

The MomShift: Having children can actually boost your career, Toronto author Reva Seth says ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Despite the massive career strides women have made in recent decades, the choices still appear stark once babies land on the radar: Have children and hobble a promising career? Or put off motherhood until it may never happen? But, through more than 500 interviews nationwide, Toronto author Reva Seth discovered what she calls The MomShift - women who are living proof that a career and motherhood are not mutually exclusive. And they're not just making it work, Ms. Seth told the National Post's Sarah Boesveld this week before her book on the subject hits store shelves. They're finding fulfillment:

Q: Motherhood is often pegged as a career's dead end. But you argue it can actually boost a woman's career. How?

A: Some women found it made them take the leap to make them do the thing they wanted to do. When one woman in my book, lawyer Catherine McKenna, left her job [to start a family] everyone said 'You've lost your ambition because of motherhood.' She said 'I actually became more ambitious because I wanted to do something impactful.' She subsequently started Canadian Lawyers Abroad and she's actually running in Ottawa-Centre for the Liberals. For some women it was financial. A lot of women felt they worked better, that they were more efficient and just more focused.

Q: You have limited time.

A: Yes, you think 'I actually have to do this.' People were more strategic. A lot of people took the leave and said they wanted more flexibility and they started a business. Some women just felt more like adults.

Q: Like they had more of a path in life?

A: I think so. Having a kid really focused me. I was really ambitious, but I was completely 'Oh yeah, let's go for drinks.' I felt like I had unlimited time. And then suddenly having a child made me feel 'Oh my god, I'm getting old! Pull it together, do something with myself.' You need to take yourself more seriously, and I think that makes other people take you more seriously. So there were a lot of good things that came from it.

Q: That stark messaging - that kids are career killers - is it powerful enough to turn ambitious women off of motherhood?

A: When people tell you children will end your career and you're pretty excited about your career, I wouldn't want to have a child. I didn't want to have children because that's the messaging I grew up with. Why would you, if you invest so much time and education wanting to do something? And then you think 'But it's so untrue! Tons of women have great careers and children.'

Q: Here in Canada we have solid parental leave and public healthcare. What did you hear from Canadian moms in particular about the anxieties they have or their concerns about the system?

A: Childcare and flexibility. We're too focused on maternity leave right now. There's so much advice and counseling on how to do a good maternity leave, how to come back, what happens after. But once you're a parent, those issues don't go away once you return to work. What I heard a lot was we need flexibility, because the challenges for a lot of parents was the rigidity of the schedule. That was a real anxiety point for a lot of women, who said 'I hadn't anticipated I would keep needing so much.'

-reprinted from the National Post

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