

Yes, it is possible to combine career and family

Our joint heads of ESG, Astrid Waser and Valérie Menoud, talk with head of marketing Corina Schnyder about balancing career and family life

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EXPERTISE	ESG	

Astrid, Valérie: why did you want to become partners in our firm?

Astrid It wasn't my primary goal to become a partner in a big law firm. When I started my studies, I was completely undecided about what I wanted to do after my degree. But I was always fascinated by law, by my specialisation (competition law/public law) and by working with my clients to find solutions and to support them in difficult cases. My aim was to be among the leading players in my field, take up responsibility and provide a top service for our clients. And of course – I always wanted to be as good as my peers!

Valérie I decided to pursue partnership at Lenz & Staehelin mostly because I felt that the firm aligned with my professional aspirations and values. The firm's collaborative and supportive culture played a significant role in my decision. Its commitment to excellence, integrity and client service also resonated with me personally and professionally.

What motivated you most to follow this career path?

Valérie As a partner, you're in the driver's seat. You can have a key role in nurturing the firm's values while growing the business, accompanying clients on their most challenging projects over the long term and also training the next generation of lawyers. I wanted to have the chance to do exactly that over the course of my career. On a day-to-day basis, I find my motivation in working alongside my partners and our associates. I do think they

represent some of the most brilliant legal minds in our sector. That's incredibly enriching and it does motivate me to continuously grow as a lawyer. It also doesn't hurt that I really love my job. I wouldn't be able to do it otherwise!

Astrid I completely agree! I really like my job and working in an environment delivering cutting-edge legal services alongside people who are at the forefront in their field. I also wanted to take up responsibility and be part of the management team and an entrepreneur. Being a partner in our firm combines all this.

Did you have a role model?

Astrid When I began my studies, and afterwards in the early stages of my career in Switzerland during the 90s, I was often told that I had to decide whether I wanted to have a career or a family. The view was that it was impossible to combine both, particularly in big law firms. But I spent several years studying and working abroad where I met many female colleagues from other countries, in particular those from the Nordic region, and also France and the US. For many of them, it was completely normal to combine a fulfilling career with family life and not have to decide on one or the other. They were my role models and convinced me, as demonstrated by their own careers, that I could achieve just what they did.

Valérie Similarly, as for Astrid, it helped me to exchange with women professionals from other jurisdictions. I also looked up to the few incredible female lawyers who practise in Switzerland as partners. Their dedication, hard work and professional visibility were inspiring.

Now – honestly: is it really possible to “juggle” between career and family?

Astrid Yes, it is possible to combine career and family. It's challenging sometimes, of course, especially when the kids are still small. But it's so much more worthwhile following this path because it gives you the possibility to have both: a fascinating job and a family too.

Valérie It can be challenging, for sure. Finding a balance that feels right is a difficult exercise, especially at the beginning of one's family life. And unfortunately it's still something that's more challenging for women than it is for men in our society. We all have, individually and collectively, a responsibility to change that. Women shouldn't be “juggling” to have both, a successful career and a rich family life. I'm hopeful that it will change in the near future and “having it all” will feel normal and easier.

When is the “right moment” to have children in a career?

Astrid In my view, there's no “ideal” moment to have them. Each path is different. When I became a partner, I already had two (very small) kids. The most important thing is to be well organised, something that applies for women just as it does for men. In particular, if the children are small, it's important to have enough help and support for them and the household in order to have “peace of mind” and be able to enjoy quality time with the family. For me, my family and kids have always helped provide wonderful balance with

my work.

Do you personally – and we as a firm – support any initiatives which support woman on their career path?

Valérie We as a firm are a member of Advance, a Swiss association whose purpose is to advance gender equality, notably by providing a platform for members to network, share best practice and shape public opinion.

Astrid In addition, we have many other ongoing initiatives. For instance I was a founding member of Working Mums Switzerland, a network of professional women combining career and family. Lenz & Staehelin also co-organises the Woman Board Award designed to support and strengthen the position of women on boards

And one very last question... do you have any advice for young women who are planning their career?

Astrid Don't think too far ahead, take one step at a time and aim for the top! In my view, it's so important that women don't start thinking too early about how best to combine career and family – and restrict their career path as a consequence.

Valérie If you love your job, continue doing it and keep growing. There will be hard times, that's for sure. But it's important to keep your dreams and ambitions intact in the face of a challenge. Don't give up too quickly for fear of not succeeding. That would be a pity and a waste of talent. You can do it just as well as (if not better than) any of your male colleagues.

Thank you, Valérie and Astrid for the open conversation.

Astrid Waser is a partner and leading practitioner in our Competition & Regulated Market and Investigations groups based in Zurich. She specialises in regulated markets, particularly competition (antitrust) law, public procurement law, media and telecoms law, environmental law and compliance. She is recognized as one of the worldwide Leading Women in Antitrust. She is co-head of our ESG committee and a board member of Working Moms Switzerland and Women At Competition Switzerland.

Valérie Menoud specialises in banking, finance and corporate law, and is co-head of the Investigations practice group. She is also co-head of our ESG Committee and feels strongly about balancing professional and family life. She has a young family and made partner in 2021.



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