

HOME ALONE

Using Available Resources,
Working at Home Can Pay Off

MARGARET GRAHAM TEBO

NINA KALLEN FIGURED THAT one way to achieve that ever-elusive work-life balance was to devote less of her day to work-related activities. But instead of cutting the amount of time she does billable legal work, she decided to cut the biggest, nonrevenue time waster: her commute.

The Boston solo practitioner decided to work from an office in her home. Combining use of everything from public rooms to careful budgeting and professional courtesy, Kallen and other solo practitioners have found the joys of having the office at home.

Now she can spend more time with her toddler daughter before and after work. Her daughter attends day care on the days Kallen works, providing mom with stretches of uninterrupted hours to focus on her cases.

are generous about loaning her their conference rooms.

Kallen's office is in a separate room in her home where she can secure client files. No other family members are allowed in except when her computer-expert husband is working on fixing, upgrading or backing up her system.

"It's critical to have a computer person who really knows how to keep you running and to set up automatic onsite backups daily and off-site backups at least once a week," says Kallen.

When it comes to equipment, Kallen recommends waiting to buy. Must you have a separate copy machine, or is a combination printer-scanner-fax-copier enough to start? After all, copy shops are ubiquitous, and unless you do a lot of copying, running to Kinko's a couple of times a week might work better than squeezing a large copy machine into a cramped home office.

"As your practice grows, you can afford to invest more in equipment," says Kallen, "and by then you'll also know what you really need."

Kallen worried about feeling isolated working alone, but she has found she has more control over her time. She attends bar functions, meets with clients and opposing counsel, and if she finishes early, she says, she is free to play with her daughter or do personal chores. Even on busy days, she allows herself one hour for household chores so that she is focused on her work once she sits at her desk.

MOMS AT WORK

LISA SOLOMON ALSO PRACTICES LAW FROM A HOME OFFICE so that she can be more available for her children and for other household-supervision chores. The Westchester County, N.Y., mother of two hires a babysitter to keep her children occupied in another part of the house while she works.

Solomon says forcing yourself to set and keep regular office hours is critical for work-from-home success. She also recommends talking to an accountant to figure out the tax implications of your home office, both in space and equipment.

Solomon finds her clients appreciate that her home office helps keep overhead low, and thus her rates are competitive.

Like Kallen, Solomon likes the fact that she can work late at night. She focuses her practice on research and brief-writing for other attorneys, and often gets last-minute calls for help from overwhelmed lawyers with pending court dates.

One Sunday, she heard her office phone ringing in the afternoon. Though she didn't answer it, curiosity led her to check her messages later, and she found an urgent request for research. She returned the call, promising to have the work done by morning. She then worked into the night to complete the assignment.

"If I didn't have my office at home, I wouldn't have heard the phone and I never would have known I had a message until the next morning. I mean, who normally checks messages on a Sunday night?" she says. ■



Lisa Solomon says forcing yourself to set and keep regular hours is critical.

Kallen handles mostly personal injury cases. To avoid having clients come to her home, she often reserves a conference room at her local library for client meetings. She has also found other small-firm lawyers in her area