

Why we need to redefine the way we think about working mums

Guilt truly is a wasted emotion.

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"Don't you feel guilty?" "Aren't you afraid you're missing out on seeing your kids growing up?" "Do your children [resent you for working?](#)"

I've been asked all of these questions over the years. Nine out of ten times by another woman. We can be harsh judges of ourselves and one another when it comes to being a good enough mother, particularly if we are working mothers.

Having confidence in the choices you are making, around both working and being a mother, in my experience is what matters most.



Karen Gately, founder of Corporate Dojo, is a leadership and people-management specialist. *(Image: Supplied)*

To the question of guilt, my answer has always been: "What do you believe I should feel guilty about?"

The truth is I've never felt guilty about working, and yet so many women do. The question makes no sense to me at all, and I confess to enjoying the challenge I pose to people to think more clearly about what they mean and why they feel the way they do. I'm yet to hear an answer to the question that was worth listening to. Typically, people have responded with "Oh, I don't know, I just thought you might".

The reality is if these women don't understand why they think I should feel guilt, they are unlikely to understand why they feel it themselves.

Guilt truly is a wasted emotion that serves little purpose other than to make us feel bad about ourselves.

What I'm really saying to people in these moments is think about what you are asking me. Working is a choice I am making that in no way stops me from being fully invested in my children's lives, their development and happiness.

It's how I choose to be a working mum that matters to their wellbeing and my success at work.

For me being a kick-ass working mum has meant making my kids matter while at the same time being [passionately invested in my work and career](#).

The most important 'rule' I've applied has been to turn up when mum is needed. [I don't miss school events](#) and other important moments in my children's lives because I'm in meetings. Period.



"Working is a choice I am making that in no way stops me from being fully invested in my children's lives, their development and happiness." *(Image: Getty Images)*

As soon as I'm aware of an important date for one of my kids, it goes in my diary as a priority appointment. The way I see it if I had a specialist doctor's appointment that took nine months to get into, no meeting would cause me to miss it.

No reasonable leader would ask me to. So, if I can say no to a meeting invite because of my health priorities, I can also say no because of the wellbeing of my child.

Demonstrating to my children that they are my priority, that I'm interested in their lives and willing to say no to other people, for them, matters to the strength of relationship I have with each of them.

I wouldn't sacrifice that for anything.

It's important to understand at this point that that I am a hard worker who has always been driven to succeed in any role I have taken on.

That unquestionably influences any employer's willingness to provide the level of flexibility that I demand. All relationships require give and take.

Having great relationships with our kids isn't a one-way street either. Once I asked my son Callan for his permission to be absent from a special occasion, because a massive client opportunity had come along. He was more than happy to 'let me off the hook'.

Callan knows if it meant enough to him, I'd let go of the business opportunity and be there. But I'm also proud to say he's fair and capable of putting my needs ahead of his own from time to time.

[Karen Gately](#) is the author of *The People Manager's Toolkit: A Practical guide to getting the best from people* (Wiley) and *The Corporate Dojo: Driving extraordinary results through spirited people*.