



NO NONSENSE ADVICE

5

Fox

WORKING MOTHERS

VIDUSHA NATHAVITHARANA
ANTON THAYALAN
RUWANTHI WIJESINGHE
ZAFRANA NAFEES
TATUM DE SOUZA

NO NONSENSE ADVICE

for Working Mothers

Ruwanthi Wijesinghe
Tatum De Souza

A LUMINARY PUBLICATION



**PUBLISHED BY LUMINARY LEARNING SOLUTIONS
FOR FREE CIRCULATION
FIRST EDITION, 2019**

**ALL RIGHTS RESERVED © VIDUSHA NATHAVITHARANA,
RUWANTHI WIJESINGHE, TATUM DE SOUZA**

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

**EDITED BY TATUM DE SOUZA
COVER DESIGN BY ZAFRAN PACKEERALLY**

Before you start...

All of us (authors) grew up with working moms: which was something that brought us together. However, each of our mothers 'handled' situations in very different ways (though the nagging, the worrying and the incessant effort to somehow 'feed us' seem to be common: and also the realization that none of us had a 'perfect' family !): this exchange of experiences offered some amazing perspectives.

Being a working mom isn't easy : and we wanted to put together as many viewpoints as we could : hence the reason we had two 'men' come over to co-author it as well : and also a woman who was yet to be a mom. In all earnest, having a wide-open conversation about marriage, kids, divorce and wading through all of it, through each other's eyes offered insights that would not have been possible otherwise. We so wished we had had this conversation a decade or two back: but then again: if we had: maybe we would not have been this 'wise' about how we looked at things...

Experience is a cruel teacher sometimes: but such cruelty is often required to drum sense into a bunch of rather obstinate, headstrong and stubborn individuals. Being a mother is a sacred duty : but it is also only ONE of the things that we women do : and drawing that distinction was important : as it was to truly appreciate that it really DID 'take a village to raise a kid.'

The diversity of the co-authors truly helped offer a rounded, wholesome and balanced set of advice : which the two of us may not have fully done justice to. Just like raising a kid, writing this book was also a collective effort: which made our burdens lighter, far more enjoyable, fun, and the results way better...

Tatum and Ruwanthi

PROLOGUE:

Working and having a career was awesome!

Falling in love, being serenaded and getting married was magical!

Knowing I was pregnant had both of us in absolute gushes of laughter and throes of excitement! Oh Gosh!! We were going to be parents...

With all the vomiting, cramps, getting used to the constantly 'growing' stomach and even the inability to sleep the way I used to, I was so looking forward to being a mother! The birthing pains were harrowing: but it was all worth it : that first moment I held each of my children was something that nothing can ever compare to. All my life I dreamt of being a mother: and now, it's no longer a dream...

Fast forward

The thrills of the new have been replaced by the mundane every day. Being a mother was amazingly gratifying: but one is never quite ready to think that it is something that is perpetual. If it was ONLY about the kids, it would have been quite a different story: but...

Having to be a mom AND work AND be a daughter in my own right: AND go through divorce AND try and have a life AND make sure I had a bit of adventure too... It had NEVER dawned on me that it was not quite going to be 'life as usual' : and that I needed to change course and fundamentally change my whole approach to life in general : simply because I am a mother now – and I also have to work. The old rules no longer applied: and the new rules I figured only as I went along...

We never really THINK that being a mother AND a career woman can be, and will be, and most often IS quite demanding : and that none of us are actually equipped with the skill sets required to navigate this quagmire of deeply conflicting sets of demands made of us. I so wished I had someone to navigate this with me: but it didn't take too long to understand that no one else can quite navigate life for me...

A few signposts are all I had: I so wished I had a small set of directions too...

Has it sunk in yet? If it has, then, this book is for you...

CONTENTS

Accept you are a mother now (and forever): and choose your priority	01
Understanding realities	06
Getting the support, you need and creating a positive network	32
Being Supermom	53
Some Final Tips	74

CHAPTER - 1

ACCEPT YOU ARE A MOTHER NOW (AND FOREVER): AND CHOOSE YOUR PRIORITY

Motherhood is not negotiable. Once you make a choice to be a mother, you are one forever. Never fool yourself thinking that you will outgrow it. Most mothers I know are not ready to let go of their children even after they become grandmothers. Chances are, you will follow suit. Being a working mom is also a choice you make, regardless of the reasons; a choice which will often lead to a conflict of interest. How do you prioritize? While your duty to your kids is non-negotiable, loyalty to your employer should not be compromised. Hence, think it through carefully. Once you decide to play both roles, stick with it. Prioritize every step of the way.



Do's



- **Being a mom is a choice you made: accept it**

The decision to be a mom is one of the most important choices you will ever make in life; one that could yield tremendous joy or unbearable pain. Hence, every bit of effort you put in, to get it right, will be worth it. Accept your role. Face the dilemmas. Do the BEST YOU can.

- **There IS a tough choice to be made: make it**

Remember that you're about to step onto a tightrope. The choice before you is tough. You cannot be double-minded if you want to make it to the other side. Weigh the pros and cons meticulously. Make your decision and give it your BEST shot.

- **Talk to your supervisor/manager either way about key limitations**

Before you make your final decision, speak to your superiors. Have an honest discussion about the key limitations you foresee. It's important for you to impress upon them the commitment you would continue to have towards your work but also the seriousness with which you would be adapting to your new role. No employer wishes to lose an asset. Set the stage: if you don't place value on motherhood, why should your employer?



Don'ts



- **Expect everyone to understand your choices**

This is not Utopia. You live in the real world. Don't expect everyone around you to understand or approve of the choices you make. Once you have discussed it with those who matter and have arrived at a decision, refrain from entertaining negativity. It will only weigh you down and distract you. Stay focused on the path you want to tread and where you want to get.

- **Sugarcoat your expectations and requirements**

Lay all the cards on the table, clearly; all the expectations and requirements AS THEY ARE. Sugarcoating in order to facilitate your decision would be a fatal mistake. Be realistic. Be honest with yourself and the other players involved. Negotiate. Get real.

