

# Leave the juggling for the circus

Helpful tips for working moms

By Judy Stafford

As a single, working mom keeping it together is a challenge. When my sister said, "There is a big difference between juggling your life and balancing your life, and you juggle." I was surprised.

To **juggle**, by definition is to hold, catch, carry, or balance precariously; almost drop, then catch and hold again. That described my life. Keeping everything up in the air was exhausting.

To **balance** is to maintain a state of equilibrium; equal distribution of weight, or amount.

My juggling act, although skillful, was not doing the trick. So I looked for help.

Canadian author of *Briefcase Moms. 10 Proven Practices to Balance Working Mothers' Lives* takes a unique approach. Lisa Martin says, ... "In order to find our balance, we must first go down a journey of self-discovery. There is no magic bullet." What she suggests are lifestyle changes. What works for one may not work for another. And what works today may not work tomorrow. Lisa suggests:

## 1 Create your 'Yes List'

Make a priority list of what is important to you. Be clear with what's on the list. When you are asked to do something, refer to the list. If the request doesn't fit, you have more power and confidence to say no. Martin says, "No is usually one of the first words that come out of our kids' mouths. We have to tap in and remember that time."

## 2 Change your expectations

Do you have realistic expectations of yourself? Martin reminds us that guilt resides between our expectations of our roles and our reality. The wider the gap, the greater the guilt. She says, "Sometimes we don't change our expectations even though our life circumstances change. It is important to adjust and be realistic." By letting go of some expectations we feel more balanced, lose some guilt and feel less weighed down.

## 3 Perfection and balance do not go hand in hand

"If you want perfection, you will be a long way from balance," Martin warns. Wanting perfection is connected to wanting control. We can only control what we think or say. The more we try to control others the more we create chaos. Ask yourself where are you asserting control? Is that connected to where you really want to be? Does having a



## 3 Simplify, eliminate physical clutter

According to Feng Shui – the Chinese art of positioning objects, the clutter of furniture, old magazines and other unnecessary objects in the home can cause a feeling of disorder.

- Reduce the amount of 'stuff', less to dust
- Toss out broken toys and other items
- Donate things you no longer need or use to charity
- Store seasonal and items you don't often use
- What can you eliminate?

## 4 Eliminate mental clutter

- Keep paper and a pen on the fridge and beside your bed to write down: grocery items and other necessities
- Put reminder Post-It notes in your car
- Keep your daily planner handy for appointments, work schedules, and play dates.

## Creating more balance

### 1 Sneak in more me/we time

- Ann Fisher, a working mom in Toronto, has her child in a car pool for the extra-curricular activities to create free time with her partner. "We take advantage of day-care when we have time off work and have a couple's day."
- Take a yoga class while your child's in the pool or another activity
- Organize a group of families to take turns having all the kids over. On your free night, go to a movie, go dancing, get a manicure, or just relax.

### 2 Delegate

- Older kids can feed the dog, sort laundry, set the table
- Have dry cleaning delivered; do grocery shopping online and have it delivered
- Share chores with your partner: housework, cooking, take turns with story time, bath time,

tidy linen closet balance with your priorities on your Yes List? Or is it better to let someone else put the towels away and let go of how you want it done? Letting go of perfection means better balance.

### Make your hours work for you

Helpful tips you can start today to get organized and create more quality time for you and your family.

#### Get organized

##### 1 Start your day off right:

- Organize you and your tots the night before – make your lunch, get clothes and things you need for work ready
- Older children can do the same themselves
- Make breakfasts simple yet healthy. Put slow cooking oatmeal in a slow cooker the night before; cut fruit; get someone (Dad) to set the breakfast table
- Tidy up before bed to wake to an organized house.

In the morning have some quiet time for yourself before you wake up the family to prepare for your day.

##### 2 Productive TV time

According to Statistics Canada, Canadians average 22 hours a week watching television. Set up a weekly schedule to do tasks during TV time:

- Make your home to-do list
- Plan the week's meals; look up recipes; make the shopping list. (For help with family meals and planning see Recipes on page 40 for hints from *The Dinner Fix*)
- Open the mail; organize and pay bills
- Put in a load of laundry and fold it
- Exercise – get on the treadmill, do sit ups, push ups and squats
- What other chores can you slot into TV time?

- putting the kids to bed
- Have the whole family participate in meal planning
- What can you let go of?

##### 3 Take back your lunch

A recent study found 75 per cent of workers eat at their desks at least three times a week.

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The University of Toronto instituted a 'Take Back the Lunch Break Challenge', to motivate employees to put themselves first and take a break during the day. Make this hour work for you:

- Get a manicure
- Go to the gym
- Plan a walking meeting with co-workers
- Catch up with friends or family over lunch
- Do quick errands away from your desk.

So now that you've given up juggling, you'll find your life more balance. With some of your new found time, have a fun night out with your family, maybe a circus?

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