



Financial Success vs. Family

Working Mothers – How To Find The Time

By: Elizabeth Cruickshank, MBA '92

Many of us – Crummer graduates - share a common link. We identified unrealized opportunities, evaluated our options, and then worked hard to receive an MBA to help further our goals and dreams. But that's where the commonality ends. More than the separation between male and female workers, or boss and employee, is a fundamental division of all working people – people with children and people without.

Women, in particular make up fifty percent of the work force and a large number are mothers. I, for instance, have two sets of twins – ages 3 and 5 and the art of balancing work and family can be a daunting task at times. How can a parent win at home and work?

Natalie Gahrmann, a success coach and owner of *NRG Coaching Associates* provides private and corporate coaching to help parents achieve mastery of work and life. She is also the resident expert for www.Bluesuitmom.com, a web site specifically designed for working mothers.

Another expert from www.Bluesuitmom.com, Wendy Burt, states in *From Power Lunches to Power Rangers; How Executive Moms Juggle the Daily Grind*, “Unlike the June Cleavers of yesteryear, today’s executive moms often carry the double burden of maintaining a house and working full-time outside the home. (Not to mention that with the divorce rate higher than ever, many of these double-duty moms jump to virtual Superwoman status without the help of Superman.) The fact that you or other executive moms exist is proof that it can be done, however draining and stressful.”

“The primary issue facing working mothers today is that they feel overburdened and guilty,” Natalie explained in a recent interview. Working mothers often face the challenge of trying to complete projects at the office while worrying about a sick child at home, or trying to take care of that sick child at home while worrying about the neglected stack of paperwork on her desk at the office. And inevitably, the exhaustion and the guilt catch up with you. However, there are solutions and although they may seem simple on the surface, implementing a new action plan at home can be every bit as challenging as implementing a new contract at work.

Lindsey Townsend, also of www.Bluesuitmom.com, explains, “We recently asked working mothers around the country to tell us what their biggest work/family dilemma was.”

The top four challenges were:

1. Needing to be in two places at once
2. Getting to school and work on time
3. Finding the time
4. Never having enough time

Lindsey makes practical suggestions to help parents solve these dilemmas. For example, one executive was required to drive her son to after school activities several times a week. She used technology to take advantage of her commute time by using a hands-free cell phone to respond to conference calls. “As wireless devices continue to gain popularity,

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using a PC is no longer the only way to work. According to International Data Corporation, by 2004, more people will tap into the Internet through Web-enabled cell phones and other mobile devices than through personal computers,” stated Townsend. She also explains that prior planning is key. Getting the kids to school on time may be as simple as purchasing enough socks or underwear to carry you through more than one week’s wardrobe, or as organized as packing lunches and laying out clothes the night before. The trick is to find what works for your family and stick with it.

Of course, the biggest challenge is finding lost time. Townsend suggests that if your family is your top priority, lower your standards on housekeeping, for example. Learn to focus on only those things that are most important. Be sure, too, that you’ve familiarized yourself with the Family and Medical Leave Act and investigated every possible option at work. Slowly but surely, employers are beginning to address the employee’s work/life balance needs. Telecommuting from home or working on your lap top and cell phone are gradually becoming acceptable alternatives to spending 10 hours a day behind a desk.

To get it all done, learn to delegate. In the office, no executive would be expected to turn out all of the department’s work alone. So why would you expect to handle all of your family’s priorities by yourself? Mothers, including myself, often feel we’re letting our families down if we don’t shop for the spring wardrobe, attend every school activity, and go to every pediatrician appointment. If this rings a bell for you, force yourself to delegate a little responsibility. Of course, this isn’t always as easy to achieve as it is to suggest. When your three-year-old’s idea of helping to pick up the family room means piling all of the toys into one chair, or your five-year-old helps your husband make breakfast and you eat “crunchy” eggs, a good sense of humor is helpful.

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Finally, to alleviate feelings of guilt, Natalie suggests, “From the beginning, establish clear limits and focus on using your work time highly productively. Take the energy you are using to worry about your upcoming situation and use it to create a strategy and find solutions. You are working to provide for your family, yet that necessity is pulling you away from your children and creating an internal conflict. Be the best mother and business woman you can be. Do not berate yourself for what you don’t or can’t do. Focus on making sure your kids are well cared for in your absence. Be fully present when you are there, whether you are at work or at home. Eventually, everyone will adjust and remember to give yourself credit for your hard work and desire to care for your family. As far as the guilt goes, it is one of the biggest wasters of time and emotional energy. Introduce logic to help counter-balance your guilt. While at work, limit your stress by using good time management and organizing techniques. Set priorities and take responsibility. Do not over-extend yourself-- learn to say “no” to personal and professional demands and obligations so that you can reduce some pressure on yourself. Lastly, focus on being grateful for the opportunities you do have. Your life and attitude will improve when you focus on the things that are working.”

Natalie further suggests, “To keep surviving you need new skills to find some peace of mind and work toward what you want without overload. We have to learn new approaches that are fulfilling and not destructive, do nice things for ourselves and be happier. We each have to periodically take quiet time to think about our life and what we can do to change this pattern.” She advises asking you, “Can I do anymore? What can I give away?” After answering, revise and adjust. If you’re caught up in a whirlwind, before you say yes again, step out and take some time for yourself. It could be the most important appointment of your day.”



Your Comments Determine The Future Of This Column:

This article is a first in an effort to start a permanent column dedicated to the art of balancing financial success with family. Your opinions/suggestions will decide whether we continue with articles on this subject. Please send your comments to me, Elizabeth Cruickshank, MBA '92, ecruick007@aol.com and/or Mark Carbone, MBA '98, mc@Xecorporation.com.