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10 TOP WOMEN

Talk about their lives and their careers

Take a walk around the executive suite and working mothers are strangely absent – and not because they’ve gone home early to look after the kids. Despite some high profile examples to suggest the contrary, it seems that women have broken through the glass ceiling, only to find they don’t like the view.

On the face of it, there’s never been a better time for women to combine their corporate career with having a family. According to the Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, there are more women in our boardrooms than ever before – 12.4 percent last year, up from nine percent in 1997. And women’s share of jobs in the top three tiers of management has reached 28.8 percent, up from 24.6 percent in 1998. The new corporate catchcry, work-life balance, seems tailor-made for women with children.

But when *Management* magazine interviewed 10 of our most respected professional women, we found those combining a corporate career with child-rearing are the exception. Not because they can’t; indeed many employers make significant concessions for their senior female staff. The irony is, at the very time those concessions are available and women can afford the support systems they need, they choose to take the skills and contacts they’ve acquired in the corporate world, and fit them into a new way of life.

It’s not just a case of “having it all”, the phrase coined in the ’80s to describe

women’s dual career and family ambitions, but a more pragmatic reality of “making it work”.

Women at the top aren’t so naïve as to deny that there have been compromises along the way. The phrase “quality time” exists to assuage the guilt of working mothers, and almost every woman I spoke to wished she’d taken more time off after the birth of her babies. Many, for instance, underestimated the level of physical exhaustion involved. But, understandably, they don’t buy the studies suggesting that children of working mothers suffer, and when they make changes to their working lives, it’s on the basis of a shift in their personal ambitions.

The traditional choices – have children, then drop out or stagnate, or else don’t have children at all – don’t appear to apply to New Zealand’s top women. It is not like the United States where a study recently published in *Harvard Business Review* showed that 42 percent of corporate women and 33 percent of high-achieving women aged 41 to 55 are childless. Data from Statistics New Zealand shows that, here, just 12.4 percent of female legislators, administrators,

managers and professionals aged 40-54 are childless, compared with 9.5 percent of all women in that age bracket.

The proportion of childless women is the same when measured across only the most senior positions. In other words, there are large numbers of women in high-earning positions who have children, even if they’ve stepped off the corporate ladder.

Some choose to stick with the corporate job, but adjust their hours and their personal support structure to fit with family responsibilities.

They’ll breastfeed at work if necessary – which might conceivably appal their bosses, simply because of the trickle-down effect such behaviours might have on the lower orders. (My prediction – compulsory breastfeeding areas in all offices in 10 years’ time.) Others take the skills and contacts they’ve acquired in the corporate world, and move into their own businesses – often contracting back to their former employer.

One factor is consistent across these top women’s lives – they’re choosing their own balance. And they’re doing it not out of guilt, but for themselves.

Jane Freeman
Principal, Jane Freeman Consulting
Director, Air New Zealand and Sheffield
Mother of three

Combining work and family is “really hard, whether you’re at the top or not”, says former BankDirect and e-Solutions chief executive, Jane Freeman. “The person who suffers is you – you want to give your best to the family and the job.”

Freeman made some tough decisions about her working hours when she was at BankDirect. "I decided I wasn't going to work from 7:30am to 8pm. I used to work late once a week, and twice a week I'd go in early. I didn't make a habit of working on the weekend. It was really hard walking out the door at 5.30pm, but I had lots of women working with me and I wanted to set an example."

Freeman says former bosses Ralph Norris and Theresa Gattung were very supportive. "But if I could do it again, I'd have taken more time off with my first child. The longer you're a mother, the more you realise it's important."

Last year, she decided to step away from the daily corporate grind, for her own sake more than for her children's. She says that although combining work and family is difficult, that's not the reason women leave. "I don't think [women] aren't there because it's too hard – rather, they've chosen to do things differently, I could still be doing it if I wanted to, but this was the right time for me [to go]."

In the context of the quest for work-life balance, she says, "there's not a lot of balance in being a working mother at the top of an organisation".

Heather Shotter

General manager, group marketing, sales and communications, Sky City

Mother of six

Heather Shotter has arguably taken "having it all" to extremes – six children and a top job in one of the country's most respected corporates. But she is sanguine about her achievements.

