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Boss? Mom? How to Be Successful at Both in This Industry

Set Goals That Make Sense for Your Life and Your Job

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The one with the answers, that's what they call you -- but it's not how you feel. Years ago, your priorities were probably pretty easy to define: Make VP, check; get married, check; start a family, check.

Now things are more complicated, but you still have those last-minute deadlines, crisis conference calls and meetings that begin at 6 p.m. Somewhere along the line you lost that balance between your work life and personal life. But things are not about to get easier in the current economic environment. Media and marketing firms are under increasing pressure to

work smarter, faster and more cheaply.

That, in turn, puts added stress on working moms in the high-octane advertising industry, of course. But you can keep it together. Doing so means developing goals that work for both you and your boss -- goals that help you succeed at work and at life. Setting goals that work, in fact, was the focus of a recent coaching seminar I conducted with working parents at Digitas, one of several I plan to conduct as part of my new program, A Working Life. The seminars will help parents cope with the everyday challenges of managing the yin and yang of their personal and work lives. I shared the following tips to get started with the folks in the first seminar, and I'll share them with you here:

1. Set your goals. Your goals today are probably not the same as they were five or 10 years ago, and that's OK; your priorities have changed. The first step is to recognize that your life

stage plays a part in setting your goals. Because you are a working mom, your life can branch in many directions, and your goals need to reflect the path that you are on today. Realize that your goals can be as fluid as your life. Then consider the kind of goals you want to set for yourself -- are they work or home related, or are they a combination of the two? Are your goals centered around your personal development, a specific client objective, or achieving a better balance of work and life? Here are some tips for picking your goals: First, get input. Discuss goal setting with others, whether it be your spouse, an office mentor or a coach. Second, acknowledge there is no right or wrong decision. Third, have confidence in the choices you make, and finally, plan to reevaluate your goals every six months.

One of the challenges for many working moms in developing goals is the desire to achieve "big things." In our seminar at Digitas, we talked about the importance of being realistic during the goal-setting process. Set small goals rather than trying to achieve work/life balance overall.

2. Be open about your goals. To be successful, it will be much easier if you have the support of your family, friends, coworkers and boss. Maintain your credibility and support from these key stake-holders by letting them know what to expect from you, and meeting those expectations. Talk to your boss and co-workers about your goals, and your plan for success. Keep a copy of them close at hand (in your purse/wallet) to remind you of what you want to achieve. Most important, don't give up.

3. Reach your goals. Making goals realistic and attainable is key to success. They don't all have to be life-altering -- remember, you want to be able to get an early win. As an example, if you are working toward more family-dinner time because you leave the office every night at 7:30 p.m., make your goal to leave the office twice a week by 6 p.m. Identify the biggest barrier to making each goal work, and come up with practical solutions. Ask yourself what it will take to make this doable; develop the plan and stick to it. Here are some tactics to consider:

- Understand your business priorities and make sure your goals allow you to succeed in them.
- Empower key decision-makers on your team.
- Stand up for yourself and your choices at all times.
- Develop a peer network who can support you in achieving your goals.
- Build a positive relationship with your boss so you can go to her/him in an emergency.

Finally, be sure you know how you are going to evaluate success, and give yourself an easy way to measure it. It's important to remember that setting goals is not a magic wand that will help solve all your problems, but a tool to help you better manage your life. You may decide if you want to formally share these goals as part of an annual review process or keep them informally as your own personal goals. Think about what success will feel like, and make sure you know how you will determine if you have achieved your goals. Most important, set

yourself up to win. Be realistic about what you can achieve and focus in on that objective. When you accomplish a goal, celebrate that success before you move on to the next one.

Understanding your motivations, defining your goals and achieving them will not only help you to be the boss and mom you want to be, but will allow you to excel at both.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Judy Laughren is a partner at Mercury Group, an executive-search firm and consultancy focused on media companies, and she has worked in the agency business for more than 30 years, having started her career at Doyle Dane Bernbach. Judy has a B.A. in psychology from Pennsylvania State University and resides in New York.