

SO MUCH TO DO AND SO LITTLE TIME.

You're running a household, juggling schedules, getting dinner on the table, while trying to maintain a sense of calm—and it's no small feat. It's easy to feel overwhelmed by all the daily details and forget that managing your family is the most important job you'll ever have, no matter how many other paid or volunteer positions you hold.

Your job description includes numerous tasks, all of which fall into one of these seven departments.

TIME & SCHEDULING—You're in charge of your family's calendar and daily schedule, making sure each person is at the right place at the right time with the right equipment.

HOME & PROPERTY—You make sure your family's home and yard, your belongings, and your vehicles are maintained and run smoothly.

FOOD—You see that your family's nutritional needs are met—and that mealtimes bring your family together.

FAMILY & FRIENDS—You love and support your kids in countless ways each day, and you also build relationships with other important family members, friends, and neighbors.

FINANCES—You help coordinate your family's budget, bill paying, saving, investing, and charitable giving.

SPECIAL EVENTS—You plan significant occasions like birthdays, holidays, and vacations.

SELF-MANAGEMENT—To ensure you have the energy and stamina to handle all your other responsibilities, you must also care for your body, sharpen your mind, and nourish your spirit.

You're probably managing some of these areas well, but there are others that cause you a lot of frustration. It's that way for every mom—but now you have a trusted resource with solutions to daily dilemmas and answers to your most urgent questions. Kathy Peel, America's Family Manager, is here to help!

THE BUSY MOM'S GUIDE TO A HAPPY, ORGANIZED HOME



*FAST SOLUTIONS TO HUNDREDS
OF EVERYDAY DILEMMAS*

AMERICA'S FAMILY MANAGER

KATHY PEEL



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The Busy Mom's Guide to a Happy, Organized Home: Fast Solutions to Hundreds of Everyday Dilemmas

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DEDICATION

To Genevieve and Christin

Beautiful brides
and the answers
to our prayers
for John and Joel

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INTRODUCTION

CREATING A HAPPY HOME STARTS HERE

When you start a new job, most companies provide orientation. You learn where to park your car, where to keep your sack lunch, and what qualifies as acceptable attire for casual Fridays. But when you take on motherhood, the world's most important job, there's no formal orientation—just on-the-job training and trial by fire.

My first few years of motherhood, I feared that if all moms were rated according to their domestic skills and parenting know-how, I would surely be in the remedial group. Boy, did I wish that all the secrets of motherhood and family management were passed down, from mother to mother, in a thick binder, indexed and categorized for every scenario. There were so many things I needed to know, like how to convince a toddler to eat vegetables, when to replace the hoses on our washing machine, and the best time of day to shop for groceries—all of which I had to learn the hard way.

I certainly could have used such a resource when it was time to enroll our three-year-old in preschool. I did some research and decided on a school that a mom in my neighborhood had raved about. She suggested I arrive early on registration day since classes filled up fast, so on the appointed day I pulled out of my driveway in time to get there 30 minutes before the doors opened. I was sure I'd get a prime parking spot, but as I rounded the corner, I almost hit a snaking line of women, hundreds of women, many of them sitting in lawn chairs, some of them playing cards on top of coolers, all of them stopping to stare at me (or so it seemed). My face turned hot with embarrassment. Oh, how I wished I had known that “early” meant “before dawn.”

Since that time, I've collected thousands of tips and motherhood “secrets” that help moms save time and money—and sometimes embarrassment. *The Busy Mom's Guide to a Happy, Organized Home* is the quick-read version of the big binder I dreamed of when I was a young mother. It's for today's moms. Their lives are complex. They work, chauffeur kids to many activities, book vacations, buy birthday gifts, kiss boo-boos, and whip up nutritious meals. They manage their children's educations and social lives, decorate their homes, and provide clean laundry. Armed with cell phones, the Internet, double ovens,

When you take on motherhood, the world's most important job, there's no formal orientation—just on-the-job training and trial by fire.

.....

grocery stores that deliver, and casual office attire, they are world-class multitaskers, but they are still the most time-strapped generation ever.

Maybe you picked up this book because you can relate. You may count yourself among the 95 percent of moms who, according to AOL, are online two hours every day. You want instant information, so you head to the Web when you need answers. You compare prices, search for coupons, respond to blogs, and solicit advice. Often your research nets too many results. Finding ideas or opinions is easy; knowing which sources to trust isn't.

That's where this book can help. Growing wiser and working smarter is what the Family Manager way of doing things is all about, and it can transform your life. In my own quest to be a good mom and successful manager of my home, I devised the Family Manager system. It's based on the premise that the strategies that run any organization or business well—things like casting vision, creating standard operating procedures, practicing team building, and doing advance work—will help you run your home well. Trust me: These tactics can make your home and life run more smoothly than you ever dreamed. They'll help you order your day and ably oversee the countless tasks that come with your job, including . . .

- creating a place where family members feel good about where they live
- living a balanced, fulfilling life
- knowing what matters most to you and living accordingly
- reducing stress by getting organized and keeping up with housework
- learning to operate as a family team
- encouraging family members to be their personal best and share their skills, resources, and love with family, friends, and community
- planning memorable occasions that strengthen family ties
- appreciating and learning to work with each family member's unique giftedness; helping family members learn to love themselves and others in meaningful ways
- giving each person—including yourself—the room and time to grow in mind, body, and spirit
- having more time for fun and enjoying life

Of course, creating a happy, organized home and being a great mom require more than what is printed on the pages of this book or can be downloaded from the Web. You've got to know what you want for your family, including yourself. In one of those rare moments when the kids aren't tugging at your shirttail and you're not playing beat-the-clock to your next event, I encourage you to fix yourself a cup of tea and take some time to think about what a happy home means to you.

When our boys were young, I wrote the following description of what a happy home meant to me and what I wanted to aim for as our family's manager.

I want my home to be a place where the members know they are valuable, where they feel loved for who they are as unique individuals, where they feel like they belong and can grow in their separate interests. I want our home to

be a friendly place for everyone, those of us who can stand clutter and those of us who like everything in its place. There should be a balance in the “common” areas—the family room and kitchen—clean enough to be healthy, messy enough to be happy, so as not to offend either type. Every person’s personal space should be his or her own personal space. Their personal belongings are theirs to enjoy, to share, and to take care of.

I want our house to be filled with laughter. I want to have plenty of time to share our daily hurts and joys with each other, but we all have busy schedules. Therefore we designate certain times to spend together. Breakfast in the morning—starting the day off on a positive note—is a must. At least three nights each week I want us to sit down as a family and eat together. We’ll share the cooking on those nights, as well as the cleanup, and use the time to talk about each other’s worlds. We’ll have family meetings to iron things out, talk about schedules, or work on specific projects or problems. Each week we’ll go somewhere fun as a family, and we’ll plan a fun weekend outing once a month. We’ll take two family vacations each year. We’ll look forward to growing up and growing old together.

