

REPRINTED
WITH
PERMISSION

The New York Times

Business Day

TUESDAY, MAY 3, 2005

Business Travel

The Pacifier Isn't for the Client

Women Are Finding Ways to Bring Their Children on Business Trips

By MELINDA LIGOS

Alana K. Bassin, a partner at Bowman & Brooke, a products-liability law firm in Minneapolis, has a simple checklist for her business travels: a suitcase for her business suits, an attaché case for her legal papers and an infant seat for her daughter, Talia.

Just over a year ago, when Talia was 7 months old, Ms. Bassin brought her to a two-week trial in Galveston, Tex., so that she could stick to her nursing schedule. Since then, the pair has hit the road several times, and Ms. Bassin, who is about to give birth for a second time, plans to bring both children on business trips in the future.

"When I tell senior male partners at other firms that I do this, they're shocked," said Ms. Bassin, who sees herself as a trailblazer of sorts in the legal profession. "They can't believe I'd bring a baby across the country with me, especially to a trial, which they liken to going to war."

It turns out that Ms. Bassin's routine isn't all that unusual. The Travel Industry Association of America reported that of 163 million business trips taken in 2003 — the last year it tracked the statistic — 10 percent included children. This figure has grown steadily over the last decade, said Cathy Keefe, an association spokeswoman, in large part because more women hold high-profile jobs that require travel. Some, like Ms. Bassin, are nursing mothers. Others are simply seeking to "eke out some much-needed quality time" with their children, Ms. Keefe said.

Eva Wisnik, president of Wisnik Career Enterprises, a New York City firm that provides training to lawyers, belongs to the latter group. Last spring, her son, then 11, accompanied her on a 10-day training program throughout California and



Dawn Villella for The New York Times

Alana K. Bassin, a lawyer in Minneapolis, brought her daughter, Talia, to a two-week trial in Texas.

Nevada. Her two other children, ages 4 and 5, and her husband, have also tagged along on various trips over the last few years.

The fun starts once they're old enough to work a BlackBerry.

Ms. Wisnik, who travels about 30 days a year to conduct training sessions at law firms throughout the country, says she uses the trips as opportunities to connect with her children, as well as expand their horizons. On the trip out west with her

oldest son, for example, the two rented a sailboat one afternoon, took a tour of the wine country on another day and soared over the Grand Canyon in a helicopter on another. "The only thing that we didn't do is ride in a blimp," she said, adding that her son documented the entire trip in a vacation journal.

Fueling the trend, hotels and resorts are expanding services to business travelers with children, Ms. Keefe said. For example, the Loews hotel chain offers a program at its resorts that includes child-friendly foods, camps for children over 4 and amenities like coloring books and pool toys. The company is also planning exercise classes for mothers and their babies at several resorts this summer.

Many hotels, even in remote locations, offer babysitting services or have concierges who can help parents find nannies. Some even customize camps or services for visiting conventions. At the Hotel del Coronado in San Diego, "group children's programs are becoming as commonplace as spouse programs" at corporate conventions, said Victor Woo, the director of sales and marketing at the hotel.

Bringing children along on business trips isn't without challenges. There is the extra plane fare to consider, and the cost of babysitting services or camps that range as high as \$15 an hour per child in some cities. Some parents may be uncomfortable leaving their children with strangers.

Last fall, Jennifer Bannan, a principal at Zero to Five, a marketing firm in Philadelphia, brought her 10-month-old son, Desmond, with her to a trade show in Denver, and worried that his desire to be held constantly would scare off a nanny. She was right. A babysitter she had booked for two eight-hour days through a local service seemed fine when she showed up at Ms. Bannan's hotel room, but was frazzled when Ms. Bannan called a few hours later to check up on her.

"She told me I had to come home right away because she couldn't keep my son from crying," Ms. Bannan recalls. Ms. Bannan had to skip out on a meeting with clients and run six blocks back to the hotel to relieve her. "I told her to take a breather for an hour and then she would feel better," she said.

Two hours later, Ms. Bannan realized she'd been jilted by the nanny.

She spent the rest of the day meeting with clients while standing up and holding her son so that he would not cry during the sessions.

Child-care glitches also complicated Ms. Bassin's plans at the trial in Galveston. A few days into the session, a client in Dallas had a legal emergency that required her immediate attention. Before flying off to deal with the crisis, however, she had to find somebody to care for her daughter that night. A paralegal she had never met volunteered to babysit, but the experience made Ms. Bassin uncomfortable. "All of a sudden I'm leaving my child with a stranger in a strange city," she said.

At other times during the trial, Ms. Bassin did not have child care at all and had to bring Talia with her into the war room for client meetings. "I would just cross her fingers and hope that she didn't cry," she said.

Even minor schedule changes have the potential for trouble when children are in tow. Melinda Adamec, director of DBC Public Relations Experts, a firm in Washington, recently brought her 5-month-old daughter, Ella, on a business trip to Chicago. Ms. Adamec thought she had prepared well before meeting with her new client a few hours after she had flown in. She had secured her husband as a babysitter, and she had nursed Ella just before going to the lobby to meet the client.

But the client was an hour and a half late, which meant Ella was "upstairs screaming her head off" before Ms. Adamec had a chance to nurse her again. Ms. Adamec also had trouble explaining to her clients why she had to disappear for a half

an hour at a time to nurse her daughter.

"They were all male, and I didn't want to embarrass anyone, so I had to be a little bit delicate about the whole thing," saying only that she had to spend a few minutes with her daughter, she said. "I think they eventually figured out what was happening, and they were O.K. with it."

Marta Kagan, chief executive of Lifeline Coaching, a New York firm that counsels people on leading balanced lives, urges clients to take children on business trips only if they expect to have a lot of free time to spend with them. "If you're never going to be available, what's the point?" she asked. "You've got a frazzled child who's off his routine, and you're going to feel like you're split in two."

Ms. Wisnik heeds that recommendation. She makes family outings of her trips only if she can schedule half of each day with her children or extend her stay a few days to see the sights with them. And having her husband come along isn't necessarily a child care cure-all. She recalls returning to her hotel room after a day of meetings to find him in the midst of a two-hour-long conference with "three very unhappy kids bouncing off the wall."

Still, traveling with them "is always the highlight of my year," she said. On occasion, it can also make doing business easier. Last year, when her oldest son, David, came along on a drive from Los Angeles to San Diego, he monitored her BlackBerry. "Whenever it buzzed, he would read the messages out to me," she said. "It was like I had my own personal assistant."