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Working With an Infant

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Working With an Infant

Abstract

"My vision of a successful career is shared by many people – I want to be good at what I do, and I want to be happy doing it."

Posting about balancing a career and motherhood from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/working-with-an-infant/>

Keywords

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Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Working With an Infant

 [all in allthings.org/working-with-an-infant/](https://allthings.org/working-with-an-infant/)

Kayt Frisch

As a girl growing up in the 90s, I was told that I could (and should) expect to “have it all” – that is, not have to choose between a career and a family. For the past eight years, that dream has seemed possible as I have successfully juggled a developing career and a happy marriage. Last June my son was born, and eight weeks later, summer vacation ended and I returned to my full-time job. Six months later I am struggling to live fully in both of these callings, and I find myself having to confront my visions of what it means to have a successful career and what it means to be a successful mother.

My vision of a successful career is shared by many people – I want to be good at what I do, and I want to be happy doing it. In my own context as a professor of engineering and physics, this means that I want to create meaningful learning opportunities for my students and have my students (along with my institution) recognize that those experiences have equipped them for work as professionals in engineering and the health sciences. In practice this looks like writing lesson plans, homework assignments, study guides, quizzes, tests, and any other tools I think will benefit my students, as well as physically teaching the classes. It also means being available to answer students’ questions. Before my son was born, I routinely worked nine to ten hours per day at the office, another hour or two after dinner and between three and seven hours on Saturday to accomplish these tasks. (Don’t add up those hours for a weekly total.) While less than ideal, this was okay for our family life during the past four years, since my husband was a graduate student – essentially we both had a “hobby” of work, work, and more work. However, now I have an infant who wants and needs to be fed, changed, and played with when I get home from work. What is more, I *want* to do these things with my son – seeing the smile on his face when we play peek-a-boo is one of my greatest joys in life.

I could compensate by staying up late in order to work the hours I used to, but I am not the sort of person who operates well on less than 8 hours of sleep. So, I am trying to adjust by learning to prioritize at work, trying to work smarter instead of harder. Trying to cut back on hours means that I am being forced to learn to differentiate between essential and helpful and to learn how to say “no, I can’t help you with that right now” or “that sounds really interesting and worthwhile, but right now I can’t.”

My vision of successful motherhood is also shared by many people – I want to raise a child who loves God and others and is smart and socially well-adjusted. The practices that lead to this goal seem rather nebulous, especially at the infant stage of development, and truth be told, they probably don’t really inform my daily practice as much as the pictures of mothers I observed growing up. I grew up in a conservative homeschooling family – my mother quit her job as an engineer to homeschool my brother and I, and we “did” (or tried to do) the conservative homeschooling thing – jean skirts, canned food, and A Beka homeschool books. While I have left some of these things behind, particularly the skirts and the idea that a woman’s place is in the home, the ways that a mother should be involved in her children’s lives are harder to shake. With this as the underlying foundation, my vision of a successful mother is one who has a (more-or-less) clean house, makes her own baby food, reads to her children several times each day, comes up with art projects for her children to do, grows a garden, preserves food, and the list continues.

There are many days where I struggle to be the mother I want to be – tonight I was helping students with homework after physics lab, so I didn’t get home in time to feed my son dinner, and today he took his afternoon nap early, so he was too tired for stories before bed, and most nights I go to bed with the counter piled high with dishes (thankfully my husband usually loads the dishwasher and washes the bottles when he gets up in the morning). But there are also days where the juggling act works – “where is Mrs. Duck?” is a favorite bath-time game, *Hand, Hand, Fingers, Thumb* has been read (and chewed on) dozens of times, and there is broccoli puree in the freezer (mmm gourmet...).

Increasingly, my vision of “having it all” is changing as I am learning to focus on the thing that is most important to me –relationships. Homemade baby food is moving down on my list of “essentials to be a good mother,” and checking my work at the door so that I am able to be 100% present for the people that matter the most to me – my family – is moving up in my definition of a successful career.