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EMPOWERING Women

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VALORIE BURTON:
What Children Learn from
Work-at-Home Moms



WHAT ARE YOU
TEACHING
YOUR KIDS?

**THE REAL IMPACT OF YOUR HOME-BASED
BUSINESS ON YOUR KIDS**

by Valorie Burton



WHAT ARE THE POSITIVES THAT KIDS CAN LEARN FROM PARENTS WHO WORK FROM HOME?

- That you can control your work life. You don't have to work for someone else if you don't want to.
- That it is possible to be a stay-at-home parent and still have a professional life.
- That they are important enough for their parents to rearrange their lives to accommodate spending time with them.
- That they can be creative when they envision their future.
- How to set boundaries that empower you to have a joyful personal *and* professional life.

WHAT ARE NEGATIVES THAT KIDS HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO LEARN FROM HOME-BASED PARENTS, IF PARENTS ARE NOT CAREFUL TO SET BOUNDARIES?

- That they are not as important to you as your work.
- That home is not a haven, but rather a place where work takes over one's personal life.

So what do kids learn from parents when they don't have clear boundaries between work and home?

"It didn't make me want to work from home," says Kristin Tucker, 25, whose mother launched a public relations business when she was a toddler and that continued until Tucker was in college. "When you go home, you want it to be your refuge. And when work is at home, it's hard to get away."

Working from home is often touted as the solution to tip the scales in your favor toward balancing work and family. With more time at home, the assumption is that kids naturally benefit, right? Maybe. It depends on the parent.

If you follow a few guidelines, working from home can have a positive impact on your children—emotionally, mentally and financially. Without those guidelines, it's also possible for a work-from-home arrangement to become a frustrating experience for both you and your family. The good news is that you hold the key to work-from-home success.

"Parents who work from home have to be willing to establish some clear boundaries between work time and family time," says Carole Billingham, a life coach who just celebrated her 10th anniversary as a home-based entrepreneur. Billingham coaches clients by phone from her home office in Estes Park, Colo.

"My office is next to the family room. It's harder when you are passionate about your work not to cross those boundaries." If you are not clear about your boundaries, Billingham says, you will find yourself checking e-mail and doing work during times when you should be with your family.

Establishing a clear line between work and home seems to be at the root of the biggest challenges parents who work from home face. The key is to model the kind of behavior that allows the entire family—yourself included—to have a sanctuary from work stress at home. It is a challenge, but one that can be managed well if you are intentional about your choices.





She saw that there was a benefit to her mother having a home-based business, but says it didn't seem "as nice as people make it out to be."

"I agree that it's convenient," she says. "You don't have to deal with traffic or go to an office, but it can invade your life. I think going to an office outside your home can have benefits."

She adds, "I really admired the fact that my mom was able to run her own business successfully, especially being a single parent, and having a kid in private school and juggling everything in her life. I really appreciated that."

HER TOP THREE TIPS FOR STAY-AT-HOME ENTREPRENEURS WHO WANT THE MOST POSITIVE IMPACT IN THEIR HOMES:

1. Make a work schedule as if you were going to a regular job. Have "hours," just as you would if you had a regular job.

2. Leave work at work and say to yourself at the end of the day, "I'm home now."
3. Talk to your kids about why you chose to do it and what the benefits are. This may inspire and guide them as they make choices in the futures about their own careers.

Although Tucker admits that being the child of a home-based entrepreneur posed the challenges of work-life balance in her household, she also sees some positive benefits.

"Because of my mom I know I'd rather work for myself than work for someone else," Tucker admits. "My mother was happier having something that was hers. Even as a kid, I loved seeing her business card with her name and business on it. I was really proud of her and being able to say, 'That's my mom.'"

After finishing a master's degree in film writing last year and taking an editorial position at a respectable newspaper, Tucker took a risk by quitting her job and moving to Los Angeles to follow her passion for screenwriting and acting.

"In a roundabout way, I was influenced by my mother's risk-taking mentality," she says of her leap of faith to pursue her dream. "I learned from her that you can have what you want."

Perhaps it is the belief that 'anything is possible' that is the biggest lesson kids learn from entrepreneurial parents. They see their parents doing something most are not—and making it work. They see that life can be different. It doesn't have to be a 9-to-5 job if that's not what they want.

