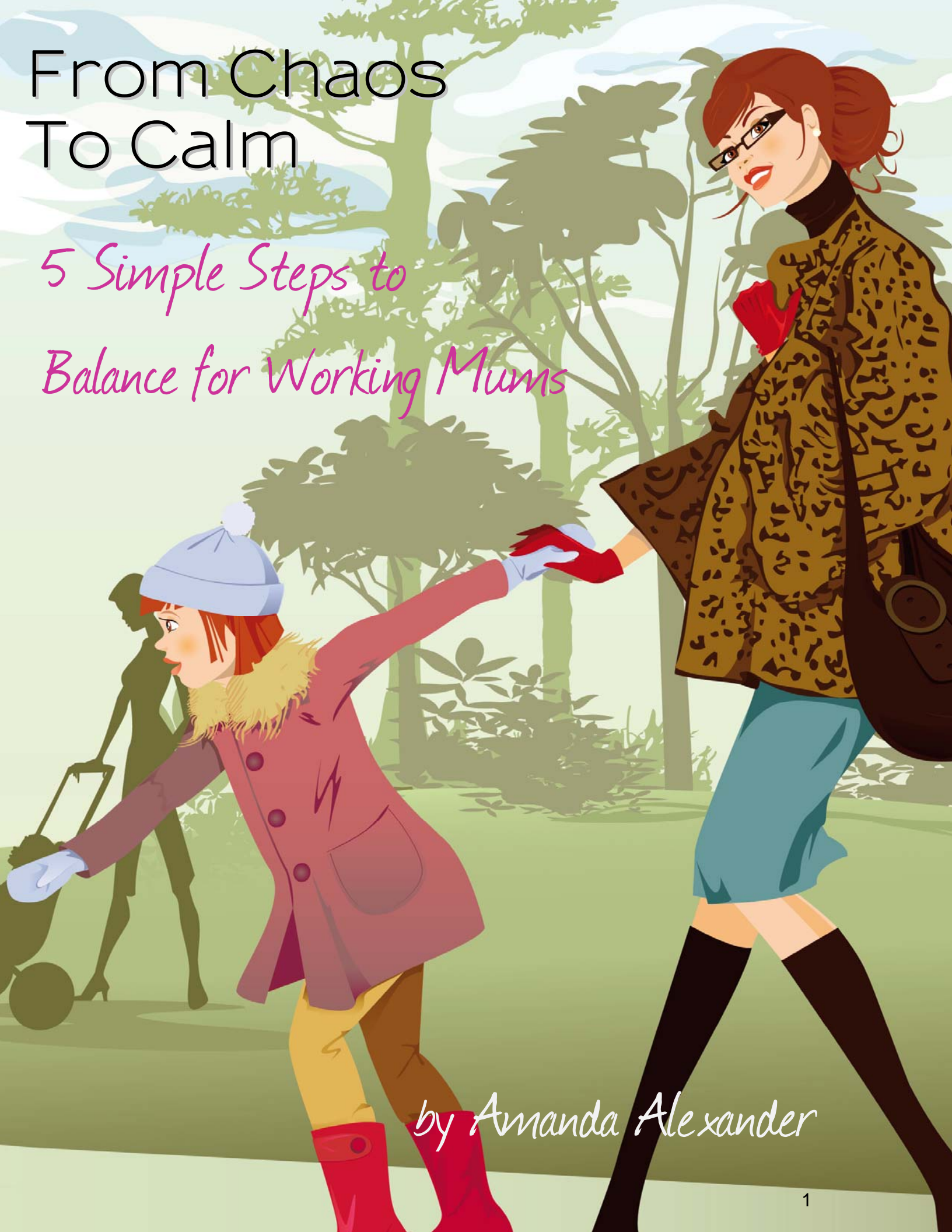


From Chaos To Calm

*5 Simple Steps to
Balance for Working Mums*



by Amanda Alexander



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Introduction

I believe that as working mothers we have challenges that are unique to us. **Working mothers have a tendency of trying to be all things to all people and we frequently stretch ourselves beyond our limits.** Then when we complain that we are out of balance, stressed, worn down, fed up – or simply knackered!

