

THE *Hollywood* REPORTER®

ENTERTAINMENT'S 1st DAILY PAPER

a VNU publication

77th year

December 2006

\$5.99 (U.S.) \$8.99 (Canada) £5.50 (U.K.) € 9.25 (EU)

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Hand on the Run

Eight clever ways for a working mom to achieve a balance between work and family life *By Rebecca Ascher-Walsh*

Executives don't get a lot of breaks, but executives who are mothers get close to none. Understanding bosses and a solid support network are crucial, to be sure, but dependable child care, weekend escapes and a strong body are perhaps no less important to keeping the ever-precarious balance of being a fully functioning worker and parent. Here, a primer for the prime caretaker.



1. Best Backup: Hollywood mothers and celebrities sing praises for the Grapevine, and for good reason. Founded only a year ago by Lori Zuker Briller, a former development executive, Rachel Zaslansky, a former assistant to CAA's Kevin Huvane, and Caroline Bassett, who had worked in staffing agencies, Grapevine places baby nurses and nannies — as well as personal chefs, estate managers and assistants — with a level of vigilance that makes nanny cams all but irrelevant. “We are the only workers in the company because we’re only comfortable if we’re doing the work,” Briller says. Each potential employee is vetted by the partners themselves, and clients are interviewed in-depth about their specific needs. “We meet with everyone, even on the weekends, and ask what people need,” Briller says. “Where are they located? What are they willing to pay? Does the person need to drive? Does English need to be the employee’s first language?” Grapevine charges a percentage of the placed employee’s annual salary, which ranges between 15%–20% and includes a 90-day satisfaction guarantee, within which time the company will replace the employee for free. “But that’s a little specific,” Briller says. “If it’s 95 days, it’s not like we charge. We want everyone to be happy. We give clients our cell phone numbers, and we give them our home phone numbers. We’re always available. I’m a working mother, so I get it.” (www.thegrapevineLA.com)

2. Best Dressing: Emilia Fabricant has come to the rescue of all working executives who thought that they had to look as awful during their pregnancies as they feel during morning sickness. Fabricant’s fashionable Cadeau line makes no apologies or allowances for expectant mothers, except in the area of more forgiving waistlines. “I was pregnant with my third child when I realized the sacrifices I was having to make as a professional woman, and one

who dressed fashionably," explains Fabricant, a former executive at Barneys New York who helped launch the department store's line of maternity wear. Fabricant's company is now relied upon by celebrities such as Jennifer Garner, Katie Holmes, Angelina Jolie, Heidi Klum and Christy Turlington during their time of need, thanks to clothing made entirely of high-end Italian fabric that guarantees no bagging in the butt or knees. The line changes up to 10 times a year to reflect current fashions so that no one has to sit out a fashion fad; this season, patterns even come in leopard print. And thanks to the "button out" system featured in each skirt and pair of pants, expectant moms can buy clothes early on in their pregnancy and then wear them throughout the postpartum period, with buttons brought back in as mothers get back into shape. A new layette collection also offers fine gifts for celebrating friends and colleagues. (www.cadcaumaternity.com; 8113 Melrose Ave., 323-297-2000)

3. Best Bootie: For all mothers who miss seeing their friends almost as much as they miss seeing their abs, Cardio Barre is a revelation. The brainchild of former Chippendale dancer and choreographer Richard Giorla, Barre is a low-impact, high-intensity class that gives serious caloric and butt-burning without any pounding; indeed, it's so tough, Giorla promises noticeable results after only three sessions. New mother Melissa Joan Hart lost her pregnancy weight here, and celebrities such as Melissa Gilbert and Amy Smart are joining suit. The studio has recently added 6:30 a.m. classes for mothers who want to get in their exercise as well as some grown-up time before heading to work. "There's no locker room, but it's definitely a social scene," Giorla says. "Everyone hangs out afterwards in the parking lot, catching up." There also is extra motivation to attend: Giorla claims to remember everyone's name after only one class, so skip a day in favor of sleeping in, and it will be noticed. Classes, which are \$16 each, hold sixty-five students, and while reservations aren't necessary, Giorla recommends showing up 15 minutes early. For the truly time-deprived, a video and portable barre are available on the studio's Web site. (www.cardio-barre.com; 12530 Riverside Drive, Studio City, 818-761-4525)

