



2015 Professionalism Matters Working Moms Work-Life Balance Report

What
Working
Mothers
Are
Saying...

“Don’t multitask. Give one thing full attention especially when it is a human being.”

“Make time for family dinner no matter what time.”

“No electronics in the bedroom.”

“Spend as much time with your children as you can because they will be gone. Your JOB will still be there.”

“Hire a cleaning service. Everyone needs a “wife”.

“Wash a load a day and read to the kids every night no matter how sleepy you are!”

“Your home is a business, and you are the CEO.”

“Work will never love you back.”

“It’s rough but well worth the battle.”

“I can’t do all the housewife duties and be the breadwinner all at the same time”

“He knows nothing about all I do, for our daughter, my home or our business. If I were out of commission he would be totally lost.”



2015 Professionalism Matters Working Moms Work-Life Balance Report

Introduction

Sometimes we have the best epiphanies in the strangest places – the shower, the gym, etc. For me, my epiphany came during a morning jog. I was reflecting a bit on my life overall (when else would I have time to do it honestly), and I was equally struck by two strong but competing feelings:

1. I am SO lucky to have the flexibility to work part time as a mompreneur.....*BUT*
2. Most of the time I feel like I BARELY have my head above water trying to juggle everything between work and home/family – HOW do other working women do it????

That jog resulted in my developing a “Mommy Contract” with myself to begin to take concrete steps to help me keep my priorities clear (Read more about this in this WSJ article - <http://blogs.wsj.com/juggle/2013/04/04/why-multitasking-blocks-your-best-ideas/>)

I’ve spent more than a dozen years working as a corporate trainer oftentimes training teams and team leaders on topics like leadership skills, project management, time management and how to increase effectiveness/efficiency among other things. In recent years as I became increasingly challenged with my own work life balance struggle, I simultaneously noticed more and more clients and colleagues requesting my help, tips, and tricks to help them save a few minutes during the day, prioritize more effectively, or provide any suggestions/tools they could use to help them be more productive as they try to get it all done!

Ironically, I’d recently read a book about different types of working moms, and while it was an interesting read in many ways, the theory/focus of the 200+ pg. book was one I could have summarized in a paragraph....and then moved on to the other 8 things on my to do list for that day. I couldn’t help but think to myself that I would have so much more appreciated reading a page or two of theory and 50+ pages of specific tips and advice from real women in the trenches making it work day in and day out! So I couldn’t help but ask myself -- why not reach out to working moms myself and ask the questions I’d really like answers to? This sparked my desire to send out a simple survey – first just to friends and colleagues – to gather real feedback and advice from real moms trying to have it all and be their best in the process.

Clearly, I’m not a well funded institute or foundation, and I wasn’t really interested in conducting a “scientific study” with paid focus groups – instead, I wanted authentic feedback from real moms on their fears and struggles but most importantly their real tips and advice to share with others. I like to think of it as a “virtual group therapy session” of sorts.

More About the Survey

The survey includes responses from 524 respondents collected over an approximate one month timeframe (April 2015). Below you will find some basic demographic data that describes respondents:

Which of the following best describes your current relationship status?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Married	78.8%	413
Widowed	0.2%	1
Divorced	7.3%	38



2015 Professionalism Matters Working Moms Work-Life Balance Report

Separated	1.5%	8
In a domestic partnership or civil union	1.0%	5
Single, but cohabiting with a significant other	5.0%	26
Single, never married	6.3%	33

Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Employed, working full-time	83.2%	436
Employed, working part-time	5.5%	29
Self employed, working full-time	5.5%	29
Self employed, working part-time	2.7%	14
Not employed, looking for work	1.1%	6
Not employed, NOT looking for work	1.7%	9
Retired	0.0%	0
Disabled, not able to work	0.2%	1
Other (please specify)		23

How many children, by age, currently live in your household?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than 3 years old	41.6%	218
3-6 years old	45.0%	236
7-12 years old	45.8%	240
13-18 years old	27.1%	142
over 18 years old	14.3%	75

What Surprised Me About the Results....