I have written this guide to **help you as a working mum to feel better** without having to take time out to make big changes.

I know that if I give you complicated and time-consuming ideas or techniques, you probably won't get round to trying them! You might have **best intentions but then someone or something will demand your attention and your own needs would get pushed to the bottom of your ever-increasing “in tray”** of things you must achieve or improve upon in your life, and that one day you'll get round to!



I've been supporting working mums since 2003 to achieve success on their own terms, and my experience has taught me that **you need simple**, and **you need instant!** And as a working mum myself, I too crave "simple" and "instant"!

So I've written this guide knowing that, whilst you may have best intentions, you're also time-poor and under enough pressure as it is without me adding to your load. I want to remove the excuse of "no time" as much as I can. Sure, you'll have to take the time to read this guide, but once you've read it, you can coach yourself easily into new and healthy habits that will balance your life.

This guide encapsulates my **five simple steps to balance**: The five things that over the past six years of helping **hundreds of working mums** that I have found to be the **core essentials to achieving balance**.

If you picture balance as a house, then these five steps represent your foundations.



And the great thing is that each one of these steps can be done “as you go”.



You might want to spend a few minutes scribbling things down, but if you don't have time to do that, then **just reading this guide and letting your mind work on the good stuff will still make a difference to your equilibrium.**



Step One – Stop Trying to Achieve “Perfect” Balance

The first step about achieving a balanced life is this:

Give up trying to achieve perfect balance in your life – ‘cos it ain’t ever gonna happen!

Yes, that’s right; the Coach who specialises in Work Life Balance told you that perfect balance is impossible!

What’s that I hear you say? “Surely, you can’t be telling me to just give up on ever achieving balance?”

'Fraid so, sister!

**There is no such thing as being in perfect balance.
It’s a fairy story, la-la land, a Big Myth, right up there
with the Loch Ness Monster and Big Foot.**



Ok, let's try to picture how balance actually "looks".

I like to invite my coaching clients to picture balance as a set of old-fashioned weighing scales. You know the sort – where you have to add weights to the other side until each side of the scale is perfectly horizontal?

Imagine that you are on one side of this old-fashioned set of scales, and you and other people are adding or taking weights away on the other side.

You might momentarily achieve perfect balance, but pretty quickly, something or someone will add another weight that will send the scales tipping dramatically to one side!

Think you've got yourself perfectly balanced?

Hang on a second – Here comes a note from your child's school. It says, "Monday will be book character day. Children can come into school dressed as their favourite character from a book".



WHAM! BAM! – The scales just tipped as this is something else you have to think about and action that you couldn't possibly have foreseen!

In 21st century life, we will *always* be having to shift or adjust to compensate for the unexpected additions to the other side of our balance scales!

Or you can think of balance as a seesaw.

Look at the picture and imagine that you are the guy in the middle, trying to prevent each side from tipping! It's a simple picture and I hope it helps to illustrate my point about having to **constantly shift your weight to achieve balance.**



One of my online coaching programme clients summed up the balance problem thus:

“You feel like you're not achieving enough at work. But then you feel the guilt if you're not doing enough at home and you're not spending time with the children.”



So in other words, you can't ever make it perfect.

And because you, as a working mum, tend to be conscientious and want to do your best in every aspect of your life, you berate yourself for not being superwoman. If you leave work early to pick the kids up from school then you're a bad colleague/boss for abandoning your co-workers. If you stay late at work, then you are neglecting your children. **Bad mummy! You can't win.**

But what I want for you is for you to realise that there is no point in trying to achieve that elusive perfect balance because life just doesn't work that way.

Even if there was such a thing as perfect balance, it could never be defined, as it would be different for each one of us.

One woman's idea of balance might be working four days, having two days to herself and one day with the kids. Another might think that anything more than a two day working week is completely unacceptable.

So, give up trying to achieve perfect equilibrium in your life as you will only set yourself up for failure.



