



Mother + Corporate Leader

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Panelist Tips

Panelists shared these tips with Flexperience prior to the event.



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NOTE: There may be some tips that sound duplicate because they came from multiple panelists so we tried to condense but wanted to keep their "voice" where we saw a little difference – or if it was such a good point it needing saying more than once!

Part-time Working Mom Tips

- Negotiating: Use the what is “right for business” approach to your conversation rather than what I “can’t do” now when discussing moving to flex time or part time schedule.
- NEVER make any lasting decisions the first MONTH back from maternity leave. It is HELL, no matter what you end up doing.
- Make it easy for your company to say yes to a flex schedule, offer a 3 month test, 6 month check in, and 12 month check in.
- Be ready to “quit,” so they know you are serious.
- Negotiate from a position of power, which is hard to do on maternity leave. (Either while pregnant or after a couple of months back.)
- Over communicate —make sure that everyone (manager, direct reports, business partners) know exactly where projects stand, even if you are not there. (I did weekly, with very detailed recaps)
- Hire a team that is excited about a Part time boss, can work independently and that can cover your ass when needed.
- Have the confidence to say “no” or leave at 5pm. (One time I had to leave during a presentation to our CEO to pick up my kids—he later left me a voicemail and said that he completely understood.)
- Be flexible on big projects and super available when needed. (For the really big ones, talked to boss over weekend, late sat night, sun night, etc).
- Take pride in being a trailblazer!!! You are creating opportunities for yourself and everyone that follows you. The more “bosses” that get that part time highly skilled mothers are the key to a successful organization the better.
- Management needed someone with my specific skillset but on the flip side I recognized that I needed to “give” on my end.
- Be willing to be flexible on days (M, W, F but some Th if necessary)
- In first six months, worked 25-30 hours/week even though part time was 20.
- Organization, organization, organization.
- Chaos at home makes workplace organization easy.



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Panelist Tips,
CONTINUED

- Use to do lists, prioritize projects, utilize assistant and analysts, etc.
- Visibility at company-wide meetings is key.
- Prioritize projects based on visibility within workplace.
- Be productive when in the office.
- Be flexible when necessary on hours and timing.
- It's OK to say no, you are not being paid to be there full time.
- Pull your head up every few months and ask yourself if you are having fun – say “Is this worth time away from my kids?”

The Balancing Act Tips

- RELIABLE CHILD CARE, RELIABLE BACK UP, RELIABLE DOUBLE BACK UP.
- Organize!! Lunches made the night before, clothes laid out, etc. I plan the week's meals out—because it is ok to wear dirty clothes to work and school, it is NOT ok to run out of food for the family.
- Date night (or the multi tasking date). My husband and I get our exercise dates (run, hike, bike AND talk).
- Bring your kids (occasionally to work). They love it. My dad brought me on a business trip when I was in 4th grade and I still remember it. The only other thing I remember about 4th grade is learning to macramé.
- Only volunteer at school when your kids can see you- so you get “kid credit.”
- If you have multiple kids, devote 1 hour a week to mom/ kid ALONE time—grocery shopping, brow wax, etc.
- Workplace organization makes me better organized at home.
- Organize calendar (playdates, workout times, etc.) on Sunday nights.
- Meal planning.
- Set timelines for home improvement projects.
- Find a great nanny; work together as a team.
- Discuss why work is important with your children and talk to them about your day at work.
- Make kids feel special when you are home.
- Ignore chaos/mess when come home at night, focus on your kids.
- Create “special days” and “special trips” for each child.
- Initially, my husband did not think his life needed to change when I went back to work—then our roles evolved; we divided morning workouts, shared driving, etc.
- Have a grand plan, but be flexible – you never know what life is going to deal you!
- Every six months or so, take stock in life and then live it with joy and gusto.
- Pull your head up once every six months and ask yourself if you and your family are happy -- If yes, put blinders on, do a good job as a Mom and at your career and focus on being happy -- If no, make a change!



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**Panelist Tips,
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Challenges of Part Time Work

- Learning to say “NO.”
- In previous life, succeeded based on going the extra mile.
- Need to do cost/benefit analysis – what am I getting paid to do?
- Office politics.
- Maintain strong relationships with key influencers – communicate with them on off days to minimize surprises.
- Overcommunicate with the team.

