

WomanNews

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Moms on the road

Bringing kids on business trips may ease scheduling hassles

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Fascinating destinations, chic hotels, elegant restaurants and interesting sights. Traveling for business sounds so glamorous and enriching, and it can be.

But it's not all that it's cracked up to be when the exec is a mom who has to book sitters and arrange schedules before she heads out of town, and who wants to maintain contact while away.

Just listen to Maureen "Moe" Grzelakowski, a senior vice president and general manager of strategic marketing for Motorola Inc.'s network solutions sector. She estimates that she has slept in her own bed eight days in the first quarter of this year. The "staff" she needs to keep everything running smoothly includes an organizer who pays bills and researches anything she needs to have checked, a woman who takes care of her children and does the laundry and buys groceries, and four grandparents who pinch-hit.

Or consider Ann Richards' plight. The director of marketing for Merchandise Mart Properties Inc.'s properties in High Point, N.C., has had "a full-time person make meals for years, has flown in my mother from Ohio to watch my daughters, left 10-page reports on what's supposed to happen, and arranged after-school sitters to come to the house and teens to drive them to activities."

Exhausted yet?

An increasing number of business moms, including Richards, think one solution is to bring along a child or children occasionally, which in addition to reducing scheduling hassles eliminates separation anxieties both generations may feel.

But success generally hinges on a number of factors: the age of the offspring, the distance traveled, length of the trip, availability of help, type and intensity of work, and attitude of clients and colleagues regarding the extra "baggage."



Author Susan Kuczmariski suggests postcards, letters and diaries as ways to stay close.

Many moms have found that taking children works best when they are very young, or are old enough to amuse themselves at least part of the day. Liz Ryan, founder and vice president of Ucentric Systems Inc., a Chicago home networking startup, found it easiest to bring along children when they were nursing and could sleep in a basket. Her brood includes twin 6-year-olds, a 4-year-old and a 2-year-old.

But if the child is only going to get in the mother's way, resentment is certain to build on both sides. "There were times when I definitely felt torn and thought I should curtail my business activity to spend more time with my children when I brought them," says Joyce L. Gioia, a management consultant in Greensboro, N.C., and co-author of "How To Become an Employer of Choice" (Oakhill Press, \$30).

At such times, it may be smartest to travel solo. Then the keys to success include having competent help, leaving detailed lists of who does what when and what isn't permitted, and discussing how often and when you'll call. Gail M. Gross, a Houston-based talk-show host, suggests getting children to voice concerns since wee ones may worry they're being aban-

doned.

Most moms who are regularly away for work develop their own routines. Chicago parent Susan Kuczmariski, who conducts workshops for parents and educators and authored "The Family Bond" (Contemporary Books, \$12.95), recommends sending postcards and letters, and keeping diaries (with each generation writing down what they're doing while apart).

Chicago native and WNBA basketball player Yolanda Griffith, who has a 10-year-old daughter, Candace, calls nightly and sometimes three or four times a day. "It's a way we stay close," she says. Griffith has worked hard to explain why she needs to travel. "I've explained what I hope to accomplish in order for us to have a better life. I'm not doing this to spoil her and buy clothes or take her to the movies," she says.

Cathy Harshman, founder of Louie & Co., a Northbrook-based shoe manufacturer, brings back gifts for her daughters. One collects spoons, the other crystals. The longer she's gone, the bigger the present, she says.

Irene Gutman, director of national affairs at The National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C., whose husband is a director at the World Bank and has an equally gruesome travel schedule, says they survive on her organizational skills. She lists the two children's daily schedules on a large dry-erase board, and precooks and freezes meals with heating instructions. The couple has tried never to be away simultaneously.

Once back home, both generations need to spend time together, which may mean curtailed social plans.

The most seasoned travelers have mastered another lesson. They know that taking care of themselves is vital. Gutman tries never to catch the "red-eye" plane home since she prefers to return rested the following day. Ryan sings with local groups and takes regular pilates classes.