

Dana White: Being a Mom and Being an ED

Position: Executive Director, WiredWoods

Start Date: February, 2001

Education: BSE, Princeton University; MBA, Harvard Business School

Previous For-Profit Experience: Technology marketing at Microsoft and Avid Technology; investment banking at Broadview Holdings and Morgan Stanley

Previous Nonprofit Experience: Marketing at Boston University; PTO leadership at children's school

Organization Information: Partners with other non-profits to teach its technology curriculum to kids; goal is to spark a life-long interest in technology among underserved youth to empower them to succeed in today's digital age; founded in 2000; virtual organization; five year-round employees (including full-time/part-time/contractors) and 13+ summer staff; \$300,000 budget

It is a topic important to many people—the decision to reenter the workforce after having a child. How do you decide whether to return? What will be the right position? We spoke with Dana White, a Harvard MBA, the current executive director (ED) of WiredWoods, and a former banker and high-tech executive, about her path to part-time ED and full-time mother.

After White had two children and tried working part-time for her former for-profit employer she decided it “wasn't worth it” and retired. However, she missed the fulfillment and challenge of work, and began to contemplate other options. Teaching caught her interest, but after pursuing this idea and taking a position as an assistant professor, she decided that this was not the path for her, and it simply wasn't worth the time she missed with her children.

“What I found was, for me, everything is about opportunity cost. You have a great pull to be at home, so what you sign up to do outside the home really has to be valuable enough to leave your kids at home.”

White retired again, had two children (twins), but remained open to the possibility of reentering the workforce, if the opportunity was right. This “right” opportunity came along in the form of a phone call from a previous boss at an investment bank where White had worked. Paul F. Deninger, her former employer, was looking for a program director at WiredWoods, an organization he had recently founded. WiredWoods is an organization with a mission to spark a life-long interest in technology among at-risk children, through offering programming to these youth through summer camps. It was about to launch its first summer of services, and Deninger firmly believed that, given White’s technology background and skill set, she was the right person for the position.

White and Deninger arrived at the agreement that White would work 20 hours a week through the summer and see what happened. Three years later, White became ED of Wired Woods, finding a position that to her is worth the opportunity cost of less time with her children. However, she was quick to comment: “It takes a while to figure out what the right solution is (to being a working mom) to find the right balance and to know what is right for you. Fortunately, a good education and good experience can give you the confidence to be patient.”

At WiredWoods, White has been instrumental in the successful launch and growth of the program, while continuing to juggle the demands of motherhood, work, and her community.

“I am getting to be a leader with a small ‘L’ [i.e. not a Fortune 500 Leader] and I have come to realize that there are a lot of ways to have impact.”

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