- **Expect anyone to cut you slack: you are neither the first - nor the last 'working mom'**

If you wake up each morning at war with the world, look around and remind yourself that there are a countless number of women placing their feet on the ground along with you. For goodness sake, don't pass the buck. YOU are the mother and anyone who cooperates with you to ensure that you wake up with a smile on your face, is a bonus. You need to have the right attitude to command the respect you will need to make life easier for you. You cannot demand it.

CHAPTER - 2

UNDERSTANDING REALITIES

Working moms constantly battle to juggle all their responsibilities; from managing work, to having the house in order, fitting in their social life and neglecting self-care in the process; the struggle is very real: and it's ok not to have cracked it all too well. Yes, you will be exhausted, emotionally stretched, feel guilty about things and not have some 'you' time. But it does not have to be the norm. Sometimes you've got to take a cold approach, look at things as they are. Address one thing at a time and stop comparing yourself with others. YOU are unique and so are your methods at striving to be a good working mom.



You will be physically exhausted

Being tired pre-kids and being tired post-kids are two entirely different things. It's not a crime to be physically exhausted. That is the reality, and let's face it. You could feel worn out even if you had enough sleep, even if you had enough rest and even if you had taken a break. Such is reality.



Do's



- **Plan out your day**

As it goes, failing to plan, is planning to fail. Make sure to list down the most important things that you need to get done for the day. Be it to draft a business plan or to take your kid for a vaccination; you need to know which ones are important and urgent to complete for that day. Be realistic in planning your schedule and ensure you stick to it. You will avoid a lot of repetitive work and feel less exhausted as you complete each day.

- **Take care of yourself before you take care of others**

You can't pour from an empty cup. Taking care of yourself IS a part of taking care of your kids. Not getting enough sleep could be exhausting. Get some extra sleep when you want, meditate and engage in some form of prayer. Break up your self-care routine into smaller tasks and do one each day. Maybe color your hair one day and do the nails on another day. Taking care of yourself is not an option, but a necessity.

- **Carve out some YOU time - downtime**

Do something daily that makes you feel good and smile. There are a lot of options. From reading a book, to listening to your favorite music track, or just taking a walk outdoors. Believe it or not, it will make you re-energized and your downtime could double your effective time. This will make your job as a mother easier and help you de-stress from work.



Don'ts



- **Try to do it all**

Sometimes, it's about getting the job done; and not really about WHO has to get the job done. Delegate! – that's key to balancing your work and focusing on the priorities which need your personal attention. Perhaps a junior at work may not complete the task as well as you do; or a helper iron your clothes as neatly as you would. But hey, you do get some free time by not doing it all by yourself. Accept it!

- **Allow your kids to dictate your timetable**

It may be tempting to make your life revolve around your child; but neither of you stands to benefit from this. Kids who dictate what you do and how they need to spend the weekend or where you should go, have too much power. Making them feel like the boss is not healthy for kids. It's important to give kids the opportunity to make appropriate choices while maintaining the hierarchy.

- **Sweat the small stuff**

It's high time to give yourself a break. It's not the end of the world to have toys in random places at home. Not having something done in the exact way you would do it, is alright. You don't have to re-do the tasks. Learn to ignore : you will feel less stressed and much happier.



You will be emotionally stretched

As a working mom, your emotions will be tested in all possible ways. Opinions, advice, and judgments could overwhelm you; but don't let it get to you. Feeling low and sad at times is natural as human beings. You are not alone!



Do's



- **Learn to shrug your shoulders**

At times, you just have to let yourself do what you have to do to keep your head above water. Not everyone who gives their opinion about you being a good or bad mom has walked in your shoes. Take a step back, discern between what's related to you and what's not, and simply shrug away the negatives.

- **Meditate**

Have you ever wondered, how to have a positive mind and be energized all day? You can do that only if you release the tension and get rid of all the piled-up stress. Finding a convenient time, ideally in the morning, picking a quiet spot, and sitting in a comfortable position, is all you need to do to get started. Meditation is not only about spirituality; it's about calming the mind. There are many techniques to meditate. Research and find what best suits you.

- **Pick your battles**

It's not new wisdom: and it's best when avoided. Every opinion passed and every comment made, does not really need a response even if it's at the tip of your tongue. The more you allow yourself to be in conflict situations, the more you will get absorbed in them. You need to learn to sit them out, let things pass and not necessarily engage.



Don'ts



- **Think you can control all of it**

Whether you're a new mom or a mom many times over, in all honesty, don't think you can have it all under control. The chaos of parenting is both constant and not always predictable. So, it's ok to have days when you don't perform as well as you want to.

- **Think everyone is judging you**

Let's accept the fact that you're not the center of the universe. Everyone has their own life to deal with. So, stop worrying about everyone judging you. No one is perfect and neither are you. What's important is that you are convinced of what you are doing, and you make the right choices (for you and your children).

- **Think going to a counselor is a weakness**

The popular misconception about going to a counselor is that it's for weak people who can't manage their lives. Moms often feel bound to 'protect' their problems and are afraid that revealing them to outsiders could be seen as betrayal. Such beliefs and fears are understandable given that our culture and upbringing are not conducive to people seeking assistance for mental health. However, going to a counselor and getting professional advice, is one of the bravest and smartest decisions you could make; one that would equip you and give you the strength you need.



You will feel guilty

This can happen ever-so-often, even to the ones who balance their work and life well. You may feel guilty: on days when you have to leave your little one crying, or you forget to buy something your kid wanted for school due to work commitments. It's not a crime to fall short. You cannot possibly get it right every single time. You are doing a great job. So, quit feeling guilty.



Do's



- **Unpack your baggage**

As a working mom, your expectations, the social expectations, family pressures and often unspoken rules that you have accepted without even realizing it, could certainly be overwhelming. Over time, these very expectations, that you are unable to live up to, (or you think you have missed), could all get bottled up, and that's where the guilt builds up. LET go of those emotions. Let some things slide, and know where to draw the line.

