia, and met her husband three weeks later. Then, she says, reality hit. She had quit a job she loved in order to find fulfillment elsewhere, but she wasn't fulfilled.

Therein lies the dichotomy for many people: You love your family, but you also love your job. What you need is balance, whatever that balance might look like for you. Chicourrat no longer works until 8 or 9 p.m., but she'll put in a 12-hour day when needed. Her husband has been a positive influence on her, helping to remind her that time away from the office is as important as time there.

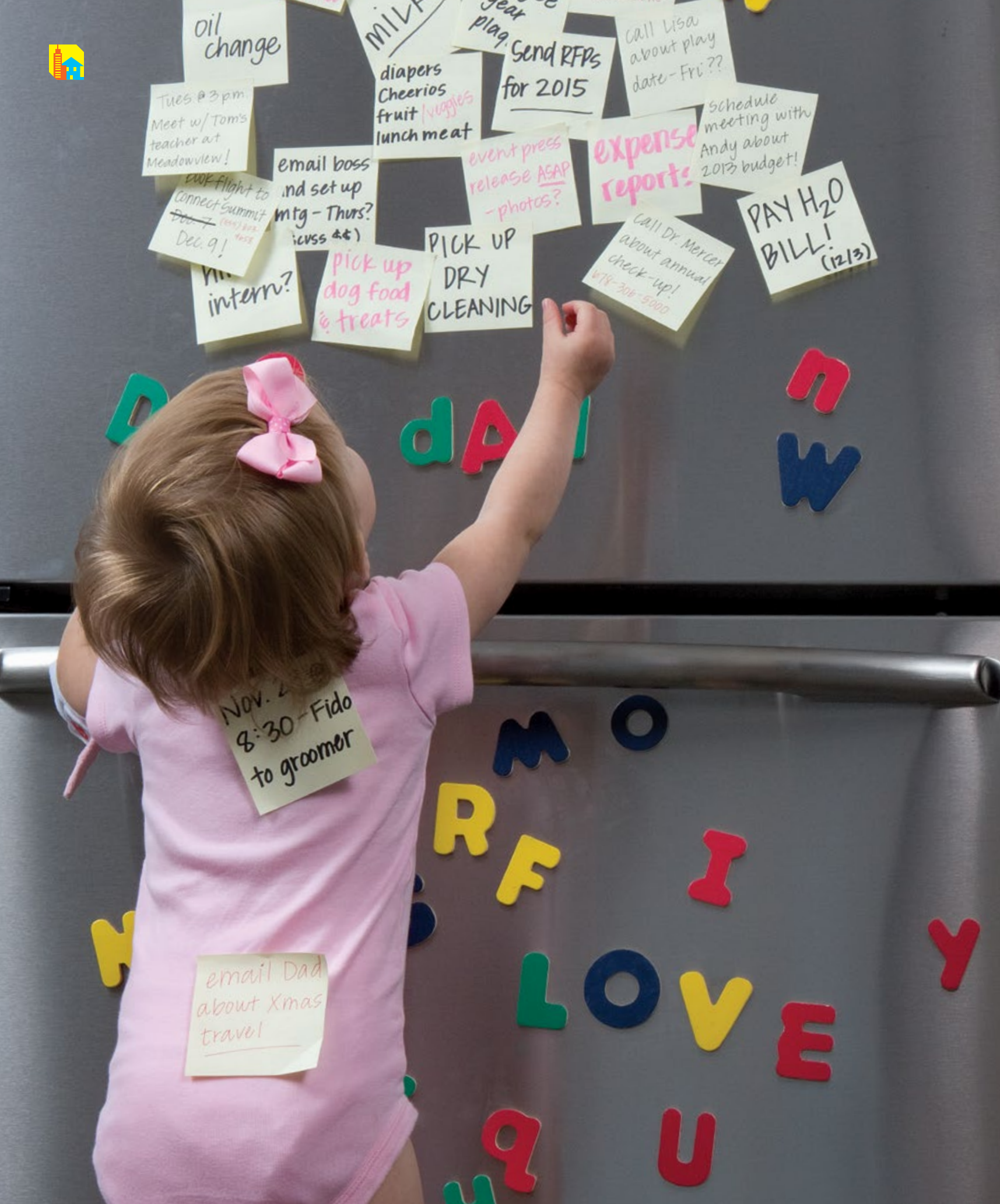
### Learning To Say No

Beth Hecquet is on the road a lot. As director of meetings and events for the National Association of Sports Commissions, she goes on site visits, plans and executes national events, and attends or speaks at other meetings industry events often. She loves the travel, but with two school-age children at home, she has to manage her time away from her kids and her husband.

"I'm really enjoying my job and the growth opportunities it's affording me, but I also need to make sure I'm not away too much," says Hecquet. "I need to make sure I'm there for my kids and not putting too much stress on my husband and not overwhelming him, so I do need to learn to sometimes say no."

