

# Raising a family in the sportsturf industry

» **Below: BRANDON PUTNAM**, sports turf manager for the York (PA) Revolution, proposes to his girlfriend, Megan, during the 7th inning stretch of a game this summer. The team's marketing department set up a phony promotion where three female contestants were told a gift certificate was under one of the bases. Megan was asked to stand in at second base for a "no-show" contestant. The grounds crew removed first base and then third to show there was no gift certificate. That's when Brandon knelt, pulled out the ring, and proposed at second base. By the way, Brandon also won the Atlantic League's Field of the Year award.



**I**N OUR EVENT DRIVEN INDUSTRY, we have all had our share of holidays, birthdays and anniversaries that were missed due to employment obligations. After a 35+ year career in this business, I can honestly say that I've missed a few family life events that have me wishing I could be a time traveler. Unfortunately, missing your daughter's prom or your son's birthday is a memory that can't be restored. Our trade requires us to miss a lot of family events and your main goal should be to minimize the emotional hit the family takes when you can't attend those sentimental occasions. There is really no simple recipe that will allow you to obtain a perfectly balanced lifestyle in a sportsturf career but there are things we can do to ease the emotional impact to help our families cope.

Many of the turf managers I talk with are planning to wait until they are 30+ before tying the knot.

As the baby boomers begin to retire, the next generation is growing and developing their own lifestyles to deal with marriage and children. Long gone are the traditional breadwinner type families where mom stays at home to raise the kids. Back in the early 1900's, the average age at which men tied the knot was 25.9 years while women married at an average of 22 years. In my daughter's *Bride Magazine* it states that today women are waiting until their 27 years old and 29 for men. I can only imagine this trend will continue to rise considering the current economic climate. Many of the turf managers I talk with are planning to wait until they are 30+ before tying the knot.

## HELPING FAMILY UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU DO

Spouse or partner selection and the timing of when to have children is a process that is part planning, faith and luck. If the parenting experience takes place in your life, it's important to make sure each person in your family unit understands what you do at your job. Communication as to what is



planned and expected of you shouldn't be a mystery. Pick a day each week to talk about schedules as a group so everyone knows where you will be. Talk about what the kids are doing, etc. Informing the family that you have a 10-game home stand or a turf conference coming up is better than hearing about it the day it starts. Even though you may be the head of the household doesn't mean everything revolves around your schedule.

Being open to hearing everyone's agenda really helps. Sharing goals and dreams with your life partner from the onset is crucial to the building blocks of a family and a solid sportsturf career. Understanding that you can achieve more goals by living and working together takes on a whole new meaning when everyone's on the same page.

I recall taking a position in West Palm Beach after we had just moved from Virginia to Pennsylvania. There was a brief discussion that I would go ahead of the family and set up our home and they would follow a few months later. I just couldn't see that happening and since the kids were still underage and not in school, it was a logical decision to move the entire family at once. We have all witnessed someone that took a job in another state and left their families behind and in most cases the person has no choice because they couldn't afford to move everyone right away or perhaps they didn't want to disrupt the school year as older kids have a much harder time moving and leaving friends. These decisions need to be weighed carefully because it is difficult on everyone when the family is separated. However, if you have a great network of friends and family nearby, it helps manage life's ups and downs a lot easier. As your family grows with your career, developing relationships with your spouse and children should not be secondary, but rather a part of your success.

When reviewing the family's weekly schedule, try to pinpoint and talk about things to look forward to. At family meetings:

- Give them your full attention. We are all great multi-taskers but during this time you need to live the moment and stay 100% focused on their needs.
- Turn off your cell phones, the TV, etc.
- Don't make promises you can't keep, especially with children. (To this day my kids ask me when I'm going to buy the Sea-Dos I promised when we moved to Florida.)
- Don't focus on planning for holidays or occasions you can't attend but rather the ones you can and make them really special.
- In our line of work we are always developing contingency plans just in case the first plan falls apart. You should do the same when planning your family events, especially if you're in the middle of the sports season and your work schedule fluctuates.