"I think my son has learned that work can look a lot of different ways," says Angie Steele, who provides marketing and public relations support to small-business owners from her home outside Raleigh, North Carolina. Both she and her husband operate their businesses from home.

Carole Billingham concurs. "My 5-year-old daughter Ania specifically said to me the other day, 'When I grow up, I want to be a doctor *and* a mommy.'" By being a mom and a businesswoman, she hopes to illustrate for her daughter that she can create what she wants in her life.

Carole also hopes to send Ania the message that she matters.

"I pick her up from school. I don't work on Fridays, when she is only in school for a half day, so I dedicate that day to her," Billingham adds.

She also points out the significance of the type of business an entrepreneur decides to operate from home. "I didn't plan for coaching to be such a perfect fit for motherhood," she notes. It gives her the flexibility to choose a schedule that fits the needs of her family perfectly—both financially and emotionally.

ADVICE FROM CAROLE BILLINGHAM, Master Certified Coach:

Set healthy and firm boundaries around your work so you are fully present in whatever you are doing—whether it is work or being with your family.

Take yourself seriously as a professional, and don't discount the value you are bringing to your family and to your world.

Celebrate the flexibility and freedom that you have as a home-based entrepreneur.



Twelve-year-old Wade Murray agrees. “I’ve learned from my mom that you can do work anytime it fits into your schedule,” says Wade, whose mom is retired and now works from home. “Sometimes she works early, and sometimes she works late, depending on what’s going on with me.”

He says he doesn’t see any downside to his mother working from home. “Some of my friends’ parents leave home in the mornings before they go to school,” Wade says. “They have to make their own breakfast and things like that. They go home in the afternoon by themselves. I like that my mom can be there for me.”

His sentiments are exactly what many home-based business owners hope their kids feel about them working from home. But it isn’t always easy.

“My biggest challenge is juggling work and project deadlines against the needs of my child,” says Steele. “My son needs me, but I have to get this work done within the next hour. What do I do?”

She has found her solution in reassuring her son when she has a deadline to meet—and following through on promises to spend time with him when a project is completed.

“If your child is old enough to understand, explain the fact that you do have a job—even though it’s at home—that requires you to get certain things done,” she advises. “Also, let your child know that when the work is done, the two of you can do something fun together.”



Overall, it seems that the benefits of a home-based work life can outweigh the negatives—as long as you and your family establish clear boundaries and a plan to maximize the advantages of your working from home. As I work with entrepreneurs and professionals, I have found that one of the most effective ways to manage the home-based dynamic is to get clear about what will best support you in achieving success and what will support your family.

First, notice what’s not working well for you. Then identify some of the options that could work better. You may need to ask for more support from family members. For example, the families of home-based business owners often expect them to carry a heavier load of household work because, after all, they are at home all day. That may work fine for you at times, but not all the time.

Initiate a conversation with your kids and your spouse about how your business impacts them in the home, and what could be some solutions to make it work well for everyone. Then experiment with the ideas for a while—a few days or even a few weeks.

Come back together after you’ve tried your new options, and discuss what worked and what didn’t. Make adjustments until you find the right plan for you. Finding solutions in this collaborative way will model for your children a creative and effective way to problem-solve. It will also empower them to be a part of the solution.

For example, if you endure constant interruptions during the summer months when your children are out of school, you might come to a mutually agreeable solution that allows both you and them to have needs met. You might agree not to stay holed up in your office for more than hour or two at a time, while they agree to give you the peace and quiet you need between your breaks.

Whatever solutions you develop, be sure to honor them. Don’t agree to stop working at 5:30 p.m. if you aren’t going to actually do it. Commit to changes that you have the structure and capacity to accomplish right now.

Perhaps the greatest gifts from your home-based business to your children are your ability to be more available to them and to let them see balanced professional success firsthand.

“The most significant thing I think my child learns daily is that I am here for her, and that she comes first and work comes second,” Billingham says. *EW*



Valorie Burton, a life coach and professional speaker, is the author of What’s Really Holding You Back?, Listen to Your Life, and Rich Minds, Rich Rewards. Subscribe to her free e-newsletter at www.valorieburton.com.