

LIFESTYLE FOR HER

ARE YOU A WORKING MUM WHO IS TRYING TO HAVE IT ALL?

Tell us what you find most difficult about your role and which one thing, that if you could change it, would make your life a lot easier. Send your 'Letter to The Editor' by e-mail to: bev@tjmedia.co.za and let us know what's on your mind.



HAVING IT ALL

The debate about working mothers has been in the news recently. The resignation of one of Hilary Clinton's top advisors to spend more time with her family has stirred up a hornet's nest, while the appointment of a pregnant CEO at Yahoo has raised some eyebrows.


A top advisor to Hilary Clinton, Anne Marie Slaughter, has challenged the accepted belief that if a woman is determined enough and organised enough, she can rise up the career ladder like any of her male colleagues while raising successful children and maintaining a healthy marriage. She concludes that in a job where you're working long hours on someone else's schedule, it's not possible to balance effective parenting with being an effective professional, and that the notion that women can 'have it all' is a myth.

Into the middle of the debate came the news that a woman who is pregnant with her first child has been appointed CEO of Yahoo. The reaction to her pregnancy was polite, but criticism quickly followed when she said she would be taking only a few weeks of maternity leave. It is predictable that however she

manages her life she will face the accusation that she is either neglecting her child or her job... or both.

There are some conditions that make it more possible for women to have it all. Obtaining qualifications which attract a salary that covers extensive child support and having a supportive partner are two of the most important. Finding an employer who offers flexible working hours is another. But many women in low paid jobs are not allowed the flexibility and do not have the support of teams of babysitters. Some are single parents or have partners who do not share equally in family responsibilities. It seems that society has still not come to terms with the implications of working motherhood. Women with children are consistently discriminated against in hiring and promotion decisions, and in salary increases;

while highly motivated women are perceived by managers to be so committed to work that they must be bad mothers.

For some women 'having it all' means affordable child care, minimum wages, and reliable public transport. For others it's to do with liberation, achievement and job satisfaction. Maybe it should be about never feeling guilty, either when you say you are a stay-at-home-mum or when you announce you're off on another overseas business trip. Perhaps we should rather be asking what 'having it all' means to a family as a whole. 

Maureen Collins has a B Sc degree in Psychology from Edinburgh University. Maureen's passion is for showing people how to improve the quality of their conversations even under the most difficult conditions www.straight-talk.co.za