

The Entrepreneurial Parent:

How to Earn Your Living

From Home and Still Enjoy Your Family, Your Work and Your Life

Chapter 1

The EP Opportunity

For most of us, driving to the flow of traffic feels like the right thing to do. Step on the gas pedal to pull ahead on the Interstate and you feel like too much of a risk-taker, tagged for a ticket. Lighten the pressure on the gas pedal to slow down and you feel like you're holding everybody up behind you, and then inadequate as other cars pass yours by. Keeping up, keeping pace, is an easier ride. To go with the flow is a natural.

But what happens when that flow breaks the recommended speed limit, and you realize that every driver around you, including you, is at greater and greater risk of a major collision? Or when that traffic jams and you feel restless and stuck in a line of slow progression? With this new awareness, is keeping pace still the intuitive move to make? At what point do you decide to slow down, speed up, or exit the highway altogether and find a better-suited traffic flow for you on an alternate route?

These days the flow of workplace traffic is dual-income households, comprising 63.6% of married couple families with children under 18 years of age, according to the 2000 population survey by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. After years of drifting with the prevalent current, many parents feel stuck in a routine rut that pushes children and parents alike into stifling schedules and a sense of entrapment. Others have grown startling aware that the frenetic pace of a full-time, year-round, double-income lifestyle may be putting their families at risk of a major emotional "collision." While they certainly hope that such an incident won't happen, as the rush of time whips through their daily schedules like a strong and persistent wind, they feel more and more vulnerable, more and more worn down.

Perhaps you, our reader, would like to slow down, speed up, or exit I-9-5 (Interstate "9 to 5") altogether, or already have. Even if you feel confident and secure in the road frequently traveled, it's always a good idea to have an alternate plan if for some reason you hit a roadblock or otherwise need to take a detour. For those before you who have felt this strongly

off-course – or were thrown off-course by a company layoff or other life-altering event – a new “backroad” has been gaining ground, one that is surprisingly close by and is getting better-paved and better-serviced all the time. We call the travelers on this road “Entrepreneurial Parents” (EPs).

Entrepreneurial Parents are working parents too, only they earn their living at home where they could put the break on their work time whenever they need to without disrupting anyone else’s flow, or move full-speed ahead when opportunity arises. Above all, they have a resolute need to be in the “driver’s seat” around the clock when it comes to parenting their children. The Entrepreneurial Parent, as defined by Rich Minitir, author of the article “*Entrepreneurial Parents Profit from More Time with the Kids; Family Values Driving New Work-at-Home Boom*” (Reader’s Digest, April, 1999), are home office workers who believe that family values are crucial to their long-term business strategy. They are designing businesses that will grow no bigger than the walls of their homes can contain, taking control of their careers so their time can stretch and flex around the everyday needs of their families.

“To me, an Entrepreneurial Parent is a parent who is proactively seeking a new and better lifestyle – one that successfully combines the excitement and realities of making a living with the excitement and realities of raising a family. So it’s not about “how to make money” or “how to be successful” per se. It’s about already knowing that a successful life starts with a successful family.” – Pete W. Siler, M.A., Father’s First

How many EPs are there? According to the annual household survey conducted by IDC, a research firm that tracks the small office/home office trend, an estimated 11.6 million American households in 1999 contained at least one parent of dependent children who was generating income at home. In 2001 Cyber Dialogue Inc. spoke to 4005 adults and found that out of an estimated 84.9 million adults who were online, 21.7 million were parents with children under 18 years of age working at home, and 8.5 of these work-at-home Internet users were also self-employed.

But while so many families have joined these ranks, the story of Entrepreneurial Parents is not yet fully told and they are far from living happily ever after. Even though work and family is back under one roof, EPs still find themselves constantly torn between the two, with their career ambitions and parenting instincts locking horns almost daily. They also face isolation, burn-out and marital issues that are vastly different from their work-at-home counterparts who do not have to also care for a family. Finally, for those EPs with very young children, childcare responsibilities can hold back and/or put a cap on income potential so much so that frugal living often becomes a necessity.

