

Introduction

Here's an idea: let's use machines to extract breast milk from our bodies several times a day, while we are working demanding jobs. Let's do this when we are already exhausted, anxious, stressed, and overwhelmed – and trying to prove to our employers that we're "back".

Who on earth would do this? Well, for starters:

- A police officer on patrol: "I pumped in the car at a remote site where I was spending twelve hours helping to recover the skeleton of a murder victim from a muddy creek bed."
- A school teacher: "My classroom has three doors and no office. I've been walked in on twice despite displaying do not disturb signs. Both were male. One backed away slowly. The other stayed to chat even though I found it very uncomfortable."
- A communications director: "I'm limited to thirty minute pumping sessions, so I often have to leave or arrive in the middle of an hour-long meeting, and call in from the pump room for the remainder."
- A doctor at a busy hospital: "I had to pump while answering pages, talking to other doctors on the phone, or while eating my lunch. Once, I forgot my bottles and had to pump into urine collection cups. I swear they were sterile."

...and, me. I'm a working mother of two, and when I had my first baby, working and continuing to breastfeed became one of the most difficult experiences of my life. For me, at that time, it produced more anxiety and guilt and feelings of being overwhelmed than any other part of parenting. It was a very physical job, in the midst of an already physically trying time in my life – the lugging of the equipment and the milk, the running from a meeting to pump and back again, the finding of private places in which to pump. It was also an emotional job, and one filled with second-guesses. It was time-consuming, draining (literally), anxiety-producing, and stressful. Being someone's sole (or main) source of nutrition is hard work.

But I did it, as best as I could. I was the first woman to have a baby at my company, so I had no precedent and no mentors at the office. I did about a dozen domestic and international business trips during the nine months I breastfed my son. I pumped in storage closets and on airplanes and in far-flung locations in developing countries. I fought TSA agents over my frozen milk. I stared laser beams into photos of my son while pumping, trying to force my body to produce just a little more milk. I spilled tears onto those same photos.

I counted every single ounce I made and felt incredibly stressed if my son “beat” me by eating more in a given day. I did all of this for nine months, and then I woke up one day and just knew there was no more gas left in the tank, so I stopped.

The Hows of working and breastfeeding are many, and can be overwhelming and confusing. How to build up a stash of milk, how to find clothes you can wear to work, how to talk to your boss about needing to pump how to get through airport security with frozen milk. A huge pile of Hows that no one ever bothered to jot down for us “triple threat” mothers (worker/parent/milk-maker).

In a world overflowing with more parenting books and Pinterest sites and mommy blogs than you can shake a positive pregnancy stick at, why is the Motherhood Industrial Complex failing us when it comes to breastfeeding in the working world? There are stacks and stacks of books to tell us how to get pregnant, be pregnant, birth a baby, nurse a baby, sleep train a baby, follow its development on a moment-by-moment basis, and raise a child. These books are overflowing with opinions (often conflicting) on the right and wrong ways to do all of these things.

But many of these same books gloss over how hard breastfeeding is. And working *and* breastfeeding? That gets a paragraph, if you're lucky. Just look at the covers of most breastfeeding books and you'll see a drawing of a mother, still in her bathrobe, cuddling her baby at her breast.

That image might ring true in the first couple of weeks (especially the bathrobe part), but for the working women I know, the reality looks more like stirring a pot of food while on a conference call while trying to breastfeed a baby while kicking (gently! lovingly!) at a toddler or pet (same thing, sort of) to get out of the kitchen. It makes for a busy cover to a book, but it's the truth.

I don't think there are any ill intentions in this. But it does sometimes seem that some breastfeeding advocates who want, for very good reasons, to promote and support breastfeeding, have collectively decided that giving women any hint that breastfeeding is going to be difficult might scare them away from doing it. It's an odd conclusion to make: we are talking about women who are aware that, to paraphrase the great Carol Burnett, they are going to have to push something the size of a watermelon out a hole the size of a lemon.

We know that having a baby is going to be messy and painful and difficult, and we do it anyway. But to point out that breastfeeding might be difficult, or stressful, or crippling anxiety-inducing; that it might (will) make your nipples bleed; that it might (will) be one of the hardest parts about going back to work, that it might (WILL!!!!) make you crazy? We are "protected" from this information: *Women can't handle that! They'll quit breastfeeding if they know! Let's just not tell them. They'll thank us later.*

Excerpt from Work. Pump. Repeat: The Survival Guide to Working and Breastfeeding
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For me, other working mothers have been the only source for practical, honest, and funny information; war stories; and insightful insider tricks. Only they truly get the guilt, pressure, and anxiety that breastfeeding and working pile on top of the already stressful situation of going back to work. And only they can make you laugh about the whole thing, when nobody else in the world seems to find any of this even remotely funny.

