

# How do I exist in my pre child state now that I have a child?

TAMMY TANSLEY- FEBRUARY 20, 2020

3 MIN READ



It is a question that is asked the world over. That is, how to balance a meaningful career with having children or other caring responsibilities.

As Annabel Crabb famously put it in *Wife Drought*: “the obligation for working mothers is a very precise one: the feeling that one ought to work as if one did not have children, while raising one’s children as if one did not have a job.”

Before we go too much further, I want to acknowledge that it is an absolute privilege to be able to even contemplate such musings; being able to ask the questions with a view to changing your own circumstances at will. There are many for whom there is little choice beyond survival.



I am not sure that there a one size fits all answer, but this time of year often brings about reflective thoughts on how to make it all work. If that’s you today, here are some thoughts that might help shape getting to an answer that feels right for you.

## The intersection of role and self

I found it helpful understanding the concept of role (ie – what role does society assign me) and self (ie – Who am I?). The magic happens in the intersection of both. So, it’s not about trying to balance multiple roles, but rather, being clear on what is expected out of those roles by other people AND critically, what YOU as a person want and need.

Understanding this helps to explain how some women spend their whole lives acting out the role of mother, only to find that when the kids leave home, they don’t know who they are anymore. Equally, there are women who identify solely with their career that they have worked hard to build. When you take that away (through illness, redundancy or other termination of employment or taking time off to have a family), those women truly don’t know where to start – they have no sense of “who am I?”

It’s tricky this stuff. But starting to separate out who you are vs what is expected of you and what role you are fulfilling, can be the first step to being able to “balance” (to the degree that balance ever happens) motherhood and career/work/your own business (insert whatever is important to you). This might mean dropping bits that the “role” or society expects in order to be able to free up time and space to find more of the other.

## Changing tides

The next bit is being able to come to terms with changing tides. What might have worked for you in the past – eg – working 60-hour work weeks, just may not work when you have small kids. It is not a failure to not be working full time. But equally – if you are working full time and it works – fabulous.

The trick to this is that there is no one “right” solution – only what is right for you. And what fits your situation when the kids are little may not fit when they go to primary school, high school or beyond.

## Are we our own worst enemy? Banish the word “should”..

Often, I think it is our OWN expectations of ourselves and what we think we “should” do that creates the unhelpful expectations. We think we “should” be able to balance working full time, children and all that goes from them, looking after the house, with the other expectations of us – extended family and friends etc etc. Add to that the idea of hobbies, or additional studies or whatever, and it is easy to see how it all becomes just overwhelming and undoable.

Whilst we’re at it, banish the word balance too..

Bear in mind the word balance is misleading though, because it implies equal attention, and we know the reality is that it waxes and wanes depending on what is going on in any particular part of your life.

Knowing what it important to you, as a person before any roles that are enforced upon you, helps identify which of the expectations matter.



And knowing that helps identify which ones don’t matter and can be dropped. Of course this might mean either that stuff doesn’t get done, or that it doesn’t get done the way you’d do it. It might also mean putting on hold particular projects.

The most freeing realisation for me was – “just because I CAN doesn’t mean I SHOULD”. Or – you can do some of the things all of the time, or all of the things some of the time, and Enterprise Agreements : Made Easy (a book on how to easily negotiate an enterprise agreement that meets the needs of all parties). Check out the website here: [www.easmadeeasy.com.au](http://www.easmadeeasy.com.au)

To find out more about the person behind the business, take a look at my [Flying Solo Spotlight profile](#).

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This can mean anything from getting the people basics right, to the solving of a systemic or difficult people or team problem, to the introduction of complex organisational and cultural changes. Why do I do this? Because I know that the bit that makes work unpleasant usually is when people interactions start to go wrong. I love working with clients to help them resolve issues or put in place approaches so that the issues don’t arise in the first place, rather than for them to spend hours lying awake at night trying to work out how to move an issue (or person) forward.

There are lots of consultants out there; so how will you know if I am the right person to work with you and your business? Clients have described me as part confidante, part strategist, part tactician. Clients say that they have a sense of relief that things are being dealt with, and that they are no longer alone in trying to deal with an issue (particularly complex or long standing issues). They say that it is not just the quality of the advice but the depth of the advice. That they feel that they have someone on their side. In answer to the question - what do you do?

I work with either individual clients (usually via a coaching relationship) or organisations either at the team or organisational level. Sometimes I am working with a CEO on discrete periods of time or a specific project. Other times, it is an ongoing and varied relationship that evolves as the organisation evolves. I work as a human resources, culture & change and industrial relations consultancy for businesses in finance, manufacturing, resources, oil and gas, government, retail, services and not for profit sectors - both in Western Australia and nationally.

These include both smaller 100-500 employee organisations and large global businesses. I am also the author of *Do What You Say You’ll Do* (a book for new leaders and those reinventing their leadership styles). Check out the website here: [www.dowhatyousay.com.au](http://www.dowhatyousay.com.au) and Enterprise Agreements : Made Easy (a book on how to easily negotiate an enterprise agreement that meets the needs of all parties). Check out the website here: [www.easmadeeasy.com.au](http://www.easmadeeasy.com.au)

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