

Life 'but for' the law

I recently started to ponder what my life would be like 'but for' the choice I made to pursue a career in law. These days, I constantly see pictures of old friends now happily married with 2.5 kids and a city 4WD, putting comments up on Facebook about how they have just made cupcakes or are very excited that little Brady slept through the night. They make life as full-time mums seem rather enviable.

I've always known I wanted a career in law. Now I am in my 30s I realise that I have somewhat subconsciously chosen career over a happy marriage and children. When I was in my teens, innocent and naive, I always imagined being happily married by 25 to a tall, dark, handsome man who adored me, with two children – a boy and a girl – all, of course, before I was 30. And I was always adamant that I'd take four years off work to be at home until the kids went to school...

How things changed as I realised I loved working as a lawyer, and set my sights on partnership. Plus, who can afford the luxury of four years off work?!

I have an enormous amount of respect for those women who seem to be able to juggle a career and family. Take one of my colleagues for instance: Charlotte has a small baby, works three days a week and studies law. She's trying to juggle being a fabulous mum, wife, employee and student and, in my view, is doing a fantastic job. She emails at odd hours of the night when she's working from home (and up feeding) and still manages to come into work looking fresh and fabulous. Having said that, her constant refrain is never having enough time and always juggling priorities in an effort to be everything to everyone.

When I review my life thus far, I am pleased that I studied hard, worked hard and have risen to a respectable position within my firm. I'd like to think that I could step out of the workplace for a short while to have

a baby (should the right man come along...but where is he hiding?) and step straight back in where I left off. Or am I just dreaming? But (presuming I can actually have a baby), will I want to come back to work full-time? Many mums say that with the cost of full-time childcare, they are working only to pay the babysitter. My current passion for work tells me that I would want to come back to full-time work; but at what price? A friend took only three months off work following her baby before returning to work full-time. She maintained her high position within her firm but regrets missing those early and irreplaceable years of her child's life. This sadly seems to be the choice us career women are forced to make. Another friend who raced back to full-time work has just elected to drop back to four days to shift the balance back towards family, but the price may be that she will not be able to retain her current role.

Many women say that if they leave the workforce on the way up the corporate ladder it is very hard to jump back on and progress at the same pace they would have done if they hadn't left. It shouldn't be

the case, but unfortunately it seems to be. I can see how it would be incredibly difficult to maintain a busy law practice working part-time. I'd like to think that in this day and age, when we are all contactable 24/7, it may be possible, especially with a competent junior solicitor on hand, but I am probably one of the lucky ones with a supportive team to hold the fort. What's the option for mothers without that support? I'd love to see more high-level positions job-shared – which should also be possible if you had good communication between you. We see job-sharing support staff regularly, but why not professional staff? Ladies, I think this is something we should push for.

And gents, too – let's hear it for more full-time dads!

So what will I do? Well, keep working hard until the right man comes along for starters... and then, should I be blessed, tackle these tough decisions that parents, predominantly women, face daily. Who knows, maybe I'll happily replace fighting for my clients' rights with pushing a Bugaboo and lunches with a mothers' group. But I hope I can manage a bit of both. ■

Fast, professional legal costing

SYDNEY: (02) 9977 9200 • BRISBANE: (07) 3229 7433

CANBERRA: (02) 6248 8077

www.dgt.com.au • costing@dgt.com.au



DG Thompson