

42 Rules

*For
Working Moms*

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“42 Rules for Working Moms” Book Excerpt

Edited by Laura Lowell

foreword by Amy Keroes,
Founder and President of

<http://www.mommytrackd.com/>

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WHITE PAPER Table of Contents (included here)

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Foreword

My fears have always revealed themselves to me through dreams. I am terrified of heights—so I have dreams of free-falling off the Golden Gate Bridge. I am afraid of being unprepared—so, when I was in school, I had recurring nightmares about having to take a final exam in a class I never attended. Now that I am a working mother of two, the dreams reveal my fears of parental inadequacy. You don't need a degree or even a passing grade to raise a child, so every parent at times feels utterly unqualified for the daunting responsibility of protecting and shaping the lives of their children. Working mothers have the additional fear that their time away will irreparably harm their children.

In this age of helicopter parenting, are we short-changing our children because other mothers are by their children's sides, coaching them to be better people during the hours we are, by choice or necessity, working? That was my fear for the first few years as a working parent. I did my best to be a productive professional and a present parent. I worried, I cried, I felt very, very guilty.

When my son was around three, I joined him for lunch at his day care. Most of the kids in his class were children of working parents. On that particular day, when it was time to leave, I told my son that I had to go back to work. One by one, from behind their sippy cups, each kid announced excitedly that their mommies had offices, too. Some said their mommies had computers; some said their moms had spinny chairs; some said their moms had pictures they had drawn on their desks. Whether they knew it or not, this unbridled enthusiasm was actually pride in their mothers' professional lives. For me that pride also gave me permission—permission to transform my fear of parental failure into something far more

positive. Since that day, my working-mom fears have been converted into a courageous conviction that while I may very well mess up my kids—it will not be simply because I have a job.

Sadly, this epiphany did not alleviate the overwhelming challenges of my dual life. As founder and CEO of a Web site dedicated to informing and entertaining working moms, and as the working mother of two, I am keenly aware of our collective need for a rulebook to guide us as we attempt to tackle the daily tug-of-war between work and home.

42 Rules for Working Moms is the instruction manual we have all been waiting for. Finally, we have a resource capturing the best tips, tricks of the trade, and survival strategies from smart, savvy, supportive working moms. Consider this your map for making work—work. If you heed the creative and constructive advice set forth in this very inspired book, you will be well on your way to conquering the chaos of working motherhood.

Amy Keroes is Founder and President of <http://mommytrackd.com>, a popular online magazine offering busy stay-at-work moms something they desperately need—a fresh, funny and helpful resource to help them manage the chaos of working motherhood. Amy is also the author of “Mom’s Ultimate Family Organizer: A One Stop Planner for Busy Moms.” Before starting Mommy Track’d, Amy was Senior Corporate Counsel for Gap Inc. She lives in Mill Valley, California, with her husband and two children.

Introduction

When I had my first daughter and returned to work six months later, I was very optimistic about my ability to “do it all.” Today, after eight years as a working mom, I’m still optimistic, but I’m much more pragmatic about the whole thing. I can do it all, just not all at the same time.

The idea for this book was born out of experiences with my kids, my husband, and my girl friends—some who work outside the home and some who work just as hard (if not harder) at home. We’re all working moms. The only difference is that some of us get paid in cash, and others get paid in kisses.

There have been studies that looked at the difference between families with two working parents, one working parent, single parent families, etc. There is little to no evidence of any significant difference one way or the other. We work for different reasons; to support our families, to contribute to the greater good, for the personal satisfaction or the financial rewards. Regardless of why we work, we all love our kids, and we do the best we can.

When my kids started school, I met lots of other moms, working and stay-at-home. I struggled with how to describe my role. I worked full-time from home. I took the kids to school and chatted with the “stay at homes” and volunteered in the classroom because I had a lot of flexibility. But both my husband and I had to work. That meant no chatting at the coffee shop at 10 a.m., no play dates, and the dreaded day care.

The contributors to this book have all dealt with these issues and more. They share their experiences, ideas, and opinions so that others like them can learn from their mistakes and benefit from the years of collected wisdom. As you read through the rules, I ask only one thing. Don't take them literally. In fact, don't even read them in order.

Feel free to pass them along to a Mom in need of a friendly little reminder. I invite you to share your "rules" and be part of an ongoing discussion. After all, these are our rules. What are yours?

1

Rules Are Meant To Be Broken

Rules can be bent, stretched, and even broken.

What keeps me sane, might make you crazy. What you think is heaven, might be my personal version of hell. It is the same with working motherhood.

