



In the News

SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS:

RED-EYE MOMMY S.J. EXEC'S WORK-FAMILY BALANCING ACT IS NO FLIGHT OF FANCY AS SHE JUGGLES HOME LIFE HERE WITH BUSINESS ON THE EAST COAST

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MIKE CASSIDY column

IF she times it right, Vani Kola can read the kids a story, tuck them in and still catch the 9:30, 10 o'clock or 10:30 p.m. flight to New York or Boston or Washington, D.C.

That will get her back East in time for a morning meeting with the analysts, reporters or customers. She'll spend the day pitching her San Jose software company to anyone who will listen and then catch a red-eye back in time for breakfast with the family in Cupertino.

Of course, her schedule isn't always that hectic. Sometimes it's worse.

"I've gotten used to it in some ways," says Kola, CEO of software maker RightWorks and the mother of Tara, 6, and Sandya, 20 months.

It is what people do here -- balance jobs and family. The 12-hour day grind to the product launch. The three hours in traffic just to get back and forth. And the school play or the soccer match or the relatives flying in for the weekend. It's what makes 24/7 not so hip after all. You love your kids and spend time with them when you can, but when work calls, you fly -- about 100,000 miles a year if you're Kola.

She knows she has it better than most. A housekeeper, a nanny. Parents who live with her. A supportive husband.

"We all knew that it was going to be difficult," says husband Srini Kola, 38, who works as a consultant so he can set flexible hours and care for the kids. "And we all promised that we would support her."

Vani Kola's life in a snapshot hangs on the walls of her downtown San Jose office. On one wall an indecipherable software schematic. Across from it, Tara's colorful drawing of a horse on a romp. It's like the small art projects Tara sends along on her mother's business trips.

The equation is never as simple as it seems. For Kola, 35, work is not just work. It is a dream. At mid-decade, she set out to build a company with a stock value of \$1 billion. Her older daughter was 2. Her younger daughter wasn't born.

"I don't think that there is a good time to get married, start a family or start a company," she says. "You just have to do it when you're able to do it."

For Kola, that was 1995 when she left Consilium Inc. An electrical engineer by training, Kola planned to build a Web-based purchasing program for businesses and move her company to a spot where it would take less of her attention, freeing up family time. She figured it would take two years. As often happens with start-ups, she figured wrong.

Now, four years later, she has her product and \$25 million in financing, including \$13 million she landed last month. She is looking to offer stock to the public by mid-2001.

Yes, it all takes time from the family. But she now has customers and investors and 60 employees, many of whom have sacrificed their family time to push the company forward.

"There is a responsibility to my family, but there is also a deep responsibility to these people," Kola says. "I can't just say, 'This is too hard. Let me give it up.' "

And so, it's back on the red-eye.

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