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working employees with a gym and a roof-top patio for summer lunches in her swanky corporate digs.

Not too shabby for a woman trained as a graphic artist who had to sell her wares at the local flea market to support her two young children. Ruby has always taken her responsibilities as a single mother very seriously. She describes herself as more of a "planner" than a "risk-taker".



"I think you have to be more careful when you have children and you're alone," she explained. "I was always careful never to risk my family's home. That is what I tell others who ask my advice about trying to build a business. Never risk your home or your family's security. I think that is one of the big differences between men and women in business," Ruby mused, "the men will more often take more risks if they don't have families to worry about — women often have to think about their children too."

While Ruby's passion for her business and for travel is evident, it is eclipsed by her pride and pleasure she takes in her children, and the responsibility she felt when they were young. "I believe that children learn values from a very young age. What they learn takes them through life and in truth, they are best taught by example."

Ruby is quick to say you don't have to be a stay-at-home mom to be a good mom, but she does believe you have to give up something. "I gave up my personal life for my kids and my business." Even though she has no regrets — she sometimes wonders "what if?"

Ruby's unique combination of drive and caution may well be the result of what she describes as a "very tough childhood." Yet in spite of early deprivations and challenges — Ruby lauds her parents as two of her strongest influences — "I picked their qualities I admired and (for) those I didn't I made choices for myself."

As with many gifted and driven people who flourish in spite of less than idyllic circumstances, Ruby remembers finding inspiration from many sources in her early life — especially books and teachers.

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She was a fanciful child whose fascination with the world began at an early age. "I played with my globe a lot. I thought I could affect the weather — that's a bit weird as I think of it now," she reflects.

Today her "global interest" takes on a different form. She likes to retrace the path of early explorers — her travels giving new meaning to her lifelong fascination with history. "It thrills me to follow the footsteps of explorers and imagine that I am looking at the exact view they saw so many lifetimes ago," says Ruby.

The greatest challenge when interviewing Ruby is not to digress to one of the many topics on which she is an expert. Chatting with Ruby is like ringing up an old friend who just happens to be a combination of Auntie Mame and a charter member of the Explorer's Club. What doesn't this woman know — or have time to do? Ruby takes it all in stride — from community activities, squeezing in an extra workout with colleagues, or to planning luxury excursions to the Arctic.

While Ruby is a self-made success at the top of the luxury travel industry, she is also a family person, friend, and community member. It's clear all of these identities are vitally important to her.

When asked what is most important to her, she answers: "The health, values, and success of my family, staff, and friends (which includes my clients").

Ruby makes no bones that over the years, due to her personality, her personal life and business life have overlapped. "I make the most of every moment with my children. I am flexible both personally and professionally... Our staff can easily run out to have lunch with their kids, meet with a teacher, go to an appointment, or take their kids to an after-school program."

When I asked Ruby the secret to her success she said "passion." Both travel and customer services are essential to her business. She likes to make people happy.

She also emphasized her ability to plan, research, and calculate — and control risks. But most of all she talked about the value of her staff and teamwork. That would explain her investment in corporate amenities such as a staff gym and dining patio — as well as her endorsement of flex-time and even work-at-home options.

What struck me is that Ruby never once mentioned herself as a workplace innovator. But clearly, finding a way to balance her own home life while pursuing a challenging career allows her to offer these same

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When asked how she wants to be remembered, Ruby answers: "If anyone even thinks of me much when I'm gone — I hope it's with just a smile and a warm touch to their hearts."

It's a very modest and gentle wish for self-made millionaire with a fiery moniker — but perhaps not so strange for this Ruby, who is also a mother and a maven.

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