

MOM LIFE

How I Got Past the Fear that Having a Child Would Hurt My Career



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My 12-month-old daughter took a few gulps of water and pushed the sippy cup against my husband's firm grip.

"She's done," I told him.

He looked puzzled.

"How do you know?"

It seems intuitive that a pushing away motion would indicate a lack of desire, but my growth in reading my daughter's



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[skill set](#) I've cultivated in motherhood.

Beyond understanding non-verbal cues, a given day as our family's [primary caregiver](#) involves a slew of skills that enhance any professional resume. For example, take my careful word choice when I'm describing the baby's needs to my husband above her crying ([communication](#) under stress). Or abating the situation that led to the crying (crisis [management](#)). Or giving directions to the contractor while researching new month-appropriate meal plans while slipping spoonfuls of applesauce into an eager mouth (multi-tasking). Or occupying the restless child with new household items-turned-toys (creativity). Or bringing the household into a rotation of groceries and upkeep in the new era (project management).

As I balance caregiving with my own professional endeavors, I have grown [confident](#) that my daughter is not hurting my career but accelerating it. Motherhood has not forced me to abandon my autonomy, but has strengthened it. My very decision to become a mother was just that: mine. And my current season of life reminds me daily that only I can decide what kind of life I want to live.

Every good thing costs something. Close relationships require your time and empathy, while living with purpose and intention often means giving up convenience. And motherhood is no



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me, I would question its worth.

For all its hardships, motherhood has called me to balance competing priorities and communicate boundaries in my personal life that transcend to the professional world. It's a skill set I'm developing in addition to those listed above. But I'm learning that the daily work of understanding a rapidly changing child's needs are just as helpful to my professional growth as the cognitive proficiencies that have built my career.

After all, any kind of personal growth inherently translates to the professional world. Our different spheres aren't quite so separate as we think, which explains why newly engaged colleagues are so cheerful around the office, why employees return from sabbaticals with more creativity, and why workers at peace with themselves get along with their deskmates.

This is why companies are investing so much in their employees' personal [wellness](#). It's why [maternity](#) leave is so important. And it's why family benefits are crucial to maintaining a workforce. "Happy families are all alike," says Tolstoy – and the same goes for workers.

My experience certainly does not dismiss the barriers that make motherhood [harder](#) than it needs to be: the monetary and social costs, the time poured out, or the emotional burdens



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necessary, but much of it can be alleviated. I chose to work while raising my daughter because as a mother, I can better advocate for other mothers in the workforce – especially the least advantaged among us. I can normalize our experience. I can improve it. I can do it with my daughter by my side. I can work to give her a world in which the barriers are lower, the burdens lighter. I can say yes to work and to motherhood without fear or guilt. And I have.

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Carmen Dahlberg is the founder of [Belle Detroit, L3C](#) a creative agency that provides high-quality creative work to businesses by training and employing low-income Detroit moms.



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