The ideas of the contributors to this book are just that, their ideas, opinions and experiences. What works for them, might be just the thing you have been looking for, or you might give it a try and think to yourself, “What was she thinking?”

This was exactly what I thought at 2 a.m. one morning, while surfing a chat room for moms who couldn't get their kids to sleep. My daughter was about 9 months old. I had returned to work full-time and hadn't had a full night's sleep since she was born—an all too familiar tale. I read every book I could on “How to get your child to sleep”—everything from “cry it out” to “silent return to sleep” to the “family bed.” Nothing worked for us. I was on chat rooms and bulletin boards. I was a wreck, my husband was a wreck, and our daughter could have cared less. She was only nine months old and would take two or three naps during the day.

I went to the pediatrician. He gave me a big hug, asked me how I was doing, and I began sobbing—again, an all too familiar tale. I explained what was going on, and the first words out of his mouth were, “Stop reading all that stuff.”

His point was that everyone has different opinions. You know your child, your family and yourself. Take the ideas that make sense to you and give them a try. If they work, great; if not, chuck 'em out and try something else.

When my daughter moved into her “big-girl” bed, I decided it was better for everyone if I just lay down with her. It only took a few minutes, and she was sound asleep. The only problem was, most nights so was I. I'd wake up in her bed at 10:30 p.m., and the evening was gone. I had done nothing on my “list of things to do when she is asleep.” Hrumpf.

When my second daughter was born, I was ecstatic. She was healthy and happy. Selfishly, I was looking forward to applying the lessons I learned with our first daughter. I wouldn't make the same mistakes twice, I confidently told myself. Indeed, I'd make a whole new set of mistakes. Hrumpf.

What I have learned is that there are no absolutes. Nothing works for everyone. We all have different styles, different personalities, and different idiosyncrasies. Take my sister and me. I am a very organized, schedule-driven person. That is how I approach life—including parenting. My kids had schedules, and we didn't mess with the schedules. As a result, I'm now trying to teach them about flexibility and how to “go with the flow.” My sister is very intuitive and takes things as they come. Her kids have schedules too, but they are different from mine. They are not early morning people and tend to stay up later in the evenings. She manages quite well, and her kids are happy and well-adjusted. We're just different.

The ideas in this book are shared with the best of intentions. Some may work for you; others may not. You can take the ideas behind the rule and do with them what you will. They don't have to be followed to the letter. In fact, they can be bent, stretched, and even broken. The point is to learn from others, see what they do, get a good idea, and see what happens. You never know when a great idea might sneak up on you and make life as a working mom just a little bit easier.

2 Your Daughter Can Brush Her Own Hair.

“When they get old enough to care what their hair looks like, they will brush it.”

Robin Wolaner founded Parenting magazine in 1987 and sold the property to Time Inc., where she served as CEO of Sunset Publishing. She is the author of “Naked in the Boardroom: A CEO Bares Her Secrets So You Can Transform Your Career” and recently founded TeeBeeDee, <http://www.tbd.com>, a networking site for people over 40.

Maintenance is time-consuming. As a working mother, I gave up on regular manicures. It was enough to keep my hair looking professional (and, later, not gray). As soon as I could, I abandoned skirts for the same reason (keeping a supply of un-snagged pantyhose is beyond me).

While I could cheerily make trade-offs for myself, at first I had deep pangs when I would see other children beautifully dressed, with the boys' hair trimmed neatly and the girls' tresses arrayed with barrettes, braids, etc. I had given up on the idea that my kids' grooming reflected on me. I rationalized by saying that if they didn't brush their teeth twice a day, they would have to suffer the consequences. The theory was that not-nagging my kids would help them develop self-discipline. But, the real reason was, I couldn't do everything. (I'm terrible with a blow-dryer; my own style is wash-and-wear by necessity.)

In all seriousness, as the founder of *Parenting Magazine*, I do feel a bit responsible for the generation of “helicopter parents” who hover over their kids, feeling their successes as our own. If

my (not-fully-employed) friend's daughter doesn't get into Harvard, my friend will be more devastated than her daughter. This begins early. Non-working mothers spend time competing with other mothers for the best-dressed kid, the best lunch packed for school, the fullest roster of lessons to which they drive their children. Working mothers are already competing in the office and don't have the time to compete in the lunchbox.

I think we, working mothers, are better off for this. While I am as competitive as the next person, I think it's fortunate that our lack of time saves us from the ugliness of getting our "wins" through our children's appearance and performance. We may pay a price in guilt, at the visible shame that our daughters don't have perfect hair or our sons wear wrinkled clothes, but those kids are taught a good lesson about taking care of themselves.