- **Talk it out**

Bottling up all the guilty feelings could trigger fights and bursts of emotional reactions. Talk it out. It's always better late than never. First of all, have the conversation with yourself. Figure out why you feel the way you do: feel free to express your feelings, your limitations, what you can commit to and what you want to, to those around you. When you get it off your chest, you will feel much better.

- **Address issues; not ignore them**

No one ever said that it's going to be a bed of roses. Yes, there will be issues. Issues that you CAN find solutions for and issues that you CAN'T. We are often tempted to let things be, rather than address them. Having the courage to address the issue and not shy away is a competency that you must acquire.



Don'ts



- **Blame yourself for EVERYTHING**

Blaming yourself won't erase the fact, that you've made mistakes. No one is perfect, so it's unfair to blame yourself for EVERYTHING.

The best part of mistakes is that you learn to be resilient so you could prevent them the next time. Do not be too quick to blame yourself, but rather, give yourself credit for all the wonderful things that you actually do. Understand that some things are out of your control, focus on the things that you do right, and replace the blame with action.

- **Wallow in self-pity**

Bad things do happen and it happens to everyone. Don't let self-pity take control. We often don't find the courage to look at options and possibilities; rather we take the 'easy route out' telling ourselves that we can't do anything about it. Remember that there are always multiple options available if only, you're willing to spend some quality time thinking, analyzing and planning how to get ahead!

- **Give others the power to make you feel guilty/ take everything personally**

All of us grew up observing different kinds of moms; and so, we would have preconceived notions about being the 'ideal' mom.

You will also have people around you, who would constantly remind you of the things that you're not doing 'right'. Avoid such negativity as best as you can. Don't let others make you feel guilty at any cost. Don't take things personally. Forget the rules set by others. Set expectations based on your circumstances : who you are, what your kids like and your career goals. Don't give anyone else that power.

IV



You are a career woman too

Yes, motherhood is a blessing and should definitely be cherished. We often make this a reason to give up on everything else that matters to us. As much as you are a mom, you are a career woman too. Don't forget that. Balancing is an art : if you put in a little effort, you can easily master it.



Do's



- **Understand you can lose weight (if you want to)**

It may seem challenging to have a healthy lifestyle and lose weight. Amidst all the chaos, the last thing you might want to work on is, to lose your weight. Don't be discouraged. If you want to, you can. It's all in your mind. Losing weight doesn't always mean that you must go to the gym leaving all the work behind. There are many simple exercises that you can do at home whilst being conscious about the diet too. You've just got to be disciplined to stick to it.

- **Invest in grooming**

You may be playing multiple roles, immersed in getting them all lined up. Regardless of this balancing act, you must always be well-groomed. You will never know when you might be called in for a meeting or have to meet a client/customer. Do invest a little on 'yourself' – and look presentable. Trust me : it's therapeutic – and it will give you confidence to face the corporate world!

- **Invest in education / continuous learning and skill-building**

Being a mom will not give you 'extra credits' for promotions. YOU need to continue to work on your skills, participate in training, improve your knowledge and invest in your education. It might sound impossible. But if you plan for it and discipline yourself, you will find time despite your busy routine.



Don'ts



- **Give up – the journey doesn't stop**

Imagine this! Your career just started to take off - or you are at the peak of your career AND you are a MOM! Don't HALT at this point. You don't have to give up one for the other. It's a journey. Balancing work and family might get you exhausted at times; but don't give up. Believe in yourself. You can do it...draw inspiration from thousands of mothers out there. Not only can you do it, but you can keep getting better!

- **Neglect your deadlines**

Your colleagues and your boss might be extra supportive at as you are a working mom. But do not take it for granted. If you're at work, you're at work. There's no excuse for you to neglect your duties and miss out on deadlines. Plan accordingly and see that it all gets done on time. It's all about how you manage it. Continue to be a professional.

- **Make motherhood an excuse**

It's easy to use kids as an excuse to fall behind on your own insecurities and faults. Stop making excuses and work on pursuing your dreams. Look around. You're neither the first nor the last to attempt achieving success in a career whilst maintaining a happy family life. You can do it. You just have to choose your path and stick to it.

V



You will not have the time to do it all

We all have the same amount of time in a day no matter who we are. As a working mom, first of all, you need to accept that you will not have the time to do it all. You've got to make some choices, decisions as to what's best for your family and you.

Learn to prioritize, plan, and make the best out of the limited time.



Do's



- **Decide what will truly add value**

It's not about 'having' time, it's about 'making' time. Only you know and only you can decide what truly adds value. Be it a friend's outing, office party, an outbound training or family time; make sure that you spend time on what matters to you.

- **Outsource what you can**

Having trouble fitting everything into your busy schedule? If you could outsource a few of the daily chores, you could increase the time you spend with your kids or at work, or both; and it's nothing to feel guilty about. What's important is that you get it done, and not how you get it done. Start with some of the tedious household chores. When you really think about it, you'd be amazed at how much you can actually outsource.

- **Let technology help you**

We can accomplish more each day using technology. You could be more organized and prepared for a workday as well as home-life and make the balancing act a bit easier. Whichever the smart phone that you use (if you don't have a smart phone, invest in one) look for apps that will help you with specific tasks. For example, there are apps to manage grocery lists, which could be shared with other people, schedulers and apps to track finances. Why keep it all in your head and risk forgetting to act on it? This will only add to your stress. Use technology, de-stress and have your reminders at your fingertips.



Don'ts



- **Expect everything to go according to plan**

When you choose to be a working mom, you have to accept that not EVERYTHING will go according to plan. It's ok to let some things slide. Change plans and you can still make the best out of the situation. It's ok to politely decline a party when you feel like staying back even if you have confirmed your presence in advance. People will understand when there is a genuine reason. Plans will change! Adapt!

- **Add to the pile – learn to say NO**

We live in a 'yes' culture, where we're constantly expected take on more responsibilities and more work. As a working mom, with the limited time you have at hand, be it at work, or with family and friends, you have to learn to say 'NO' when it's absolutely necessary to do so. We're not comfortable saying 'NO' as we may feel guilty, fear rejection or the loss of an opportunity, or simply because we genuinely want to help. You have to decide what your highest priorities are, and have the courage to politely say 'NO' to other things.

