

WORK & PARENTHOOD

Mothers returning to the workforce after years out of paid employment often find themselves at a 'careers crossroads': do they return to their previous profession part-time or full-time, contract out their services, re-train in a new career, or start their own business using the skills/interests they've developed while caring for their children. It's a time of choice. One option, which is increasing in popularity, is starting your own business "on the kitchen table".

Homegrown spoke with Fran Harre, from 'The Art of Work-Career And Business Designs'. As well as individual consultations, she helps people set up/find direction or shape their businesses.

Children's age has a major impact on whether or not mothers in two-parent families participate in the work force. While nearly three-quarters (72.4 percent) of children aged between 10 and 14 had a mother in employment in 1996, this fell to 63.7 percent of children aged between 5 and 9, 51.8 percent of children aged 1 - 4 years and 35.5 percent of children aged less than 1 year. This represents an increase since 1986 when, for example, 37.7 percent of children aged between 1 and 4 years had a mother in either full-time or part-time employment.

CHANGING TIMES: There are many options these days re trying to make work and family fit. Employers are becoming more open to flexible family-friendly work arrangements eg job sharing, part-time work, home-based work, project work, telecommuting etc - and improved telecommunications has made a lot of this much easier. The EEO Trusts 2001 Diversity survey found that 83% of organizations surveyed provided flexible work options for employees. So worth looking around/ asking around... times are changing and have changed considerably/ there are a lot more flexible work options than there were 5-15 years ago (when many mothers were last in the workforce).

Part time work: in the 2001 census 1 in 4 workers were part-time, a trend which is on the increase. 3 in 4 of these part-time workers were women.

Project work/working from home: On census day 2001 1 in 10 people worked at home. This was more than double the number in 1996. Some of these were self-employed, some employers, some employees.

Self-employment: In the 2001 census 1 in 6 people got income from self-employment.

Options facing women at this 'career crossroads'

Flexibility in work -everyone (not just mothers) is seeking it and employers are being more flexible these days (see stats above). There are thousands of jobs out there, thousands of ways of doing work. The important thing is to ask questions, find out what others are doing and how they're doing it.

Fran suggests doing voluntary work, low-paid work in an area you might be interested in. Give yourself time to look at the options - don't start looking a few months before starting back, start looking with plenty of time. Look at your lifestyle, how you want your life to be. Things tend to 'unfold'. If you're considering re-training, do lots of research... it costs a lot \$10-15,000 in fees for a 3 year course. People think qualifications open doors but they don't unless you study something professional like law or medicine... after studying most things, still need to decide on career direction... this might be a good time to talk to a career to find your direction/focus.

Don't get too hung up on getting the top money, often people are misled by salaries (divide \$ by hours you end up working, what tax bracket you're in etc), more important/the key really: is to enjoy what you're doing.

There has been a trend for women to work to supplement the family while children at primary school. They can wake up when kids at secondary school (so 10 years down the track) and wish they'd been building up a new career, doing something they enjoyed. If you re-enter the workforce at 40 say, you have many years left ahead, so do something you enjoy.

Fran says juggling work and family is something women think about even before having children. "There's a whole level of conversation among women 28-32 - they want to have children, but don't want to get behind in their careers, don't want to be superwomen yet don't want to lose career levels... really want to know how other women manage."

'Steps to success' for women thinking about setting up their own business

- Find an area that really inspires you, a field or something you're passionate about.
- Have a clear idea of where you're headed, what you want to do before you start.
- Think big, think outrageously big, put yourself right out there, and then break it down into small, manageable, attainable steps.
- Find a 'business buddy', someone who really believes in you, can offer you support. Someone you can talk through your ideas with. Often your beloved is not the best person - they're too close, think it will never work, especially if they work in the corporate world, will think a kitchen table business seems ludicrous. Meet each week, discuss direction and draw up action steps.
- There is a statistical correlation between success and training, so having some relevant training is often (though not always) useful.
- People are often scared of failure, so helps to start business like it's a hobby, run business as a pilot project... not so much to lose, then re-evaluate in a few months.
- Hang in there. Setting up a successful business takes time. Takes about 2 years... people often give up just as they're turning the corner, before things get easier. People go into it thinking it will happen quickly.

