

Tax Warrior Career Tips

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Advice to New Moms on Returning to Work

By: Dottie Leonardi, COO - Drucker & Scaccetti

At Drucker & Scaccetti, our 100-person tax advisory and consulting firm is having a mini baby boom. Our ranks include three new moms, two expectant moms and one returning mom, plus two expectant dads.

We are developing a new parent coaching group to help navigate the return to work for our new parents and are discussing how best to provide this. Who will be the coaches; recent new parents or experienced parents of older children? What advice do new parents want or need? Do men and women need the same advice? Do they want professional or personal advice? Or, do they simply need an ear to listen or a quiet room to nap in?

I wondered what advice I might offer to the new moms returning to work. When I had my babies, now teens, I was a CFO at a regional firm in a predominately-male industry. I wanted "a seat at the table" and a voice in the organization. I did not want to pause my career AND I wanted to be the best mom possible.

There was no road map and no women in my organization at a similar leadership level. I basically had to wing it and what worked for me may not work for all new moms, but below is the advice I could have used.

1. Identify Options. Do you want to return part time? Do you want to transition back over several months? What flexibility do you need, if any? Like me, do you want to pick up where you left off? Ask your human resource department about available options. Also, speak directly with your boss. Tell her candidly what options you desire and outline a plan, being thoughtful to the impact to both colleagues and clients. If you are unsure how to handle all aspects, ask for her assistance but you think through the basic framework before you meet.

2. Assume You Can. Don't assume that as a new mom you cannot juggle the responsibilities of parenthood and professional life. Many women (and men) successfully juggle this every day, some days better than others. If they can do it, you can do it. Don't take a wait-and-see approach.



Men don't. You shouldn't. Be fearless and badass. You can be a wonderful mom and a powerhouse professional.

3. Beware Benevolent Bias. In a genuine desire to assist your transition back to work and not to purposefully sideline you, many organizations assume you need less hours, fewer responsibilities or more time to adjust. Don't let anyone assume what you need or want and don't assume leadership should know. Decide what you can handle and inform your leadership. If you want more opportunity, state it. If you see an opportunity, raise your hand. Don't take it personally if someone exhibits benevolent bias. Politely and pointedly call him or her out on it. Live by the quote attributed to Ayn Rand, "The question isn't who is going to let me; it's who is going to stop me." Don't let anyone stop you.

4. Maintain Perspective. Three to six months of maternity leave - even if taken two or three times over several years - will not derail your career. You may miss a prime opportunity while out on maternity leave or if you want some time after returning to adjust, but it will not be the only opportunity you get (or that you make for yourself). It is no different from when someone is committed to a major project and must pass on other opportunities until that project is completed. This doesn't set them back and it won't set you back.

5. Spend Time Understanding How You Spend Time. As a new mom, your time is a limited resource, so be a fierce protector of it, personally and professionally. Take time to understand what is important to you and how to ensure it happens. The non-essential must fall away.

You must be selective accepting social invitations. Be extremely thoughtful about how and with whom you spend time. It means saying no to many things and saying yes to spending precious time with family and close friends.

Approach daycare and school activities with an eye towards quality and not quantity. You don't have to attend every event. Request a complete events calendar at the beginning of the year, then divide and conquer with your partner, attending separately two or three events each that are most meaningful to your child. Together attend awards, recitals and championship events. Volunteer opportunities are essential to most schools and fortunately they offer many options. Choose ones that fit your work schedule. I focused on weekend events, missing the weekday bake sales to chaperone the weekend dances.

Exercise judiciousness with networking opportunities at work. As a new mom, I said no to most things outside of work hours. This was a mistake. I should have selectively said yes. The right networking opportunities are crucial to building your personal brand and influence. Is there an industry specific event attended by key players? Hire a babysitter and go. Meet and greet with no discernable objective? Politely decline. Dinner invites multiple times a month? Suggest lunch instead.

Lunch is valuable time in your business day that doesn't take away from your family. Don't fall into the trap of eating with the same two colleagues every day or at your desk. Use lunch to network with potential clients and vendors, as well as influencers and leaders within your organization. Decide on which critical contacts you need to nurture and schedule lunches in advance.

6. Embrace Your Calendar. Between baby and business your days and weeks will pass in a blur. Place must-do items on your calendar, both to keep yourself on track and so other people don't hijack your calendar. Does your child's school have can't-miss events? Put on your work calendar ASAP. Quarterly shareholder or client meetings you must attend? Schedule them a year in advance, along with time to prepare. Monthly reports due on a certain date? Block out both the due date and the time to complete on your calendar. Standing date night? Pencil it in now. Brunch with your girl squad? Schedule the next one before paying the check. Bi-annual networking lunches? Set as recurring meetings.

7. Live Close to Where You Work. Sacrifice house size and "better" school districts for commute time. Time spent commuting is time not spent with your family or on your career. It is lost time. You are more important to your children than the size of your yard or the school they attend. Even if you work on the train during your commute, you don't want to be an hour away from home in an emergency or a sudden school closing for a weather event. If you won't or can't move, ask your firm for "work-from-home" options. Keep your commute to less than 30 minutes.

8. Outsource. In business, we routinely outsource tasks we don't specialize in or that others can do more economically. Outsource in your personal life. Outsource things you don't do well or don't enjoy. Don't view it as money out of pocket; consider it an investment in your career, your children and your sanity. I outsource house cleaning. As a product of a blue-collar family, this was difficult for me to embrace, until I did the math and realized working 50-hour weeks plus spending weekends cleaning, left too few hours for fun with my family. Hiring a cleaning service was not as expensive as I thought and worth every penny. Outsource scrubbing floors and toilets. Outsource ironing and trips to the dry cleaner. Outsource cooking to the prepared meals section at your supermarket or Uber Eats. Do whatever works to make you a more-fun, less-stressed mom on the weekends and a better-rested professional on Monday morning.

9. Choose Your Partner Wisely. Your partner must share in raising your children, including the drop off and pickups, doctor visits, and school activities for you to succeed at work and life. You cannot be the only one taking time off for these things. Far too many women predominately shoulder this duty, even when their salary is as vital to their family's livelihood as their partners' salary. Any success I have in my career since having my children has been possible due to my husband, a true partner in raising our children. Without him sharing this responsibility, I can't commit the energy and time I do to my career and still have time to enjoy our family.

For those moms without a partner, you have my never-ending respect, as returning to work will be measurably more difficult for you. You must actively find a network of family, friends, neighbors,

and other parents who can help. Don't try to go it alone. Ask for help. Hire help. Build your village. Building a village is a good idea for those of us with partners, too.

10. Be Kind. Recently, while watching videos taken when my children were small, I was horrified by the appearance of my house: the unopened boxes in a corner a year after the move; the mail piled haphazardly on the buffet; the explosion of toys and toddler paraphernalia everywhere. As I was chastising myself about the chaos, I nearly missed the joyful delight in my children's faces as they danced and sang for me from the video. My house was a mess, but my kids were happy. I had to remind myself to be as kind to myself as I would to a friend. At the time, I was a relatively new mom in a senior leadership role at a successful firm, with happy kids, a wonderful husband, and most of my sanity. A ransacked house was a small price to pay.

So be kind to yourself and other women. Don't judge women who choose different options than you and don't judge yourself when it appears someone else has it all together – they don't. Ask for help when you need it and help others when you can. Be the owner of your career and show your sons and daughters what wonderful things women in the workforce do.