This isn't a defeatist attitude, it's a realist attitude. The sooner you realise that you can't control all aspects of your life and bend them to your will, the easier it will be for you to lighten up on a quixotic quest for **something that doesn't exist.**



Step Two – The Biggest Obstacle to a Balanced Life is You

Read the following comments from some of my coaching clients:

- ❑ ***“I need to be in control of everything”***
- ❑ ***“I’m the only person who can do stuff”***
- ❑ ***“It’s ok for me to hold everything together”***
- ❑ ***“I’m there for everyone, anytime”***
- ❑ ***“I still find it hard to say ‘no’ and end up taking on too much and then resenting it”***
- ❑ ***“Things need to be perfect”***
- ❑ ***“I’ve a tendency to put my personal needs on the back-burner and end up being incredibly resentful”***
- ❑ ***“Taking too much on – needing to be perfect”***
- ❑ ***“Keeping others happy – focusing more on what I feel I ‘should’ be doing to meet expectations of others or needing to prove myself to others over what I would like to be doing”***



The above are all answers to the question “What habits/thought processes do you believe need to be dropped in order to move forward quickly? How are you most irresponsible?” taken from the Kickstart Questionnaires of some of my coaching clients.

I call this “**The Perfectionism Trap**” and it’s a trap that too many working mums fall into.

We construct a set of beliefs in our heads such as the ones above and we never stop to examine or question those beliefs, such as “*I’m the only one who can do it*”, “*I have to be there*” and “*Everything has to be just right*”.

When you recognise that **you fall into the trap of living your life by such beliefs, you are a huge step closer to balancing your life**, because you will recognise that the **biggest barrier to balance isn’t** money, time, work, kids or anything else.

In fact, the biggest barrier to balance is YOU. I’ll say it again as it’s so **important** – The biggest barrier to balance is YOU.

Have you ever thought that by trying to be Superwoman, you make life difficult not only for yourself, but also for your family?



Read the answers above again, but **imagine that they have come from your daughter's or son's lips, rather than your own.** Would you really want to hear your grown up daughter making life this difficult for herself – insisting that everything **has to be perfect** and that she is the only one who can make it so?

But what might happen to your perception of balance if you let go of the need to be perfect, if you “got out of your own way”?

Be kind to yourself and others and **let go of trying to make it all perfect**, as you're doomed to fail every time! Get out of your own way, lighten up, let go and start thinking “good enough” rather than perfect. **This will release time and energy so that you can dance with life rather than battle** with it.



Step Three – Develop an Attitude of Gratitude

This is probably the most simple, yet most effective step to having a balanced life:

Developing an attitude of gratitude is an introduction to a whole new mindset, and one for which I'm so evangelical about I want to surround this chapter with big flashing lights and shout it to the world!

We all notice how the world focuses on the negative.

Just pick up any newspaper or switch on any news programme, and you won't read or hear much good news, but you will hear all about the horrors and worries of the world.

As I write this we are entering into a global recession. There is no shortage of doom and gloom, and for me, this makes step number 3 – **Develop an Attitude of Gratitude** - even more essential to living a balanced life.

A gratitude diary is so simple to do and you can do it in your head or on paper.



All you have to do is to start **noticing the good moments** in your everyday life and giving silent thanks for them. It's not about reeling off pat phrases such as "I'm grateful for my health" and "I'm grateful that my kids are healthy".

Developing an attitude of gratitude is about **retraining your mind to focus on all the many wonderful things that each day brings you, even when, on the surface, you think you're having a bad day!**

I set this exercise as homework to almost all of my clients.

The more they feel overwhelmed by life, the more homework they get! **All you have to do is spend a few minutes** at the beginning or end of each day casting your mind back over your day. Think about all the little things that you are grateful for.



Here are some from my day today to give you an idea:

Today, I was grateful for:

- ❑ **The feeling of warmth and comfort in my bed as I woke up**
 - ❑ **The cleansing feeling down my throat as I sipped my morning hot water with lemon**
 - ❑ **My youngest son pulling funny faces and mimicking my oldest son as we ate breakfast**
 - ❑ **Reading an email from one of my clients to thank me and to tell me about the positive changes she'd made over the past three months (what a great feeling that I helped her).**
 - ❑ **Sitting quietly for a moment in front of the fire and feeling the warmth on me**
 - ❑ **My eldest son running up to me and giving me a good morning cuddle**
 - ❑ **Watching my two boys rolling around on the floor together giggling**
 - ❑ **A hot shower and the feeling of warmth and invigoration I felt when standing under the water.**
 - ❑ **Seeing a robin jump onto the bird table and eat some nuts**
- Opening the window and looking at the frosty, misty morning and breathing in the freshness of a British winter day.**



I could go on, but these “**moments of gratitude**” should be enough to give you an idea that the things I’ve just reflected on are made up of moments from my day.

