

Doing it My Way: Working Moms Strive for a Happy, Balanced Life

By: Lori Barrett, Thinkertots Founder

A successful career. A beautiful child. A happy home. Women across the country are striving every day to find a way to balance their professional and personal lives. Without the support of their employers, women who hope to “Have-It-All” have two choices. They can remove themselves from the workforce (unhappily) and stay home with their children for up to a decade or more. Or, they can adapt themselves (again, unhappily) to their workplace structure, which usually means working more hours than is ideal or taking lesser positions (and passing up promotion opportunities) to gain the flexibility they need.

Most women want to be there for their children more than the typical 9 to 5 grind allows. At the same time, they want to do something they really love, while nurturing their creative spirit. The bottom line is feeling fulfilled as mothers and contributing their talents in a meaningful way, benefiting their community not just their own children.

Turning this dream into reality requires some bold thinking and action. Some women may decide to stay with what they know, not rock the boat, and remain unhappy and unfulfilled. Others may wish for a change in their lives, but simply don't know what to do to make that happen. There is a segment of this huge population of women with similar challenges, however, who are figuring it out and exploring new options and opportunities.

When my first child was born, I faced the same dilemma shared by so many working moms. I knew I wanted and needed to spend meaningful time with my son at this critical early formative stage of his life. At the same time, I was determined to utilize my education and professional background to be more than a stay-at-home mom, to continue to apply my child development background in a way that would make a difference for other families as well.

Fortunately, I was able to address both issues by founding Thinkertots Learning Centers. As the owner and program director of our first location, I was able to continue my professional career, enjoy the flexibility to spend time with my children at home and at work, while providing a needed child development learning activity center for children ranging from infants to toddlers. This “pre pre-K” age group was tremendously underserved in terms of age appropriate classes to stimulate early learning based on sound child development theory and practice.

Many women are similarly fighting back, taking charge and going into business for themselves. In fact, women-owned businesses have become the fastest

growing segment in the small business category. Home-based, Internet-focused businesses. Consulting businesses in their fields of professional expertise. Other businesses based on their professional backgrounds, or their personal passions.

Women are also the fastest growing segment among franchise buyers. Our first Thinkertots franchisees became aware of our learning centers because they enrolled their own children in our programs. These moms saw firsthand that the concept was viable based on consumer demand, provided flexible hours, could be located close to home and offered the opportunity to spend quality time with their own children while running a successful business. Best of all, it was fun and beneficial to their communities.

In fact, we target our marketing messages specifically to reach women in this category – not through traditional franchise sales channels – because we found that our best prospects are women who do not fit the profile of typical franchisees.

More and more women are realizing that they don't have to feel frustrated about their desire to be both a mom and a businessperson. Their fate is not controlled by their former employers, or dominated by the needs of their children. By focusing on the things that are important to them – and taking a chance on new ideas and opportunities – they can do it their way. They are finding fulfillment by balancing both sides of their personas and answering happily to the titles of Mommy and Boss.