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Juggling Your Job and School

Learn to balance the demands of earning a degree with those of your career.

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Pursuing an advanced degree can be time-consuming — especially if you have a full-time project management job. But heading back to school can also boost your knowledge, marketability, career opportunities and earning potential.

Here are four tips for meeting the demands of work and school:

1. Build a support system.

"Splitting your time between work and life is hard — adding school is that much more challenging. Three entities want your undivided attention," says Joseph R. Czarnecki, PMP, senior consultant in the London, England office of ESI International, a project management training and consulting firm.

"There will be time pressure, competing demands for your attention and never-ending deadlines — one after the other," he says.

The best way to survive is with backing from your friends, family and co-workers.

To secure their support, sit down for a conversation to make sure your expectations are aligned, says Philip R. Diab, PMP, CEO of Leadership Formation, an executive consulting and training firm in Amman, Jordan.

2. Engage your employer.

"Make sure your manager is aware you're interested in pursuing an advanced degree and that they're supportive of it," says Mr. Diab, also a past PMI chair. "Even if your organization isn't willing to financially support you, get the moral support."

Showing an ROI on your educational endeavors helps build support, of course. When he was earning his MBA, for example, one of Mr. Diab's fellow students used his own employer as a case study so the company got something out of it as well.

"Once employers see results, that's when they buy in," says Don Mitchell, PMP, program coordinator and a professor for the project management program at Humber College in Toronto, Canada.

"At the start of our program, about 25 percent of our students have their employer's blessing," he says. "At the end, about 90 percent have that support."

3. Schedule your time carefully.

Block out a time you devote exclusively to studies, suggests Gwanhoo Lee, Ph.D., associate professor of IT management at American University in Washington, D.C., USA.

"In addition to attending class, you need to be able to set aside at least eight hours a week to do readings, assignments and group projects," he says. "That means you may need to sacrifice part of your weekend and/or after-work hours."

If you have a conflict with work, Dr. Lee suggests asking your professor for help. "They might be willing to provide you with some flexibility."

And make the most of any opportunities for multitasking.

"Try to use current work projects as assignment projects," recommends Liz Davies, program manager, major projects, property services, at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia, where she's currently pursuing a master's in project management. The program is accredited by the [PMI Global Accreditation Center for Project Management Education Programs \(GAC\)](#).

4. Treat your education like a project.

Plan, prioritize and don't procrastinate — just as you would at work, says Mr. Czarnecki.

"You can't do it all at once, so you need to take a more strategic view of the entire workload and keep it balanced," he says.

When you have to make a choice between school or work, remember your career depends on delivering the real projects.

"Your focus should be 100 percent on work. Then achieve as much as you can manage with school," Ms. Davies says. "It defeats the purpose if you're getting great marks at school but your work is suffering because of it."

[Learn more about programs accredited by the PMI Global Accreditation Center for Project Management Education Programs \(GAC\).](#)

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What do you think

Have you pursued an advanced degree in project management? How did you balance the demands of your degree with those of your career? Go to our [LinkedIn group](#) and comment.