

RELEASE IN FULL

Like many women in Washington, and a lot of men too, I read with fascination Dr. Anne-Marie Slaughter's article in The Atlantic about the challenges she faced in her time in government and the conclusions she drew from them. As a Foreign Service Officer for two decades, currently serving in a high-level position (Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs) and as a mother of two boys ages 11 and 8, I was riveted by Dr. Slaughter's description of the environment in which I work every day. My experience could not be more different.

In conversation after conversation, my colleagues and I puzzled over why Dr. Slaughter's experience had been so different from ours. Was it because she had tasted another life, that of academia where she had a level of control over her life that we could not even imagine? Was it because she lived in a different city from her family as opposed to the more typical stress all working parents face? Was it because she had an internal struggle that we did not? Regardless of why our experiences differed so greatly, I was left thinking not only about my own experience, but about the responsibility we women have to create change by introducing a different environment for the younger, more junior officers- both male and female- whether in government or elsewhere. After a stream of my officers stopped in to tell me that they wished I would weigh in, I decided to add some of my thoughts and experiences to the conversation.

OWN YOUR DECISIONS

I joined the Foreign Service at the young age of 21. I was single, certain I would only do the job for a few years until I grew up, and never gave much thought to what it would mean for my personal life much less what it would mean when I became a mother a decade later. Over the years, through assignments to Cairo, Tel Aviv (where I met my husband), Amman (where I had son #1), Taipei (with #2 now in tow as well), and Dubai, I never really considered another way of life. I was having too much fun and wanted to achieve more, reach higher, and become a leader in my field.

Along the way, I turned down assignments that I desperately wanted but that I knew would not be a good fit for my family, and the same went for my husband. I took the full allotted maternity leave after the birth of each child and so did my husband. [I am still in disbelief that maternity leave comes out of sick leave. So non-parents can get seriously ill and have sick leave available, but not parents?] I established the unheard of practice of taking a week off upon arriving at each overseas post in order to get my family settled before jumping into work myself. And I have set a hard and fast time that I arrive and depart the office on normal days, and have made sure each of my supervisors was aware that I would be keeping to those hours before taking an assignment. Mobile technology and consistent selection of jobs that handle mainly unclassified material have enabled me to continue my work regardless of my physical location and late into most evenings after my kids are asleep. I am focused and efficient during working hours at the office and am rarely far from my blackberry when I am not at the office.

My husband has made similar choices- regularly leaving the house while it's still dark out so that he can get his work done in time to do his share of the carpool duties and choosing assignments that kept him with the family even though it meant slower or fewer promotions. We are both honest about where we are when we are not at work. We are clear in our own minds that in this phase of our lives, the "work life balance" means work and family. Full stop. Social life is on the "nice to have" list not the mandatory list, we haven't seen a non-animated movie in a movie theater in a decade, we collapse from exhaustion most evenings by 10, watch almost no tv and do all shopping online except for groceries. Fun for us at

this point is family dinner time, walking the dog, camping as a family for a night on the weekend, reading together before bed, you get the idea. Everything else is work. Friends and colleagues have been surprised and occasionally offended when I categorically state that I do not agree to engagements on weekday evenings, with the exception of my monthly book club which keeps me sane.

It was painful to turn down a dream job in Jerusalem that I once would have killed for. But I knew the school was an hour drive away, my kids would spend 2 hours a day on a bus and I would be consumed by always-urgent work. It was hard to face colleagues when I did not serve in Iraq, though I speak fluent Arabic and could surely have made an important contribution. And it was excruciatingly hard to face one of my best friends who made the choice to leave her two daughters for a year to lead a critical mission in Iraq. I sought other assignments where I could also serve my country, pursue my ambitions and continue to rise in the ranks while raising my family the way I feel most comfortable. And as plum jobs have sometimes gone to other officers, I have remained fundamentally confident that I have chosen a path that is right for me.

So the bottom line for me is: own your decisions. Know what your own priorities are, stay true to them, and know that every decision has consequences. If you have made a choice that is true to your priorities, the consequences will be far less painful.

NO ONE HAS IT ALL, AT LEAST NOT MOST OF THE TIME

After I read Dr. Slaughter's article I was struck by how two-dimensional her vision of "having it all" had been before her Washington experiment. My experience has been much messier than a high-ranking job and raising a family may look from the outside. It is a work in progress every single day. Just as I have passed up dream jobs and professional opportunities even as I pursued my ambitions, I have played less of a role in my children's school, extra-curricular activities, and homework routine than I would like. It was hard to let my husband take our son to the doctor when he was sick and we both could have used some extra snuggles. And the pain of my first grader asking me why I couldn't pick him up every day after school "like the other mommies" was a thousand times worse than turning down my dream job. My kids knew by first grade that they should sign up to bring water to school parties even though I love to bake. I would like to have closer friends, but that would require time I simply cannot give. And I would love to exercise and get haircuts when I need them, but those too are luxuries that do not go along with the life I am leading at the moment.

I have been incredibly gratified to see that my kids, now that they are starting to understand some of these choices, are (occasionally) proud to have a mom who works hard at home and in the formation and execution of our nation's foreign policy. But the fact is that there is no such thing as having it all at every moment of every day. I don't believe there is a woman - or man- on Earth who feels that they "have it all" at every moment of every day.

WORK LIFE BALANCE ISN'T ONLY FOR PARENTS

The red herring of this conversation is that it is all about kids. Yes, kids add a layer of unpredictability, but everyone needs work-life balance and we all have to make choices to achieve the

level of balance we seek. I speak on panels at the State Department about work-life balance and I always try to point out that we frame the conversation as being about family and the workplace, but that "life" is something different to everyone. If we are genuine in our desire to create an environment that allows balance, then we want everyone to have a life, whether that means running marathons, caring for aging parents, supporting a partner in his or her career, playing in a band, or getting a good night's sleep before going back to work.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

It is here where I was most distressed by Dr. Slaughter's article. One of the questions that lingered for me after reading Dr. Slaughter's article was how her vision of herself as a feminist and the pace she set impacted the people on her team. We have many more choices now thanks to the generations before us who blazed so many trails for us. Don't we owe the women coming after us even better? If we wish things were different still, shouldn't we use the stature we have achieved to continue to create change? Do the young men and women we mentor really need us telling them whether or not they can "have it all", especially when that means something different to each of us?

As someone who came up through the ranks and now leads a team of over 250 people of varying ages, ranks and backgrounds, I feel responsible for how my leadership impacts their lives and careers. I want my people to have lives so that they can make positive and optimistic contributions when they are at work. I want my office manager to leave early and bowl her heart out two nights a week since I know how hard she works at the office and at home, and that she will make up those hours up on other days. I want the young dad on my team to take his daughter to the doctor and the other young dad to be there when his wife has her ultrasound. And I want the newly-divorced young woman to get out with her friends and have a social life she feels good about. I want the pregnant hard-charger to feel good about taking her full maternity leave without a single shred of guilt.

I went into the foreign policy profession because I wanted to make the world a better place. Having achieved a high rank- and hopefully I will someday achieve higher still- I feel an equal desire to make my own immediate world a better place by the way I lead.

Work hard, live hard. I try every day to lead that by example, and occasionally achieve some balance.