



Ardent Law's Half Birthday – a Note to Business Owner Moms

Ardent Law is 6 months old today, and it feels like it. We're cutting our teeth and learning to sit up without falling backwards. We're the beneficiary of countless acts of selflessness, and we're constantly being changed. As we stumble, grow, and stumble some more, we grow frustrated, then excited, then proud, and then tired. We have our moments of panic, but we're surviving. And yes, by we, I mean me.

Two of my modern-day heroines coined phrases that are more true today than ever for this married, working mom. The most important career choice you'll make is who you'll marry (Sheryl), and, it takes a village (Hillary). My husband told me long ago to start my own law firm, and continues to be my biggest cheerleader. My friends and family have brought encouragement, support, and babysitting to my door. Most recently, my mom flew in for ten days to help during a particularly busy time at work. My network of colleagues, my online community, and my fellow alumni have been so generous with their advice and good wishes. I wouldn't be so ardent if it weren't for these motivators.

But posts don't always have to be positive. After all, at a mid-year assessment, one *must* consider the good and the bad. When I started the firm, my kid was 9 months old. As of today, I'm 16 weeks pregnant with my second. By the time the firm turns the big 0-1, I'll have 2 under 2. It's a wonderful thing for our family, and for the firm. For me, having a family serves as motivation to dive even deeper into my career, build my brand, and own my practice. It encourages me to make more money, even though I'm pretty happy living off of Chipotle and Hershey Kisses. Kids, apparently, need fresh produce.

So what's bad? The hours? Nope – I set them. The balance? Nope – I force it. The benefits? Nope – I am fortunate to have a spouse who has health insurance. I have little to nothing to complain about, and those who know me well know I consider a lack of perspective the most distasteful of human traits. But pay close attention, ladies, because a bit of bad is hidden behind an old, petrified log from the olden days. I can only describe it in Hitchcockian terms:

“The Mother Who May (or May Not) Be Working”

Once I launched Ardent, I began to understand the power of stereotypes. In meetings, some folks ask me detailed questions about my son's daycare schedule: the hours, as well as the days of the week (7 am-6 pm, M-F). Some assume I only do transactional work, because litigation is “not great for moms.” Some think I work part-time, or on the side, or as a sort of supplemental income to my husband. Fun money? I think I heard about that on *The Price is Right*.

None of these realities would be bad if they were my reality. But when you're launching a full-service, litigation firm with an eye on growth and longevity until it's time to move to Florida, it can be a very bad thing to be stereotyped. Specifically, it can make it more difficult to get clients – already the biggest challenge for anyone starting a business. I explain to anyone who asks that I typically work longer hours, at odder times, than I ever have before. “It's great,” I explain, “because it's my own thing. I hope it does well and grows and I have some associates in the near future.” (Read: This is a real business! Just like a male business owner, it has plans and a federal tax ID and it is serious! Want my card?)

Until motherhood is seen as one-half of parenthood, *which is a necessary endeavor to keep the species from dying off*, women will continue to field these questions. And, while annoying, we should never let it deter us from pursuing our dreams, or delay us from having offspring (if we want them). It is easy to doubt ourselves, but we shouldn't feel bad about growing a family alongside a career. After all, working fathers are seen as more committed to their jobs than non-fathers, so it can't just be about the kids. I picture starting Ardent as a man, with a 9-month old at home and another on the way. I can't imagine fielding questions about daycare hours.

So to my fellow mom business owners: take note! Kids are like vacation – they're a lot of fun, they cost a lot, and there's no good time to have them. So forge ahead, fight against stereotyping, and don't forget to forgive yourself when you show up to work with spit up on your shoulder.

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