

### SITE INDEX

[Home page](#)  
[News](#)  
[Opinion](#)  
[Sport](#)  
[Live](#)  
[Work](#)  
[Home](#)  
[Taste](#)  
[Pulse](#)  
[Look](#)  
[Rev](#)  
[Contact Us](#)  
[Back Issues](#)  
[Classifieds](#)

### VANNET SITES

[VANNET Classifieds](#)  
[Astral Reflections](#) [Movie Listings](#)

### VANNET PAPERS

[Abbotsford Times](#)  
[Burnaby Now](#)  
[Chilliwack Times](#)  
[Coquitlam Now](#)  
[Delta Optimist](#)  
[Langley Advance](#)  
[Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows Times](#)  
[New West Record](#)  
[Richmond News](#)  
[Surrey Now](#)  
[Vancouver Courier](#)

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### WORK



NEWS photo Victor Aberdeen  
NORTH Van's Sandra Wilson, who founded Robeez footwear 11 years ago, has learned how to juggle career and family responsibilities. Robeez now has more than 500 employees and is one of Canada's fastest-growing companies.

### If the shoe fits...

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Frequent flyers know the routine.

When demonstrating how to affix your oxygen mask before takeoff, the flight attendant will always tell you to secure your own mask before assisting your children.

It might sound strange, but North Van's Lisa Martin says these instructions can serve as a good motto for working mothers.

"If you're passed out cold, you can't help your kids," says Martin, "In other words, if you run out of energy or time, there will be

nothing left over for you to support your family, or your career."

Martin is a life coach and author of the book *Briefcase Moms*. The book, published in June 2004, offers 10 practices to help balance the lives of working mothers.

"The most recent statistics reveal that more than 75 per cent of women with children under the age of three are working," says Martin. "That's changed upwards of 20 per cent in the last 20 years."

More women are undoubtedly combining family and a career, whether it's for financial or personal reasons. Statistics Canada reported that working mothers are the most time-stressed demographic, with more than one-third reporting "severe" levels of time stress. Findings also state that on average, working mothers put in a 75-hour working week when paid and unpaid work are combined.

But as Martin says, many women find the lifestyle gratifying. As the mother of a young son and president of her own company, Martin argues that it is possible to have it all.

"You can have your cake and eat it too," says Martin, "The secret is in knowing what kind of cake you want."

Martin says one of the best ways to succeed is to know what your priorities are. She argues that by clarifying what is most important to you, your life will align accordingly.

"There's always the challenge of juggling too many balls in the air," she says, "You need to be able to let go of guilt, and let go of the 'shoulds' in your life and learn some techniques to really manage your stress," she says.

And apart from knowing what you want, Martin says it's important to plan a strategy to get what you want. She decided to write *Briefcase Moms* because she was tired of hearing about life-balance problems with nobody offering solutions.

"There isn't too much that's put out there in a really concise, pragmatic way," says Martin, "The feedback I get from people is that it makes a big difference to their lives."

*Briefcase Moms* presents the tools and a path to living a balanced life. "I'm a busy working mom, (so) I know how difficult it is to just sit down and read," she says, "The book is structured in a way that makes it easy for the to happen."

Balancing a career and family is something that North Van's Sandra Wilson has also achieved. She started her own home-based business 11 years ago when her son was just 18 months old. Now in her mid-40's, the founder and CEO of Robeez footwear has over 500 employees and one of Canada's fastest growing companies.

After being laid off from her job at Canadian Airlines, Wilson decided she wanted to start a home-based business that would give

her more flexibility and time with her son. "When it's your own business you can decide how busy you want to be and how much work you want to take on. So you've got total control," she says.

Wilson kept the business in her home for five years before it was time to expand. "You need to set goals and work towards freeing up more time for yourself," says Wilson, who would often work late into the night in order to free up days with her son.

"I learned you can have it all as long as your expectations are realistic," she says, "I knew I wanted to build my business and spend time with my family."

Wilson's son Robert is now 12 years old and she has been married to her husband Jim for 19 years.

Wilson says if she were to give advice, it would be to not take on too much.

"Know what you are capable of and ask yourself how much stress you want to add to your life," says Wilson.

"I felt like I needed to do a stint on the PAC at my son's elementary school and manage his hockey teams," says Wilson, "Looking back, I think 'What the heck was I thinking', because I was so incredibly busy, but I didn't want to miss out on that."

Wilson takes time for herself by running three mornings a week with her girlfriends and arranging dinner out with friends at least once a month.

"We talk a lot about work/life balance but I wonder how many companies actually practise it and have it in their value system," she says. For women who don't have the luxury of working from home, Wilson says it's hard to find the right company to work for because some companies have expectations that make it difficult to balance their lives.

Wilson says the culture of Robeez has evolved around her values.

"We expect people to have families," she says, "I'm really proud we have those values and have been true to them - otherwise it can be a real challenge."

Wilson will be a panellist at Market Yourself Smarter, being held at the Terminal City Club on Sept. 15. The seminar is designed to help working women find balance and make suitable career choices. For more information on Martin, visit [www.briefcasemoms.com](http://www.briefcasemoms.com).

Briefcase Moms is available on the website, at Duthie's Books and at 32 Books in North Vancouver.

The Face of Business is a regular feature of the North Shore News that focuses on business leaders and/or entrepreneurs who live or work on the North Shore. For more information or to suggest a topic for an upcoming column, send an e-mail to

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