

The Legal Intelligencer

Reasons Why Being a Mom Makes Me a Better Lawyer

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When people learn that I have three children ages 4 and under, you can imagine their first reaction: "You have your hands full."

When they discover that I am also a full-time attorney and director at a law firm, their reaction evolves to something like, "I don't know how you do it."

Because of these reactions, I sometimes wonder what a client thinks about my dual roles and how I successfully manage what can only be described as a sophisticated juggling act every day.

I freely admit that a strategically placed scarf has often been a valuable tool in hiding what one of my children might have deposited on my blouse while I was holding them.

While I'm on an evening call with a client, I submit that I have resorted to using Post-its to entertain my child.

My juggling act has also required me to stitch together a vast network of caregivers to watch and transport my children in the evening so that I can be somewhere else.

Oftentimes, I am required to do all of this with very little sleep, and — in a number of instances — after being up for as many as five hours before I make it into the office bright and early.

Looking at the evidence I've offered, some clients might question my ability to juggle being a mom and an effective attorney.

To those skeptics, I'd offer a competing and much more compelling argument as to why my juggling act actually makes me an even more valuable counselor and advocate:

- No. 1: I have a Plan A, B, C and D, and if that doesn't work, I'll come up with Plan E through Z before anyone realizes there was a problem with Plan A. Being a lawyer makes me a problem solver, but being a mom makes me an even better problem solver. That is true for how I'll juggle

my personal life to deal with your issues, and that is also why I will exceed your expectations in how I handle an issue for you. I have tons of practice with backup plans, and if Plan Z is coming up with a new strategy to close your deal on time when the other side's key business contact is out of the country, I'll figure out a way to do that, too.

- No. 2: Time is on your side. You are being billed by the hour, and that is a huge benefit to you. I have a lot to fit into my day, including planning my daughter's birthday party for tomorrow on the way home from work. I'll handle your problem while giving you my very best, but I'll also work smartly and efficiently. For me, it's not an option. It's a requirement.

- No. 3: I can explain it to you in plain English. I can switch from Legalese to Dora-ese without pause. Want me to boil an issue down to the basics for you? No problem. I have answered the "Why" question 300 times in a row, and with that experience, I've learned to boil anything down to a simple answer.

- No. 4: I will deliver what I promise. If I promise my son a reward for good behavior, he'll expect that reward if he has delivered on his end of the bargain. I know and respect the value of my word, and I know that I have to maintain that trust. If I tell you I'll have it to you Friday, I mean it. I also understand that communicating is critical, and I need to set your expectations and include you in the process.

- No. 5: I will put things in perspective. As a parent, I know I can't control everything, but I am supposed to do so to my utmost ability. I will aim for an A+ every time, but I also know that there is a balancing act that depends upon how much time you have, what type of business concerns you have, and what type of resistance you might get within your organization. I am accustomed to weighing all of those contributing factors and figuring out what is most important. I have the perfect training module for this at home. Compare such a corporate scenario to when all three kids need me at once and I need to figure out which one to tend to first. The answer is usually the one dancing on the kitchen table.

- No. 6: You will be treated like a human. Even though this is business, I am not afraid to be human, and you shouldn't be either. Nothing has humbled me more than parenting and pregnancy. If I have an answer, I'll tell you. If I don't, I'll tell you. If you need something this Friday because you are on vacation next week, I understand. I get it and you can tell me those things if you want. I won't hold it against you. I'll appreciate that you are human, too. At the same time, you won't hear about my kids' first visit from the tooth fairy, first home run or first dance recital or how many times my kids woke me up last night unless you want to hear about it.

- No. 7: Failure is not an option. My kid wants a Tickle Me Whatever for Christmas? You bet I'll find one for my kid. At the same time, when I know something matters to you, I'll move heaven and earth (ethically, of course) to deliver it to you. If it matters to you, it matters to me.

Convinced yet? While you're pondering your answer, let me offer one final thought. If I promise you something by Friday and it doesn't happen, it is not because I am a mom with three young kids at home.

It is because we had to come up with Plan AA because of a new development in the deal.

If you ask me, mere mortals are probably not capable of coming up with a Plan AA on cue. That's a territory best reserved for superheroes — probably not unlike one of the caped crusaders my kids watch on my phone on Saturday mornings while I'm trying to entertain them so I can come up with Plan AA with you. •

Christie B. Tillapaugh is a director at Cohen & Grigsby who practices corporate and securities law. She has an amazing husband with similar stories, who also practices law but uses his tie rather than a scarf to hide what the kids might have left behind on his shirt.