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Best of Both worlds

Taking a cue from what Indra Nooyi recently said in an interview, "Women can't have it all", this HR Roundtable explores the challenges women employees face when it comes to achieving the perfect balance between career and personal responsibilities.

BY SANNITA CHAKRABORTY SAHA

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Our expert panelists Anita Sinai Guha, Regional Delivery Manager - Americas, ANZ, ASEAN, Korea, & Japan, IBM Learning, Padma Rajeshwari Nandi, Senior Director, Head - Learning & Talent Development, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, **Aparna Sharma**, Country Head- HR, Lafarge, and Manika Awasthi Menon, Director- People Success, Sapient India, and Dr. Sujaya Banerjee, Chief Learning Officer, Essar Group discuss integral aspects of maintaining work-life balance, ponder on how to strike an equilibrium and making the right work-life choices.

Do you think workplace biases compel women employees to approach work more aggressively vis-à-vis their male counterpart?

ANITA SINAI GUHA: I don't agree that women approach work more aggressively. But I would contend that on average, women probably need to work harder than men to get to the same level in the workplace. A big part of it is that a woman is working both at the office and at home so, assuming she has the same expertise as her male colleague, she may require more time to complete a task because of her other responsibilities.

PADMA RAJESHWARI NANDI: "A woman has to work twice as hard as a man in order to achieve the same thing." I would relate this aspect to 'aggressiveness' mentioned in the question rather than getting into the literal meaning of the word 'aggressively'. Given this context, I agree that workplace biases compel women employees - at least those who are ambitious - to approach work more

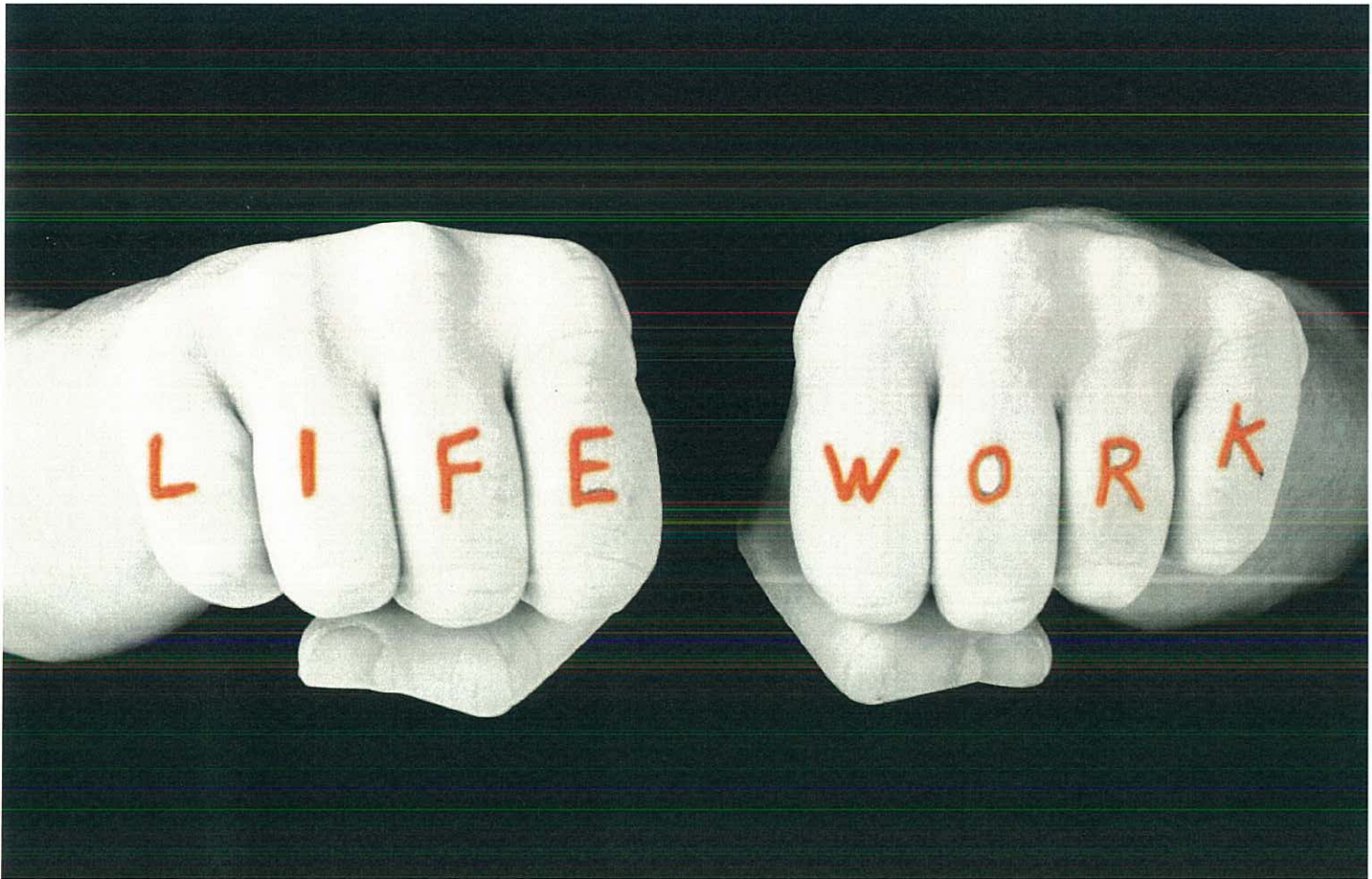
aggressively. Some managers hesitate to hire women employees as they feel that women would be burdened with other priorities and will not be able to take up challenging work or fully commit themselves to work. These managers may have formed such bias either through their prior experience or listening to other's experiences. Some women will no doubt fit into this frame. However, managers tend to put all women into the same stereotype. This in turn forces women, especially those who want to build successful career, to adopt a more aggressive approach, making more personal sacrifices in order to achieve the same level of success. Though the scenario is gradually changing, the workplace biases continue to linger and continue to impose a negative start for women employees.

