

Work & Life

by Beverly Denver

The conflicting demands of work and life have long posed major issues for women. So very often the commitments we make to our families or ourselves seem to be at odds with the commitments we make to our careers.

If we take a personal day off from work, an employer may think we are not dedicated enough to our jobs. If we work overtime to complete a project, we run the risk of disappointing loved ones waiting at home. In both cases, we do our best to explain our actions to the “injured” party. Always, the result is the same: The disappointed one is still not happy, and we are left bewildered and confused.

For those of us who grew up reading *Cosmopolitan* magazine and the musings of editor Helen Gurley Brown, this scenario is all too common — and understandable. Brown did a great job convincing us of that “having it all” was both highly desirable and, of course, attainable.

As I recall, Brown’s definition of “having it all” included having great men in our lives, having the most fashionable clothes on our backs and places to live, having glamorous jobs where we would meet fascinating people! What smart and savvy American young woman wouldn’t want *all* that?

Not one that I knew!

So, in the 1970s, Cosmo gals like me finished high school and headed off to college with dual ambitions: 1) to find our future husbands, and 2) to earn degrees that would prepare us for one of those rewarding careers. If we graduated from college having accomplished both, we were well on our way to “having it all.” We were in enviable positions — or so we thought!

Only when we became working mothers did we discover Brown and *Cosmopolitan* forgot to mention an important detail: Corporate America wasn’t ready for women to have it all. You might say, “It wasn’t family-friendly!”

For years, Fortune 500 companies ignored the needs of working mothers. Besides unequal pay, there was no such thing as flexible time for full-timers or opportunities to work from home. There were no on-site day care centers. Paid maternity leave was still only a dream!

As a result, the acquisition and retention of talented female employees was low. In many cases, married women with educations didn’t bother to pursue careers. The ones that did go to work left their jobs after a few years to stay home with the kids. The simple truth was those in the later group had little choice.

The good news is that federal mandates, along with a common-sense approach, have helped change the face of Corporate America.

Today, more and more women are joining its ranks. Larger numbers are busting through glass ceilings and staying on long enough to qualify for retirement benefits. Many of them are working mothers!

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