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More Than a Job

Managing Your Career and Pregnancy

By Teri Brown

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Sometimes being pregnant can seem overwhelming. For first-time moms, not knowing what to expect can be stressful. Those pregnant with child No. 2 may be concerned about being the mother of two children as opposed to one. To top it all off, the number of mothers who work up until the last few weeks of their pregnancy is skyrocketing. Managing your career while dealing with your pregnancy and preparing for Baby can seem like a lot, but planning can alleviate much of the stress, leaving you better able to enjoy the journey.

Family Policies

Christy Murphy from New Castle, Del., found that understanding employers and a strong family-friendly policy can go a long way to make pregnancy both a happier and healthier experience. She works as a unit manager for HSBC-North America and was concerned that having to leave work earlier than planned because of a high-risk pregnancy would affect her career. But those fears were unfounded.

"During my first pregnancy, I had a few scares resulting in several unscheduled trips to my doctor due to false labor," says Murphy. "My boss was more than understanding and willing to work with me to ensure flexibility in my schedule, whether I had to come in late, leave early or take the day off. I was uneasy with leaving earlier than planned, but my boss was extremely understanding and made sure that my work and team were taken care of. Because of his help, I was able to focus on what was most important – taking care of myself so that I could deliver a healthy child."

Murphy is currently pregnant with her second child and has found that managing motherhood, pregnancy and a career is manageable with support from others.

"I have to say that my boss and upper management have helped me through this process a great deal," says Murphy. "If for some reason I can't make it into work or have to leave early for a doctor's appointment, it is never an issue, which makes it that much easier. The fact that I'm very organized and create a 'to do' list every day helps, too."

Going Your Own Way

Diedre Dennis Wachbrit is an attorney who started her own firm after becoming pregnant with her first child. She wanted more flexibility than she would find in traditional firms and knew this flexibility would be important when raising her family. For quite some time she ran her business with one other "mommy friend," but now she has a thriving firm with 10 employees. As an employer she wants to give her employees the same flexibility she enjoyed. She believes this is important for the health of both the mother and the unborn child, not to mention the health of the growing family.

"Whether an employee is pregnant, a new mother, going through a tough time with family or facing some sort of other family issue, my firm is committed to making that employee's preferred schedule work," says Wachbrit. "For one paralegal, this meant a six-month maternity leave, returning just one day per week. For another, it meant working from home during late pregnancy and early motherhood. For one it meant setting up an office downstairs for her so she wouldn't have to climb the stairs. For another it means making an office available for her to pump her breastmilk and allowing her to bring her baby with her to work from time to time."

Making It Work

Brette McWhorter Sember is the author of the book [Your Practical Pregnancy Planner: Everything You Need to Know about the Financial and Legal Aspects of Planning for Your New Baby](#) (McGraw-Hill, 2005). She believes striking a balance between the needs of your career and the needs of your pregnancy is important to your health and the health of your baby.

"It's important to strike a balance in your life when you're working and pregnant," says McWhorter Sember. "There are times when you're going to be more tired than ever before, and you need to make room in your life for rest. When your baby is here, you'll be doing a lot of balancing to make things work, so starting now is actually good practice."

McWhorter Sember says you can most definitely continue working and being a very successful person in your career, but you've got to be attuned to your body and pay attention to its signals.

"You can make subtle changes in your work week that will benefit you. Breaks to get snacks or get up and get your blood moving," says McWhorter Sember.

McWhorter Sember gives the following tips for simultaneously managing your pregnancy and your career – successfully!

- Some women are very concerned about being mommy tracked. Job discrimination is illegal, but mommy tracking is a very subtle kind of discrimination. If this is something you are worried about, you may want to signal your commitment to your job by taking on new responsibilities or projects now and planning a definite return date from your leave your employer knows your job is a priority. Understand your rights under the Pregnancy Discrimination Act.
- Consider the things your job involves and look for ways to make slight modifications for your comfort. For example, if you are a bank teller and stand on your feet all day, ask if you could sit on a tall stool part of the day. Bring a small footstool and stick it under your desk so you can put your feet up while working on a computer. It's all about working smart.
- Learn your options for medical leave now. Even though you may be in the early stages of your pregnancy, it is good to be knowledgeable and prepared. Find out what options you have should you need to stop working for health reasons during your pregnancy (such as bed rest, etc.). Discuss disability leave and Family and Medical Leave Act choices with your human resources contact. You don't want to be stressing out about your job when you're in the middle of a health crisis. Get the information now so you're informed and prepared should anything come up.
- Get organized. You have a lot to do to get ready for your baby and the best thing you can do for yourself is get a grip on all the things you need to do and all the decisions you need to make. Start a notebook or file folder and make lists. Buy a pregnancy organizer. Use a calendar. Create a pregnancy budget so you have a grip on your finances. Planning and organizing will get all your ducks in a row so you don't have anything to worry or stress over.
- The best thing you can do is get your boss on your side. Be friendly and show your commitment to your job, but make it clear that you have some health concerns. Most employers are sympathetic and understanding when you take the time to explain your situation.

Being pregnant and working at a full-time career doesn't have to be overwhelming. Just make sure you realize there has to be give and take in order to keep you and your unborn child as safe, healthy and stress free as possible!

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