

# Daring to Have It All

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## Barriers to women in senior leadership positions

Regan Barkla

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Women are currently underrepresented in senior leadership positions worldwide. On a recent leadership course I had the privilege of meeting some of New Zealand's highly regarded female leaders; however I was shocked at the perceived sacrifices these women had made to gain success in their careers. A staggering number of those introduced were both unmarried and childless. This made me consider the barriers which women face in seeking senior positions. As an aspiring young professional I would like to think that it is possible to have both; a successful career and a happy family. To prove that it was possible I interviewed 10 women from across New Zealand and Australia who had managed success in both aspects of their lives. Those interviewed were of senior positions in their organisations and expressed their challenges, advice and recommendations. These are all outlined in this report.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Worldwide, there is a scarcity of women in leadership (Sandberg, 2010). In many organizations, even at the lowest level women struggle to make up 50% of the workforce. This number decreases steadily as you get successively higher. Worldwide, only 3 – 4% of women reach CEO level (Herminia Ibarra, 2013). Despite key advancements in the workforce for women over the last few decades, women remain underrepresented in senior management and leadership roles.

As a 25 year old female within the next 10 years I have a decision to make.

Do I pursue a big career, and aim for a senior leadership position?

Do I start my family, and if so how long do I take off work?

Do I dare to have it all?

I would like to think that I could opt for option three and dare to have it all. However the statistics are concerning and therefore I have conducted this report to investigate the barriers to women in senior leadership positions with a focus of how you can successfully balance a career and children.

## 1.1 The cause for concern

When we look closer into the number of women in senior leadership positions the figures are a cause for concern. In my 25 years of life, New Zealand has been one of only two countries in the world to have two female heads of government in succession. Despite an emphasis on gender diversity amongst our board members, figures released for the 2014 calendar year show that only 14% of directors on our NZX listed companies were females. In addition the diagram bellow outlines the CEO's of ten NZ companies during 2014, results show that not one of these CEOs are female.

Table of 10 New Zealand CEO's in alphabetical order:

A2 Milk Company	Geoffrey Babidge
Air New Zealand	Christopher Luxon
ANZ Banking Group	David Hisco
Auckland International Airport	Adrian Littlewood
Chorus	Mark Ratcliffe
Contact Energy	Dennis Barnes
Diligent Board Member Services	Alessandro Sodi
Ebos	Mark Waller
Fisher & Paykel Healthcare	Michael Daniell
Fletcher Building	Mark Adamson

Source: <http://www.nzherald.co.nz>

## 1.2 Why women?

Men have been leading our companies, governments; sporting sectors and so on for thousands of years and many are doing a fine job. However a 360 degree study of 16,000 leaders which measured leadership effectiveness on 16 different competencies showed that women were actually more effective than men in 12 out of the 16 competencies (Sherwin, 2009).

## 1.3 The barriers

If it is not an issue of competence and qualifications what is holding women back from senior leadership positions?

Research indicates that it is not an issue of emotional intelligence, empathy or personality but more an issue of family responsibility, discrimination and a lack of confidence in ability.

### 1.3.1 Timing

Literature shows that the safest and most fertile time for child birth is between the ages of 20 – 35 years old. During this time period the NZ Labour Force Survey shows that there are 22% more males within the workforce than females. Although the average age of women conceiving their first child has risen over the past decade it can only raise to a certain point. The reason being that your chances of miscarriage, still birth, and birth defects increase with age. Research also shows that many of these mothers will downgrade their careers to allow for flexible working hours and child friendly policies.

### 1.3.2 Institutional mindsets

One of the most insidious barriers to women is institutional mindsets. Even in this current day and age, perception is still 'Think Leader, Think Male', Men are employed into leadership positions on potential where women are only hired into leadership positions on performance.

### 1.3.3 Individual mindsets

In a report (Coopers, 2008) which looked into Eagly's survey of MBA students, it showed that 70% of female respondents rated their own performance as equal to that of their co-workers, while men rated themselves higher. They also mentioned a Hewlett Packard survey which showed that women were only likely to apply for a job if they knew they had 100% of the criterion whereas most men were willing to take the risk if they had achieved 60% of the criterion. As females we systematically underestimate our own performance. Furthermore research (Harvard Business Review, 2013) shows that as women age our desire to take on more responsibility dissipates faster than men's desire. This demonstrates that women are less likely to recognize their own performance leading to difficulty in them asserting their talents and gaining recognition and promotion within the company.

## 2 Review of Literature

There are many decisions a woman must make throughout her career, and with these decisions there are challenges. Many female leaders have gone before us and demonstrated that it is possible to navigate these challenges and align yourself for success in both your career and family life. The review of literature will focus on accounts of female leaders who have succeeded in both career and family aspects.

