



# See Jane

## K

**Shuttle the kids to school, talk to residents for eight hours, make dinner, get the children ready for bed—where’s time specifically for the working mom? To achieve the ultimate success, women in the apartment industry must discover the delicate balance between work and family.**

risti Jones strapped the two-way radio onto the handles. She placed the pens, floor plans and stapler into the pocket. Then she buckled in her son, and she was ready to roll. Her baby stroller-made-mobile-office was set for a day of property tours.

Though some literal moms-on-the-go, like Jones, have it all under control with their work and their home lives blended compactly into a loaded baby carriage, others lie awake at night making frenzied and detailed to-do lists: finish the report by Tuesday morning, sew the kids’ Halloween costumes, find something to make for dinner. It’s enough to make even the most organized mother scream, “Uncle!”

### Technology: A Beauty or a Beast?

It may sound like an Inspector Gadget invention, but Jones, Director of Growth and Development at McSha Properties Inc. in Norman, Okla., really did create her own office on wheels. All it took, she said, was a little creative problem solving in a time of need.

“When I was a single parent, I stressed about missing work, even when my son was sick with constant ear infections,” Jones said. “My whole office was in that stroller. It’s how I got my work done.”

For chronically busy moms, BlackBerries, Web-conferencing and text messaging have kept many tethered to their bosses, as well as to their children. The ability to track down anyone anywhere is a necessity for most companies, but have those vehicles of mass communication become weapons of mass self-destruction?



# Balance

“I always carried a pager, even right up until 45 minutes before I gave birth,” said Carrie Ann Gillis, a Real Estate Asset Advisor for New Colony Ltd., of Fort Collins, Colo. “The only time I didn’t carry a pager was during the actual c-section. Because our world is so technologically advanced, it really affords us the opportunity to work from anywhere.”

*BY KATE PIERCE*

Natalie Gahrmann, author, speaker, certified life coach and mother of two, said the increase of technology also makes drawing the line between work and personal time much harder.

“The rapid rate of change in this world can really be a problem for women,” Gahrmann said. “Because we’re just so scared for our jobs and security and being the best, we make ourselves so readily available at the price of our own families and lives.”

Making time for family and friends, despite the urge to be shackled to a BlackBerry, is an important part of balancing work with life, Gahrmann said.

“My family and I leave two weeks a year and go to Mexico where we can’t be reached,” Gillis said. “Let me know if it’s burning or flooding; otherwise, I’m gone.”

## Balance and Support

Balance isn’t that elusive thing that every other woman in the world has managed to perfect. It’s not a mathematical equation either, Gahrmann said.

“Balance is consciously creating a life that reflects your values,” Gahrmann said. “It’s not a one-size-fits-all solution. People think of it like a scale where both sides have to equal out, but it’s not.”



“I always carried a pager, even right up until 45 minutes before I gave birth. The only time I didn’t carry a pager was during the actual c-section.”

—Carrie Ann Gillis  
Real Estate Asset Advisor  
New Colony Ltd.



“Love, patience, understanding, knowing yourself, knowing your situation and knowing your child—those are the things that help you deal with work/family balance.”

—Kristi Jones  
Director, Growth & Development  
McSha Properties



“We started with 900 units and now, after an eight-year journey, we manage about 15,000 units. So, you know, I think it’s worked.”

—Jodi Bart, CPM  
Co-owner  
Morrison, Ekre & Bart

Gahrmann offered the story of a single friend of hers who dedicates about 90 percent of her time to work and the other 10 percent to horseback riding. “She says that those are her values and that this is how she’s spending her time,” Gahrmann said. “Others might see her life as out of whack and not balanced at all, but it’s all personal.”

Jones likens the struggle to stay balanced to another struggle many women face daily.

“Honestly, I think this is one of those things that sounds so easy but isn’t—like parenting,” Jones said. “There are tons of books with tons of advice, but I feel that you have to find out what works for you as an individual. Textbook advice doesn’t always work in every situation. Love, patience, understanding, knowing yourself, knowing your situation and knowing your child—those are the things that help you deal with work/family balance.”

Knowing what the children need, as Jones said, can be radically different than doing exactly what the children need. Children, especially young children, easily disrupt any sense of balance the busy mother has managed to attain.

“When my children were younger, I had to draw the line between work and life

because younger children demand so much,” Jodi Bart, CPM, Co-owner of Morrison, Ekre & Bart Management Services of Phoenix, said of her four children, who were between the ages of 1 and 14 years when she began as a full-time leasing consultant 21 years ago. “Young children’s needs are simple, but numerous. I can remember sitting in the office, especially when I was in more of the corporate world as district manager, while they were at home and I was calling them while trying to finish a report. Sometimes I just had to stop and put it away and go home to them.

“Balance can change, but anytime you feel that your relationships with your family and friends are wanting because you don’t have time for them or for yourself to relax, then you’re in imbalance. And it will change as wants and needs from your family and yourself change,” she said.