Off Ramp Advice

- Enjoy this time – staying home is a choice some cannot afford to make.
- Set goals for yourself and your kids:(Kids: one-on-one travel with Mom, learning to read, taking off training wheels; Mom: 4 triathlons/year, play competitive tennis, travel)
- Stay current with workforce – you never know when you may need or want to go back to the “other side.”
- Stay in touch with your network.
- Read newspapers, journals, etc. – stay current.
- Join nonprofit boards.
- Look for consulting opportunities.
- Make a point to stay connected w/ workforce.
- When I missed that sense of achievement that comes from the workforce and felt my skills were starting to expire, I decided it was time to go back to work in some capacity (consulting or part-time).



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Event Notes

Summary discussion from the February 6th event.



Questions From Our Moderator

We often hear working moms say: "I feel like a better mom when I am able to work on some level outside the home." If that is true for you, how did you arrive at this?

Tamsin: I've always been focused on working. I try to stay positive and happy and be in the right place – working works for me.

Robbie: Working is part of who I am. After becoming a parent I considered how much I'd work, how I'd do it while being a parent. It's energizing and I value being able to contribute to the household income.

Jodi: Tried various paths – realized if I'm happy it keeps my family happy.

Holly: Its in my gene pool (mom, grandma, etc. worked); have to be honest with yourself about what makes you happy; variety is very satisfying

Cindee: Love what I do but struggled to balance family and career because I love being a mom.

Trisha: I stayed home for 5 years and constantly questioned what I was doing; got involved with the book and tried to not make it too noticeable – realized I like to work.

Amy: I went full circle and had peace with myself when I went back to work.

Dawn: I love working; always worry about impact to kids.

Catherine: I fluctuated a lot; always thought I'd be a working mom until I had triplets – needed to stay home full-time for 3 years. Once kids in school, realized I missed sense of achievement and so I went back. It will evolve as my life changes.

What support systems worked really well for you – practical advice you've learned through the years?

Holly: Established working moms group within the law firm. We very efficiently exchange information with each other around both personal and work related topics. Firm provides us some budget to organize outings, etc. Also, there's benefit to organizing a group to influence change. Our firm's remote access system was poor and we, as a group, gave feedback it needed to change and eventually it was improved.



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Robbie: Got connected to other independent consulting women in similar situations. We meet and share information.

Tamsin: My nanny and friends are a huge support, especially with my travel schedule. Need to find a really good quality person for childcare that understands what you need.

Dawn: Biggest enabler for me is reliable child care (and back up care and back up back up care). Then you don't have to worry about kids during the day.

Motherhood is full of surprises. What were the biggest surprises you discovered while doing interviews for the book "I Was A Great Mom Before I Had Kids."?

Amy and Trisha: Being open & honest in talking with other moms is really supportive. In our book research we conducted in depth interviews of over 100 mothers. In the first 22 minutes of each interview, we got a "bucket of sunshine" (life's great, husband is best friend, etc.). But after that point the mothers started being more honest – how tough it is, how they felt like they were failing, etc. We realized it's a generational issue and so much is expected of mothers in today's world – we feel we shouldn't complain because of everyone counting on us to do so much. Women want to connect and talk about real issues that they are facing.

Describe your most hilarious working moment.

Jodi: At the Gap I basically hadn't slept in 2 years because I had two kids within 14 months of each other. I had a meeting with the President of Old Navy and had 5 minutes to pump before presentation. They say you're supposed to relax and think of your child when you pump but I was in a complete twilight zone and thought the pump noise was saying my daughter's name – I knew I was losing it at that moment.

Tamsin: Don't have a personal one but have a story of another woman who was in the government sector with me on a conference call. She had this four-hour conference call and had to have her child with her. The first half of the call she was nursing her child. For the second half of the call she had pens and paper for the child to draw on. By the end of the call the child had drawn all over the mother. It's more fun to relay a story about another mom!



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How did you approach management about changing your work schedule? For those of you who tried part-time and it didn't work, what made it hard? For those who thrived in a part-time role, what made it work?

Holly: As an employment lawyer I often get insight to other women's situations and negotiations. I saw that women and men negotiate differently. I found myself pushing female executive clients to ask for more because you'll often get a "yes" answer by asking, and women tended not to ask whereas men did. Also found that when men ask for something and they get "yes" – they think "shit – I should have asked for more." When women ask for something and are told "no" – they feel they would have been better off if they had never asked at all. But women need to learn to ask for things. We need to break through the myth that part-time and flex-time working moms are not as productive. Don't compare yourself to perfect "stereotype" employee. Think about the value you bring to the table and what management/company will miss if you're gone.

