Parenting and WFH

1. How working environments have been altered as a result of COVID and what are the biggest challenges working parents are facing as a result?

COVID brought about an instantaneous global experiment in Working From Home. Up until March 2020, there were only 50-60% of companies who had been allowing certain functions in their company to work from home (either full time or part time.). Typically it was Sales Reps and or tech programmers who could do their work remotely. The debate continued for the past 3 decades of whether working from home was effective.

This pandemic caused more than a billion people to be forced to work from home, many of whom had never ever tried it before.

The most challenging populations affected were parents as not only were they now told they would be working from home, they also learned that their children would be home with them 24/7 as well. Unable to go to school or to day care (or visit relatives in some cases). Many of these parents who have school age children were also told, “you will be doing home schooling for the next few months as well.”

For single parents, this seemed insurmountable. I know one of my clients who said she was so grateful she could afford to go buy a jungle gym to install in her living room in northern Canada so that her 7 year old son could get his “play time” and keep occupied while she tried to conduct work during the day light hours he was awake and wasn’t on a zoom call for school. The creativity and resourcefulness was a must to survive and thrive during this difficult time.

1. Balancing work and family can be done, but it takes much of the following to be successful: Flexibility, Resilience, Processes and Partnership.
2. Managing time and space are key to being able to focus your attention on work tasks and then finding time slots to focus on family needs.

I highly recommend for couples who are both at home, to “tag team” the family demands. If you each set time for focusing on work a couple hours at a time and then trade off, it can work.

Meal time with the family can be split (one parent does breakfast). One does lunch and the whole family tries for dinner time together. For some families lunch time mid day works best for everyone to be together (as one parent has international global calls, work hours to accommodate.). Strategic Planning and organizing around the NEEDS that are a MUST, then prioritize the WANTS. The most successful families are looking at one parent being up earlier in the morning to get administrative tasks done and work that requires focused concentration done before the children wake up.

If you are a single parent, then working with your children to develop a workable plan will require additional creativity and experimentation depending upon their ages/stages. For those with children under 5, you may have to use the times of day they are napping, still sleeping in am or pm to do your focused work. When you have team zoom calls or client meetings virtually, you may have to find activities or tasks they can do quietly while you complete your meetings.

One great idea is to have your children’s grandparents or relatives do a zoom call with them while you are working. They can read to them over zoom, play a game, practice a language, or just talk together. When children are a little older, it’s easier to work with them to create expectations and processes like practicing not interrupting when the sign says, in meeting, emergency’s only. Build scenario plans with them. If you need mommy and my sign is on the door, what should they do first?

The most important practice for parents is compassion, resilience and repairing.

Under these stressful times, we will find ourselves yelling at our children and thus parents need to be able to repair and have compassion for themselves and their children.

This is the hardest thing many will ever do in their lives. It’s hard enough to be moved home, have to set up a home office, figure out how/ where to work from, find privacy and take care of your children’s needs all while dealing with the realities and unknowns of how long this WFH Working From Home will continue and when you can get your resources back in place to support you in childcare moving forward.

Like all good experiments, it’s helpful to remember that you will try one thing and it may work well for a while and then it won’t work any longer. You then have to try something new or different. Keep in mind that you are learning as you go. Be gentle with yourself and your partners as you align together to navigate this unknown territory.

There is no prescribed way to navigate this. You will have to try some things and see what works.

My favorite mantra is What’s Right for Right Now?”

Some days you will be in flow and able to work well from home. Some days you will be struggling to find time without interruptions and juggle all that has to happen. One important truth is that when people are in the office, they are often really only productive 4-5 hours per day, due to interruptions, tons of meetings, breaks, talking with people, etc. So when you’re home, do not beat yourself up if you feel like you are only in your home office focused for 4-5 hours per day.

It is my hope that companies will finally see through this global experiment that it’s not how much someone works that matters. It’s what they produce. For many of you, this time working from home will help you FOCUS and get more done in less time. Because you have to. And this actually bring benefits to you, your company and your family.