

Is Working From Home For You?

My daughter was born a few weeks before my company told employees we were being sold. Not the best time for the VP, Human Resources to be on maternity leave! Back to work when Meghan was a few weeks old, the acquisition was completed a few months later and I learned there would be no job for me. Severance provided the opportunity to start my own business, work from home and spend more time with all my children including three stepsons aged 14, 16 and 25. A year later, I realize how much I underestimated the adjustment for the entire family.

It was easy to ignore a messy house when I went out to work each day - especially with cleaning help every Friday. We needed to cut expenses and decided to clean ourselves. My husband agreed to help but it continues to require a lot of “reminders”. The boys, used to a few hours alone after school, don’t appreciate the watchful eye of mom who thinks homework and chores should come before MSN and t.v. Everyone sees me “working” but there’s still something inside that says, “But you’re home all day, why can’t you do it!” There’s no escaping the mess making it difficult to get to work with crumbs and clutter blocking the route from my office to the bathroom, but strangely, not to the cookie jar in the kitchen!

My interaction with colleagues, a source of satisfaction and recognition, disappeared. Now it bugs me that the work I’ve done in the garden has gone unnoticed and that no one in the house has bothered to visit my website and check out the latest article! The family hasn’t changed but what I need from it has! Every family and every relationship has it challenges and problems and when you work from home, the opportunity for them to grow is very real! We realized we never discussed the following:

- How will your family income change? What adjustments need to be made?
- Can everyone truly get that you’re still working and do their share of the chores?
- How will you handle things when, in an angry moment, your spouse says, “But you’re home all day!” or “We could afford that if you were working at your old job!” How’s your track record for talking out problems?
- What personal needs are met through your relationships at work (e.g. recognition, friendships, intellectual stimulation). Don’t underestimate their importance! How will these needs continue to be met?
- Do you have a work space that is yours alone? If your home office is where the family computer is and the place that homework gets done, you’re in for trouble!
- Is it possible to establish regular home office hours and stick to them as much as possible. How will you ensure the house, and that cookie jar, don’t distract you? Can you afford to take the kids to daycare several days a week so you have uninterrupted work time?