

Working Moms – Especially New Ones – Are Struggling. This Company Created One Less Thing to Worry About.

Lisa Myers is a former attorney and a mom of two, who says she failed at breastfeeding when she went back to work. Now she's making sure that other moms feel successful when it comes to their baby-feeding journey. She sat down with Jessica Abo to talk about her company Ceres Chill and more.

Jessica Abo: Lisa, can you tell us what was it like for you when you went back to work after having kids?

I was a partner at an international law firm. I was lucky enough to have paid maternity leave, but still, you were trying to be the person you were before you were completely sleep-deprived and keeping a small person alive and being at a law firm in a group that was pretty much all men. Trying to be who I was before was a huge challenge.

So how did you come up with the idea for your company?

Having had my son and going back to work early from my maternity leave, I was determined to be the best mom I hoped or thought I could be. When I went back, I had all my pump parts, I was ready to go. I pumped, and I had a bunch of little bottles lined up on my desk, and realized that it was another epic fail, because what was I going to do with that milk? I worked with a bunch of guys. The last thing I wanted to advertise was that I was actively lactating.

So, I put the bottles in my suit pockets, went down the hallway, had to find a paper bag, stuffed it in the communal fridge, and then rushed home on my long commute, and it just wasn't good enough. That day I searched and searched for something other than another bag, another cooler, something bulky, something that required prep and something that would not last more than six hours. I needed something more. More capacity, more time, just something that would support me and maybe even if I was lucky, something with a little bit of style and a little under the radar. There was nothing, and I was pretty disgusted with that. And I figured if it wasn't out there, I knew there was a need, and I was going to make it happen.

Ceres Chill is about solving those problems for moms. It's a two-chamber system, so you can either store your milk in here for 12 ounces, or your milk in here for 24, and you just put your ice either in here or in here. You're reversing it, of course. The upper cup becomes a baby bottle. You can pump it directly. It connects directly to your pump, either here or here. So you can double pump. You can adapt as you need to on the go. If your flight gets canceled or if your day goes extra long, all you have to do is add some ice for another 20 hours. So it just adds a lot of versatility and opportunity for moms who are trying to do it all, or for caregivers who are out with a baby. It can be a bottle warmer, and when you're all done, we have a straw top and it can chill an entire bottle of wine in less than 20 minutes without diluting it. Don't ask me how I know.

What have been some of the highlights for you since starting Ceres Chill back in 2020?

I started a few weeks before the pandemic really shook everyone to their core. I realized the women who really needed us, the customers, and the incredible people that have formed the base of this company were essential workers. They were doctors, nurses, postal workers, police officers, firefighters

and grocery checkers. People who were on the front lines, who were trying to keep their children healthy. We as mothers knew that breastfeeding was the best defense we could give our children against this unknown but viral threat. So I made it a point to support those women, those members of the community. My husband is active duty military. I'm a military spouse. So we've been able to partner with breastfeeding and combat boots and different frontline organizations. I'm really, really proud of that work. But I would say one of the big things for me on a personal level as an entrepreneur is I now have some of the most incredible people working with me toward this common goal of empowering women and supporting families all over the world, and there is nothing like it. And I would not have had that had I not found this need and founded this company.

And what have been some of your biggest challenges?

I was certainly told my idea was silly. I was told I was a bad mother, neglecting my children, putting my marriage at risk. Certainly jeopardizing the financial security of my family. There was a lot of judgment. People who loved me begged me to stop because I gave myself shingles. You lose sleep and you sacrifice, and if you're lucky and you have a good idea and you are in touch with your customers, you have a shot at succeeding. But there are a lot of stories out there of people who tried hard and failed, or tried really, really hard and it made it look easy, but it never really was.

So I love it. It has been amazing. But make no mistake, it came at a cost, and I'm grateful for where we're at, but it's not easy. It's just worth it.

What do you wish more people knew when it comes to breastfeeding?

I think the key, particularly for entrepreneurs and business leaders, is to understand how even the smallest effort on

their part can have a big impact on their bottom line and the morale of their employees. Breastfeeding may seem like this abstract concept or something very selfish and personal that an employee wants to engage in, so it should be on her own time. However, giving her a safe, private, clean place to pump and providing support for the schedule she needs to be successful will ensure her health and the health of her infant, which contributes to her health, because there'll be fewer absences and sick days. If you are supporting an employee in that way, other employees see it, other employees aren't getting as sick, and they understand that you as a company are prioritizing the mental health and physical health and welfare of everyone.

And finally Lisa, what advice do you have for the person out there who has their own big idea?

You have to share it. I understand there's this great hesitation to keep it a secret because someone will steal it, but without sharing it, without putting it out there in the world, you are preventing any forward progress. I'm not saying someone won't try to steal your idea, so protect it. Get an attorney if you can. But also, if you can afford an attorney, do your best. Do your research, file your own provisional patent, and move forward.

And if you can't file a patent because it's not something that can be protected, well just get out there and get aggressive about it. Because if you're putting the energy in, that's something somebody else isn't going to do. If it was easy to be an entrepreneur and start a business, everybody would. And I'm here to tell you, it's not easy.

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