I want to be my best so I can do my best. Therefore, I’ll take time to take care of myself as well. I’ll work time into my schedule to read books, take classes, learn new skills, and exercise my body; and even if everything else falls apart, I resolve to take time to think about my life.

I admit those are lofty goals, and I certainly haven’t achieved them all. But the exercise of getting my dreams down on paper has helped me to remember what’s most important and to stay on course over the years. Although moms today face unique challenges when it comes to managing their homes and nurturing their children, many tell me they want the same things I did. Simply put, they want to create a happy, organized home. If you’re thinking, *That’s what I want too!* keep reading. This book will help you make it happen.

But please do not think that I am telling you exactly how you should run your home. (You’ll see in these pages that that’s not true.) I do, however, want you to benefit from my experience and avoid learning things by trial and lots of errors like I did. You see, the Family Manager system helped me make our home a good place to be. We maintain a healthy balance of organization and order, flexibility and fun. Our family is a team—even now, after our three boys are grown and two of them are married. We’re still committed to working and enjoying the blessings of life together, and to helping each other develop our individual potential. There’s no greater blessing on earth, and I want this for you and your family.

Girlfriends, hear this: We play a very powerful role in our families. At some point we all realize that our influence greatly determines our home’s environment—certainly the physical aspects, but emotional and spiritual aspects as well. And typically Mom is the glue that holds things together at home. This means that when we personally come “unglued,” a whole lot of things begin to crumble.

I pray that this book will be a valuable resource to you—like a trusted friend you can turn to for practical advice, proven solutions, and the inspiration you need to hold things together and create a happy, organized home. For this to happen, you need to understand some things about your very big job as your family's manager.

Getting Down to Business

You oversee an economic institution that includes such services as facility and resource management, meal preparation, child care, education, and transportation, to name a few. Using the strategies and tactics of successful business managers will help you realize your dream for a happy, organized home. Here are the 10 most important things you need to know about your job.

1. Think like a manager. You oversee the most important organization in the world. The Family Manager Creed summarizes your role.

THE FAMILY MANAGER CREED

*I oversee the most important organization in the world
Where hundreds of decisions are made daily
Where property and resources are managed
Where health and nutritional needs are determined
Where finances and futures are discussed and debated
Where projects are planned and events are arranged
Where transportation and scheduling are critical
Where team building is a priority
Where careers begin and end
I am a Family Manager*

2. Manage by department. To keep from being overwhelmed, you need to develop a way to meet your never-ending Family Manager responsibilities. They can be better managed when categorized in seven distinct departments and supervised accordingly:

TIME & SCHEDULING—managing the family calendar and daily schedule; dispatching the right people to the right place at the right time with the right equipment
HOME & PROPERTY—overseeing the maintenance and care of all your tangible assets, including your belongings, your house and its surroundings, and your vehicles
FOOD—meeting the daily food and nutritional needs of your family
FAMILY & FRIENDS—fulfilling relational responsibilities as a parent and spouse, and with extended family, friends, and neighbors
FINANCES—managing the budget, bill paying, saving, investing, and charitable giving
SPECIAL EVENTS—planning and coordinating occasions that fall outside your normal routine—like birthdays, holidays, vacations, garage sales, family reunions, and celebrations

SELF-MANAGEMENT—caring for your body, sharpening your mind, and nourishing your spirit

3. **Know your mission and values.** It's important that you take time to consider what's most important to you and your family. Your priorities will help you as you make decisions all day, every day.
4. **Cast vision and communicate benefits.** Successful managers must inspire and attract employees around a common goal and communicate how that goal affects each person's best interests. It's no different in a family.
5. **Build a family team.** All good management is about sharing responsibility, helping people find their niches, and empowering them to succeed.
6. **Create a base of operations.** As your family's manager, you need a "Control Central" from which to supervise your family's comings and goings.
7. **Use a Daily Hit List.** Selectively choosing each day what you will Do, Delete, and Delegate in each department will help you manage tasks and alleviate stress.
8. **Manage according to how you're wired.** Family management demands a set of skills that no one person has. There will always be jobs you hate. The trick is learning to work with your strengths and work around areas where you are not gifted and through people who are.
9. **Be prepared.** It's the Scout motto, but it's also a good motto for Family Managers.
10. **Lean on God.** He created the family and will give you the wisdom and strength you need to be a great mother, wife, and Family Manager.

In the chapters that follow, you will learn more about these 10 principles. You'll also pick up tips and tactics for each of the seven departments to help you accomplish all the tasks you *have to do* faster and find more time and energy for the things you *want to do*. You will also find helpful checklists and forms.¹ For a bit of quick encouragement when you feel out of control in one of the departments, I invite you to read "The Most Important Things to Remember" at the start of each chapter. It's easy to get overwhelmed by life's details, but I've learned that creating a smoothly running home really comes down to a few key attitudes and actions. Finally, the Web site resource guide and topical index at the end of the book will help you to quickly find information you need to know for your family.

¹Members of the Family Manager Inner Circle can download these interactive forms, as well as a number of others. See <http://www.familymanager.com>.

Whether you feel like you have all the time you need and things at your home are running fairly well or you're beyond chaos and need all the help you can get, at times every mom needs a few tricks up her sleeve and inspiration to keep going. You can speed-read this book and tag the pages with ideas you want to remember, or you can keep it in a handy place for the days you need some instant advice on how to survive a family road trip or get your kids to do their fair share of housework. Either way, you'll find help for getting on the fast track to a happy, organized home . . . so you can slow down and enjoy the blessings of life.



CHAPTER 1

MANAGING TIME AND SCHEDULING

We can all learn a lesson from attorneys. No doubt you’ve heard plenty of jokes about lawyers and their billable hours. Actually, the way they see their time—as very valuable—is the way we, as Family Managers, should look at our own time. When you view your time as a commodity, like money, you can look at your days and identify whether you spend too much in one area.

If you constantly feel breathless and behind, this chapter is a good place to begin reading to find ways to restore sanity to your life. Think back on yesterday. Did you lose an hour at the grocery store because you went at a high-traffic time of day? Did you talk too long on the phone with that friend who bends your ear about her problems when you really needed to spend time with your son? Were you late for an appointment because you spent an hour looking for your daughter’s ballet shoes because she hadn’t put them in their designated place? Can you think of other ways precious minutes slipped through your hands? If so, don’t get down on yourself. Recognizing the problem is the first step to solving it.