CHAPTER - 3

GETTING THE SUPPORT, YOU NEED AND CREATING A POSITIVE NETWORK

Remember : you don't really have to do it all alone. We ALL have a support network around us : though some of us never see it as such. Family, Friends and Colleagues can all help us in being a mother : and also a career woman. What we need to learn is to ensure we INVOLVE them when required : and ensure we are able to forge meaningful relationships that augment our ability to juggle our multiple roles.



Husbands or Partners



Do's



- **Assign Tasks**

The roles you and your husband/partner play do NOT have to be based on gender stereotypes : rather : focus on each other's competencies. NEVER take on things you don't like : or force your husband or partner to take on things they don't like. Remember, you are 'equal' partners in raising your child(ren) and therefore need to actively and positively engage in it : rather than taking on tasks grudgingly.

- **Make it fun**

Please don't forget to have fun TOGETHER. Often, the 'fun' goes away from a marriage after kids come along : and activities become monotonous and drab. Take the effort to have a laugh - even over the everyday stuff : and allow yourselves to be the good friends you were. Having kids, and being a mom should not make you boring !

- **Keep the channels of communication open**

Always, always, make time to talk. Talk NOT ONLY about the things you need to 'fix' but talk about 'little things that don't matter' too... If things are NOT going according to plan (which will certainly be the case often enough), take the time to dive into it : rather than ignoring it. Create dialogue : never shut those channels down...



Don'ts



- **Take you partner for granted**

Your husband/partner is a person too : and each person is different. Just because other fathers/partners do certain things, don't expect it from your husband/partner. Remember : being taken for granted can go both ways : and it will deeply hurt them if they are forever considered just a 'spare wheel.' Take the time to show you care : that you love them deeply : and proactively seek opportunities to make them feel appreciated.

- **Forget you are a wife/partner too**

Don't forget to keep the romance alive. Being parents can often dull the spark : never allow it to be completely extinguished. Take the time to go on a date or two. Be spontaneous – as often as you can. As much as you have duties and responsibilities towards your kids : remember you have them towards your spouse too. Also remember, your spouse came before the kids !

- **Don't go to bed angry**

Resolve issues. The same day if possible. NEVER go to bed angry with each other. Give a cuddle. Make up. Say 'I Love You' and go to bed ensuring you are at peace...



Parents and In-laws



Do's



- **Draw the line (parenting styles)**

We may well rely on our parents and our in-laws : but remember to always draw boundaries and the proverbial 'lines on the sand' that should not be crossed. Parenting styles differ : and it is important that you and your husband/partner set the tone here : NOT the grandparents. NEVER allow that role to be unclear.

- **Treat both sets of parents equally**

It is not easy to treat someone else's parents as your own : but make every effort to do so. NEVER draw the distinction between 'yours and mine' when it comes to parents. Give the same love, attention, care to both sets of parents - as equally as humanly possible.

- **Allow them to be grandparents**

Please understand that grandparents are going to 'spoil' your children : allow them that joy. Of-course, like we said before, draw the line when it is required : but DO allow them to just enjoy your kids : and do what they like with them. The best way to do this is to give them the kids 'exclusively' for short periods of time : weekends, long holidays, etc., offer great opportunities for the kids to have a whale of a time with the grandparents - and the two of you to chill in peace : so, ever so often, abuse the privilege !



Don'ts



- **Make them substitute parents**

NEVER be tempted to overuse your parents or your spouse's. Sure, you will always need them to do the balancing act you have to perform : but remember THEY ARE NOT YOUR KID'S PARENTS. So, NEVER palm that responsibility over and get annoyed at the 'grandparents' for 'not doing it right' !

- **Forget they are getting old**

NEVER forget they are old - and getting OLDER. Remember also that YOU are THEIR child : so, spend some 'daughter' time with them too : without always bringing the children over. Cook for them, take them shopping, sit and talk to them, watch a movie together : and make sure you are with them as much as you can.

They have a lot less time on the earth than you do - so, be conscious of it.

- **Play politics**

NEVER resort to politics within the family. Don't encourage it, don't resort to it, don't ignore it either. Just like at work, play it straight : play it right : and play it fair.



Friends



Do's



- **Keep in touch**

Make time to keep in touch. A quick mail, a quick call, a hi and a hello and comment on FB or Insta... Better still, catch up for a quick lunch whilst the kids are at school : for a movie with the kids in tow, or dinner where families catch up. Save time for friends : they are an amazing source of strength and comfort when you are going through your worst.

- **Call in a favor when required**

They ARE your friends : don't feel guilty about calling in that favor. Don't worry about it. When you need it the most : they will BE there. However, NEVER abuse it either : and remember, relationships go both ways : so, please do make sure they get favors in return too !

- **Choose your friends wisely**

Not ALL of your friends need to be friends. There are those whom you truly need to be close to : and those you need to keep at arm's length : and that distinction becomes all the more important when you are pressed for time. Choose wisely.



Don'ts



- **Forget they have their own lives**

Time with friends must be at their convenience too. Ensure you understand that timings must work BOTH WAYS. You may be 'lugged' with the kids : but they may be equally 'lugged' with something else which may seem trivial to you : but maybe all important to them. So, empathize with the fact that they have 'lives' too !

- **Become a leech**

Don't be 'needy.' Don't overextend the courtesies. Don't overstay the visits. Don't always expect them to pay at outings. Don't always expect them to pick you up. Don't be a leech !

- **Expect to have the same fun as before**

We ALL grow : and change over time. What WAS fun when you were younger may no longer be fun. Some will still do that all-nighter infused with the B52s, topped off with the Tequilas : but others may actually want their 8 hours of sleep. Let 'fun' evolve too... It's ok...

IV



Colleagues



Do's



- **Call in a favor when required**

It's ok to call in a favor from a colleague when you need it : especially with regard to tough deadlines and difficult assignments. Remember not to make it a habit though. Favors are an exception : not the rule...and must be returned!

- **Set out expectations clearly**

Make sure your colleagues know your limitations - and that you are absolutely clear about it. If you can't work extended hours because you don't have a nanny or day care facilities : make it absolutely clear. NEVER create expectations unless you can keep them.