"You cope because you want to. I've always wanted to have a family and I've always wanted to work. Everything you do that's worth it is hard work. You build the life you want." Shotter's corporate life is less flexible than most – Sky City is open 24/7, and she can't always choose her own hours. But she believes that balancing work and family is easier now than it used to be, when fewer women were doing it.

"More people are [combining the two] now, and the more common it is the more it just becomes part of how you structure a job. As a result of what I do women who work with me do it, too."

Cindy Mitchener

Director, Mitchener Cammell

Mother of one

Cindy Mitchener sums up the key to successfully combining career and motherhood: "a nanny and an attitude". The attitude was her determination to make it work, even if that meant taking a young baby to high-powered meetings. After her daughter was born, Mitchener continued in her high-profile career as national media director and deputy MD at Saatchi & Saatchi, followed by a stint as chief executive at the ill-fated e-Ventures.

The e-Ventures board included luminaries such as Telecom chairman Rod Deane, entrepreneur Craig Heatley, and Warehouse chairman Stephen Tindall. But Mitchener had no compunction about rescheduling a board meeting that clashed with a kindy party.

"In a way it's easier when you're the chief executive. Those very, very senior guys actually get it. Stephen Tindall has a sign in his office saying "The most important thing you can give your kids is time." The demise of e-Ventures was her cue to set up a new business with partner Sue Cammell, offering operational services to start-up technology companies. She hasn't stopped working, but she values the flexibility of her new role.

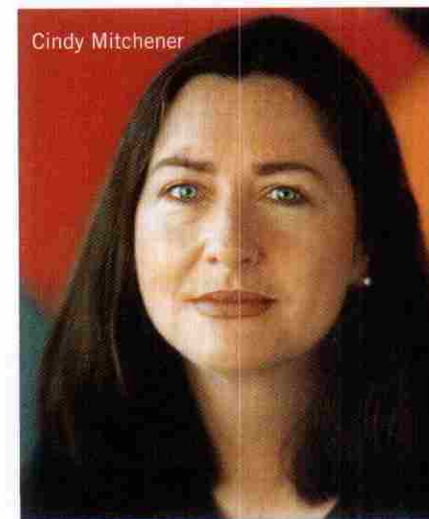
Mitchener's husband is an artist, working from a studio at home. "I'm lucky," she says. "It would be incredibly difficult if you had two parents in nine to five jobs. I've tried very hard to organise life to minimise [the guilt]. But sometimes I wish that when my daughter was really little I'd taken more time off. I had three months fully paid leave from Saatchi & Saatchi, but I never really stopped. I probably had post-natal depression, and I didn't recognise it.



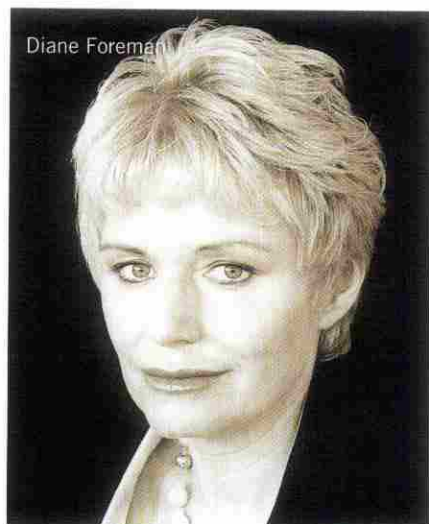
Jane Freeman



Heather Shotter



Cindy Mitchener



Diane Foreman

"I had no idea how tired I'd be. [If I did it again,] I'd say to the office, 'Don't call me'. And I'd be even more rigorous in my timekeeping."

Diane Foreman
CEO, Emerald Group
Member of the Business Roundtable
Mother of four

"I've always worked, since my first baby was six months old," says Diane Foreman, whose children range in age from five to 22. For much of that time she has been in the enviable position of owning the company – she was CEO at family business Trigon Plastics, and now runs Emerald Group, the family investment company with interests in hospitals, furniture manufacturing and retail, tourism and property.

