First: a confession. I have intentionally distressed a cake on a plate. I made the perfect store-bought cake look like an imperfect homemade cake, so when I brought the cake to Back To School Night, the other moms would think I spent the day baking instead of working in a law office.

As both a young lawyer and young mother, I wanted everyone to think I could do it all.

I couldn't. No one can. But I found I could balance motherhood and work effectively. And so can you.

Working moms are no longer an anomaly in the United States. In fact, they are the rule. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, in 2013, 69.9 percent of mothers with children under 18 years old were working outside the home.

Here are some tips I have discovered since I first became a working mom.
• Get a large paper weekly calendar and display it in a prominent place in your home, or have that same calendar on each family members' computer. List everyone's daily activities, appointments, and assignments. Either way, paper or electronic, everyone can see the calendar, add to it, and cross off each item when it is accomplished. That way you avoid being late for or missing anything.

• Expand your social network to include both working moms and stay-at-home moms. Join or start playgroups where the kids play and the moms chat. You will make more friends for yourself and your children. You will also have more people to help you in an emergency or time crunch situation. And you will learn valuable information, such as the best babysitters for your weekly date night with your husband, and family friendly places around town to visit.

• Be in the zone at work. Displaying family pictures on your desk and divulging a few daily sentences about your kids' latest exploits is fine, but otherwise, leave Mommy Land behind. The same goes for home. Once you get home, other than a short story about something that happened that day at the office, leave the work world behind you and focus on your role as a mom with your kids. Your co-workers and your family will value you more if your focus is on them when you are with them.

• No more "shop 'til you drop." Errands are huge time wasters. Whatever you can buy online, do so. Use your work lunch hours (when you aren't using them for business lunches) for these tasks. The time I spend shopping on my lunch hours leaves me more time to spend with my family.

• Work for a family-friendly company, or introduce those values at your workplace.

"Working Mother" magazine annually lists the 100 Best Companies for Working Mothers. Included in 2014 were several national companies with a Brevard presence, including Allstate, Avon, Bank of America, GE, Marriott, McGladrey, PNC Financial Services Group, and Verizon Communications.

"Working Mother" magazine’s criteria included programs such as childcare, flexible schedules and telecommuting that “help working families thrive, while serious advancement programs make sure that women can continue to succeed in their careers.”

Examples of programs at these companies include:

• Allstate — $200 in incentives for participating in specific health activities, and unlimited financial counseling
• Avon — 10 weeks of maternity leave, $5,250 in tuition aid annually, back up childcare
• Bank of America — Returning Talent workshop, which includes help with interviews, resumes, and introductions to recruiters, as well as childcare reimbursement
• GE — Back up childcare and sick care
- Marriott — New mother's support group, on-site daycare, discounts on 2,900 U.S. childcare providers
- McGladrey — Telecommuting and compression of work schedules
- PNC Financial Services Group — Health education, flexible schedules
- Verizon Communications — $8,000 annual tuition aid, $10,000 in adoption assistance and six months of adoption leave

Being a working mom is exciting and fulfilling. Follow these tips to maximize your time and avoid conflicts. And you may even have a few extra minutes in your day — to bake that cake for back to school night. Or even to distress it better. Your choice!

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