### 2.1 Making the decision

Many young professional females struggle with the decision of when is a good time to start a family.

According to medical experts (Center, 2014) on babycenter.com the safest and most fertile period of your life to conceive a child is between 20 – 35 years old. Over the past decade we have seen the average age of

women conceiving their first child rise to 30. Experts explain that we are not likely to see this rising age continue, the reason being that as the bellow table points out your chances of miscarriage, still birth, and birth defects increase with age.

Table 2: aging effects on child birth defects

Age 30 -34	The miscarriage rate is 11.7 percent. By age 30 your risk of having a baby with Down syndrome is 1 in 952, and a baby with any chromosomal abnormality, 1 in 385.
Age 35 - 40	The miscarriage rate rises after age 35 to close to 18 percent. Rates of stillbirths are about twice as high among older pregnant women than younger ones, according to recent studies, although the reasons are unknown.
Age 40 - 45	About one-third of all pregnancies in women ages 40 to 44 end in miscarriage. Risks of chromosomal birth defects rise steadily with each year into your 40s. If you give birth at age 40, your baby has a 1 in 106 chance of being born with Down syndrome and a 1 in 66 chance of being born with any chromosomal abnormality. But by age 44, those risks rise to 1 in 38 and 1 in 26, respectively.

Source: [babycentre.com](http://babycentre.com)

Common themes for this rise in age are

- Allowing time to establish your career
- Building equity and a strong financial backing
- Getting to know yourself
- Getting to know your partner

Literature suggests that having a child in your late 20s or early 30s offers you the best of both worlds, you've been in the workforce for a few years, established your identity, built some financial resources and have the health and energy of youth. Furthermore as many people are quick to point out to young women generally in order to get pregnant you need to find the right man. Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Google says that "the most important career choice you will make is who to marry" having a supportive spouse and creating a 50/50 balance will play a pivotal role in creating success in your career. Waiting until your late 20's allows time to find this partner.

However there is also a strong debate that if you want a "high powered career you should get pregnant at 25" (Trunk, 12). Penelope Trunk advises women that 'you should not wait until your 30 to have kids because you will be taking care of them during the very time when all the men you work with will be working harder and longer hours than before'. An article written by Anne-Marie Slaughter agrees with this statement in saying that 'if you want to have a huge career, have kids at 25 so your kids will be grown up when you are 45, allowing you time and energy to throw into your career' (Slaughter, 2012).

Susan Patton (2008), author of "Marry Smart," agrees that putting family before your career is beneficial because timing, like any successful endeavor, is everything. "Work can wait; fertility won't, so spend your 20s landing a husband, not climbing the corporate ladder,"

Further to this debate a trend developing in professional roles, is that the longer you wait the more difficult it can be to take time off to start your family. Research in the US shows that many executives return to work, sometime only two weeks after their babies' birth as they feel "so much responsibility at work" (Coudreau, 2010)

With strong debates in both directions of the age scale, it leaves many psychology experts stating that the perfect age for a women to have her first child is simply when she feels ready. Currently there is no defined 'perfect age' and there are strong debates on early 20's vs late 20's and 30's, the key factor however is finding the right partner to start your family with.

## 2.2 Align yourself for success

It doesn't matter what stage of your working life you are in; whether you are pre or post motherhood. In order to be successful you need to align yourself for success.

(Grant-Halvorson,2011) noted that 'successful people reach their goals not simply because of who they are, but more often because of what they do.'

According to (Grant-Halvorson,2011) by focusing on the points listed bellow you can enhance your skills and better align yourself for success.

- Get Specific
- Seize the moment to act on your goals
- Know exactly how long to have left to go
- Be a realistic optimist
- Focus on getting better, rather than being good
- Have grit
- Build your willpower muscle
- Dont tempt fate
- Focus on what you will do, not what you won't do.

Diane Smith–Gander chair of ASX- listed Transfield Services, strongly believes that to be a successful female leader you need to harness your strengths, rather than strengthening your weakness, believing that all good leaders build on their natural abilities. (Scobie, 2014)

"You need to set the vision, communicate that vision and be able to create an environment where that vision can be executed" (Scobie, 2014)



Smith (2014) also explains that she has found it useful in her career to ask for peoples support especially if you want something. She is a strong believer that you need a purpose and to understand what you want your legacy to be.

Anne Mulcahy, chairman and CEO of Xerox is quoted to be in the top 10 of the “Greatest Living Business Leaders” by Forbes (Chana R. Schoenberger, 2009). In an interview conducted by MIT Sloan Management, Mulcahy explains the factors of her leadership strategies which lead to the successful resuscitation of her company.

