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Women are an essential part of any workforce

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Women are an essential part of any workforce



"Career or family?" is a question that most women, married or otherwise, necessarily ask themselves at some point. It is not only major life-situations that prompt this, but even daily situations we women face, need us to make this choice. Therefore every employed woman constantly strives to achieve a 'work-life balance'. It struck me that the phrase itself proves that these two components, work and life, are at odds and need to be evened. I quote an article that says that women who have managed to be both mothers and top professionals are superhuman, rich, or self-employed. I think there's some truth in this. For a balance in satisfactory parenting, personal time, fulfillment at work, career progression, happy partner, elders, and good health, a woman would definitely need to be one of these, or even better, a combination.

That "career-oriented woman" we hear about, who contemplates kids or even marriage only after reaching some milestone in her career? How many such women actually exist? Fact is that greater than 95 percent of women in our country will get married and get into motherhood. It is no different in the biotech sector! I reviewed this aspect recently with young working women who have just started their families. Young couples are managing the care of kids with the support of crÃ?Â¨ches and baby sitters. I found this to be a big change from ten years ago, but I was appalled at the toll this trend is taking on the women, in spite of men being more supportive these days. Among my colleagues and friends, I see young women who are true heroes, managing their work and home admirably, many are working four roles every day of the week - that of an employee, a wife, mother of two and a daughter-in-law! Point is, the demands on a woman's time guarantee a compromise in the long run, either on family or on work or on personal health, particularly for ones with a challenging career. In my own case, it has been purely the total support of my life-partner and my family that has assured and insured my career.

Since every aspect of the Indian home front involves the woman, her career stands second in comparison to family demands. The woman's career is the first choice when a sacrifice is warranted. Their role at home cannot be compromised in any way. In the face of any threat there, for many women, the career is liable to end abruptly. Therefore, they struggle to outdo themselves every day, in all their various roles, in order that this does not happen. This is the reality today. In my analysis, whether early weds, or new moms, or teenagers' moms, or women at the peak of their career, or just over the hill, their commitment to the career depends on being able to strike a balance between personal and work life. Across ranks, working women are earning and enjoying a sense of financial independence, but most are still not in a position to make independent choices in most families. Even when they do, women always make choices that they see as the right for their families. Also, women always tend to put themselves last and needless to say, their own health is the last priority. This is something women need to alter in their own interest.

Recent research has linked women's wellbeing and their fulfillment at work. It reports that a woman does not quit her job due to a lack of fulfillment in any one area of her life; she leaves at the point where that lack of fulfillment creates an unsustainable lack of wellbeing.

Today, women are an essential part of the workforce in every field. In the Life sciences, they constitute more than 50 percent of the staff in research institutions as well as in companies. Employers across sectors are recognizing the importance of meeting their women employees' lifestyle needs. Losing committed and skilled women not only diminishes a company's talent pool, it is also a loss on the time and money spent on training and mentoring. The culture of flexible working arrangement and option to work from home have motivated many women to keep their jobs and employers to retain talent. Aptly, they now say "I work 'for' X Company", rather than "I work 'in' X Company".

In some Industries, it is possible for the workforce, men and women alike, to work from home. Even in the life sciences area, there are dry lab enterprises that could operate comfortably with their women working from home, having flexi timings and working offline & online. In contrast, we deny these possibilities outright, where the job function is in a wet-lab setting. Although such options can work best in certain jobs, it is important to explore the possibility of creating avenues where ever feasible. One glimpse into the daily routine of a young working mother of a small child will make us realize we are missing something. After a long day at work, she has to battle the traffic in the city or endure a long and crowded commute. Once she's home, she has to transform on her doorstep into a radiant, smiling, energetic mom and take on everything awaiting her there. We are making the woman fit the work place, instead of asking how we can make the work place fit her.

To conclude, providing equal opportunity to women is meaningless in the face of so much disparity in the total responsibility shouldered by a woman, compared to her male counterpart in the same rank or position. Women have to be empowered and allowances have to be made so they can comfortably integrate their personal and professional lives. A change has to come in mindsets of employers, co-workers, families and society as a whole, to ensure that women are able to make their career to work out right for themselves as much as it does for their employers.