

Working to Advance Your Career While Raising a Family

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Recent statistics, as reported by The Legal, indicate there has been no movement in the percentage of women lawyers practicing in this state's 100 largest law firms in the last 10 years. Undoubtedly, a confluence of factors contributes to this sobering fact, which is the subject of another article completely. Many articles in this category often focus on the reason why women leave the profession. I'd like to offer a tiny glimpse of why I chose to stay.

I have heard many people tell me that I can't have both, being a full-time mom and lawyer, that on either side, someone will be short-changed. However, I can precisely recall the events that led me to choose the practice of law and motherhood. It was the first day of February when I arrived at the office, having just dropped my then-3-year-old off at preschool and my 13-month-old at daycare. The hours for January had been posted and the blank spaces for four missed days out of a long billing month stared back at me in horror. Those days were not spent on a beach in Belize, but rather tending to one of my sick children.

I knew that a conversation about my productivity for the month and the upcoming billing year was inevitable. Being told that I was not meeting my productivity goals was a hard thing to hear, mostly because I knew it was true. I was finding it very difficult to maintain my responsibilities at home and at work. I had just returned as a full-time employee, after working a part-time schedule for six months post-maternity leave. I was also in a new practice group and learning new areas of the

law. Needless to say, it was a tough time and the pressure was on.

After the meeting, in the solace of my office, I cried and wondered how I was going to fulfill my goals as a wife, mother and young attorney. I questioned how I was going to, pardon the cliché, do it all. Yet, it's a question I am asked quite often. And the answer is, I don't.

Looking back now, almost three years later, I couldn't think of a better approach to get my mind in gear for what has been a whirlwind of an experience for a young parent and associate in a large law firm. Being told that I wasn't keeping my end of the bargain about my productivity was a test. I wasn't given the opportunity to fail, I was given the opportunity to succeed, but it was my choice. What I did that day was make a decision about the career I wanted. I decided that I was either going to choose another career path or I was going to give this opportunity all that I had. I'm glad I chose the latter.

Don't get me wrong, there are days I look back and wonder if I made the right decision, to be a full-time attorney while raising young children. There are sacrifices I have to make on both ends at different times. To say that there is work-life balance is a misnomer. It's more of a juggling act; at times you fall and at other times you rise to the occasion. To get through it, I've learned to manage my expectations for what I want out of my career and my life. At certain times, it also requires you to manage your priorities, which I've learned to do at different

stages of my family life and my career life. By no means do I feel that I have obtained success. However, I do feel that I am in control of my career and my personal life, and that is an empowering place to be.

Practical Tips

Whether you have a spouse or partner to provide behind-the-scenes support, or whether you're a single parent going it alone, over time you will discover best practices and routines to help you balance parenting and your career. The following practical tips may help ease your transition:

- Make a choice about what you want with your career. Understand that you can do both things. Do not overplan your life. Take a leap of faith in yourself and your family. Do what is right for you in that moment and then tackle what is to come, day by day.
- Communicate with your supervising attorney and your firm management. For me, it was a huge benefit to be able to work part-time for a short period of time while my son was very young. When I came back and recommitted to my full-time career, I had a great rapport with my managing attorney, who was open to discussions about our mutual expectations. Face it, your priorities have shifted, but your responsibilities at work still remain; keep open lines of communication about those responsibilities.
- Surround yourself with great people whom you trust and whom you can call on when urgent matters arise. No doubt there will be emergencies both at work and at home. Partner up on both ends with people you can turn to when unexpected circumstances arise.

- Be present. If you are at work, stay focused on what needs to get done (barring any emergencies) and give your clients your best. The same philosophy works at home. Focus on your children's needs when you are with them. Stay organized so that you can plan ahead for work-related events that may overlap with family obligations, and vice versa. When I'm at work, my focus is my clients, and when I'm home, my focus is my children.
- Lastly, do not quit, because it does get easier. When you are a mother, especially in the early days of motherhood, it is hard to think of anything else but tending to your newborn; that's innate. However, don't lose sight of your other passions. People adjust and babies adjust. Once you've decided that you want to make this work, you can get through it.

My desire to practice law was what got me through law school and the bar exam. That desire has continued to be a driving force for me. My career has created an unexpected and wonderful dimension for me as a wife, mother and lawyer. Perhaps YouTube's CEO, Susan Wojcicki, who is about to give birth to her fifth child, said it best when recently interviewed about her career and motherhood: "Your kids get something from your career and your career will get something from your kids."



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