



Leap of faith

Changing careers as a parent: terrifying?
No doubt. Possible? Absolutely

BY SAMANTHA MOOLMAN

When Sinead Brook and her husband Henry began their journey into parenthood, they knew that compromise was inevitable. One of them would soon need to sacrifice a burgeoning career in the corporate world for a more flexible job closer to home. But life takes over, and after giving birth to daughters Cameron in 2006, and Tallula in 2008, both Brooks were still running at maximum capacity by the time Sinead fell pregnant with their third baby, Ryder.

A time for change

Things took a turn when Ryder was born prematurely, and had to spend three and a half weeks in neonatal care.

It was at this point that Sinead realised she could not keep up with the demands of corporate life on top of the demands of being a parent. And even if she could, she soon realised that she didn't want to.

And so she took a leap of faith. An idea had been brewing in the back of Sinead's mind since having her firstborn, and seeing Ryder in the neonatal unit four years down the line suddenly spurred her into action. Her reasoning was simple: "Life's just too short, and if you have something in your mind that's got potential, you've just got to do it." Which is exactly what she did.

Since that pivotal moment in the hospital, Sinead has happily swapped power suits and boardrooms for make-up brushes and a Canon camera. Formerly a successful research analyst

in the multi-management industry, this mom of three is now a professional make-up artist and photographer, officially known as The Makeover Stylist (www.themakeoverstylist.co.za).

Makeover mom

It all began when she took her firstborn, Cameron, to a professional photography studio for some family pictures. At the time Sinead felt uncomfortable and unattractive, as many new moms do, but after a positive and reinforcing experience at the photoshoot, she was pleasantly surprised. "At the time, I was not feeling so great about myself. But with clever lighting and clever make-up...", she smiles. "That photoshoot was a huge boost for my self-esteem. After that, I looked at myself differently." The

next time she fell pregnant, Sinead was a lot easier on herself. "I realised that with make-up, even though your body's expanding, you can look good every day!" As a result, inspiration hit to pay it forward, and Sinead considered the possibility of a new venture that would help her to reinforce other women's self-esteem.

Since that photoshoot five years ago, Sinead now has her own studio and is still as inspired as ever. But getting to this point was by no means an easy feat. The new business venture needed to be financed, for a start, which meant that Sinead had to build her new business from scratch while continuing to juggle working in the corporate sector with being a mother.

It also meant that she had to take classes in make-up artistry and photography – which took place in the evenings. "When you're working around the clock it takes a toll on your family, but I had to make a go of it," says Sinead. It took determination, perseverance and some foresight, but the hard work paid off.

Making it work

Making a living from home also has its disadvantages. Without the luxury of a private office, Sinead has to get used to managing her work time around her children, which requires a lot of self-discipline. "It's easy to underestimate the amount of interruption that you have at home. It's also very easy to get sidetracked," she says. "But if you have some structure and you compartmentalise your day, then you can manage it."

“The biggest obstacle is listening to people and taking their opinion seriously”

Sinead also had to get to know her children again, having relied so much on their caregiver when she was away at work. "Knowing what they like, or what their favourite thing is – you don't always capture these things over a weekend."

Knowing that she's now accessible to her children throughout the day if they need her is a lot easier for Sinead to deal with. "It frees up a lot of the megabytes of worry that took up most of my evenings in the past but it is still a juggle," she says, determined not to sugar-coat her experience.

She attributes a lot of her success to her husband. "You've got to have a very supportive spouse," she says. "Henry did all the shopping, all the cooking. He ran the house while I was working at night editing photos, or at a make-up class." And though doubt and fear of failure haunted Sinead everyday, her husband and closest friends were rooting for her, motivating her to stay on track and pursue her dream no matter what.

Still, comments from what Sinead calls "the negative peanut gallery" were often discouraging and demotivating. "Are you really going to earn money from that?" That's the famous one," she recalls, eyes rolling. Sinead advises those who are venturing into a new career to block out any negative influence. "The biggest obstacle is listening to people and taking their opinion seriously. It takes a lot of guts to expose yourself and

it's a personal thing, so it's hard not to take it personally.

Living the dream

Having witnessed too many people whose dreams have passed them by, Sinead is passionate about empowering people, especially women, to be the best versions of themselves. She warns people against being too conservative or risk-averse to see their dreams through to fruition. "Don't procrastinate," she warns. "If you want to do something, get off your butt and do it. Most people say, 'I wish I'd done it'; for me it was, 'I wish I'd done it sooner.'"

As The Makeover Stylist, there are enough perks to make up for corporate nostalgia. She is stimulated by the challenge of owning her own business, but also loves how much she gets to interact with people. "I'm a bit like a hairstylist – people tell me stuff," she says, laughing; but adds with sincerity, "I now have an opportunity to affect someone in a small way, or just bring some positive change to their lives."

Nevertheless, Sinead says she isn't against rejoining the asset management industry, if need be. She is still adamant that she has no regrets, and that the time she gets to spend with her children now far outweighs any perks from her previous job. "Nothing can compensate me for the soulful rewards that I'm receiving now," she says, "on an intellectual, creative, and family level." ●



Sinead Brook with her husband Henry and three children Cameron (5), Tallula (3) and Ryder (1). When Ryder was born Sinead decided to drastically change her career path