"I love what I do and I have a very supportive husband, who's the primary caregiver, and a nanny. [But] it's hard to fit in a career and be a good mum." Foreman cites routine and organisation as key to managing work and family – "and I've got great kids". "It's easier when you own the company or are at the senior level and can put support systems in place. But it's jolly hard on a low income – almost impossible, and incredibly tiring. If I was doing it again, I'd be much stricter on myself in terms of time. I would give the kids higher priority."

Her advice to women is never feel guilty. "Don't compare what works for you and your family with anyone else. If women were less judgmental of each other, the world would be a better place. Being a parent is the most difficult thing to do. Running an international corporation is easy by comparison."

Anske Janssen
Managing director, The Hub Business Services
Mother of two

Until Anske Janssen stepped off the corporate ladder last year, she was chief executive of Shell Service International, Shell's IT operation in New Zealand and Australia, with a staff of 300 and turnover of \$70 million.

She'd taken brief periods of maternity leave (just six weeks with her first child), but otherwise worked right through.

"I didn't hit the glass ceiling," she says. "I could happily have stayed with Shell and kept going up." But spending alternate weeks in Melbourne started to take its toll and forced a rethink of Janssen's priorities. "It's all very well to be a high flyer, but working in a multinational with a family is very difficult. My husband has always been extremely supportive, but it's hard."

Her next career step would have been offshore. "I do know women who've done it. They say they'll [work overseas] for a few years then come back – but there's nothing to come back to."

Janssen weighed up the pluses of an interesting job and involvement in global decisions against the stress and the "sheer logistics", and realised the job would have to go. With partners, she set up The Hub Business Services in Wellington, to procure products and services in bulk on behalf of small businesses.

She offers this advice to other women: "When you're thinking of having a family, try to understand what your company will expect of you. And if you think you'll have a certain level of stress or tiredness, double or treble it, because that's what it'll be like." Somewhat improbably, she adds, "But don't be discouraged."

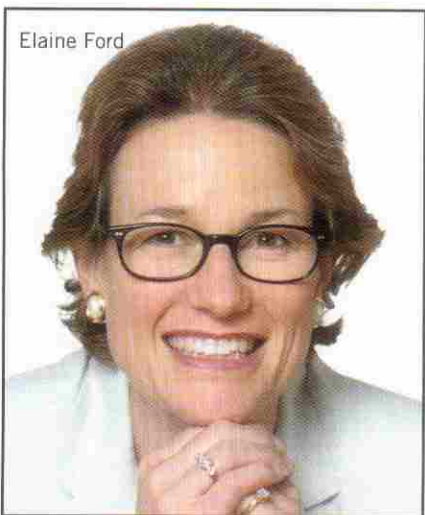
Elaine Ford
CEO, Onesource
Mother of three

Elaine Ford's desire to work is reinforced by the fact that she's a sole parent. "I feel a responsibility to provide for my family, not to become dependent."

During her time as a mother, she's progressed up the ladder at a rapid clip, holding senior positions at Wang and Price Waterhouse, and heading up IBM Global Services in New Zealand, before joining U-Bix. Ford has taken four weeks' annual leave for the births of each of her children, who are cared for by a woman who started off as a nanny, but is now more an aunt to



Anske Janssen



Elaine Ford

the children and a sister to Ford herself. "We've worked very hard at developing [that relationship]," Ford says.

She has never asked an employer for special treatment as a mother and has made few compromises beyond restricting her time at the office. "It's about the choices you make. You can't expect to have the same kind of role [if you can't put the effort in]." Ford takes her children with her on business trips, at her own expense, and deems the quality of time with them as the most important factor.

"We have a fantastic time together. I've outsourced everything else – I pay for a support structure. Being happy and successful in my own life is important."

Cathy Quinn

Partner, Minter Ellison Rudd Watts

Member, Securities Commission

Mother of two

When top lawyer Cathy Quinn announced she was having a baby, she received strong support from male partners at Rudd Watts – unlike stories she's heard from her counterparts at other firms. "One of our values is a balance in life – that's unusual for a law firm. We have a more supportive environment than most," she says.