This book was written to address these issues and more. In addition, like the dotcom panacea, there’s been a lot of hype and myth enshrouding the “Work at Home!” option. Whether

posted in a flyer on a telephone pole down the street, or incessantly appearing in your email inbox, bold proclamations of being able to work at home earning thousands per month (or week!) within a part-time framework abound. So to help you navigate your homeward journey, we bypassed the deluge of opportunity-seekers both online and off and went straight to registered members of selected freelance marketplace job sites – Aquent, Ants.com, Talent Market (of Monster Talent) and MBA Free Agents. Through them, as well as Oxygen Media’s business and finance site (ka-ching.com) and The Entrepreneurial Parent online community itself (en-parent.com), we conducted “The National Survey of Entrepreneurial Parents,” an online survey that ran from September, 2000 to January, 2001 (see book insert for more details). This survey was intended to probe the work-life trend the authors of this book have been well aware of for a long time now, and resulted in 606 respondents to our demographic survey as well as over seven hundred pages of appended stories, upon which this book has been based.

Contrary to the hype, we learned that these parents for the most part are earning everyday livings by leading everyday lives: 58% indeed opting for a part-time work week *but thereby part-time salary* (only 30% reported earning \$30,000 or more per year) so they can be as available to their children as their personal needs dictate. In Chapter 2 you’ll find 101 business/career profiles of “Entrepreneurial Parents” – freelancers, home business owners and a handful of employed teleworkers – and learn how they made the transition to home employment, how they market and price their products and services, and what their advice is for aspiring EPs. Behind this business front you’ll find a collective home front – rich with insight, inspiration, information and ideas – in Chapters 3-6. You’ll be encouraged to “Design Your Own Solution,” become an “official” entrepreneur, manage your time, involve your children in your work, and pass the Entrepreneurial Parenthood work option on to the next generation.

Through the 700+ EPs who contributed directly to our research and the over 2,000 who have joined the en-parent.com online community over the past 2.5 years, we hope you’ll find a “traffic” flow that keeps pace with your priorities.

Before we take a look in their direction, however, it may be helpful to offer an aerial view of the workplace landscape, as it looks from a distance, at this time of writing. While we are certain this landscape will alter by the time this book is in your hands, the seismic shift in the economy caused by new technologies which have resulted in a 51% personal computer and 41.5% Internet penetration in American homes has already occurred (according to the August 2000 Internet and Computer Use Supplement, Bureau of the Census for the Bureau of Labor Statistics). Work life has irrevocably penetrated home life for the employed (after hours) and self-employed (all hours!) alike. The virtual genie, as they say, is out of the bottle.

How can this wired genie knock down the physical boundaries that have been separating parents from their children in 10-12 hour blocks of time throughout the workweek? Let’s very briefly “rewind” the work scene a hundred years ago and then “fast forward” back to today. We’ll see how modern technology threw American family life off-course and how it is now

directing us back home. Literally.

The Way We Were

A hundred years ago the Industrial Revolution sent Americans on a tailspin, breaking the natural order of everyday family life by sending the great majority of parents outside the home to work for the first time. Up until then, an agricultural economy was mainstream and others literally lived on top of their livelihoods – a flight of stairs up from the Mom & Pop shop below. For the past one hundred years, however, millions of families have struggled with the unnatural state of Dad working a good distance from home, or more recently both parents taking jobs miles and hours away from their children. While the financial, professional and/or personal growth for a great many parents have flourished as a result, their children have been inadvertently left out of the loop (save the token “Take Your Child to Work Day”) ... and told it was in everyone’s best interest to do so.

