

The Balancing Act: A Home-based Business and Family

Advice for Women — and Men —
Facing the Challenge

BY ALIZA SHERMAN

With all of our high tech solutions, we still haven't found the "killer app" for balancing working from home and taking care of kids. How does a woman — or man — who is establishing or running a home-based business handle the crying baby or tantrum-throwing toddler these days? The old fashioned way — planning, good parenting, and a healthy dose of patience.

Balancing Pregnancy and a Home Business

When Merilee Kern started her e-marketing firm, Kern Communications, from her home, her son Mason was one and a half years old. Initially, Kern hired a caregiver to keep her son entertained and fed, but as soon as he was ready, she enrolled him in a school where he still attends during most of her work hours.

More recently, while Kern was pregnant with her second child, working from home during pregnancy meant she "did not have to worry about buying professional maternity clothes," and sweats were the outfit of choice. Adds Kern, "In the first and third trimester, I was exceptionally tired, and working from home allowed me to take power naps as needed."

Kern does admit that it is still embarrassing when her baby Devyn lets out a blood curdling wail in the middle of a high-powered conference on speaker phone. Equally as uncomfortable is "trying to explain to a business colleague that the funny sucking noises they hear in the background are from my baby eating and then having to further clarify that she is bottle fed, not breast fed."

For Jennifer Reed, finding out she was pregnant was the catalyst for starting a business in her home. After her twin daughters were born, she left a high-stress

technical support management position to start a home-based web services company, leading to the "birth" of RTech solutions.

"Working from home just seemed right for me," explains Reed. "I have flexibility with my kids and am able to stay home and fulfill my dream of running a successful business."

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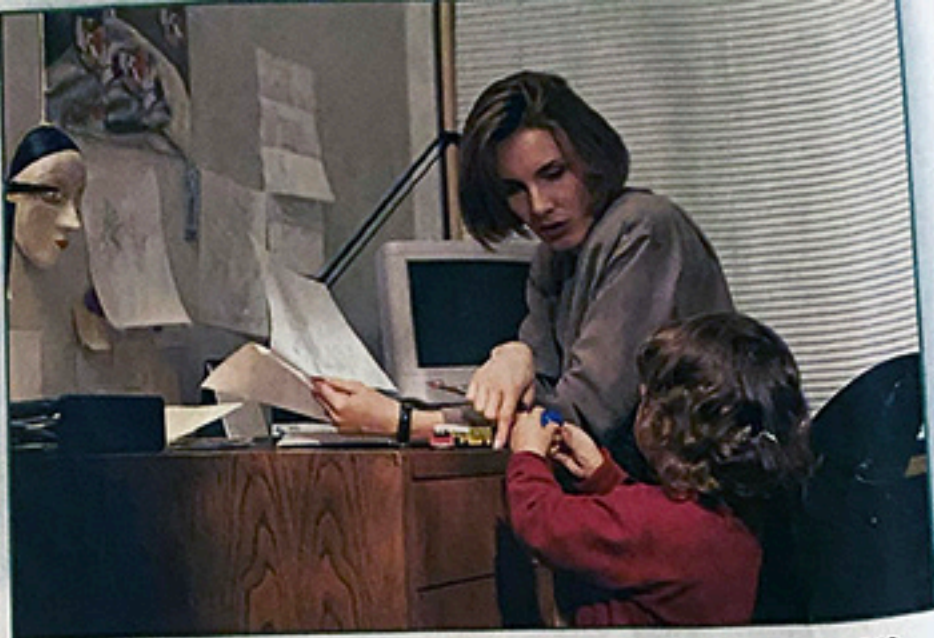
— Millie Szermanthor

Transitioning from Work Mode to Parent Mode

For Kern, her greatest balance challenge has been to disengage from work-mode into "mommy mode," particularly when her PC chimes with the arrival of another email, or the phone rings. "I have simply made a commitment that after a certain time of the day, I stay out of my home office." Reed deals with the balance issue by coming up with a regular schedule and sticking with it. Also having an on-site babysitter four days a week allows her to complete at least 16 hours of uninterrupted work time during normal business hours.

Sticking to a Structure

Structure is key, according to Millie Szerman, author of "A View From the Tub: An Inspiring and Practical Guide to Working From Home" (Stairwell Press, 2000). "Part of the beauty of working at home is that you're more readily available to your family than ever before," says Szerman. "By the same token, you need to be able to devote a good portion of that time to the creation and continuation of



With planning, good parenting, and patience, entrepreneurs are able to balance working from home and a family.

your business. People around you who are not trained in the ways of the home-based business are not going to understand your structure. The solution, of course, is communicating what the structure is and sticking to it."

More on Balancing

Here is more advice for women — and men — facing the balance challenge:

- 1. Plan everything ahead.** Says Kern, "I keep a meticulous To Do list on my computer that assures I don't forget anything that I intend or need to do in a given day."
- 2. Include your spouse or partner in the plan.** Work out a schedule together so both of you know what you need to run your home business successfully.
- 3. Create a distinct work area and work time.** The ideal home office has a door you can shut. Don't run out to put the laundry in the dryer while you're in work mode. This is a distraction from your business and a confusing signal to your family.
- 4. Have a good children's video collection.** Keep the kids entertained and stimulated, but also consider investing in an in-home caregiver, even if only part-time, to have truly uninterrupted, productive work hours to achieve your business goal.

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