What You'll Find in This Book

So, what I offer you, modern mama with too much on your plate, is a straight-to-the-point resource that will complement the tried-and-true, and essential, breastfeeding stuff that's already out there. I'm not going to tell you about football hold or proper latch or give you a cookie recipe to increase your milk production – all of that stuff exists, and you really ought to read it. What I will tell you, because I couldn't find it anywhere else myself, is the following:

- Practical tools for the situations working, breastfeeding mothers find themselves in: the gear and tools; the tips and tricks to navigate the workplace and co-workers; the coping strategies and pathways to success
- Insight into your rights and responsibilities as a nursing mother at work, and advice on how to approach your employer on this very personal subject
- Stories from other working, breastfeeding moms – some of which will make you laugh, cry, or cringe (or maybe all three) – that will help you navigate your own situation, and remind you that you're not alone
- Honest, non-judgmental support for the anxiety and pressure we all seem to feel on this issue

This advice comes straight to you from my own experiences and the experiences of hundreds of other working mothers, plus some HR professionals and managers for additional perspective. These working mothers are practical women – they know how to do things in a step-by-step way. They are driven and goal-oriented. They’ve worked hard to try to continue to provide their babies with breast milk. Some of them have done it for months or years; others for days or weeks. They all deserve a big, fat medal in the form of a beverage of their choice and a solid hour where nobody is allowed to touch them or talk to them.

Only fellow working mothers can remind you to buy multiple sets of pumping parts to avoid the days you forget one piece and end up pumping into Ziploc bags or coffee cups (which you can steam-sterilize in the office microwave!). They know the importance of back-up clothes, stashed in a desk drawer or filing cabinet, for when you spill or leak breast milk all over your blouse. They can tell you about handling pressure from co-workers – including, amazingly, HR and other women – to stop pumping at work. They know what it’s like to be walked in on, while hooked up to a breast pump, by a firm partner, the company CEO, a client, or the Harlem Globetrotters (seriously). They know what to say to the TSA agent at the airport who wants to open a bag of frozen breast milk on the way home from a business trip. And they can tell you exactly how to pump in a moving car...or on an airplane...or in a storage closet with no lock.

If you’re reading this while pregnant or on maternity leave, I know that all of the above makes working and breastfeeding sound really scary. But it doesn’t have to be that way. It’s never going to be easy: it’s a third job and it can make you crazy. But it doesn’t have to be so scary, so stressful, and so totally unknown.

When I had my second child, this same experience of pumping and working changed completely for me. It wasn't fun – I'm not a crazy person – but it felt totally doable. When I asked myself why this was, I realized that it was all about making the unknown known. My first, overwhelming time around, I had learned so many coping strategies, tricks, workarounds, emergency measures, and day-to-day best practices, that the second time just wasn't scary. I knew what to expect and felt armed to manage both the day-to-day and the unusual experiences that crop up when working and breastfeeding. That knowledge gave me the strength to do it a second time, with less anxiety and more confidence. So, this book is my love letter to working mothers. I want this to be less scary for all of us.

This is hard work, and I don't know if you'll meet a working mother who will tell you differently. But it is doable. And this book is here to help.

This Is a No-Judgment Zone

My assumption in writing this book is that you love your kid, and you are putting a lot of effort and energy into learning as much as you can about being a new mother. And mama, that's good enough. My mantra, which took me a long time to believe myself, is this: *your worth as a mother is not measured in ounces*. I sometimes worry, because I have written a book to help breastfeeding mothers, that some women assume I am judging them if they don't breastfeed their children – or don't do it for “long enough”, whatever the hell that means.

So let's be totally clear: You will not find judgment in the pages of this book (except of jerks who are rude to you about pumping at work, or who try to milk-shame you for your feeding choices), but I do hope you find validation in your struggles and your efforts to strike that elusive balance of work and motherhood. Breastfeed or don't (or find the in-between of supplementing with formula). Do it for a week or for two years. You are the best mother your baby could ask for, period.

In writing this book, I took working mothers out to lunch, talked to them over the phone, email, and Skype, drank endless glasses (ok, bottles) of wine, and asked the simple question, “What was breastfeeding and working like for you?” I cried; they cried. We laughed our asses off, and peed our pants a little, in true just-had-a-baby style. I felt honored that they would share some of their deepest secrets and craziest stories with me. In this book, you will find the collective wisdom of these women; you will even “meet” some of them, through their stories and advice.

I found, through countless hours of conversation, that we working mothers hold ourselves to much higher standards than we do anyone else. When I tell my working and breastfeeding stories to other working mothers, most ask the same thing: “How did you *do it*?” And I’m on the other side of the table, in awe of what they have done, imagining it to be much harder than my situation. We view each other as Supermoms who are making it all work without breaking a sweat, while we’re freaking out inside.

Here’s the truth: we’re all sweating, we’re all freaking out, and we’re all inventing solutions as we go along. We all doubt our decisions, and we all wonder if we’re coming up short. But we’re smart, and we’re good at solving problems, and by collecting our problem-solving abilities in one place, we can help countless new mothers do this difficult job as painlessly as possible.