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### **AUSA Family Readiness**

An important read. There are no do-overs when it comes to your kids growing up, as this COL learned.

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'Important' vs. 'Urgent' by Col. Mark Blum Commander, 212th Field Artillery Brigade, U.S. Army

"My wife and I took our daughter to college a week ago. She's our last child to leave the house as our son has been in college for a couple of years now, and it seems a little empty right now. Phone calls and e-mail will be poor substitute for kitchen conversations, and it is difficult to envision exactly what she's doing, with whom, through a phone line. I suppose we'll have to get used to her being grown up, but I still remember the little girl who loved gymnastics and didn't like to play with dolls.

As I look back, I wonder what I might have done differently if I'd known everything I know now. The Army is a great place to raise a kid, but I think I'd make a few changes given the chance. For instance, I remember a Thanksgiving in Germany as a major when I worked through the day and all night, only going home for an hour to wolf down some Thanksgiving dinner and then going back to work again. I don't even remember what the subject was, but I now know it wasn't important enough to miss Thanksgiving with my family.

There are a lot of good reasons to spend time with your family, and far fewer good reasons not to. I've been in the field on my share of birthdays and holidays, and there's not too much we can do about that.

Still, here's what I'd change:

1. I'd leave work every day by 1800 if at all possible and earlier if I could.

We work from before our children go to school until after they go to bed at night sometimes when they're small. How many hours might I have spent with them in the evening if I'd realized the chance doesn't come around again?

2. I'd save less money and have more fun. I think I'd take more long summer vacations to really memorable places with the kids instead of making the PCS move part of the vacation.

3. I'd make it a priority for them to see their grandparents more often, regardless of where we lived.

4. I'd be more selective about the social engagements I accepted, even if it was "expected" that I attend. My kids "expected" that I'd be with them too, and I don't recall any banquets where my presence determined the

outcome of the evening. Sometimes I made the wrong choice.

5. I would pay more attention to which teachers my children had and less attention to the grades they made.

6. I'd be more help on school projects and less irritated when they brought one to me for help at the last minute. I get things every day at work at the last minute, for a lot of reasons. I would be more understanding that it happens to kids, too.

7. I'd go to all the PTA meetings, not just some, and every sports. Through the door at night I'd be more absorbed in their worlds. I could have thought about most of those problems after they went to bed. I'd throw a Frisbee more often with the kids and do less yard work. I can rake leaves anytime. We'd clean the house less and spend more time messing it up doing fun stuff.

8. I'd never again lose a day of annual leave. One year I lost 24 days - what a waste.

I once had a boss who talked about the difference between what's "urgent" and what's "important." He hadn't learned that lesson until late in his career, and didn't want others to make the same mistakes. He always worked long hours, even once missing his son's Eagle Scout initiation because of something happening he felt he needed to deal with, but later wished he'd left to someone else.

He had three rules to determine the difference between "important" and "urgent," and if an event were important he'd offer that you should think long and hard before missing it. To him, an event is important if:

1. It is important to someone who's important to you; 2. Your personal presence makes a difference; and 3. The opportunity is not going to come around again.

If those three conditions are satisfied you have a pretty good idea what you should focus on. He would always use this one example: As a Division Commander his unit was having a Warfighter Exercise - a major event for a Division. One of the Brigade Commanders' daughters was starting her freshman year in college, and he indicated he was going to take her and get her settled, and would miss most of the exercise.

As might be expected he was not real excited about one of his senior commanders missing the Warfighter, and pressured him to just have his wife take his daughter. The Brigade Commander insisted, even knowing he could be killing his career. After the Warfighter ended he said he gained a great deal of respect for that commander as a result of his decision, and took a hard look at some of the choices he'd made in his own career. His own wife had made him see the wisdom of the man's choice.

Overall, I think military life has been great for my family, and I wouldn't trade it for anything. The choices I've made have been mine, and I haven't always made the right ones for the right reasons. Even so, kids survive parents learning "as we go." My advice is to make your choices wisely. The object for all of us is to make sure we run out of career before we run out of family. For more than 20 years we've had at least one kid in the house at all times. Now it's just as, which is what we had when we started, at least until Thanksgiving. We're already looking forward to that time this year!"

— with John Hobbs

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**AUSA Family Readiness**

So good!

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**John S Wilson**

Good advice, but (1) I wonder if he'd have made O-6 had he followed his own advice, and (2) I wonder how he treated his subordinates who were faced with the same day-to-day choices (i.e. did he push them out the door by 1800 or did he "top block" those who stayed until 2200)?

69

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Megan Zed replied · 20 replies

**James Anderson**

Briefs well, but is incompatible with the culture of today's Army unless you are senior enough that you can delegate your duties down to a competent subordinate, are vested in the retirement system, or are junior enough that you are easily replaceable with a minimum of fuss.

Frankly, the Brigade Commander in the example is already vested- he can afford to make those decisions and "kill his career" because he has already had his career- he isn't necessarily risking anything more than getting a star.

The CPT or SGT in the same position would be risking much more, and I think it's likely that there is a reason that these senior leaders made all those choices over the years that is obscured by the rose tinted glasses.

38

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Ryan Feil replied · 2 replies

**Daron Aukerman**

My wife still reminds me; even though my career was cut short, I have the opportunity to be there as my kids grow. I even get to be a stay-at-home Dad to my son (she got to do it when my girls are young, I get to do it while he is young).

5

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**Chris Whitmus**

I chose my family over my career in the military. I knew I was finished when I made that choice as the military does not reward a family first outlook. I lost my career but gained my family. It was absolutely worth it.

