

You Can Have It All – By Putting It All In Perspective

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Liza Burby, Editor of Newsday's Parents & Children magazine, eloquently shared her personal story of integrating motherhood and her career along with the lessons she learned from her connections with other mothers. Liza began by sharing that at the age of 7, she declared to her parents that she was going to be a mom and a writer. Thirty plus years later, her conviction has proven to more than come to pass. But at 7 years of age, Liza could not have imagined the full meaning of what she was about to embark upon.

Along with many of us, Liza was raised in a generation that was taught we can have it all - we did not have to choose either motherhood or career. No one told us, however, of the curse and the lessons that would come with those beliefs!

From the time Liza was pregnant, the differences in perspectives between her mother and herself made it clear that Liza was limited in terms of the support she could expect from this very important woman in her life. While her husband was very supportive, the absence of like-minded women who could really understand Liza's experiences and concerns left Liza feeling isolated. She developed an urgent thirst to connect with other mothers – to compare experiences, share feelings, perform the occasional sanity-check. Liza described how driven she was to connect with each mom she met to the point she wondered if these other moms might think she was stalking them! What she discovered is that many of them were feeling the same way and just as eager to connect.

Liza described the waves of guilt that washed over her when the desire to include work back in her schedule came at a time that Liza thought to be too early for the good of her baby. After all, shouldn't she WANT to spend all of her time with her baby? The guilt waves mounted when she had to return to work full time after her husband was down-sized out of a job. When her daughter informed Liza that she was the only mother who did not attend the monthly assemblies at her daughter's school in Commack it only added insult to injury.

Liza struggled to balance her responsibilities as a mother to, then, two children, her job, her husband and her home. To say it was unreasonable for her employer at the time to place her on probation for being one minute late on a day her daughter's bus arrived late due to bad winter weather is an understatement. It only made Liza more determined to work independently so she could create her own schedule – one that was more demanding but afforded her the flexibility she needed. Liza was determined that her work would not take her away from making time for her two daughters.

It wasn't until she interviewed author, Judith Viorst, that she finally realized that doing work she loved was actually good for everyone. She realized after that interview that her daughters would not be young forever and decided to let go of the guilt (as much as she could) and enjoy every stage of her daughters' growth because they would be grown and on their own before very long.

Today, Liza's daughters are much more independent and she has more time to work than she wants. Reflecting back she sees those early years as physically exhausting while the teen years are more

emotionally challenging. While her role as a mother is constantly evolving, she still considers mothering her most important work.

Liza summed up what she has learned over the years in 15 tips:

1. Make time for yourself. Exercise, read, learn a craft, nurture yourself. It not only helps you manage the stress of daily life, but your children will learn the importance of taking care of themselves from watching you.
2. Make time for women friends. Join a mothers' group. Share your experiences, concerns and thoughts with other mothers. You will enrich each other's lives while tapping into the maternal wisdom that allows us to thrive as mothers.
3. Make time for your marriage. Have date nights, take time to talk and spend time together. Include him in what you are doing.
4. Have an adult in your life. As mothers who spend so much time with our children, we need to have adult conversation.
5. Learn to forgive yourself. Children and others do not judge us as harshly as we might think. Remember you are human and there is no such thing as the perfect mom.
6. Learn to say no – to family members, friends, business colleagues. You don't have to do it all to prove yourself. Keep a healthy balance in your schedule for your emotional health. Your spouse and children will benefit, too.
7. Accept that you will always need more money. Find ways to manage your spending so you do not over extend yourself and can create savings.
8. Do not be at war with stay at home moms if you are a mother who has a job outside the home. You may need their support with meeting the kids at the bus or being there for them after school. And you can return the favor by watching their kids on a Saturday night so they can have a date night.
9. Get recommendations for child care from other working parents and trust your gut when making decisions for your children.
10. Strategize early and often about your work / career options. Look for family friendly companies and options.
11. Utilize parenting resources available in your area. Many are free. You just have to look for them. For Long Island residents, *Newsday's Parents & Children* magazine lists many in this area.
12. Your home doesn't need to be a showplace. Your children's most important needs are to have clean clothes, food and your care. Put things in proper priority order.
13. Get help with the jobs you hate to do.
14. Be silly with your kids. It reduces stress, breaks the tension of potentially challenging situations and facilitates bonding.
15. Learn to appreciate the gifts of parenthood and let go of the "shoulds" and "supposed to's". As I like to say, don't "should" on yourself, but rather accept yourself and your family for who they are and allow yourself to enjoy your life as a parent!

Letting go of the guilt, getting support and help and enjoying your children is an excellent way to set a powerful example to your kids and ensure your own health and happiness. Thank you, Liza, for a powerful, important and inspiring message. You helped me and others see that our lives, while challenging, are very rich indeed!

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