

# tales from a mommypreneur

## Balancing work and life as a start-up CEO



guest columnists  
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You are the mother of a preschooler. Your husband is a busy software executive. You are itching to start your own business.

How can you possibly balance these three seemingly conflicting priorities? By becoming a "mommypreneur," that's how.

In my case, the entrepreneurial idea stemmed directly from the needs of my then 4-year-old daughter Aboli (who is now 8). In our Ellicott City home, I was trying to teach her our native Indian tongue of Marathi. I wanted her not only to have an understanding of her parents' culture, but also to be better able to communicate with family members in India and have the benefit of learning multiple languages.

Some Indian people I know tend to give up on teaching their children Marathi or Hindi. With their kids surrounded by American culture, they think our native tongues aren't needed anymore. They don't see the advantages of world languages in terms of getting into college or going into business in our increasingly globalized economy.

The other day, I read an article about a recent study of bilingual people by Italian researchers, who found that being bilingual seems to make the brain more flexible. But on that morning almost seven years ago, my preschooler and I were having a frustrating time. I would use Marathi references for the different letters of the alphabet – for example, the word "anas" which means pineapple, for the Marathi letter that sounds like "ah" in the beginning of the word. Aboli, struggling to make the connection, would get confused, wondering why I was trying to teach her the "ah" sound with a word that began with the letter "P."

My troubles teaching Marathi to my American-born daughter got me thinking of ways to help all children, and even adults, learn the Indian languages. And that thinking led to the launch of Inditoy Inc., which is now renamed to Quick-n-

EZ Language, the Columbia-based company I started in 2009 to provide materials for those who wish to learn the Indian languages of Hindi or Marathi.

As a mommypreneur, I think it's important to give something back to the community. So I became a Marathi teacher in the pre-school program at the Greater Baltimore Hindu-Jain Temple in Finksburg, MD. I bring my two kids (my second child, daughter Pooja, was born in 2005). Teaching in the community gives me visibility among children and their families, allowing me to make connections with many other people who could become customers.

In addition, I started volunteering two times a month at Aboli's elementary school and started a class in my neighborhood.

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Teaching the Marathi language to children in the community provides valuable feedback for development of my business, while I am using my products as teaching tools. For me, the community class is the perfect beta site.

Being involved at my daughter's school also affords visibility opportunities for my company and products. For example, for a recent International Day, I donated a set of my language learning products as a giveaway item.

Fast forward to a snowy day in February 2011. Six inches of snow have closed Howard County schools. Both of my kids are home. I have a business to run. My "mommypreneurial" skills are about to be put to the test.

Rule number 1 for mommypreneurs: When your kids are at home, you need to be at home focused on them – not clients or deadlines. I might slip in a call or an email every now and then, when my daughters are watching TV or a movie, or playing a game, but generally speaking, I won't take calls or emails.

Fortunately, time zones work in my favor. My website designer and graphic artist are both in India, which is 10 and a half hours ahead of the East Coast. Because of this time differential, the best times for me to talk to them are very early in the morning (before the kids wake up) or late at night (after they go to bed). During the middle part of the day, while the kids are at school, I prepare work for the product designer, such as a language lesson on

consonants or work on the website.

As an Indian-American business owner, I make it a point to attend Indian conferences and cultural programs where I can exhibit my products, such as a Holi program in observance of the spring religious festival celebrated by Hindus. To do this, I have to rely on my husband, founder and CEO of a financial services software development firm, or friends to watch my children.

When all is said and done, mommypreneurship takes a lot of heart. The idea for your business should come from your heart, and while you are doing business, you must keep your children close to your heart. **CEO**

Yogini Dahiwardkar is CEO of Quick-n-EZ Language, a Columbia-based global provider of language learning products that help children ages 3 to 10, teens and adults learn Hindi, Marathi and other world languages quickly and effectively. [www.quick-n-ez.com](http://www.quick-n-ez.com). Contact us at [editorial@smartceo.com](mailto:editorial@smartceo.com).