### BE FLEXIBLE

Our jobs have trained us to be very flexible. Our event schedules can change like the weather. Turf managers are trained to react quickly and efficiently to keep the game rolling. Use the same approach at home and you will reap the benefits. Understanding everyone has schedules and yours is not the only one will build trust that you are trying your hardest to be with the family.

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The Cook family at the Athens Olympics: Megan, Cameron, Scott, Murray and Donna.

You also need to understand that with kids, things can change very quickly. As soon as you think things are under control junior breaks an arm and all you can do is to be flexible and go with it. You are the parent that is responsible so imagine it's a rain delay and get the job done.

It's also important to take that kind of approach when you can't complete a project at home or fail to finish that "honey do" list. Whatever you were supposed to do but couldn't because of your employment you need to find a way to forgive yourself. One of the



Murray's daughter, Kate, painting a logo in Mexico.

greatest wastes of emotional energy is the feeling of guilt and no one can make you feel guiltier than your family. Everyone experiences feelings of guilt. This is where logic comes into play. Accepting the fact that you missed your daughter's music recital is the first step towards a positive outcome. Again if you have those weekly family meetings, she knows you planned to be there and that something came up that wouldn't allow you to make it.

One tip that has helped me feel less guilty when I couldn't attend a particular event is to leave a card in a place where you know they will look such as in a purse, clarinet case or above the visor in the car. It becomes a game for your family to see where you hide the cards when you can't be there, but more importantly it's letting your family know that you were thinking of them.

## ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES

The social media explosion over the past few years has allowed us to communicate with ease. We can tweet, Skype, SMS, MMS, Facebook, MySpace, IM, AIM, Meebo, our families instantly. We can use these wonderful medias to keep up with family activities as they unfold throughout the day however the down side is it also opens up more ways for friends and peers to contact you. I do quite a bit of work internationally, so for the family to see me tapping away on my Blackberry at night or weekends is pretty common.

It's tough to do but everyone needs to create personal and professional boundaries. You need to decide what are acceptable and unacceptable actions that you will allow from others as it relates to using your time. This is a huge step in taking charge of your life. Everyone needs to set boundaries or limits so people will respect you. For example not taking cell calls during family dinner is no different than turning your phone off during a 2-hour movie in the theater. Which is more important? I would say the family dinner. Everyone knows how to say "no" and respecting those boundaries is a personal and professional reflection on you.

Our industry requires that we hold ourselves to high standards. Finding the balance of what you will accept via compromise in all facets with your spouse, kids, job etc. is needed but be mindful that personal standards are about who you are and when you lower them it can be a reflection on you as well.

You need personal time so get organized. Try to delegate responsi-

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bility to others at your work. To many times we see where young turf managers believe they need to water the clay, drag the infield and mow the grass themselves. Many times we feel there's more control if we can do everything. Unfortunately while you are performing all of these tasks, you are burning up time to use for other personal and professional goals.

Delegating duties by developing a work plan and keeping to it is building trust in your staff. One of the work plans we have used in our home over the years is the "official" kitchen calendar. It has everything on it from birthdays to travel schedules, appointments, etc. In fact, it has become somewhat of a family diary of events that is great to look back on as the kids get older. Just remember, being successful at your job doesn't mean you need to be a workaholic. Delegate and educate.

## FIND RELIABLE CHILDCARE

Outside of your spouse we turn to extended family such as grandparents, uncles' aunts to help watch the kids. If not them, you will need to find someone that you are extremely comfortable with to care for your children. If you attend a church it's a great first step to finding childcare options. Remember children are pretty smart so even if you are not pleased with the child sitting arrangement, don't show it or let your kids see it because they will pick up on the negative vibes. Now the guilt sets in, so step back look at the situation logically and



From left to right: Cameron Cook, Murray Cook, and Scott Cook, in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

positively and makes a decision. Sometimes it's better to make a change than do nothing.

During this holiday season take the time to attend those important events in your family life. If something is important enough, you can probably make time for it. For a New Year's resolution, start out the year with a plan to bring harmony and balance into your lifestyle because it will lead to both personal and professional rewards at your job and with the family. ■

*Murray Cook, former STMA president, is president of Brickman Sportsturf and the Field & Venue consultant to Major League Baseball.*



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