

SOONER RATHER THAN LATER



PROFESSION VS PARENTHOOD

By **NURAINI MOHD SALLEH**
editor@leaderonomics.com

I made the decision to quit my full-time career back in 2004, around the time I got engaged to be married. The decision was surprisingly easy for me to make, despite a flourishing career in advertising.

I have always been an energetic person who loved the demands and daily challenges that came with my job.

Whilst there has and will always be those who are genuinely smarter than me, I figured my work ethics would help me earn my spot at the table and get me the recognition I was aiming for.

Hence, I would stay up late and work during weekends in order to organise, supervise, troubleshoot, and do the due diligence required.

I wore my workaholicism like a badge of honour. But, it became obvious this lifestyle wasn't sustainable. I was getting burnt out, which led to feelings of disillusionment, despite the fact that I had "an awesome job".

I wanted time out with my new status as a wife, to start a family and plan my next career move. I didn't want feelings of guilt and stress to compound me because of divided attention between the demands of work and family.

A PRIORITY SHIFT

Today, I am a freelance brand and advertising consultant, and I have found my personal equilibrium between profession and parenthood.

Admittedly, freelance work has no guarantees, but by networking my abilities, I found my niche.

Whilst being a mum with three children, I freelance at my old job as an advertising suit for agencies that require short-term help, or assist consult agencies or clients in the areas of brand strategy and consumer research. I even do translations!

Some jobs are flexible enough to allow me to work almost entirely from home, so long as the expectations are being met.

In my nine years of self-employment and being a stay-at-home mum, I can honestly say that it has been rewarding and wonderful.

I can add value to what the children learn at school by brushing up their lessons with them, or provide fun assignments that build their creativity and competency.

I can take them for movies and play dates on less crowded weekday afternoons. I have the time to experiment with recipes. I can dedicate myself to marathon training in the early mornings.

My commute to my "office" on some days is merely walking one floor down from my bedroom.

'I'M ONLY HUMAN'

But for those planning to tread this path, be wary. Do not dive into it with rose-tinted glasses. Freelancing while you have



children has its fair share of problems!

For instance, try receiving a call from your client only to have your children start singing *Frozen's* "Let It Go" at the top of their lungs on a permanent repeat button!

I have also learnt, to my utter mortification, that young kids do not recognise the idea of not interrupting any calls or Skype videos. They even think it's a good idea to join in!

Over the years, I've had my share of call "bombings". My daughter previously interrupted a call to a senior client with, "Dada, is that you?" and then giggling away chattering, oblivious to my flapping hands and look of despair.

Not only is it embarrassing having work calls interrupted with toilet requests or demands for their favourite TV show, it utterly kills your professional veneer and you are revealed as human – or worse, a mum.

As soon as they hear your two-year-old's voice they no longer have that perception of you as an expert in a power suit.

If you think being a freelance mum means delicious hours of uninterrupted sleep, think again.

Whilst trying to meet your work deadlines for the week, there are also the additional factors of your kids' extra-curricular activities, hours spent food-shopping, cooking, cleaning (even with a maid's help), trying to slot in a morning run and even perhaps a social outing or two.

You basically end up feeling fairly exhausted at the end of the day!

CHOICE AND EMPOWERMENT

Daily organising and logistics have become a mandatory skill to be learnt and adopted in order to manage freelance work, keep the house running smoothly and keep the children entertained, learned and well-fed.

When they are sick, the days get even more complicated and stressful. In fact for



me, the days whizz by all too quickly now, even more so than when I had a full-time job as a single woman.

Despite all the above, I cherish the ability to do what I am doing now. But in all honesty, the phrase "work-life balance" doesn't hold water for me any longer. There is never on any day a 50/50 balance of anything!

What I am truly thankful for, is the empowerment I get in making my own work-life choices as far as my career, my family and also myself are concerned.

I think at the end of the day, life is all about knowing where you want to go, what you want out of it, and heading there sooner rather than later.

■ To connect with Nuraini, please email editor@leaderonomics.com. To read more work-life balance stories, visit www.leaderonomics.com

I WANTED TIME OUT WITH MY NEW STATUS AS A WIFE, TO START A FAMILY AND PLAN MY NEXT CAREER MOVE. I DIDN'T WANT FEELINGS OF GUILT AND STRESS TO COMPOUND ME BECAUSE OF DIVIDED ATTENTION BETWEEN THE DEMANDS OF WORK AND FAMILY