

1998 LAUNCH OF THE TELSTRA BUSINESS WOMAN OF THE YEAR

26th March 1998

Introduction

Deputy of the Administrator of the Northern Territory, Mrs Minna
Sitzler

Minister for Asian Relations Trade & Industry, the Honourable
Daryl Manzie, MLA

Ms Clare Martin, MLA

Mrs Leslie Conn

1997 Telstra & Northern Territory Government Business Woman
of the Year, Mrs Penni Tastula

Honoured guests

Australian's like to work. Or so the Australian Institute of Family Studies in its Australian Family Life Course Project has concluded. This project looks at how families combine work and family.

According to the study, 65% of men and 69% of women surveyed agree that both partners should contribute to the household income. But in married couples and couples living together, 59% of men and 62% of women believed the male should be the main breadwinner.

Household chores remain the responsibility of women in most cases with 80% of women taking the lionesses share when they are not in the paid workforce. Where both partners are working fulltime 56% of women say they do most of the housework.

Having babies remains popular with 253,834 babies born in Australia during 1996. A 4% increase compared with 1986 figures.

So what does that say about women in the 1990's? It says that we are having, collectively, more babies than we did 10 years ago, we are still doing the lioness's share of the housework AND we are expected to contribute financially to the household income.

Some women are spectacularly successful in combining family and work.

Brenda Barnes, at the age of 43, had managed to have 3 children and a husband and become president and chief executive of the soft drink giant Pepsi Cola North America with a reported annual salary of \$2 million US (\$2.8 million AUS).

Recently Ms Barnes resigned from her job to become a housewife. Whilst her extremely well paid job enabled her to afford a country mansion, designer wardrobe and chauffer driven limousine it also required her to begin work before dawn, attend regular dinner meetings and travel extensively.

Her 3 children all under the age of 10 years and her husband saw her briefly each week. She saw her children's milestones such as birthdays and school plays on video replay.

She made her decision to resign from Pepsi Cola after one of her children told her he didn't mind her working so long as she promised to be home for their birthdays.

Ms Barnes explained her decision in these terms. "I suppose a lot of chief executives can find a way to balance work and family but I couldn't figure out how to do it with 100% commitment to the Company... in a way that would give me a role in my children's life... I am not leaving because my children need more of me, I am leaving because I need more of them".

Her decision was reported widely around the western world including the Australian newspapers and magazines. It rekindled a lively debate, particularly in the United States where there are

many high profile women about the ability of dual career couples to juggle family and work in an era where 2 income households are increasingly the norm.

Ms Barnes is one of several prominent women in the US and elsewhere who have either given up or interrupted their careers for family. In 1995 Penny Hughes caused a stir when she gave up her job as head of Coca Cola in the UK and Ireland at the age of 35 to give birth to her first child. Around the same time Linda Kelsey the Editor of She magazine - a publication devoted to women who juggle family and work - also quit her job to spend more time with her young son.

In November 1997 it was reported that Anna Booth, one of Australia's most powerful corporate women (former ACTU heavyweight) was quitting her job as Sydney Casino spokesperson to spend more time with her family. She has 2 children aged 6 and 3. Although she hopes to attract positions on

company boards, she envisages that it will not entail the 60 hours per week that she needed to devote to her corporate job. She is reportedly keen to pursue a career in Federal politics but has decided to defer that prospect for another decade because of her children.

She says:

“You have to spend time with them at this age. Sometimes it takes Angus 12 hours to come out with important information about what has happened to him at school. Things you need to know. It’s a personal choice - I don’t want to miss that”.

Brenda Barnes did not see her resignation as a gender issue saying that men also feel torn between the responsibilities of family and work. President Bill Clinton apparently regularly interrupts White House meetings to take phone calls from his teenage daughter Chelsea. Our own Prime Minister Howard upon his elevation to that office declined to follow his predecessors and

move his family to Canberra, preferring to leave his children's schooling intact in Sydney where he conducts a major portion of the business of being Prime Minister.

There are examples of high flying male executives giving up their jobs for lifestyle reasons yet the women who do this get the majority of attention. They tend to get this attention from other women.

This indicates to me that women are still more likely than men to give up work rather than their families.

I am struck by the fact that our newspapers and magazines carry an amazing number of articles about women who are achieving. These stories are not necessarily about women trying to do it but who are doing it.

Some examples:

- Jenny Thompson a 39 year old Financial Consultant from Canberra, the only women racing in the 1997 Bathurst 1000 (the Australian 3/10/97)

- Jane Bennett, a 28 year old cheese maker from Tasmania who has never eaten butter or cream and who gave up drinking milk when she was 6 years old. Jane became Australian Rural Woman of the Year for 1997 (Australian 3/10/97).

