

Hudson Valley

BUSINESS JOURNAL

Smart Solutions for stressed out Moms

BY THERESA KEEGAN

Balancing life and work is always a struggle, perhaps no more so than when a new baby is added to the equation. But thanks to the lessons learned by Danielle Novi Heller, other moms may have it a bit easier.

a big fat “No.” But Novi Heller went home, developed a strategic plan, wrote it down, gathered facts and figures about productivity, the ability to overcome obstacles, personalized it for her position and presented it to her supervisor, where it was met with enthusiasm.

“Right from the beginning of the pregnancy, for a working mom, preparation is key,” she says.

Employees need to be involved with managers in planning their pregnancy leaves to secure their jobs upon return, she says, adding that it’s a vital step in the current economic climate. Novi Heller also adds that utilizing the time at home after the baby is born for planning the return to work is important. Wardrobe challenges can still exist for moms who haven’t shed all the baby weight and breastfeeding poses its own challenges, but which are not insurmountable.

“You need to make it impossible for them to say no,” she said. “As an employee, we always need to be looking at it from an employer’s angle.”

Novi Heller has broken her toolkit into six sections, some of which can be used for strategic planning, such as the template for seeking flex schedules and some of which is on-going, such as the weekly meal planner with detachable shopping lists. In between is everything from a refrigerator magnet on how to deal with a choking child, to a wallet-

“More and more women are breastfeeding even after they return to work,” she says. “It’s not impossible and it’s better for your baby.” It’s a topic that she’s addressed in the toolkit, all the while understanding that no one solution works for all women. The ability to personalize the toolkit was a key factor in its development, says Novi Heller.

“I was very involved in every aspect of its design. A lot of this came from personal experience and talking with other moms,” she said. “I’m surrounded by my market.”

Currently, she uses Hudson Valley sources for everything from printing to publicity and the kits are being assembled in her home office at Malden on Hudson. She’s doing a soft rollout of the product, which was launched about two months ago. But long-term she sees this as a product with national appeal, especially as



“Personally, the transition back to work was very difficult,” says the mom of two, now ages three and six. “I was always a valued employee, but it was tough.”

The Human Resources director at her office suggested looking at some books to ease the transition. But for a new, sleep-deprived mom, the last thing Novi Heller needed was yet another chore.

“There were books about it,” she recalls. “But they were all 400-pages long. I hardly had time to read the back of a child’s Tylenol bottle.” Her business-focused drive kicked in and now the “Smart Solutions Toolkit for Working Mothers” can be found on area shelves.

“I wanted something that was ready to use ... just pick it up and use it,” says Novi Heller. “I learned from all the mistakes I did, and there’s no need for other moms to have to go through that.”

The first inkling that she was onto something was her request for a flexible schedule upon returning from maternity leave. The initial discussion was met with

sized immunization record.

“It’s one-stop shopping,” she says of the kit. “It makes the mornings run smoother, the evenings calmer.”

One thing Novi Heller stresses is preparation.

companies recognize the need to retain valued employees.

“A happy employee is a good employee,” said Novi Harris. “We moms value our jobs and plan on returning to work.”

