

Management Lessons from Motherhood—Part 1

By Gail Z. Martin

Multi-tasking is my middle name. (Actually, my middle initial stands for my maiden name of Zehner, but you know what I mean.) I own a marketing company. I write novels. I teach at a university. I write articles. And I have three kids, a husband, a golden retriever, a cat and a fish. Sometimes all at the same time.

I worked before I had kids, during my pregnancies and after the babies were born. I was a Director of Corporate Communications and a Vice President of Communications and Marketing and a few other titles. And while my kids grew from babies to teens and I graduated from corporate roles to owning my own company, I found that I was a better manager for being a mother—and sometimes, a better mother for being a manager.

We lose a lot when we accept society's pressure to box off parts of ourselves depending on the time of day and whether we're wearing our business suit or our sweat suit. Sometimes, that pressure to compartmentalize means we tend to forget that what we learn in one part of our life can provide valuable insights into other parts of life. Here are a few of the things I've learned over the last 15 years of blending motherhood and management:

Taking a Deep Breath Helps. Time-out works. When my kids were very young and time-outs were frequent, I learned that I probably needed the time-out even more than they did so that I could regain perspective and think about my BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement, as they say in the office). Was the issue worth the effort? Had I overlooked something from the other person's perspective? Being hungry, tired or wet can make a person cranky. Fix what's causing the grouchiness, and the surface problem may take care of itself.

I found that the same skills worked at the office. Once when two staffers were arguing about a fairly trivial issue, I refused to make the decision. Instead, I told them to go back to their offices, write up the justification for their separate proposals, and not come back to me until they had a workable solution. Stunned, one man asked if I had just put him in time out. "Yes," I replied, "and don't make me take away dessert!" Abashed, the two quarreling co-workers went back to their desks, thought through their differing proposals and came back with a workable solution. (And in the meantime, I diffused the general tension in the office, bought myself time to think about the differing approaches, and made a few phone calls to check out what was really going on.)

Discoveries don't happen on schedule. Creativity and true insight is less likely to happen when you're grinding away than when you take a walk, stare out the window or switch scenery. Fidgeting during homework is part of thinking. Why expect it to work differently just because you're in a suit at a desk? Give yourself permission to walk around the building, stare out the window at the squirrels, listen to a relaxing song or do a 10-minute meditation. You can be working when it doesn't look like work. (And you can be spinning your wheels when you look productive.)

Fairness counts. No, the world isn't fair—but you can make your corner of it as even-handed as possible. And with a teenager, a pre-teen and an elementary schooler, I know that fair isn't always the same as equal and equal isn't always fair. Having said that—the trust that comes with knowing you will get a square deal goes a long way. Whether you're in the office or on the playground, it's not nice to play favorites, ignore the rules, cheat to win or switch rules in the middle of the game.

People learn from watching you. My children have learned that teachers grade papers at night, TV commercials are written by someone, and books start out as a big stack of loose papers. Their trips to my office—and later, up the stairs to my home office when I started my company—taught a lot about how business and finance work. At the same time, co-workers in the corporate environment learned that having children doesn't mean a woman loses the ability to think, work or meet deadlines. Motherhood meant that I challenged any entrenched inefficiency or thoughtless imposition that got in the way of getting the maximum amount of work done before daycare closed. That made for a more productive workplace and lightened a few stereotypes along the way.

Simple can be profound. I've found encouragement and insights in some of the simplest children's books, proving that wisdom is often where we least expect it. I remember reading "Oh the Places You'll Go" by Dr. Seuss to my daughter one time when I was making a job change, and being struck by the wisdom of his advice about being in a "waiting place." "Yertle the Turtle" should be required management reading in these post-Enron days, as a reminder that there is no king (or CEO) on the top of the stack without the hard work of the least recognized person (or turtle) at the bottom, holding everything up. Mom was right. Stick by your friends. Don't let bullies talk you into doing something you know you shouldn't do. Walk proud when you're different. And always, always, believe in yourself.

Gail Z. Martin owns DreamSpinner Communications and helps companies in the U.S. and Canada tell the Real Story of their business through exceptional writing and marketing. Gail has an MBA in marketing and over 20 years of corporate and non-profit experience at senior executive levels. She is also the author of *The Summoner*, a fantasy adventure novel. **Sign up for a FREE email mini course, FREE marketing conference call, FREE newsletter and FREE teleseminar**

<http://www.dreamspinnercommunications.com/page/page/4378461.htm>

Discover how to tell the Real Story of your business to boost your bottom line at <http://www.DreamSpinnerCommunications.com>. Find out more about Gail's books at <http://www.ChroniclesOfTheNecromancer.com>. Contact Gail at [gail at dreamspinnercommunications dot com](mailto:gail@dreamspinnercommunications.com).