

# JUGGLING WORK AND FAMILY

What is it that helps a working woman strike the right balance between work and home? **Kavita Krishnamurthy** speaks to a few woman professionals at the peak of their careers and shares their self-experimented tips on how best to juggle corporate and family life



**RADHIKA BALASUBRAMANIAN, COO, Intelnet India Domestic BPO Operations**



**SANDHYA JOSHI, Country Head Human Resource & Staffing, NCR Corporation India**



**RENU KAKKAR, Vice President, Technology and Corporate Communications, Apeejay Surrendra Group, Oxford Bookstore**



**LEENA DHANKHER JOSHI, Assistant Vice President & Head, Life Profit Centre, Tata AIG Life Insurance Co. Ltd.**

## QUALITIES FOR SUCCESS

Commitment, faith in one's capabilities and passion to achieve are the biggest success mantras for any young manager to do well. It is necessary that a woman manager is confident of herself and is focused on goals.

## EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

I believe the glass ceiling has dipped to a considerable extent. It all depends on your performance and not your gender. However, the glass ceiling also varies from one organisation to another where the mindset of the staff could be biased towards women. To deal with such circumstances, a woman needs to step ahead and fight for rights and the position, which she truly deserves.

## CAREER OR HOME?

It was fairly challenging as when I started my career as a young manager over a decade back, women had to work twice as hard to have access to the same opportunities as men. There was no concept of 'flexi-time' and you had to manage time at the workplace and travel nationally and internationally. I was in customer facing roles throughout most of my career and had to manage a work, home plus the travel. But maintaining a balance between career and family was important to me, so I focused on managing my time effectively.

## CORPORATE POLITICS

Wherever there are people there are bound to be workplace dynamics and this happens only when there is poor communication. Bringing things out in the open and being as transparent as possible is the best way to manage workplace dynamics. I have always dealt with it in a straightforward manner.

## BALANCING ACT?

As businesses are going global, it's not just long hours at the workplace anymore. Though communication through advanced technology tools such as laptop, Blackberry handsets have reduced 'workplace hours', the new challenge is managing time away from home when on an overseas assignments. I believe in the fact that mentoring is the best way to motivate and encourage young women managers to reach their full potential and help them through the challenges of balancing a demanding career and a family.

## SUPPORT FROM HOME

Family support is extremely important especially when you are married. The number of married women working today vouch for the fact that the families have changed their thinking and have allowed their daughter/daughter-in-law to work outside home.

The support from family and spouse strengthens and motivates a woman to excel much better in her career. It also adds the extra zeal in her attitude and drives her morale in achieving her dreams.

## JUST ANOTHER MANAGER

Every individual wants to succeed and reach the top. So it's important that a manager is mentally prepared to handle the challenges in the corporate world. To succeed and reach a coveted position, a young woman manager needs to first stop thinking that she may have limitations at work because she is a woman. It's necessary to understand that she is one among many other managers in the company.

## MULTITASKING HELPS

It is never easy for any woman with a family and kids to look after both a career and a home. Usually women possess the unique ability to multi-task, otherwise its important to build this as a strength. Ensure that your kids are in safe and trusted hands while you are at work. This is where the support system comes into play - your family! But definitely nothing replaces the time you lose being with them. Also spend quality time with family members and leave an open channel of communication with your partner.

## BORN TO BE MANAGERS

Women are born to be managers. Simply put, give your child's sports days as much importance as you would to an important customer meeting. There may be occasions that really matter for your family, so make your presence felt wholeheartedly. At the same time, ensure that your official responsibilities are managed as expected. In one word, the secret lies in multitasking.

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## FAMILY SUPPORT

Your sense of achievement is realised only when you are back home with your loving family after a long tiring day.

The only person you tend to take liberties with, is your spouse, that is by being yourself - saying you are tired if you really are, refusing to eat outside if you want to spend time at home, saying you would prefer a coffee at home together followed by a late night movie or a drive may be.

## COMMUNICATION

Communication is the key to a happy home; if something bothers you, speak-out your worries. Always remember to be as good a listener as a communicator. While at home, try and not limit your discussions to office. Rather lighten up your spirits by being the friend, mother and wife you always were.

## GLASS CEILING?

Yes it exists - but it is to be taken with a pinch of salt as it's part of a proverbial myth that greets a woman when she steps into a career. Nobody can or should even try to work around it, just punch through and break it. Every woman who has reached somewhere today has either done that or has a unique world view.

## WALKING ON TIGHTROPE

Balancing a career and home is not easy at all. I've worked hard and prioritised my personal and professional goals at every stage. The beginning years were tough. I loved my job, but my heart told me that enjoying motherhood was more important. So I quit and took a break. Later, when I made a comeback, it was tougher when I switched professions to enter the corporate sector. The worldwide dot com bust and crash in the Indian stock markets radically changed my job profile. Stakes were higher, and the magnitude of responsibility to monetize functions was a huge challenge. Time management would make me go batty, those were really challenging times. I'm not sure what is there to balance. One must prioritise needs at any given point.

## MAKING THEM UNDERSTAND

I was a journalist when I was a young mother and I targeted my little boy. I would sit with the newspaper showing him my byline every morning even when he could not read. When he asked, "My friends mom doesn't work, why do you?" I used to answer, "You like to go to playschool? I like to work, I feel bored as a full

## MANTRAS FOR SUCCESS

My mantras would be hard work, willingness to stretch, tenacity and a supportive family.

## HOURS AT WORK

I don't think this is any different for women at all. The only thing may be that most women don't hang out with the colleagues after work and hence tend to rely more on the professional aspect of their relationships with colleagues. But I have never found that it gets in the way - you may know a little less of the gossip but otherwise it doesn't really matter.

## HOME OR WORK?

It was not difficult to manage home and work, when it was just my spouse and me. It only got really complicated once our child was born. And that is when the family stepped in and really supported us. Most women continue to work over any length of time either due to compulsions or her individual aspirations and in both cases there is no way you can manage without your spouse and family's support.

## WHAT'S TOUGH?

The toughest thing eventually is to balance work and family, especially when children are involved. And there is the whole guilt aspect if you are a mother. Most career oriented women will never let anything at home come in the way of work, but the reverse is not true.

## WEAKER SEX?

In most progressive organisations, I don't think supervisors differentiate between their staff for tasks on the basis of gender. And also at the work place there is not much impact of the 'so-called weaker sex' bit - unless you are referring to the safety and security aspect. Opportunities are provided to women based on what they have proved to be capable of doing and the confidence their manager has in them in terms of their abilities.

## WHAT'S LACKING TODAY?

I like the youngsters today - I have quite a few in my team. Though the younger they are - they want faster results, without having to go through the grind.

*kavita.krishnamurthy@timesgroup.com*

## THE BALANCING ACT

- Abide by commitments
- Have faith in your capabilities
- Have the desire to achieve
- Communicate well
- Take a break if required
- Multi-tasking really helps