

Lisa Lieberman.



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GO BACK TO BASICS?**



solutions

by Lisa Lieberman

The last thing you need at the end of the day is a headache. But while you try to put dinner together, the children are clamoring for your attention, the phone is ringing, and the television set is blaring in the background.

Janet Braz, a single mother from Hanford, California, has found a way to turn down the volume—and the stress level—while also creating more family time. How? She's banished television from her house.

"The thing I hated most about the TV was the incessant noise it made," says Braz, who owns and operates a child care center in her home. "I get enough noise and stress during the day while I'm working. It's the last thing I need in the evening."

Like most parents, Braz was worried about her kids being exposed to sex and violence on TV. She was also concerned that television was preventing her family from spending



their precious free time really enjoying one another. "When you think about all the conversations that were left unsaid because we were watching TV, it's really sad," she says.

So a few years ago, Braz tried an experiment: She banned television for a month. It wasn't easy. The kids—Shannon, now 11, Bethany, eight, and Spencer, five—complained. Friends and family thought Braz had lost her mind. "It was really quiet at first," she says. "It was as if we were in mourning!" To help the family adjust, Braz rearranged the furniture in the living room so there wouldn't be an emp-

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ty space where the TV set used to be.

To fill their free time, Braz helped the kids think of fun activities and projects, like playing games, reading, coloring and even writing stories for one another. Without TV, they felt more alert and relaxed. Braz was so pleased with the results of the experiment that she got rid of the family's television set for good.

Despite another brief round of protests when her kids realized the TV wasn't coming back, they took to their TV-free life quickly. They soon became too busy enjoying time with their mom to complain about shows they were missing.

The children now gather in the kitchen while Braz prepares dinner. They help with the cooking, talk about their day or read aloud to each other. Eleven-year-old Shannon says the family is better off without television. While she admits to watching an occasional show at friends' houses, she now finds TV "boring."

the juggling act

by Dana Friedman

Q I run a public relations business from my home and find it hard to get away from clients who call, E-mail and fax me at all hours. Part of the reason my business is a success is because of my responsiveness, but I have less time than ever for my kids, and I'm beginning to burn out. How can I set some boundaries without alienating my customers?

A The perils of being too good! Actually, your plight is common. No one starting her own venture can avoid the sheer volume of work involved or the impulse to be instantly available to clients while establishing herself in her field.

But now that your business is up and running, it's time to decide what kind of life you want to lead. To have time for your family and keep your-

self from burning out there must be some boundaries between your business and home life—and it's up to you to set them.

What to do? Here, some pointers:

• The first and most obvious step is to set up a separate phone line for business if you haven't done so already, and give that number to clients (you may need to change your home number if it's the only one customers currently have). Then, decide what your hours of operation are and communicate those hours to clients. In relaying this information you might tell them, for example, that you won't be returning phone or fax messages after six p.m. Assure them, however, that you will respond to their messages promptly the next business day—unless there is an emergency or a deadline is looming and late or weekend hours are necessary. In this way, you can maintain the responsiveness that contributed to your original success.

• Keep clients' needs in perspective. Just as you set your own hours, your customers also determine the best time for them to work. If they continue to phone and fax at all times of the day, it doesn't necessarily mean they expect an immediate response.

• If you find yourself gravitating back to your computer after business hours, try establishing a ritual that brings your workday to a close. Turn off the lights and shut the door to your office; that way you won't hear the fax running or the answering machine taking messages.

• Remember that one of the reasons you probably started your own business was to have more control over your time. Don't negate that benefit by allowing your business to consume you. If you give yourself some downtime each evening, you're apt to feel less stressed and more invigorated by your work—and your kids will thank you, too!

Dana Friedman is Senior Vice President of Corporate Family Solutions and Director of Corporate Solutions for the Research Group.

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Farley, like most service dogs, must become comfortable walking beside wheelchairs.

An ASDEC student trains her service dog, Glitter, to remove laundry from a dryer.

school students before they entered the judicial system. In 2002, the Whittakers founded ASDEC, one of the only programs of its kind in the country. They formed a relationship with Woodlake Union High School, which allowed students to earn high school credit for training service dogs. Classes are held in a nearby rural school house in Woodlake, which the Woodlake School District leases to the Whittakers for \$1 every five years. The dogs are housed in outside runs during the day and kenneled in a back building at night. Classes take place first period every day of the school week, so teens have an extra incentive to attend school.

