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Work It, Moms!

Three Bergen mothers balance their careers with raising children

Getting the right work-life balance is always challenging, but perhaps never so much as when you're raising children. Here, three amazing women share insights into simultaneously managing — and enjoying — their businesses and families.

SANDY RUBINSTEIN

"My kids push me every day and challenge me to never take my foot off the gas." — SANDY RUBINSTEIN

WRITTEN BY BROOKE PERRY

Sandy Rubinstein follows a few simple guidelines for achieving work-life balance: a half-hour of "me time" before the family gets up, tag-teaming with her husband on school drop-offs and pickups, and the occasional early-morning load of laundry. One thing, however, is non-negotiable: a daily after-school debrief with her 15-year-old twin sons, Max and Jake.

"It's something my husband and I started years ago when the boys were young, and now everyone knows that at 3 p.m., there are no calls or meetings on my calendar, just 30 minutes to discuss their school day and talk about what's on everyone's plate. It's the key to making every evening flow better," she says.

As CEO of DXAgency, a Bergen County-based digital marketing firm founded in 2004 by her husband, Mark Klein, Rubinstein who lives in Edgewater, oversees one of the country's fastest-growing private companies, according to *Inc.* magazine's "Inc. 5000" annual ranking. She joined the agency nearly 10 years ago, following 20 years in senior marketing roles at major televi-

sion networks like Lifetime Television and Nickelodeon. She credits one lengthy, long-distance post, requiring a weekly commute to Los Angeles, with helping her boys understand that work is something to be valued. "By the time they were 6, I'd taught them how to read a media plan and critique television commercials," she smiles. "I think from a young age they've felt vested in my professional success.

"I tell mothers that I meet, 'There's no trophy, and there isn't a wrong way or right way to parent,'" she says. "We always wanted our children to respect what we do and feel that they were a part of it."

While Rubinstein shared the finer points of marketing, her husband, then an executive at Sony Music, had the boys listening to music demos. "We've always included them in what we do," she says, "and we want them

to include us in what they do."

Turns out, what they do is an equally interesting story. In 2016, when they were just 14 years old, Max and Jake launched a website, *Kids That Do Good* (kidsthatdogood.com). The site was inspired by their shared experience of being turned down as volunteers in a local soup kitchen due to their age. It's designed to connect young volunteers with charitable organizations and events that welcome kids as volunteers. In the two years since its launch, the Klein twins have been profiled in the *Wall Street Journal*, interviewed on NBC's *Today* show, and named in a *Reader's Digest* year-end salute to the "17 Most Inspirational Kids of 2017."

It's just one of many "proud mom moments" for Rubinstein, who recalls "when the boys were around 7 years old, they decided to turn their birthdays into charitable events." Subsequent celebrations helped raise money to buy laptops for the local fire department and to purchase bullet-proof vests for local police.

The boys call their mom's sense of social responsibility a guiding force. "Our mom is always looking for ways to help us make the right decisions," Jake says. "She treats us like partners

AGE 45

HOMETOWN
EDGEWATER

CHILDREN
15-YEAR-OLD TWIN
BOYS, MAX AND
JAKE

JOB TITLE
CEO OF DXAGENCY,
A BERGEN COUNTY-
BASED DIGITAL
MARKETING FIRM



on her team and we always want to know her opinion before we take on something new. She is kind and thoughtful and always there when we need her. I don't know how she does it all."

Rubinstein founded Edgewater Strong to provide much-needed resources and more than \$200,000 in aid for more than 200 families displaced by a 2015 fire at Avalon at Edgewater. Later, she founded the Edgewater Education Foundation, which has raised more than \$160,000 to fund teacher grants in the "STEAM" areas of science, technology, engineering, the arts, and math. Thanks to her efforts, students at Edgewater and Leonia area schools now have access to a \$30,000 Apple Mac lab, can engineer and write music, and can study business via an online program that allows them to manage the day-to-day details of a virtual restaurant.

Rubinstein was elected to the Edgewater Board of Education in 2012. Joanne Megargee, superintendent of Leonia Public Schools, says, "As the Edgewater Board liaison to the Leonia Board of Education, Sandy is the perfect representation of a board member whose interest is focused on the service of our students and the communities she serves."

What drives Rubinstein are her husband and boys, whom she calls her "biggest sources of inspiration."

"Our mom does the things you would expect — make our lunch, wake us up for school, help with homework," Max says. "But what stands out is how she goes above and beyond for our family and for the things that matter most. She works full time, knows everything that is going on in our lives, helps with anything we need, and is never too busy for us."

When she's not working her magic on consumer brands and sports teams, Rubinstein is savoring the "small town, big city" feel of her hometown of Edgewater. "It's such a great little town, and it feels part of the (201) while still feeling connected to the (212)," she says. Her favorite restaurants include Roberto's, River Palm Terrace, and Le Jardin, but it's her Edgewater office, housed in a red brick schoolhouse dating back to the late 1890s, that really inspires her. Thanks to Rubinstein, the historic building is — once again — engaging students. In January, she welcomed business school students from her alma mater, the University of Miami, for a hands-on winter internship. Her advice: Try to take a step back from being the driver of the train to listen to and learn from others. It's about giving up the fear that you're not driving and instead saying, "We're driving this together, and it's going to be awesome." >