Taking some time to think about how your time is spent every day is an important exercise. It will help you identify your priorities—whether you’re living according to yours or someone else’s, for whatever reason—and it’s the first step necessary for becoming a good manager of the minutes of your day.

Minutes is the key word in that last sentence, because to be a good manager of your family’s calendar and daily schedule, you must, like an attorney, see not just the hours but the minutes of your day as valuable. Wouldn’t it be helpful if someone invented a way to stop the clock for a full day so we would all have a large, uninterrupted block of time to catch up with everything we’re behind on or accomplish a big project? This might make a good story line for a film, but when it comes to reality, we have to catch up and keep up in real time—which for most of us means seeing small bits of time as treasure. You’d be surprised how much you can accomplish when you start using the snippets of time you grab here and there. Granted, you may not be able to scrapbook every age and stage of your 10-year-old daughter’s life, but you’ll make progress every time you work on a page—which will make you feel better about yourself—and eventually the project will be finished!

When you view your time as a commodity, you can look at your days and identify whether you spend too much in one area.



It's also important to live in the present as well as the future. That's right, we need to live in two tenses. Here's what I mean.

Living in the present has everything to do with living one day at a time—being prepared for the day's responsibilities, using the minutes of the day wisely, and being alert for and enjoying each day's blessings. Living in the future means thinking ahead about what you want to happen—tomorrow, next week, or next month—and what needs to happen for a goal to be met, using small bits of time along the way to prepare for the future event.

For example, let's say today is Monday and your schedule includes taking your toddler to the pediatrician for a checkup, then dropping him by the house of a friend who said she'd watch him while you do cafeteria duty at your third grader's school. You also have a roofer coming to give you a bid in the afternoon, so when lunch is over you go back to your friend's house, pick up your toddler, go home, and put him down for a nap. You get the mail, check your e-mail, and hope that the roofer is punctual because you can't be late to pick up your third grader. If you're not near the front of the pickup line, you can't get her home in time to have a snack and get her changed into her soccer uniform before your neighbor picks her up for practice.

Let's stop here to look at what has transpired. You definitely needed to be present in the present, giving your full attention to driving, caring for your toddler, listening to the doctor, giving your friend instructions, and making sure you put the right foods on the trays at school.

But let's say you also looked at your calendar this morning and saw that your daughter's Scout troop is having an overnight camp-out on Friday, and you need to remind her to start gathering the stored camping gear she'll need. You also notice that the annual neighborhood garage sale is two weeks away (you remind yourself how that extra \$200 came in handy last year), and you need to start a stash of items you want to sell. And you see that you made a note that Thursday is the last day to sign up for the women's retreat, and you haven't registered yet. You get the picture. We all have to consciously work on today and tomorrow at the same time.

One mom with three closely spaced children (grades one through three) told me it was hard for her to think about tomorrow and the next day because she could barely make it through all she had to do today. She wondered how she could possibly add any future tasks to her already overstuffed days. What she didn't realize—giving birth to three children in three years, who can blame her for responding slowly?—is that by looking ahead and doing what she could to prepare for tomorrow, she could make each “today” go a lot better. When she did start living in two tenses, she noticed big differences in her life.

The Most Important Things to Remember

1. Unless you set and resolve to live by your *own* priorities, you'll wear yourself out trying to meet the demands and expectations of others.
2. You—like everyone else—have 60 minutes in each hour, 24 hours a day. Time is made up of moments, and moments are manageable.
3. The minutes of your days come with a choice: Only you can decide how you'll spend them.
4. Don't let the things that matter least to you rob time from the things that matter most to you.
5. There is no such thing as unimportant time. Each moment is a gift.
6. As you become a better manager of time, you'll begin saving hours. And every hour you save is an hour added to your life.
7. Be flexible. Unexpected events can interrupt the best routines. Bend with the interruption instead of resisting it.
8. When you say yes to something, you're saying no to something else. Don't let it be your family.
9. When you are more efficient at performing the tasks you must do, you have more time for the things that matter most to you.
10. How you carry out each 24-hour day can make the difference between a household in constant uproar and one that hums along smoothly.



GOOD TO KNOW

Forty-four percent of adults say that having a satisfying family life is their highest priority in life, according to a 2005 Barna poll.

Mornings had been nothing short of madness. She refused to make lunches the night before school because there were too many other end-of-the-day tasks to tackle, not to mention helping her kids finish their homework and get in bed at a decent hour. Her routine was to pack lunches in the morning. Yet she felt as if from the moment her feet hit the floor, she was trying to beat the clock. Often she had to make an additional midmorning trip to school to deliver the kids' lunches. (Did I mention this mom's other routine was hitting the snooze button on her alarm three times before getting out of bed?)

She knew that madness is not the best way to start the day. A frazzled mom means frazzled kids. No mom likes sending her kids off without smiles on their faces and sandwiches in their lunch boxes.

Since it was clear that mornings weren't working, she started to experiment. What if she cut up extra veggies for the kids' lunches when cooking dinner? What if she gave her eight-year-old the job of cleaning out the lunch boxes, building and bagging turkey-and-cheese sandwiches (hold the mayo until morning), and storing them in the fridge to pack the next day? And what if her seven-year-old was in charge of readying each lunch box with a napkin, plastic utensils, and a water bottle? This simple change in routine gave her more time in the morning. Having more time in the morning made her relax. Once relaxed she could connect with her kids—instead of yelling at them. She was happier. They were happier. And she even got to have a cup of coffee. She became a staunch believer in living in two tenses, doing what she needed to do today and grabbing a few minutes here and there to make progress toward tomorrow.

Once you start living in two tenses, you realize the importance of protecting your time. When you anticipate future needs while managing those routine yet vital tasks, you naturally want to guard your minutes and spend them on what's most important to you and your family.

Yet even with the best of planning, we all can end up frustrated when projects and people who weren't even on our radar screens take up time we hadn't planned to spend. Being a mom requires flexibility and guarantees interruptions. In many ways our time is not our own, and that's one of the sacrifices and privileges that comes with being a parent. Children—and life events—are predictably unpredictable. Every hour of every day brings events, episodes, and exchanges we cannot control. But some we can. Before we can get a handle on them though, it is imperative that we know what's most important to us. This section will help you organize your day, identify time wasters, take advantage of small chunks of time, and discover new ways of multitasking.

Strategies and Solutions for Time and Scheduling

As a young mom, I collapsed into bed many nights wondering exactly what I'd accomplished that day. In essence, the Family Manager system developed out of my own sense of desperation. Over the years, I discovered three keys to managing my time rather than letting it control me: (1) recognizing and living by my priorities, (2) setting up a Control Central—a base of operations—within my home, and (3) learning how to take back control over the minutes of my day.