Issues for women looking at setting up own business

- Lack of confidence is a huge issue for women who have been out of the workforce for a while (doesn't just apply to those wanting to start own business). They think no one will want them, that they're not capable. A lot of women say they know nothing about business, they think it's some mythological thing, business is what you read about in the Herald. Which it isn't.
- In reality, women have great skills for setting up a business: men generally need the gizmos and everything to be in place before starting, women can start a business in the bathroom! Women are flexible... most women are businesswomen already - they run households, good at time management, budget, research good deals/products for their family, they're good communicators, most have sold something even if it's just raffle tickets etc. They often just need help selling themselves, identifying and repackaging their skills.
- Often women are reticent in getting advice/training/direction: Because they're not earning at the moment, women at this career crossroads find it hard to spend money on themselves. Should see it as "an investment in their family's future". Often really successful - she sees many women who start a business part-time, husband working full-time on a salary, woman ends up earning more than their husbands, and he ends up quitting the salaried job to help her.
- Lack of faith: believe you will succeed. The 80:20 statistic (that 80% of new businesses will fail) is an urban myth and has been proven so (by a Massey Uni study). You have a good chance of succeeding.
- Start-up money. Realistically you need financial backing at some stage - but perhaps not immediately though (although women on the DPB can get assistance through WINZ's enterprise Allowance).
- Lack of support: need someone who really believes in them.
- Charging what they're worth: This is a tricky one when starting a business, and for women in particular generally.

ANNABELLE'S RECIPES

SUPER SIMPLE SAVOURY SAUCE

A simple, versatile sauce to accompany a grilled sausage, piece of chicken, or pasta!

Oil for sauté

2-3 garlic cloves, finely minced

1/2 onion, finely chopped

1 capsicum, seeded and sliced

3-4 tomatoes, chopped or 1x 420g can tomatoes

200g mushrooms, sliced

1 cup diced cooked chicken (optional)

3-4 tbsp Tararua Lite Creme Fraiche

Salt and pepper

3 tbsp chopped parsley

A squeeze of lemon juice (opt)



METHOD:

Heat a fry pan and add a drizzle of oil. Add the garlic and onion and capsicum and cook for a few minutes on slow heat until softened. Add tomatoes, mushrooms and smoked chicken - allow the mixture to cook down slowly for 3-5 minutes. Add the Tararua lite Creme Fraiche, the seasoning, parsley and lemon juice. Stir and simmer until the mixture is fully blended and serve.

Serve with hot pasta and a salad. Tararua lite Creme Fraiche is simple, versatile, and with 40% less fat - a bonus for the home cook!

Go to www.tararua.net.nz for more info

BUSY PARENTS

We live in a busy, fast-paced world, and for more and more families a busy, fast-paced home with both parents heading out to work and kids rushing out the door to school is the reality. There doesn't seem to be much time left for 'family'... so how do you parent well with limited time? How do you ensure your children feel loved and cared for when you're not around as much as you'd like to be? How do you make the best use of the time you have?

How much time do kids need?

You can only give what you've got - you can't give what you haven't got. Energy and engagement is more important than just sheer duration. The key seems to be reliable access to you rather than constant contact: You turn up when arranged, and you are there when really needed. Deliver as promised, don't let them down if you said you'd be there.

How do you make the most of the time you have?

Top up their emotional tanks to handle the times when you aren't there - send them off with kind words, a bright smile, and affectionate touch. The keys are Affirmation, Affection, Acceptance and Attention. Make sure that upsets and anger are cleared away and patched up before parting.

When you are feeling overloaded it's easy to get offside with your kids and then leave the situation in not the best state for all concerned. Kids don't need a parent's "busy baggage" - so we should keep it to ourselves, send them off with a good happy feeling for the day, or to sleep and then sort it yourself thereafter. Try and protect your child from your own personal stress.

Be mindful of how you use language. When kids ask you to do something that seems unreasonable to the parent but fun to the child (e.g.- can we play Monopoly now? At 5pm at night) try not to say "no we're busy", but rather "yes we can do that, when we've finished having dinner, etc". Use "in a minute" cautiously with little children as they take a minute literally.

How do you stop the busyness of the day following you home from work?

Have a switch off point on the way home: when you drive past there you stop thinking about work and start anticipating home. Switch off all phones during meals, play times, story times. Very few calls are really very important. Have a set area and set times for doing work at home - kids will learn that when you are at that place you are not to be disturbed.