10

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**Samuel Rogers**

I noticed he didnt give a shout out the tens, hundreds, or maybe thousands of families of NCOes and Junior O's who were just forced to live the same or worse family life even if they didnt want to while serving under his leadership.

9

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#### Robin Kessler

This is why you learn to know your people and delegate. If you are not there then the mission can still be accomplished. Truth be told, putting in long hours doesn't necessarily result in success. If you are a good leader, trust and train your subordinates you will succeed without sacrificing your family.

8

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Jonathan David... replied · 2 replies

#### Kelli Keenan Flynn

Well said! Thankfully for the most part my husband put his family first. Yes he missed birthdays, anniversaries & holidays while living in another country, even missed a family cruise right after 911. All things he could not change but when he was home, he was home. We spent 12 years of his 25 year career at Fort Bragg. That means his toothbrush was always packed. Are there things I would like to go back and change, of course but it is what it is. We have 3 very strong adult children that we couldn't be prouder of. They all stepped up when needed.

7

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#### Cheryl Wynn

Each and every second you can spend with your children should be a cherished moment. You cannot bring them back to an age. Love them. Spend time with them. I love my kids so much and miss those days more than anything. They are gone like vapor in the wind. Love you and salute you my precious son who has become a great man that I am so very proud of!

1

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#### Roberto Medina

Some people think that if you didn't work past 1700hrs you weren't a good leader. My answer is/was "maybe they are such good leaders that they make sure everyone is doing their assigned tasks"

4

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#### Matt Behr

Don't worry, the Enlisted man will always stay at work to accomplish your mission while you attend your family event. (not a personal complaint. Just something I've observed).

7

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#### Wesley William Charles Hart

Now what would happen if an enlisted soldier asked for the same things? I cant think of a single reason that would allow an enlisted soldier to be allowed to miss a brigade exercise, yet he can take off to drop off his daughter at college?

3

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#### JP Hensley

Very few leaders have this mind set, regardless if they have family or not. I wish we had more leaders that had this mind set!

4

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#### Faye Keel

So true Son so true. This is true with every career. I worked 2 jobs for several years and what gad it gotten me. I wad there for my children, but now I am paying for it with health issues. God bless you and everyone else trying to make the best decisions for you and your family, in the end we still love

each other. Your Dad is 70 yrs old. Count up the times you or the kids have seen him in the last 5 years and goodness when will you see him again. I love you and your family so much. It is what it is. With all my love 🙏🙏🙏❤️❤️

1

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**Belinda Scott Gruber**

Well said. So true. We often don't understand this in the midst of raising our kids, and feel good, loving grandparents are underappreciated and underutilized.

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**Tim Mercer**

Good advise. I never missed any if my sons high school football games because he expected me there, plus I'm his photographer 😊 I worked long hours but always made time for him regardless of the situation. If I had to take leave because he had a game out of state I was there. I told my son in going to miss high school Friday night 🎉cheering him and his teammates on. Now instead of going to 🎉 on Friday I'm blessed to he will be playing 🎉 on Saturdays now. Always make time for your kids. I did regardless of the situation.

1

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**Kevin Martin**

Just re-read this about six months ago- one of the best articles I have ever seen- thanks for sharing-

4

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**Danny N Debbie Lovejoy**

Amen. Lessons learned late are sometimes the worst way to spend your life. Live for family. Love them, hold them and have fun.

3

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**Linda Hearne**

Great story and oh so true. Enjoy the years your children are home because they fly by and then look forward to watching them raise their families.

1

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**FE Medina**

Great read..wish i would have read this 5 years ago...i probably would have done more of the advice mentioned....But its never too late even when the kids are grown.

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**Kerry Franks**

As so often said, when you're lying on your death bed you won't regret not spending more time working, but you will regret the times when you could have been with your family.

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**Shelley Holbrook**

Good article. I was lucky for most of my working career. I had only one bad boss out of 5. I was allowed to miss company meetings for my sons school activities.

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**Pas Pee**

Very insightful,....from the various comments, it so in every career. God help us make a qualitative decisions in this journey of life. God bless us all.

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**Jeffrey J. Chludzinski**

The same is applicable in the civilian world. Having spent over 15 years as a C-Level Executive in a multi-million 24x7 industry I can say I did/do a good job of balancing job and family. I can't say that about my early years but fortunately I woke up before I lost my family (wife & 6 kids) to my career. Jobs and careers come and go, the family is your only constant. If you cherish that your subordinates will too and everyone will be better focused "on the clock". It's a win-win.

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**Tabatha Pepin**

A lot of the people that I know that did very well early on in there career were either single or had someone that stayed at home with the kiddos. We wonder why the divorce rate is among the highest. I completely agree but I don't know anyone who was told they are a top performer and only works 40hrs

3

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Carol Ann replied · 2 replies

**Ann McGillicuddy**

Well said! My boys have grown up. I worked every Holiday for triple pay. If I could only go back and forget the money and exhaustion doing double shifts with money, money and more money. What a sin! Yes I was there physically yet I was a zombie! My boys needed me. Not the money! They are gone now. What a Stupid waste all to do better than the Jones's!!! If I could just go back for a moment. Please do as I say; Not as I did!! Ann. ❤️🇺🇸

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**KayBee Lea**

This goes for every walk of life, not just military. 5

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Mary J La Foun... replied · 1 reply

**Shannon Haney**

This is why I always preferred having female leaders -- they all seemed to inherently know these things. Not to perpetuate a stereotype, just an observation of my own personal career.

13

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Shannon Haney replied · 4 replies

**Lynn Logsdon**

Great read for every parent....military or not! 7

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**Brandon Jerard Benson**

Wake up earlier, get in the office earlier, so you can leave earlier. 4

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Tres Pettus replied · 1 reply