STEP 1: LIVE BY YOUR PRIORITIES

Every business leader sets the course for her company. She decides what's most important and establishes guidelines—things like return policies, hours of operation, and employee incentive programs—that reflect the values she considers most important. Running a home and a family should be no different. If you aren't clear on your most important objectives for each of the seven departments, it is likely that you'll end up frustrated and find that life is controlling you, rather than vice versa.

For example, let's say you wanted to take your seven-year-old budding paleontologist to the traveling dinosaur exhibit at a nearby state park, but it's now been shipped to the next state. What happened? Perhaps you believe it's very important to notice and encourage your child's interests, but you've never actually stated that as one of your priorities. So while the day trip to the state park was an option on several Saturdays, catching up on laundry and clearing the week's clutter always seemed more urgent. As a result, you missed the opportunity for an unforgettable day with your child.

Maybe you can relate because you realize that you, too, have not been living by your priorities. All of us face numerous obstacles that keep us from setting priorities and ordering our lives the way we would like. You may relate to the big three I fight in my own life:

1. *Circumstances.* Until we decide it's vitally important that we take an hour or so to go someplace quiet and think about what's important to us, the natural course of life will carry us out of control along a path of minimal accomplishments, meaningless activities, frustration, and mediocrity.
2. *Expectations and pressure from others.* We are all prone to succumb to the agendas of others, appropriate the goals of



GOOD TO KNOW

As Internet use grows, Americans report that they spend less time with friends and family, shopping in stores, or watching television, and more time working for their employers at home—without cutting back their hours in the office. (Stanford University)

What Are Your Priorities?

Imagine yourself years from now taking time to look back on your life. What one or two accomplishments in each of these seven areas would give you the most satisfaction? Remember, there are no right or “exceptional” answers. You don’t even need to share this list with anyone else.

The following verbs may prompt your thinking.

advance	contribute	guide
advise	coordinate	illustrate
advocate	create	improve
analyze	deliver	influence
assemble	demonstrate	innovate
balance	develop	introduce
brighten	direct	launch
coach	educate	learn
collaborate	encourage	nurture
collect	engineer	organize
communicate	enhance	schedule
compose	establish	teach
compute	experience	transform
connect	explore	welcome
construct	facilitate	

Time & Scheduling _____

Home & Property _____

Food _____

Friends & Family _____

Finances _____

Special Events _____

Self-Management _____

our culture, and compromise. Let’s be honest—peer pressure is not just a teenager’s problem. It’s a lifelong issue. And it’s never too late to start standing on your own and supporting your priorities.

3. *Love of the comfortable.* We tend to arrange life as best we can to avoid pain and to maintain personal comfort. The prob-

lem is that, until we step out of our comfort zones, we experience no significant change for the better, no personal growth, and no relational development. It may be time to sacrifice now for a long-term payoff.

If you want things to change, there's no better time than now to begin incorporating some new tactics and activities into your life that will produce positive change.

First, for each of the seven departments, you need to choose your priorities and decide to live by them. How you spend your time in each department speaks volumes about what your true priorities are—and if you're not spending time the way you'd like, you have to ask whose priorities you're living by.

Maybe you agree that living by priorities is a great idea—but you feel too overwhelmed by life to sit down and figure out what's most important to you. Perhaps you're thinking, *I'm so busy I can't even take time to sort them out, let alone live by them.* I urge you not to fall into this trap.

I suggest you think about one day at a time. You might even want to use a small notebook in which you write your top priorities. Then, as you make choices during the day, simply jot down a few words about the choice you made and how it did or did not fit your stated priorities. You're not doing this to beat yourself up. You're doing it to become conscious of your actions.

Decision-Making Guidelines

Establishing your priorities will give you a yardstick against which to measure the many decisions you must make about how to spend your time and resources. Whether it's a small but important decision like whether to join a Pilates class or ask a neighbor to walk with you three mornings a week, or an important life choice like whether to take a part-time job to ease monthly cash flow or spend more time tutoring a child whose grades are slipping in math and science, these nine steps will help you navigate through the decision and change processes as smoothly as possible.

1. List your options. Just brainstorm and let the ink flow. Don't edit at this point.
2. Think about your choices. Sort your feelings about the options you wrote.
3. Relate your choices to your priorities. What's really most important to you?



FROM THE HEART

When your schedule gets overloaded, take a short break. For example, take a 10- or 15-minute walk or sit quietly and read something inspirational for a few minutes. Then you can come back to your tasks refreshed, more energetic, and better focused.

4. Think about how your choices will affect other members of your family.
5. Make a decision and a commitment to follow through on it.
6. Help yourself stick to your decision by telling someone what you've decided—become accountable to that person.
7. Be realistic about when you can make the change or start your new habit or action.
8. Launch your new practice as strongly and vigorously as possible. Make it a big deal.
9. Avoid too many changes at once. Whenever you can, plan major life changes—houses, jobs, adding to the people who live at your house—so they do not occur at the same time.

STEP 2: SET UP A BASE OF OPERATIONS WITHIN YOUR HOME

Control Central

Every manager needs a Control Central—be it a desk, a countertop, or an office. In a company, it's the place from which he or she calls the shots. In a home, it's the place from which the Family Manager organizes, tracks the family's schedule, notes changes, responds to messages, makes lists, and keeps all those important papers in their places. By setting up your own Control Central, you can better oversee your family's comings and goings and manage the countless tasks, responsibilities, and decisions that are made every day. In short, by becoming more efficient, you'll save precious moments that can be redirected to your larger priorities.

Here are ideas to consider when setting up your own base of operations:

- Choose a central location in your home. Make sure it has a desk or countertop you can work on. Install a bulletin board in this area, and place a trash can within easy reach. If possible, a filing drawer should be easily accessible.
- Hang a family calendar on an adjacent wall. Record each person's appointments, activities, and important dates.
- Stock Control Central with pens, pencils, a highlighter pen, and some notepads for jotting down ideas and recording phone messages.
- Pull together the following supplies and keep them at Control Central: paper clips, stapler, staples, staple remover, rubber

bands, scissors, tape, and letter opener. Let family members know that these supplies must stay in their new home.

- Put a copy of your local phone directory here, as well as a list of the numbers your family regularly calls. This is also the home for directories from church, school, home-owners associations, clubs, and other groups.
- Keep an ongoing grocery and personal-needs list here so family members will always know where to add items you're running low on.
- Have an easy-access file for takeout menus and coupons.

Family In-Boxes

Purchase stackable in-boxes and label one for each child. Place them near your Control Central. When kids get home from school, have them unload their backpacks right away and put important papers and forms in their in-boxes. Mom or Dad should go through kids' in-boxes each night and review contents, signing and returning any papers that need to go back to school.