4. Best Crib: Former UTA agent and founder of Step Up Women's Network, which encourages executive women to dedicate themselves to philanthropic efforts, Kaye Popofsky Kramer started Nurseryworks with former City Search chief operating officer Traci Flemming. The motivation came in realizing that no children's home-furnishings company addressed the need that parents be

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—Lori Zuker Britter, *Cranvino*

as pleased with the decor as the child. "There would be the aesthetic of the house, and then there would be the nursery," Kramer says. "We wanted to build a brand that would be both contemporary and traditional, so the nursery isn't totally separate in terms of how it looks from the rest of the house." The furniture is featured in more than 150 stores, but contributors to Step Up (www.stepupwomensnetwork.com) get a 10% discount on the line. (www.nurseryworks.net, 888-508-9540)

5. Best Eats: It seems like an impossible feat: Dine at home in sweats alongside your children without needing to cook, order out or microwave frozen pizza. But thanks to Deena Fisk and her company, Thyme Around the Table, not only is that possible, it also doesn't cost a lot more than taking the family out to the local pasta joint. A former dance teacher and nutritionist, Fisk went back to train at the Cordon Bleu and now offers up home-cooked meals to those who are too busy to do it themselves. Fisk has one face-to-face meeting with each client in order to suss out needs and tastes, and she's happy to oblige everyone from those who demand a macrobiotic diet to those who crave satiating comfort food. If left to her own devices, "I like to cook with butters and cream, but with my nutrition background, I know that's not something to do every day," Fisk says. "So, I lighten it up." Since private chefs aren't legally allowed to prepare meals in a non-professional kitchen, Fisk gets a copy of the client's key and does her work in their home. Once-a-week visits cost \$325 and provide enough food for three dinners, ready to be served or refrigerated, and include entrees and sides for four people; Fisk throws in the occasional dessert as a treat. (www.thymearoundthetable.com, 818-986-0109)

6. Best Escape: Taking precious free time away from the kids seems too wrenching; bringing them along seems equally so in different ways. The Ritz-Carlton has made it as easy as it can be to escape for the weekend with the whole family and still have time for everyone. Drive south to the Ritz property in Laguna Niguel for "Kids' Night Out," which offers on-site baby-sitting services for the young ones Friday and Saturday night so that the grown-ups

can partake in a romantic meal in the dining room overlooking the Pacific; during the holidays and summers, the hotel also offers a kids' lounge that provides food and activities. Head north for the short journey to Pasadena's Ritz-Carlton, Huntington Hotel & Spa, which not only welcomes children but advocates time for couples only with its "Reconnect" package. For \$555, couples can enjoy a one-night stay in a deluxe guest room, a three-course dinner and either massages or tee times on the local golf course. (www.ritzcarlton.com)

7. Best Gifting: Lullabies put you to sleep along with your child, but belting out Madonna's "Holiday" doesn't necessarily have the desired effect come bedtime. Instead, stop by Riginols and have a \$12.99 tape cassette made of six songs, each of which inserts the child's name into the lyrics for a grand total of 28 times, lest an overexhausted mother forget her moniker of choice. Titles include "Bug Bug Boogie" and "Someone Special Lullaby." The store also stocks clothing for newborns and toddlers, much of which — surprise, surprise — can be personalized. (Located in the Century City Shopping Center, 10250 Santa Monica Blvd.; 310-557-2532)

8. Best Bonding: "When you find out you're pregnant," says one executive, "you call Jackie before you call your husband." Jackie would be Jackie Rosenberg, otherwise known as a mother's best friend thanks to her famous Mommy and Me class, Babies First Class. Trained as a pediatric occupational therapist, Rosenberg began the program 25 years ago when she had her own children and realized the lack of information being made available to mothers about how to be with their children. The classes are structured to take a mother and her child through the first two years of life, with each 16-person class devoted to babies born that particular month. Classes are held once a week for one hour, and a parent must be present (no nannies or grandparents) to participate in a 15-minute question-and-answer forum, a 30-minute lecture from Rosenberg on psychological and medical issues and a final 15 minutes devoted to music and movement. Rosenberg has recently trained a colleague, herself the mother of twins, to teach a class devoted only to multiples and their parents. "I take a baby through his or her first two years of life," she says proudly. "They come in lying in their mother's arms, and they leave saying, 'Bye, Jackie!' It's such a passion for me." Classes are \$300, bought in groups of 10. Reservations are suggested early on in the pregnancy. (www.babiesfirstclass.com; 14368 Ventura Blvd., Sherman Oaks, 818-501-BABY) ■