“Good leaders listen”

Mulcahy gained new perspective by actively listening to customers, shareholders, and employees at all levels of the business which allowed her to pinpoint their weaknesses.

She also notes that you need to have a shared vision and know the importance of good management instincts.

“Even when Rome was burning, people wanted to know what the city of the future would look like”

The CEO explained that this was also true of Xerox during their downturn. She and her team then wrote a fictional *Wall Street Journal* Article (2009) that detailed what the company would look like in the future. The Xerox team found it beneficial to ‘peel it back’ and create ‘clear accountability’.

The three other keys to Mulcahy’s success were research and development, customer focus and communication. Mulcahy was able to successfully lead her employees through a very turbulent time by using honest communication and through the ‘alignment of people around a common set of goals’.

Furthermore Women of Influence (Annis, Lawrence, & Doerr, 2014) released a whitepaper researching the Solutions to Women’s Advancements in partnership with Thomson Reuters. The results of their survey where they interviewed 326 senior executive women show that successful women have 5 common themes for career success. These being

- Their ability to understand the objectives of the ‘Big Picture’.
- Displaying diversity within their leadership responsibilities.
- Showing leadership maturity – embracing their own authenticity and breaking historic research where women feel they have to behave like men in order to succeed.
- Self Initiation – navigating the system and accessing informal networkers, however the study also shows the women still struggle in ‘self-promotion, advocating for themselves and expressing their talents’
- Career Advancement – Although women ranked this as their weakest area they acknowledge that it is a pivotal factor in gaining success. “ It’s all about believing in myself, finding the courage to keep my hand up, and gaining access”

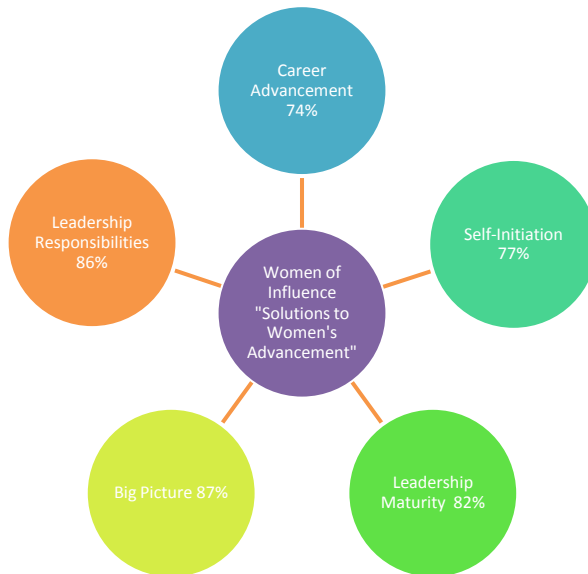


Figure 1 – Women of Influence, Solutions to Women’s Advancement (Annis, Lawrence, & Doerr, 2014)

In a lot of the literature on successful women there are strong themes of personal empowerment and determination. Women are engaged and willing to accept the responsibility of leadership. They are also committed to both personal and professional growth and development.

### 2.3 The use of mentors for leadership development

Many successful leaders will comment that the use of a mentor/mentors was pivotal in their success. Research will also show that women finding strategic networking as a major barrier. Women are known to be natural networkers however they rarely network for transactional reasons whereas men do this very well.

“The use of mentoring programs provides an opportunity for students to benefit from the experience and wisdom of those who have already learned the trials tribulations that come from serving others” (Shandley, 1989)

With many women admitting that a lack of confidence is holding them back in their careers a mentor can be a good way at combating this factor.

Aspireforsuccess.com set the below list of steps as a platform for someone searching for a mentor.

- Be clear on why you want a mentor
- Establish goals for the relationship
- Network to find a suitable mentor

- Don't limit yourself to one mentor
- Establish communication methods and frequency of contact
- Manage expectations and build trust
- Acquire mentoring skills and competencies
- Be respectful of your mentor's time

In an interview conducted during the survey for the Women of influences white paper, one female explains the key driver to her becoming successful was "gaining more experience and exposure to women who have succeeded in this path, particularly women role models who have learned to balance work and life".

## 2.4 Leadership Styles – Difference between men and women

When a recruiting officer is faced with filling a senior management position, with both the female and male applicants being equally trained and educated, research shows that the recruiting officer is/are more inclined to choose the male over the female.

"So why do they automatically think leader, think male"?

Self-confidence, decisiveness, self reliance, individualism and dominance; are all characteristics of a strong leader, all of which are considered to be masculine and therefore associated more closely with men. Leadership is linked to nine key behaviors and it is perceived that males portray more of those attributes than women. If we look at the traits associated with females, caring, helpful, interpersonally sensitive, intuitive and collaborative; these are also quality attributes of a leader. However these traits are seen to be 'communal' behaviors.