Daily Hit List

One of a mom's biggest challenges is remembering all the tasks that need to be done each day. Years ago I designed the Daily Hit List to manage my own daily responsibilities. It's different from other to-do lists because it enables you to categorize your many jobs by each Family Manager department. Using a Daily Hit List will:

- declutter your mind by providing a systematic way to sort through the myriad chores and responsibilities that you face every morning
- clear your perspective, revealing what's trivial and what's priority
- clarify which tasks only you can do and which can be delegated or shared
- improve your memory through the exercise of writing details
- help you remember what steps to take today so whatever's coming tomorrow will run more smoothly

As you begin to use a Daily Hit List, accept that you won't always be able to check off all of the tasks on your list at the end of the day. Move unaccomplished tasks to the next day's list, or delete the ones you deem unimportant for now.

I like to fill out my Daily Hit List early in the morning. Some other moms say that filling it out the night before works best for them. Whatever time you choose, there are three steps for making a Daily Hit List work:



SMART MOVE

Don't overschedule weekends. Plan some free time for activities that refresh you. Block it out on your calendar just as you would an important appointment.



FamilyManager™ DAILY HIT LIST DATE:

6:00 _____ _____ _____	HOME & PROPERTY	FOOD	FAMILY & FRIENDS
7:00 _____ _____ _____			
8:00 _____ _____ _____			
9:00 _____ _____ _____			
10:00 _____ _____ _____			
11:00 _____ _____ _____			
Noon _____ _____ _____			
1:00 _____ _____ _____			
2:00 _____ _____ _____	FINANCES	SPECIAL EVENTS	SELF-MANAGEMENT
3:00 _____ _____ _____			
4:00 _____ _____ _____			
5:00 _____ _____ _____			
6:00 _____ _____ _____			
7:00 _____ _____ _____			
8:00 _____ _____ _____			
9:00 _____ _____ _____			

Do. Think about and list *everything* that needs to be done. This includes obvious things like preparing meals, putting gas in the car, and depositing money in the bank, as well as other responsibilities such as cleaning, carpooling, and scheduling appointments.

Delegate. Looking at your list, ask yourself, *What can I delegate?* Can a teenager start a load of laundry before he leaves for band practice? Can a younger child fold clothes when she gets home from school? Can your husband start dinner when he arrives home from work? Always delegate according to skills, age, and availability—not gender.

Delete. Once you've delegated, take another look at the list. Are some of the tasks expendable? Do you really need to mop the kitchen floor every day? What is truly unnecessary, at least today?

STEP 3: MAXIMIZE YOUR MOMENTS

The final step in taking control of your schedule is about building some smart and simple time-management techniques into your life. These are things anyone—even the most right-brained, creatively out-of-control of us—can do.

10 Principles of Time Management

1. *Write it down.* Don't trust things to memory. Using lists and checking off completed tasks frees your mind for more important things.
2. *Do it now.* Whenever possible, make this your motto—especially with onerous tasks that could become worse if you put them off.
3. *Have the right tools.* The projects for which we have the tools or resources will be finished before the ones for which we're not prepared. If you schedule some time to organize your child's closet, have on hand various sizes of organizing bins, self-sealing plastic bags, a garbage bag, and boxes to store or give away items.
4. *Believe in buffers.* Anticipate traffic, checkout lines, and children to be slower than you'd like, and adjust your expectations.
5. *Set deadlines.* Deadlines are the best guarantee a job will be done. Jot down on your calendar the time or day you want to have a task completed. If needed, ask a friend or family member to hold you accountable.



SMART MOVE

Life is predictably unpredictable, so always allot a little extra time for tasks. If you think something is going to take you 30 minutes, schedule 40 minutes.



GOOD TO KNOW

An average American spends 27 hours each year sitting at traffic lights.



SMART MOVE

When you get a haircut, manicure, pedicure, or facial, schedule your next appointment as you pay.



SMART MOVE

Take a few minutes during the weekend to organize your work clothes for the week ahead.

6. *Do advance work—don't wait until the last minute.* If you're hosting a big dinner at your home, decide what you can do a week ahead of time, the day before, and so on. Estimate how much time you'll need and when to schedule tasks; anticipate potential time wasters. Then set deadlines for accomplishing goals.
7. *Work with your biological clock.* If you're a morning person, do your most important work then. Schedule tasks that don't demand as much attention and brainpower during lower-energy times of day.
8. *Create boundaries.* Set your priorities, and don't let other people guilt you into crossing them. Give yourself permission to "just say no" to requests that dent time with your family or time spent nourishing yourself. When you say yes to something, you're saying no to something else.
9. *Take charge of your own life and schedule.* Do things on your time. Don't pick up the phone every time it rings—use voice mail or an answering machine. Turn off your "you have mail" computer alert. Answer messages when it's convenient for you.
10. *Don't wait for time to "free up."* If you have a big project to accomplish, schedule work appointments for yourself in 30-minute or one-hour blocks. Be as serious about this time as you would any other appointment. Before you know it, you'll have the project licked.

Scheduling Strategies

Traveling to and from and waiting at appointments can eat hours of valuable time. These tips will help you keep travel and wait time to a minimum.

- Many services and businesses offer online scheduling—a big time-saver.
- Try to schedule the first appointment of the day or the first appointment after lunch. It's less likely you'll have to wait.
- Schedule family members' dental checkups and kids' pediatrician appointments back-to-back so you can make fewer trips.
- Avoid scheduling "maintenance" checkups at the doctor or dentist in May, August, or December—the busiest months of the year for moms.

- Schedule kids' back-to-school or summer-camp physicals well in advance.
- When you make an appointment, write the office or person's phone number on your calendar so you won't have to look it up if plans change. If you've never been to the office or location before, get directions when you make the appointment and take the office's phone number with you when you go.
- If you'll need a babysitter while you're at an appointment, arrange that at the same time.
- Call before you leave for an appointment at your hairdresser or doctor's office. If he or she is running late, use the extra time to get something done.
- Bring along toys or books for small children.
- Always take your calendar with you to an appointment so you can schedule follow-up visits while you're there. You'll have your pick of the schedules, and you won't forget to write the new appointments down.
- If you're running late for an appointment, be courteous and call to let them know you're on your way and when you'll arrive.

Making Phone Time Count

The phone can be your best friend or worst enemy. You decide that by determining whether to view your phone as a tool under your control or as a taskmaster that must be answered every time it rings. Here are some simple ways to save time and make better use of time on the phone.