- One of the first facts that surprised me was the simple fact that the vast majority (~83%) of respondents actually work FULL time (vs. part time or are self employed). One thing that we don't need a survey to confirm is that being a full time working mom is REALLY HARD so I was simply surprised at the high percentage of women surveyed who were doing it!
- When asked how they'd spend a free day, believe it or not, errands/time for organizing, etc. trump a spa day! To me this is a true testament to how seriously we take our to-do lists!
- Most respondents seem to crave more time with.....their spouse (over other choices like self, kids, friends, etc.) – believe it or not! I'm ashamed to admit that I was surprised at this, but I was. One of my closest friends wanted to write a blog entitled “No Time to Pee” – a nod to her reality with 3 kids that she gets no time to herself so somehow I assumed more time with “self” would have been #1. Having said that, many women did discuss needing more time for themselves,

More moms voted to spend a free day running errands and organizing over a spa day!!!!



2015 Professionalism Matters Working Moms Work-Life Balance Report

but interestingly "Self" as an option ranked #3 behind "Spouse" and "Kids". Just another indication that most moms are inherently selfless givers.

- One might assume that many women choose to work outside the home primarily to increase their household's income so I was surprised to see that BY FAR the #1 stress for working moms was financial concerns!
- It should be no surprise that every working mom is different and has different values/priorities, but it was still somewhat startling to see some women embrace the motto "Sleep when you're dead" and "Keep working even when I'm tired" while others swear by "Never respond to emails from home....ever" and "A tidy house is usually a sign of a boring mom." Working moms are definitely NOT all the same ☺ and operate with different life management philosophies and priorities.
- I was surprised by the sheer number of times the word "commute" (or some derivation like telecommute) appeared throughout survey responses. So many women commented that their daily commute was a significant source of stress and frustration.
- **79%** of respondents rated themselves as "somewhat successful" or "quite successful" at achieving work/life balance (as they define it)! Given the other feedback throughout the survey about how difficult the work-life balance struggle is, I was surprised to see such a high percentage rating themselves as successful in this area, but it seems that overall respondents have accepted that they can't "have it all" and there is no "true balance" and have reset their "work-life balance" expectations accordingly (which may have influenced their ratings in this area).

My Key Take Aways...

Work Seems to Trump Home Unfortunately and Working Moms Feel the Stress

2/3 of respondents indicated that work seems to win in the work life balance struggle. Similarly, when asked to characterize the amount of time spent at work, 43% of respondents selected "probably too much" or "definitely too much" and conversely 73% characterized their amount of time spent at home as "definitely not enough" or "probably not enough". This data seems to succinctly summarize the internal strain, stress, and guilt many working moms seem to feel about where they want to put their energy vs. where they typically do.



Working Moms Crave More Help, Understanding, and Connection From Their Partners!

Probably the most intense/visceral comments received in the survey came when we asked working moms to respond to the question, "What do you think your spouse/partner least understands about your day to day struggles?" The responses clearly underscored the importance of the role of dads/partners and just how much moms need help to help keep "the ship" running smoothly. Similarly reflecting this need for connection and support, our respondents also listed their spouse as the person they'd most crave more time with if given a choice.

Working Moms Have Lots of Stressors...and Finances are #1

The sadly predictable news is that when respondents were asked to select their top 2 stressors, there were a variety of DIFFERENT responses. In fact, there were five completely different issues (listed below) receiving vote totals in excess of 10%. There were 7 additional stress categories/causes (beyond these top 5 listed).



2015 Professionalism Matters Working Moms Work-Life Balance Report

Top 5 Stressors for Working Moms

1. **Finances – 21%**
2. Childcare/kids' education – 13%
3. Career trajectory/upward mobility –12.5%
4. Marital/relationship issues –11%
5. Body image concerns – 10.5%

Just looking at this list of the top 5, it's clear that the sources of stress are plentiful and varied. Whether it's worrying about paying the bills, picking a kids' school, succeeding at work, keeping marriages strong, losing weight, or seven OTHER issues – there's plenty to stress about!

Working Moms are Stressed...AND Happy!

83% of respondents characterized themselves as “fairly happy” or “ecstatic”! Many commented that “work life balance is a myth” and even suggested alternate wording like “Work/life integration” or “Work/life harmony”. Most respondents acknowledged the craziness and constant stress of their day to day life but also insisted that they appreciate every element of their lives (and really enjoy all the moving parts). Many respondents seemed to suggest that they wouldn't trade their life for anything – they just wish they had more time to devote to each area. Clearly, some respondents did indicate a level of fundamental disconnect – wishing to be a stay at home mom, desiring a job change, even expressing regret over having children, or expressing discontent with some other major element of their lives – but the vast majority seemed to enjoy being a working mom and fully enjoy both career and home. One respondent summarized it nicely by describing her life as “*Happy, but too much stress!*”

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Sample Respondent Comments*

**Verbatim participant comments are shared to illustrate the breadth of feedback received. These comments are not necessarily supported/recommended by Professionalism Matters, Inc.*

What is your single best time management tip (for work or home)?

