

Juggling It All



Dr. Iman Al Jaber

Life is never easy for a working mother. Even when you're as busy as Nashwa Al Ruwaini. The award-winning media personality, who runs the Abu Dhabi-based production company Pyramedia and a charity foundation for vulnerable women, knows too well about the challenge of balancing work and home life.

After multi-tasking for many years, producing popular TV shows such as Million's Poet and introducing "Who wants to be a Millionaire" to the Middle East, she finally realized it was time to slow down after having her first child.

"I decided that I don't want to be an employee anymore and wanted to

control my time – for my baby's sake. I used to work 18 hour days and felt that I needed to stop and rethink my priorities in my life."

Although she still works late hours occasionally, she has no regrets about the independent life she had chosen. "It was the best decision I made. I didn't stop working crazy hours but I stopped making work number one in my life. It was my child from then onwards," she tells Insight Magazine.

"After this decision, I found out how wonderful it was to plan one's career with no inhibitions and how it fruitful it was to let go of any superiority complexes I had to deal with."

However, after becoming her own

boss, Al Ruwaini began to see that it was no easy life for bosses either. Not only did she have to take care of herself now, but she also had to worry the employees that she had on board.

"It was life changing," she says. "I learned a lot. And whenever the going got tough, I just looked at my son's face and forgot the world in his warm smile.

Clearly then, achieving the much-desired balance between family and career is more than simply dividing time equally. It's about establishing a harmony that reflects an individual's priorities, and for Al Ruwaini, her first choice was family.

It gets tougher when you're a



Nashwa Al Ruwaini



Dr. Iman Al Jaber

woman in the police force. Lieutenant Colonel Dr. Iman Al Jaber, a lecturer in the Abu Dhabi Police College and the first Emirati female investigator, has three children, two of whom are now married and the third is in school.

"When I was pregnant, I still had to go to work and fulfil my commitments. It was very difficult. In the military, we have learnt to respect time," Dr. Al Jaber tells Insight Magazine.

A licensed lawyer and a legal consultant operating a law firm under her name, she recalls how she used

to leave her house in the morning and feel sick, before driving her car to work.

At the time, the law did not allow for long maternal leaves, although officials used to cooperate with individual cases based on humanitarian grounds.

"The situation is much better today, thanks to Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the UAE's Minister of Interior. He has always been very compassionate with working mothers. A woman who is pregnant can now get sufficient holiday leave and

hospitals are cooperative."

"It takes a commitment to both family and career," she says. "Our work in the police force has taught us how to apply preventative measures, to foresee a problem before it gets bigger. Nothing is difficult with willpower, desire and cooperation"

According to Dr. Al Jaber, there's always a way around a demanding job, whether that's by hiring a reliable nanny, coordinating with family members for day-care, and most importantly, having an open channel with one's boss. Husbands should also be helping and contributing, she says.

Al Ruwaini, meanwhile, shares her key formula in life: "Family comes first. I try my best to make the time I spend with family a quality time, meaning no interruptions unless absolutely urgent. If there is a sacrifice I need to make, it will only be losing out on the 'me' time. I don't mind it as long as I get to spend more time with my kids."

A number of polls conducted by Dubai Women's Establishment in 2012 found that 62% of respondents were reluctant to join and stay in the workforce due to the balance between work and life.

Despite the fact that many organizations have succeeded in dealing with work-life balance issues by providing child care facilities, implementing flexible work schedules and allowing longer maternity leaves, women still seem to struggle, and society seems to expect women to do it all.

But as Dr. Al Jaber reminds us, "If everyone insisted that a woman should work, who will raise our children?"

- Heba Hashem