"The idea of the program was two-fold," says Steve Katz, coordinator of student services at Woodlake Union High School. "We wanted to give back to the community and assist people who desperately need service dogs. We also wanted to provide vocational classes for the students."

In ASDEC's first year, two teenage boys entered the program on a judge's orders. Previously, they had attended school only 6 percent of the time. However, after they received their puppies, they had a 97 and 98 percent attendance record. "The only days they missed were when they were ordered to go to court," Whittaker says.

In its nine years, only two teens have dropped out of the program.

How it works

Teens make a two-year commitment to the program and work with the same puppy every day of the school week. During classes, teens spend the first 10 minutes of each



hour grooming the dogs – brushing their teeth, combing their hair, checking their nails. This helps them bond with the puppies.

"The first thing we do is build the kids' self-esteem. You do that by giving them something that has a lot lower self-esteem than they do," Whittaker says. "Compared to little puppies, they're giants. So, right away, they feel like they're accomplishing something."

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Jonathan's Journey

Seventeen-year-old Jonathan Barrientos was always a good kid, but he didn't like school. During his freshman year, he missed 22 school days and was late two or three times a week. He had a 1.9 GPA – just barely passing. "I had to get up early in the morning to catch the bus, so I thought why bother?" he says.

Barrientos hung around his older brother whose friends drank and smoked. Although his brother was a good kid, too, some of his friends were troublemakers. They burned vacant fields, set off firecrackers in people's mailboxes and got into trouble with the law. Barrientos, only 14 then, was looking for other ways to spend his time. Before his freshman year ended, Barrientos noticed other kids at school with dogs that wore bright yellow service-dog jackets. "I wondered what class they were taking and how I could get into it," Barrientos says.



Jonathan Barrientos and Gage

things around him, but he usually didn't say anything. The ASDEC program gave him more confidence to speak up.

"My friends would say, 'You know you're going to try it one day, so why not do it now?' I would just tell them, 'This is a stupid thing for you to do. If you're going to do it, just don't do it in front of me,'" Barrientos says.

As he gained more confidence, Barrientos's GPA rose from a 1.9 to almost a 3.0. He, along with the other kids in the program, went to service clubs to give speeches and demonstrate their dogs' skills in front of hundreds of people.

"I was always shaking and nervous, but Gerald told us to think good thoughts and that our dogs were

right next to us and that nothing bad could happen," Barrientos says. "I would talk for five minutes and then demonstrate commands with my dog. I would still be nervous, but then I would get this proud, happy feeling afterward."

Barrientos, now a senior at Woodlake High School, serves as a teacher's assistant in the ASDEC program. He plans to become a veterinarian and open his own animal shelter someday.

"I love being around animals every day and seeing how I can help them," he says.

– L. L.

Open door

The class was the Assistance Service Dog Education Center program based in Woodlake, Calif., which only accepts eight new students out of 40 applicants a year. Barrientos wrote an essay about why he wanted to get into the program and took a personality test.

Barrientos was ecstatic when the program accepted him. During the first year, he didn't miss a single day of school. He also found himself relating to teachers and school in entirely different ways.

"Gerald [ASDEC's program coordinator] always says you have to focus when you're working with the dogs," Barrientos says. "He'd say, 'If you're tired, your dog will be lazy, too.' So, when I was in school, I'd pretend I had my dog, Gage, with me and stay focused."

During the two years he was in ASDEC, Barrientos occasionally took Gage to school or to the coast for family weekends. Gage, like the other service dogs in training, was mostly housed on ASDEC premises.

As time went on, Barrientos found himself making friends with other kids in the ASDEC class.

"We all got closer and hung out at the cafeteria at lunch," he says. "They were not my normal group of friends. They all came from different backgrounds."

Adi Renteria, 18, who was also in the ASDEC class, was one of the outgoing, pretty girls at school Barrientos thought he'd never meet. They became best friends, and Barrientos spent a lot of time at Renteria's house after school, even helping clean the house.

