

Quitting work - for a baby!

<http://archive.gulfnews.com/articles/08/10/07/10250224.html>

10/07/2008 12:43 AM | By Carole Spiers, Special to Gulf News

It is perhaps the ultimate workplace stressor. The young female executive being pulled three ways - professional responsibilities that squeeze-out family life, the body-clock that urges her to quit work and have a baby, and the scenario of a reduced living standard if she does give up her job to start a family.

One big problem with this kind of emotive pressure is that it can give rise to an impulse decision that may turn out to be the wrong one.

Before making the leap, it is necessary to carefully evaluate your position - starting with a worst-case scenario, where your existing job will go to someone else in your department and you will eventually become a working mother having to take temporary jobs to assist with the family budget. Bluntly, would you be able to survive?

If not, then you must face the unwelcome truth that motherhood may be too much of a risk, at this time. Being in a good job but staying childless, is what we could call the "least worst option". Your life would at least be satisfactory, if not satisfying. But your body-clock may not want you to heed such logic!

Thinking back over the large number of women I have counselled while facing this decision, I suppose I am most struck by the "naturalness" of quitting to start a family. I visit them later at home, and their eyes say it clearly, "This is fit and right." And the satisfactions of the old job seem shallow and colourless by comparison.

Doing the sums

However, if you're used to sophisticated company, the first few years can be a social challenge, as your conversation tends towards kindergarden subjects, and you're at a loss for interesting conversation at dinner-parties. There is no doubt that not every mother is suited to an exclusively home-based life. It is worth attending to the specific calculations about the feasibility of quitting. Of course, we're assuming that you're tearing yourself away from the job you love.

Note that much of your current expenditure may be quite wasteful, without your noticing. Executive life just seems to invite that attitude. For example, those restaurant meals you always feel entitled to after a long work-session. It probably hasn't occurred to you how uneconomical they are in terms of pure nutrition. Transport too. Giving up your car can prove to be a mighty relief, both financially and as a physical stress-reliever.

As for day-care, this may seem an endless burden, but it's not endless. It's only maybe the first four or five years, at most - before you experience the heartfelt joy of packing them off to nursery school.

And apart from that, it's just costing-in whatever savings and insurance you may have arranged, and then assessing your options of part-time or freelance work to help pay the bills.

So much for the logic. As for the magic, that's up to you. And I hope it happens.

- The writer is a BBC broadcaster and motivational speaker, with 20 years' experience as CEO of Carole Spiers Group, an international stress consultancy based in London.