That stamp of approval for working parents today was manifested through the rose-colored lens of the television screen. Appeased by watching popular childhood sitcoms, too many of us bought into the idealism that work and family had clean, clear lines of separation. Remember those black and white (appropriately so) amiable programs like *Father Knows Best* that gave Dad (the sole breadwinner) all the authority, and Mom (the focused parent) all the heart of the family? Some of us even grew up in such homes, with Mom (without fanfare) perhaps taking on part-time work when her youngest child went to school full-time. Meantime, we watched Dad on the TV screen come home in time for family supper at 5:30, served up by the maid (Hazel, Alice) or their diligent spouse who kept everything running smoothly at the home front all day. Later, when it was our turn to be parents, we discovered that the picture-perfect ranch house with a garden on a quiet suburban street took two incomes and long, laborious hours ... but justified whatever lengths we needed to live the good life.

More recent favorites like *Family Ties*, *Full House* and *The Cosby Show* always presented an unharried but well-educated parent in the kitchen or living room, with their work life neatly tucked away in between commercials. On the flip side, progressive shows like *Mary Tyler Moore* and *Murphy Brown* turned co-workers into family members, completely disillusioning our expectations of what the workplace was all about. Here the work-family line blurred, merged, so much so that an all-career-no family expectancy took hold. Where did children fit into this picture? Towards the very end of one’s career, if ever. A tough model to follow when the median age of first-time moms is 24 years, according to the National Center for Health Statistics.

Of course in the end entertainment is just that and we are each accountable for the decisions we make individually, but understanding how popular culture can affect our sense of self is important. Few loyal fans of Oprah Winfrey, for instance, don’t know that *The Mary Tyler*

Moore Show was an enormous source of inspiration for Oprah as she grew up and began her own highly successful career as a single woman in broadcasting. For those of us who are married with children, however, there's a pull to be ... or be married to ... Laura Petrie, happy homemaker with a good-humored spouse, and Mary Richards, happy independent professional surrounded by co-workers (all men) who love and adore her. These polar life paths both looked so appealing; turn off the tube and grow up, of course, and the battle with disgruntled co-workers, spouses, children *and self* begins...

Fast forward to today. Between cell phones, laptops and instantaneous communication with anyone in the world, the net of alternative work options is growing wider and wider. Turn off the TV tube and plug into the World Wide Web, and working while sailing the seven seas seems possible, especially for the tech-savvy, ambitious and well-connected. But parents aren't looking to go off on adventures, they're looking to simplify, to settle down, to go with their own personalized family flow. To meet this need, the Internet Age is extending the welcoming hand of home-based work once again, and parents from every industry, stage and experience are taking it – and with no apologies. These parents are part of a growing movement across the country and around the world aimed at using advances in technology and the proliferation of the Internet to bring work back home, where they could put another log on the fire and take an afternoon break to build a snowman with the kids. They are being fueled not only by technology-driven careers, but by the innate desire of parents to spend more time with their children and to pursue their vocation in a true family-friendly workplace. The *Mary Tyler Moore* myth exploded, that workplace is where, at last, children are not only back in the picture but back “in the loop.”

With modern technology nudging those of us who want to return to the homestead... *without* sacrificing our education, career, income, or self-sufficiency... to do so, what exactly are our options? Must one be an envelope stuffer or a highly-skilled computer whiz to join the home-working ranks? Where's the middle ground? Between Chapters 2 and 7 you will hear from 101 EPs who have developed home-based careers that fall into one of three broad categories:

“Tech-Lite” Home Careers – which need minimal tech proficiency, if any.

- “Tech-Heavy” Home Careers – which need a higher level of tech proficiency because advanced software programs and other high-tech pre-requisites are wholly integrated into the business operation.
- “Internet-based” Home Careers -- which are wholly reliant on the Internet and wouldn't exist without it.

