



Small Business Builder: Downshifting Dad

Architect Decides He's the One to Spend More Time With the Kids

By Mary Campbell

Oct. 31

Is now a good time to "downshift"?

The Small Business Builder put that question to a vote alongside an Oct. 10 column about John Drake and his 2000 book, *Downshifting: How to Work Less and Enjoy Life More*. "Yes," answered most voters, evidently in favor of moving "from the fast track to a more satisfying, healthier, less work-focused lifestyle," if they haven't done so already.

Tom Prinz was light years ahead of the trend. He became a "downshifter" in 1988, when he left his employer and set up an office at home.

An architect in Omaha, Neb., Prinz was at the office up to 60 hours a week. He and his wife, Kate, a physician, had their hands full with demanding careers and a growing family. Someone, the couple decided, needed to be at home with the children.

A Better Life

It made more sense for the architect rather than the doctor to be the work-at-home parent. Both wanted more time for the family, but Prinz's profession "seemed to have greater flexibility," says Prinz, who keeps tabs on a teenager, a fifth-grader and a first-grader — all boys. He usually walks to the nearby elementary school to meet his two younger sons when they're dismissed for the day, and he participates in school, Scouting and other activities.

Prinz graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He earned his Master of Architecture degree from the Southern California Institute of Architecture before joining an Omaha firm as a commercial architect. Now that he's self-employed, he works mostly on residential projects.

The arrangement gives him control over the amount of work he accepts. Free to put his family first, Prinz says that suits him better for now than being "at the mercy of the employer."

□ Balance Is Better □

Downshifting has worked well for Prinz and his family. Family life is much less stressful than it would otherwise be, he says, adding, "I feel that the kids have a better life."

Prinz has scrupulously kept pace with his field and says he has "long-term ambitions" as an architect. But those, he adds, can wait. "Society seems to be geared toward instant gratification."

While some career-minded parents try to have it all — and all at once — Prinz believes that "to be successful, one needs patience."

"I keep developing my skills," he says. "When the children are raised, I can commit full time to my profession."

In fact, Prinz feels he does have it all; by choosing to "downshift" 13 years ago, he's a success in every way that counts.

"I don't believe that bigger is better," he emphasizes. "Balance is better. Everybody has to balance things in their lives, and it's a constant challenge to find where the right balance lies."

An editor since the age of 6, when she returned a love letter with corrections marked in red, Mary Campbell founded Zero Gravity in 1984 to provide writing, editing, marketing and other services to small businesses. Her presentations and workshops address small-business topics from Web sites to business writing. An editor of and contributor to dozens of publications (books, journals and newsletters), she is co-author □ with her sister, Pipi Campbell Peterson □ of the second edition of Ready, Set, Organize! A Workbook for the Organizationally Challenged (JIST Publishing, 2001). Please e-mail her your comments, questions and suggestions at whywalk@about.com. Small Business Builder is published on Wednesdays.

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