Growing confidence

Barrientos also became more vocal among his other friends who drank and smoked. He never liked it when his friends did these



Barrientos and fellow ASDEC trainer Adi Renteria walk through a mall with their dogs, Gage and Glitter.



COURTESY OF BARBARA SANDBERG

It's two weeks into the new school year at Woodlake Union High School in Woodlake, Calif. At one end of the room stand eight excited high school students. At the other end, eight crated Golden Retriever puppies burst with energy. Gerald Whittaker, who looks a little like Santa Claus with his gray hair, a mischievous grin and twinkling blue eyes, pauses a moment, then releases the puppies. The room fills with the blur of fur, laughter and scrabbling puppy paws.

Over the noise, a lone puppy lets out high-pitched cries. One of the students asks about the puppy that's still in its crate. "That's what happens the day you don't come to school," Whittaker says. "Your puppy is going to sit in its pen howling."

The image of a howling puppy alone in its crate is enough to motivate these teens, many of whom are at risk of dropping out of school. Woodlake High is situated in Tulare County, which has one of the country's

highest poverty and unemployment rates as well as a high school dropout rate of 26.1 percent.

Whittaker, Assistance Service Dog Educational Center's program coordinator, is especially good at identifying teaching moments for both dogs and people. For example, a student came to school one day crying because her mother grounded her the previous night for coming home late. Whittaker said, "OK, I'll take your dog and put him outside on the front porch. Then I'll come right back in and we can talk about this." The girl's face clouded with concern. "You're going to put him outside where I can't see him?" she asked. "What if he gets out on the road or into

trouble?" The girl then burst into tears, realizing her mother had been just as worried about her daughter as the girl was about her dog.

Program launch

Dozens of prison-based dog-training assistance programs exist across the country, but Whittaker and his wife, Donna (a graduate from the Bergen School of Canine Studies in Santa Rosa, Calif.), wanted to work with high-risk high

ASDEC's student trainers take their service dogs on a field trip for socialization and fun.

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Deal With Unruly Campmates





SIGNPOST

Dogged Searchers

They no longer carry little kegs, but rescue dogs are still a welcome sight to lost hikers.

The missing hiker left no clues: no footprints, no fire remnants, not even a candy bar wrapper. Tired and frustrated after four unproductive days of scouring California's Sequoia National Park, rescue workers were ready to give up. But then Zeke gave the alert. Ears perked, tail wagging furiously, the 6-year-old golden retriever rescue dog led Marty Cross, his handler, to a crevasse.

Crawling on his hands and knees, Cross inched to the edge and peered down. Twenty feet below lay the missing hiker, obscured by

snow, his back broken from the fall from a nearby snow field several days earlier.

The hiker, who recovered fully and was later visited by Zeke in the hospital, had been undetectable to the human eye, but fortunately, not to the canine nose. "There's really no limit to what these dogs can do," says Cross, who has worked with search dogs for 15 years. "When all signs of a person have been swept away by wind or snow, these dogs can find in hours or days what searchers may not find for weeks."

Cross works with Califor-

nia-based Wilderness Finders Inc. (WOOF), one of dozens of rescue-dog agencies now operating in the United States. WOOF was founded in 1975 by Sandy Bryson, a dog trainer in the Lake Tahoe area, after a skier died in an avalanche at a nearby ski resort because rescuers were unable to find him fast enough.

At first, the dogs were used only as a last resort, but after hundreds of successful saves, they're now an integral part of national park search efforts. With as little as a whiff of a comb or discarded candy wrapper from the missing person, search dogs can track human scent trails five to seven days old.

"The most amazing part is the way they stick to the

job," says Cross. "At the end of a 20-mile-plus day, when I've got more blisters on my feet than skin, I ask them 'Aren't you tired? I'm tired.'"

Dogs and handlers train by hiking 10 to 20 miles a week, as well as practicing agility skills like balancing on teeter-totters to prepare them for slippery logs above roaring rivers. Out on the trail, the dogs pack one-third of their body weight, carrying their own food, water, doggie toys, and booties to protect sensitive paws.

"You don't always find what you're looking for on a search," says Cross. "The important thing for me is that I'm out in the wilderness, exploring—doing what I love best with my best friend."

—Lisa Lieberman

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