APARNA SHARMA: I have always believed that work environment must be gender neutral wherein a woman doesn't have to prove her worth by adopting the so-called

masculine traits of being aggressive. Women are intuitive by nature and must use their emotional intelligence to grow in their roles. This will also help them in multi-tasking and preempting concerns or roadblocks if any, with best of their abilities.

MANIKA AWASTHI MENON: Yes there are classic work places biases that exist which compel women to become more aggressive not only about their work but also about the way they approach their work- adopting behaviours that they see are successful. For example, in an organization if assertiveness

stereotypes and biases make some women act like feminists. I believe our Gender Diversity challenges are both individual and to do with our gender. We must rally around other female talent and provide support both officially and personally. However, I have a serious concern regarding this movement turning into one that reflects cynical feminism or male bashing. The aggressive, anti-male stance is detrimental to the movement of women getting counted professionally and making a mark as leaders, driving excellence in their respective fields.



and aggression is a valued trait, then women shed their natural behaviours to adopt these to succeed and compete with their male counterparts. My view is that women should be aware of these biases, should let them surface openly and address them instead of shying away from the real issue and focus on coping mechanisms to survive in an environment that is biased.

DR. SUJAYA BANERJEE: I do believe the

"The most important factor in determining whether you will succeed isn't your gender, it's you," argues Angela Braly, CEO of WellPoint. "Be open to opportunity and take risks. In fact, take the worst, the messiest, the most challenging assignment you can find, and then take control." Do you think it is easier said than done? Please justify your answer.

ANITA SINAI GUHA: It is definitely easier

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said than done but there is a very important truth at the kernel of Angela Braly's statement. While there are elements in the environment that create obstacles in the path to a woman's success, there are also elements within us that can hinder our own progress. We need to take responsibility for those elements and make conscious efforts to overcome them. The quote, "it's not the glass ceiling but the sticky floor," comes to mind in this regard. In addition to fighting the prejudice that may be "out there," we need to recognize how we may unwittingly sabotage our own careers - like when we don't speak up because we don't believe our voice is worth listening to, or when we don't take our place at the decision making table because we're not confident that we belong, or we hesitate to volunteer for a

new assignment because we are not sure we can cope with the challenge. We need to take more risks and we need to trust our own ability to transform challenges into opportunities.

PADMA RAJESHWARI NANDI: I would disagree with this point. Gender does make a difference, at least up to a certain extent. Several women are ambitious, are open to take risks, pick up challenging assignments and prove themselves. However, not everyone is lucky enough to get a senior employee who is willing to provide them the opportunity and challenging assignments. Not having a mentor (who is willing to invest time and effort in them, willing to take risk with them) is probably one of the most significant disadvantage that women employees face. Several women who have reached senior levels have either been lucky to have got good sponsors or have been able to cultivate good mentors.

APARNA SHARMA: Success is 90 percent in your thoughts and 10 percent in your actions. The results that you desire in your life will always depend on the way you think. The quality of your life comes down to the quality of your thoughts and not from physical power or physical actions. Even the highest caliber athletes usually have the same skill sets as each other. What separates the best from the rest is the quality of their thoughts. We are all created equal. What makes us different is how we use our minds and our hearts. The achievers of the world will always have a mental edge over their competitors. They always have, and they always will. The reason for the successful to succeed is because of their unstoppable will to win. Truly, it is all about mind over matter.