It's important to note here that the selected career profiles are reflective of our survey respondents and do not come close to covering the entire spectrum of home career possibilities

available to EPs. In *Finding Your Perfect Work* the Edwards identified 1600 home-based businesses, with 612 of those as being particularly family-friendly. In *The Entrepreneurial Parent*, we drew on the insights and experiences of parents in the work-at-home workforce to develop our profiles, asking questions that matter most to *them*, such as: What transferable skills can be exchanged between the traditional workforce and self-employment? (Because knowing that one can switch to and from traditional and alternative employment gives EPs peace of mind.) What's a "Day in the Life" of an EP like? (Because time management tops the stress factors for all working parents, including EPs.) How do they price and market their products and services? (Because sales and marketing is one of the top barriers of entry psychologically.) And more. Before jumping to the next chapter, however, you may be interested in how these parents came upon the EP road from the mainstream highway. A brief overview of the most common detours follow, with specific stories to be found in Chapter 6: "Designing Your Own Solution."

Far and away the most common question we receive from aspiring EPs is: "I want to work at home ... I have excellent computer skills ... do you know anyone who is hiring?"

The chasm between being gainfully employed to becoming apprehensively self-employed is gargantuan to most. Small wonder that when the concept of telecommuting – working as a full-time employee either part-time or full-time from home – first emerged as a work option over twenty years ago it created quite a stir. Employers took note of such bottom-line benefits as increased productivity and real estate savings, while employees worn out by the 9-5 grind jumped at the opportunity to skip the commute a few times a week while retaining a full paycheck. With telecommuting, parents gain all of the flexibility of working at home with none of the risk. It's a sweet deal.

While fraught with new work-related challenges like the perception that teleworkers are not serious professionals because they put their lifestyles first (false), co-worker resentment (true), getting squeezed out of the communications loop (true and false), getting passed over for raises and promotions (false), the telework option overall has built a solid reputation of being a win-win arrangement for those who venture to give it a whirl. Employers who implement a formal teleworking program under the advice and direction of specialized telework consultants find the investment in proper protocol worth the extra effort. Employees lucky enough to be offered the opportunity often wouldn't trade their position in their company for any other. Bit by bit, companies from just about every industry sector and every size are beginning to flirt with the telework promise, albeit the great majority still on an informal, case-by-case basis.

What is discouraging for parents eager to work at home, however, is that teleworking more often than not only brings a little bit of breathing room into their over-extended schedules. According to The 1999 Telework America National Telework Survey, conducted

and reported by Joanne H. Pratt Associates for The International Telework Association & Council, today's 19.6 million teleworkers typically work only nine days per month at home. When parents are feeling stretched and pulled by competing schedule conflicts, those nine days a month is really just a drop in the stress-management bucket. For some families, it's actually just a tease.

So while telework is clearly on the rise, even when given the opportunity the corporate tether is often too constricting for parents. In Chapter 2 you'll hear directly from a few successful teleworkers, but you'll notice that most EPs we came across have taken – by choice or by necessity – the self-employed route. Not surprisingly, a good many have turned their former employer into their first client, providing the springboard to an independent career.

To learn more about teleworking, visit:

- Work Options, Inc. (for “FlexSuccess,” a downloadable blueprint employees can customize for their own telework proposal), www.workoptions.com
- Gil Gordon Associates (a resource for managers and telecommuters run by a reknown telework consultant), www.gilgordon.com
- International Teleworker Association and Council, www.telecommute.org
- Canadian Telework Association (links to news, articles and studies), www.ivc.ca

The MLM/Biz Opp Scene ... Is It All A Scam?

Right behind the question of whether we know of anyone who's hiring, often comes the question: “I want to work at home, but I'm afraid I'll lose money to a scam. Do you know of any legitimate business opportunities?”

Again, the prospect of being completely on one's own professionally – having to scramble to put together a home career from scratch with no support system in place – is overwhelming to those with a ground-zero entrepreneurial background. Small

wonder here, too, that those “Work at Home!” posters and “Unlimited Income Potential” emails can turn the head of many a frustrated parent looking for a more reasonable work-

family balance but would appreciate the guidance of a parent company. Unfortunately, as too many have learned, when desperation and opportunism meet unsavory business deals are too often made.

