

THE NOT-QUITE-SECRET OF MANAGING TWO KIDS AND WORK

So... I went and did it. I had another baby! Having my first child was life changing. Having my second has been far less dramatic and, in some ways, more enjoyable.

Baby number two is just about five months old now, and I still get a little thrill out of saying "my girls" in place of "my daughter".

For some reason, having more than one child to my name makes me feel like a true-blue adult and mother. You'd think that by now I'd be feeling more than grown up (if not old), but I guess it goes to show we always have a little bit of a kid in us, no matter our age.

These days, the question I often get from other parents or parents-to-be is: What's your secret? In other words: How do you manage, with two kids and work, and not pull your hair out?

I often ask other women this very same question. It's very humbling to speak to women who are far higher up the totem pole than me or mothers who have much more pressing family responsibilities, like a special needs child.

I've learnt a thing or two from them.

They tell me: I manage — or rather I get by — because I choose to. Now that I have two children, I've come to realise it's as simple (and as complicated) as that.

One of our PwC partners often relates the story of how she handles her triplets while leading our assurance practice, the largest one in the firm.

Part of her strategy is to tell her children that in order to be a good mother, she needs to be a happy one. In her case, that means spending time doing what she loves at her job.

This line never made much sense to me, until daughter number two came along. Today, I can fully appreciate that philosophy.

My family is what gives meaning to my life and so is my work. I know now that I need the mental stimulation which my job provides.

I enjoy the adrenaline and satisfaction that come with tackling a cause that isn't about my children. Being away from them during the week makes me treasure my time with them so much more.

My husband and I made a choice to have children without sacrificing my career or his business, so we also took the necessary steps to allow us the "luxury" of having both.

Changing hats
by *Stephanie Caunter*



Stephanie Caunter studied engineering but soon realised it wasn't meant for her. Today, she heads PwC Malaysia's marketing and communications team. She counts herself lucky to be able to learn a bit more every day about being a better wife, daughter, sister, friend, mother and teammate.

This meant hiring a live-in helper.

I'm fully aware that being able to afford help is, in itself, a luxury, but of course, that's another good reason for me to keep working hard.

I remember signing the necessary paperwork and rather dreading the thought of having to share our apartment with a stranger. I thought it would be invasive and awkward, albeit a necessary sacrifice.

The reality is, well, I wouldn't be able to go to work and be effective each day with peace of mind if not for her.

So I thank my lucky stars constantly that we found someone we can trust. And also that we've got the support of my mother and mother-in-law.

Then there's mummy guilt. Or working mum guilt. It goes by many names, but you're probably familiar with it.

According to online resource site Babycentre.com, mummy guilt affects 94% of women it surveyed. There are even books written about this modern-day parenting syndrome!

My own experiences and conversations with women who've been there and done that have taught me that this guilt is mostly pointless. It only makes you feel bad about yourself and piles on unnecessary pressure.

Sure, I still feel twinges of guilt. But because I chose this path, I can also choose to ignore it. After all, it's counterproductive.

And also because there are far more fun things to do, like a list I found online of 31 reasons why you shouldn't feel mummy guilt.

One of my favourite reasons from that list is number 11, which goes: "Accepting your son's compliment that you're a good cook: You did your part, even when he's eating pre-breaded microwave chicken breasts. You pressed 'Start.'"

(Haha, I like that one. And for the sake of full disclosure, I admit I gave up trying to cook around the same time I decided to give up mummy guilt!)

As you can see, my big "secret" to cope with career and two kids is really pretty simple: I've made a deliberate choice to juggle the two. And yet, it is complicated because of the steps I have to take to accommodate this decision.

This may not necessarily work for others, and I'm sure I'll be tweaking it along the way, but for now, I can safely say I'm at peace with myself. And that works for me.

It all began with making a decision. **E**

