

Sunday Mail July 8-15

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Multi-award-winning and internationally successful theatre and film director.

I think this article is spot on. I'm now in my 50s and I've probably had one of the most successful theatre careers in the country. I have an Emmy award, a Centenary medal... a shelf full of awards. I've opened shows on Broadway and the West End. I've directed Shakespeare all over the world...it goes on and on, but I've never had children and I did not have a partner until I was 45 and there is a reason for that. There was not time, I was racing, and I also had an awareness that as a woman I felt I had to be extra focused and committed and extra high-achieving to make any mark at all. I never had a plan. I just knew I had to work fast and furious. I never had chance for a personal life.

By the time I got to 45 I started to realise that I was hugely successful career-wise, but as a person I was very isolated and quite lonely.

I didn't make the decision not to have children, I just worked so hard for so long and I didn't meet anyone until I started to slow down. By the age of 45 I met the bloke next door to the house I had not lived in for 15 years. He's still with me...but up until then I was alone - I was celibate for a decade.

Not having children deeply saddens me because as the career slows down and you are in your 50s, you suddenly look around and go: "Where is my life?"

I feel very lucky, and grateful and privileged and proud of what I have achieved but it's all been at the expense of having a family life. I grew up in the '60s with women's liberation and I bought it lock, stock and barrel. I bought the feminist dream entirely and nothing deterred me. In the article she talks about taking a break to go home and bring up the children, but I couldn't find the time or the circumstance to

WORK, LIFE, FAMILY AND ALL THAT

GENEVIEVE MEEGAN

SUNDAY WRITER



*It's the magazine cover story that went viral, amassing more than a million hits and firing up the debate about work-life balance and women juggling high-powered jobs and family. In *The Atlantic*, author Anne-Marie Slaughter - a top US academic and former head of policy planning for US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton - wrote of her decision to leave her Washington post to spend more time with her husband and teenage children. Her contention that "You really still can't have it all" has aroused furious arguments for and against. SUNDAY opened the debate to six successful women.*

have children. I woke up at 45 and went: "Oh my God, it's too late." I think it's easier than it was in my time 25 years ago and there are more pathways for women but it's still very difficult to juggle these issues.

CHRISTINE ZEITZ

Director corporate affairs, British Aerospace Engineering Systems.

I absolutely agree... that a high-powered, challenging role makes it difficult to spend quality time with your children. What we are wanting to achieve is where you can realise professional and family needs, but there is often a sacrifice. If I had it all I'd still be playing squash; I love squash, but I gave it up because it's not as important as being with the kids. So I took up running instead because I can run anywhere.

I wouldn't say I've made more sacrifices than my peers but I would say that I've built flexibility into my role and if that was not possible I would not be able to do what I do.

What we want is a situation where more women can contribute in challenging roles and not feel like they have to exit for family reasons. This old paradigm of having to be visible at work from 6am to 8pm to show commitment, that's what needs to be challenged. You should be measured on output, not on how often you are in the office. That means men as well as women. If we don't have the men asking to drop the kids off at school and care for older parents... then it's all down to the female.

It's fundamental that men feel they can do that without damaging their careers. There needs to be that flexibility. But generally, I think women don't want to ask for that flexibility because first, they don't want to be seen as being favoured; and second, they say: "Why would they change the structure of the role for me?"

I do see an increase in women coming back

to work in roles either part time or job sharing, but where I don't see that happening is in senior roles. I'm very passionate about this. It goes back to a key issue for the country - we are now number one in OECD countries when it comes to educating women...and yet for workplace participation of women we are at 23 or 24. So we are not... utilising that intellectual property in the workplace - that's not very clever. I don't think it's about having it all - I think it's about having enough to say to yourself, "I'm happy".

SUZU REINTALS

Commercial lawyer in the energy and resources sector, including almost a decade as general counsel of Origin Energy. She now runs her own consultancy.

I was talking to some girlfriends about this and they agreed that it is a fallacy to say you can have it all. My view is that life is all about compromise. You make decisions based on what suits you or confronts you at a particular time. But it's not just women. I know of a number of men who decided to move from a corporate position of demand in order to be more available to the family. These issues are also confronted by people who run three or four jobs, or do shift work. That does not seem to have the same

glorification as when it's confronted by the corporates.

Look at Julia Gillard - could she do what she does if she had a family? That's a decision she's had to make. How many days in the last two months has she been home and would her partner be a stay-at-home dad if they had kids? Maybe it's a societal thing where the younger people of today want to have it all and have it now.

When I spoke to my girlfriends about this we agreed that you are forced to make decisions in life and you will have to make sacrifices somewhere - that is what life is all about.

ABBIE ALLEN

Founder of Lifestyle Elements, a personal concierge service, which she runs with husband Tim.

After reading this article my first thought, to quote Oprah, was: "We can have it all. Just not all at once."

That is my perspective. We also can't do it all on our own. You can't be expected to have a child, have a career, have the house in perfect order and manage it all without help.