MANIKA AWASTHI MENON: I agree and don't believe it is easier said than done. Regardless of gender, it is important for people to have an aspiration- a purpose and take actions that will help realize the purpose. It is at the end of the day about "You" - who you are and what "You" want to achieve for yourself. If a woman aspires to be a CEO of a company then she needs to have the aspiration, build the capability and have the support within and outside of work that will help her get there. I think the same would apply for a man.

DR. SUJAYA BANERJEE: No it isn't, it's completely right. I agree with Angela Brady - I have personally taken on the toughest transformation assignments and delivered them successfully to leave a mark on the organization, its culture, brand, etc. I believe

PANELISTS



ANITA SINAI GUHA, Regional Delivery Manager - Americas, ANZ, ASEAN, Korea, & Japan, Global Segment Leader for First & Upline Managers, IBM Learning, is a graduate from Harvard University. She has 20 years of experience in training, organizational development, learning and knowledge management fields. Her global experience spans a range of industries including the public sector, pharmaceutical, shipping, beverages and IT.



PADMA RAJESHWARI NANDI, Senior Director & Head - L&D, Dr Reddy's Laboratories Ltd. Over the past 20 years (15 years out of which have been dedicated to talent development), Padma has enabled organizations and individuals build capability across frontline, managerial and leadership levels. Prior to joining Dr. Reddy's, she has worked with Infosys and Larsen & Toubro, among other large organizations.



APARNA SHARMA, Country Head-Human Resources at Lafarge India, is at the helm of Human Resources function for Lafarge, a French multinational. She persistently and passionately values freedom, authentic relationships and realization of potential of people. With 18 years of experience, she has worked in different roles in the HR function in organizations like Monsanto, Novartis, UCB & Deutsche Bank.



MANIKA AWASTHI MENON, Director- People Strategy, Sapient, India. She has close to 14 years of experience across several domains in Human Resources in a global context spanning Business Unit Level HR partnership, Setting up and running HR Shared Service Centers' (for employee life cycle processes, policies and compliance), HR functional expertise and Corporate level HR.



DR. SUJAYA BANERJEE, Chief Talent Officer at Essar, has been a Human Resources professional for over 24 years and has transformed the HR functions in several leading organizations during her career. She is a passionate HR professional having set up world class Performance and Talent Management programs through her assignments at ADNOC.

my success stories have created a space for other women within the organization to believe in themselves and my success has made me a role model who encourages women professionals to find their north and believe in their abilities to succeed.

The skills that make a good business leader-organization, drive, trust, delegation and compassion-also go a long way to balance the responsibilities of work and family life." How can women transfer skills from home to office and vice versa and work it to their advantage?

ANITA SINAI GUHA: Theoretically, it makes a lot of sense to consider the skills women develop at home and transfer them into the workplace. But practically, it doesn't work that way. We can be super assertive with our kids, bark out orders to our servants, even act fairly authoritatively with our husbands (!) when it comes to the home turf; and yet, we struggle with applying the same behavior to influence our teams and peers in the workplace.

Perhaps, it has something to do with our (women's) need to be liked! From our childhood, we are socialized to provide service, to help others, and to make them happy, and somehow, we find it hard to relinquish this mentality at the workplace. In her book, *Lean In*, Sheryl Sandberg shares a study that shows how success and likeability are strongly correlated for men but inversely proportional for women. Women have the competence and capability to be great leaders but as they become more successful, they are less liked. This inverse proportion adds some ambivalence to the Pursuit of Success - an ambivalence that men do not share. Women may hesitate to be assertive even when it's warranted, because we think we will not be liked for our behavior.

PADMA RAJESHWARI NANDI: I have seen few women successfully transfer skills from their home to office. For example, my ex-boss spent first few years of her married life in a joint family, which included her mother-in-law and great mother-in-law (husband's grandmother). During these years, she learnt the art of influencing family decisions without having any authority. And I have seen deftly use this skill at workplace. Similarly, I saw another lady pick up concepts of operations management in the way she designed her kitchen. Time management and organizing skills is another aspect, which learnt in one sphere can be well applied in another.

APARNA SHARMA: Listening is a big deal.

You learn to listen better at home. At office, you're ready to cut people off and get onto your next task, where you don't obviously do that at home - you're always listening to your children or to your husband.

A system of rewards characterizes a manager's efforts to encourage her team to reach goals and do the best job possible. The same idea applies to parents who are attempting to inspire their children in learning new concepts. While the specific rewards and consequences may differ, the general idea behind the execution of it is the same in either situation.

