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Two classic Forum columns, **On the Homefront** and **Balancing Act** are back! Whether we are currently in the trenches on the homefront or incorporating the delicate balancing act of paid work into our busy schedules, these classic columns are still relevant today.

Message from Gina, CEO of Mothers & More



Romance is in the air. Or it's supposed to be, right?

Mothers & More encourages moms to focus on themselves as whole women. An important piece for many of us is our connection to our partners. In these cozy days of winter, let's make sure that our connections to our partners are MORE — more than parenting our children, more than earning a living, and more than maintaining a household together. February is a great month to acknowledge and celebrate that special connection.

Have fun with it! Remind each other of your first date — or better yet, recreate it! Add a few extra conversations or texts during the work day; flatter your partner; pamper yourself. But try not to add stress to your lives. Keep it all simple.

For the mom who is trying to balance romance, work, caretaking for others and caretaking for yourself, I send out the warmest of Valentine wishes!

Thank You to Our Donors

On a separate note, we would like to once again thank all of our donors and acknowledge you here in Forum. Our generous donors and donor chapters are listed in the margin to the left. Please add your thanks when you see them!

Without our donors, we could not be a force for mothers. With our donors, we can provide support and education while addressing the assumptions that society makes about mothers. Through your support of Mothers & More, all moms can live full lives.

I am incredibly grateful to Mothers & More for being here for me, through all the stages of motherhood. Thank You!

With kind regards,

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Forum is publicly published monthly by Mothers & More. The views represented in it are not necessarily those of the editors or of the Mothers & More membership.

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Working Mothers: Paving the Way of the Workforce

Stephanie Harbour, President, Mom Corps NYC

Editor's Note: Mothers & More recognizes caretaking is also real work with real social and economic value but for the purposes of the article the term working mothers references mothers participating in the paid workforce.

There have long existed traditional notions of how, when, and where we work – does ‘full-time, 9-5, in an office’ sound familiar? However, today’s workplace is changing dramatically, and with it the traditional structures of job search and how we craft our careers. Where is the change originating? Indeed, new technology is playing a role. But, more interesting to us, is the most complex driver of change: the *people*. We look at employees and job seekers today and see change-agents. More specifically—we look at our pool of job seekers, working mothers and fathers seeking flexible positions, and we see professionals that are adding value and making waves in every area of the workforce.

So—you’re a working mother (and more!). What do employers need to know about *you* to understand how you’re laying the foundation for an improved workforce and workplace? Let’s snap a picture of four ways you add unique value—and remember, capitalize on each during your job search and interviews!

Working mothers are leading the way by . . .

1. Redefining Career Paths

It’s a fact: today, women enter the workforce at the same rate as men. However, that 1:1 ratio suffers from a “[leaky pipeline](#),” or women exiting the workforce before they reach managerial or senior positions. The positive? Many women transition back to the workforce, elect to move laterally, and choose non-traditional positions instead. Working mothers are challenging the traditional notion of a linear career path. Rarely just “marching up the career ladder,” working mothers fit into a career lattice defined by thoughtful choices and creative ways of engaging professionally at different life stages. The result for companies? Increased employee engagement and enrichment, leadership at all levels, and flatter organizations.

2. Working Flexibly

Today, flexible work arrangements (FWAs) are supported by an airtight business case. However, not long ago, FWAs were simply considered a “perk.” Working mothers have vocalized the need for alternate ways to balance work-life, and the call has been taken up by research institutions, government groups, and senior teams at private companies. By exploring options to work flexibly, women have broadened the perspective of many employers. As a result, flexible work today is a possibility for many professionals regardless of gender or parenthood. The result? Employers can use flexibility to improve recruitment and retention, to weather tough economic climates, and to achieve higher employee productivity and

Submissions

Forum accepts first-person essays of any length, humor, poetry, photography, and art from [members](#). We also accept any ideas or topical clippings you many want to send for our use. To contribute to the *Forum*, please send electronic submissions by email to info@mothersandmore.org Indicate "Forum Submission" on the subject line. We do not accept faxed or handwritten submissions.

Note: Mothers & More is not intended as a substitute for medical and/or psychological care of those in need of such care for themselves or their children. Although every measure has been taken to make the information in the Forum as complete and accurate as possible, no Mothers & More member, past or present, shall be liable for any damages resulting from the use or misuse of information contained herein.

loyalty. You add to the conversation when you talk about flexibility – [don't be shy about discussing it with your employer!](#)

3. Amping Up Quality

Parents orchestrate complex schedules, manage demanding people, guide development, mediate high pressure situations and prioritize like pros – all this, outside the workplace. Many working mothers transfer significant skills gained in personal situations to the workplace. This life-to-work experience is a plus to [include in a resume](#) and in your value proposition. Also, we've observed that many professional mothers are hungrier to work and go to greater lengths to do so. You are engaged, multi-talented employees with unique and valuable skill-sets, just waiting to contribute in a workplace that will value you.

