

June 2012

InsideA Message from  
Gina

Iced Out

What's in a Name

Transferable Skills

Two classic Forum columns, **On the Homefront** and **Balancing Act** are back! Whether we are currently in the trenches on the homefront or incorporating the delicate balancing act of paid work into our busy schedules, these classic columns are still relevant today.

## A Message from Gina, CEO of Mothers & More

I love summer. I appreciate that there are fewer commitments, fewer responsibilities at home, and of course long days to keep us outside with friends and neighbors later in the evenings. But the juggle of kids in the summer balanced with everything else I have to do on a daily basis is a challenge and something I'm sure many of you can appreciate.

We at Mothers & More have stayed pretty quiet on the latest attempts to get moms riled up about mothering issues. So many of our respected colleagues in the mom blog world stepped up and said publically: we each make our own decisions, as mothers, employees, and members of society - enough with trying to pit us against each other. I think that message is starting to sink in. Thank you to all who have helped to reinforce the idea that together, we are powerful, divided we're just fodder for the talking heads on TV.

Wouldn't it be great if the media attention was directed at improving the conditions for mothers and families? We have come a long way in making it possible for a mother to have time with her family and still earn a living and/or develop her own interests. But we know there is still a long road ahead of us. This summer, I issue a challenge to you - when out at the pool, working in the yard or sweating it out on the train home after a long day - let's all make a point to talk about how women can work together to improve conditions for all.

I hope you all are enjoying the start to your summer and make sure you take the time to roast the marshmallows.

Happy June!

Gina

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# Iced out — Making Room for Mums at Work

By Marisa Santoro

‘In Our Shoes’ covers issues that matter most to working mothers in the US and UK, given the many shoes we swap. Working mums are included in my platform to action change, given how little support they are shown to continue their careers post-babies and the many factors holding them back. Most Americans are unaware of their circumstances and shocked considering the UK is our mother ship and global partner on all fronts. Through my research with women leaders in the US and Europe and the tactical tools I deliver in my seminars to empower working women, In Our Shoes is meant to inspire change as we struggle with working our “second shift” at home amidst our busy lifestyle. In Our Shoes stands for what ambitious women want out of life: to be successful and to help others succeed — including our fellow work mums across the pond.



As a huge admirer of the British and a hit-the-ground-running career gal juggling it all as a single mom, I used to salivate when learning that women in the UK received a twelve-month maternity leave compared to our paltry twelve weeks in the US. The fact that America is the only advanced nation where women receive no paid-leave stings even more (California & New Jersey offer six weeks at reduced pay).

Yet diving deeper in my research as a writer dedicated to empowering working women who balance it all, I soon changed from envious green to shocked white. Women in the UK fall far behind in their careers once they have children; compared to the US they are given little support to re-enter the workforce after having children, let alone keep a foothold in their family life if they do. On almost every front, working women in Great Britain are iced out from returning back to their careers.

The chauvinism factor is one major reason — ‘a woman’s place is at home’ is a common shtick in their work culture. Flex-time is deemed a privilege and often sniffed at by predominantly male employers. Many women feel employers use the part-time or flex-time arrangement as an excuse to force them out of their jobs.

Then there’s the extended maternity leave itself. Looking back, when returning from my short maternity stint, it took me several weeks to get back into the swing of things after being on baby brain for just a three month stretch. Given that British women aren’t hailed back into their careers by employers to begin with, that one year gap weighs heavily and becomes a bittersweet benefit. They have now missed out on advancement opportunities which they otherwise could have had, if they had ‘stayed warm’ on the back burner for a shorter period.

Further debunking the myth of their gold plated maternity leave is that most of it

## Submissions

*Forum* accepts first-person essays of any length, humor, poetry, photography, and art from **members**. We also accept any ideas or topical clippings you many want to send for our use. To contribute to the *Forum*, please send electronic submissions by email to [info@mothersandmore.org](mailto:info@mothersandmore.org) Indicate "Forum Submission" on the subject line. We do not accept faxed or handwritten submissions.

Note: Mothers & More is not intended as a substitute for medical and/or psychological care of those in need of such care for themselves or their children. Although every measure has been taken to make the information in the Forum as complete and accurate as possible, no Mothers & More member, past or present, shall be liable for any damages resulting from the use or misuse of information contained herein.

is unpaid, so in reality many women cannot afford to take more than six months off.

Still, the largest stack of cards working against women in the UK which keeps them from slipping back into their career shoes is the incredibly high cost of day care and lowest quality of facilities even by European standards. It isn't affordable to return back to work as most of their pay will go toward outside childcare. Left with little empowerment to return back, they often call it quits for the next four years until their children begin school; a long period of time where low confidence can creep in. That's not to say that all women remain at home. There are many women who fear leaving a competitive job market in this economy and choose to stick it out even if it means working just to pay for childcare.