That hasn't always stopped her feeling guilty about making concessions for her family. "My practice had been if the team stayed, I stayed. When I first had kids and was having to leave earlier, I felt really conscious of it." But, she says, her colleagues, including junior staff, have been supportive. "I try to make it the norm that I go home and put the kids to bed, and

call my colleagues at eight o'clock." Quinn works at home most evenings.

"Of course it's a guilt trip. But I know I wouldn't be happy staying at home. I enjoy what I do and I'm good at it. This job regrettably is not one you can easily do part time. It would be difficult to do some of the work I do, with clients I feel privileged to work for, if I wasn't full time."

Quinn says that a supportive and flexible husband and a "fantastic" nanny are essential. "And I couldn't have got away with half of what I have without my mother-in-law." She sums up the dilemma for women lawyers as being whether to have children early, and accept that their career progression will go on hold, or to work hard to attain partner status before having children. "But then you have your kids later, and it's harder physically," she warns.

Like other women at her level, Quinn finds that in her busy schedule something has to give. "There's no time for me," she says. "It does make you more irritable and grouchy." Juggling work and family is, she says, an elusive balance. "It's not easy, but it has its compensations."

Dellwyn Stuart

General manager, corporate affairs, Carter

Holt Harvey

Mother of two

Dellwyn Stuart measures the decisions she makes about work and family against four criteria: her health, her desire for work that is both challenging and rewarding, her relationship with her husband and family, and her self-respect with regard to the choices she's made. "It's about

Cathy Quinn



Dellwyn Stuart



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Leanne Watson



Treacy Bell

understanding what makes you happy, what's important to you," she says.

She counts herself lucky to have a husband who accepts that they share home and family responsibilities. "Women generally don't expect enough of men. There was a documentary on TV a while back about childcare. They were forever talking about what the mother should do, not fathers. If you both work fulltime, and you both want children, why would it be different for the woman?"

Stuart believes it's generally easier for women in the corporate environment now, with male bosses more sympathetic to family considerations. "We have younger men leading corporations and they have families, too."

Leanne Watson
Manager, business services, Canterbury Employers' Chamber of Commerce
Mother of one, currently expecting a second child

Leanne Watson intended to return to fulltime work after the birth of her first child. It didn't work out that way, and she now works in the office three days a week, and the other two days at home, if necessary.

"There are some weeks when it's a struggle to juggle," she says. "Without the support of family and friends, I couldn't have done it." And is it a guilt trip? "Absolutely, every day. But at the end of the day you have to deal with that guilt. I want to provide a decent lifestyle, and I enjoy [my work]. Every person is different, you have to do what's right for you as opposed to anyone else."

Watson intends to take more time off after the birth of her next child. After that, she'll be back doing what she does now. "In 10 years time, I'd like to be moving up the ranks again."

Treacy Bell
Consultant
Mother of three

Treacy Bell was at the top of the HR pro-

fession – general manager for HR at Auckland Healthcare, whose 7500 staff made it the largest employer in central Auckland. But late last year, she left.

"I'd run out of steam, I needed a break – time to work out how to do something not quite so full on," she says.

After several months off, she is now contracting four days a week. It may not sound much of an improvement, but she is far happier. "At the end of my time at Auckland Healthcare I was fat, fit and unhealthy. Now I'm 10 kilos lighter and I have time [with my kids]."

Bell does have one regret. "I haven't had the guilt, because I don't operate like that. But where I've let myself down is I haven't taken enough time for myself. I went on a course in the US last year and I realised I hadn't been alone for seven years. You lose the sense you have of yourself."

She's been thinking recently about where she'll be in 10 years' time, when she's 50. "I won't be working fulltime. I'd want to be contributing to a broad range of things – business and community. I hope I don't have to work for the money." She says that attitude is common among her female peers. "We all want to step off the career ladder, we want flexibility but we want decent money."

Bell finds her new ambitions are supported by the business community. "People are coming to me asking how to support me so they can access my skills. It makes it easy for me to work out the next step."

Someone asked her recently whom she aspired to be like – Theresa Gattung, perhaps? "I thought about it and realised I wanted to be like two mums at my kids' school. They work from home, 20 hours a week. Any 'I want to be head of this or big in that' has completely gone now. My whole frame of reference has changed." **M**



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