



**CAN
WOMEN
HAVE IT
ALL?**



**YOUR PERSONAL EXPECTATIONS TO BE THE BEST LAWYER,
MOTHER AND WIFE CAN BE OVERWHELMING. WHEN DO
YOU KNOW YOU'VE GRABBED THE BRASS RING?**



Can women have it all? I was raised to believe the answer was an unqualified yes: I could have a family, a successful career, and a great marriage. Being a perfectionist, I assumed this meant I could have a family, bake cookies from scratch with

the kids, keep a perfect home, climb the “corporate” ladder to the top, have dinner on the table every night, enjoy a trouble-free marriage and still find time for myself. I was naïve.

Perfect pretty packages are for TV movies. My days start with a mad dash to get everyone out the door. My husband of 14 years, now a full time graduate student, takes care of getting our six year-old son and four year-old daughter to school as I make my way downtown to start the endless flurry of meetings, conference calls, reviewing email, analyzing agreements and drafting documents. By 5 p.m., if my husband has class, I leave to pick up the kids who attend two different schools (both of whom have to be picked up by 6 p.m.), get us all home, and then figure out what to do for dinner. Too many nights that means cereal. After a bath and two (or three) stories, it’s time for the munchkins to go to bed. I rarely feel like I’ve spent enough time with them.

Once they are tucked in and water cups are refilled, I start tackling the mundane stuff that has to be done to keep our lives running: bills need to be paid, the endless supply of dirty dishes and laundry needs attention, and I try to eliminate at least one thing from the never-ending to-do list. Sometimes, I’m taking care of work related work. Around 11 p.m. (sometimes later) I crawl into bed. What I want to do is read the stack of novels collecting dust on my nightstand. Instead, I turn off the light and think about what I have to do in the morning.

Superwoman doesn’t exist. You can only be in so many places at once, in so many roles at once. All parts of my life are rarely on the up-swing at the same time. When all is going according to plan, I feel like I’ve got this thing called “having it all” licked. Then, in no time at all, Murphy steps in and I realize that I don’t. Facing a huge deadline at work on a Wednesday? Not a problem. Until your nearly 15 year-old baby with four legs succumbs to a tumor you didn’t know he had, your son comes home with a project that has to be completed tomorrow, your husband has a group project and a mid-term, your attendance is required at a church meeting, you have to do that research for your networking group and, oh yeah, carve out three hours to see your doctor because you’re getting sick. What working mom has time to be sick?

Can women have it all? I think the answer is

a qualified yes. You can’t have it all at the same time, but you can have it all over time. A few years ago, when my daughter was one, she was facing some health issues that required her to stay home from childcare. I had been a working mom since my then three year-old son was born, but I had always wanted to stay home with the kids. The guilt over prying a screaming child from my leg to drop him or her off for an eleven hour day was killing me. Add on top of that, my daughter’s health issues exacerbated by the group child care environment and the decision was an easy one. I had no regrets, although it was difficult to say goodbye to the dream in-house job I was leaving. I was thrilled to be a stay-at-home mom, although the transition was much more difficult for me than I had anticipated.

I was home for a little over a year and during that time, I learned two important things. First, being with two toddlers all day long is really hard, but ultimately very rewarding. (And, yes, we did get our daughter’s health issues resolved.) Second, I need to work. I don’t need to work maniacal hours, but I do need to interact with other adults, use my brain in the way that writing and analysis requires, and contribute financially to our household. I’m not saying that since I stayed home for a year, I don’t need balance now. I do. Some weeks are still a struggle. But for me, if I want to answer the question, “Can I have it all?” I have to look at the different seasons of my life. My twenties were spent focused on my marriage and career. My early thirties were spent working, having my children and, ultimately, staying at home. Now, in my mid-thirties, I’m back into the work force full throttle, but armed with a perspective I didn’t have before.

I think “having it all” is a fluid concept, with give and take throughout the day, week, month and year. “Having it all,” at least the version of it I am experiencing, requires anticipating logistical issues, delegating and kicking guilt to the curb. I try to appreciate each moment, whether that moment is achieving a milestone at work, watching my son score his first goal or my daughter write all of her friends’ names, being there for my husband, or making it to a yoga class. Instead of feeling guilty about not baking from scratch, I buy cookies from Whole Foods and save myself a mess in the kitchen. I have also stopped apologizing to the housekeeper about not picking up the house before she gets there. When I walk into my messy house at night, I survey the piles of dirty laundry and take a moment to be grateful for a fulfilling job, a supportive spouse and our two amazing kids who make us laugh every day. Then, I pour four bowls of cereal and we all sit down and talk about what happened at work and school -- I dare say, the perfect ending to a gloriously imperfect day.

“When all is going according to plan, I feel like I’ve got this thing called ‘having it all’ licked.”

By Kandice K. Bridges