

Entrepreneurs juggle home responsibilities

ENTREPRENEURS JUGGLE HOME RESPONSIBILITIES

By Sara Ganus

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Tod and Leslie Hardin have been self-employed since the late 1980s, and for about 10 years, the couple and their business were the only things under their roof.

That all changed when their daughter, Katie, was born.

While Tod Hardin continued to work full-time, Leslie Hardin cut back on helping her husband run the business and her part-time teaching job and decided to co-author a college textbook instead.

"I learned how to use my mouse with my left hand, holding (Katie) with my other," she said.

Today, Leslie Hardin, now back to her full-time schedule, said she still finds it difficult to balance the task of running a business and the responsibility of raising her daughter, now 9, in the same space.

"It's harder for me because I really struggle, especially in the summertime," she said. "Should I be stopping and playing a game with Katie? I've got work to do. I've got the house to pick up or grocery shopping or laundry, and I have to balance all these roles."

In a world where many entrepreneurs start home-based businesses to be with their family, Leslie Hardin is not alone.

Almost three out of four home-based entrepreneurs said they find themselves making sacrifices in their personal lives in order to run their business, according to a 2007 OPEN survey from American Express Small Business Monitor of 626 small-business owners with fewer than 100 employees.

In the same survey, family ranked highest as the area where home-based entrepreneurs found themselves making the most sacrifices, followed by health, friends and personal finances.

Here's hurdles to leap

Family is the biggest hurdle to hop over for a home-based entrepreneur, said Glenn Muske, interim associate dean of the College of Human Environmental Sciences at Oklahoma State University, who helps entrepreneurs start home-based or micro businesses.

"You've got this business system and this family system, and they're totally intermeshed with each other," he said. "All of a sudden, the dining room table becomes the cutting room table or craft table or it becomes the office."

Still, Tod and Leslie Hardin, who operate DiscoverSoft, a software development company out of their home said although they didn't go into the home-based business sector because of their daughter, they wouldn't have it any other way.

"It would be really hard if you owned your own business and didn't work at home," Tod Hardin said.

Leslie Hardin agreed.

"The benefits outweigh the stresses, especially when (Katie)'s this young," she said. "We have breakfast together in the morning, and one of us takes her to school and we pick her up or my aunt helps take care of her. I think that's better than taking her to the before-care at school at 7:30 (a.m.) and picking her up at 5:30 (p.m.). I wouldn't trade that."

Muske said many times, self-employed women have a harder time than men juggling the roles of entrepreneur and parent. Not only do they tend to have a guilty conscience, but they often have to struggle for legitimacy from their peers and their family.

"I know of a business owner who literally walks out of her front door, walks around the house and comes in the back door into her office," he said. "She makes that mental and physical transition into her business world.

"Good home-based business owners find ways to help the family understand and to create this balance so that they can be a business owner."

Formula offered

That same formula helped the Hardins operate their business and raise their daughter in the same space, which is exactly why they moved into their Nichols Hills home about five years ago. It had two rooms they could use for office space that they could shut off from the rest of the house.

Leslie Hardin said that during the summertime, when Katie is out of school, she often watches television or draws in one of their offices. On most nights, they leave their offices and shut their doors and move to the living room area.

Tod Hardin said discussing boundaries and having a strong family structure helped them find balance.

"We try — Katie would say we violate them, and we do — but at least we try to shut down the business at night," he said.



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