

A Working Mother

Chanel Majeks
*Barrister & Solicitor,
Majeks Legal Pty Ltd*



Nothing could have prepared me for motherhood. All the books, advice and well wishes, in the end, only gave me a glimpse of what the reality of life being a new mum would be like. Naturally, being a mother presents daily challenges to all new mums and dads but when you add to the mix a legal practice at times the enormity of the challenges can get just plain daunting. Running a practice whilst being the primary carer for my daughter (my husband works away six months a year) has meant the last four months have really been a steep learning curve.

As a sole practitioner I am fortunate to enjoy a degree of flexibility when it comes to my work hours, so I was able to start working again when my daughter was seven weeks old. Among the main challenges I have faced as a working mum has been time management. My ability to do what I want when I want (or my clients want!) is less than what it was before. It is a balancing act and as my daughter gets older and her routine is more predictable I have been able to schedule appointments, court appearances and office time more effectively. Initially, each day was as unpredictable as the one before it. A new baby and a new schedule meant that for the first time in my professional life there were simply things that I could not control. Even now there are days that it is impossible for me to be in the office at all; at other times I will be in trial all day without a hitch. Despite this, my ability to self-manage (a luxury afforded to me by being my own boss) has meant that I am able to control my workload.

Naturally, I no longer maintain a practice as large as I did before my daughter was born. The challenge of being able to say no

to new work and manage the work I have currently has been my biggest. As a criminal defence lawyer, it is not often that I have said no to work in the past, but the reality of being a working mum is that my professional capacity has diminished. In order to service the clients that I do have properly, I have had to learn to know my limits and refer work on where it is the right thing to do not only for my family but for the client. I have been able to enjoy the best of both worlds without compromising my commitment to either.

For any new mums who plan on going back to work I suggest that you invest in setting up a home office. Having a home office has meant that I can keep my finger on the pulse of my practice without necessarily being in the office. My ability to access my work database and email, without leaving home, has frankly been a lifesaver. It has meant that I can attend to matters as they arise rather than have work build up until I'm in a position to be able to go into the office. A home office and great support staff has meant my business has continued to run rather than coming to a grinding halt, which in the cut and thrust of criminal defence practice could be catastrophic.

In the end, I couldn't do what I do without the support network that I have around me, both personal and professional. My family and friends have been invaluable and my colleagues have provided advice and support without reservation. The saying that it takes a village to raise a child, for working mothers today, perhaps means more now than it ever has!