- Set your cell phone or pager to vibrate instead of ring. Don't let it interrupt what you're accomplishing at the moment—unless a family member is on the line.
- Set time limits on your phone calls and take them only at certain times of day. Keep a watch or timer handy. If you make a call and are asked to hold but can't, don't be afraid to say so.
- Call service businesses on Thursdays or Fridays, when business is slowest. (Their busiest days are Mondays and Tuesdays.) Call during the slower hours. Companies' busiest periods are from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Schedule repair calls online whenever possible.
- Consider adding a distinctive second ring to your phone line. For a minimal monthly charge, your phone company



SMART MOVE

Use drive time to broach a difficult subject with your child. Sometimes it's less threatening to discuss a sensitive matter when you're both staring out a windshield. Turn down the radio and make comments that build up your child. Ask how you can help him or her move toward a goal or succeed at an undertaking. As you affirm him or her, add a light touch of your hand to your words.

can set up caller ID so you'll know when family members are calling.

- Program the speed-dial features on your home phone and cell phone.
- Cut solicitors short by saying, "Thank you for calling, but I'm not interested."
- Call long-winded friends or family just before lunch or at the end of the day.
- Gently guide nonstop talkers to the point. Remind them that you have only a few minutes to talk, ask them direct questions, or schedule a time when you can talk longer.
- Highlight all numbers you look up in the phone book. They'll be easy to find again.
- Create a family phone book. Keep one at each phone in your house, in your car, and at the office.
- Use a portable phone or headset so you can walk while you talk.
- Store a box of stickers, activity books, and small toys by the phone to distract a small child when you have to make an important call.
- Avoid "phone tag" by making appointments for phone calls. Treat these calls just as you would treat a face-to-face appointment. Put them on your calendar and make notes about what you want to talk about. Think of each as a meeting—because it is. Be prepared with any information you will need before making the call.
- When you need to call someone back at a later date, write the name and phone number on the calendar so you won't have to look them up.
- Use e-mail rather than the phone whenever possible. It's often faster.
- While you're on hold:
 - Clean out your purse.
 - Purge your coupon file of outdated coupons.
 - Organize a drawer.
 - Dust a piece of furniture.
 - Polish or file your nails.
 - Straighten your desk.
 - Clean your glasses.
 - Tidy your sewing box.
 - Organize your wallet.
 - Clean out your jewelry box and untangle necklaces.

Memory Joggers

Every day you deal with countless bits of information. While the Daily Hit List will help you stay on top of details, here are 10 other tips for reminding yourself of something you can't afford to forget.

1. Stick a note on the bathroom mirror, on your exit door, or on the car's steering wheel.
2. When you receive schedules for anything from school to soccer to dance class, write the dates and locations *immediately* on your calendar. Use a highlighter pen to make important events stand out.
3. Have a calendar program such as Outlook or the alarm on your PDA or cell phone alert you when you need to remember to leave for a meeting or start the grill for dinner.
4. When you're away from home or the office and remember something you need to do there, call your voice mail or answering machine and leave yourself a message.
5. Carry a small notebook in your purse and/or car. Take a minute to write down pertinent information as soon as you get it.
6. Create your own memory jogger and turn it into a game with your kids. For example, one autumn I was having trouble remembering to shut the garage door when coming home from doing errands. This meant leaves could blow in, causing more work for the boys when they swept it. We put a jar on the counter, and every time I forgot to close the door, I had to deposit a dollar in the jar. My boys got to split the contents.
7. Keep a spiral calendar notebook near your phone and make notes of phone conversations on the day you have them. It keeps you focused on the call, plus having the information and the date you obtained it sometimes comes in handy later.
8. If you are going to a party, write not only the time of the party but also the address on the calendar. Also list anything you'll need to take, such as a gift or a dessert you offered to bring.
9. Keep notepads and pens in convenient locations, such as by each phone and on your nightstand. But don't let your data keeping become paper clutter. Post information on a bulletin board near your Control Central, then act on it, file it, or toss it ASAP.



SMART MOVE

Have children load their backpacks the night before school days.

10. If you keep your car in a locked garage, put clothes for the dry cleaner and videos to be returned on the driver's seat the night before. You won't be able to miss them when you leave in the morning.

Timer tactics

A kitchen timer can help you regulate your schedule and reduce the need to nag. Here are examples:

- If you want to spend only a designated amount of time on a task, set the timer to remind you when the time is up.
- If there's a video game or toy the kids are constantly arguing over, set the kitchen timer for 11 minutes (or whatever length of time you decide), and when the timer dings, the player automatically knows his turn is up.
- Put a kitchen timer in the bathroom and time showers in the morning so you can keep family members moving in and out of the bathroom and out the door on time.
- When you ask your child to do a chore and he nicely asks if he can do it in five minutes, fine. Set the timer so he'll know when five minutes is up.
- Does one of your children love a challenge? Put a kitchen timer in her room. Break the morning routine into five-minute tasks and let her try to beat the clock.
- Create a 10-minute warning. Set the timer in the mornings to go off 10 minutes before walk-out-the-door time.
- If you've got a lot on your mind, as usual, and you don't want to forget that you promised to take a friend to the airport, set the timer to help you remember when it's time to leave for her house.

Planning Ahead

In order to keep a home and family functioning effectively, a Family Manager has to pay attention to the demands of the day but also look ahead to what's coming up. Good family management, as I mentioned earlier, means learning how to live in two tenses. When I made that statement at a Family Manager seminar, a woman in the audience cried out, "I must be doing a great job, because I'm always too tense!" We all welcomed the comic relief but felt her pain.

But it's true. By developing a habit of looking ahead on your calendar, thinking about where you're going and what you want to see happen, then making plans, you'll be ready for most anything—

and you'll avoid a whole lot of headaches in the process. Here are a few ways you do just that:

- On the first of each month, look at your calendar and decide which events you need babysitters for. Arrange for them now.
- Keep your list of babysitters updated and growing. Ask friends and neighbors for referrals so you have plenty of options if your regular sitter has to cancel. (Keep their contact information in your family phone book, along with the hours they are usually available.)
- Mark your calendar, or have your computer alert you, one month before holidays and birthdays. Begin early to plan celebrations and buy presents and decorations.
- Start planning summer vacations and checking into kids' summer camps in February.
- Schedule a time in the summer to have pictures taken of your kids. Enlarge one to give Grandma and Grandpa for Christmas.
- Plan for fun. Collect information and save some money each month for that trip you want to take for your 10th anniversary, three years from now.
- Keep takeout menus in a file at work so you can place an order before you leave and pick it up on your way home.
- Keep an emergency set of clean clothes, underwear, and socks for your child put away for the inevitable day when you have to go someplace and haven't had a chance to do laundry.
- Keep a change of clothes and accessories at the office in case of unplanned meetings or dinner engagements.
- Stock up on sale items even if you won't need them for a month or two.
- When the winter sales hit, buy your kids' coats (a size bigger) for use next year.
- Keep one-dollar bills and quarters on hand. You never know when you'll need them.

