

It's About Time:

By Jennifer Wake

Work or stay home. It is one of the biggest decisions a mother can face. While many women do not have the luxury to choose, some Lamorinda moms try to do both by running their own home businesses. But pursuing an entrepreneurial career with flexible hours, while spending quality time with children, does not come without its challenges.

When Orinda mom, Sara Curran, first started her business, Polka Dogs, last year making handmade belts from fine woven ribbons and fabric, her son Declan (then age 4) watched in earnest.

"One day he thought I needed help and proceeded to chop very expensive ribbon about every two inches," she said. "Needless to say, that was not a good day." And although her daughter, Charlotte, 8, loves to model for Curran and has even begun sewing and creating in her own room, it can still be a challenge.

"Sometimes she gets frustrated with me for working at night, or not driving to a field trip, but I remind her how much I am around and she understands," said Curran. "I try to keep organized, stay focused and not try to do all things all the time. Over the holidays, my business was great, but my parenting was terrible. I just didn't have time to do it all."

Moraga mom, Tracy Gordon, helps companies build brand identity with her marketing business, Proforma Concepts Unlimited. She soon figured out that she couldn't do it all either. "I enjoy having a balanced life: time dedicated to my family, myself and my work," said Gordon. "I used to consider myself a working woman who has a family. Now I consider myself a mom who also happens to work in a fun business."

Her biggest challenge remains time. "My two boys (Evan, 13, and Brendan, 9) are growing older; they are involved in more activities and I have less time to devote to work," said Gordon, who has run her own business since 2002. "Work can be very satisfying, both emotionally and financially, but you also have to take time for yourself."

Lafayette writer/editor, Linda Lenhoff, believes even a few minutes of solitude helps. She switches gears between work and "mommyhood"

by parking a few blocks away from the school when she picks up her daughter, Casey. "I can take a little walk before getting her, to clear my head," she said. "Then we have a nice walk back to the car, too, something of a transition time for both of us."

Lenhoff says she is lucky to work in a field where she can at least consider working from home, but when she has done freelance work, she has missed the social interaction.

"You can let yourself get swallowed up and forget who you are," said Orinda mom Christy Dalton.

A marathoner, former group fitness instructor and personal trainer at several Bay Area health clubs, Dalton started a personal training business, Fit Chix, with partner Melissa Aycock six months ago. She says it has helped her redefine herself.

"For years I've been mom and wife; now I'm mother, wife and business owner," she said. "It feels good, but mostly because the timing is right. The kids are more independent so I have less guilt in having my own life." Most importantly, Dalton says her boys, Shane, 7, and Brice, 5, cannot believe that she gets paid to do something that she loves. "I look at my work as fun and the boys can see that," she said.

Moraga professional organizer Sheri Sweeney says that setting realistic expectations and maintaining a healthy work/life balance is key.

Sweeney, mother of Sarah, 10, and Eric, 7, started her professional organizing business, Time to Spare, in 2001 after Eric was born.

"I realized I would need to find a career that allowed me complete control over my work hours," said Sweeney. "I knew one of my personal strengths was systems organization, so [my business] was the perfect fit."

Sweeney's business has evolved into a coaching practice where she helps clients set priorities, overcome resistance to taking action, and make real changes in their lives. Much like the other Lamorinda moms, Sweeney tries to conduct her coaching sessions when her children are in school.

All the moms agree that it comes down to setting priorities.

The key, says Sweeney, is to understand that there is no "right"

Juggling Motherhood with a Home Business



Moraga Personal and Professional Coach Sheri Sweeney with children, Sarah, 10, and Eric, 7.
Photo by Jennifer Wake

way to work. "When moms spend the time necessary to develop their own talents and share them with the world, they are modeling an unbelievably important value for their children."

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