

Career and family: challenges and opportunities

Combining family life with a career: three of our associates, Anja Affolter Marino, Severin Christen and Flavio Delli Colli, discuss the challenges and opportunities that are inherent to having both a professional and a home life.

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Managing a family and a career is a challenge but also brings a lot of satisfaction. What are the moments which you treasure most? Where do you draw your motivation from?

Severin: I think building a family is always a challenge for everyone, not just for lawyers. And of course this is in particular true combined with an intense time at work. However, I think we also enjoy some flexibilities others might not have. For example, being able to work from home certain days allows me to have lunch with my family or to take a short break with the kids instead of having a coffee at the office. This helps to better balance my work and private life while still being focused on whatever are my to-dos on that day.

Flavio: Exactly. Also, while naturally there are very intense days, it is important and rewarding for me as a professional to work on the most interesting cases while still being able to spend time with my family. I highly value the professional challenges my job brings but equally treasure the offline moments I can share with my family during my time off.

In your opinion, what would really help parents to navigate the intense period in their thirties and forties when they progress in their careers while setting up a

family?

Anja: As Severin said, managing both a career at a top law firm and your family is not easy. Some days are more difficult or easier than others, and it is sometimes a challenge to dedicate the attention they deserve to each. Of course, it does not always work perfectly, but having some flexibility for both is crucial – for example, when my children have a school play, I make sure to attend. Luckily, this is no issue and we are privileged to have colleagues who help each other out when needed. On the other hand, if I have a deadline, I might need to work late or weekends to be able to meet it – and my husband and I organize ourselves to make sure the kids are taken care of.

Severin: Being able to organize the hours and place of my work makes an important difference. By organizing, I do not just mean part-time work if this is desired, but also the flexibility to choose independently when and where I do my work. What helps is that many of our colleagues have a family and are facing or have faced similar challenges. It is important and valuable that we share experiences and there is mutual understanding. For example, if I need to be offline during late afternoon for a family matter and decided to do my work later if need be, this is no problem. The most important thing is that we talk to each other – communication is key.

Flavio: The support shown at the firm both from superiors and colleagues is very strong. It is reassuring to know that others are going through similar phases in life and we can exchange experiences. Also, it is fair to say that awareness has increased in the last years. Even though the pace in our daily lives tends to continuously intensify, the firm is committed to enabling everyone to ensure a work/life balance on an individual basis.

How do you explain your work to your children? What message do you want to give them?

Severin: Being a lawyer is quite abstract to explain especially to young children. Apart from the “obvious” tasks – writing e-mails, making phone calls, attending meetings etc. – I like to say that we help our clients to solve their problems.

Flavio: Indeed. Ultimately, I hope that I can convey the message that whatever it is one does in their jobs, it is important to do it with passion and to not be discouraged easily. Hard work and sometimes a bit of luck are crucial – and of course believing in and enjoying what you do.

Anja: Being a lawyer is a job with many opposites: Success and throwbacks, insistence and ability to compromise, short deadlines and long periods of uncertainty and many more. This is what makes the work so interesting but also challenging – and I fully agree that it is an important lesson to be persistent and not get discouraged easily (for our children as well as for ourselves).

Thinking back to when you started your studies: What would you have wanted to know and would have been grateful if someone had told you?

All: Do things you will likely not have the chance to do again or the same way once you fully enter the workforce. Take the odd job, go on a trip, enjoy going wherever life takes

you. You have time on your hands and the freedom that goes with it which is unique for the university period. Accept that there are things you cannot plan but try to prepare for what you can. One year more or less will not make a difference over your whole career, but may give the opportunity to make valuable experiences.

Thank you, Anja, Flavio and Severin for the open conversation.

Anja is a senior associate in L&S' employment, pension and immigration practice in Zurich. She is married and has a young son and a teenage daughter who are tougher to negotiate with than any opposing counsel.

Flavio is a litigator and represents clients in all kinds of disputes. When he is not in court fighting for his clients, he enjoys peaceful moments with his family. He is married and has a son.

Severin is a dispute resolution lawyer, mainly active in the area of international arbitration. He is married and a father of two little daughters, for whom he always makes sure to have enough quality time together.

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