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Staying Productive as a Working Mom

By Nevenka Campodonico, Consultant

Being a mother of a 16-month-old boy and working full time, I've had to develop strategies to maintain my productivity. In this journey of motherhood, I've realized that *no one* has it figured out, we are all learning as we go. Sometimes we are prepared, sometimes we are just winging it.

More and more, women are given the chance to be successful in business while being present with their families. We can have both, but we do need a system to make it work and have it be easier. I'm a productivity consultant and my system is *Take Back Your Life!*.

I have been teaching productivity for so long that I thought I should know by now how to be productive at work and be a good mom. That was a big part of my decision to apply for motherhood! I made plans for the changes I needed to incorporate in my life moving forward, I created strategies around clients, adjusted my schedule for the year, got support, interviewed nannies, visited day-cares, worked around my schedule to ensure I would have enough time for it all. I was just entering the third trimester when I thought I already had everything I needed, had it all figured out and of course things might be a little different when the time came, but I had a plan and I was confident.

Then, a baby was born. I got the sweetest little guy, and I also got a C-section to recover from and breastfeeding. How come no one ever says how difficult breastfeeding is going to be? And painful. And time consuming. And, all worth it. Of course, I had some time to ease into it but at some point, maternity leave is over and you want to get back to work and start developing that amazing plan you had.

Working and being a mother is mostly about balance. It's not about trying to be perfect, as long as you're giving it your best in both areas of your life, you're doing it right. As I said before, I don't have it all figured out, but I've learned some tips and tricks along the way for creating balance and maintaining productivity that I want to share with all the working moms out there!

The first thing I quickly discovered was the necessity of booking buffer time on my calendar. Babies don't breastfeed on schedule! At first, I didn't have breastfeeding scheduled on my calendar. Why would I, right? I would feed my son on demand, and I found myself falling behind on everything and feeling out of integrity. Not a nice feeling when you are also dealing with the emotions of taking care of this delicate, tiny person. I realized that I needed to have a half hour buffer scheduled on my calendar every 2-3 hours so that when he needed to be fed, I could move other things around so that I could nurture and bond with my son and still get the most important things done. Even CEO's book buffer time on their calendars, it's a great strategy to deal with unexpected situations arising.

I was fortunate enough to have the choice to work from home and have the baby with me, or to work from an office and take him to day-care. If you have this choice, it's an important decision to weigh as a new mom. I imagine working from an office would be a little closer to what your life was like before the baby. You're your own person from 9-5 and then you leave work behind and you're a mom during the other hours of the day (and night, of course!). If you choose to work from home, you may find more distractions and also be lucky enough to see your baby during the day and don't miss out on their first attempt to crawl, first steps, first words.

I chose to work from a home office with the support of family and a nanny. This way, I can still be present in my son's life and share moments of the day with him, but can also shut my door if I need to take a call or deliver a virtual class. I've learned to work my schedule around my child's. I try to have lunch with him every day, because routine is so important for children. I take breaks to play with him and schedule calls in the morning when he's awake and strategic tasks when he's napping. It's much easier to get distracted from a task than it is from a call!

It's important to realize that work-life balance can look very different for all parents. Work-life balance doesn't always mean working from only 9 in the morning to 5 at night. I spend time with my son during the work day when he is having the most fun and then go back to work in the evenings after he's gone to sleep. I save this time for my most focused work-time. I try to make it a fun time for myself. I'll turn on music and have a latte. Work-life balance means doing whatever you need to do to make sure that your life feels in balance. For me, that might mean working throughout the day and evening, while *also* spending quality time with my son.

I learned to favor toys that have no specific purpose so that my toddler's imagination can develop and he will be entertained longer and need less adult interaction. I've also learned that musical instruments and toys that make sounds definitely should be limited to times when I am not delivering a class or having a call with a client. Supporting their independence is very important if you're going to be a successful work-at-home mom as your child grows. Even though he is only 16 months old, I have my son help me with chores such as putting the laundry in the washing machine or cleaning up his high chair after meals, and he loves it.

In the beginning, I tried to be present with him when I was around him. I would work in a separate room so that he didn't have the experience of seeing me be absent to him and focused on something else. That is getting harder as he grows, since he now knows where I am and knows how to look for me; and sometimes his looking for me will be louder than I would like!

I am readjusting in that area and starting to work nearby and watch him play, he will glance at me from time to time and then go back to playing. Sometimes he will come and wants to be hugged, the faster he gets my attention and gets his little loving time, the more willing he is to walk away and keep on playing with the nanny.

Sometimes I get interrupted by him in the middle of something important. Sometimes it can be a little embarrassing. If your toddler ever walks in on you in the middle of a business call, never ignore the fact. Your client will hear and be distracted anyway. It is best to address the interruption. I have learned that you can't ignore the fact that you're a parent working from home. It would be so stressful for me to try to hide the fact that I had a kid in the house; like I was living a fake life.

If you get interrupted, acknowledge your child. Acknowledgement is so important to children and it will not only make you feel better, they will cooperate more. If you ignore them, they will start to get less and less cooperative. However, the key is to have a plan to avoid getting interrupted. The nanny knows that if my son starts crying when I'm delivering in the other room and she can't calm him down right away, then she needs to take him on a walk or out to play so that my interruptions are limited.

Finding your tribe is another essential piece to being an effective work-from-home mom. More moms than ever are working now and you can share best practices, learn from their experiences, and some days, just venting will do it! Mexico has a lot of coffee shop-playground combinations and I love to have playdates there so the kids can play and us moms can work!

When you accept that you will not get everything done, and that you don't really have to, your life will become much easier. Making sure that you empty your inbox at least once a day will help you make sure that the most important things are getting done. Sometimes, that is the only thing that gives me peace of mind at the end of the day. Oh, the love of an empty inbox!

As I share these best practices with you, working moms out there, I need to say something in all authenticity: by no means is my life perfect and no, I do not have everything under control all the time. Sometimes I just wish I could ask the nanny to come over during the weekend so I could sleep for 24 hours straight. Sometimes I am behind on work and sometimes I lack patience. BUT, it is not like that all of the time.

Of course every week is different and sometimes it is harder, however, there are so many days when it is easier and fun... it *is* possible! I'm having my most productive year ever, and my little guy is a loving, gentle, fun and confident little person. I got to nurture him, see his first attempt to crawl, feed him his first meal, and see him take his first steps, say his first words. Sometimes I just hear him giggling as I work and it is the sweetest sound. My relationships with my clients are deeper than ever. I am helping them create the lives they want to live. So no matter how many mistakes I make along the way, it is working.

Whether you are mothering on your own or sharing the experience with your spouse, whether you are having your first or your third child, there is always a way to have the best of both worlds. Take a moment to look around and identify your successes, don't be too hard on yourself. As your child grows, you will continue to update and readjust your strategies to match their growing needs. There is always room to learn and grow as a parent, *especially* a working parent. I'm sure there's parents out there who are envious of what a good job you're doing, juggling it all!

I couldn't imagine maintaining balance in my life without McGhee Productivity Solutions' Take Back Your Life! system. It makes all the difference, especially since I became a parent!