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Mr. Greco

English III

15 March 2023

Balancing Acts

Colorful patterns adorn the screen and holiday cards shimmer on the desk, each one representing a different family or person. Various colorful designs such as holiday cards transform the room into a vibrant and unique space.

In her home office, Paula Su sits at her desk meticulously designing and curating Christmas and other festive cards. She frantically brainstorms ideas for designing these products and figures out which designs will appeal to parents and families throughout America. There is something different though about this CEO. While most leaders of a company would adopt business attire and sternly instruct others what to do, Su is an energetic and outgoing person who works comfortably in her own home; she commonly wears t-shirts, leggings or jeans, and her glasses. This business casual lifestyle helps her to transform new ideas and designs into *Petite Lemon*.

Petite Lemon creates designs with a focus on cards and stationery, but also kid's decor, lettering, t-shirt designs, and wedding invitations. After founding her company, Su partnered with Shutterfly, Target, and Michaels to sell her products. "I think entrepreneurship for me, definitely has been a way where you can figure out what your priorities are" (Su). In a society that favors moms staying home to take care of their children, Su sees how it can be challenging for women to balance both having an occupation that they aspire to and having enough time to care for their families. In the face of traditional gender norms, many women struggle to achieve

this proper balance. However, Su embraces entrepreneurship as a gateway to a successful job where she doesn't have to sacrifice family for her career. Tonika Bruce, CEO of Lead Nicely Inc. explains, "As a female entrepreneur in digital marketing, my latest networking opportunities...have shed light on how much potential exists in exploring those areas of the industry unknown to us." Like Bruce, Su sees the importance of digital marketing and exemplifies to other women that founding your own business, such as her card company that lets her imagination and creativity flourish, makes it possible to become financially prosperous while still allotting your hours to make time for being a mother. She has found this possible through the endless possibilities of e-commerce. By founding her own successful business, Su embodies how women can obtain work-life balance through entrepreneurship and self-reliance.

Many corporations expect women to work extremely long, tedious hours in their occupations, which is near-impossible when women have children at home in need of their care. Many corporations expect women to work extremely long, tedious hours in their occupations, which is near-impossible when women have children at home in need of their care. As professors, Robin J. Ely and Irene Padavic assert, "High-level jobs require extremely long hours, women's devotion to family makes it impossible for them to put in those hours, and their careers suffer as a result." This reality sheds light on the imbalance in opportunities between men and women in the workforce. It doesn't seem fair or applicable that men can obtain financially prosperous jobs and women a lot of the time can't, because of the long extensive hours required to do so.

A journey towards independent entrepreneurship and managing one's occupation isn't simple. Su highlights the challenges of maintaining a 9-5 occupation while also having family responsibilities. Su started off working for a scrapbook company in Utah in her late 20s when

she had young children. She took the job because of her role as VP of design, an opportunity too significant to pass up. She collaborated with designers and came up with product ideas, packaging, and other creative components to enhance E-commerce. However, she quickly realized how difficult it was to manage being a mother and someone in the workforce, and she wasn't receiving the respect she deserved. Her boss was a middle-aged man who made her work strenuous, long hours, sometimes going the entire night without even sleeping while commuting from her home state of California to Utah. She would have to leave her family for days at a time to make the commute to her job and meet all of her deadlines. "He was so inflexible that it motivated me. I wanted to do interesting work and I wanted to make money off of it, instead of making money for someone else; I needed to [make] my own business" (Su). Working for someone else limited her abilities to work and be a mom too: "They expect to own your Saturdays or Sundays, your kid's birthday, like they don't care" (Su).

Monique Edmonson, Sr. Director of Transforming Employee Experiences at CISCO and Su's colleague and friend, emphasizes that working for large companies can be time-consuming: "Working for corporate America has its limitations and expectations. Maybe choose a career where eventually (after you put in your time to gain the domain expertise), you can create your hours, and schedule, and stay relevant and fulfilled. As a Mom, that is my dream job." While a corporate job has its pros and cons, it can pose challenges to maintaining a balanced work-life. Edmonson's point here is essential; although Corporate America is prosperous, it makes it challenging sometimes to manage family life and work.

