

The Art of

Start Up

Tiana Kubik is never the only Kubik on set.

THE NEW FAMILY BUSINESS

STAY AT HOME WITH THE KIDS, OR RETURN TO THE WORKFORCE? A NEW CROP OF ENTREPRENEURS IS BRAVELY DOING BOTH.

By Kate Rockwood

GRIFFIN "GRIFF" KUBIK is holding a dog leash, his 3-year-old fingers wrapped around the vinyl cord as a terrier sniffs the grass near his feet. It might not look like it to passersby in the park, but the duo are on the clock: They're on a photo shoot, the dog is about to be in *Chicago Parent* magazine, and Griff is playing unofficial dog wrangler. Nearby, Griff's parents are setting up the next shot.

"Hold tight to the leash, Griff," calls his mother. He's used to taking instruction. His parents are cofounders of TK Photography, which, with

more than 1,200 sessions a year, is one of Chicago's biggest family photography companies. Dad (Thomas) is the principal photographer; Mom (Tiana) is the management whiz. They have a team of three other photographers, as well as cullers, editors, and admin support. And through it all, Griff has been a constant presence: The business is one endless Take Your Kid to Work Day. "We're not taking Griff along because we can't find a babysitter," Thomas says after the shoot. "We want him involved, and being entrepreneurs means we have the flexibility to spend that time together."

The Kubiks are part of a growing class of business owners who refuse to choose between full-time parenting and work, instead merging the two worlds into one big family operation. But that brings a fresh series of hurdles in addition to the usual startup stresses: making sure the business and the kids are getting enough attention, explaining the kids' presence to clients and staff, and finding some kind of work/life balance when work and life are intertwined. But like the Kubiks, many think the benefits outweigh the extra challenges—and they're getting creative about finding solutions.

For Kelly Schneider, split shifts are the answer. Based in Bloomfield Hills, Mich., she spends most of the day with her 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children, and the bulk of her afternoons and evenings running a company called At Home Tutoring. But when those shifts overlap, it means bringing the kids to a client meeting or taking a call while they're playing in the

background. "Most people are understanding," she says. "But if I have to do a Skype tutoring session for a full hour, that's really stressful. I'll set the kids up with a TV show and explain to them that if they can't be quiet for an hour, I'm going to lose this job. One started saying, 'Mom's going to lose the house if we're not good.'"

Even with the added stress, Schneider says entrepreneurship has kept her sane amid the chaos of parenting. And while she's eager to grow beyond her current stable of 10 tutors, she wants to be thoughtful about



Tiana Kubik and Griff, on the job.

expansions. "I've been growing in a way that I don't have to sacrifice my whole week," she says. "There are things I could have done to grow faster, but then I'd have had to dedicate every waking minute to the business. And I don't want that."

Neither do most parents. When Margaret Hardigan launched a local Chicago group for work-from-home moms last year, nearly 500 members signed up in the first nine months. "People want to be present parents but also do something with that magical degree they spent all that time getting," says Hardigan, who runs a marketing and events

agency while home with her two kids. "Having your own business gives you the flexibility to do both—but it's also really, really difficult."

The group, RocketMamas, hosts monthly incubator meetings for business owners and weekly working dates at local play spaces, so parents can pound their laptops while kids run amok in the background. RocketMamas' online forum has become a safe place to troubleshoot problems particular to this realm: *How do you organize your home office amid the kid clutter?* (Threaten to throw away any toys that wind up in your space.) *Does anyone want to set up a childcare swap next week?* (Oh, yes.) *What activities keep your kids entertained for more than 10 minutes?* (Washable markers!) "If you want to be running a successful company, you have to have some structure in place," Hardigan says. "That starts with building a village of like-minded parents who understand."

Connections like these can also grow beyond networking. "Our circle of friends changed," Tiana Kubik says. "We're now naturally closer to other families trying to do this, too—but that's been a huge source of support." It has also given them enough confidence to go through it all again: The Kubiks are expecting their second child this month. "With Griff, there was no maternity leave," Tiana says. "I was answering emails on my phone from my hospital bed. But now we've built a team—I won't be doing nothing, but I won't have to be on the front lines the entire time." □

TOUGHER THAN EVER

How do you get past a setback? Take a cue from one of the entrepreneurs profiled in the new book *In the Company of Women: Inspiration and Advice from Over 100 Makers, Artists and Entrepreneurs*, by Grace Bonney.

