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Mom has virtually everything

[By Susan Stiger](#)*Of the Journal*

You will not need a wand to understand this column. It will only feel that way.

Meredith Eisenberg works at her Albuquerque home for full-time wages she amasses from a half-time career. She wraps her work life around her personal life — a husband and 5-year-old daughter, she makes \$50 an hour, she likes what she's doing. It may not be magic, but it certainly seems unfair.

Except that you, too, can have work like hers. Eisenberg is one of five women included in an article in this month's Good Housekeeping magazine on moms earning full-time incomes working part time from home.

"For most women, going part-time means accepting the obvious trade-offs. They often make less money, lose benefits, and risk putting their career off track. But there are women who avoid the pitfalls and manage to have it all," the article says.

Eisenberg is a virtual assistant — meaning she works online for entrepreneurs or small businesses that want administrative help with certain facets of business, say public relations, bookkeeping, writing, blogging and/or Web site development, but don't want to hire a body. A body needs a set number of hours and office space. A body needs to live nearby. A virtual employee can live anywhere, work as many, or as few, hours as she pleases and buy her own Kleenex and sticky notes.

"I have clients in every time zone except Central," says Eisenberg, president and CEO of Yellow Highlighter Virtual Assistance. "Most are in New York and the East Coast, Seattle, San Francisco. I don't have any in Albuquerque."

She doesn't have any in New Mexico.

Eisenberg had worked in public relations and public information in the Washington, D.C./Virginia area. When she and her husband, Jame, moved here, she poked around the job market for a part-time option that would give her time to spend with daughter Suzanne. As she was surfing, Assistyou, a Web site about virtual assistants, popped up like a fairy godmother to change her life.

Eisenberg took the classes, figured out what she had to offer and used Assistyou's referral service. She draws more clients from her own Web site and gets clients from clients.

Among them: a psychologist, a divorce coach, a marketer, a weight loss coach, a writing coach, an art therapist, the host of a feng shui television show.

"I become a partner, provide a sounding board, talk strategy, customize and put up a blog, set up a Web site, help sell a book, write a press release, become a technical assistant," she said.

For the psychologist, Eisenberg set up an appointment booking system, posts blogs and markets her e-books and seminars on the Internet. For the weight loss coach, she set up separate Web sites for her two markets — those who had had weight loss surgery and those who had not.

Is all that Web site-building and blogging stuff giving you second thoughts about this as a career? Eisenberg saw that coming. She teaches an online class called Internet Monster Tamers School (the woman is good with names). She has two versions, one for people who just discovered that parallel reality we call "virtual" and one for those who know how to log on.

"It grew out of a frustration I have," she said. "I network with Internet marketing people who complain that they can't find a virtual assistant with the right collection of skills. And I listen to virtual assistants who say, 'I don't have any clients. What am I doing wrong?' "

Internet Monster Tamers School teaches the basics, an overview of skills to put up a Web site and blog, for example.

"You're not going to be an expert in one session, but you get your training wheels," she said. "And I have resources available in class to dive in further."

It all happens online, by Webinar, an online seminar. Students do exercises in class on their home computers. She takes four to six students at a time, records the classes for those who need to miss one or want back-up. It's 12 weeks for \$495.

Virtual assistants' hourly wages vary, from maybe \$35 for the newly minted up to \$85, the highest she's heard of.

A work day in the life of Meredith Eisenberg looks like this: Up at 6 a.m., work till 8 a.m. with East Coast clients two hours ahead, while Suzanne is still sleeping. Get her ready for preschool, drop her off and maybe hit a spin class. Work from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., pick up Suzanne, hang out, have dinner with the family, and if anything else needs to be done, finish it when Suzanne is in bed.

Most days, she works four to five hours, but it isn't all billable, she said.

Good virtual assistants are prioritizers.

"You have multiple bosses. A regular employee can go to the boss to get the work prioritized. You have to do that for yourself. If all 10 of your clients need something today ... "

Because you're communicating by e-mail, sometimes by phone, you have to be a good listener and read between the lines to find out what people want, she said.

"You can't pick up cues through body language."

For more information, go to: www.assistyou.com and <http://tametheinternetmonster.com/va>. Or e-mail Eisenberg at meredithe@gmail.com.

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