Travis O'Donnell faces a similar challenge. A regional sales director at Peppermill Resort Spa Casino in Reno, Nev., he is the proud dad of four young children, and he makes family a top priority despite a busy work and travel schedule. "The demand from the job here is obviously very high," says O'Donnell. "Some of the challenges have been learning to separate the stress and the demand from here and the stress and demand from the home life. A lot of people are reminding me to fill a lot of rooms and a lot of meeting space, and bringing that home has been really hard to separate. But whether I'm at home or at work, I try to make sure I'm there 100 percent."

O'Donnell acknowledges being a working parent is difficult, but he believes it still might be tougher on women to maintain a career while caring for young kids. "Today there is so much demand on both parents to be very present in a child's life," says O'Donnell. "Obviously



with new mothers there is a tremendous amount of pressure to be involved in the new infant's life, and the mother wants to be there, too."

### Changing The Culture

The meetings and hospitality industry is inherently demanding simply because of the nature of the field, but some organizations are recognizing that flexible workplace cultures can create greater employee satisfaction and productivity, while also increasing employee loyalty and retention.

Marriott International, for example, was recently voted one of the 100 Best Companies to Work For by Fortune magazine. In the late 1990s, the company introduced its Alternative Work Arrangements program, which includes an employee telework program. In the past three years, Marriott also has ramped up the program as part of a strategic talent management strategy that's aimed at getting the best workers in the industry.

Meetings and hospitality companies also can take a cue from many innovative software and tech companies that have made work-life flexibility part of their culture. 37Signals, a Chicago-based software company, has experimented with four-day work weeks during the warmer months of May through October. CEO and co-founder Jason Fried says his employees tend to accomplish more quality work in four days versus the traditional five.

"The employee is your most valuable asset," says Longo. "If the employer can accommodate you, whether it's coming in late or leaving early [or having] a good personal or vacation policy, that's helpful for the employee. If you get a good meeting planner in your business, you want to keep them. Hopefully, employers are doing those things that show value to their employees and that they're important to them."

Emerging technologies are making it easier on the traveling parent. Email, instant messaging, smartphones and videoconferencing help parents keep in touch with spouses and kids at minimal cost. "Ask yourself how you maximize your travel and how can technology help you to stay in touch, for example, through Skype or FaceTime," says Longo. "I don't buy that when I'm at a meeting, all I have to do is focus on this meeting. You can take five minutes to call your kid. Don't be so wrapped up in your meeting. Don't be a martyr."

Those same technologies are also making telecommuting a more viable option. According to a recent Ipos/Reuters poll, one in five workers around the globe telecommutes frequently, and nearly 10 percent work at home daily.

Telecommuting is only one of a number of employee-satisfaction measures being introduced at workplaces nationwide. Simple flexible work schedules are a big bonus for parents who also juggle school schedules. "It starts with management that's able to sit down with their team and be flexible [and] figure out how to still cover the operations, but at the same time work with their different players to make sure that they get time to be with their families," says Chicourrat. "As a boss, I try to be really good at helping my employees trade hours and duties so they can go watch their kid's game or see them in a play. You don't want your people to miss out. The most special thing is seeing your child grow up."

O'Donnell sees a value in an accommodating employer, but he recognizes the employee's responsibility. "It's important for a company to have flexibility, but also for the employee to have flexibility and understand that whatever your job title is, you have to work with that," he says. "It would be great to take my kids to school every morning at 8 and pick them up at 4, but that's just not realistic. I know if I went to my boss right now and said, 'I need to spend more time at home and stop traveling,' that's not the direction we're going.



**"I don't buy that when I'm at a meeting, all I have to do is focus on this meeting. You can take five minutes to call your kid."**

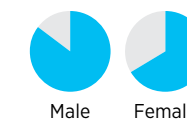
—Andy Longo,  
Delta Tau Delta

So it really comes down to what am I going to do when I'm home and how am I going to make up that time."

### Work-Life In Progress

What work-life balance looks like for each individual varies over time, depending on the phase of one's life. At every stage of life, finding time for exercise, socializing, vacation and career development remains important. Finding solutions to help balance work and life is a fluid, ever-changing process, and with the right support, it is possible to attain a work-life equilibrium.

Visual Economics, a website that analyzes financial data, conducted a study that shows 85.5 percent of U.S. working males and 66.5 percent of females work more than 40 hours per week.



"There's a light at the end of every tunnel, and it will get better," says Hecquet. "Don't ever get complacent and don't ever feel like you can't take personal time for yourself. I did that a lot, thinking that when my kids sleep I need to sleep, that I need to be so focused on them. But if you're not happy, they're not happy."

Longo agrees. "I make no apologies for having my hobbies, interests [and] for wanting to take time," says Longo. "I work hard, I take it seriously, I try to make the

best decisions I can and do what's right for the fraternity and make our meetings the best I can, but at the same time I also realize I have a personal life. My children are only going to be 11 or 12 once, and I don't want to wake up one day when they're 18 and graduating from high school and all I can say is, 'Boy, I sure planned great meetings!' or 'Wow, I really saved on that budget!'" ■