- “Keep moving”
- “I effectively didn't watch TV for about a decade when my children were young, so I think you have to give up some activities that are less important to you to have time for what is important to you.”
- “Disconnect!! Go retro with a moleskin and a pen. You'll get more done.”
- “Outsource what you can, except for raising your children.”
- “Just survive”
- “Get help!! It's ok to have a maid or nanny if it gives you more quality time with family.”
- “Leave work at work”
- “Lock cell phone away in home office for a period of 2 hours at night to allow dedicated family time and focus on my daughter”
- “Have a weekly family meeting to go over schedule and give kids a chance to voice whatever is on their mind”
- “Shorten your to do list. Decide what to stop doing. Attack big items first.”
- “Don't clean your house”
- “Don't open email first thing in the morning. Attack your to do list first.”



2015 Professionalism Matters Working Moms Work-Life Balance Report

- *"I assigned each of our 5 kids their own color plate and laundry hamper. After each meal they wash that plate and when their hamper is full they start their laundry, there is never a question about whose plate or clothes are left out."*
- *"Schedule time for yourself just like you schedule time for meetings!"*

What do you wish someone had told you 10 years ago about managing work and home?

- *"That no one does it well. There is always someone that is getting shortchanged – home or work – but those of us that choose to do it all would likely be bored if we didn't do it all!"*
- *"Your kids love you unconditionally...your work doesn't love you in the same way. Get your priorities straight."*
- *"'Good enough is perfect"*
- *"Your worth is not based on the amount of tasks you complete. Learn to tell others 'no'.*
- *"That it will not be anything like you expected. Guilt will plague you, and all you give will never be enough."*
- *"You'll never feel at peace, so get comfortable being uncomfortable for awhile."*
- *"That dust doesn't matter"*
- *"It gets harder as your kids get busier."*
- *"For work – will this situation matter a year from now? If not, relax and log off."*
- *"Marry a wealthy man with genuinely nice parents."*
- *"No one can do it all and if you try to, you will lose yourself to a chore list."*
- *"It's impossible and you will always feel like a loser. Or as someone more eloquent said "in work/life balance there will always be a winner and a loser. Just know which you are choosing at the moment."*

What would you most want to change about your work situation if you could?

- *"I'd prefer to work four 10 hour days and have an extra day off for kids' doctor appointments, dentist appointments, and parent teacher meetings."*
- *"Shorter commute"*
- *"I need clear guidelines on when I am supposed to be working – with email, text messages, etc. I feel like I am supposed to ALWAYS be on."*
- *"Go part time"*
- *"Move up so I can make more money but work less."*
- *"When I'm not busy, I'd rather not feel tethered to my computer. I wish I could pick up my kids from school, go to the park, spend more daytime hours with them, and make up for the work during evening hours. I use up all my flexibility with dr appointments, parent/teacher conferences, and volunteering, and my babysitter seems to get the fun parts."*
- *"I would love to be a stay at home mom."*
- *"I would find a new job where I am respected and that respects my role as mother to my children. I currently work in an organization of all women, none of whom have children."*
- *"Get off at 3."*

What do you think your spouse/partner least understands about your day to day struggles?

- *"That I never get to take a breath or minute to do something on my own. I'm literally exhausted and crash at the end of the day."*
- *"The overwhelming sense of anxiety that I feel trying to keep track of all the house operations (from house supplies to keeping with everyone's schedule) on top of my work responsibilities."*



