

# forum

**Robert W. Lind**  
*Human Development Specialist*  
*Montana State University—*  
*Bozeman*

## *If Commitment Is Good, Is Overcommitment Better?*

A story is told of a man who was advised by the king that he could claim for his own all the land he could encircle in a day's journey on foot. At the crack of dawn, the man set off from the starting point. His vision of possessing a vast empire spurred him on, and he widened the arc of the circle he was making. He ran faster and faster, hour after hour, as the size of his empire grew in his mind. He had encircled tens of thousands of acres as night fell, and, in the last ray of sunlight, he enclosed the circle by returning to his starting point. He fell across the finish line—and died. The prize was great, but the price was incalculable.

Whatever the nature of our endeavor, a question we must always resolve is whether the prize is worth the price. Every achievement results from commitment, and commitment is a positive thing. To have a loving and harmonious family life requires a great deal of commitment and self-giving. To have a successful Extension career requires the investment of enormous energy and the application of all your skill. Even to appreciate a beautiful sunset requires the investment of time and thought to achieve the moment of wonderment.

But, for many of us in our Extension careers, life has a way of bringing us too many opportunities to make commitments. Financially, we know we may commit ourselves to payments on a home, a car, a freezer, a sailboat, until the outgo exceeds our income, and we're in trouble. Professionally, the same kind of thing can happen. Our resources of time and physical and emotional energy are finite. If we don't carefully weigh the merits and cost of the commitments we make, we may find ourselves in a losing situation.

In the minds of some, the image of the ideal Extension professional is of a person who is totally and continually involved in meetings, fairs, and a host of other activities, to the exclusion of nearly all other interests.

As admirable and important as our work is, we still must ask if the prize of being "Mr. or Ms. Extension" is worth the price. To get ahead in business at the cost of one's family life, to strive for recognition at the cost of one's physical or mental health, to rise to power at the price of one's integrity—all these are prizes most of us would agree aren't worth the price.

We may not always be able to avoid getting involved in things that cost us more than they're worth. But, we can develop the ability to bail out when we realize we don't really want to go where our present course may be leading us.

It's not a matter of abandoning our values, but of asserting our dominant values. Commitment to one's job, carried to an extreme degree, ceases to be a virtue, just as a large number of vices are virtues that have gotten out of control. It must surely be better to achieve somewhat less per year for many years than to achieve a larger amount for a brief time and quickly burn out.

We're better able to be profitable servants in Extension if we keep our career alive by maintaining a healthy balance between our professional, personal, and family life.