4 Tips for the Single Working Mom



A single mother herself, this contributor starts out with the tip, ‘You’re not alone.’

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Some years ago, early in my career, I was just starting a demanding new job when I had a conversation with my then-boss that is forever etched onto my brain. My son was 6 at the time, and I thought it best to proactively mention that in the case of an illness or emergency, I might need to leave work early to tend to him.

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I had had my son in my fourth year of college at UCLA and was

a young, single mother trying to juggle many responsibilities while providing for my child.

Though I see now that there was no reason to disclose this fact to my leadership – I should have had every right to take care of my child when necessary – I thought at the time that I was doing the right thing, being transparent. Unfortunately, my boss's reaction was jarring.

"Why didn't you tell me you had a son?" was the curt, annoyed reply. This person was visibly flustered that I had a personal obligation that might, on occasion, distract me from my work. And, what's worse, this person was a woman.

Hoping for support from our fellow women

This woman was also very career-focused, with impressive work experience, yet sadly someone who would never be an advocate for me as a single, working mom. Not in that moment, and not at any time after.

That's too bad because, as mothers, we hope and expect that our fellow women will embrace and uplift us – especially when we're simultaneously juggling two jobs, as full-time worker and full-time single parent. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case with this boss and still isn't the case for so many women today.

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The lesson I took from that experience is that the battle for support, acknowledgment and understanding is very real, very present and not something to be expected just of our male bosses and counterparts.

Thankfully, I've never been the type to let these kinds of

experiences weigh me down. I retain them as important lessons but don't allow them to color my attitude or steal my joy. While I've encountered my share of naysayers, I'm fortunate to have been supported and uplifted by a great many men and women throughout my life. I wish the same kind of support, resilience and optimism for every one of the 10 million single working mothers in the United States today.

That's not to say we don't have every right to feel drained by the demands of our dual responsibilities. After all, recent studies have shown that we single working moms are putting in approximately 100 hours of labor every week, between work and home. But I want us to take a moment to acknowledge our courage, strength and perseverance, and to find the positive in what can seem like a hopelessly exhausting situation. These four steps are a good start.

1. Know that you're not alone.

Women today comprise approximately 47 percent of the American workforce. An estimated 70 percent of American mothers with children under 18 participate in the workforce, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, and 75 percent of that group are employed full-time.

Of course, nearly all working mothers juggle "second shift" responsibilities at home – caring for kids, managing the household, cooking, cleaning, caring for relatives, engaging with the community and more. Some of us have help from a partner, and some of us don't. And those of us doing it all alone are often stressed to the gills in an effort to get it all right.

According to a study from Pew Research, 8 in 10 adults surveyed said that women face a lot of pressure to be an involved parent (as compared to only 56 percent who said the same about men). A 2018 study on motherhood from Welch's found that the average working mom's day begins at 6:23 a.m. and

doesn’t stop until about 8:31 p.m.. That translates to approximately 14 hours of nonstop work and home duties. And let’s not forget: Our work doesn’t stop when the weekend comes or a holiday arrives.

2. Count your achievements.

Take out a piece of paper and make a list of what you’ve done in the last week. Start with your work tasks, the mundane as well as the noteworthy. Then start listing your household and childcare tasks. Include that third load of laundry and the second reading of a favorite bedtime story (the one in which you performed all the characters’ voices, by request).

Don’t forget the nutritious meals you prepared, the life lessons you’ve taught, the appropriate discipline you’ve doled out, the picking up of all those pesky Legos. And, finally, include everything you’ve done to take care of yourself and others: the skincare routine you dutifully carried out, even though it was 11 p.m. and you were dead tired; that call you placed to the aunt you haven’t spoken to in a while; your successful efforts to avoid the doughnuts in the breakroom in favor of a healthy lunch.

Then, when you’ve combed through your memories of the week to include everything you’ve done, take a step back and examine the list as an outsider looking in. Try to see the list for what it really is — the achievements of *a woman who is killing it.* A real-life super hero.

3. Push for benefits for working parents.

hankfully, a growing number of businesses are waking up to the workplace needs of single working moms. Smart companies are expanding their benefits and culture to accommodate parents’ unique challenges, and reaping tangible benefits

(including better employee engagement and lower turnover, as seen at Google). Then there are companies, like Nike and Patagonia, which offer onsite child care for employees – a major draw for single mothers and parents overall.

Smaller companies can't necessarily afford on-site daycare but some of the things they might consider are:

- Breastfeeding rooms/storage
- Flextime options
- Paid maternity leave/adoption leave
- Back-up child care

Moms (and dads) should push for these benefits and offer positive feedback to their employers when they get them. Having a safe place to leave your child on those federal holidays that many companies don't offer, for example, can be a major stress reliever.

4. Celebrate yourself.

For all that you did this week, and all that you do throughout life, you deserve more than just a pat on the back. Frankly, you deserve a deep-tissue massage, a bottle of rosé and an uninterrupted Netflix binge. But if those things aren't possible today, just take a moment and seriously acknowledge your efforts.

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Don't let the critical voices – whether outside or inside – bring you down. You may not be doing everything you'd ideally like to do, you may be tired every day, and you may sometimes feel like you're failing. But I'm here to tell you that I see your achievements and your sacrifices, and many others do, too. To the single working mother discouraged by the lack of support at her workplace, or the mom who is desperately

reaching for a helping hand, I say: You are more powerful than you can even imagine. And you’re demonstrating your awe-inspiring power every single day.

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