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STAY AT WORK, MOMS: ONE PHILADELPHIA FEMALE CEO HOPES TO KEEP WOMEN IN BUSINESS BY TEACHING THEM HOW TO BALANCE JOB AND FAMILY

PHILADELPHIA — When Julie Copeland saw a recent edition of “60 Minutes” that focused on the growing number of successful women leaving the business world to raise their families, it hit close to home.

As the CEO and President of Arbill Safety and as a new parent, Copeland knows all too well that finding time to devote to both work and family life can be extremely difficult for today’s executive women. She’s seen it happen to her own friends and business associates.

“They are getting too stressed out and going back home. I think it’s a huge loss to the business world. Many of them can’t figure out how to strike that balance,” said Copeland, who is 34.

Over the past several decades, women have made tremendous strides in the business world. According to the Center for Women’s Business Research, between 1997 and 2004, the growth rate for women-owned firms was nearly twice that of all firms. Nearly half of almost all privately-held firms are at least 50 percent owned by a woman or women.

But it seems these figures are likely to be affected by another trend — the growing number of women who are leaving the business world to become stay-at-home moms. The Census Bureau reported in May that the percentage of mothers with infant children who work is on the decline — 55 percent in 2002, down from 59 percent in 1998 — the first significant decline since the Census Bureau began calculating the measure in 1976.

Copeland, who this past April was named one of Pennsylvania’s Best 50 Women in Business, is concerned that this trend will continue, leaving a void in the corporate world.

“The U.S. really needs to have that male-female balance in business. We don’t want to regress in any way,” she said.

Copeland, through her memberships in various business organizations, hopes to prevent that regression by becoming a mentor to other business women. As the leader of a 60-year-old family business that has customers throughout North America and as the mother of a 2-year-old, Copeland has a wealth of advice for women who want to “have it all.” Here are some of her tips for achieving balance in life and work:

Tip #1: Remember that anything is possible, if you can develop a plan to make it happen.

Copeland always knew she wanted to have a family. But she also knew that her career was just as important to her.

“I love the contributions I can make to my business and my community — if this business can win big, so many other people can win big,” she said. “I also wanted to be a great role model for my family.”

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So when she decided to start her family, she didn't go about it haphazardly. She planned. She investigated every different type of child care available, talking to friends, family and co-workers about the methods they used. Copeland eventually decided that hiring a non-live-in nanny would be the best solution for her family.

Tip #2: Become a fierce guardian of your time.

Before she became a mother, it wasn't unusual for Copeland to work 12-hour days. That all changed when Austin was born. Now, she makes sure to leave the office by between 5 and 5:15 p.m., instead of 8 or 9 p.m. When she gets home, the two hours between 6 and 8 p.m. are devoted completely to her son.

"I try hard not to let anyone take that time away from me," she said. "Before I had a baby, I would let things happen in my day that I won't let happen now. I'm more guarded with my time. I have to look at the ROI (return on investment). I do a ton of traveling. Now, I'll only go on a trip if I know there will be an ROI, because it's time away from my son."

Tip #3: Embellish upon the typical "To Do" list.

One way Copeland keeps track of her busy life is to create a more involved version of the typical "to do" list. She keeps one list with several categories: "Must Do," "Need to Do" and "Want to Do." Each of these lists is then broken down into business and personal tasks. The "Must Do" and "Need to Do" lists have dates and times associated with them so that she always remains on task. The "Want to Do" list consists of tasks that have looser deadlines and can be moved up when time and priorities permit.

"Dividing my tasks into several categories really helps me to prioritize. By keeping these lists, it's easier for me to focus on the work that needs to be done right away without losing sight of the goals that I want to reach in the long term," she said.

Tip #3: Take several mental health days a year.

Copeland usually takes between two and three days a year off. Sometimes, it's just to spend time with her family. Other times, she uses the day to schedule doctor or dentist visits that can be hard to fit into the course of a regular work day.

Tip #4: Use technology to your advantage.

Copeland took six weeks off after her son was born, but during that time she was still working, thanks to the wonders of technology. While her son was napping, she was able to conduct a lot of business from home through e-mail and phone conferences. She managed to land one of Arbill's biggest accounts while she was on maternity leave. Even now that she's back to work full-time, Copeland still does work from home after her son goes to bed around 8 p.m. She also uses technology to simplify her personal life, using the web to grocery shop and gift shop.

Tip #5: Surround yourself with good people and empower them.

Having a great team both at Arbill and at home has made it easier for Copeland to balance her responsibilities.

At work, she thrives on building great teams and driving those teams to success. Teamwork is a theme that she reinforces constantly, both through her own actions and through the goals she has for the company. Her five-part vision for the company, for example, involved the reorganization of Arbill's sales staff so that every customer has a team of people to work with — safety consultants to answer their compli-

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ance and safety questions and service specialists to track orders, provide samples and maintain customer accounts. Such an approach means that when Copeland needs that time to be with her son, she is able to do it knowing that the Arbill team can carry on without her. The same goes for her “team” at home – when she is away on business, her supportive husband and nanny take up the slack.

“With regard to my whole surroundings, I try to make sure everything is in alignment,” she said. “Having champions around me makes life easier.”

About Arbill Safety

Arbill Safety is North America’s single safety solution provider and has over 10,000 customers in 50 states. Headquartered in Philadelphia with additional locations, the company is committed to providing customers with quality safety products and the support they need to manage supply chains effectively, save on costs and remain in compliance. Arbill, founded in 1957, is one of the top 100 industrial distributors in North America, and ISO 9001 certified. The company is certified by the Women’s Business Development Center as a national Women’s Business Enterprise. Visit online at www.arbill.com.

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