Not to mention our local high achievers

- Diane Marker, Dunhill Management Services, the 1997 AIM Manager of the year
- Carole Frost, Chamber of Commerce 1998 NT manager of the year
- Penni Tastula, 1997 Telstra & NT Government Business Woman of the Year, 1998 winner of the Chief Ministers Award for Management

- Terry Underwood, Pastoralist, acclaimed & published Photographer and now author
- Ros Bracher, Director of Paspaley Pearls
- Marilyn Paspaley, Actor and Director of Paspaley Pearls

These are but a few of the many women now achieving successfully in business at local, national and international level.

Late last year Mrs Jeanette Howard, the Prime Minister's wife, featured in several Australian newspapers. Mrs Howard has been described as a public figure and yet she has striven, successfully in my view, to retain that essential personal privacy which appears to be part of her make-up and which is so incredibly difficult to achieve when in public life.

Mrs Howard was ridiculed by some segments of the press and feminist groups for firstly publicly admitting that during moments of stress she resorts to doing the washing and secondly for

describing her role as the Prime Minister's wife as "supportive" rather than a position of influence.

Her comment which raised so much discussion was this:

"I am most happy in the back blocks organising something or other - seeing that raffle tickets are being sold, checking everyone is at the right table or that type of thing. It is supporting my husband and making sure that the family stays in good order - I have always seen it as not a particularly political role. That does not mean that I am not interested in issues; it just means that I am very conscious of not being elected".

This comment provoked a heated debate amongst Australian feminists in much the same way as Brenda Barnes resignation from Pepsi Cola did in America - the struggle to balance family and work. Mrs Howard was unfavourably compared with Cherie

Blair who has continued her role as a barrister upon her husband's election to Prime Minister of Britain. There can of course be no comparison. Ms Blair chose as her life's work the role of working lawyer whilst Mrs Howard chose family. What is to be noted in both cases is that both women chose their life's work.

Yet Mrs Howard copped it for being a good wife and mother. Why is it that it is only selected domestic images which are acceptable in public life, such as children and yet the day to day mechanics of keeping it all together, such as housework, put one in the sin bin?

One of the criticisms of Mrs Howard was her apparent failure to acknowledge the power and influence that she is expected to have and exercise upon her husband, the Prime Minister (Susan Mitchell - Australian 4/10/97).

Conversely, Hillary Clinton provides a most vivid example of what happens to professional women who do try to exercise their influence in their husband's political roles. She is a high profile and highly regarded lawyer who was forced into the good wife and mother role, complete with new hair-do, wardrobe and contact lenses, the very role for which Jeanette Howard has been criticised. But then Hillary Clinton hasn't admitted to doing the laundry.

It will be interesting to see how Cherie Blair copes in Britain. She became the "Good Wife" during the campaign by giving up her job which she has now resumed but I suspect in a much reduced capacity.

It appears it is acceptable to be the good wife and mother so long as one's publicly proclaimed virtues are not too domestic. Nor does it appear to be acceptable if one is too successful or too influential.

As I have been asked to speak about my personal experiences in combining work, motherhood and public life, I will do so - briefly

Firstly, some brief facts

I have been married for 20 years to the same person.

We have 2 children, aged 8 and 2 years.

I am a lawyer and have worked full-time as such except for a period totalling about 12 months when I took time off to have my babies.

I have been a solicitor with the Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission for about 8 years after giving up private practice when Shane entered politics.

I have latterly taken on the role of Chairman of the Red Cross Katherine Flood Appeal.

So for 8 years I have combined the roles of Solicitor, mother and chief support (if I can use that term) of my husband in his public life.

It has been rewarding, but like a lot of rewards, has been achieved by a lot of hard work and at some cost.

Most people are interested in the glamour side of public life.

What's it really like?

At the end of the day it's like a lot of other "businesses". It requires hard work, a team effort (ie. involvement & support from friends, family and co-workers), a degree of compromise & long hours.

Of course, there are rewards, none of which unfortunately are monetary. The major difference between public life and business life is that it is so damn public. There does not appear to be any recognition of one's entitlement to private time.

The other major handicap to public life is the ridiculous stories and perceptions which surround one. These can be particularly difficult for the children. Speaking strictly as the "supportive spouse" there

is also a total lack of recognition of one's sense of self, one's individual identity. I am sometimes shocked when people express surprise that I have a life outside of politics, that yes I do have a full time job and do not sit at home waiting for Shane to take me to the next glamorous function. The political arena is very time consuming and whilst certain compromises have to be made, I did not cease to be me.

One of the wisest comments I've heard comes from Senator Amanda Vanstone.

Senator Vanstone has had to implement some of the most politically difficult decisions of recent date and has done so in style that would be seen as good tactics in a man. She has recently been demoted. Of this she says "I don't bother to look back, that's a disaster. You'll waste a lot of time in life if you're always looking back and one of the big mistakes you'll make is you'll forget to look forward".

