

# How to Choose Your Cake and Eat It, Too

**D**o you want to find your ideal balance of work, family and personal pursuits? This book presents ten practices to help you balance your life. It provides a complete program of self-discovery and intentional change for working mothers who want to succeed in all areas of their lives.

Just like you, I am all too familiar with the tug-of-war, issues and struggles of work-life balance. These are the ten most powerful practices I have learned through my personal experience of having a child mid-career and in my work as a coach for professional, executive and entrepreneurial women. They will give you the tools to realize your vision of balanced living.

This book is for women whose careers are important to them, whose children—newborns, toddlers or teens—are equally important to them, and whose own personal satisfaction and passion make up the third side of the balance triangle. It's not just about career and children; it's about you, too.

These ten practices have proven to work best in helping my clients find the right balance for them; I know they will also work for you. They are sequenced firstly to support you in uncovering your passions and priorities, secondly to create your balance foundation and thirdly to ensure you achieve success through your balance. Each practice is supported by three intentions addressing your unique needs as a working mother. The intentions provide practical advice and exercises designed for both reflection and taking action. They aim to help you recognize which parts of your life and which choices you have before you will bring joy and fulfillment. Like making the decision to combine work and motherhood, these intentions are both easy and complex.

## **Briefcase Moms Balance Zone**

### *Practices and intentions*

Practices are the fresh habits or attitudes you initiate to create change in your life.

An intention can best be described as an aim guiding an action. What you intend, what you truly focus your energy on, will in some form be realized. The thought alone will not make the intention come true—rather, the outcome will be influenced by your desire combined with action steps, small or large. Clear, achievable intentions lead to transformation.

### *Combining work and motherhood*

Euphoric overwhelm. This is how I felt when my son Adam was born. Powerful emotions surged through me in our early days together: joy, wonder, unconditional love, caring, exhaustion, elation, contentment, pride and relief. This new person shifted all the priorities I had before he was born. But as time passed, I realized that my priorities had only shifted, not changed. I still wanted my career as well as the full experience of being a mother. Some would say I wanted to have my cake and eat it, too.

This cake-having, cake-eating business became a powerful metaphor for me as I tried to figure out how I was going to combine all the external demands and everything I wanted in my life without going crazy. Through my own happiness and heartaches, plus the stories I have been privileged to share during the past five years in my work as a life coach for working mothers, I have come to recognize that you *can* have your cake and eat it, too. The secret is in knowing what kind of cake you want, in choosing a cake you love.

A simple story to illustrate: My son's second birthday was approaching. My husband, Rob, and I had invited a couple of children from the playgroup and their parents, some of our neighbors, the aunts and uncles and grandparents. We had decorated: blown up balloons and even put a small vase of flowers in the bathroom. Food was artfully arranged on platters, covered with cling wrap and placed in the fridge. But the day before the party, I still faced baking the birthday cake. I had probably left this to the last because at that point in my life baking was among my least-favorite things to do (and, to be quite honest, it still is). My sighs of despair and exhaustion (and constant not-so-quiet muttering) probably brought Rob into the kitchen. His was the voice of reason and relief.

"You don't have to do it all," he said quietly. "What's important is that you do what makes you happy. Adam's birthday was meant to be fun for everyone. My sister Lori loves baking. Why don't we ask her if she wants to make the cake?" This was an "aha!" moment for me. I realized that I could have my cake, literally and figuratively, and eat it, too. (It was delicious. Thank you, Auntie Lori.) Who baked it was up to me to choose, but I did have to choose. I did have to decide what I wanted, not just for my son's birthday cake, but also for my life—my goals and passions. I needed to apply that knowledge not just to the little stuff but to the "big" decisions of life, too. I understood that having and eating your cake came down to making choices that aligned what you really wanted with the way you lived your life. It became crystal clear to me that choosing well was the foundation of balance.

### *Balance on a working mother's terms*

What balance means to each woman is as unique as she is. Think about your body, for instance, how you are put together.

The length of your arms, your height and your stride all contribute to your physical sense of balance. This is different from that of all other women and belongs only to you. Having coached hundreds of women to discover their vision of balanced living, I can tell you that embarking on this personal exploration process, on a working mother's terms, takes an approach unlike that for any other because you face special challenges whether at the beginning, middle or end of working motherhood.

