

# SHE Magazine (November 2010 Issue)

## Project Super-Dad

WHEN STEVE BARLEY SWAPPED HIS CITY CAREER FOR LIFE AS A HOUSEHUSBAND, HE DECIDED TO TACKLE THE ROLE HEAD-ON

When my children pleaded with me to “Stay home, Daddy!” I assumed their words were an instruction not a job title. Househusband, house dad, stay-at-home dad, call it what you wish, back in 2006 that’s what I became - a far cry from my former role as a project manager working for a major investment bank. And before anyone starts measuring my neck for a noose, no, I wasn’t a City ‘fat cat’ or a futures trader earning £1m bonuses; I worked behind the scenes in IT. So what made me swap trading floors for household chores, and bull markets for supermarkets? A severe case of work-life imbalance.

There’s a reason why so many people in the City have framed photos of their family on their desks - it’s the only way they get to see them. I left for work every day before my children, Bethany, 11, and Christian, eight, woke and returned after they’d gone to sleep. School assemblies and concerts played second fiddle to project deadlines, and I later came to realise this was a period when my children came to believe in ‘toy fairies’. After all, who else would leave all those Kinder eggs and soft toys on their pillows?

Things came to a head after a disastrous Sunday lunch at the pub, where I spent three hours sitting outside, glued to my BlackBerry because of an IT glitch at work. “Well that was a success,” remarked my wife Gillian on the way home. I argued it was my responsibility to solve problems at work. “And whose responsibility is it to solve problems at home?” she replied. In the end, I decided to resign from work and take a ‘gap year’ to spend more time with the kids, and support Gillian, who had started her teacher training.

Adjusting to life at home wasn’t easy. True, there was no commuting, no suits, and above all, no BlackBerry. But, equally, there’s a limit to how many episodes of *Homes Under The Hammer* you can watch without applying said hammer to the TV set. So, with the same energy I used to apply to running my department at work, I dedicated myself to Project Super-Dad.

Soon, I was doing all the chores and ferrying my children to and from school and their many clubs, all with the help of the organiser function on my phone. I quickly got the hang of all the various household gadgets, but at times I found myself wishing the children came similarly equipped with an instruction manual. Dealing with my own kids was hard enough, but they would insist on having friends round to tea. What I really needed was an ‘app’ to match children’s names to faces.



**SHE LOVES MEN**  
STEVE BARLEY

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I learned that managing kids wasn’t that different to managing projects. They both require clear goals and boundaries, need regular status checks, and have a tendency to overrun if you let them. When I organised Bethany’s birthday party, I ran it with military precision. It was a great success, even though the mother picking up the girl who had had a nosebleed wasn’t

impressed at the state of her daughter’s party frock. Nor with my advice to use a cold wash setting.

My managerial skills came in handy when I served on the committee for Christian’s scouts. It felt good to flex my business muscles as we debated vital issues, such as the merits of using plastic woggles.

The end of my gap year came round all too soon and we realised it had been the first time we’d felt like a ‘complete family’. The best times were no longer weekend visits to theme parks, but walking Bethany home from drama club, as she told me how excited yet fearful she was at the prospect of secondary school.

That’s why Project Super-Dad continued for four years. Now both children are at secondary school, I’ve gone back to work. But I haven’t forgotten the lessons I learned. In fact, I’ve swapped them for lessons of a different kind: teaching ICT and Business Studies. The salary is less than I earned before, but the hours allow me to be a true father to my children, and a loving husband to my wife. What could be more valuable?

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT STAY-AT-HOME DADS? Let us know by emailing [editor@shemagazine.co.uk](mailto:editor@shemagazine.co.uk)

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# SHE

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