Five Minutes Is Worth Its Weight in Gold

Have you come to dread the sight of your to-do list? As a mother whose kids are now grown, I can tell you that the list never gets shorter. (Instead of picking up the kids at school, I'm now picking them up at the airport.) But I still have to find the time to cull bulging closets, reorganize drawers, and purge the freezer of UFOs (unidentified frozen objects). The large blocks of time to



SMART MOVE

Fifty-one percent of mothers plan family vacations. The Family Manager Vacation Packing Checklist can help. (See page 247.)



FROM THE HEART

The secret to effective time management is using small bits of time well. But the idea is not just to do more. It's to create time to do more that matters.

accomplish these tasks are few and far between, but fortunately I've discovered a hidden treasure.

What is that? Five-minute segments. You'd be surprised how much you can accomplish in 300 little seconds, and how many five-minute segments you can grab here and there. Granted, you won't unload the basement of 10 years' worth of clutter in a few minutes, but you'll make progress every time you work on it—which will make you feel better about yourself—and eventually the project *will* be finished!

In five minutes, you can . . .

- Sort through a junk drawer.
- Clean out a couple of shelves in your medicine cabinet.
- Sort children's clothing one drawer or shelf at a time.
- Purge through a basket of magazines and catalogs; toss old ones.
- Remove clutter from one surface area.
- Wipe fingerprints off a few doorjambes and light switches.
- Check the batteries in your smoke detector.
- Throw in a load of wash.
- Fold a load of laundry.
- Sew on a button.
- Empty waste cans and take out the trash.
- Vacuum a room.
- Sweep the front porch.
- Water plants.
- Check the air pressure in your tires, or check the oil.
- Call to make an appointment.
- Sort mail.
- Pay a few bills.
- Answer an e-mail or two.
- Purge your e-mail in-box or clean up computer files, five minutes at a time.
- Add new contact information to your family phone book.
- Make a Daily Hit List (see page 10).
- Put DVDs or CDs back in their cases.
- Pick up some toys or clutter in your family room.
- Do some crunches, push-ups, and leg lifts.
- Take vitamins and drink a big glass of water.
- Moisturize your face.
- Write a thank-you note.
- Pray for friends or read a chapter from the Bible or another inspirational book.

- Rest! Purposely choosing to devote five minutes for personal relaxation and rejuvenation may be the best use of your time.

Multitasking Made Easy

Some time-management gurus don't believe in multitasking. They talk about being "present in the moment"—giving something our whole attention. Maybe that's a reaction from people who once wore themselves out trying to do two or more things at once—and trying to give both equal mental focus. Real multitasking is different: It involves doing things that *don't* require a person's full attention. And there are plenty of tasks that don't deserve our full attention!

Doubling up on tasks lets us spend more time on fun and other things to which we want to give our full attention. Get started by listing tasks that can be done simultaneously. Post the list in a central location. Every time you "catch" someone multitasking, praise and reward him or her! This is a great habit to teach your children.

Two-timing ideas

- Never walk through the house empty-handed. Pick up as you go. If you're going upstairs, take something with you that belongs up there.
- Encourage teenagers to start a load of laundry before tackling their homework. When they stop for a snack, they can move the clothes from the washer to the dryer.
- Have kids strip beds and take linens to the washer before you change the sheets.
- Request that kids fold clothes, sort socks, brush the dog, or reunite a basket of toys with missing parts while they watch cartoons—definitely an activity that does not require full focus!
- Divide and conquer. On a trip to the mall, give each adult or teen a separate list of errands to accomplish.
- Ask young kids to wash patio furniture and bicycles while older ones wash the dog and the car.
- Teach preschoolers to identify colors while they are cleaning, first by picking up the blue toys, then the red, etc.
- Clean the bathroom mirror and shine fixtures while tending your child's bath.
- Put away groceries while you talk on the phone.
- Wash dishes or unload the dishwasher while waiting for the water to boil.
- Hold on to the kitchen counter and do leg lifts while you're waiting for water to boil.



SMART MOVE

Use long drives to talk to your husband about important matters such as goals and priorities for your family. Ask him about his world—what he enjoys most, what's difficult for him, how you can support him.



SMART MOVE

While you're waiting for your food to be served at a restaurant, have everyone in the family dream aloud about what they'd like to see happening in their lives five years from now.

- Make a grocery list while you cook dinner. Check the pantry as you go.
- Have kids swish hands and feet around the tub during a bubble bath to loosen a bathtub ring.
- Before you run errands, consider what else you might pick up or drop off on the way.
- Cook two, three, or four meals at once. Clean carrots for tonight's pot roast, afternoon snacks, and tomorrow night's salad.
- Make soup and stew at the same time. Double the recipe and you'll have tonight's dinner and another for the freezer.
- Look through mail-order catalogs while you're on the exercise bike or step machine. Plan purchases; glean gift ideas.
- Bathe the dog while you water the garden.
- Buy two or three of each household staple—deodorant, shampoo, soap—so you won't have to make a special trip again soon.
- During TV commercials, have everyone pick up and put away clutter.
- Steam wrinkles from clothes by hanging the garment in the bathroom while you shower.

Prescription for Procrastination

At times we all need a jump start to get us or to keep us going. But if procrastination is a consistent problem for you, try to understand why you put things off. If you fear doing a poor job, remember that doing your best—not achieving perfection—is your true goal. If you think you “thrive under pressure,” consider whether the stress you go through prevents you from doing your best work.

Try one or two of these ideas to help you accomplish a task you've been dreading. Remember, time adds up—24 hours, 1,440 minutes, 86,400 seconds a day—whether we use it or not. A little action now can add up to a big result at the end of the day.

Getting started

- Gear up for a task the night before. If you plan to tackle a project the next morning, set out the supplies or tools you'll need and the clothes you'll wear. Go to bed a little earlier than usual so you'll wake up refreshed and ready to go.
- Make the steps to completing the task tangible. List each one you'll need to accomplish. As you finish each, give yourself the satisfaction of checking it off in red ink!

- Have the right tools available to tackle the project. If you are going to excavate the clutter in the basement, buy plenty of plastic storage bins in various sizes. Save the receipt; you can return the ones you don't use.
- Decide beforehand how you will reward yourself when you complete the job.
- Ask someone you have fun with to help you with the project.
- Speed up your metabolism. Before starting the task, take a brisk, 20-minute walk.
- If all else fails, start a 15-minute rule. Spend 15 minutes every day on something you've been procrastinating about. Before you know it, you'll have the dreaded task licked.