McKinsey (Joanna Barsh, 2012) has done research [on leadership traits which illustrates that women do process strong leadership skills. They found that of the](#) 'Nine key criteria that on average define any decent leader. Women apply five of these leadership behaviors more frequently than men. For example, women were found to be particularly good at defining responsibilities clearly as well as being strong on mentoring and coaching employees. Men were much better at taking individual decisions and then corrective action should things go awry'

Further research on leadership capabilities, conducted by Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman show that women were rated higher than men on 12 out of 16 traits which they identified through years of research as the most important factors to leadership effectiveness.



Figure 2 “A study in Leadership: Women do it better than men,” Zenger Folkman, 2012.

The concerning issue pointed out in this study, was that the higher the level, the wider the gap. Although the gap was in favor of women we still see men dominating these leadership roles.

### 3 Method

#### Introduction

This research aimed to gain an understanding of how executive career women have managed to build successful careers and raise a family. It looks into their detailed experiences of both motherhood and work life, therefore qualitative research was used. Both structured and unstructured interviews were conducted allowing me to explore the experiences and behaviors of our top female leaders.

#### 3.1 Defining the sample - Successful women

A key aspect of this study was defining a *successful woman*. For the purpose of this report, successful women relates to those mothers who have managed executive level management during their careers.

In large businesses this also includes women involved in Senior Leadership teams – for example within Dairy NZ I interviewed the Regional Leader who is a part of the senior management team.

#### 3.2 The interviews

In total 10 women were interviewed for this study. To enable an in-depth look into the trials and tribulation of the women involved in this study the qualitative approach was used. As these women are time constrained interviews were conducted in a variety of ways including over the phone, face to face and via email. Most interviews lasted 60 minutes and included a lot of open ended questions. This allowed me to get a good understanding of what drove these women, the barriers they faced and advice they had to give.

### 4 Results and reporting notes

For the purpose of this section, the women's views are analyzed and presented in key themes. Verbatim quotes have then been used to illustrate these themes. Specific names will not be used.

#### 4.1 Make your partner a real partner and utilize support networks

All participants interviewed during this study explained the important role their partner played in both their professional and personal lives. Of the individuals interviewed, in 50% of the relationships both parents worked. There was an importance of having a strong bond, with clear responsibilities, good communication and the ability to compromise.

- *If your husband is not willing to support you through a big career there is no point in starting down that path.*
- *Make your partner a real partner*
- *We are a team, we work it out together, I could not do it without that support and nor could he.*
- *Have the discussion continually, negotiate continually. You may need to pull back to support him. Agree on that and understand it.*
- *Work together at home first and foremost as a team kids included, everyone doing their respective parts and that includes kids understanding what is expected of them with regard to school, home life and family time*

Due to the time demand of executive positions these women urged the importance of using the support networks around you, be it your family, friends or a good supply of baby sitters.

- *You do need the right support around you*
- *We have 3 or 4 baby sitters. This creates a safety net should something pop up*

## 4.2 Time management

Few women surveyed for this study cited work life balance as a barrier to their success but rather present themselves as proactive in organizing their lives accordingly. They are proactive in finding ways to balance their career ambitions with their desire to build and maintain both family and personal lives.

- *Just as you do with work set frameworks and guidelines and stick to them*
- *Be 100% organized – run a military account on EVERYTHING including lunchboxes!*

Many women cited that it was also important to schedule time for yourself – although admitting at the same time that this is an aspect they can improve on.

- *Look after yourself – recharge your own batteries.*
- *Take time to reflect, often.*
- *I try to make sure I annually take time for my family that is all about them and me and nobody else. Whether that is a few days or a few weeks, taking and making time is important and as a mother they will always come first because it can't be helped but somehow you find a way to balance it.*
- *More recently, I have decided that I cannot go on ignoring my health etc so I am putting things in place at work to move in this direction. It is way too late I know. This is something we should all do every day. But saying it or even knowing it, and doing it are different things. I gave up 'my' time to the family and to work - to fill those guilt ridden spaces, so as to fit it all in.*

## 4.3 Believe in yourself and have confidence

In the novel *How Remarkable Women Lead*, they mention that 'for women to sustain herself on the path to leadership and to function as a leader, a women must view situations clearly, avoiding downward spirals, in order to move ahead, adapt and implement solutions' (Cranston, 2009). Those interviewed strongly urged women to believe in themselves and their vision for success. A lot of women work in male dominated industries and therefore confidence and determination are needed to reach goals and maintain momentum.