Now here’s the magic.

The more you do this exercise – either in your head or on paper, the more you will start noticing the little things to be grateful for in your life.

And the more you notice these things, the more balanced your life will, feel, even on the busiest and most challenging days.

And if you make this a lifelong habit, I bet you’ll start attracting even more of the good stuff into your life too!

This exercise has never failed yet and it is the single most powerful yet most simple way I know of **quickly transforming your life for the better.**

Start right now by drawing up a mental list of 10 things you are grateful for today, and you’ll feel happier and calmer instantly.



Step Four – Understand who you are and what balance is to you

My fourth step to getting your life in balance is to understand who you are.

As I said earlier, balance is unique to each individual. So when I say that finding out **who you are is a cornerstone to achieving balance**, I'm not going to launch into a big philosophical lecture.

Notwithstanding this, it is essential to **know what you love**, what you hate, what makes you tick, **what makes you unique**, so that you can use that knowledge to apply to your own vision for a balanced life.

Knowing exactly who you are and what you want is like having a map for your life.

You can use it to check that you are actually heading for the right destination for you. **“Know who you are”** sounds like such an obvious thing to say that you may be thinking, “What a swizz! This isn't going to help me **get my life into balance!**”

But please bear with me and go through the following exercise anyway.



I regularly have clients telling me that they realised that, having actually looked at their life, they are much closer to achieving their ideal vision of life than they originally thought.

Most of us are so busy doing what we need to accomplish, who we are actually 'being' is ignored.

We simply don't have the time.

There are kids to get up, breakfast, school run, a working day to plan, meals to cook, chores to do, calls to return, bills to pay. Life is one long round of doing, doing, doing.

It's a rare thing, indeed, for someone to say, "Hey, I'm going to take half an hour out of my day to think about who I am and what makes me tick!"

But that's what you are going to do now.

By doing this exercise, you will reassure yourself that you're on the right track, or you'll realise that you need to pay attention to your own needs and goals.

This exercise will remind you of who you are and how you can use your own uniqueness to help you balance your life, setting



the sort of goals that feel right for you, rather than those which someone else thinks are right for you.

You'll need a good 10 minutes, 20 minutes if you can, to just sit down and have a look at the following.

So, my request for you is for you to spend 10 minutes quietly with these questions in front of you to help you start discovering who you are behind the mother label!

Choose just five words to describe your personality. Which five words would you use?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



How do you want your kids to describe you when they are adults?

What is absolutely effortless for you? What comes easily and naturally, something you think that, “Hey, this is easy. Why doesn’t everybody find this easy?”

What nice things do others say about you? When people are complimenting you, what is it you hear time and again? What’s the pattern that you notice?



And what's the flipside? What about your personality are those closest to you likely to complain about? Where are you difficult, stubborn, or where do you get stuck?

What do you enjoy doing so much that it fills you with energy? What energizes you?

What qualities are missing that you'd like to grow in the next year?



Once you've spent 10 minutes or so just pondering on those questions, complete the following statements:

"I am fabulous at _____," *and whatever it is that you have noticed that you really are great at*

And:

"I am becoming _____." *So, when you've looked at question seven, what qualities are missing that you'd like to grow in the next year, think about how you'd like to grow those qualities, what you can do to **discover who you are so that you can define what your unique brand of balance is.***



Step Five – Choose How You Respond to Each Day

Sometimes life is average, sometimes it's great and sometimes it can be just plain crap! But no matter what challenges life throws at us – and it is inevitable that it will - **we can choose how we respond.**

To illustrate this, sit back, kick off your heels, and read the story about Little Miss Sunshine, adapted from the original by Roger Hargreaves.

Little Miss Sunshine (or LMS as she'll be known from hereon) is "as her name suggests a very happy person".