4. Sharing and Supporting Change

Working mothers, especially those in high-level positions, are recognizing their contribution to the way we define and do work. By sharing with their peers and younger generations, women are adding to a culture that supports diversity and development. Employers have implemented mentoring and support programs to respond to the challenges experienced by today's workforce. As a working parent, you add a unique perspective and set of leadership qualities to those around you.

Working mothers are enriching the 21st century workforce through their choices, their willingness to speak up, their unique skill-sets, and their leadership. It is not surprising that we've seen social transformation since women become breadwinners, and we only expect more. For working mothers asking yourselves what you bring to the workplace – the answer is, a lot! Consider how each of these points strengthens your value to an employer, and tackle [job search](#) or professional advancement from there.

About Mom Corps NYC

Stephanie Harbour is the President and Owner of Mom Corps NYC. [Mom Corps NYC](#) is a specialized search and staffing firm that partners with Fortune 500 and early stage companies to create and fill flexible, high-level positions. Mom Corps NYC offers part-time, full-time, and project-based opportunities at the professional level to job seekers focused on advancing their careers while balancing family responsibilities. One of fifteen franchised offices nationwide, Mom Corps NYC is implementing job flexibility and work-life balance for talented and motivated professionals.

Our Mission

Mothers & More is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of mothers through support, education and advocacy. We address mothers' needs as individuals and members of society, and promote the value of all the work mothers do.

Our Beliefs:

- A mother is more than any single role she plays at any given point in her lifetime. She is entitled to fully explore and develop her identity as she chooses: as a woman, a citizen, a parent or an employee.
- All the work mothers do – whether paid or unpaid – has social and economic value.
- Caregiving work is real work with real social and economic value.
- All women deserve recognition and support for their right to choose if and how to combine parenting and paid employment.
- All mothers, all children and all families are unique. We respect the wisdom of each mother to decide how to care for her children, her family and herself.
- Mothers have the right to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities without incurring social and economic penalties.
- The transitions women make into and through motherhood are challenging and can be difficult.

Together, mothers are powerful.

CLASSIC FORUM On the Homefront

The Perfect Day

Chris Fletcher

Something wonderful happened recently. I had a perfect day.

I didn't realize it was perfect until it was over, when I curled up between warm flannel sheets and waited for sleep. The bed was soft and I was tired. I snuggled deep, letting memories of the day wash over me, bringing a smile to my lips as I drifted closer and closer to sleep. It was in the wonderful, half-dozing warmth between wakefulness and dreamland that I understood the gift I'd been given, the perfection of the day.



It wasn't a day I would ever have expected to turn out so right. In fact, as the first day back to reality after a week or more of no jobs/no school/no housework, I would have expected it to overflow with problems and protests – but no. My alarm went off at its usual ungodly hour, waking me in time for a couple of hours of solitude before the rest of the family arose. My computer, which had spent the previous day refusing to let me access America Online, patched me through with no problem. (Ah, e-mail: my lifeline to the world.) The kids got up and dressed with a minimum of prodding. My husband left for work on time, the older kids remembered their library books as they headed off to school and my youngest burst into nursery school with a grin, happy to see his friends once again.

And then, with everyone settled, I went home. Home, to a house that held only me for the first time in weeks. Home, to plot a new novel I'd been itching to start. Home, where the laundry was done and the toys were picked up and there was nothing or nobody to call me away from the work I'd waited so long to begin. I sipped ice water and scribbled notes and knew bliss.

One by one the family returned. Noah and I spent an hour cuddling, reading books and rearranging the playroom. When Joshua and Daniel came home, we shared a snack and a game of killer ping pong before they settled down to a minimal amount of homework. Larry slipped out of work early and everyone actually liked dinner (a minor miracle itself in a house full of individualists). The boys did their chores, everyone went to bed on time and I even had a chance to talk with Larry and

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Members and chapters donate to our General Fund as well as our Member Dues Scholarship Fund. Our Member Dues Scholarship Fund is established for women who need financial assistance in paying annual dues and is funded completely by member and chapter donations.

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finish reading Kristin Hannah's excellent *On Mystic Lake* before it was time to turn off the lights, snuggle into bed and see the perfection of the day.

Now, I know that many would look at my day and think, bor-ing. It certainly held none of the usual hallmarks of success – no money, no acclaim, no good news or high-powered contacts or celebrations. Heck, I didn't even lose weight! But it was the day I needed.

It gave me the perfect proportions of solitude and togetherness, of challenge and laughter, of cuddles and contacts. It was a day that made me appreciate the nature of my family, my work, my home. It was a day that warmed me and fulfilled me and left me with a smile on my lips.

In *Simple Abundance*, Sarah Ban Breathnach discusses the need for women – especially busy, frazzled, stretched-to-the-limit mothers – to find and honor their authentic selves. The relentless demands of our multiple, overlapping roles have overwhelmed the quiet voice inside us that tells us what we need, who we are.