- **Understand that your child is not their problem**

When it comes to work : be a professional. YOUR children are no one else's 'problem' but yours. Learn to be someone others can depend on and trust : someone who always HONORS a commitment made.



Don'ts



- **Make your private life public**

Do keep a part of your life private. Don't overtly use social media to put every little thing about the children 'out there' : there is wisdom in knowing where to draw the line.

- **Abuse kindness**

Don't always call on the colleagues who always bail you out. They are kind enough : so don't ever overextend that generosity. Make the effort to do something generous in kind. Remember to appreciate their kindness. NEVER abuse it !

- **Neglect participating in organizational activities**

As much as your personal friends, your work colleagues are also an important cornerstone of your support structure. NEVER neglect company events that are organized to increase camaraderie. Rather, take the opportunity to meet work colleagues that you may not always be in touch with. Company events are great opportunities to 'take a load off' too : so, make use of them !

CHAPTER - 4

BEING SUPERMOM

SUPERMOM - Fact or Fiction?

When you take on the title 'Mother', you have essentially signed-up for a full-time, lifetime commitment. Quite a beautiful title really: but now add to this family demands, a dash of social pressure, a pinch of educational commitments, just a dab of household chores, gently fold in the commitment to spouse and to garnish, add on your Career!

Honestly the demands of a modern-day mother are quite Herculean, and if you are reading this book then you are expected to wear many hats. The nurturing Mom hat, the homemaker hat, the attentive and alluring wife hat and the successful career woman hat! Good thing women are notorious multitaskers!

Enter SUPER MOM!! - Here are some firsthand, helpful tips on keeping it all together – well most of the time, and doing so with a smile on your face!!



Making time for your kids

It's important to consciously carve out time from your day to spend with the kids. Just like you are handed responsibilities at work and you can't let your team/manager down, your responsibilities towards your children cannot be left on a back burner either. They are after all the ones who are the constant in your life. Offices may change, bosses will come and go, but your children will always be connected to you.



Do's



- **Understand where you can make the biggest impact**

You are obviously expected to do everything simultaneously and do them well too. STOP! Start by looking at each area separately and ask yourself how much time you would need to spend and how much of an impact it would create in the grander scheme of things. Lock in on areas that you know you will have the biggest impact. Almost the 80/20 principle where 20% of your effort will impact 80% of things. List these down and this is where you will start. Sometimes you might need to consider long term implications too. So you need to decide between spending time with the kids, helping them with their studies, cooking those balanced meals or cleaning the house, see where your impact is felt the most. Delegate the rest.

- **Create Independence**

Everyone needs to learn how to be 'independent' – this is what we teach our children, from feeding themselves to taking their first steps as toddlers. This should be practiced – age appropriately of course. Encourage them to complete little tasks themselves, like getting dressed alone, doing the easy bits of homework that they can manage, these are ultimately the little things that take a load off MOM! Focus on this at an early stage, the initial bits will require an investment in time, but the long term pay off is independent kids who can manage themselves, while you get better managing your time.

- **Take your holidays when they have holiday**

Have you had situations where you are at work trying to focus on those deadlines and you keep getting calls from home...every 5 mins??? How many times have you asked yourself, why do they have so many holidays, even though this is just a 3-day break for the kids? Well you need to plan better. You know well in advance when the school has holidays and when the statutory holidays are. Plan yours accordingly. That way not only are you able to spend time with the kids, but you are also able to spend quality time and do more meaningful things - with the kids and for yourself too! What's more? You will be able to focus better at work!



Don'ts



- **Think that Presents can substitute Presence**

No matter how many times Santa decides to visit or no matter how expensive that toy is, it will NEVER compensate for quality time with your kids. The attention given to them to guide them, to build them, can never be substituted. Lost time can never be recovered. As their mother there will always be that special connection and it is important to nurture that connection for the long-term benefit of the child...not a temporarily solution! Also, think carefully of the value system you are instilling...remember it is the presence not the presents that count!

- **Make working long hours a habit**

Agreed, your job is important as it helps to contribute financially towards home. Under these circumstances, for most, long working hours eventually become a part of working life. However, you really need to remember that as a "Super Mom" you need to be successful in your career AS WELL as in being a mother.

Occasionally you could be called upon to stay after hours for a pressing deadline. Know when you are going the extra mile and know when you are going overboard. Never let it form a habit, because your 9-hour job will suddenly become a 12-hour role. This will not only set the wrong precedence at work but will most certainly deprive your kids of valuable bonding time and learning opportunities.

- **Bring work home**

Just because you stopped working late, DOES not mean you bring work home! Being a supermom demands a lot of your time.

However, it also requires for you to be more disciplined. This means you need to learn to manage your time at work and become efficient. Delegate where you need to. But DO NOT bring work home! The occasional call from office, can be tolerated; not encouraged.

The flip side: would you take your kid's science project to work, to complete it during work hours because you couldn't finish it at home? – unless of course you were trying to prove a point.

Practice work-life balance without being extreme.



Making the most of your time with the kids

Not to be mistaken with carving out time, it's actually about being present in the moment with them. Using the time wisely as teaching/learning opportunities. Being in a calm frame of mind and not thinking that you doing chores around the house equates quality time. Do chores on your own time or find creative ways of getting the kids involved.



Do's



- **Understand what they want from you - Pick out things that they will enjoy as well**

To sum it up simply, there will NEVER be enough time to spend with your kids! These energetic little beings will always beat us out right when it comes to endless energy, imagination and short attention spans! They always want to do SOMETHING! Well it's up to SUPER MOM to pick out the activity that gives everyone, kids and mom the most joy! Limited time, limited energy – aim for greater impact!

