

GETTING A GRIP ON GUILT

“Inspiring Women: Accelerating the economic growth and potential of women” is a summit that’s taking place in Kuala Lumpur in August. We speak to Australian Linda Chander, an expert on the subject, who will be here for the event.

Clinical psychologist Paul Jambunathan recently observed that “maids, teachers and drivers have taken away the God-given role of parenting.”

He was commenting on how today’s mothers were so committed to their careers that they didn’t mind their children being brought up by maids.

But that made a lot of working women, already stressed by their numerous roles, feel an added nudge of guilt.

Indeed many women suffer an inner conflict.

How do they contribute significantly to the workforce, and generate the necessary extra income for their household, while ensuring their children don’t pay the price of negligence?

Linda Chander, an expert in Corporate Training and director of Enskills Learning and Development in Australia provides some insight.

She says there have always been women who have had to work outside the home but nowadays, the type of work has changed, and many women are stretched by extended business hours.

“Women are growing and changing, so the model of family and caring that has served us in the past has to change too, to keep up with the pressures of life today.”

She says in Malaysia, women have the added advantage of the traditional support system where the extended family and principles of community caring come into play.

“Engage your families as support, and turn to each other to provide caring and support. Create communities of care once again in the city. The benefits are enormous.”

She also says talking to your family about the pressures of your work, and helping them understand your career commitments will also help.

“Assuaging the guilt is achievable only by creating clear communication with our family members so they appreciate why we do what we do. As a community we are always ready to credit men with the efforts they take to provide for us and the family. Their role is an easy one to define, but just as women’s lives are changing with the pressures of delivering for a good lifestyle, their roles have to change too.”



Linda Chander

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Chander advises women to communicate their needs and expectations to their husbands, so that where possible, the husbands can supplement women's primary-care role by looking after the family when women are called by work-commitments.

"A loving, supportive relationship can help women achieve great things, and can ensure that our children receive the loving attention of at least one of the parents."

Where both the father and the mother have work commitments that cannot be compromised, then the extended family's contribution is required.

She says a good work-life balance can also be achieved by outsourcing certain responsibilities in the home.

With both parents working, there is more cash available to channel funds into what is good for the children.

This could be proper daycare facilities, outsourcing household chores and engaging someone to cook the meals. This allows the parent coming home from work to spend quality time with the family instead of labouring in the kitchen.

"It's as simple as that. What we can do at home, we should do. What takes up our time and keeps us from spending that valuable time with our family, we should engage others to do. There's no shame in it. We are helping each other by providing work for others." She says the work the house cleaner does is just as important as the work we do. The house cleaner is providing a service, and if we pay a fair and reasonable price, everyone benefits.

"Think of it as an employment agreement."

Chander particularly lauds the importance of a support network among women.

Working mothers often swallow their dilemma and suffer silently. Their heart strings are tugged every morning when they kiss their children goodbye. In the evenings, when they can't get back in time to tuck the kids in bed, guilt creeps right through their veins.

Talking to other women about these feelings can help.

"We need to develop a network of friends and colleagues who have the same pressures as we, so that we can help each other on such occasions."

Chander says this support network can help women both in their personal life issues and their professional business.

"Women also have a real understanding of one another, and it's that common understanding which is so invaluable; it enables us to provide genuine support to one another."

She says that a network of like-minded women in business can assist individuals overcome the pressures that they face in all areas of business today.

By offering advice, being a source of information, and being generous with their time and attention to each other, they can enable each other to climb higher in their careers.

"We have to truly understand that success for one of us, is success for us all. Whether it's we ourselves, or another woman who breaks through the barriers to achievement, we all must remind ourselves that it's a collective achievement."

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On the other hand, women who themselves succeed, must not forget the countless women who continue to strive to support their families and develop a career of their own.

"We need to give back to others: whether by giving our time, our attention or sharing our experiences with each other."

Chander reminds us that a woman's achievement need not be confined to the business arena.

She cites how in Gujerat, India, a women's collective successfully initiated and sustained a water harvesting and management initiative which has resulted in increased income and a better livelihood for themselves and their families.

In Australia an aboriginal women's collective was formed to address pressing issues faced by aboriginal women.

Today, women can claim to do any job known to man. But it is those women who can succeed in their career, have successful marriages and bring up well-adjusted children, who are truly accomplished.

"There's no doubt that we women are faced with incredible challenges both in the area of the home, where most of the pressure of childrearing falls on us, and at work where we have to compete in an often un-level playing field. It does seem as if we have to be superwomen."

However by following Chander's advice — developing the communities she talked about, and getting groups of women together to create a support network — we can make it easier on ourselves.

Linda Chander will be speaking at the Career Women's Summit 2008 on August 19-20 at Parkroyal Hotel. The Summit is entitled "Inspiring Women: Accelerating the Economic Growth and Potential of Women".

To book your seat, call 02-22606500 or email admin@thomzwell.com. □