- *Maintaining the pace and believing in yourself, trusting yourself and your judgment in times of crisis or change. There will always be people reading and willing to put you down, destroy your confidence, challenge your decision making, skills etc. self reflect often... be sure to check your moral compass (Greed is a powerful Siren), and always do the right thing. Once you are sure you are on track – fight for your position and never give up.*
- *Never give up! Never*
- *Always believe in yourself, if you lose this you will lose your crusade. Keep your values close to you, let them steer you.*
- *Hardening up took a while to master, I didn't master this well until I learnt to not care about what others necessarily thought of me, to only be concerned about those closest to me that I cared about. Only their opinions really mattered.*
- *Define success for yourself do NOT be defined by society and others*
- *Set your own goals and strive to achieve those and the rest will happen*
- *Don't beat yourself up if things don't go EXACTLY to plan learn to flex and go with the flow a bit*

#### 4.4 Managing decreasing energy levels

To allow women to succeed in the long-term they need to learn how to accommodate family and community responsibilities. Women leaders also need to learn to manage their energy reserves.

With women now feeling like they need to be available 24/7 for work related issues, managing factors such as different time zones and the pressure to stay extra hours in the office for face time it is no wonder that our female leaders feel like there is no energy left in the tank at the end of the day.

- *Pre children you couldn't slow me down, my hand was constantly up. You learn that you do have to slow down a little bit – don't get involved in too many projects so it's not impossible on your family. You do adjust, your hand doesn't go up as much and it's not a bad thing.*
- *I am a strong person but the main change is – I use to be full of energy nothing was too much – with kids you can have a whole night up because the kids are not well and then you have to face a full day of work, and I am finding that I don't have the energy and this can be depressing*
- *Look after yourself – recharge your own batteries.*



- *Women need to remember that work will take as much as you give it*
- *Energy can be a real issue, things are easy to deal with, and people are not.*
- *Having meaning, framing and connection as tools in your toolkit are great to use on your leadership journey. But you're not going anywhere if you are too exhausted to move.*

#### 4.5 Learn to look after yourself

Every women interviewed explained the importance of being, on time, attentive, ready to learn and committed, they also stated that you are no good to anyone if you are exhausted, 'your brain doesn't work the same when you are tired'. A key factor to success is learning how to look after yourself. 90% of the women interview commented that they could do a better job of nurturing themselves. Of the two women who were nearing a point in their careers where they are starting to take a 'back foot' they both mentioned that they are putting a real focus into their own health and admit this is an area they have largely neglected thought their careers.

The easiest way to explain this factor is to show some of the responses to the following question asked within the survey

##### Culturally women are nurturers, what do you do to ensure you are nurturing yourself?

- *I don't. I should I know, but I don't. More recently, I have decided that I cannot go on ignoring my health etc so I am putting things in place at work to move in this direction. It is way too late I know. this is something we should all do everyday. But saying it or even knowing it, and doing it are different things. I gave up 'my' time to the family and to work - to fill those guilt ridden spaces, so as to fit it all in.*
- *I have a few friends who are similar to me, work full time and have children so we are proactive about getting together regularly. Watch movie and laugh, reinvigorates me. I could be more physical, was going to the gym 3 times a week but have got a bit lazy this year*
- *Was a bit slack here to be honest. Since I left work ive had more medical checkups!. I needed more sport in my life. Worked better if I had a goal*

- *I think I just inherently know when I am at the brink and therefore know it is time to back off and take some time. I try to make sure I annually take time for my family that is all about them and me and nobody else whether that is a few days or a few weeks, taking and making time is important and as a mother they will always come first because it can't be helped but somehow you find a way to balance it.*

#### 4.6 Sacrifice

In an article recently published in the North and South Magazine, journalist Joanna Wane looks into the question of why are some of New Zealand's women not having children, and should we be worried about it?". Janine Burchett is quoted in this article stating that "when your juggling work and children something has to give a bit and that compromise shouldn't be on your children's heads". It is a controversial issue whether working mothers can in fact have it all. Below is the response collected from those interviewed on this issue.