- **Be THERE**

This is very important! Don't be the 'lights on but no one's home' person. Please be switched on. It's not just your physical presence, but your emotional and mental presence are equally, if not more, important. Never do things as a tick in the box exercise. Spend each minute and MEAN every bit of it...whether it's with the homework or prep for a test or to just listen to them ramble on about the day, repeating the same story twice....It does not matter...just give them your undivided attention and time, wholeheartedly! Ask them questions, engage with them! Give the same amount of enthusiasm you would, when listening to your office-mates gossip, to your kid talking about a classroom drama. While you are at it, also talk to them about your work and the day's happenings. They will love the inclusion. (Age appropriate of course)

- **Plan Holidays with creating memories as your focus**

Definitely, best planned in advance, being spontaneous is fine but don't make it a tick in the box exercise. The key word being PLAN. You know the holidays are coming up. Book your leave. You want to make memories, not to just look good on social media. First commit to doing at least one thing for everyone in the family and one that everyone will enjoy. The experience of these activities should be committed to memory and embedded in the heart. These are things you can look back at and talk about as a family.



Don'ts



- **Be in a bad mood when you are with them**

Being there physically and mentally is great, but not if you are on ogre or hulk mode. If you are in a crabby mood, it's best to address that issue first, instead of passing the negative vibes on to your kids. Remember making memories...you don't want them remembering you as morphing into Shrek or Fiona at the slightest provocation. Plus, it's unfair on them. Take a moment, have some tea, a nice long shower, then turn up the music and dance it off with the kids. Mood-shift before taking on the kids – this is not an option.

- **Get into unnecessary arguments**

When you carve out one-on-one mom time, remember you are dealing with Kids! Not your peers! Kids will be kids and as a supermom you are required to have different perspectives on each situation. It's not to say that you don't correct them when they are wrong, but knowing when the correction will ruin the mood; so pick up that point later and move on. Not only for the sake of your sanity but also for the sake of the kids. Do pick up the hard discussion later, or the correction later. Count to 10 if you have to, but hold back and think carefully of all the repercussions, before unleashing your authority!!!

- **Micromanage**

We all crib about that pedantic micromanaging manager, who is always on our case, always looking for faults and having their finger in every pie? – Oh! how you detest it!! So, don't do that with your kids! Kids are built to be messy, loud and experiential learners. Be there when they look for guidance, use opportunities to groom them, but do let them make that mess, and figure things out. Help them put things right when they ask for help. We are growing independent individuals with the ability to think. So, let them do just that. Save's a chunk of your time as well, go bake something if you have the overwhelming compulsion to micromanage, the measuring and exacting of this exercise will satiate your need to be in control and the outcome will hopefully be delicious!



Bringing some of your expertise as a career woman to help the kids

Are you nailing it at work? Great. Let's channel that skill into managing your home front and home affairs. After all you are building little leaders of the future? Give them the - best start from home. According to a study by the Harvard Business School, kids of working mothers grow into happy capable adults, and perform better in their eventual careers.



Do's



- **Learn to Manage your kids**

Being MOM is not the easiest job in the world especially if it's your first crack at it. But remember your first job as a newbie? Having to learn the proverbial corporate ropes; Learning to manage your first team; Navigate your boss's high demands. If you have accomplished this, it is because you have gained some serious soft skills. People Management, Time Management, Emotional IQ and Collaboration (well if you haven't then, think of signing up for a Luminary session). If you have – then please channel all this learning on the little people in the house. Manage them, coach them and transfer your skills. These mini individuals are going to end up in the corporate jungle – there are plenty of things kids can learn from their working mom: like commitment, equality and determination!

- **Apply Policy, procedure, rewards and penalty schemes at home**

In your mini 'home' office environment go all out on implementing policies and procedures and rewards and recognition schemes. Yes, if we want to go all out and get all technical about it. It boils down to good old-fashioned discipline, with incentives for good behavior. Always make sure your YES means YES, NO means NO. Exercise a level of freedom, your kids must know that there are rules and guidelines within which to operate and live their life. Have that discussion and clear this as early as possible. As you would incentivize them for good work, also remember to penalize them for failure or breach of rules. It works well in an office environment, there is no reason this should fail at home.

- **Take a leaf off mentoring**

Mentoring has been cited as one of the most rewarding experiences; being mentored and being a mentor. Children recognize that they are being offered a measure of respect and importance and in return they reciprocate with desired behavior patterns and independence. Children also learn through observation, so if you are seeing a change in behavior, first take a look at the immediate environment. Oftentimes the problem lies at home. When in the wrong, gentle coaching (unless its life threatening) is the best approach. Think of it as building mini leaders and skilling them for life ahead!



Don'ts



- **Only manage – lead**

Managing becomes very task oriented and administrative. While this is important, when getting things on the home front done, and efficiently at that, also ensure you LEAD. Don't just give commands and expect results. Work with them so that you become not just an authoritative figure but also are seen as a friend. Planting seeds of trust and comfortability – they won't be kids forever!

- **Be a hypocrite**

A vital part of leadership is ensuring that you are able to walk the talk. Again, unlike us in our childhood, where we would never question our parents and where we were not that curious, our kids are way ahead of the game. They are very observant and do not hesitate to ask questions. So whatever you do...ALWAYS Walk The Talk! Make sure that your rules are not broken by you! Kids are very quick at picking up on this!

- **Stop being mom**

We have talked endlessly about applying your managerial skills, and soft skills in the home front for better management. Yes, we spoke about making them independent, accountable, and performance driven rewards. But you are mom. Always have your arms open and freely hand out hugs, kiss the 'ouchies', and when time progresses sooth the broken heart.

IV



Finding the balance between being tough and being fun

Yes, a critical skill to navigate the “Parenting Pendulum” between being fun and enforcing discipline. Recognize that fun is required on the home front, so is law and order. It’s the careful balance of enjoying TODAY and equipping a child for that SOMEDAY. There isn’t a perfect description or formula for what the fun-order balance should look like and not one size fits all. But here are some basics to guide you towards a good starting point!



Do's



- **Understand that you are the parent**

So it is important to be a friend as well so that they trust you enough to confide when required. But you are the parent so if your kid does not eat vegetables or drink milk, - in general cultivate a healthy eating habit, then that's on you! The choices your child will make are based on the options they are given by you. At times this may be a mammoth task, but as a parent no matter how difficult, you are the responsible one and therefore will be required to make the hard choices.