I know this. I love my children. I love my husband. I even (mostly) love the hustle and bustle and craziness that comes from a life that revolves around school and Scouts and soccer. But there is more to me than this, more to any of us that this, and on my perfect day, there was time for all those other parts. In *Simple Abundance* terms, I tapped into all the facets of my authentic self that day, and that was what made it perfect for me.

The best part, the ultimate gift of the day, was that now I know what I need. I'll never live that particular day again, but now I have an image to work toward, a memory to pull out when I lose my way (and myself) somewhere between the laundry room and *Goodnight Moon*. As the weeks and months pass I can steer my way closer to that elusive blend once again. Because I liked falling asleep with that smile on my lips. I liked knowing that I had given my best to my family and myself. And I'm going to do my darndest to make sure I can get it back.

And that, for me, will mean perfection.

Chris Fletcher continues to chase perfection while keeping tabs on her five kids, now scattered across three countries and two continents.

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CLASSIC FORUM

Balancing Act

It's Always Something

Julie Somogyi

Sometime between 8 and 8:30 p.m., a familiar routine takes shape at my house. My two children change into their pajamas, brush their teeth and pick out bedtime stories. Then I tuck them into their snuggly beds, kiss them and tell them that I love them. I turn out the lights, wish them a good night's sleep and retreat to the quiet sanctuary of my home office to begin the second half of my day.



I settle in and begin to focus almost immediately. Time is a terrible thing to waste, so they say, and I believe them, whoever “they” are. Then, just as I tune out the chaos around me and begin clicking away on my keyboard, a freaky phenomenon overwhelms me. It’s something I call “being watched syndrome.” Sometimes I hear the faint sounds of little feet making their way down the stairs. Other times I can just sense that there’s someone there. And, still other times, I turn the corner only to jump three feet in the air when I run into one of those stuffed animal-toting munchkins I swear I just tucked in.

“I had a bad dream,” he or she will claim innocently enough. I squint my eyes at the oh-so-sad waif, feign sympathy and comment how remarkable that is since I just put him or her to bed two minutes ago. I turn the child around, tread upstairs once again and re-tuck the sheets. My son’s latest excuse for extending his bedtime relates to his high-water pajamas. He simply can’t sleep because, as he claims confidently, he is “4” and his pjs are not. Size four Superman pajamas get added to my “to do” list, as I realize that no matter how much I accomplish, there is always something left to be done.

It means putting a kid to bed for the sixth time in one night. It also means restocking the toothpaste that everyone hates, despite the cool Luke Skywalker picture on the packaging; digging up foam scraps for a last-minute diorama; building a boat that can hold a zillion little tiles before it sinks; and unloading the groceries in the pouring rain.

Then, there are the mountainous baskets of clean laundry sitting on our bedroom floor that always seem full, even though my husband and I swear we just folded, sorted and put away everything yesterday. I still have the Sunday newspaper that

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was delivered two weeks ago, because surely I'll have time to read it soon. So go the days of our lives.

Actually, we handle the ordinary days pretty well now; things are far less chaotic than when I first returned to work. However, when life takes a U-turn and throws something else our way, we simply do our best to adapt.

Last Friday was a classic example. I scheduled my three office days early in the week to accommodate the two "No School" days that the elementary school declared for parent-teacher conferences. On that particular Friday, I had planned to take my son to his two-hour preschool program in the morning, then to meet up with my husband so we could make a beeline for our favorite museum as soon as preschool was over. Then life threw us a curve. My daughter woke up with a sore throat. So, after dropping my son off at his school, I called the doctor and begged for an appointment. Good thing I did – the diagnosis was strep. Our plans screeched to a halt, and we adapted to a new agenda yet again.

That happens a lot in our house. Usually, however, it's on a day that I am scheduled to be in the office. That's when my spouse, and undisputed soul mate, comes in. Like most wives, I may complain once in a while about his preoccupation with television sports or his forgetfulness, but I heartily praise him for his unflappable ability to step in and help me juggle life's little curve balls. I couldn't make my flexible schedule work without his unfaltering support and encouragement.

Most of the time I can adjust my work time when the kids fall ill. Then there are those days when I can't, and my husband steps up to the plate to pinch-hit that curve ball. When I shower him with apologies for these occasional juggling dilemmas, he dismisses my groveling and moves on. He accepts the unexpected, considering it to be our family norm for the time being. He doesn't expect a spotless house; we work at sorting through the disarray together on the weekends. Since he gets bored eating at home all the time, eating out a couple of days a week is more than acceptable.

Best of all, if he hears my son complain about those high-water pajamas one more time, he may beat me to the store himself.

Julie Somogyi and her husband, Leonard, fully admit to liking life with two teenage children straddling between childhood and adulthood. Their balancing act today requires different skills than it did 10 years ago, and thanks to their trials and tribulations through the early years they feel a little more qualified to handle most of what life throws them. Julie is director of integrated marketing and communications for Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana.