

## KEEP 'EM SPINNING!

By Sue Dickinson

Remember those old variety shows? There was always a man who would start a plate spinning on a high stick, and as it spun, he would add more and more plates spinning on more and more sticks. As time went on, he would have to rush around to the plates first set in motion in order to keep those spinning, and before you knew it you were watching with held breath wondering how in the world he was able to keep them all going!

Well, I now know that the act was just an analogy for life. The man spinning the plates is in reality not a man at all. Instead, he represents the moms of this world. And the plates are nothing more than all of the responsibilities we try to juggle from day to day in order to keep it all going.

Although we all spend the majority of our waking hours keeping those plates spinning, (and a great deal of our sleeping hours on call for the same purpose), I'll bet we have trouble explaining how we do it. And we are always in search of the "magic pill" that will help us to do it better. Well, although I am sorry to say that there is no "quick fix" that will miraculously lessen our load, our fellow moms have found a few tactics and strategies that may make it a little bit easier along the way. And if not, I guess we can count running around spinning all those plates as our exercise for the day!

### **HELP!!!!**

Most women have come to the conclusion that they just can't do it all. For one thing, it's impossible to be everywhere at the same time. With a job, kid's school, extra curricular schedules and the endless housekeeping chores to take care of (not to mention a little time to actually spend time and enjoy our families), we have to accept the fact that a little help can go a long way. Where does the help come from?

Your number one ally in this battle is, of course, Hubby. Does he do his share? Many women's answer to this is "no". Not to confuse this article with male bashing, it is, unfortunately a universal problem stemming back to the birth of our children (if not before). When a couple brings that little bundle of joy home, it is usually the mommy that gets 4-6 weeks (or more) home with them, free from the added demands of work. They are responsible only for bonding with and caring for the child. But, this responsibility often lasts long after maternity leave is over and mom returns to work. The pattern has been set, and is hard to break.

I cannot lie. In my own situation, the problem of me having more responsibility for child rearing (and, as a logical add on, housekeeping) than my husband was in a big way, my fault. Sometimes, it is just easier to do it myself. And, frankly, I prefer the way I do it. And, so, logically, I end up doing it! Then, I complain

about that! But, over the years, out of necessity, we have started to work out a more logical division of duties. I think it helps for our son to see us both doing our share.

The fact of the matter is, though, that usually men work too, so even the two of you combined won't have time to get everything done! Can you afford to buy help? Cleaning, yard work, and other household chores can all be purchased for a price. It's a decision you have to make: do you have the money and is that where you want to spend it? Some people have found it's made all the difference in the world with respect to their stress levels. Others have found alternate ways to get the job done.

Kids as young as 5 can have designated jobs, folding laundry, picking up toys. The job, of course, won't get done to the perfection level you are used to. Douglas has started to unload the dishes from the dishwasher, and I haven't been able to find a teaspoon in the correct slot in the drawer since! I think he feels good to be able to help, though, and at least I can get the rest of the dishes done while he fiddles with the spoons, so as long as I keep my cool it works for everyone. One mom suggested that you make a list of chores for the fridge and award gold stars to your kids (yes, and even your spouse, they like recognition, too) for helping. If you have more than one child, they further suggest that you rotate the jobs since some are more "fun" than others (how can you say household job and fun in the same sentence)?

As your kids get older, you can have the best of both worlds. One woman worked out a deal with her 13 year old son to do the laundry, straighten the house, dust, and vacuum. She paid him about \$25 a week to do the work (MUCH cheaper than hiring a service), he had a job and spending money, and when she got home at night she was able to relax a little and spend time with the family. One thing to remember, though, was that she made it part of the deal that if she had to nag or remind him to do the work, the deal was off and he didn't get paid.

## **GET ORGANIZED!!!**

OK, you've asked for and received help, but who is responsible for making sure everyone is where they need to be and everything that needs to be done is done? Most of the time it is you, Super Mom! Luckily, this area is a little easier to handle, as we have been organizing ourselves and our careers for years. Many of the same principles apply to organizing our family. It's just helpful to remember that our family members are a little harder to corral than employees!

