

I started my legal career the way that many men start their careers—by choosing a hard-charging, prestigious law firm straight out of law school. In addition, I chose to work in a department that was known for being dominated by men and required extremely long hours and lots of travel. I went to work for Latham & Watkins in their project finance department,

devoting, what seems to me now, insanely long hours to work. I spent weeks, which at times rolled into months, in conference rooms in cities all over the country. And I loved it. I loved my colleagues, I loved the frenetic pace of the work, and I loved the challenge that came with the complexity of the work that I was doing.

There were some instances where I felt the gender gap—the endless sports talk, the golf-mania, and my personal favorite, being called a “little lady lawyer” by a client in a room full of men. Yet, I also felt that there was an equal amount of opportunities given to me because of my gender, such as attending important meetings (even as the junior attorney) to present a more gender-balanced team and being properly mentored as part of an attempt by management to improve the retention rate among women.

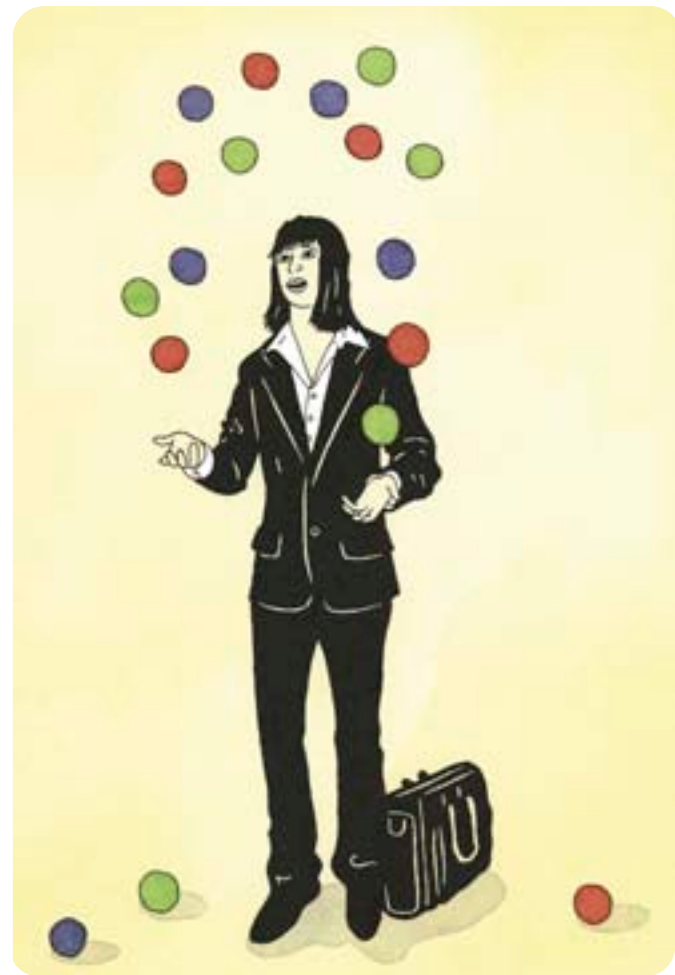
I didn't begin to understand that being a woman in the law is materially different than being a man in the law until after I had my first child. I was fortunate (or unfortunate, depending on your point of view) enough to finish law school at 23, which allowed me the luxury of practicing law before having children. And when I say it was a luxury, I do mean that, because I was able to devote myself to my career and clients in a manner that was never fully possible after the advent of children.

Certainly all working parents feel the dividing pressures of work and family. But I believe that women, and in particular women in a demanding profession like the law, feel it more keenly. There is the obvious reason: women, whether working full-time, working part-time, or staying at home, tend to be the

primary caregiver in the majority of households. In addition, I think that women tend to take a more holistic approach to their careers. The fathers that I worked with seemed to have an amazing ability to compartmentalize their work life, their family life, their religious life, and their free time. I watched many working fathers, each of whom loved their families as much as I did, have the ability to singularly focus on their work without allowing family concerns to disrupt them. The mothers that I worked with, and myself in particular, seemed to be constantly fielding family-related phone calls, planning the day-to-day details of their children's lives, and feeling guilty (that dreaded mother guilt) that they weren't at home fixing the PB&J for their three-year-old.

So while my colleagues at my law firm went out of their way to make sure that I could continue to work and parent, I finally found that the juggling act wasn't working for me. I simply had too many balls up in the air, and the pressure was getting to be too much for me. I left Latham & Watkins two years after having my first child, deciding that I couldn't make it work (although my hat is off to those women in large firms who have made it work). Since my tenure at a large firm, I have worked at a real estate boutique and, most recently, as in-house counsel. While the juggling still continues, the frenetic pace of it has become manageable for me and my family.

I am currently in-house with a family-friendly company that has been very accommodating of my schedule and family demands. Yet, as my male colleagues watch my scaled-down juggling act, they are the first to remark that it's very different



for working mothers than for working fathers. And I say this not to try to elicit kudos or help or (heaven forbid) pity, but as a statement of the facts of how it is and always will be for mothers working in the law, regardless of how many committees are formed by our law schools or law firms to try to address the issues of women in the law.

However, I have become pretty darn good at keeping pace with the often conflicting demands. I've become much better at saying no to the peripheral stuff\* that gets in the way of my primary obligations: my children, my husband, my employer, and my religion. I know that there will be a time and a season, coming faster every day, when my juggling act slows and finally ends.

And I will miss it. Just as I loved the frenetic pace of my early career, I have come to love the frenetic pace of racing from a strategy meeting to pick up a car pool, then taking a conference call in my minivan while waiting for soccer practice to finish, and finally calling my paralegal and asking her to distribute signature pages while I grill veggies for my family's dinner.

My life as a mother working in the law is full and it's busy and sometimes it's really, really crazy; but at the end of the day, I know that I am blessed.

*\*NOTE TO READER: I told the editors that I didn't have time to write this piece initially, and only after they were desperate did I concede. I guess I still need to work on saying no.*