While you're working

- Do the worst part first. The rest will seem easier!
- Put on some peppy music that makes you want to move.
- Listen to a motivational tape.
- Stop and pat yourself on the back when you finish a segment of the task. If you have six drawers to clean out, congratulate yourself each time you conquer one.
- Ask a friend or family member to monitor your progress and encourage you along the way.
- Give yourself the freedom to stop and rest if you need to.
- Visualize how you will benefit from finishing.

Reward yourself!

- Buy a little something to make the task more pleasant. If you dread spending a day in the kitchen cooking and freezing a week's worth of meals, buy yourself a cheery apron or a new pot you've had your eye on.
- Fix yourself a treat to keep you going. On attic clean-out day, put a plate of enticing fruit on a counter or table near the door leading outside to your garbage cans. When you travel to and from the attic, you can grab a bite.
- Post inspirational quotes in your work area. Read them when your motivation starts to wane.



GOOD TO KNOW

In 2006, watching TV was the leisure activity that occupied the most time for both men and women, reports the Bureau of Labor Statistics.



APPENDIX

WEB RESOURCES

These sites were last accessed in May 2008. While all these sites contain helpful information, inclusion does not imply endorsement by the author or publisher of all the content on any of the Web sites.

Appliances

<http://www.appliance411.com>

Appliance411.com offers general home-appliance information for consumers, including money-saving purchasing and servicing tips, information about getting repair parts, and many links to merchants and helpful Web sites.

<http://www.appliance.com>

Appliance.com provides descriptions of household appliances and selected lawn and garden equipment, as well as product reviews and tips on appliance maintenance. It also offers links to dealers, manufacturers, and buyer's guides.

<http://appliancehelp.com>

Appliance Help allows you to order replacement parts for various types of appliances.

<http://www.aceee.org/consumerguide/index.htm>

Consumer Guide to Home Energy Savings provides a checklist to help consumers conserve energy and reduce costs. It also gives tips on choosing energy-efficient appliances and lists the best ones based on product directories and manufacturer's data. It only includes models widely distributed in the United States.

<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/appliances.htm>

ConsumerReports: Appliances provides reviews, information, and buying advice for appliances. Paid subscription required for full access.

<http://www.eere.energy.gov/consumer>

A Consumer's Guide to Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy is a comprehensive U.S. Department of Energy site, including a glossary, fact sheets, and energy-conservation tips for several home systems and appliances.

<http://doityourself.com>

DoItYourself.com has more than 36 topics, covering everything from appliances and energy savings to concrete and woodworking.

<http://www.pcappliancerepair.com>

Point & Click Appliance Repair has a diagnostic chart on washers, dryers, refrigerators, dishwashers, and ranges. The difficulty index takes into account the ability of the average person, any special tools required, the time required to fix the appliance, and the danger associated with the repair. This site also allows you to purchase parts, manuals, and accessories.

<http://www.repairclinic.com>

RepairClinic.com gives troubleshooting and repair advice for most home appliances. It also sells parts and repair tools.

Autos

<http://autos.aol.com>

AOL Autos provides new- and used-car reviews, tips on buying and selling cars, insurance advice, financing information, and Kelley Blue Book values.

<http://www.autodirectory.com>

Autodirectory.com provides links to sites related to automobile pricing and buying, vehicle trends and innovations, insurance information, and warranty tips.

<http://www.automobiles.com>

Automobiles.com gives information pertaining to automobiles, including insurance information; suggestions on buying, leasing, and renting; and the rights of owners.

<http://www.autoobserver.com>

Edmunds AutoObserver provides information on the automotive industry, including analysis of auto-company events and strategies.

<http://www.carspace.com>

Edmunds CarSpace allows consumers to participate in forums about automobile issues, as well as write reviews of car dealers.

<http://www.edmunds.com>

Edmunds.com provides automobile pricing information, car reviews, ratings, and advice about purchasing a car.

<http://www.edmunds.com/insideline>

Edmunds Inside Line is a site for automotive enthusiasts that highlights auto shows, concept cars, and new automotive trends.

<http://www.familycar.com>

The Family Car gives tips on selecting a car, caring for it, and handling repair problems. The site also covers safe driving and styling trends.

<http://www.fueleconomy.gov>

Fueleconomy.gov gives side-by-side comparisons of up to three vehicles at a time and provides information on advanced and alternative-fueled vehicles such as hybrid vehicles. It also supplies information about gas prices and your car's energy impact.

<http://www.nadaguides.com>

NADA Guides is an online database of the National Automobile Dealers Association and provides price information, reviews, and comparisons for new and used cars, trucks, boats, recreational vehicles, and motorcycles.

<http://www.newcarbuyingguide.com>

NewCarBuyingGuide.com is an Internet magazine that provides pricing information, reviews, and guides for buying, leasing, and maintaining new and used vehicles. It also supplies information on auto insurance.

<http://www.vehix.com>

Vehix.com is an online solution for buying, selling, and researching new and used vehicles.

Babies

<http://www.aap.org>

American Academy of Pediatrics has articles, general health topics, professional-education resources, and a parenting corner.

<http://www.americanbaby.com>

American Baby offers information about conception, adoption, pregnancy, and parenthood. Read advice from an ob-gyn, a pediatrician, a midwife, and a nutritionist. It also has a fetal-development timeline, a due-date predictor, a baby-name search, a recipe center, and much more.

<http://www.babycenter.com>

BabyCenter offers info and advice about pregnancy and babies, including adoption, breast-feeding, child care, family finances, postpartum health, and sleep.

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ABOUT KATHY PEEL

Kathy Peel is called America's Family Manager by the media and by millions of women. She is the author of twenty books (over 2 million sold), including *Desperate Households*.

She is founder and CEO of Family Manager. Her company provides training and resources for women and families through a national network of certified Family Manager Coaches trained through the Family Manager University online campus.

Kathy serves as AOL's Family Coach and is a contributing editor to Scholastic.com, *American Profile*, and *HomeLife*. Her articles and ideas have appeared in *Family Circle*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Redbook*, *Woman's Day*, *Reader's Digest*, *Parents*, *Parenting*, *Child*, *Woman's World*, *FamilyFun*, *Cooking with Paula Deen*, *Cooking Light*, and many other magazines.

Each year Kathy is a guest on many TV and radio programs, including repeat appearances on *Oprah*, *The Early Show*, *Good Morning America*, *The Today Show*, CNN, MSNBC, WGN, HGTV, Lifetime, the Fine Living Network, the Discovery Channel, and *Focus on the Family*.

She speaks frequently—nationally and internationally—at conferences, corporate programs, colleges, and churches about life and family management, work-life balance, parenting, entrepreneurship, leadership, and women's issues.

A graduate of Southern Methodist University, she and her husband, Bill, have three grown sons. They live in Dallas.

Her Web site is www.familymanager.com.