Here are a few helpful tips from other "moms in the trenches":

- Make grocery lists and shop only once or twice a week. Try to shop kid free to avoid the inevitable argument over whether or not you really need cheetos this week.
- Plan different jobs for different days. Break up the chores over the week. For example, Monday, do bathrooms, Tuesday, vacuum, Wednesday you mop the kitchen, etc.
- Cook in bulk and freeze the extra (just an aside from me, who has often come home at 6:00 to a frozen chunk – remember to defrost!)
- Get as much ready to go the night before as you can: clothes laid out, bookbags packed, lunches made.
- Use Brian Tracy’s method for prioritizing. Make a list of all you need to do in a day and prioritize each thing. “A” tasks are the things that MUST get done, “B” tasks are things that should get done, and “C” tasks are things that would be nice to get done. Then, never do a B task until all your As are complete, or a C task until all Bs are complete. If you don’t get everything done today, at least the most important stuff was covered. Oh, yeah, and never forget my favorite, the “D” tasks – those are the ones you can Delegate!
- Go High Tech. Trade in the sticky notes and scraps of paper for a planner, just like at work.
- Communicate! Call hubby at least once a day to make sure that you both know what’s going on, and who is responsible for what. (I have done this ever since the day I got a call from daycare at 6:05 wondering who was picking up our son. I flew out of work in a hurry, but still lost a bundle on late daycare fees and had plenty of guilt for days)!
- Get friendly with the important people in your kid’s lives. Teachers, coaches, other friend’s parents. That way, you have friends and allies to help remind you of important permission slips or upcoming events and maybe even to help cover for you if you run into a jam. But, don’t forget to be available to reciprocate with the same aid when they need you!

## SIMPLIFY OR, IN OTHER WORDS, GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK!

As one woman shared: “frankly, my house isn’t as clean as it used to be, and at first this bugged me very much...but I’ve learned to live with a little more grime than I used to. It’s worth it to have stress free time with my family every day”.

Most women seem to agree, in theory if not always in reality. It just isn’t worth it to “sweat the small stuff” when your good cheer and your family’s well being are at stake.

Different women simplify in different ways, depending on their level of tolerance. Some have decided that rather than mess with a sink full of dirty dishes every night, paper plates and plastic cutlery will do just fine. Others change the beds

less frequently. I personally tell myself every week that “next time” I will REALLY scrub the floor, you know, even the little corners and crevices you can’t reach from a standing position. But, I must say, most of the time a lick and a promise is all the floors get.

One woman has a great tactic for avoiding those horrible morning confrontations you can face when you have a sleepy baby and a time crunch to get to work:

“Most weekday mornings are pretty hectic with my husband and I showering, dressing ourselves and our daughter, making coffee for the road and, of course, packing last-minute diaper bag items. In the early morning chaos, our two-year-old daughter occasionally decides that she doesn't want me to change her ultra-wet diaper and/or exchange her comfy jammies with her play clothes. It usually happens on a day that I have no time to spare. I negotiate to a point and then, if she is extra-stubborn, I'll simply throw a coat on top of her bed wear, pack her play clothes, buckle her into her car seat and head on out. Her child care provider will change her later in the morning, when she is feeling more awake, cooperative and ready to start her day. It's much better than witnessing a complete meltdown that will cause both of us to start the day off on a bad foot and there is absolutely no harm in letting her stay in her jammies until 9 or 10 AM versus 7:30 AM. (I certainly would like to!)”

Wouldn't we all?.....

But, despite all our good intentions and organization, sometimes the stress of it all leaves us acting less than great. I think it helps to remember that life with your children takes place over many days (and weeks, and years....). A few bad experiences will mix in with the many, many good ones. And each day is a chance to start over.

Are we too hard on ourselves for not being able to do more? Probably so. We Super Moms tend to think that we really have to live up to the title every day of our lives. But, some day, when you are feeling a little less than super, maybe it would be a good idea to take stock and re-examine all of the things you ARE accomplishing. You might realize you really are doing a great job as a mom, a career woman, and a wife. And remember why we are trying to keep all those plates spinning at the same time, anyway. By handling all of our tasks with fun, enthusiasm and satisfaction, we can show our kids that we really enjoy our life and our many roles, and that each is an important part of our life.

*Sue Dickinson publishes the Unlimited Mom Newsletter, a newsletter dedicated to helping working moms recognize and value all facets of their lives...their families, their work and their personal development. Visit <http://www.unlimitedmom.com> for more information.*