

COLUMBUS BUSINESS FIRST

'CLIENTS EXPECT DIVERSITY'

Advice to children: You can have a career and a family

BY MELISSA KOSSLER DUTTON



When Kathy Kreps left the law firm of Porter Wright Morris & Arthur LLP, she was pursuing her interest in serving as a law clerk.

But she was also acting on her concerns that she couldn't balance family and work at a busy law firm.

"When I was at the firm, I did not have children," said Kreps, who left in 2008. "I was looking at other people and thinking 'How would I ever do this?'"

After leaving the firm, she clerked for two judges, worked for the Ohio Attorney General's office and had two children. She returned to the firm earlier this year because she missed litigation.

She's found – with the support of her supervisors and spouse – it's possible to have work-life balance.

"One of the reasons I came back to the law firm was that I find my career so personally fulfilling," she said. "I realized when I'm doing something that makes me happy, it helps me take good care of the people in my life."

What challenges do women face when they try to balance work and family?

"Guilt is one of the biggest challenges. Women worry that they're not doing a good enough job at work or at home, or both."

Her thoughts, excerpted from a recent conversation with *Columbus Business First*, follow.

How has working at the firm changed your time with your kids? I do spend less time with them, but I appreciate our time together more.

How important is flexibility in making it work? It's very important. I actually find



working for the firm is more flexible than my previous job for the state. Some public-sector jobs demand regular hours, which makes it more challenging to get to doctor's appointments and school functions.

What, if any, efforts do you see law firms making for women – and men – who want to devote more time to their family?

Firms and clients recognize that women are part of the work force and people with kids are part of the work force and that's a good thing.

How important are career successes in your efforts as a mother?

For me personally, it has a huge impact. I have always had a passion for litigating, and although I had great jobs in the public sector, I wasn't doing what I was passionate about. That left me feeling less satisfied in general, at home and at work. Now that I am doing what I love again, I'm in a good mood and a happier person.

What example do you wish to set for your children? I just want them to know that they can do what they want. They can have a career. They can have a family. They can decide those things for themselves. That's what I did.

How does employing working moms help Porter Wright?

Porter Wright understands that a diverse work force brings new ideas to the table that will help the firm in the long run. And clients expect diversity. Law firms can't continue to have the same standards in place that they have had for the last 100 years. It's not good for business.

What advice would you give to women with demanding careers who want to start a family?

Try to focus on making decisions out of love, not fear. If you love your demanding job, but you fear your children aren't getting enough of your attention, then keep your job and make those personal moments with your children really special. If, on the other hand, spending more time with your children makes you happy, but you fear taking on less responsibility at work will damage your career, then take that risk so you can spend more time with your children. Your career may not look like you imagined it. It may not look like your husband's career, your father's, or your brother's. Sometimes you will take steps backwards or sideways, but you will ultimately get where you want to go. And adjust where you want to go throughout your career as your values and experience change.

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