

Work-Home Guilt Tug

By Patricia Morgan

Women's socialization to care for the babies, the sick and the vulnerable can become a set-up for us to feel guilt when we have two or more commitments pulling at us. We tend to invest in keeping everyone happy at work *and* home. I remember my mother's training in this regard. At social events, she would give me a plate of sweets and say something such as, "Now dear, make sure everyone is happy and has what they want." She trained me to be on the watch for others' needs, not to consider taking a sweet for myself until others were *happy* and not to question that my brothers were off playing and *being boys*.

The mother's curse is believing, "If I really loved my child I would _____ (You fill in the blank)."

In the 376 answers I collected from women asking about their workplace challenges twenty-eight respondents reported that their biggest workplace challenge was how home and family demands distracted them from job focus. Thirteen said that the pull between home and workplace was their most significant challenge. Here are some of their comments:

- Difficult teen experimenting with alcohol and drugs and also has Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). It's very challenging, stressful and time-consuming.
- Our autistic adult son and teenager with Aspergers/Tourettes is a constant worry.
- The relationship with my spouse is distressing.
- Blending families is difficult.
- Supporting my mother with breast cancer is emotionally hard.

And the list goes on. John Gray, in *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, explains that men are apt (there are exceptions) to feel successful when they think they made their wife and children happy. Meanwhile, women tend to feel responsible for everyone's lives including their feelings.

One of Linda Bradburn's most challenging experiences was when she daily left her three-month-old baby, Matt, with her parents in order to continue her teaching career. She had just received her permanent teaching certificate and her husband, Roy, was rising at 4:00 AM to do the chores on their new farm before driving to his day job. She felt like she was hanging on by a thread, asking herself, "Can we manage?"

Linda did manage. She stayed organized.

She describes her strategy:



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I knew what I'd wear the next day. I'd have the baby's items ready and packed. I would plan our meals. Since Roy and I had few hours to see each other, I left a lot of notes. It was like a long-distance relationship with him. I would call him from work. I'd get home and he'd be gone. The fact that we loved each other helped.

But feeling guilt was her biggest challenge. Although baby Matt was well cared for by his grandparents, every day Linda went to work feeling ashamed for leaving him behind. The belief that mothers *should* be home providing 24 hours of care to their babies haunted her.

The worst part of leaving Matt was how I fantasized what other people were thinking, "She's leaving him for the *almighty dollar*." But I had put a lot of effort into my education and my salary was necessary if we wanted to keep the farm. It was a tug of war. "Should I stay home or should I go to work?" In the end, I'm glad I worked. At school, I focused on my job but there was always a picture of my son and, a few years later, my daughter on my desk.

Linda's strategies included calling on her friends, asking for help and telling herself, "Kids are okay as long as they are with people who love them. Kids are resilient."

Linda also recommends:

- Avoid letting what others might think haunt you.
- Minimize guilt as it can drain focus, energy and confidence.
- Take your work seriously and yourself lightly.

The above excerpt is from ***From Woe to WOW: How Resilient Women Succeed at Work*** by counselor and speaker, Patricia Morgan. Contact Patricia to help your people become stress hardy at 403-242-7796, patricia@SolutionsForResilience.com or www.SolutionsForResilience.com