Career-oriented mothers come in all shapes and sizes. That's what makes us so interesting. We are professionals, entrepreneurs, executives, free agents, academics and the list goes on. We work full-time, part-time, flextime, on contract, at home, in the office, on the boat, in the plane and at the park. We are in varying stages of our careers—preparing to start a family, managing pregnancy or adoption and maternity leave, planning for our return and returning to work, living the early years (infancy, toddlerhood, preschool) or navigating the school years (elementary to graduation).

As different as we all are, I believe we are connected on the deepest of levels by our shared love for our children. We are connected by the knowledge and experience of the pure joy of motherhood, of those moments of beauty with our children that completely overwhelm our senses in ways we can never anticipate or forget. We know that this time in our lives—when our children live with us—is limited and precious. And yet sometimes, we let the urgency of life redirect us and we are left feeling stressed, pressured...and guilty for not dwelling in the moment with our children more.

Working moms are often experiencing this kind of conflict when they first contact me. They are struggling. They need more time. Most are nearly drowned by waves of to-do lists for career, kids and life—each competing for its share of Mom. They have confided in me: “I want to spend time with

*Making the decision to have a child—it's momentous. It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body.*

—ELIZABETH STONE

my children and be engaged in my career.” “I want it all—love, success and balance—on my terms.” “I’ve got the flexibility I want but I want a career I’m more passionate about.” “I want to restructure things so I can have more time for myself and my kids, but I don’t know how.” “I feel like something is missing and I’m not sure why or what it is.” These women are looking for a new way of doing things, a simpler way. These women are ready for change. Are you?

As a woman on a mission to make it easier for working mothers to live balanced and successful lives, I have heard these sentiments repeatedly from women attending my workshops, surfing my website, and subscribing to my newsletters and e-mail courses. This thread of frustration and desire for change confirmed for me the need for a book that could help. It would be one that encapsulated the principles of life coaching and took a commonsense, reality-based approach to help working mothers manage both a career and a family while enhancing their quality of life—in short, a guide on how to have your cake and eat it, too.

### *Intuition can guide how you use this book*

As you work through this book, think of it as a tool that you can use for change in your life. Leafing through the practices may give you a couple of ideas, but it is in working through the intentions that transformation will happen. In each intention is a Check Your Balance section. Here I ask you to commit to paper your deepest thoughts to help you take action and

integrate the intention into your life. As you do the Check Your Balance exercises, you will begin your journey toward better balance.

*Inspiration does not beget action. Action begets inspiration.*

—CHINESE PROVERB

Treat yourself to some fabulous pens, colored highlighters and a journal or notebook to be your companion as you work your way through this book. Large or small, plain or fancy, kept in your briefcase or by your bedside, your journal will be your confidante, your dream space and your reflection in ink and on paper. By allowing yourself the freedom to express your innermost thoughts without fear of criticism or quarrel, you will discover ideas you didn't know you had, aspects of yourself you didn't know were there.

If you use your journal as your traveling companion and guide, it will give you the directions you are seeking. As you become more confident about putting your ideas on paper, you will probably discover that you are tapping into new thoughts, new directions and new solutions. You can be totally honest in your journal. In fact, if you're not, your journal will even help you figure out what is stopping you from being completely truthful. Keep the pages and preserve the trail of where you've come from as you move toward the life you want to live.

I believe the path taken through this book will be a very personal experience for each woman. Following closely the route laid out, working through the practices of Simplification, Lightness, Well-Being, Discovery, Alignment, Liberation, Protection, Connection, Courage and, finally, Reflection is one option. Skipping over certain practices, choosing instead to focus your energy and time on those areas that have been caus-

ing you the most concern is another. Some will read the book all the way through first and then go back and reread and work on the areas of most value.

You may be compelled to dive right into some Check Your Balance exercises, while others you will want to think about for a while before taking pen to paper..or not do at all. The way you answer each of the questions and exercises at the end of each intention is entirely up to you. Quick notes, one-word thought-provokers, full paragraphs—whatever form you're most comfortable with will work. You could commit a set time to work through each intention—a day, a week or a month. It's your call based on what feels right to you. You will know it is time to move on when each intention becomes like second nature. Let your intuition guide you as to the best way to use this book.



*True life is lived when tiny changes occur.*

—LEO TOLSTOY

What follows is not about how to become perfect (no one can be) or how to better multitask and do it all for everyone (too exhausting). This book is about undertaking a process to identify your priorities, enhance your work-life balance, and reclaim your personal power, energy and time. Imagine waking up every morning inspired, excited and passionate about your life.

Your key to balance resides in you. It may be just under the surface or it may be deep down. But the answers are there. You just have to give yourself permission to find them. So, let's find out. What kind of cake do you have in mind?