



DOT-MOM CASUALTIES AT DOT-COMS

By Bill Holland, dbusiness.com
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EXCLUSIVE TAMPA BAY, Fla., Aug. 18 (LocalBusiness.com) -- "You can have the life sucked out of you," K-Tek Systems founder and president Kim During said. With two boys and a daughter in diapers, During is probably the area's leading dot-com-mom and overload alarms rang loudly for her earlier this summer. During's throat closed up and she had pains in her neck, she told LocalBusiness.com.

"You're 33 years old and we're strapping you to a heart machine," her doctor said.

What's wrong with that picture?

During, who said physical problems were five years in the making, coinciding with her launch of software and Web development firm K-Tek, wasn't new to the juggling act of motherhood - she completed her accounting studies and an MBA while a single mother.

"It is not a healthy balance" During said of 80-plus hour workweeks that seem to be trademarks of business at the speed of the Internet. "I suffered some depression for not taking that 'me' time," she added.

In general, the new economy is a round-the-clock world where dot-com pioneers find their lives centered primarily around the workplace and precious little time is available for parenting.

Given the emphasis on parenting time in the business world in general - from the Family and Medical Leave Act to flex time and onsite child care - there is an void about such concerns when it comes to the dot-coms.

"Not many women with children are involved in dot-coms," said Miami-based dot-com recruiter Jill Kaplan. "The workforce filling dot-coms are young people, mostly young guys starting up companies and they have no time for dating or starting relationships."

Of the 75 women she has placed in senior management positions, Kaplan said, not one mentioned parenting time or childcare as an issue. That isn't unusual in the dot-com hothouse.

By her own account, During was a finely-honed parenting machine - reading trade journals at her sons' football practices, cooking meals nightly for the family, insisting on sit down dinners - all while running K-Tek.

It's a struggle Tom Wallace, 42, the king-daddy of area entrepreneurs, can relate to. The co-founder of online recruiting site BrainBuzz.com, his third start-up, has some advantages - he started his family later (his daughter is 4) and his wife is a full-time mother.

Wallace, who said he makes a point of leaving at 6 p.m. to be home for dinner, can empathize: "I've been there - done that. I don't do it anymore. My family's the priority. We emphasize that to our people, I'm not looking for workaholics."

"I'm not out to burn people out," Wallace said, "the happier the people, the more productive they are. I've worked 100-hour weeks, there's a lot of wasted time there. Give me 50 good hours." Beyond that mark, Wallace adds, workers encounter the law of diminishing returns.

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"Out in the (Silicon Valley), they talk about 'drag units,' your commute to work, time with your family, anything away from the job is a 'drag unit,'" he said.

"That's just the stupidest thing I ever heard of," he concludes.

During says the key to maintaining her balance now is imaginative scheduling (both she and Wallace read and answer e-mail after the kids are in bed) and taking time for herself. She gets a massage weekly now and tries not to work weekends. "Saturdays are sports days," she said with a pause, then a sheepish laugh, "I'm still working some on Sundays."

Staff writers Karen J. Cohen and Kathleen Spring contributed to this story.

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