- **Understand that parents can be fun too**

Remember we spoke about wearing the appropriate hat? Parenting can be tough! But bring with it an element of fun! Don't always be the disciplinarian, let your partner take some of that burden on. Instead, sometimes revert to being just the parent who gets down doing the grubby stuff with the kids, playing Lego, letting go and have child-like fun! Maybe you are into outdoor adventure, get the kids in on it. Find those areas and activities which will enhance that component or will confirm that fact that you are capable of having fun.

- **Actively involve them in decision making**

Inclusion in the family is the biggest boon for a child. Mitigating self-esteem issues being one of the most critical factors. Now we are not expecting you to run a total democracy at home, some decisions cannot be negotiated. However, whenever possible bring them in and let them have a say; perhaps in choosing the color of their room, the plants for the new landscaping project, where to go out to dinner or even places to visit on vacation (get them to do the research) and listen and validate their opinions.

This will make them great decision makers someday.



Don'ts



- **Make a threat you can't execute**

Make sure that if you make a threat, you hold true to it. Are you taking away their phone privileges? For how long? Stick to it don't give in. Are you canceling the trip on account of bad grades? - great! But don't change your mind at the last minute. When you fail to uphold your threat, you will never be taken seriously and it will be downhill from there. You have invalidated your authority as a parent. Making threats is a slippery slope. So, don't make empty threats in haste and in the heat of the moment. It's okay to differ a punishment till you can construct one that really hurts. Be clear and deliberate. Just like not making promises you can't keep, don't make threats you won't implement.

- **Mistake equity for equality**

Leveling the playing field for your kids, perhaps in the quality and choice of education is creating a level playing field for both of them – amounting to equality. However, doling out the same punishment to a 3-year-old and 10-year-old, will never get you equity. We need to give our kids equal opportunities, but never treat them the same. Kids can be different in age, gender, personalities. Grounding your introverted kid won't be as effective as if you were to ground your extroverted kid. Giving your 3-year-old a time out is not the same as giving your 10-year-old a time out – this makes the punishment fail on the equity front.

Same when rewarding. When providing opportunities go for equality, for punishment and rewards apply common sense and equity!

- **Overthink it (Instinct)**

Finally, for all good intents and purposes, use your instinct. Don't rely wholly on what society tells you to be, do or feel. You will know when things are working well for you and when they are failing. Just have the good sense to realize this and stop and take account of what you are doing. Don't overthink and over analyze, just channel into your navel chakra and go with your gut feel!

You've got this!!

CHAPTER - 5

SOME FINAL TIPS



Tips for moms who work from home

While this segment has been put together with work-from-home moms in mind, it must be noted that most of the tips in the preceding sections are applicable to both. Contrary to the popular notion that working from home is easier, it could actually be much harder to navigate. Gaining respect, acknowledgement and cooperation from those around you could prove to be a tedious process; and self-discipline, a nightmare. It's imperative that you don't take things lightly.

Your attitude and commitment towards what you do will determine the response from those around you. Remember to maximize the opportunity of working from home as it gives you a chance to model for your kids.



Do's



- **Have a work space arranged**

Kids will be kids; curious by nature. In order to ensure that your work stays where it should be and you don't have to deal with unnecessary drama with your kids or the rest of the household, have a clearly designated workspace. From the word go, set boundaries. Keep your workspace neat and tidy and show it the respect it deserves. Make use of this opportunity to set standards for your kids with regard to their attitude towards their study space.

- **Set work times (don't compromise)**

If you are to function efficiently and balance your responsibilities, time management is key. Set definite work times in your daily schedule, and unless it's a matter of life or death, don't compromise. If you dance each time someone claps or you lack discipline in your time management, why would anyone else take you seriously?

- **Explain to everyone that this is work**

When you make the decision to work from home, have a discussion with your partner, kids and any others involved in your day-to-day life. Send out a clear signal that you will not be disturbed during your scheduled work hours. Refrain from entertaining visits, calls or socializing on social media. If it helps, have a clock in/out log book. Let your kids see you and internalize the message. Or perhaps, you could set an alarm. Send the message out loud and clear that this is work YOU take seriously; work that pays bills and puts food on the table. Make it an opportunity to let your kids feel special and loved knowing that you chose to stay with them rather than go out to work and interact with others.



Don'ts



- **Take on more that you can chew**

Whether you need to make more money or not, remember that you made a decision to work from home for a particular reason. If you're going to be at your desk round the clock, it would defeat the purpose. When you take on assignments and schedule your time, be realistic. Be cautious in taking work which will pressurize you to compromise your 'mom' commitments.

- **Procrastinate**

One of the worst pitfalls of working from home is procrastination.

The mere fact that you're at home is bound to make you feel entitled to slip in a cat nap, steal a chat or attend to a temper tantrum. However, the delicate balance required to walk your tightrope demands sticking to schedule. Deadlines have to be met regardless of where you work from. You cannot afford to put off what you need to deliver on, in either of your roles. You cannot steal from Paul to pay Peter. Face hard facts: children fall ill, people gatecrash, life just happens. If you accumulate tasks, you will only entangle yourself in a web. If you have to do something at a particular time, DO IT!! Not later, but NOW!!

- **Think that others have to work to your timing**

When you sit down to make your schedule, don't make the mistake of assuming that everyone else will fit into it. Discuss with the other players involved. Remember that you're a team. Factor in your commitment to your kids and the other members of your household. Don't be inconsiderate by making your schedule and then expecting them to adjust to your timing. It isn't going to happen! You will only pave the way for disharmony and resentment towards your work. YOU get paid to do the work. Timing is your responsibility.



Tips for single moms

Being a working mom, even with the support of those around you can prove to be tedious, and at times even thankless. Add the status of 'single mom' to that and Voila! You top it all! With this Sisyphean task ahead of you, immaculate planning, commitment to decisions made, gritting your teeth and getting on with it and having zero expectations from those around you, will make your journey easier. Each day you have to tell yourself: "I can do this!" And YOU WILL!!