This story is about how Mr. Grumpy ("the grumpiest person in the world; everything annoys him") tries to put LMS "just for once" into a bad mood.

Mr. Grumpy thinks of a plan, and races home to make a very long list of all the things that are guaranteed to upset him so that he can find something from his list that will surely put LMS into a bad mood. First of all, Mr. Grumpy lets the sheep out of the field to delay LMS's bus (Mr. G hates waiting for buses).



He fails - LMS had decided to walk into town that day, as it was such a nice day!

Mr. Grumpy hates getting caught in the rain, so he climbs up a tree with a ladder and sits in wait for LMS with a watering can.

But, foiled again - LMS sees the ladder, thinks "What a silly place to leave a ladder" and takes it away.

Mr. Grumpy ends up in the tree all night then falls out before sunrise!

Finally, Mr. Grumpy decides to spread a rumour about LMS. He tells a big fat lie:

He tells Mr. Nosey that LMS calls Miss Bossy "knobbly knees" behind her back.

This backfires on him in spectacular fashion.

As with all rumours, the meaning is scrambled, and Miss Bossy hears that Mr. Grumpy, rather than LMS, calls her knobbly knees.

Miss Bossy promptly marches round to Mr. Grumpy's house and punches him on the nose!

And of course, when seeing Mr. Grumpy with his sore nose, Little Miss Happy invites him round to breakfast to cheer him up (and she serves eggs - sunny side up of course!)



I originally retold this story for one of my newsletters after I'd read it one night to Max.

It struck me as an ideal way to show how we can all choose how we respond to life.

Mr. Grumpy is simply determined to be offended and annoyed by anything.

LMS chooses how she responds to everything - and she chooses sunny!

Today, I remembered this story when I went into two local banks on an errand.

I had to get a certified copy of an official document for my pension provider. My pension provider had reliably informed me that any bank would certify a copy of the document free of charge.

The first bank I went into was HSBC. I was greeted by the teller, a woman who looked as if her face might crack if she had one sunny thought.

In fact, I wondered if there was something about MY face that had annoyed her before she'd spoken to me!

I smiled and asked about certifying the document.



Without so much as a word to me, she scowled and showed the document to the bank manager who was standing next to her also scowling. He too looked at me as if I'd just poisoned his first-born and asked me for my bank card or cheque book.

When I answered that I didn't bank with them, he practically spat a reply out to say that I would need to go to my own bank to get a certified copy done.

Now, believe me, there are times when I'm ready for a fight, but I'd decided that morning that I was going to choose to be sunny and calm.

So I smiled, thanked them for their help and left.

I momentarily felt a little hurt by how rude they had been, but I decided to try the bank next door anyhow, as I was sure that the information I'd been given – that any bank would certify a copy of an official document – was correct.

So in I walked to another bank where I was **met with a smile** and the document was duly certified and handed back to me without so much as a pause.



Success – with a smile!

Apart from an illustration of customer service, this small episode in my day taught me that by not “rising” to the treatment I received at the first bank, but by remaining irritatingly positive like Little Miss Sunshine, I **got the result I wanted AND had a better day because of it!**

The snarling duo from the first bank were a pair of Mr. Grumpies. Perhaps they were having a bad day, or perhaps they felt offended, but whatever their motivations, *I chose not to get annoyed or offended*, and my **day has flowed more easily because of how I chose to respond.**

So this is the fifth step to balance:

No matter what happens to you each day, you can choose how you respond.

One piece of fieldwork that I often ask my clients to experiment with is to **consciously decide how they want to face each day** and to record their intended state of being for the day in their **journal each morning.**



For example:

“Today I will be.... “

- Calm
- Relaxed
- Joyful
- Open to adventure
- Ready to laugh
- Unflappable
- In awe of the wonder of life
- Kind to everyone I meet

You can choose whichever state of being will help you on that day.

Say for example that you have a very busy, important day ahead of you.

If this is the case, then **what state of being will best help you** to ease through this busy and important day?

Perhaps you might choose to be tranquil on this day.

Or perhaps you have a day ahead of you that is filled with small but



time consuming chores and tasks. **What state of being will help you** to accomplish these chores and tasks?