Rethink the goal line.

“We felt a lot of pressure to operate like a startup, not a small business—which meant going after investment and crazy-fast, hockey-stick growth. We tried to scale in ways that didn't totally make sense, and spent time, energy, and money chasing this dream we felt societal pressure to pursue. Once we let go of that, we felt more confident in the things we are really good at—and our ability to build on those things in meaningful ways.”

—Erica Cerulo, cofounder, *Of a Kind*

Make team decisions.

“I try to share my feelings with everyone in the studio and work through hardships together so we can collectively strategize and move forward. Anything that can affect our livelihoods is open to discussion and suggestions.”

—Tanya Aguiniga, founder, *Aguiniga Designs*

Attack assumptions.

“I thought I knew how to [build this business] because I had bootstrapped a company before and succeeded. But after going back to the drawing board [a few times], I learned it is easier to create something with no preconceived notions. In being flexible and changing our strategy, we now have Amazon and Verizon as investors and are closing major distribution deals.”

—Gauri Nanda, cofounder, *Toymail*

Quotes edited for space.



So, you want to open a **vintage shop?**

It's a good time: Sales at consignment and thrift shops are growing every year. But be prepared for a life of nonstop scavenger hunting. *By Ashlea Halpern*

TYA TIEMPETCH

OWNER
THE RABBIT HOLE
MIAMI



“The smaller your niche, the easier it is to connect with a core customer base. Plus, your social media presence will be more impactful.”



Tiempetch's shop has 15,000 Instagram followers, but not just because of her wares. She takes photography seriously, down to composition, lighting, and styling. If that doesn't come naturally, she says, pay a pro for pointers. Then use your best shots everywhere—from Twitter to Yelp.

CHRISTOPHE LOIRON

OWNER
MISTER FREEDOM
LOS ANGELES



“The entire business of antiques, clothing or otherwise, is based on who has the most knowledge and the better contacts to resell at a profit.”



HIT THE ROAD. “Buying trips are rarely glamorous, but they're requisite for keeping fresh inventory,” Loiron says. Go often.



MAKE FRIENDS. Buddy up with—and tip!—your local dealers and rag houses (warehouses that sort discarded clothing). They'll call you with hot finds.



ANTICIPATE TRENDS. “The price of a vintage item is based on hype,” Loiron says. If you can predict what's next, you'll buy low, wait a bit, then sell high.

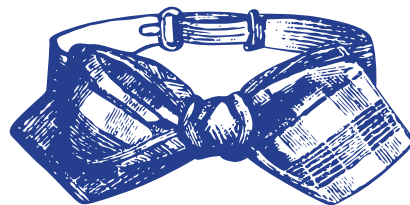
KATHRYNE WISEMAN

CO-OWNER
STREET SCENE VINTAGE
LEXINGTON, KY



“Always think of the reason something vintage would be needed today. If it doesn't have a practical or modern function, why would a customer buy it?”

Start small. “When my partner and I first opened, we had a booth in an antiques mall,” Wiseman says. Smart move. It's cheaper than a store, provides more time to scout inventory, and lets you commune with like-minded vendors. Biggest downside: the slice of your sales you owe to the mall. Negotiate your terms upfront.



Going in...

Gems are often found at estate sales, but don't barge in. “It is a real honor to be allowed into someone's home to look through their loved one's things,” Wiseman says. “Be patient and kind and pay the most you feel comfortable with. Vultures earn a reputation, but compassion will earn you respect in your field.”



...and coming out

The average American donates 12 pounds of clothing per year, according to the Council for Textile Recycling. Much of that will end up at rag houses. The best is divvied up to resale and consignment shops; the rest is shipped overseas (so teenagers in Bolivia can enjoy someone's dad's old polyester shirt) or recycled.

NEXT MONTH So, you want to open a **wine store?**