How do you make time to interact with your kids in a busy home?

You may need to be strict about planning it. e.g. "if I have all the kids stuff in my Palm Pilot or wall planner then I can work out that during the in between times we can stop for a play at the park". Dropping your child off or picking them up can be a fun time: singing in the car, word games etc. e.g. Every Saturday we had a tradition of an ice cream with the kids coming home from music lessons.

You may have to lower expectations of tidiness to level where you have the time for play and cuddles. Go for once a week clean-ups instead of every day perhaps and use the time to play with the kids more.

Are traditions important?

They provide a great sense of family belonging, a 'we-culture'. Kids really expect them - traditions around Christmas, Easter, and Birthdays. Saturday morning pancakes, the special plate, bedtime games etc.

Fun traditions can slide in a busy life. A parent perhaps may not put the same importance on it that a child would. Being busy and tired can be a reality, but don't let it bleed into special times and rob your family of them.

Routines and rules can also be allowed to slide if the parent is busy, and that can add to a feeling of boundaries moving for the kids, which is not good. It takes time to keep the rules in place. Busy parents can get slack and let the kids get away with stuff they may normally not have, then things get worse. It can be a cycle that feeds on itself.

What are some other ways to connect with your kids?

Do chores with them. Like talking shoulder to shoulder with your son while doing the dishes together. He doesn't feel like you're in his face - you're just getting on with things but you can chat about what's happening for him.

Snuggling up in bed at night and telling stories. Make this an every night thing - actually getting into bed with them and having children either read to you or you read a book to them. Ask your kids what happened today - a time at the end of the day to find out what's going on in their life. Also discuss the plan for tomorrow. Kids like to know what's happening if the household is busy - don't spring surprises about someone else picking them up.

Think about fun ways to sometimes do the menial, every day tasks. For dinner try camping on the lawn or in the lounge for a bit of fun, or have a picnic on the porch. One dad had a tradition of telling stories as he shaved in the morning - added attraction of possibly seeing blood! Join a walking school bus - a great way to spend time together with many benefits. Tell stories over

the phone if you are away on business. Read books into a tape player if you are going to be away.

A really big one - share a meal together. Sometimes dinner is hard, especially if one parent works later and the little kids need to eat at 5pm. In that case have dessert together, or perhaps go for breakfast as a together time. It's a chance for the family unit to catch up with each other and ask, "what happened in your day?"

One on one time with each child is also important. A mummy or daddy "date" devoid of siblings is a great way to connect with your kids.

You've got limited time so you want an efficient way of showing your kids you loves them. Find out what your child's 'language of love' is so you're not spending the hour per day kissing and cuddling a child who would rather you were down on the floor playing lego with them. See below, written by John Cowan at Parenting with Confidence.

There are five Love Languages

- Words of encouragement
- Gift giving
- Acts of service
- Quality Time and Attention
- Physical Closeness and Touch.

We all enjoy each of these things: we love to be praised, to get presents and to have people do things for us. We like it when people give us their attention, and I'm sure we all enjoy the occasional cuddle and squeeze. When we are in the romantic phase of a relationship, we operate brilliantly in all five: gifts, words, kindness, hours of just being together and of course kissing and cuddling all rate very highly. But something cynical within me observes that type of relationship only tends to last about two years - and then you've got to get on with your life. We tend to settle back into our preferred love language, for both showing and receiving love. And your children will have a favoured love language as well.

For example, take my family: there are five of us and we each have a different love language.

My wife Naomi is lovely. If I give her a box of chocolates or a bunch of flowers (which I do occasionally, even when I'm not in trouble) she'll always be very grateful. But if I really want to make her purr, I'll tell her what a wonderful wife she is and how much I love her and how special she is. And she just melts. Because her love language is "Words of Encouragement". The words in the card are always more important than the gift the card is attached to. It's the way she shows love as well. She praises the kids and me very liberally. She is a very verbally affirming person.

