



Leila Baker:

THE NEED TO SUCCEED

Leila Baker is maternal, passionate and empathetic, each of her career paths has taken her to different corners of the care industry. But what does it take to be a Babies in Waiting practitioner, especially when your own five children take up most your time?

It can be any time from ten in the morning to eleven at night, but Leila Baker will be there when you're in labour. Her caring nature and maternal instincts clear to anyone who speaks to her. She's passionate about breastfeeding and educating women on the importance of the mother/baby bond and wants to see labour being more about the wonder of life than the mayhem.

At the heart of Leila's skillset lies a desire to provide a support network for those who need it most; "I provide birth and post-natal Doula services, pregnancy and postnatal massage and breastfeeding peer support. I teach baby massage and have recently entered antenatal preparation training. I also offer a convalescence or end of life service, delivering palliative care to those who need it most." And why has she ventured into end of life as well as beginning of life? "Because not everybody has somebody to look after them," she says.

This all began when Leila was in a doctor's surgery waiting room. She saw a poster for volunteers who could support other mothers as they discovered the benefit of breastfeeding for themselves. The NHS' breastfeeding programme was on a supportive drive, which appealed to Leila on an emotional level. She herself had received much-needed support when she had her first child. In 2014, when she had reached a career and life turning point, a friend advised her of an actual profession for supporting parents through pregnancy, and the birth process. They were also on-hand to give support and care in parents' early days with their new-born babies.



Shortly after this conversation, Leila trained to become a self-employed Doula. Four years later, she is the Head of Membership and a Director for Doula UK, the leading membership organisation for Doulas. In March she was nominated for the Doula of the Year award. Leila's inspirational outlook on life, is uplifting and encouraging for a woman who is so often in demand from her own children (five to be exact!). There surely cannot be enough hours in the day?! "I try to figure out what can and can't be delegated, which is difficult. I have so many things on my mind, all at once, so many balls to juggle! As a woman, we have to think about health insurance, the car, the shopping and school trips - this is all going around in our heads at once, but we find a way to cope with it."

Leila believes this is the case for many women, regardless of how many jobs they work or how many children they have. There's a constant stream of female thinking and organisation integral to the family unit. "I don't know if it's natural or society has imposed it on us, but there isn't fair distribution for the sexes when it comes to balancing business and family. Sometimes I work up to 45 hours a week outside of the home, and still have to think about the supposedly mundane elements of daily life which are, so often, highly important. But I guess we just have to learn to live with it otherwise everything will fall apart!"

Balancing Babies in Waiting

Leila has recently become a Babies in Waiting Antenatal Preparation Practitioner, combining her skills to add yet another string to her bow, teaching Hypnobirthing to expectant parents. But this is not something Leila is taking lightly. "I want to take it seriously and I want to really be successful with it. I've invested money and time in it, and I want to give this amazing new business the effort it needs. I'm trying to be good at getting things done on time and I want to really make an impact."

There is a sense of community within the Babies in Waiting network, which gives newcomers the support and guidance they need. "We have a WhatsApp group for new people in the network and if you ever need someone to talk to, there are people there. It also gives us the opportunity to ask the franchisor any questions we might have, and they are so quick to give us reassurance and encouragement."



Leila is not unrealistic about the hard work which goes into making a franchise a success, "You need to be resilient. It won't always go smoothly, and you could just give up. In today's world, social media makes everything look so successful and wonderful, and things are not always like that" Leila says. "I think you could be tricked into thinking the path to success is easy, especially for a woman. I don't mean we're weaker. Just, we might be more insecure because there are more impressions out there of strong men and to be a strong woman you must be pushy and intimidating. But you don't! Take the knock-backs and get back up." Leila is constantly prioritising her time, scheduling when each job opportunity comes up, when her children need care and when each family member is free to take responsibilities on board. For a family Leila's size, it's important to keep on top of everything.

Leila pursues her careers in the same way she brings up her children, with compassion and drive. "It's a very rewarding business. I'm watching people become parents, the couple become a family. It's so magical. There's very little more amazing than a child being conceived and born, and I get to watch them being born on a regular basis. It makes me so happy. I can give the couple or the families the support they need and I see it pay off. That's why I enjoy what I do. My job is to love people. What could be better?!"



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A drive for success

Leila's need to succeed has, inevitably, been passed down to her children, "My 19-year-old, has Asperger's Syndrome – a condition which is part of the ASD spectrum, and he has started work at his first job just after finishing his first year of university. I was really nervous about how it would go, because he works well with routine, and this is going to be a rotating shift pattern. I was very worried about him getting up on time, and how I would cope with not having to feel responsible for him. He's kind of, a man now, isn't he? But this morning he had to be at work by 6 o'clock. When I got up at quarter past 6, he wasn't there. I don't need to worry, he just does what he needs to do" Hopefully this level of dedication has also been picked up by the younger members of the family. "He's setting a great example for the other children, as well."

She describes herself as "dedicated, determined and driven" and Leila's new venture with Babies in Waiting is the icing on the cake for this super-mum. Another business, more people to educate and care for and another avenue for Leila to pursue. We can't wait to see what the future holds for her.

