

Juggling life with work life lived on the road

By Irene S. Levine
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Balancing work and the rest of life is always a challenge, but difficulties are compounded when your work demands frequent travel. The patina of dining at fancy restaurants, staying at upscale hotels, or achieving elite flier status fades quickly when you are worrying about leaky pipes or sick children back home.

When travelers arrive at a destination, it's not uncommon to encounter such hassles as hotel mix-ups, canceled appointments, lost luggage, Internet problems, or unexpected weather.

A study of 13,000 people employed by a multinational company, published in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, suggests that those who travel the most (20-plus nights per month) are more likely to have chronic health problems. Researchers speculate this may be due to the combination of bad eating habits, sedentary lifestyle, and poor sleep associated with travel.

Here are five strategies veteran road warriors employ to better juggle their busy lives:

Outsource

Jessica Murray of Atlanta has traveled almost weekly for the past eight years in her work with

Skanksa, an international commercial construction and development company. Murray outsources as many chores as she can. "Hire a housekeeper if you can afford it," she says.

She hires someone to bring in the mail, take out the trash, and tend and play with the cat.

Organize and streamline

Christopher Lowell of Santa Fe, an interior design and lifestyle specialist, is the author of six books, including "Seven Layers of Organization." Traveling some 250 days a year for television and personal appearances, he stresses the importance of being organized to save time.

"Always pack your bags the night before and walk yourself through your schedule," he says. "Keep an inventory of clothing that travels well, and anticipate what you'll need."

Take only what fits into a carry-on, ideally one with a trolley handle outside so it doesn't take up precious inside space, he says. "Make sure your plastic bag of toiletries is refilled the moment you return, so it's ready to go."

To simplify life at home, Lowell uses a commercial mailbox service so he doesn't have to notify the post office each time he's away. "Things are easier if you're married and have an infrastruc-



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ture at home," says Lowell. "Unless you make arrangements beforehand, life stops when you travel as a single."

Stay connected

Smartphones and Web-based technologies enable travelers to oversee their finances no matter where they are. Psychiatrist Fred C. Osher, who lives in Charleston, S.C., travels about 80 days a year as director of health policy for the Council of State Governments. Like many others, he pays bills electronically through his bank and arranges for automatic payment of recurring utility bills. "This way I don't have to worry about missing a payment window or incurring a penalty fee,"

he says. Murray sometimes uses Gogo, a relatively inexpensive in-flight Internet service, to catch up on her finances.

Focus on your health

Many travelers worry about maintaining their health on the road. "Breakfast is an especially difficult meal because it robs you of time and most of what is available is unhealthy," says Murray. She routinely carries apples, bananas, nuts, protein bars, and oatmeal packets. "You can always ask for hot water," she says. At home, she shops like a European, buying food a day at a time. "Otherwise, it will just go bad," she says. She keeps staples such as cereal, soups, and late-night

munchies in the cupboards.

Because travel is physically wearing, many fliers return with colds. Murray's travels are usually domestic so she relies on "doc-in-the-box" services (called MinuteClinics at CVS pharmacies) across the country rather than waiting to make doctor appointments. If she knows she will be traveling to the same place multiple times, she finds a local gym where she can exercise and usually is able to negotiate a favorable rate.

Nurture your relationships

Whether someone is single or partnered, relationships require nurturing. Murray believes her hectic schedule was one factor

that contributed to her divorce. Now she makes an effort to devote more time to the people who are important to her. She uses Skype and her cellphone to catch up with friends, family, and business associates during downtime on trips.

Osher realizes his traveling shifts many household burdens to his wife so he makes sure to pitch in when he's home. He didn't travel as often when his children were young, but he recalls the stress of missing birthdays, graduations, and soccer matches. In addition to explaining why he had to be away, Osher tried to give his family something to look forward to when he returned. "When my daughters were young, they loved getting little gifts (like Beanie Babies), so they weren't too upset with my being away," he says. Now the empty-nester plans a dinner date so he and his wife can catch up after being apart.

"The worst thing is not arriving home when you're expected," says Osher.

Clearly, there are no simple fixes. But the best way to minimize the unnecessary stress and inconveniences associated with frequent travel is to plan ahead.

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