Might it help you to be super-organised just for this day?

Or maybe what you need is to tackle the day ahead with lightness and fun?

You will be amazed at what a difference it can make if you simply **set your intention for how you will choose to be for each day.**

When life throws a curve ball, your inner voice is likely to kick in and remind you of your intention for the day. It might not completely protect you from stress and strain, but it will certainly act as a buffer to soften the blow.

This fifth step of balance is one which will most definitely have an instantaneous effect on how you perceive your life on a day to day basis.

Whether you get caught up in a traffic jam today, or you receive a curt email from a colleague; if your toddler thinks that potty training is about avoiding the potty at all costs or your teenager scowls at you for simply speaking to them:



Choose to respond as if you were Little Miss Sunshine and see what a difference it makes to your hectic day!

More Support for Working Mums

Thank you for reading!

I hope that you will take at least one thing away from “**From Chaos To Calm**” that will help you improve your balance quickly and painlessly.

My name is **Amanda Alexander** and I’m the founder and director of Coaching Mums, and the author of “From Chaos To Calm”.

If you have benefited from reading this, then you will almost certainly benefit from coaching with [Coaching Mums](http://www.coachingmums.com). If you’re interested, read the short blurb below first. If, after having read more about how we **work with mums**, you want to know more, we’d be delighted to hear from you.



You can send me an email at amanda@coachingmums.com or call me on **Telephone: +44 (0)1829 752656**

Mums all over the world work with us at a level that meets their needs, within a coaching package that suits their budget.



What is coaching?

Imagine a relationship with someone who is as committed to your dreams as you are, who stays focused on your big picture even when you can't, who always tells you the truth about your strengths and weaknesses from an unbiased perspective. Someone who celebrates your victories and helps you learn from your setbacks. That someone is me! My job as your coach is to be the person with whom you can make better decisions, reach higher and achieve more in less time but without the guilt and stress. My job as your coach is to ensure that you to *live your life intentionally, not accidentally.*

What is Coaching Mums?

I formed Coaching Mums out of a desire to create a “special” place for mums who don't want to just “make do” with life. Coaching Mums' mission is to effect an attitude change in mothers – to help you to have the confidence, the courage and the support to “almost have it all”. I see motherhood as a role that, whilst it brings great challenges, can be a driving force that enables us as women to achieve great things for ourselves, our families and the world in which we live. There is not much that I will “step over”, and I will insist that you do your best for yourself.



Nowadays, many women become disillusioned with their careers or their lives after becoming mothers, sometimes soon after giving birth, or sometimes not until their children are older. When you become a mum, your priorities tend to change, your flexibility and independence is curtailed,

You will probably find that you can't "have it all" and sometimes you wonder who on earth you are behind that all-consuming "mother" label. You may lose your confidence, your independence, and your sense of self or all three. At Coaching Mums, we aim to sort you out and help you soar! Oh, and we believe that **it's possible to have it almost all!**



Amanda's Story

My original profession was as a Project Manager in the IT Industry, where I enjoyed a successful international career until I announced my pregnancy.

This led to a combination of threatened redundancy, uncertainty as to how I would manage a full-time demanding career with motherhood, and a feeling as if I was at a crossroads in my life.

I hired a coach and the rest, as they say, is history!

Coaching was such a powerful catalyst for me that I took steps to change my own life immediately.

I enjoyed the coaching process so much that I retrained as a coach myself.

Since 2003, I have coached leaders, executives, entrepreneurs and working mums, but **working with working mums has always been my number one passion** as a coach, my “raison d’être” and the area where I know that I have most to offer.



I am committed to always improving my skills as a coach and to coaching as a profession, which is why I always work with a mentor coach and follow a stringent accredited career path with [ICF](#) (International Coach Federation).

I “show up” to my Coaching Mums clients as a mum myself, warts ‘n all! I have the scars, I have the vomit-stained T-shirt!

**I have the stories and I walk my talk in my own quest for a
life of balance, joy and fulfillment!**

*What Does Your Life of Balance,
Joy and Fulfillment Look and Feel Like for You?*

Check Out More Great Self-Coaching Tips at the
[Coaching Mums Blog](#)