

A. Dear Jill, You are not alone in how you feel. What you are experiencing is very common during this time in our lives. It seems so many people—men and women—find it increasingly difficult to manage. We have increasing work, family and personal demands which often make us feel overwhelmed and inadequate.

The invention of cell phones, pagers, and computers are great tools for convenience and productivity in the work place. However, they also increase our accessibility allowing us to be available above and beyond the traditional workday. This results in more work and less time for family and ourselves.

Various types of families have different demands placed on them. Single parents must fulfill the role of provider, household manager and parent without sharing the responsibilities with a partner. This can leave even the most organized and sufficient single parent feeling unfulfilled because her needs often are last—and may even be ignored. Two-parent households have increased demands placed on them with the constant challenge of fulfilling work obligations while meeting the needs of their children. Chauffeuring the children to and from their activities can be a job in itself! Often, parents in these families may feel overburdened with family and household responsibilities due to the assumption that tasks should be equally shared with a partner but in reality, may be imbalanced. Families in which one parent stays at home also feel the strains of increased demands exclusive to their situation. Often, these parents question if what they are doing is



Q. Dear Renee, I find it harder and harder to manage my life with all of the stress from my work and my family; I don't even have time for myself. I feel as if I'm constantly struggling to meet all of my responsibilities that I never have time to do anything else. I don't understand how this can be when my friend who is a single parent seems to manage fine all by herself. What's wrong with me?
—Jill E. Naples, FL

important and measures up to careers outside the home. Furthermore, the parent who chooses to stay at home may feel increased demands about his or her future after the kids are grown.

These increased demands undoubtedly raise the demands we have on a personal level. The world is growing in technology, convenience and accessibility making it easier (and more competitive) to improve ourselves. We can increase our intellectual capacity through online universities and classes, books, and self-help groups. We can improve our physique through breast augmentation, liposuction, hair transplants, etc.

So, where does that leave the rest of us? The demands are greater because the options and accessibility are greater. This doesn't have to be a negative fact of life, however. If we re-frame our view of these increased demands, we can see that we have more options and opportunities to manage our lives the way we want to. The key is the way WE want to.

People tend to increase the daily pressures of life simply by expecting too much of themselves. They tend to compare themselves to others and then feel inadequate for not measuring up to

their counterparts. Don't get me wrong; I'm not saying that it isn't healthy to improve oneself. I believe it is important to strive for bettering our lives and ourselves. But, where do we draw the line? And how do we know we crossed over it?

The answer lies within you. Each of us has our own capacity in which we can handle life's demands. Some tolerate more demands than others. Therefore, it isn't fair for me to compare myself to you because we are comparing apples to oranges. An apple has different needs to survive and flourish than an orange. Apples need a different environment and they grow at a different pace than oranges. Thus, in order for you to thrive, you need to find your ideal environment and growing pace. It won't be the same as your friend's environment because you are two distinct individuals. We tend to place undue demands on ourselves because we have been given the life of an apple and are trying to live the life of an orange. In doing this, we often come up short in bearing fruit because we aren't living to our life's specifications.

So, how do we draw the line on life's increasing demands? We need to draw the line on our own needs and desires instead of looking at where others draw their lines. It is important to stop comparing yourself to others who appear to have it all under control. Their capacity is different than yours and that's okay. We know we've crossed

the line when we begin feeling overwhelmed, inadequate and stressed. Listen to your body, it will tell you. It doesn't mean something is wrong with you. Rather, it's telling you to look at your situation and ask yourself if you are expecting too much. Then, realize you are one of a kind with individual needs separate from anyone else in the world.

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An informative exercise to help you see how you are managing your life is the following: On a piece of paper, list your top 10 needs as it relates to your personal life, in order of importance making sure to be as specific as possible. For instance: 1) Need to spend quality time with my son twice a week 2) Need to find leisure time for myself to read one book once a month 3) Find time to walk the beach every week. Note how each need has a specific time component involved. Next, choose one item on your paper that you will commit to doing for the next 2-4 weeks. Only choose one item for now so it isn't overwhelming. Once you accomplish your first item, move on to another, etc. Remember, you are unlike anyone else. Therefore, you will move at a pace that is all your own, and that's okay.

It's common to feel inadequate and overworked in today's

society. We must keep in mind that everyone has a different situation than our own and that we simply increase our stress and frustration when we compare ourselves to others. Once we come to terms with who we are, we can look more closely at our needs and make a commitment to honor them. Most often, people who are overwhelmed and overworked are not making the time to fulfill their needs. It is a matter of prioritizing your needs and fitting them in to the demands of daily living. By doing this, you will feel more control in your life because you are the one directing it. You will be making time for yourself and your needs and living the life the way you want to live.

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MS has combined her expertise as a Clinical Psychotherapist and Business Consultant/Trainer into an Executive and Personal Coach assisting others in reaching their potential and effectively moving through transitions. Renée owns Coaching-4-Success, a business in which she coaches individuals, couples and businesses on issues such as, burn-out, communication, motivation, and empowerment. She can be reached at 272-2888 or rkennedyedwards@netscape.net. Renee currently resides in the Naples area with her husband, Robert and daughter, Brittany.