However, multi-level marketing and home-based franchises can also provide at least a part-time income for some, particularly those who come from a strong sales background and/or are particularly enamored by a certain product line that you discovered at a neighborhood “party.” However, because the National Survey of Entrepreneurial Parents yielded only a 2% survey response from network marketing/MLM consultants, and an entire book by the Edwards has been written on this subject, we will not be addressing this particular avenue here.

Before we move on, however, there’s one important discovery we’d like to point out. Over the years we have heard from many an EP who has gotten their entrepreneurial start from the multi-level marketing or business opportunity industry, and either has used the experience as a launching pad to their own independent home business, or they work in a dual capacity, both as a direct sales consultant and as an independent professional or entrepreneur. In other words they have found that their investment of time and money in a turnkey operation or direct sales opportunity gave them a hands-on “education” in entrepreneurship, and/or saw it as an “entry level” self-employed position of sorts. Explains Howard Dingman, an independent systems integrator in Maine, New York:

Oddly enough, the best thing I did for our business was to become involved in Amway MLM, as part of the Dexter Yager organization. Not because we had any success at all in Amway, in fact we "lost" quite a large amount of money. But the way we "lost" the money was by attending seminars and buying training materials. We received an education in business unlike any available in schools. We learned about business ethics, work ethic, and how to treat a business like a business rather than a hobby. We learned about attitudes, and how our own attitude would influence the growth of our business. We learned about success materials from authors like Zig Ziglar, Og Mandino, and many others. We learned to associate with others who shared our goals and ideals, and to disassociate ourselves from those who would try to drag us down to share their quagmire existence. We learned that as we began to succeed, that others would call us "lucky." We learned that our hardships were our own, to be kept to ourselves, but that we should share our success with everyone we could.

Besides the Edwards/Zooi book, other resources work-at-home parents rely on to guide them through the maze of work-at-home opportunities vs. scams include:

- WAHM.com

- Bizymoms.com
- Home-Based Working Moms, www.hbwm.com

So Who's Hiring EPs ... and Why?

Although former employers and MLM opportunities are common stepping stones to wholly independent home careers, many aspiring EPs bypass both and go straight to this question: "I want to work at home ... I have a great idea/am highly skilled in [fill in blank] ... how do I get started?"

The truth is that unlike "natural born" entrepreneurs, the majority of Entrepreneurial Parents come from a corporate upbringing (see Figure 11, illustrating 74% of our respondents) and maintain a corporate mindset for quite awhile. This places them on a distinctly different launching ground than their home-based entrepreneurial counterparts who are *not* parents, the latter who most likely made the leap because of workstyle rather than lifestyle reasons. EPs who choose self-employment to spend more time with their children often leave behind not only a steady paycheck but their comfort zone as well. In short, it's not entrepreneurial blood running through their veins as much as their parenting instinct. Therefore, marketing, sales... snatching that first client/account ... can be a monumental psychological hurdle.

The transition from turning to a single employer for one's livelihood to multiple businesses, clients or customers is a good bit unsettling. Erin Staeck, owner of Catering to Computers, represents the sentiments of many EPs who have been cut off from their former sense of self:

"I think it is a shame that Corporate America has yet to realize that all their great talent has left the cubicle and are sitting at home filling the role of Entrepreneurial Parents! They have yet to realize that very cost effective contracts with people like us would allow them to not only gain the hardest working employees they ever had, but also help in securing the world's future by allowing us to participate in the upbringing of our children, make a decent living, and be productive members of society."

