

“Balancing Life as a WAHM”

By: Paula Dodds

My fringe benefits have constantly sticky hands and milk moustaches. I no longer have the usual perks and benefits like expense accounts, company cars, and a private office (with a door that closes out the rest of the world!). My office is now in half of our basement. It shares this subterranean space with my husband's game room, complete with pool table, and my daughters' oversized toy box. When I “commute” to work in the morning, I pick up the dirty laundry on the stairs and throw it into the laundry room, and then check my email. Is this what I thought my “career” would be like when I was growing up? Not even a little. Would I trade this in for a private, corner office and a six-figure salary?

No way!

When my husband and I started our family, we struggled with the decision we had to make about one-income or two-incomes. In today's society, it's becoming more and more difficult to make ends meet on one salary. We decided that I should start working from home in order to help with our budget. I looked into a lot of the business opportunities that are out there. I'm not a very good salesperson, so that took me out of the running for a lot of the jobs that are offered. I had one desire. I wanted to keep doing the job that I liked doing and that I kept getting complimented on. . . . I wanted to be an Administrative Assistant.

After four and a half years, and another daughter later, I am now an established Virtual Assistant. I provide secretarial support for a number of clients both locally and nationally. I get to work on the projects that I love and stay at home with both of our daughters.

So, how do you know if you're right for the WAHM lifestyle?

First, and foremost, do you have a true desire for working at home? Can you not imagine any other way that your life could be? Are you motivated to succeed? And, do you have faith in yourself?

Next, do you have an entrepreneurial spirit? I always found it so hard to work for someone else. I very much like setting my own deadlines, or working with a client on when a deadline will be set. There is no more guilt on playing “hooky” every once in a while. The girls are the reason I'm working from home. It only makes sense that I take a day every now and then to play with them. It's one of the perks that this position has!

Do you have a marketable skill? If not, are you willing to learn one? I had been an administrative assistant and then promoted to office manager at the company I'd worked for until I became pregnant with our first child. I liked the administrative tasks. I liked having to learn new software for bookkeeping, word processing, contact management, and more! I liked supporting our manager. There are so many opportunities for women (and men!) to work from home now; it seems there's something for everyone! Now that I have my business established, my husband is working on starting his own web design company. He's been doing this for many years, and would like to have the same fringe benefits that I do!

Are you resilient? This is not an easy life. There are a lot of obstacles when working from home. A LOT. But, whatever you run into, you need to be able to pick yourself up and dust yourself off. Then, keep going!

And you also need to be creative. This is not creativity for presentations (although that helps!); this is creativity for when you need to be meeting deadlines for your family and your work. One week, I had a major presentation due, a birthday party for my oldest, and another smaller project due. I'm still not sure how I got everything done! There are times where you're going to want to tear your hair out. And then there are times when everything is going to fit perfectly!

How Do You Know You Made The Right Decision?

There are days when I think I did make the wrong decision. These are usually the 16-hour workdays, when I don't even take a lunch break for myself – I just run upstairs to make a couple of sandwiches for the girls – but I think that Garrison Keillor said it best, "Nothing you do for your children is ever wasted." I have that saying on my office wall. I look at it often. It's true!

Why Do I Write Articles Like These?

I know how tough it is when you're starting to look for a job from home, or are working from home and getting frustrated because the laundry's stacking up and the dishes are dirty. And, while I still have days where I spend more time working and less on family, or vice versa, I am balancing pretty well. I'd like to help others to balance their lives also. Working from home is *honestly* one of the best decisions I've ever made when it comes to my family and myself. I want to help other moms and dads find the balance that works for them so they don't get discouraged and give up. Just think of all the milk moustaches and sticky handshakes you'd miss!

Paula Dodds is a devoted WAH wife to her husband Skylar and mother to her two daughters, Brady, age 5, and Emma, age 2. She runs her own Virtual Assistant business www.TheVirtualChoice.com; and she's also an Independent Consultant for Kat's Coffees & More (her sales site is at www.TheCoffeeNut.com).

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