2015 Professionalism Matters Working Moms Work-Life Balance Report

- *"How many tiny little details I have to remember and juggle to keep the ship afloat."*
- *"That the house doesn't clean itself, laundry doesn't do itself, meals don't magically appear on the table."*
- *"How many things I do to keep the household going without him having a clue. How much I focus on the home/kids, etc. – he doesn't seem to see that, but he sees it if I work occasionally in the evening."*
- *"There is no way to sum this up. His needs have only increased with time and his expectations of me as a wife have only grown. Now that we have two children under the age of 4, I resent feeling like a failure to him every day."*
- *"Nothing. He only has to work. I have to work and be mommy/wife."*
- *"Hubby doesn't understand why I'm so committed to the job which causes me to stay late often."*
- *"How trapped I am as the sole breadwinner to just suck it up and make it work."*
- *"The sexism I face every day at work."*
- *"That I feel so alone."*
- *"Very little, I take care of him too"*
- *"How hard it is to still be nursing while also trying to be full time at work."*
- *"I am amazing!!! And he got an amazing woman!! Just because I don't fold laundry doesn't make me less smart."*
- *"My hubby is a perfect co parent and partner. I've got nothing for this one."*
- *"I make it look easy and so he believes it is easy."*
- *"The amount of decisions I have to make on a daily basis is overwhelming. Don't ask me to pick up dinner too!"*
- *"It's 2015 not 1980, and I'm not anything like his mother."*
- *"Why my clients are so important to me."*
- *"That we both work full time and we both do a lot of chores, but I organize most of the family events which requires a significant amount of additional energy (calling babysitters, calling doctors, reminding kids of their chores, asking if homework got done, etc.)"*
- *"He gets it."*
- *"Even though I seem to have it all together, I am a step away from crashing due to exhaustion."*
- *"That 'tired' from working all day and driving home in traffic is not the same 'tired' as woke, dressed the kid, took her to daycare, worked all day, drove home in traffic, picked the kid, cooked dinner, cleaned up, bathed kid, and serviced husband. Wife 1 Husband 0."*
- *"I work from home so he discounts a lot of what I do and expects housework to be completed regardless of my work schedule."*
- *"Every goddamn thing"*

If a genie granted you a single wish to make the work/life balance struggle easier, what would you ask for?

- *"A house manager"*
- *"My husband got a huge raise so we could live comfortably. I could quit my job and focus on being a wife and mom."*
- *"A wife"*
- *"A clone of myself so one of my selves could spend time with my kids and the other clone could do the "extras" at work that would help my advancement."*
- *"Ability to sleep for 8 hours without disruption."*



2015 Professionalism Matters Working Moms Work-Life Balance Report

- *"All means of electronic communication disappear after 5 pm. No choice, just poof! Deal with it."*
- *"Time in my schedule to go to the gym."*
- *"Grant me the strength and SUPPORT to say no and not be superwoman."*
- *"More hours in the day. I feel like I am so busy, sometimes I just miss the little things with the kids."*
- *"I wouldn't ask for things to get easier, I'd ask God to make me better so I do better."*
- *"1/2 day per week to focus only on me."*

What makes you happy?

- *"Quiet time but only when everything is taken care of"*
- *"Being with my family and being able to feel like I add value in the world by working."*
- *"Being able to attend my children's after school activities."*
- *"Laughing, music, hugs, my family, my work."*
- *"I have forgotten....At this point, I am happy if I can leave work without having to log back on."*
- *"My family is everything."*
- *"Doing for others and seeing them happy but wishing it is reciprocated."*
- *"Accomplishing a goal, whether it's large or small. Making others happy."*
- *"Sleep!"*
- *"Not sure anymore"*
- *"My daughter, the post work out high, a good blow out and deep tissue massages"*

About the Author



In 2003 Dana Brownlee founded Professionalism Matters a corporate training company based in Atlanta. She is an energetic and innovative corporate trainer, keynote speaker, and work-life balance advocate. She has been interviewed by (or published in) CNN, The Wall Street Journal, Atlanta Journal Constitution, Redbook, Working Mother, Forbes.com, Money magazine, Entrepreneur.com, and other notable publications. A nationally recognized speaker, Dana speaks to groups large and small on a variety of topics including tips for rescuing your

meetings, dealing with the difficult boss, secrets of the "Thoroughbred Leader", and discovering the keys to true work life balance.

As a follow up to the 2015 Professionalism Matters Work Life Balance Survey, Dana has developed the following keynote presentations/workshops:

- *7 Secrets to Work Life Balance Success: Learnings from the "2015 Professionalism Matters Work-Life Balance Survey"*
- *"Taking a Breath" to "Taking Charge" – The Women's Support Retreat*
- *Managing Mompreneur Mania!: Practical Tips for Mompreneurs*
- *The NEW Time Management Model: Change Your Paradigm and Reclaim Your Time*