Getting the balance right

A personal view of LTFT training

I don’t recall ever having masses of spare time before I had my first baby. I was your average CT2 trainee, working fulltime and studying for my Primary FRCA. Making the transition to part time trainee and mummy and still managing to fit everything in has certainly raised some challenges for me. I have been back at work for 6 weeks now, having taken 9 months of maternity leave. Being 27, and by no means what I would consider a young mum (although perhaps I am amongst medical colleagues) I think that the lessons I have learned trying to make everything work would benefit many considering starting a family, so I thought I would share my thoughts on how to get the infamous work life balance right.

Organisation is everything

I was told very early on in my anaesthetic training that ‘proper preparation prevents poor performance’ and this is now true of my whole week. I considered myself an organised person pre-baby, but now I have taken it to a whole new level. I have technology to thank in part for this, my Google calendar is synced to my husbands and to a third ‘nursery’ calendar which we can both access from our smart phones and amend as necessary. This ensures we always know who is picking up or dropping off, who is on call and when we ever have time off together!

My organisation doesn’t stop there, I meal plan every week (including homemade baby meals) and tie this in to my online shopping. Every evening has a ritual of baby bathing, dinner, sterilising, cooking more baby meals if needed and getting any work done. I also have to prepare bags, lunch and clothes for the next day.

Spontaneity is only a distant memory now, but with forethought and planning we manage to fit in work rest and play into our days.

The Rules

I set myself some basic rules to follow to ensure I was getting the most out of both my professional and home life (box 1). Keeping work days and baby days separate is very important, I want to feel I’m giving my best at work and when I’m with my son. You don’t want to be distracted by anything else so it’s important to draw a line and enjoy what you’re doing at that particular time. It would be easy to worry about my little man at nursery when I’m at work, but all that would achieve would be to distract me from my job and not maximise my learning opportunities. Besides, the nursery will call if there is any problem. Equally there is no point in getting stressed about work tasks on baby days as there simply isn’t any opportunity to do anything about them.

It is possible to fit in all email checking, audits and revision on work days. If I’m on shifts, I will often drop my son into nursery an hour or so earlier than I need, so I have some designated ‘work time’ before my shift starts.

I find it works well to have fixed days at work, so I can plan activities and book classes (such as baby swimming lessons) on my baby days.

Prioritising/Choosing your battles

I, like most anaesthetists, have a slight perfectionist tendency, so it came as quite a shock to me that I couldn’t keep on top of everything and have everything perfect all the time. I think the key to coping with this and accepting it without having a meltdown is to choose your battles wisely. For example, I feel quite strongly about cooking...
all of my son’s meals. On returning to work, my plan was still to cook all of his meals including for his days at nursery. I quickly established that this was madness! I would never have time to buy all the ingredients and cook them without having to sacrifice another aspect of my day, possibly sleep. The nursery has its own chef who prepares fresh meals daily; as obvious as it seems to take these, it still took me time to swallow my pride and sign up for these.

**Misconceptions**

It is a shame that sometimes people still hold misconceptions about LTFT training. Certainly, training part time is not easy, on the contrary LTFT trainees work equally as hard at work and have to be extremely efficient and organised with their time, dare I say even more so than their fulltime colleagues? We certainly don’t get ‘four days off’ a week, although we are only paid for three of our days!

I also think it’s important to dispel the myth that just because I am training flexibly that I am less dedicated to my career that any other trainee.

LTFT training is not a one-way ticket. Many people return to fulltime training at a later date to hasten the acquisition of their CCT and this is certainly something that I have not dismissed when the time is right for my family and me.

**Final thoughts**

Balancing everything can be really tough, tougher still is managing to feel that you’re a good mummy, a good anaesthetist and a good partner. Saying that, it really is extremely rewarding to be lucky enough to be a working mummy who enjoys her job and dare I say, has everything she could have ever wanted.

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CT2 Anaesthetic trainee, Wessex Deanery.

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**6th Oxford Paediatric Difficult Airway Workshop**  
Thursday 23 June 2011

The Paediatric Difficult Intubation Workshop is for trainees and consultants who anaesthetise children and wish to refresh and update skills in managing children with a difficult airway. The course aims to discuss the management of the anticipated and unanticipated paediatric difficult airway. The format of the day is one of short interactive lectures, videos and hands-on small group workshops. The workshops cover care and basic use of the fibre-optic laryngoscope, modified airway and LMA access techniques using guidewires and exchange catheters.

Delegate numbers are limited to 24 places to allow maximum opportunity to interact and interrogate the faculty.

Early booking recommended.
Registration fee includes refreshments and lunch.

**Course organisers**: Dr David G. Mason, Dr Mansukh T Popat and Dr Stuart W Benham

**Registration Fee**: £220  
5 CECP points

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