

Secrets to being both an executive and a mom



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There is one way in which men and women will never, ever be equal: Women can get pregnant. Men cannot.

And so for ambitious, career-minded women, there is always a series of looming questions: Should I get pregnant? And if so, when? How will I manage being an executive and a mom? Will I ever achieve a healthy balance between work and family? To be sure, in many families, childcare is a shared responsibility. But, being pregnant can really only ever be done by one person.

And once the children are born, if one parent doesn't put his or her career at least partially or temporarily on hold, the work-life balance dance gets ever more complicated to maintain gracefully. Kira Wampler, the chief marketing officer of ridesharing platform Lyft and mother of two, says she doesn't even try to achieve balance. Instead, the idea of allowing for "flow" works better for her. She recognizes that there are certain periods of time that she will have to be spending more time at the office, and certain periods of time that she will be able to spend more time with her family at home.

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Wampler speaking to Lyft staff. Image credit: Lyft

"Sometimes it is going to ebb and flow in different ways, and sometimes you are going to flow very heavily around work, because you are getting ready to relaunch the brand and try to hit these huge milestones for a startup within two months of joining," she says, laughing, because that is exactly what she is currently trying to do at Lyft.

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“ And other times, it is end of the school year and there is the recital and the school play and da-da-da and those things are important, too.” Wampler joined Lyft in December, just as the startup has been working overtime to make its brand more sophisticated. The San Francisco-based Uber competitor recently traded in its large, magenta, fluffy mustache that was affixed to the grill of a car to identify it as part of the Lyft fleet for a much sleeker, glowing, smaller mustache — dubbed the “ glowstache” — in an effort to become more modern and sophisticated. , Wampler was the chief marketing officer for real-estate marketplace Trulia.

Before that, she was a vice president of marketing at camera company Lytro. In raising her 8-year-old and 6-year old, she’s realized another secret: the importance of marrying well. To her, “ marrying well” has nothing to with choosing someone with deep pockets; it means choosing someone who has your back. Related:“ A lot of your life’s decisions are going to be heavily impacted by your partner and by the choices that you and your partner make together,” she says. For example, after business school, when she was considering taking a job at the camera company Lytro, she and her husband Jeff were also considering having a third child. They made the decision together.

“ My husband actually said, ‘ I would rather you join an early stage startup than have another baby right now.’ Which was so great,” says Wampler. “ I think that it is indicative of the relationship that we have.” In addition to eschewing the quest for unattainable balance and marrying a true partner, Wampler believes that working for a purpose-driven company makes it easier to juggle a career and an active home life.

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“ When I look at the women who are successfully navigating both sides of their lives, or parts of our lives, that we have found a reason to be part of something bigger than ourselves and our professional lives.” Lyft, in a conceptual sense, is about maximizing efficiency, increasing sustainability, and building a community. That doesn’t mean that Wampler — or the women she observes who are like her — aren’t also committed to being profitable on an individual basis and on a company-wide level, but the companies they work for or have started themselves are committed to more than just making money. Related: Finally, Wampler believes in embracing the unknown.

There can be no question that there will be chaos. The answer has to be, however, that one way or another, it will all work out. When Wampler was offered the job at real-estate website Trulia, she hemmed and hawed at first. She knew that she shouldn’t turn away her first opportunity to be a CMO for a public company — a career milestone. But she wasn’t sure how her family would manage.

Her friend convinced her that she really could not pass up the role, but she should be honest about her commitment to her family. Many women, afraid that they don’t already have a picture of how they can manage to be a mother and an executive, back out of their professional lives when they really don’t need to. When she told the CEO of Trulia that she takes her commitment to her family very seriously, he was perfectly fine with that. “ Just because we don’t know how it’s going to work, doesn’t mean it isn’t going to work,” Wampler says.