- *Family is always first – always!!! But this is the hardest question yet. Family first is always the ideal, the intension anyway. In crisis or real need or major events there is no question that this is true. But what is also true is that when a major event at work collides with a sport day for instance, often, too often probably, I have gone to work. It is always a matter of deciding which is more important at that time. It is a hard call because have an importance rating – this is the conscience crusher – this is the question that eats away at you, fills your with guilt (either for your work or your child)*
- *Never thought something had to give – I aimed for 100% and was never happy with 80%. I find that if you stick to your values it will all work out. You can make it all fit; juggling it all can actually be exciting.*
- *I have had times in my career where I had to step back – I was offered directorships but my boy was struggling at school and he was my priority. So you will find that you have to give up certain opportunities to make it all work but family is a strong value and you can't push through that. However in the end it all works out. I don't think it matters whether you are a mother or not, you will find yourself asking what have I missed out on.*
- *Do it all, you can have it all!*
- *Teaching my kids (in detail) the finer points of cooking and home chores, they both know how to cook and run a house but I would have like to have taught them a few of the finer details. In the bigger scheme of things I haven't really had to give up too much the odd school event that my husband went to but I couldn't and more actual time with them but*

*you can't have everything and if they are well adjusted and know that one of us will be there that is all I have ever worried about.*

- *Don't be hard on yourself – some times, something has to give*
- *When you have kids, you can still be on the leadership journey.. It's just a bit slower!*

#### 4.7 Advice and general insights

During the interviews our female leaders were asked what advice they would pass on to young women striving to follow in their footsteps. Bellow is some of this advice; other points have being absorbed in the themes above.

- *Love your family with every part of your being but look after yourself first*
- *There does need to be a balance – u need to connect with people outside of your narrowness. Take stuff from other industries, the answers are on the outside*
- *Understand what your drivers and motivators are. What's going to derail you?? There is nothing more deflating than self sabotaging behavior. If you don't feel like your doing a good job it will implode.*
- *Set your own goals and strive to achieve those and the rest will happen*
- *Don't beat yourself up if things don't go EXACTLY to plan learn to flex and go with the flow a bit*
- *Be happy with little victories they lead to the big ones.*
- *For someone that wants to have a family and a career, it has to be your choice*
- *Set boundaries, for work and home. Create a list of non negotiable*

## 5.0 Discussion

It is clear that there are multiple benefits in having talented women in our senior management and leadership roles. It is also clear that there are challenges that these women will face.

Although organizations have taken action to reduce barriers to women and are encouraging women to return to work by introducing policies, practices and culture to support flexible working conditions we still see too few women in our senior roles.

There are many in society who will argue that women simply cannot do both. In a recent North and South magazine there is a published article titled, Too Smart for kids. Which goes onto ask; should we care that smart women aren't having kids? This article articulates the point that during the 2013 New Zealand census statistics showed that women aged between, 40-44 who had degrees produced an average of 1.76 babies compared to women with no qualifications, who averaged more than 2.5. As the literature studied above suggests, these high flying roles come with long hours, leadership bias and a lot of dedication. Women are working hard to cement a place in the leadership pipeline and then the perfect time for childbirth arrives at around 30 years old and they are too afraid to step out of the workforce for fear that they will not be able to get back on the ladder. The good news is – is that there are women amongst our workforce who have managed to achieve a successful career and still raise a family. They acknowledge that there are challenges but at no point do they say it is impossible. Contrary to the debate above these women all stated that they would not do anything differently, feeling that neither their jobs nor children have missed out by them trying to juggle both aspects of their lives.

Those interviewed acknowledged their partners as a key to their success, strongly stating that it is not worth starting down the track if your partner is not willing to support you. It was also made clear that before you start breeding you need to be in a role you enjoy, feel challenged in and are excited to return too, as leaving your child to return to work can be one of the hardest things you'll do in life.

It was reassuring to hear that none of the women interviewed for this report feel like victims of the system. Some did make mention to the fact that they work in male dominated industries which at times provided added challenges, however self esteem, confidence and learning to manage energy levels were areas where these women found themselves mainly challenged.

Low self esteem and confidence can create a barrier to women as this can lead them to shy away from promotion and creating strategic networks. Those interviewed urged women to never give up, stating that there will always be people willing to put you down, knock your confidence or challenge you. As aspiring leaders we need to learn to channel this, trust our judgment and move forward.

Other key attributes of these astonishing leaders were good time management and knowing their limits. Executive positions and even career building takes a lot of time and dedication and so do children, therefore it is important to execute good time management in all aspects of your life. This includes scheduling time for yourself everyday – this was a concept that even our highly regarded leaders struggled with at times, stating that you learn this with age. It is important to know your limits, when to back off and when you need sleep.

The largest barrier these women seemed to face was energy. As time got tight the first thing to leave the schedule was 'me time', which included relaxing, exercise etc. There are multiple studies which show the

benefits of exercise to energy levels which is why I have a section in the recommendations around daily exercise and nutrition.

When I look at the advice provided by these leading female leaders, it was easy to put it into 9 key questions or snippets of advice.

- Is this your personal decision - Do you want a big career and to raise children
- Do you have a partner who is willing to help you down this path? This is a journey you will both be taking.
- Build strategic networks and strong relationships (at home and at work)
- Accept that at times, it will be tough
- Get organized – on everything, you can never have too much routine but you also need to learn to be flexible and how to handle crisis.
- Be confident in your ability – keep your hand up and don't shy away from opportunity.
- Make time for yourself –EVERYDAY, no negotiations.
- Never give up.
- As you start progressing through your career, be the best role model you can to future women leaders.