Creating balance is never a one-woman job. It may take a village to raise a child, but it takes a well-established support network to develop a balanced life.

“Your support network is your success team,” Gahrmann said. “At work, your success team can be your colleagues, peers or customers, but the more people who know what your strengths are, then the more people that can support you going

forward. We all get stuck in our comfort zones, and they can help get us out.”

Jones said that a support network also comprises people who can think of hidden opportunities.

“You have to have a good support system, and you always have to have a plan B,” she said. “You can’t do it yourself. It takes a group of people to see that for you.”

## Who Knows Where the Time Goes?

With a to-do list that’s six pages long, it’s no wonder that a busy woman can’t find time in her day to do it all.

“So many women say to me that there just isn’t enough time,” Gahrmann said. “Well, you’re right, there isn’t enough time to include everything in your life. You need to make choices and decide what’s important and when. What’s important right now might be a deal that you’re closing. Tomorrow it might be your sick 2-year-old or a car that needs maintenance. Priorities change, but use your time wisely and there will be enough time.”

Don’t stress too much just because five out of those six pages on the to-do list are still unchecked.

“There’s always something to do, yes,

but no one will give you a bonus of two extra hours at the end of the week just because you got things done so quickly," Gahrmann said. "They'll probably just give you more things to do."

Most women know what priorities they will or won't give up and what they will or won't replace, Gahrmann said. Gillis said she knows her priorities lie with her family, which includes a 19-year-old college student and twins in the fourth grade.

"I've never had the feeling that if my family called, I wouldn't drop everything," said Gillis, who invited her parents to live with her and her family a year and a half ago so that they could care for her ill father. "Family always comes first. My daughter, Molly, has broken a few bones at school and I had to get there right away, but it didn't matter when it seemed to happen; as overwhelming as it seemed right then, it all worked out. I just think, 'Tomorrow I'm going to wake up and it's going to be a new day.' You also just have to keep a sense of humor about it all, whether it's with family or with work."

## 7 Tips to Create Balance

1. Evaluate your values.
2. Prioritize.
3. Create a support network.
4. Rethink the time you have for "me time."
5. Learn to say, "No."
6. Let go of guilt.
7. Always be honest with yourself and with your family.

For Jones, being a master of three traits enables her to attain some semblance of balance: planning, preparing and scheduling.

"I always had to know what I was willing to sacrifice," Jones said. "Some things were so important to me that I was willing to do extra assignments or to take on

extra things to ensure that if I needed a 30-minute window to be at an event with my child, then my employer would have no problem letting me do that. You have to serve them as well as honor your commitment as a parent."

And if planning, preparing, scheduling and a little bit of humor don't do the trick? "Starbucks!" Gillis said.

### Putting the 'Me' Back in 'Me Time'

Shuttle the kids to school, speed off to work, talk to residents for eight hours, make dinner, get the kids ready for bed—where's time specifically devoted to Mom? Instead of trying to cram another 10 minutes of time in the day to relax, rethink the time that's already there, Gahrmann said.

"When people get so busy and they're so crazy, they don't realize that they have those pockets of 'me time' because they tend to take them for granted," Gahrmann said.

Taking the dog for a walk doesn't have

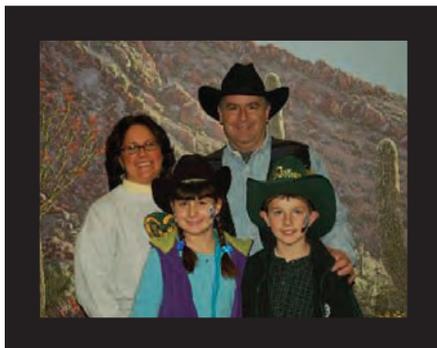
# Rent Grow



Left: Jodi Bart's family (from left) Rod, David, Lynda, Jodi, Christy and son-in-law David.

Bottom left: Carrie Ann Gillis' family (clockwise from left) Carrie, Fran, Jacob and Molly.

Bottom right: Kristi Jones' family (from left) Nick, Steve, Redford, Brittany and Kristi.



to be just another chore—that can also be “me time.”

“We all know commuting to work is drudgery,” Gahrmann said. “If you’re spending an hour commuting, listen to music you like, think about your day. It’s all about taking another look at the times you already have.”

Instead of adding “me time” to the day, re-evaluate pre-existing time commitments, Gahrmann said.

“What about that half hour waiting in the doctor’s office? What a gift!” Gahrmann said. “Instead of being angry about the doctor being late, enjoy the ‘me time’ that you’re given. We think we have to do something all the time and be busy all the time, but we can take that time and just enjoy it.”

Taking time out to relax doesn’t necessarily mean being sedentary and solitary, Bart said.

“I have to be deathly ill before I just lie on the couch doing nothing,” Bart said. “For me, ‘me time’ is family time. Of course, there is a part of me that needs to hibernate and to be by myself to re-energize and self-reflect. In this industry, you’re constantly surrounded by people, and it’s important to have some alone time.”

