

Playing the mom card

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I'm in the midst of a move to Chattanooga, Tennessee. My husband had an opportunity to start a new worshipping community here, and since the cost of living is substantially less than it was in D.C., I have an opportunity to be a full-time writer.

This was an intentional move on my behalf.

Actually, I was pretty much full time before. I woke up early each morning and wrote for three hours before I went into the office and for another hour when I was waiting for a ride at the end of the day. I traveled and spoke a two to four times a month. I loved every minute of pastoring and writing, but there are only so many hours in the day.

The transition has been interesting. It's fresh, mind you. We don't even have a permanent address. I'm still in awe of the amazing scenery and confused about how to get around town.

The most fascinating thing I've found is how so many people are concerned about me getting a job. I know the game. Especially in D.C., "consultant" is often code for "unemployed." When I tell people what I'm up to, they say, "Yeah, I was unemployed once. You'll enjoy it for a while, but you'll want to get back to work soon. Don't worry. You'll find a job."

At that point, I want to whip out my CV and tax forms and say, "Do you know how much I write? Do you know how much I travel? Do you want to know how much I made last year? This is not just a fun hobby. Why won't people believe that I *am* employed?"

I was talking to someone who was trying to interest me in this really amazing pastorate. I began to itch at the opportunity. Then reality hit. I ran through the litany of reasons why I made the decision to write fulltime.

I explained that I needed a break and I couldn't take on the additional work. I talked about how much I had been working for the last six years. I let him know that I frequently went for months without a day off. I detailed the fact that I needed a Sabbath. I could tell that my body was falling apart from the exhaustion and stress.

The message wasn't getting through to my persuasive new friend.

Then I leaned in and said, "To be honest, I have a daughter who just entered junior high and I need to be home more for her."

And, that was it. The conversation was over. Understood.

I thought, *The mom card! People may not understand that I can't keep working 80 hours a week, but they understand the mom card.*

Of course, it's true that I have a daughter who just entered junior high and I always remember the advice I got when she was born, "You think that you need to be home when they're little. That's important, but it's more important when they're preteens and teens."

In D.C., I saw many teens who were crushed by their parents' all-consuming drive for success. Naturally, I don't want that to happen, but I still felt guilty playing the mom card.

As a woman, I try to hide the parent card. I see it used against women so much.

*We can't really rely on her to do that job; she has little kids.*

*I'm sure that when she gets back from maternity leave, she'll want to have her hours cut. We'll be doing her a favor.*

*We don't need to give her a raise. She's a mom. I'm sure her income is supplemental.*

I always feel like using the mom card highlights some sort of gender defect. My husband was a work-at-home dad for three years and he has been just as involved in the diaper changing, sick days, and parent/teacher meetings as I have. But I always have a feeling that when a guy uses the parent card, people think, *What a great dad*. But when women use it, people think, *What an inept worker*.

Of course, I don't think I'm doing the next generation of women workers a favor if we never make our churches aware of the needs that we have at home. It somehow neglects the fullness of who we are. And maybe this is a quandry that will be washed away with the next wave of feminism.

So what do you think? Do you ever hide your family's needs? Do you think this helps or hurts parents?