It's also important to ask what does "having it all" actually mean to you?

For us at the moment, our top priorities are our family and our business.

When I started my business, at the age of 23, I made a conscious decision to create work that offered the flexibility I wanted in life and for me that involved





having children in the future. I think there is an expectation for career women, or anyone looking to progress their career, that you need to work long hours. I'm just not sure whether this is an expectation from the corporate world or whether we set up these expectations for ourselves. I also wonder whether we've really questioned that - have we tried to get more creative in our solutions about what we are trying to achieve?

It is a challenge to work from home with a young child and the nature of our business... is that people ring us and need something quickly, so that is a juggle. Yet we enjoy it and we work together to make it happen.

NATASHA STOTT-DESPOJA
Former Senator and leader of the Australian Democrats, she is now a board member for non-profits, including beyondblue, a media commentator, and a lecturer at the University of Adelaide.

[When *Sunday* asked her to comment on this topic, the busy mother of two was completing a lecture and preparing to travel overseas. In-flight, she edited this piece, previously written for *Harpers Bazaar*, and sent it to us so she could have her say on a topic she is passionate about.]

On my final day in Federal Parliament - after almost 13 years as a Senator - a TV journalist gleefully asked: "Can't you finally admit it? Women can't have it all?"

I am not willing to concede that having it all is a "myth" for women while men are not even asked the question.

My decision to leave federal politics was primarily so I could spend more time with my young family - four-year-old Conrad, and nine-month-old Cordelia (now seven and four). It was an empowering decision and one that suited my

life at that point. Especially after nearly 13 years in federal politics and having entered as the youngest woman ever at 26.

Many men have made a similar choice, whether it's a career switch or leaving a job so they can be with their families more often, and we don't interpret their decision that combining family and work life is "too hard".

I was fortunate to be in a position where I could exercise choice. It wasn't an admission of failure or inability to cope nor intended as a message to other women that it is "too hard". I'm proud of how I combined my work and family life. Of course, we cannot have everything all the time, but why is it women's life choices that are so analysed and criticised?

Being able to make choices is what feminism is about. But the way women's choices are scrutinised remains unfair.

I am not sure it's the shine of the supermum tag or superhero status that we're after. Isn't it the right to make similar choices to men and not be judged by different standards?

The answer is not to wrench women out of the workforce but to provide better support structures so that women - and men - can better balance their work and family commitments and do what research tells us they want to do, which is spend more quality time with their family and friends.

Having it all is achievable, but no one can do it without support - such as flexible workplace practices; accessible, affordable childcare and paid parental leave.

Maybe work-life balance is like happiness - striven for but elusive, ephemeral, sometimes deceptive. Perhaps the best we can hope for are some fail-safe structures, such as fallback childcare for when all else fails, and ingenuity when flexibility is required. If men can have it all, women can too.

ANTOINETTE JONES
Principal of Mitcham Girls High School.

I am not a superhuman, I am not rich and I am not self-employed. I am a mother, a partner and a professional and I believe "I have it all".

Am I a feminist? Yes I am, if being a feminist means believing in equal rights between men and women. If we really believe in equal rights, it follows that both men and women should be able to "have it all" if they wish.

However, rather than talking about "having it all", I think we should be talking about having choices. I am optimistic enough to believe that in the near future we will be having serious discussions at all levels of government and in the workplace about creative solutions.

In the meantime, we will continue to encourage the young women of today to expect to be treated equally, to follow their passion and expect to be supported in their choices.

Passion, commitment and doing what you love best is the key to success. You need people around you who will never make you feel that you are abandoning your family when you don't get home until late. I consider it a privilege to be working with some 600 students. If anyone asked me, 'what is more important, your family or your students?', I would probably say they are equally important. I can only recall having to make very few difficult choices. Would I attend my son's Year 12 graduation, or stay behind at school to witness the graduation of 120 Year 12 students? I chose the latter, because, believe it or not, the graduation of my students was just as important and I was able to watch my son's graduation on video and celebrated his successes with a special dinner, the next day.



1. THE ARTIST: A hugely successful theatre career came at the expense of having a family for Emmy Award-winning director Gale Edwards. Picture: Adam Knott

2. THE CONCIERGE: Abbie Allen runs her own business from home so she can also care for daughter Harper. Picture: Jo-Anna Robinson

3. THE FORMER POLITICIAN: Political powerhouse Natasha Stott-Despoja asks why women's life choices are so frequently analysed and criticised. Picture: Roger Wyman

4. THE DEFENCE EXECUTIVE: Christine Zeltz says flexibility is the key when it comes to juggling her senior role at BAE with bringing up her children Charlie, 7, and Jessie, 9. Picture: Chris Mangan

5. THE LAWYER: Suzy Reintals believes the article has injected a healthy reality into this debate

6. HIGH FLIER: Anne-Marie Slaughter who wrote the contentious article

7. THE EDUCATOR: School principal Antoinette Jones had to choose between seeing her own son or 120 students graduate. Picture: Tricia Watkinson

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