Heather Rix, a working mom and blogger living in Yorkshire, shares: "Motherhood is seen as a consolation prize especially for professional women. Women are being put off from having children as it is impossible to have a family and a strong career without having a meltdown. A flexible working arrangement is rare and must be fought for. We need more flexible working laws that spell out for employers that they have to let women be mothers as well as workers."

*Marisa Santoro's work is focused on writing, landing success story interviews and leading any seminar program that celebrates, inspires, supports, motivates, empowers and /or actions change for women. Her expertise is rooted in supporting working women and mothers in the US and UK given her extensive research, female connect channels and partnerships with media outlets and like-minded organizations on both sides of the pond. Marisa is the founder of In Our Shoes, [www.InRShoes.com](http://www.InRShoes.com). In Our Shoes is seeking new partnerships with organizations interested in supporting women in the UK to return back to their careers.*

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## CLASSIC **FORUM** On the Homefront

### What's in a Name?

By **Chris Fletcher**

Those of you who've been reading this column for a while know that we're adopting a baby from China. Four months of paperwork and 13 months of waiting should soon yield the news that we've been matched with a child. By the time you read this – depending how long it takes you to find a quiet moment to peruse your *Forum* – we may even be home with our new daughter.

We're getting ready. Noah moved from the small bedroom to share the biggest one with Daniel, and they're



## Our Mission

Mothers & More is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of mothers through support, education and advocacy. We address mothers' needs as individuals and members of society, and promote the value of all the work mothers do.

## Our Beliefs:

- A mother is more than any single role she plays at any given point in her lifetime. She is entitled to fully explore and develop her identity as she chooses: as a woman, a citizen, a parent or an employee.
- All the work mothers do – whether paid or unpaid – has social and economic value.
- Caregiving work is real work with real social and economic value.
- All women deserve recognition and support for their right to choose if and how to combine parenting and paid employment.
- All mothers, all children and all families are unique. We respect the wisdom of each mother to decide how to care for her children, her family and herself.
- Mothers have the right to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities without incurring social and economic penalties.
- The transitions women make into and through motherhood are challenging and can be difficult.

Together, mothers are powerful.

having a blast covering it with every piece of Harry Potter merchandise they can scrounge. The small room is freshly painted, and the pastel balloon border went up without incident. I've started the terrifying task of toddler-proofing the house. We still have no clothes, but once we learn her age and weight we'll go out together, all of us, on a baby-buying spree. There's no crib yet, but a friend has offered a high chair, changing table and assorted other necessities. The pieces are falling into place.

Except we still don't have a name.

Well, actually, we do have a name we use already, but I think a child would resent growing up being called "Little Miss NoName." It's asking for a complex.

I can't understand this. We're 99% positive we'll be given a girl. In each of our pregnancies, we had beautiful girl names picked out – Elissa Marie, Emily Suzanne, Bethany Jean. The problems then involved choosing which biblical hero to choose for a boy's name. Joshua, Daniel, and Noah were all men worthy of emulation, with fascinating stories and even songs about them. (And let me tell you, there's no shortage of awesome Noah's Ark products out there for the child so named.)

But biblical heroines? Yes, they're there. I have a major in religious studies, so I can even tell you about some of the more unfamiliar ones, like Susanna and Tamar. But most are remembered, not for acts of daring, but for whom they married or mothered. Nothing wrong with that. But it's hard to make those stories as exciting as facing hungry lions or blowing down a wall with trumpet blasts. Even if we should go that route, the most familiar Bible names are so popular that we'd be condemning her to a lifetime of being known as Sarah LastName. Memories of the year Daniel was in nursery school with five other Daniels – and a Danielle – make me reluctant to take that route.

There are options. I have a list of 20 possibilities, as does my husband. Unfortunately, none of the names on those lists match. I can't see giving her a name that nobody will know how to pronounce, such as Geva, and he just rolls his eyes when I try to convince him that Lydia or Joanna are beautiful names.

We thought we'd hit pay dirt with Leah. Flows nicely, biblical, not too common, easy to spell. Except I, and many others, pronounce it *Lay-a*, like the Princess. And my husband's last name, which all the children carry, is Brown. Say it out loud. Lay-a Brown... egg? Her future brothers were quick to suggest all kinds of brown things she could lay.

Back to the drawing board.

The boys had their own ideas. They didn't care about the Bible tradition. They said her name should reflect something that's important to all of us, that has meaning for our family, and that goes well with Brown. Their suggestion? Hershey.

Uh-uh.