Through working with this design corporation, Su realized her true aspirations: to manage her mom-work life more so that she could see her family regularly while still pursuing her dreams of design.

While this type of work is crucial for creating a foundation for success and building a business, Su understands that creating an occupation is not an overnight process—it requires skills and dedication. “I think early on, it makes a lot of sense to work for a big company. You'll get training and exposure that you won't get at a small company” (Su). In other words, working in larger corporations can be important for gaining foundational knowledge for your job, even if it doesn't always make family-work life possible. Her corporate job led her to gain financial stability and foundational skills in E-commerce and design to create *Petite Lemon*.

For some mothers, a part-time job is the most they can balance. The data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics illustrates this reality: “In 2020, 22.4 percent of employed women usually worked part-time. By comparison, 11.6 percent of employed men usually worked part-time” (“Highlights of Women's Earnings”). For Su, a part-time job in her earlier career did not seem like the appropriate choice for advancing her career and becoming financially successful. She wanted to be able to manage her hours, and this is really what led her to the creation of *Petite Lemon*. At her company, she learned how to become prosperous through mass marketing . In particular, marketing her cards digitally made it possible for her business to become popular. For instance, “Market research will tell you if there's an opportunity to turn your idea into a successful business” (“10 steps”). Entrepreneurship is one way to be able to manage your hours and still be able to make money. It can be a gateway into obtaining an occupation and being able to successfully manage family life. Su demonstrated this skill when learning how to market to her audience. She honed her ability to select designs, fonts, and arrangements in her cards to effectively target a broad network of individuals and families across America through years of experience and work.

“I think entrepreneurship is, for me, definitely a way where you can figure out what your priorities are and your priorities are. And my priority has been interesting, meaningful work, but also work that's flexible and that allows people to go pick up their kids at 3:00. And nobody needs to explain to me or, you know, apologize for being gone” (Su). Monique Edmonson brings an interesting perspective on time management, explaining how she sees her mom vs work life through metaphor: “Glass balls are ones you can't let go and rubber are ones you can allow to drop. This changes all the time.” In other words, some things in her family are like the glass ball; the most important thing that will come before work. Sometimes though important meetings with work will be the glass ball and other activities will be the “rubber ball,” the crucial part about managing work life and home life is having an overall balance. She maintains resilience as a businesswoman because Edmonson is an example of someone who can manage their priorities in life successfully despite scheduling conflicts and different events in her life.

Su sets an example of how entrepreneurship and creating your own company can lead to a variety of benefits, including the flexibility to manage scheduling. This leaves time for going to your kid's soccer game, recital, or event—the things in life that matter.

Ultimately, the key to being able to work and be successful while also being a mom is just doing what is right for you and your lifestyle as a woman in society. Or, in Paula Su's words: “Don't let the choices in the world decide for you.” Petite Lemon gives her the freedom to manage being a mom and following her passions. Still, it's a job, and being a mom is not easy. Su explains how hard work and grit will need to be put into every day, but it is worth it in the end to create your own destiny. Su reflects, “The world will say you can have this or you can have that, right? [They will say] you can have a career or you can have kids, but it's pretty hard to have

both. And don't listen to them. You pick for yourself what you want, and then you find a way to make that happen, you know, and to know what's possible.”

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Use of Generative AI: Asked for ideas on a title: “Could you give me a title that could correlate to an article about a women entrepreneur managing family life?” Asked Microsoft Copilot for sources by saying “Could you give me sources based on women entrepreneurs, e-commerce, marketing, women, etc.?” Asked for minor grammatical errors as well like saying, “Could you make this sentence grammatically correct?” For one of my quotes, Copilot integrated the quote into my essay by supplying multiple sentences. Overall, the use of AI helped to better enhance my writing by supplying new and creative ideas that supplemented my work.