

Life Happens

A woman's life is a series of stages or passages. No matter if you are married or single you will be cruising along thinking everything is fine and then life throws you a curve. Particularly in the middle years you might be moving forward on a career path or raising kids and a parent gets sick. Or you move. Or the kids are getting out of school for the summer, which means you will have to adjust your work schedule!

Maybe you thought you had the whole scheduling thing figured out. You did your laundry on a certain day and you never ran out of socks. But now you've just had a baby and your three year old won't nap anymore and everything has gone out of whack. What used to work isn't working any more.

While doing yoga one day, I was attempting the dancers pose and felt a bit wobbly. I recalled the advice of my long ago instructor who told us that balance is fluid. "Some shifting is normal. If you focus your eyes on a fixed point maintaining your balance will become much easier."

It's a fact that every organizing solution will not work for every person. The surprising thing is that the same routines often won't work for every stage of *your* life. Life is fluid. Each phase seems to require a certain amount of tweaking.

Here are some of my routines for different phases:

Married/Working Couple

- Laundry and cleaning on Friday nights.
- Grocery shopping on Saturday mornings.
- Errands on lunch hour or after work.

Babies and Toddlers

- Began setting up routines.
- Regular shopping day.
- Regular errand day. They couldn't be the *same* day, or there would be meltdowns.
- Chose to do business with places based on the whether they had a drive- up window.
- Heavily relied on naptime for small chores.
- Load of laundry in before bed. Dry and fold in the morning.
- Eliminated knick knacks. Put things in baskets or on high shelves or behind doors. In addition to the whole baby-proofing element, it meant there was less to dust and clean around.

What I wish I had known:

- **Online grocery delivery service is affordable and very easy to use.** *I remember how cumbersome it was to strap two kids into those oversized grocery carts with seating for two. Once I added a week's worth of groceries it got really heavy. It was still a better alternative than having two boys on the loose.*
- **You could order stamps by mail.** *I remember standing in line at the Post Office, waiting, pulling children out from under the counter, all while trying to keep my place in line. Yes, ordering stamps would have been preferable.*

Kids in preschool. A few hours of freedom per week.

- Grocery and errand shopping while kids were in school.
- Meal planning was essential. Extra trips to the store were just not an option.
- Instituted Quiet Time, to replace naptime. *The goal was to have the boys play quietly in their room, look at books or watch a movie, for one hour. I didn't want to rely on movies too much, but it was a great fall back for days when I need to accomplish a project. Every day offers its own challenges. I remember sometimes suggesting they pick a long movie.*
- I did laundry, loaded dishwasher, paid bills and tidied up during quiet time.
- Had boys put away toys before bed. *We had one giant toy basket. The advantage was that no sorting was required, so it was easy for the kids to clean up. The disadvantage was that if they were looking for a certain toy, the whole basket would get dumped. Instant chaos!*

Two kids in two schools. They were in two cities with two different schedules so my day was quite chopped up. I found it very helpful to use the stray minutes that I had in between carpooling or volunteering at the schools.

- Tidy up bathroom and kitchen every morning. (I couldn't always finish both before driving my oldest to school. So I would finish up between start times.
- Did one load of laundry every morning. Put it in and dried it in between coming and going.
- Menu planning and grocery shopping on one day.
- Cleaning chore for each day. Sweep and vacuum floors on one day. Deep clean the bathrooms on a different day. Kitchen and refrigerator cleaning on another.
- Tidied up and made a to-do list before bed.

Kids in school. Working from home. I'm approaching my time differently now because I don't want to become distracted by chores and take my focus off my business.

- Clear table, load dishwasher, clean counters and tidy up bathroom before the boys go to school. Sometimes throw in a load of laundry. Write a to-do list.
- Establish work hours and try not to be pulled into the unexpected. Goal is to have blocks of time to work.
- Regular grocery shopping day.
- Adhere to lists for groceries and other items. One errand day per week.
- Clean on Friday afternoons. Kids have little or no homework, so they can help. It teaches them cleaning skills and responsibility.
- Usually do laundry at the same time.
- Tidy up before bed.
- Boys lay out backpacks, coats and shoes first thing in the morning.

Kids out of school for the summer. This has been difficult for me. Part of me wants to take the summer off and play with the kids. The other part of me wants to continue building my business. So I've:

- Signed the kids up for a few summer programs.
- Agreed to trade babysitting with another mom in the same situation.
- Decided to work more evenings.
- Worked as much as possible in advance. I saw this coming, so I've prepared newsletters through September and wrote several articles in advance.

Remember shifting is normal. Take a few minutes to focus on your schedule and you will

find your balance.