Senator Vanstone who has been tormented by both male and female opponents in Parliament said the political environment was tough for women. It's a boys game which you have to be prepared to play if you want to be in it. However, she asserts that as the number of women in Parliament increases, the running of Parliaments would improve.

Amanda Vanstone embraced power as did Carmen Lawrence and Cheryl Kernot and Pauline Hanson and all have been criticised. Janette Howard was criticised for not embracing power, of being afraid of the "P" word.

"Too much modesty can be a dangerous thing and Jeanette Howard has been hiding her light behind the OMO. It's time to come clean" (Susan Mitchell - The Australian 2/10/97).

This comment came from the same woman commentator who also said when comparing Jeanette Howard and Cherie Blair that

“One is not better than the other or more right than the other. The issue is choice.”

That debate is I think a little misleading.

As the wife of a public figure one does have influence. One can cajole, encourage, persuade, even insist. But at the end of the day Janette Howard is correct; the politicians spouse has not been elected, and although the public expects two for the price of one, they see the spousal role as one of support, not decision making.

And what then is the role of a woman in the 1990's?

First let us remind ourselves of and reaffirm that most basic tenet of feminism.

It is a woman's right to choose what she does with her life, be it the traditional yet largely undervalued role of homemaker OR the high flying career woman executive

As I recall the early goals of the Feminist Movement, they were all aimed at acceptance of women as equals ie. equal to men.

This meant

- acceptance of the right to work, if that was one's choice or need.
- acceptance that a woman's labour in the paid workforce was worth the same as a man's, in monetary terms.
- acceptance that women have the intellectual and emotional capacity not to mention physical stamina to undertake those types of employment traditionally reserved for men eg.

welder, soldier, truck driver, company director, corporate spokesperson, Premier of the State or Prime Minister.

- and more latterly, acceptance that equality doesn't necessarily mean being the same as a man, that is, an acceptance that there are gender differences between men and women and these differences are in fact advantageous and do not constitute a handicap.
- For example, the fact that women these days are expected to work may mean a certain drudgery for many. It also means economic power and independence. It means that women have a greater say in the disposal of not only the family income but the nation's income. Economic power, I believe, is more significant than political power although political power is quite often a by-product.

- Acceptance also that there is often some individual pain involved in exercising this right to choose and that our choices have a wider impact than just on our individual lives.

In short, I see the challenge for women in the 1990's not only to re-affirm that early tenet of Feminism but perhaps to expand upon them. Some suggestions:

- to remind ourselves that we have choices
- to accept the validity of the choices that we ourselves make
- to accept the validity of the choices that other women make
- to accept that it is OK to be successful
- to accept that the ground rules are already laid down but also to acknowledge that those ground rules can be changed
- to accept that success can only be achieved by hard work, lots of it, and certain personal sacrifices
- to move beyond the "victimology" of womanhood which prompted and inspired the early Feminists and accept that we are the Mistresses of our own Fate, and if we do not

stand up and make our voices heard, we have no-one to blame but ourselves.

The road to success is not an easy one. No-one promised it would be. Whilst we may achieve what men have always had and want to keep for themselves - money, power, position and decision making - we will also face the same consequences - stress, difficulty with relationships and juggling family commitments.

We should not however be frightened of success. Rather, we should revel in it!!

How women face these challenges will be less of an individual choice or burden if, collectively, we support each other.

I'd like to believe that women's inherent nurturing skills and teamwork approach to problems will enable us to achieve more user friendly solutions than our male counterparts, solutions which

acknowledge our role as primary care givers to our children and the importance of balancing family and work.

One of the most notable characteristics of successful women is that they play the game, run with the ball and then seek to effect change from within. That in my view is much more effective than refusing to play but standing on the sidelines feeling left out. After all, there's more than one way to play the game.

I congratulate Telstra for hosting these awards.

There are still many critics of functions, events or organisations which encourage and promote women. These critics say that men have never had these advantages or encouragement.

BUNKUM. CODSWALLOP. POPPYCOCK.

Men have never needed the encouragement. They have ALWAYS had the advantages, so long denied to women until recently, of

education, money, public perception, the mere fact that they do not carry and give birth to their children.

When was the last time your male counterpart took the day off work to look after a sick child. Who plans and organises the childcare in your household, who does the daily pick-up and drop-off to school, football, tennis, ballet, the doctor etc.

I bet it's not HIM.

There is no such thing as the level playing field. It is harder for women to achieve at the same rate and to the same extent as their male counterparts, be it in business, politics, sports, you name it.

So be it.

Let not that fact discourage us from slowly but ^{surely} slowly changing the ground rules or prevent us from continuing to achieve success, and economic and political power.

By golly, we've earned it.

Let's go for it.

Let's use it.

Let's ENJOY it.