Dawn: Tactically what's worked is to make it easy for them to say yes. Present plan with trial period (i.e. 30 days, 3 months, 6 months), that way they are only saying yes for a short-period of time and you can prove that it will work. I also hired a team of people that supported a boss (me) who works part-time. It allowed them to have more face time with higher-ups when they needed to fill in for me.

Cindee: Our environment is very supportive. We presented our job-share as a pilot program/trial. You should understand management's needs when you present it so you can address those issues up front. (Editor's note: Cindee/Nancy have done a job-share successfully for five years now, and have been promoted in the job...they have management responsibility too). As for part-time work, I missed the pull of being in the center of the action in my first part-time role. My second part-time job was more than part-time and the role was too big. Some jobs work for part-time and others don't as well.

Robbie: I had been a product manager where I was involved in many of the big things. My boss proposed a part-time role on special projects. I found it wasn't as exciting for me.

Catherine: As a part-time person, you need to focus on high profile projects. I tried to have full-time advocates in the office who could keep me apprised of what went on during my off days. I needed to over-communicate with my team and management so I didn't have to spend my off time following up on details.

Dawn: Part-time has been a great solution for me. There are pitfalls to avoid: I agree with Catherine in that you need to over-communicate. I chose not to get a blackberry so my part-time job wouldn't become a full-time one. I thought if it was really easy to reach me, that people would expect me to be working all the time on the Blackberry, so I told them that I'm completely reachable by home phone and by home e-mail, but I didn't want it to be "so easy" for them to reach me – I wanted them to think about it before they contacted me.

Jodi: That's so funny that you said that Dawn because for me it's exactly the opposite. I actually find that I like my Blackberry. [Editor's note: great example of how different solutions work for different people!] It allows me to delegate assignments so I don't have things to follow up on the next day. I like being connected.



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Holly: Since lawyers are all about billable hours, if I hit my targets, I have built in flexibility. A case may be intense but once it closes I can take a break. Sometimes I may have a quiet morning on one of my “off” days from work, but then will have something come up that I need to address, so I decided that I have to have flexible childcare which isn’t a solution for everyone (i.e. almost full-time care even when working part-time). I found that if I have someone (e.g., a neighborhood babysitter) who I can rely on to come at the end of day I can schedule time to do a client call and meet their needs same day. Few issues need an immediate response, but they do want a same-day response, so that is my strategy for being responsive while still not working all day.

For those who “off ramped” and “on ramped,” what did you learn/advice you have? (An “off-ramp” is defined as taking more than one year off of work)

Trisha: There’s no magic number as to how long to take off and when to return to work. I struggle with the choice constantly. I had to set my priorities and determine what I really wanted (e.g. to pick up kids from school). Make sure you take time to enjoy being with the kids and that you “live it.”

Lizzie: I questioned what I would have to offer after the break. I surrounded my self with mentors and professionals so lots of folks knew what talents I had to offer and I could maintain my connections.

For our one job share panelist, Cindee, what had made the job share arrangement a success?

Cindee: I found someone I am really compatible with (it’s like a marriage). It’s not to be taken lightly. You need similar career aspirations. You also need strong communication skills with each other so things are seamless to those we work with.

Discuss how you used the concept of flexibility, whether it was flex-time, part-time or consulting, in your career and how that evolved into your current situations. More specifically, Tamsin and Jodi were in flexible job situations then moved to full-time. How did this evolve for you?

Tamsin: I wasn’t as inspired in my flex role at the Gap. Product Red was such a fantastic opportunity. One of the hardest things is to not feel guilty about being a good mom and being good at your job.

Jodi: Ambition felt different when my kids were very young but that changed and I am happy in my job now. I want to see how far I go until my interests/needs change.



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Robbie, what are the key benefits to consulting?

Robbie: “It rocks!” Diving into a company where they need your skills is very rewarding. I make a great living. I work fewer hours because my projects are very focused. As a consultant you get feedback and therefore know your work is adding value. I also have my 5 minute plan, 5 year plan and 10 year plan. You need to give yourself flexibility and go with what happens.

Amy, how did you manage work and family with your own PR business?

