

LOS ANGELES DIARIST

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IF YOU'VE ALWAYS DREAMED OF running your own business, knock on our door. I'm serious. Ever since my wife left her job running a digital-TV firm last year, an unusually high percentage of folks who've shown up on the stoop have become either Jody's business partners or consulting clients. This is a new twist, I think, on the contemporary cliché: you know, high-powered career mom gets beamed from the executive suite to the nursery, where she plots Zach's naps on a spreadsheet and checks out preschools as if they were corporate-takeover targets. Jody's mania is different. Maybe because she plans to go back to a serious job soon, her displaced energy during this hiatus with our young daughter has taken the form of virtually nonstop business deals. She's been a (thankfully) un-neurotic mom, but a demon of a stay-at-home CEO.

FIRST IT WAS THE ZONE MAN. THE Zone, for those too svelte to know, is a fool-proof (for us at least) diet that preaches a balance of proteins, "good" carbs, and fats. When Jody went on it, she found a place called Zone Delivery to drop off Zone-perfect meals for a few weeks. That was scary enough. Then I emerged from my lair one day to find Zone Man himself in our living room, working with Jody on his expansion plan. Next thing I knew, it was the woman who teaches the "Mommy and Me" class, doing the numbers with Jody on a scheme to start her own birthday-party business. Then it was a former employee's Internet startup. Then another's book project. I knew things had hit critical mass when Amelia, our two-year-old, said her little friend was coming over for a "meeting."

THE WHOLE THING HAS GIVEN ME fresh sympathy for the plight of the corporate mom. And even more sympathy for the plight of the noncorporate work-at-home dad she's married to: me. At the office, my wife had more than 100 employees to boss around. Here there's just me and Amelia. Then there's the psychological adjustment to a spouse who, you come

to realize, is dealing with a serious case of schizophrenia. At first this creeps up on you—as in "I hadn't really thought about it, but the shift from running a company to reading the same book twelve times in a row to a toddler is a tough transition." Then, just when I thought I understood why Jody was crying into her Cheerios each morning while she read *The Wall Street Journal*, she started crying when headhunters dangled interesting job openings, too. (Note to headhunters: Jody's over this now. Keep the calls coming.) Finally it dawns on you: such struggles *will never go away*. I don't know what the experts say, but my own casual study of two-worker families with kids leaves no question that women feel these pressures more than men. Testosterone seems to be a fair proxy for self-absorption, which dulls men's anxiety. Still, if career-minded women who also love being with their kids find the dilemma more traumatic, they also have a hidden consolation—in the course of trying to deal with it, they drive their husbands mad.

THIS IS ESPECIALLY THE CASE WHEN (as with us) there's a humiliating gap in earning potential. Jody earns about as much from a week of consulting as I do from a year's worth of pieces for THE NEW REPUBLIC. (Note to editor: Does this strike you as just?) It's hard to capture in words how pathetic this discrepancy makes me feel. And it turns out there are nuances to these feelings, a kind of topography of inadequacy. If I'd married an heiress, for example, that would have been one thing—the money (more than enough of it!) would just be there, an immutable fact, an entitlement. Being the TNR writer-husband of such a woman would carry an air of aristocratic panache. After all, you're saving the world through your high-minded articles! When, instead, you marry a woman who simply earns much more than you do, it's not dashing—it's depressing. Your wife, you are constantly reminded, is slaving away to support your lifestyle. Assuming that your God-given brain could produce a much higher income (it surely could, couldn't it?), the choice you've made—to be a public-policy writer—seems self-evidently self-indulgent. After all, who reads this obscure crap anyway? (Note to editor: Just being self-effacing. Actually was just remarking how the magazine sparkles under your bold stewardship.)

AS I'VE TOLD JODY ON NUMEROUS occasions, the best way for her to assuage my guilt is to hit it big in the Internet gold rush and then retire—converting herself into the heiress model overnight. But for now the cyberboom makes matters worse. Take the night we had several entrepre-

neurs over for dinner. One, a 27-year-old, was an intern (yes, like Monica Lewinsky) in Jody's office at the White House (we're both Clinton administration refugees). Now he's the founder of a hot e-commerce start-up. In the worst-case scenario (i.e., he gets bought out by some big firm before any IPO), he's worth many millions before he's 30. But that's nothing. Another guest was a 31-year-old who was the fourth employee to join (he's since left) a company whose services speed up delivery of Web content (whatever the hell that means). The firm just went public. His shares are worth more than \$600 million. The guy was there for eight months. I'm not making this up.

ALL OF WHICH LEADS TO A NAGGING question: What is Jody doing with me? (Note to wife: Of course I don't really worry about such nonsense, but I have two graphs to fill, and editors love this "inside the mind of a family-man stuff.") Deep down, of course, I know there are answers, but in my darker moments it feels as if they come down to "Inertia—she's with me already" and "Journalists can be so amusing to have around." No doubt the chance to have your own in-house Boswell counts for something. Yet none of this gives me what the business schools call "sustainable competitive advantage." My functions could easily be contracted out. When you throw in the fact that writers notoriously need mountains of reassurance anyway, you can imagine how emotionally needy I've been lately, precisely in Jody's own hour of greatest need. Just like a man!

NOT LONG AGO WE VISITED A HOLLYWOOD writer whose production company, as part of a development deal, shares fancy offices on a studio lot with Will Smith. I'm thinking, he's a "writer," I'm a "writer"—it's pretty much the same job. In my fantasy, it's my office, and fans are whispering within earshot. "Oh, yeah, that's Matt Miller," one says. "Marty Peretz just signed him to a big three-piece deal starring health care, urban schools, and rising inequality." "Great office," says another. "I hear they're taking his voucher piece public in the spring." The ooohs and aahs are soothing. Jody beams. When I snap out of this reverie, Jody is across the room on the phone trying to conduct a business call with a hard-to-reach bigwig. Our little angel stands next to her in full tantrum mode, wailing at the top of her lungs for no apparent reason. "It doesn't bother me if it doesn't bother you," Jody says into the phone. "Let's keep going." Ditto, I tell myself.

MATTHEW MILLER