“Me time” doesn’t benefit only the

busy mother; its effects can touch the rest of the household and office, Jones said.

“I’ve always made time for me,” Jones said. “I can’t be the best at my profession, nor can I be the best role model and mother for my son, unless I take care of myself first.”

### Relax, Don’t Do It

It may have seemed like a good idea at the time to sign up for that volunteer position, but soon the favors and tasks start rolling in, and there’s still work to be done in the office and family events to plan. Most women, however, won’t put a stop to the demands, even if the demands are causing imbalance in their lives.

Judith Selee, Ph.D., author of “Civilized Assertiveness for Women: Communication with Backbone ... Not Bite,” said women’s traditional way of speaking and reluctance to say “no” and disappoint others puts them at a serious disadvantage.

“You have to learn to say no,” Gahrmann said. “You can’t have it all on an equal level—it’s not possible—but you can have it all at different periods of time. When you try to do everything perfectly, something gives and cracks develop.”

Deciding when to oblige and when to say “no” is a matter of priorities and

choices, Gahrmann said. Decide how to tackle priority tasks, and don’t agree to things that can’t be accomplished.

“The most important thing is not to try to eat the apple in one bite,” Gillis said. “But to eat it in pieces. Be consistent with what you do. Don’t commit to something and then not do it because your children will see that as a disappointment.”

Women want to please, and women in the apartment industry have been trained to please and assist anyone who asks. When they can’t, guilt inevitably sets in.

“Guilt is such a big area for women because that’s how we’re made up,” Gahrmann said. “But there is good guilt and there is bad guilt. Good guilt causes us to stop and look at our lives and maybe make some different choices. But then there’s bad guilt that keeps us stuck in one place, where we beat ourselves up, and it’s useless. When you have bad guilt, step back and look at the decisions you’ve made and why you made them. Don’t think there’s no other choice; there’s always another choice. If it’s not working, be open to exploring your options. Decisions aren’t forever.”

### Caution: (Wo)men at Work

The “Good Ol’ Boys Club” is something that’s difficult to explain, but is palpable and real in the workplace. What’s equally difficult to explain is why women don’t have one of these good ol’ clubs themselves.

“We don’t have the good-ol’-girl network where there is the good-ol’-boy network,” Gahrmann said. “We don’t need to compete with each other; we need to form the bonds that men have. Women leaders have the opportunity to use the female side of who they are—the nurturing, the compassion. But we’ve become so rough and tough because we’re trying to make it in a man’s world.”

# Dogipot

Selee explained in her book that women see men's career styles as "aggressive" and that the majority of women reject using "one-upmanship and put-downs" as a way to establish authority, which are noted as being male behavior, as is a "do anything to be the best" mentality.

"Men's self-esteem seems to be driven greatly by their careers," Bart said. "Women tend to base it on home life and relationships. Everyone has egos, but we check it at the door at our company. We want to be successful, of course, but my partners and I never felt we had to be so big because we felt successful in our personal lives. The competitiveness isn't there.

"We heard that people were betting that three people owning a company wouldn't work, and that if it were three women, then it definitely wouldn't work," Bart said of her company and partners, Melanie Morrison, CPM, and Libby Ekre, CPM. "It was a 'bless their hearts' mentality. Yet we started with 900 units and now, after an eight-year journey, we manage about 15,000 units. So, you know, I think it's worked," she said.

Bart said she believes that more women will own apartment companies and real estate firms in the future—and probably without the negative bets she had to endure.

As a woman climbs up the ladder and maneuvers through the ranks in the industry, the stress piles on—and not just job-related stress. Explaining a career move to the family can be difficult, and the fear of the announcement meeting negativity is enough to make a woman turn down a job offer.

"Use honesty," Gahrmann said. "I believe in direct, honest communication. Tell them, 'I have an opportunity and this is what it's going to mean for us.' For me, I'll discuss with my family how taking a particular job will affect me and what help I'll need from them, and I'll explain what we'll get in return for all that. Then we discuss it as a family."

More responsibility can also mean more traveling for the job, which Gahrmann suggests taking about in detail with a spouse or family.

"In the apartment industry, like most industries, there can be a lot of travel and evening commitments involved with the job," Gahrmann said. "That can put a lot of strain on a relationship. That relationship, though, is the foundation of the family and it suffers if you don't put time into it."

Separating that relationship from daily work stress can also help to draw a sharper line between job and home, Gillis said.

"The one agreement that my husband and I have is that we don't discuss work unless the other asks about it," Gillis said. "Then it's fair game. You have to set boundaries and a scale of importance. If they ask how your day was, that doesn't give you permission to give a dissertation on everything you did." ■

---

*Kate Pierce is NAA's Coordinator of Design and Production. She can be reached at [kate@naabq.org](mailto:kate@naabq.org) or 703/518-6141 Ext. 619.*