My oldest boy Bernie is a neat kid, but it used to really cheese me off that every time I went away from home, the first thing he'd say when I got home was, "What did you bring me?" I used to wonder, "Is that all he loves me for - for the gifts and toys I give?" But I realise now that his love language is "Gift Giving". What he's really saying is not "Give me something!" but "Do you love me?" He's not a mean kid at all; in fact he's really very generous. He will sometimes spend all his pocket money buying gifts for his family and friends. And so if I go away for a few days, I always make sure I bring him back something. It doesn't have to be much - just a McDonalds toy will do. He's too young to realise that his old man is cheap! But it just reassures him, in his own love language, that he really is loved.

My love language is acts of service. I love it when people do things for me. I love getting breakfast in bed. (Well I got it once and quite enjoyed it) It's also the way I show love. I potter around the house with my toolbox pretending to fix things, and that's the way I show I care for my family.

Because our kids are still quite young, we have Mummy Dates and Daddy Dates, where each of our kids goes out with us "date" for just an hour or so. We rotate them around so that in the course of time every child gets to go out with each parent. It need not involve a lot of money - climbing a hill, playing at the park, and ice-cream on the beach - just some excuse to spend some time alone with each child. It's a great way of reducing sibling rivalry, and all our kids love Mummy and Daddy Dates, but our girl Susannah especially enjoys them, because her love language is "Quality Time and Attention." Being the middle child between two very boisterous boys, she has to compete for every bit of time and attention she can get. So on a date, she just goes chitter chatter chitter chatter the whole time, soaking up the luxury of having all the parental attention to herself.

Perhaps love languages can change in time. I don't think they are set in concrete. My five-year-old, Guy, may be changing his, but up until now it has definitely been "Physical Closeness and Touch". He just loves play fights and piggybacks, he has always liked to give great big cuddles - although I think half the time it's just been so he can wipe his snotty nose on my shirt.

A person who wants to be a great lover should learn how to speak a few words in another persons love language. Imagine this situation: a couple is seeing a marriage counsellor. She is sobbing her heart out, and says, "He doesn't love me any more. He never brings me flowers. He never buys me chocolates." And he says: "How can she say I don't love her? I fixed the car for her. I painted the bedrooms for her. I put in a waste-master for her... how can she say I don't love her?" What's going on here? Of course: her love language is "Gift Giving" and his is "Acts of Service". They love their little hearts out, but they are just not connecting, because they are speaking different love languages. It's like she is speaking Samoan and he is speaking Croatian.

Imagine another situation: a teenage girl is sitting on her bed crying her eyes out. As you look around you see her skis, her in-line skates, her stereo, her TV and video, her computer, her pictures of her trip to the Gold Coast. She sobs, "My parents don't even know that I am alive!" What do you think is going on here? Her parents' love language is probably "Gift Giving" but

hers might be completely different. It might be "Words of Encouragement" and she is desperately waiting for her dad to say something like, "Hey, that was a great game of hockey. Well done." Or perhaps it's "Physical Closeness and Touch", and she would just love a great big hug from her Mum or Dad.

If you learn to speak a few words in another person's love language, you can be a great friend, a wonderful lover, an awesome husband or wife, and a marvellous parent. It's not hard. You can usually work out someone's love language fairly readily. If you can't, I'm sure they won't mind if you experiment.

BOOK

"Countdown to Bedtime", by Mike Haines and David Melling (2-3 year olds)

For your two-year-olds who're ready to move past their board books and get a bit more involved, try "Countdown to Bedtime", written by Mike Haines and illustrated by David Melling.

First of all the theme is one they'll all be familiar with, so it's an opportunity to build a book into a night-time routine. Your child can then join in with the countdown once they're familiar with the pattern. Furthermore, there are lots of lovely flaps to lift and levers to pull.

Importantly at this age, this book is bright and white with big, clear illustrations of animals and just a few words to the page. It's ideal for getting your toddlers used to repetition and language without being too wordy. And even better, this is a book that requires them to be interactive, so they're just as important to the story as the characters within it.

Book reviews by The Children's Book Shop.

WEBSITE

www.bbc.co.uk/history/multimedia_zone/ (7-18 years)

This is a huge educational site from the BBC containing virtual tours, galleries, and animations games covering all periods of history. How much enjoyment could your teen get out of something like this while picking up heaps of information?

For younger children click on For Kids. We decided to find out more about Ancient Greece, home of the 2004 Olympics - you have to answer correctly to advance. This site will entertain kids for hours while also providing great curriculum support on world history.

Websites reviewed by the Children and Teens department of Auckland City Library