Amy: I was so paranoid what clients thought I did at home (i.e. working in my pajamas) when I had my consulting business. My big learning was that I needed to learn to say “no” and set boundaries and priorities.

Tamsin, how was the transition from your flexible job to your role at Red?

Tamsin: The transition was very intense. It was very hard (was also going through a divorce at the time). I was racked with guilt but it was worth it. I learned a lot about myself and I remind myself not to feel guilty.

Questions From The Audience

How do you positively explain the gap in your resume after taking time off to be at home with your children?

Catherine: I was surprised at how few questions I got about the gap. In my industry there are a lot of men but they have families and therefore were understanding. During my break I was on the board of a non-profit which helped me stay in touch with my network.

With all the focus on kids and work, how do you make time for your partner?

Amy and Trish: We have a chapter about husbands. Heard from a lot of women where relationships changed after kids. It’s really all about expectations. You need to communicate your expectations to your partner.

Holly: Have your agenda going in to the conversation with your husband (i.e. whether husband expects you to cook dinner once you go back to work or do you want me to go back to work?)

What if working is not a choice but a need to support the finances. Is it selfish to scale back?

Robbie: It shouldn’t be about guilt. The same things don’t work for everyone.



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Do you have any tips for dealing with the loss of energy when you have young children and go back to work?

Lizzie: You just make yourself get through it. Remind yourself that it's temporary, everyone goes through it.

Dawn: I was so sleep deprived that I fell asleep during an interview of someone for my team. I realized that I needed to write everything down because chances are I wouldn't remember due to my exhaustion.

Jodi: I took naps on weekends (I'd "rho sham bo" with my husband for who got Saturday and who got to nap on Sunday).

Lizzie: On my way to run an errand (i.e. grocery store) when I knew my husband would be watching the baby, I would pull to the side of the road and nap.

Robbie, how do you get paid full-time rates for part-time work?

Robbie: I look at the value I am adding to the client and present it that way (e.g., it may take me 5 hours to complete something, and I charge the equivalent of 8 hours because people pay on the result, not on how many hours it takes you to do it).

We hear a lot about the so-called "Mommy Wars" but want to talk about the incredible support that is often found among working mothers. How have you been supported by others?

Jodi: I rely on someone having my back. I've had someone stick their neck out for me. You should build a team of others who will do this... where you support each other.



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Working Mom Moments

Funny, in retrospect.



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- First week back at work from 2nd maternity leave, I had to go on a business trip. I ended up on the corporate jet, with 8 other men (CEO, Chairman of the Board, CFO, and Consulting Investment Bankers). As I boarded the plane, the Chairman of the Board—in his 70's—asked me why my lap top was so big. I had to reply that it was my breast pump, for the long flight. Didn't get eye contact for the rest of the flight.
- Had another male boss that “fined” anyone being late to his meetings \$1/ min. I was having trouble getting enough milk and ran “overtime” pumping and had to explain to a room of 35 people why I was late. Subsequently, he never asked me to pay again.
- Last minute presentation was moved and I had had my 3 year old son with me for the day—I brought him to the presentation, put him under the conference table with 3 lollipops and a bag full of toys. Most people did not notice him until a good 30 minutes into the presentation.
- So exhausted at work after a long night with the babies that I fell asleep while interviewing a candidate to be hired. To this day, I don't know how long I was asleep for and am still embarrassed.
- Got called in from maternity leave to give performance reviews with 3 week old baby. Had to give a difficult performance review with newborn in a baby Bjorn on my chest.
- When I moved to part-time and thought I had “so much extra time” that I signed up for a BILLION things to do (non profit boards, room parent, exercise program) and instead of “cutting back” ended up crazed--- more crazed than when I was working full time.
- First week back at work. On deck to make my first big presentation to senior management team. Very nervous but feeling good about my presentation. Get a call from my nanny in a panic. Charlotte has stuffed a Barbie Shoe up her nose and it is stuck. Nanny can't remove shoe. Have to explain to management team that I need to reschedule the presentation because I am needed at home to remove Barbie's shoe. Receive lots of blank stares. (**Barbie's shoe was successfully removed by Mom)
- Working from home and receive call from a potential investor. Kids are downstairs napping and the coast is clear. Start to go through our investment thesis with the investor and things are going well. Hear stirrings downstairs and footsteps on the stairway. Son is yelling, “Mommy, I made a poopie, come and wipe me.” Hide in office closet from children and continue call at a low whisper.