Yet, it's still hard to let go of the visible signs of a pampered child. The sooner a working mother can stop feeling responsible for every aspect of her child's life, the sooner that child can develop the resilience and self-sufficiency that will empower him later in life.

"When they get old enough to care what their hair looks like, they will brush it." This was a favorite saying of Leslie Jacobs, the founder of a large insurance agency whom I interviewed for my book, *Naked in the Boardroom: A CEO Bares Her Secrets So You Can Transform Your Career* (Simon & Schuster, 2005).

I don't want to gender-stereotype, as I'm sure there is an act of personal grooming equivalent to hair-brushing that we mothers do for our sons; in my case, being Jewish, circumcision was almost a foregone (no pun intended) conclusion. But the thought did occur to me that future nagging of my then-infant to keep clean would be one less thing on my list.

3

Stand Up Straight

Good posture is an important step in balancing the burdens of life!

Regan MacPherson is a single mom of a wonderful daughter, a pug and a cat, and is a full-time corporate attorney for a storage technology company in Silicon Valley.

The other morning, I was dressing for work, feeding the dog, doing laundry, and making my daughter's lunch. I leaned down to put on a pair of heels and felt a sharp ache in my back. The advice of my granny, who, while I was growing up, would frequently come up behind me, smack me between the shoulder blades, and issue the stern command "stand up straight!" reverberated loudly in my head.

I straightened up, put my shoulders back, and took a deep breath. I opted that day for a pair of flats. By paying attention to my posture that day, by the next, I was back in the proverbial saddle.

As working moms, we carry many loads, both literally and figuratively. We lug around our babies, our toddlers, and sometimes even our school-aged kids. We carry groceries and load after load of laundry; we mop floors and scrub toilets; and cook gourmet meals. We take care of our kids when they are sick or heartsick, bored or delighted. We care for the family pets and often for a spouse or elderly parent. We keep family relations intact with our own siblings and parents, and sometimes our in-laws.

As employees, we carry a different load. We lug our laptops and other work-related items back and forth between meetings. We manage rela-

tionships with our bosses, employees, and co-workers. We carry the emotional weight of financially supporting a family. At the end of the day, after helping the kids with homework, dinner, teeth brushing, stories, kisses, excuses, and, finally, sleep, we log in again, to check e-mail and catch up on work.

As working moms, we take on multiple programs and problems, from volunteering at school and driving on field trips to running meetings and managing multi-million dollar projects. If we are lucky, we have a few hours a week to exercise, read a good book, or visit with beloved girlfriends. There is usually a sacrifice at work or at home that must be made to eke out those hours from our schedule.

If we are not careful, the physical and mental burdens that we carry every day, even though they bring us joy and satisfaction, pile up, and we find ourselves shrinking, slouching, hurting, ducking our heads, and not making eye contact with other humans.

Working moms, I am virtually smacking you between the shoulder blades! *Stand Up Straight!* Good posture is an important step in balancing the burdens of life!

Good posture makes us look and feel healthy, empowered, and in control. Standing tall makes us feel tall, and if we feel tall, we *are* tall! Straightening up and throwing back our shoulders brings about an almost instantaneous attitude adjustment and makes others perceive us as larger than life.

Good posture reduces strain on our muscles and spine, helps maximize energy and vitality, and helps prevent health issues as we age. And last, but certainly not least, another true benefit to good posture is that it makes our clothes look better and makes it more comfortable to wear killer shoes!

I find that if I take a moment, straighten up, throw my shoulders back, and take a deep breath, the burdens feel lighter, my body feels and looks better, and my attitude is transformed. Thanks, Granny.

About the Author



Laura Lowell has navigated the waters of working motherhood since the birth of her first daughter in 2000. Part-time, full-time and entrepreneur—she has tried it all. In the process, she came to meet, question, and learn from other working moms. *42 Rules for Working Moms* shares those experiences with others.

Prior to launching Impact Marketing Group, Laura was the Director, Worldwide Consumer Marketing Communications for Hewlett-Packard, where she was responsible for planning and implementing integrated marketing campaigns across all HP consumer product lines. Early in her career, Laura spent several years at Intel Corporation, where she was on the start-up team that developed and implemented the Intel Inside® branding program.

Laura's degree in International Relations prepared her for work assignments in Hong Kong and London, after which she received her MBA from UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business, with an emphasis on marketing and entrepreneurship. She lives in Los Gatos, California, with her husband, Rick, and their two daughters age 6 and 8.

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