Do's



- **Make your kids being independent a matter of urgency**

Considering the predicament you're in, empowering your kids to be independent is a matter of urgency. You do not have superpowers, although you may be a hero to your kids. You have the same 24 hours all other mother have; but less hands. There is only so much you can do. Concentrate on your work and teach your kids to engage in independent activities. Don't use your kids to fill the void. They cannot take the place of your partner. Make them secure in you by striving to be dependable and exemplary but ensure that they are able to survive in the world without you, if they have to. Besides, you need to work to keep the home fires burning. So get on with it.

- **Look at childcare options**

You don't have to do it all. Find the best available childcare options you can access. Once your child is secure and taken care of, your mind will be at ease to devote to your work. Finding alternate care for your kids DOES NOT make you a bad mom. But how you set about it might. Hence, ensure that you do your research and find recommended care. Make responsible decisions.

- **Make financial stability a priority**

"Money isn't everything, but everything needs money." You cannot afford to be lackadaisical and wishy-washy about your finances. Do yourself a favor and prioritize financial stability. This will not only make your life easier and increase your quality of life, but it will, more importantly, empower you and enable you to call the shots. You will no longer need to dance to anyone else's tune in order to obtain assistance. The faster you fix your finances, the sooner everything else will fall into place.



Don'ts



- **Try to fill the gap**

Be the best mom you can possibly be to your kids. But remember that you cannot take the place of their father. Don't make the mistake of trying to fill the gap or play tug of war. If their father is in their lives, give him his due place, build bridges where possible, but DO NOT try to replace him. Be content with your role. You don't need to prove yourself. YOU are their mom and they will love you anyway. Just love them in return and enjoy your life with them.

- **Be bullied by others**

Acknowledge the fact that you are a sitting target and people will throw stones at you. Unless you're extremely lucky, your kids will carry the 'broken home' or 'fatherless child' label. The bullies will find you a fascinating target and what you will find most distressing will be the darts aimed by those closest to you. To retaliate or condemn yourself would be the greatest mistakes you will make. You have nothing to prove to them. Your responsibility is to protect your kids and provide for them, and take care of yourself. Be confident in who you are; be responsible; avoid hypocrisy and rise to the occasion. You don't have time to waste on negative emotions. Avoid toxic people, find ways to cut off access and build on the support groups you have cultivated.

- **You have a life too**

In your attempt to carry out your responsibilities as a single mom, don't forget that YOU matter too. Don't empower people to make you feel guilty about personal decisions you make. Do remember however, though, that your kids look up to you. You are their role model. Ensure that you practice what you preach and set standards. While it is important for you to focus on your kids, it is equally important that you take care of yourself. Unless you're happy, you cannot give your best to your kids. Don't let anyone else dictate terms to you or rob you of your right to life. Get off the guilt trip. It's your life. Live it to the fullest!

EPILOGUE:

They are not going to be kids forever...

We are NOT raising kids : we are raising FUTURE ADULTS. True. However, kids will not remain kids forever either. So, finding that fine balance is important : as is the ability to take a chill pill and truly, truly enjoy them : all through the growing years. Each 'phase' comes but once : and each phase certainly has its fair share of absolute joys.

Memories are what we have once they are all grown up and leave home to pursue lives of their own : so, collect as many as you can...

Motherhood is to be enjoyed. So is your career. It IS possible to do well in both : and we SHOULD do well in both - but possibly maybe not both at the SAME TIME. If you HAVE TO CHOOSE, choose wisely knowing that careers CAN take off later on too : but your kids are not going to remain kids until YOU are ready to enjoy them. Time ticks on : how YOU decide to fill it is completely up to you...

Parenting is never an exact science. Neither is going up in your career. Wade through it with your wits around you : and your sanity intact : knowing that it will NEVER be perfect for too long. However, those all elusive perfect moments in time DO exist : so, savor them when they DO come your way...

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



VIDUSHA NATHAVITHARANA

Vidusha is currently the Destiny Architect at High5 Consultancy and Training and also the organization's founder member. His areas of expertise lies with strategy facilitation, HR strategy development and Leadership Training. He has conducted assignments in 15 countries regionally and consulted for the World Bank, the UN as well as some of the top corporates in Sri Lanka and the Region. He is also a member of the board of directors for Chrysalis, a social enterprise working to empower women and youth by fostering inclusive growth in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.



ANTON THAYALAN

Anton is a multi-faceted professional who has had over two decades of hands on experience in process improvement, change management and strategic management. As the former AVP at HSBC DPL Anton won accolades for his superlative work there: and won the prestigious HSBC Group Service – Global Talent Management Member two years in a row. Anton currently works as a consultant focusing on efficiency and productivity improvement and process optimization for local and regional Clients.



RUWANTHI WIJESINGHE

Ruwanthi Wijesinghe, an educator in English for over three decades, at both secondary and tertiary levels, has her roots in the corporate/development sectors. Her tenures with Wesptac Banking Corporation (Australia), United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the International Water Management Institute (IWM) gained her international exposure while her quality of work earned her awards of excellence. She is a graduate of the University of Peradeniya with an honours degree in Sociology.



ZAFRANA NAFEES

Zafrana started her career with Classic travels as a Corporate Planning Executive. She soon discovered her niche in Marketing and has since risen to being the Head of Marketing & CSR for Classic Travel & Expolanka Leisure Group. Zafrana in 10 short years has added to her list of accolades: the youngest member to be a part of the management team, party to the team attaining the Gold Award for best B2B Brand at SLIM Brand Excellence 2018, and was identified as one of the 'Most Influential Global Marketing Leaders' (Annual Global Marketing Excellence Awards ceremony organized by the World Brand Congress at Taj Lands End in Mumbai in 2017). Zafrana is a City & Guilds certified trainer, a Toastmaster and and was the Vice President Education of the Expolanka Toastmasters club for the year 2014/2015



TATUM DE SOUZA

Tatum started her career in the banking sector, working both Locally and Internationally, culminating as a Corporate Relationship Manager. Her 18 year career includes exposure in the areas of Sales and Marketing, Content Creation, Creative Writing, HR, Event Management & Social Media Management, covering industries such as Hospitality, Telco, Recruitment and Education.