## 6.0 Recommendations

There are two distinct areas which can help a women succeed in mother hood and her career. The bellow points are recommendations for women on a personal level. These are a conclusion of the information gathered during my interviews. The second are recommendations on an organizational level, in how we can advance women in the workforce and support working mothers.

### 6.1 On a personal level

### Create effective partnerships

Make your partner a real partner; this is a journey you will both be taking. Weather your partner is a stay at home parent, or also working. You need to work together as a team to remain successful. Literature shows that women who perceived to be successful had the support of their husbands where those who perceived to be held back didn't.

### Learn to manage guilt

With working mothers there are decisions made every week as to what comes first, an important work meeting or kids sport for example. A suggestion made by a lot of the interviewees was to give everything an importance rating and work forward from this. In a time of crisis, your family will always come first. A conversation needs to be had with the employer over what is not negotiable, eg: only emergency calls are to be made on weekends, only working to a certain time as you have family responsibilities.

### Learn to manage yourself

Diet and exercise are areas where both executive men and women often face challenges. Experts suggest that there are multiple benefits to regular exercise, including reduced stress levels, increased endorphins, increased self confidence and the fact that it is known to prevent cognitive decline and can also alleviate anxiety. Furthermore, experts have proven that employees who exercise one or more times per week, regardless of their weight, have lower health care costs than their sedentary co-workers. In relation to this Irving Paper LTD. offered its 375 employees a gym membership subsidy and programmes for exercise, weight loss, nutrition and smoking cessation. The company saw short-term disability costs drop by more than 50% between 1995 and 2000 (Cybex, 2012)

Those interviewed strongly urged other females to book time out for yourself every day, recharge the batteries, read, exercise and converse with people outside of your 'bubble' be it personal or professional.

## 6.2 On an organizational level

### Enforce flexible working policies

A lot of companies now operate under flexible working conditions/policies; however these are rarely taken up in the senior ranks. If we want to create an effective leadership pipeline for mothers returning to work, these large organizations need to lead from the top down. Declare the intention to be a leading gender-intelligent organization. Furthermore the adoption of in house child care would further support mothers returning to work. Executive level positions demand a great deal of time, therefore childcare onsite which accommodates after hours care and built in meal options would be beneficial. In addition these working mothers need sponsorship and support from a manager where a mutually-working, mature conversation is

had to put agreements in place of where the boundaries lie. This requires high trust and lots of give and take.

#### Embed gender intelligence in all hiring processes and practices

Forget 'think leader think male', we need to expel gender blind spots from the recruiting process. We need to be attracting intelligent women back into the work force and it is important that those in the recruitment field understand the difference in female vs male leadership styles and that both are very effective.

#### Create a strong leadership mentoring programme

It was cited during this survey that women would benefit from cross reference mentoring. This is at all levels, entry, mid management and senior levels so that high potential individuals can be identified. This will lead to greater retention and targeted development.

Professional development is integral to many businesses but it should also extend to leadership training. Organizations need to provide support to aspiring leaders and harness their strengths rather than working on their weaknesses. Guidance through scheme such as mentoring mentioned about or internship programmes are great examples.

## 7.0 Conclusion

The success of many organizations is largely built on the talent of those involved, and the benefits of a diverse workforce are endless. It is however alarming to note the number and percentage of women who fall off the ladder as you move through the ranks in an organization. Joanna Barsh and Lareina Yee report that in entry level roles women make up 53% of the working population, this figure falls to 40% in middle management, 35% in directorship and as little as 3-4% in Executive (CEO) positions.

The topic of workplace diversity has taken the spot light in recent years, with in depth research showing that those women, who do reach senior leadership, are capable of outshining their male counterparts. In 2011 Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman conducted a 360 degree leadership evaluation of more than 7,000 executives. The results showed that women were rated higher than men at every management level. It also showed that the higher the level of seniority, the wider the gap. The issue being that it is in this top tier where we see the least female participation.

When I first started this study I assumed that the reason we had a small number of executive women was due to the fact that the optimum time for child birth coincides with the safest and most logical time to have children. This is definitely one of the barriers that women need to overcome, and there is evidence to suggest that companies could do more to support executive mothers with onsite child care, flexible working policies and by having mature discussions on how to make it work for all involved.

Further investigation showed that the key barriers to a women's career advancement were, institutionalized mind sets where employers and recruiters 'think leader think male'. This highlights that men are generally promoted or employed on their leadership 'potential' whereas women are left to prove that they can be effective.

