

# INSIGHT

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## WHAT DOES 'HAVING IT ALL' REALLY MEAN?

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Can women really 'have it all'? It depends on what having it all really means. If it's a high-flying corporate career; a London pad, ski chalet and country retreat; three gorgeous, well-behaved, intellectual children; a nanny, housekeeper, and supportive hunk of a husband, then good luck to you.

Because the world is not your oyster. It never was. Once upon a time, being male and born into the right socio-economic milieu, armed with a touch of narcissism and big chip on your shoulder, it might have been. But since you weren't, this kind of 'having it all' could otherwise be described as a pipe dream.

Not convinced? Then let me illustrate the current state of corporate affairs to you:

“ Only 7 of the FTSE 100 company CEOs are female (and just 4% of FTSE 350 firms); there are more of them called Steve or Dave than women, and male CEO pay is, on average, 110% higher than that of their female counterparts (Economia, 2018). Women represent just 11% of the total number of executives in these companies; over three-quarters of them have no female executive at all, and just a third of the FTSE 100 workforce is female (Chartered Institute of Personal Development, 2018).

Leverage your power by using your job interviews to challenge the corporate culture of your future employer.

What is their gender pay gap and which measures are in place to address it? Do they offer returners programmes? What is their policy on telecommuting and shared parental leave? Is success measured by outcome or hours spent at your desk? What kind of female mentoring and sponsorship systems are in place?

Secondly, perhaps the corporate juggernaut doesn't actually float your boat and 'having it all' - to you - instead means creating your own business empire as a maverick solopreneur. Maybe you'd rather do something completely different, like open a flower shop, or run your own travel company.

Having it all can mean lots of things. It depends on you: what you are like as a person, your unique talents, skills and knowledge, as well as what brings you joy. Ultimately, to create a life that is in alignment with your needs, you need to know yourself. Balance, happiness and fulfilment require radical self-honesty.

What do you want your legacy to be? How important is your career to your sense of self (does it define you or is it just something you do to pay the bills)? What do you consider the most valuable things in life? What does success look like to you? What kind of parent do you want to be? What are your life goals? And what is worth sacrificing in order to achieve these?

## SO - WHAT DOES 'HAVING IT ALL' MEAN?

Maybe having it all means taking the corporate route, or maybe it looks more like social activism. The great thing is that your career trajectory need never be set in stone. Just because you were accepted into one of the most elite academic universities in the country, that doesn't mean you have to 'make the most' of that formidable intellect by wearing that badge for life.

You could, for instance, just go with the flow: jump on and off the corporate hamster wheel to suit your emotional, financial and spiritual needs at the time, and enjoy a portfolio career to match your multi-passionate approach.

Whatever you do, know that despite the depressing statistics, you've got this. And that you deserve it all, whatever 'all' means to you at the time.

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## SO, WHAT IS THE REASON FOR THIS CONGLOMERATION OF MEN IN THE TOP UK JOBS?

Because it's not about talent - over 50% of women are university-educated, and there are many more women in employment now than ever before (with numbers steadily increasing) - it's about available talent: there just aren't enough managerial women in the pipeline to be put forward for the highest positions.

Why? Because of the elephant in the boardroom: our wombs. The vast majority of professionals who take time out to fulfil caring responsibilities are female. And whilst most of us want to return (76%), the majority feel that the lack of corporate organisational support makes it very difficult to combine a career and family (93%) (PwC, Women Returners, 2016). Having children has resulted in a female brain drain. And if we do return, most of us take up positions that are well below our pay grade, qualifications and experience, in sectors that both pay less and offer less potential for promotion. Why? Because less challenging jobs provide a better balance to the demands of family life.

And this is despite the measures recently put into place to try to change things, such as Shared Parental Leave. Because, unlike our Swedish friends (who introduced the policy a mere 41 years before ours), English men still suffer from the significant cultural stigma attached to allowing childcare to influence their career progression, so that only around 1% of eligible couples have actually taken advantage of the scheme (EMW LLP, 2018).

Agile and flexible working, telecommuting and job shares are all worthwhile means of retaining female talent. But not enough companies offer these options nor embrace the behaviours needed for them to thrive. Moreover, there aren't yet enough role models - especially male - with the guts to champion them, which ends up having a negative effect on the women they were supposed to support.

So whilst you might feel justifiably chuffed at being offered one of the top corporate jobs on graduation, unless you plan to take far less maternity leave than that to which you are entitled, and you have enough income to justify either employing a full-time nanny or to request that your soulmate become the stay-at-home carer (hoping that they are fulfilled by doing so), then your career is unlikely to continue its stardust-sprinkled trajectory once children arrive on the scene.

So, with these kinds of odds stacked against you, is it even worth attempting to have it all? Shouldn't you just give up before you even get started? No!

Firstly, I believe that gender equality in the workplace is worth fighting for. And you are in the vanguard. So, take a strategic, long-term view. Become an employee activist and choose a company whose culture lifts rather than deflates you. In the wise words of Dame Carolyn McCall, vote with your feet: 'you can change lots of things as an individual, but you cannot change the culture of the organisation. If you feel it is not you - absolutely move.'