

Administrative Assistant's

UPDATE

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR CANADA'S OFFICE SUPPORT STAFF

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It's not easy being a working mom

Help yourself by delegating, saying no and focussing on your 'true north'

It's not easy being a working mom. You end up juggling many varied roles on a daily basis. You're a mother, daughter, sibling, employee, gardener, chauffeur, coach, social manager, banker, cook, counsellor, friend, and volunteer. On any average day, working moms perform at least seven of these functions.

Occupying so many roles can be exhausting and overwhelming. You may feel torn between your aspirations for professional fulfillment, the need to bring in funds to support the family and the pull to be a loving presence in your children's lives.

The price we pay

Living the dual reality of motherhood and work for extended periods of time takes its toll. First to note are the variety of stress symptoms that can begin sneaking up on you. It could be physical, such as back pain, stiff shoulders, insomnia, over-eating or tics. Or the stress could show up as irritability, forgetfulness, depression, over-reacting and feeling overwhelmed.

Second, there's the strain on relationships with the important people in your life. You become emotionally unavailable and irritable with the very people who are most dear to you—your children, partners, other family members and friends.

Work performance may also suffer over time. As you become increasingly overloaded, stressed and torn, your performance will lag behind what is required of you, leading to even more stress.

Finally, as your priorities keep pulling you in different directions, you may experience an overall sense of loss of meaning and purpose.

Your own worst enemy

Examine yourself honestly: are you adding to the stress by expecting too much of yourself? Do you feel frustrated and upset when you fail to meet the harsh self-expectations you set for yourself? The truth is, you're probably judging yourself more harshly than anyone else ever would.

Here are the three most common unre-

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alistic expectations that will tip you right out of balance:

- **No. 1: I have to do it perfectly.** The expectation of perfection is unrealistic and damaging. It sets you up for failure and self-blame.

- **No. 2: I have to do it now.** Sometimes the dinner dishes can wait. Usually, when you take a closer look at things, there's really no urgency at all.

- **No 3: I have to do it myself.** This belief tricks you into thinking that no one can do a job as well as you can. The truth is, if you stop being a control-addict you may discover that others are perfectly capable of doing a decent job, too.

As a working mother, here's what you can do to increase your sense of balance:

- **Commit to your true north.** Remember what's truly important to you in the grand scheme of things. Sit down with a pen and paper and ask yourself: at my 80th birthday party, what would I want my children to say about me? What would I want a cherished colleague to say about me?

Once you come up with a list that represents your desired legacy, consider this as your *true north* and let it inform your everyday actions. Before long, your days will be filled with actions that regenerate a sense of purpose and meaning.

- **Address your problematic self-expectations.** When you fall into wanting to do something *perfectly, now or yourself*, ask yourself if this expectation makes sense given the circumstances of the moment. If not, ignore those internal voices and move on.

- **Learn to delegate.** Forget your habitual "it's easier to do it myself than to delegate" thoughts. Learn to delegate properly. It's an art that involves investing time and effort into training another person and letting her make her own mistakes.

Or pay someone to do some of the things you're currently doing yourself. The relief you'll feel will be worth every penny.

- **Say no.** Resist the temptation to take on extra responsibilities that will tip your already over-crowded balance scale. Perhaps you're tempted to say *yes* because you really care about the cause and want to contribute. Or you may be afraid of being perceived as uncooperative or selfish, or are concerned about the consequences you might suffer as a result of your refusal. Whenever you're about to take on something that is going to create stress, remind yourself that you are saying *yes* to a balanced, sane life and teach your lips to say a friendly, matter-of-fact *no thanks*.

- **Reduce multi-tasking.** Research shows that when you perform two or more tasks at the same time, your level of performance of each task is reduced by 25 to 35 per cent. It also leaves you feeling scattered and unsatisfied. Do less multi-tasking and more uni-tasking, especially when performing your *mother* and other family roles: your kids deserve a sane mother who is available to them emotionally and mentally, at least some of the time.

- **Develop mindfulness.** Mindfulness is the opposite of multi-tasking. It is the art of focusing 100 per cent of your attention on what you're doing at any given moment and experiencing that moment fully. Mindfulness has to do with being present in your life, and it is very effective because it involves no specific commitment of time or resources.

- **Ask for help.** Asking for help from those in your personal life who care about you might seem difficult, but consider the price you're paying by not doing so.

Being a working mom is an ongoing and challenging journey. If you take one small baby step at a time, your life will feel more meaningful, purposeful and calm.

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