Other barriers, perceived to effect a female's career advancement are on more personal level. Many women underestimate their own performance; they shy away from promotion and are not as aggressive as men in seeking development opportunities. Studies show that women will only put their hands up for a promotion where they are confident they process 100% of the criterion, whereas males only need to feel they portray 60%.

Confidence has being outlined as the most significant barrier, and I have learnt through this report it takes many shapes. Self belief was a strong attribute of the women I interviewed for this study. They urged their younger generation to believe that they can have it all, to except that at times there will be sacrifices that will need to be made and that although life will throw many obstacles on both a personal and professional level, you are to never give up.

To get a clear understanding of the barriers women face in work and parenthood I interviewed 10 successful executive level women, all of whom have families.

The result of my survey shows that there are six key themes that lead to the success of these women.

- The need to make your partner a real partner and utilizing support networks
- Time management
- Believe in yourself and have confidence
- Managing decreasing energy levels
- Learning to look after yourself
- Sacrifice

When I set out on this project, I had both a hypothetical question and a personal question. Personally I wanted to investigate whether it really was possible to have a big career and still have time to raise a family. On a recent leadership course I was exposed to some of NZ's highly regarded female leaders, it was alarming to note the number of these women who were both unmarried and childless. This made me think of what the true cost of these senior positions were. Through this study and interaction with those interviewed I have proven to myself that it is possible. As young professional females we can dare to 'have it all'. The key themes listed above point out that there are key aspects which cannot be taken lightly. Every women interviewed expressed the importance of finding the right partner. As presumed, executive level positions come with a large time commitment. Without a strong partnership and effective support network's you are likely to fail.

Time management was another key attribute and one that needs to be implemented long before you start thinking about having a family. Another aspect that needs to be acknowledged is believing that you have the capability to be both an effective leader and a mother. As stated above this is the overriding issue female's face in career advancement.

A challenged faced and explained by these women was learning how to manage decreasing energy levels, this factor also plays a pivotal role in the debate as to which age we should start breeding.

Learning to look after one's self was a skill many of our senior leaders were late to adopt. It came across strongly in the survey that all women need to take time out for them every day, and learn to negotiate with their companies as to what was non negotiable in relation to family commitments.



The last factor is around sacrifice, which was not perceived as a barrier but more of a way of life. These women explained that there are times where you will put your family before work and vice versa. It is learning to manage the guilt which will at some stage hit you personally. It was expressed that you will find yourself making decisions which put your family first, for example once you have children it is a lot harder to travel for work and therefore you may decide to turn down a directorship etc, stop taking on extra projects or overloading your schedule. However these women strongly expressed their opinion that when 'one door closes, another will open' (Johnston, 2008)

Through my interaction with these amazing women I have come to the conclusion, as aspiring young leaders, we need to work hard, build networks with both male and female mentors, keep our hands up and believe we have the capability. When the time comes to have children, don't be afraid to step off the ladder as these women have proven it is possible to get back on and create success in both your career and personal lives.

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## 9.0 Interview Questions

It is no secret that we have far more males in leadership positions than we do females, this number decreases even further when we add women with children into the mix. As an influential female leader who has managed to raise a family I would appreciate your time in helping answer the below questions so I can look into whether women really can “have it all”. I would like to know what your personal key learning’s have been in your journey, your highs and lows, what you have learnt and ultimately – how you managed to make it work.

Please -- if you feel there is an area that I have missed please add it on at the bottom of the page.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_

Company \_\_\_\_\_

Family Members (please include age of children if appropriate)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Questions

Can you briefly describe your role models growing up and how they have influenced your career to date? (Family background)

Can you describe your career highlights and key learning’s?

What have being your 3 biggest challenges and key learnings?

When deciding to start a family what were your key drivers? (How did you decide what was going to be the right time?)

Was your workplace supportive in your decision to start a family?

How long did you stay at home with your children?

What links to your work did you have during this time?

What role does your husband/partner play in your family?

If you had to describe how you balance your time with family and work what would that look like?  
Who/what comes first and when.

In work we often talk about the “line” Do you constantly chase this line and when you get there  
what happens for you?

Culturally women are nurturers – how do you ensure you are nurturing yourself as well?

You have managed to have a successful career and strive to a leadership position all the while  
raising a family. How have you done this?

What drives you to get you out of bed in the morning?  
Looking back on your career/family life – would you change anything if you had your time again.

A lot of women say something has to give – you can’t have it all. What have you had to “give” up?

If you had to summarize in 5 or less key points, what advice would you give to young women who  
are striving to have a successful career and a family.

Do you have any quotes which sum up your life/ambitions?