Indeed, convincing those first few clients that you've got the best talent, skills and wherewithal to complete the project – on time and within budget, and better than anyone they already have on staff – is the subject of scores of articles and books. For this one we decided to question the "other side of the coin" – the clients themselves – and hear what made that first sale from *their* point of view. What motivates a client to hire? Most EPs will be happy to hear it's:

- **The Soft Sell.** Cleanse your mind of the Willy Loman image. It's not the fast-talking, I'm-your-best-friend persona that seals the deal between EPs and their clients. "I don't like to be approached by someone who tells me I need to do this or that right off the bat," reveals Dan Birk, a jewelry and art retailer who hired Janet Drez of A Perfect Solution as his PR specialist. "Janet was referred to us by a neighboring store owner, and when we first met she asked questions about our business and did a little research before offering any suggestions." Because Janet listened first and dispensed advice later, she got the account. Likewise, it was Roseanne Kupiec's natural instinct *not* to push the sale at the first contact that encouraged her now satisfied client, Dr. Judith Logue, a psychoanalyst who has been self-employed for over 30 years, to give Roseanne a try. "Roseanne left me alone," explains Dr. Logue, who was first approached by Roseanne after filling out an application at the Virtual Assistant Registry. "I told her I wasn't ready yet and she believed me." Roseanne's patience paid off – when Dr. Logue was ready she gave Roseanne a call as promised and has been working with her ever since.
- **A Catchy Name.** Both Jeff McCroskey, Executive Director of Community Access, Inc., which offers job training and placement for persons with disabilities, and Rich Robb, Mayor of South Charleston, WV and an attorney, used the word "catchy" to describe the name of Barbie Dallman's "Happy Fingers WP and Resume Service" business. Barbie, who offers a wide array of office support services from typing and desktop publishing to editing and writing to accounting and bookkeeping, has built up a strong clientele over 17 years in the business. Her regular clients include a minor league baseball team, a magazine, an author, a small retail business, an artist, a cleaning service and four overseas clients. Both McCroskey and Robb first spotted "Happy Fingers WP" in the yellow pages, and the image of a pleasant personality behind the ad prompted them to pick up the phone, after which they found Janet to be "super competent" and "very dependable."
- **A Local Address.** While some clients who regularly outsource are comfortable with a virtual working relationship, others are not. Pat Roed of Jackson & Associates, a philanthropic fund-raising consultancy who helps healthcare organizations raise money, tried recruiting grant writers from all over the U.S., thinking the phone and Internet were sufficient communication tools. But again and again the grant writers she hired did not pan out over the long-haul. "Sometimes the grant writer wasn't devoted to the project as much as we would like," explains Roed, "sometimes the working relationship among us, our client and the grant writer simply did not *or could not* evolve, and sometimes the writer needed more help than I realized and I didn't give it." Because Linda Regensburger of Westminster, Colorado could meet with Roed on occasion in person, she has been able to build a strong working relationship with her as well as with Roed's clients with whom she interviews for feasibility studies. Adds Roed, "And Linda has been very good about the little steps that lead up to the big project. Several writers in the past would skip that plotting work, and it showed in the end."

For more on breaking through the sales and marketing barrier that keep so many aspiring EPs at bay, turn to the EP Profiles and read through their marketing tips and top sources of revenue. Also, *Getting Business to Come to You: A Complete Do-ItYourself Guide to Attracting All the Business You Can Enjoy*, by Paul and Sarah Edwards and Laura Clampitt Douglas has nearly 700 pages of marketing strategies for the fledgling to highly successful home businesses.

Meanwhile, remember that once you develop working relationships with those first few clients, then losing any one of them is a much softer blow than losing a salaried position. In fact, a comparison can be made as follows: self-employment is to a salaried position as mutual funds is to an individual stock. In essence, self-employment is a diversified income strategy. Interestingly enough, during the writing of this book the stock market oscillated from an extraordinarily high to a frightening low market value, the economy from an unprecedented tight labor market to a sweep of layoff announcements. With their versatility and diversity, independent home office workers are in a strong position to ride out such dramatic fluctuations – during this round and the next.

Regardless of where the economy swings next, it's clear that the increasing use of the home office as a primary workplace is here to stay, as are parents compelled to spend more time with their children. While history is on the side of parents and children living and working in close vicinity, as a nation we've simply forgotten how this natural state of affairs works. How can we revitalize our close-knit instincts to stick together as families who work and learn side by side? By observing the modern-day "EP," and travelling with them on the backroad that leads to the street where you live..