As a good manager, one of your roles is

Work/Life Balance: why women really leave

If high-potential women are leaving their careers to care for their families, they're not doing it on purpose. That's the conclusion Hunter College professor Pamela Stone drew from a study of 54 female high achievers, recruited mostly from alumnae of four selective colleges and universities. The women pursued their careers an average of 11 years; 60% worked well past the birth of their second child. None was pushed out. Fully 90% left not to care for their families but because of workplace problems, chiefly frustration and long hours. Two-thirds of those who left tried part-time work but found it problematic; since they'd been putting in long weeks, part-time tended to mean 40 hours of work for 20 hours' worth of pay. Factoring even more into decisions to opt out entirely, though, was the inability to work part-time without being marginalized. (HBR)



to help members of your team grow professionally. At times, that will mean that the person will develop in a way that leads them to leave your group for a promotion. Parents do the same thing with their children - they talk with them about what their interests are, give them opportunities to learn different skills and determine which ones they want to pursue further, and, ultimately, support them in reaching their goals so they can have the lives they want as independent adults.

MANIKA AWASTHI MENON: There are skills that a woman uses at home in a variety of different roles that she plays which can easily be transferable to a work place. Multi-tasking

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and juggling different roles (mother, wife, daughter, daughter-in-law, sister), to team work (sharing responsibilities with a spouse/significant family member to bring up a family) to negotiations and team management while managing her staff which is a common factor in today's Indian family. Women are known for their compassion and sensitivity and I believe all of these skills help women be more successful and have an edge over others. All of these experiences at home or at work help hone their skills which make them better professionals.

DR. SUJAYA BANERJEE: Women have the unique ability to bring communal behaviours to the workplace. Women leaders, especially those handling homes, children, families bring


tasking is a good skill to develop for both men and women. I've worked from home for almost 14 years but I still need to close myself into a room and demand quiet from the kids when I'm on one of my conference calls. I've learned to delegate things I cannot do well (like cooking and homework support for the kids and making nice looking ppt presentations) and I try to do the best I can with the rest - one task at a time!

PADMA RAJESHWARI NANDI: It is commonly believed that women are good at multi-tasking. Pictures of working women juggling between multiple tasks are widely displayed. Certain studies have also indicated that women have an advantage over men in multi-tasking, at least in certain situations. However, it's important to understand that multi-tasking is not necessarily good. It results in more mistakes and lesser efficiency. So, multi-tasking may not really be an answer to better work-life balance.

APARNA SHARMA: Over the years, I believe that there is too much of emphasis to prove that women are better than men in so many things. I feel that questions like these make me feel part of a regressive society which just wants to pit men against women and vice versa. I feel, it's collaboration between men and woman together that makes the work environment not only friendly but also brings out the best in both the genders.

By being sensitive to each other's needs and supporting each other will help individuals to have better work life balance. Both men and women have inherent abilities that they can use to deliver the best and create a cohesive work place for one and all. An ecosystem where all can coexist!!!

MANIKA AWASTHI MENON: It has been widely accepted that women are better at multi-tasking than men. If you look at the key capability that would drive work life balance, it is the ability to juggle items with different priorities while ensuring the required outcomes is created. By taking responsibility women would put themselves in charge and therefore set the frame for the narrative. By doing so they would get a chance to set the balance leveraging the multi-tasking capability. This would ensure that the team as a whole gets to benefit from the balanced approach instead of running hard and maximizing only on one dimension.

DR. SUJAYA BANERJEE: Yes, women must use their ability to multi-task, listen and influence emotion to manage the conflicts and biases arising out of their gender and their need to manage multiple priorities. 

A LinkedIn survey entitled "What Women Want @ Work" revealed that women are more motivated by finding the right balance between personal and work life than they are by a high salary. Sixty-five per cent indicated that a flexible working arrangement would better allow them to manage career and family. A 2013 Pew Research Centre poll on modern parenthood found that half of mothers would prefer to work part-time and 11 per cent would prefer not to work. The higher the socio-economic status, the more likely the woman did not want to work full-time: one-quarter (25 per cent) of women with \$50,000 or higher selected full-time work as their ideal, compared to 75 per cent of fathers.

humility, wisdom, team spirit, credit sharing and high integrity and work ethics to the workplace. Besides presenting an alternate perspective Women are often the voice of balance, compassion and high EQ, no matter which level they operate at. I know of male leaders who prefer female co-workers as they have a reputation for being highly committed and excellence driven.

Women are inherently better multi-tasker than men. Do you think taking responsibility for the dynamic around them can to a great extent help in tackling the issue of life-work balance?

ANITA SINAI GUHA: I don't like to generalize about any so-called inherent skills of each gender. I believe men and women both have a mix of different skills and there are probably as many excellent male multi-taskers as there are not so great female multi-taskers. Personally, I'm in the latter category. I use lists to keep track of my multiple tasks but I need to tackle them one at a time. So multi-