Some folks have reminded me that she'll come with a name already, a Chinese

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name, and we may want to keep that or use a translation thereof. It's possible. But having spent the last year with an exchange student name Xiaoke, I know the challenges a Chinese name can provide in a Western society. And as for a translation, well, that works when the name means "beautiful pearl" or "song of the morning." But I read of one child who's name translated as – I kid you not – "smelly duckweed." Apparently, she'd been found abandoned in a patch of a particularly fragrant plant, thus the name. I'm not counting on her heritage for guidance.

We'll have to decide soon. It's grown so bad that one of my friends, with a nod to Harry Potter, refers to the impending arrival as She Who Must Not Be Named.

Hmmm. VoldeBabe Brown. What do you think?

*Chris Fletcher obviously thought the name of the organization was Mothers OF More, for she now has five Little Darlings - one grad student, one undergrad, one in high school, one in middle school, and one in kindergarten. She continues to maintain a slim hold on her sanity somewhere in upstate New York.*

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## CLASSIC FORUM

### Balancing Act

## Transferable Skills

By Julie Somogyi

There's no denying it. It's a common fear among women who are considering a return to the workforce. Though it may emerge in each woman's psyche with slightly different characteristics, it is, in essence, a fear of the unknown.

It seems odd that a woman who has tackled the momentous feat of natural childbirth twice and an unanticipated stint of stay-at-home parenting should know fear of any kind, but I certainly did.

I personally feared that my 2 ½ year absence from the working world had softened my professional skills, and that it would be difficult for me to fit in again. I knew I wanted to sequence back into paid employment, I even had the perfect job lined up, but I wondered if I was truly ready mentally, emotionally and physically.

It turns out that I shouldn't have spent so much time wondering and worrying about my professional skills. My time would have been better spent worrying about



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how much I would miss my beloved, well-worn sweats as I moved into the dusty business-casual corner of my closet. I should have been more concerned about my non-existent ability to accessorize and my intense dislike of high-heeled shoes.

Luckily, with my experience, qualifications and education, my transition back into the working world was a breeze.

However, it was definitely not my previous job experience, professional qualifications or collegiate education that prepared me for my responsibilities. Rather it was my life experiences with two young, energetic children that benefited me the most. Without knowing it, my kids had put me through the most intensive training program of my career. It's the kind of on-the-job training that would make even the most innovative human resources manager envious.

Knowing what I now know, here's a list of the skills that I should have included on my resume:

**Maturity:** Soon after I started my new job, I realized that I felt an incredibly calming sense of maturity that I had not felt in my first jobs after college. Decisions seemed to take shape in my head with unforeseen clarity. I began to speak up without fear when I had something to say. Crisis communications seemed even more manageable after dealing with the common traumas of lice, stitches and spiked fevers.

**Assertiveness:** Being a parent means you are continually an advocate for your children. You learn to stand up for the feelings in your gut. I never knew that having children could have such a profound effect on my ability to speak up and voice my opinions. I have noticed changes in myself that have strengthened the way in which I approach new work-related situations.

**Work Ethic:** As a working parent who is trying to balance family life with professional fulfillment, I am fairly structured with my time. Though I occasionally have to fight the urge to procrastinate on a particular project or two, I am diligent and honest about my out-of-office working time. As all parents soon discover, you can't just decide you don't want the responsibilities that come with children. You may want to chuck certain unpleasant details, especially during a temper-tantrum-induced migraine headache, but you can't. I apply similar feelings of dedication, duty and loyalty to my job.

**Tolerance for Whining:** Phone calls from cranky people don't bother me as much as they once did. I have heard it all. There's no comparison between a daughter who whines endlessly about "lumpies" in her socks and the kind of complaints that periodically light up my phone lines.

**Negotiation Skills:** My son is a champion negotiator. At the age of 4, he can out-manuever, out-last and outsmart me at every turn, though I'll never admit it publicly to him. He simply has an admirable way with the art of negotiation. In this way he is teaching me what it takes to negotiate with my peers in the office. The only

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difference is that I don't cross my arms in defiance or scream at the top of my lungs.

**Problem-Solving:** After listening to heart-wrenching squabbles about who has the best view, who gets the purple cup, who got to the car first and who can stay up later, I feel better qualified to tackle anything that comes my way in the office. As the old saying goes, "I can solve anything if I just put my mind to it." The difference between the office and home is that, at work, people actually listen to my opinions and sometimes even buy into my ideas and visions.

*Julie Somogyi and her husband, Leonard, fully admit to liking life with two teenage children straddling between childhood and adulthood. Their balancing act today requires different skills than it did 10 years ago, and thanks to their trials and tribulations through the early years they feel a little more qualified to handle most of what life throws them. Julie is director of integrated marketing and communications for Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana.*