FEMALE AMBITION
How to reconcile work and family

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INTRODUCTION

“Women who seek to be equal to men lack ambition.”
(Timothy Leary)

The conciliation of working and family life, the specific contribution of women to companies, their role as agents of change, the styles of female and male management are all subjects that are present throughout the book joined by a common thread: female ambition. Women in the 21st century want to be mothers, wives, professionals, citizens ... all at the same time, and there is no turning back on this process.

What do women think about? The press, public opinion and even some literature arising from certain media sometimes give the idea that we women have gone mad and only think about demanding rights and waving flags.

We go to the gymnasium, we scream in traffic jams, and we put up with separations, divorces, disputes, romances, two-shift working days and even power races, but our true ambition is to have a full life that can be called so.

In the post yuppie era and in light of such serious workplace problems as addiction to work and the “burn-out” syndrome, what truly concerns women is to feel that they have support in designing their own working life outside the traditional male lines (which ignore motherhood) and to see that governments are taking measures along these lines by legislating and giving direct, effective aid.

In the new context of this silent revolution in ordinary life of women, women want their femininity to be respected and to be given the opportunity to show that their specific contribution is capable of transforming companies and society to make them more welcoming and more humane. And what do they need to do this? The complicity and co-operation of men, and confidence, a great deal of confidence that things will work despite having to change ... a lot.

We women want the freedom to be able to put “married and mother of two” on our CVs; to get pregnant or say we are going to do so soon; to be recognised as something more than a qualified workforce that is interesting, efficient and complementary to men. In short, we aspire to not only not hide our family, but make it compatible with our professional work. At the same time, we do not want this to be the result of a private battle, but rather the recognition of a social right.

We women think, or rather dream, of politicians, businessmen and social agents who take a chance on the fixed return value, albeit long-term, of motherhood. That they or we might envision solutions and ways to reduce the “cost” (it is sad to say it this way) of the children that a woman might have throughout her working life. Let us use imagination, let us avoid what is facile. Let us take a chance on a true welfare society, based on its components being able to think and exist well.

Although it is true that everything is changing, not everything has been resolved. When we thought about writing this book, we were not only replying to the momentum this topic has generated in public opinion, we wanted also to serve as a platform for social dialogue in the passionate crusade of seeking alternative solutions and ways, since the goal is to foster a legal, public and working context that facilitates freedom of choice. We must bear in mind that today, sixty per cent of women have ambitions to and want to make two things, work and family1,

compatible. Another twenty per cent opt exclusively for their families and the remaining twenty per cent for their careers. The changes in our society will necessarily follow these lines: to assure the context of freedom so that every family and every woman can choose.

The family is the greatest existing area where everything important is free. Here people are loved and accepted just for themselves at all times. The relationships are essentially affective, and although there is reciprocity, they are not motivated by self-interest. Although living together may be difficult at times, families tend to forgive, protect and care for their members even in circumstances in which the environment (work, friends, and health) might fail. It is impossible to plan any similar type of social organisation. Here each individual is loved and accepted simply because he or she exists. Our society lives on this basic core of civic guarantees and core value. We cannot merely look at the family with affection based on the fear of a society without pensions or the reversal of the population age pyramid. For the company too, as we shall show in these pages, the employees’ family environment is key, since a large part of an individual's equilibrium, balance and habit-learning necessary for working life comes from this reality.

On the other hand, for all men (men and women), work is a source of self-realisation and socialisation. Work is serving and is, indeed, living. However, in the past thirty years, we have witnessed a celebration of paid work as the main indicator of a person’s value. You are no longer worth what you have managed to be but what the market pays you. This purely economic view, in which the only things of value are those that can be quantified and paid, has influenced a progressive devaluation of household work. Regardless of whether a woman can or cannot devote more time to them, these tasks are deserving of enormous social and personal recognition, as the home is the public service par excellence, the best Ministry of Social Welfare and crime prevention centre. According to several studies, the value of unpaid household work done in Spain mainly by women, if paid at market value, would be equivalent to forty per cent of the gross domestic product. Household work, so little appreciated at times in favour of work outside the home, fulfils an essential role not only because of its invisible yet real value in the gross domestic product, or because of the savings it means for public social services, but also because its very nature develops personal skills and competences related to service and co-existence. For this reason, men also benefit personally when they take part in the housework.

AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN TWO

If it were necessary to draw up a diagram of the situation of women throughout history, three phrases would suffice: the private area (family), public life (paid work, participation in political and social life) and finally, rupture (women give their talents to the working world, but the working world does not provide flexibility). Today one of the great challenges facing individuals is to re-establish this harmony among individuals, companies and countries.

In our studies of dual-income families, that is, families in which both father and the mother work outside the home, it can be seen that although an individual’s working environment is important, the greatest cause of conflict between work and family is each individual’s way of handling the problem. Business culture, that is, a company’s modus operandi and values, may facilitate or hamper conciliation, but the resolution of the problem is something personal, unique and unrepeatable. It is a question of taking decisions according to personal priorities and anticipating situations of conflict. Every married couple has to agree on this part of their joint project (how to take care of the house and their respective jobs), just as they have to agree on the mortgage, the children's school and holidays.

COMPANIES: A CHANGE OF MENTALITY

The time has come to consider every professional, who is at the same time a citizen, father or mother of a family, child, etc. This attitude is not only socially responsible, but in the long run it
es beneficioso para una empresa en orden a obtener la lealtad de sus empleados con algo más que dinero: con confianza traducida en flexibilidad. En este contexto, la gestión por objetivos y no por horas de presencia ha sido el objetivo más serio en el problema laboral en nuestro país: días laborales “eternos” que no tienen un efecto positivo en la productividad.

En España, trabajamos demasiado tiempo; esto es nuestro vicio nacional, determinado por un almuerzo tarde y excesivamente largo en el mediodía que se extiende hasta el final del día laboral, lo que lleva a un perfil profesional caracterizado por una adicción al trabajo, el cual a su vez conduce a un “burn-out” y la falta de compromiso, pero también a que se analice con mayor detalle cómo se esconde la falta de tiempo para hacerlo todo. El estrés es la causa más importante de la enfermedad de la empresa, y en el caso de las mujeres, es el principal motivo por el que dejan sus carreras.

Esta situación también disminuye la motivación y la creatividad, dos cualidades que son valiosas para una empresa y que pueden incremente el valor de un equipo, una empresa y, especialmente en tiempos como los actuales, cuando se requieren distintas soluciones en el contexto de un mundo global y constante cambio. En un momento como el actual, cuando ya tenemos una moneda europea y un mercado laboral europeo, ¿por qué no tenemos un horario europeo?

El principal activo, no solo de la empresa, sino de toda la sociedad, es la gente. Hemos oído esto una y otra vez, pero tal vez todavía no lo creemos realmente. La principal preocupación es que nos estamos exponiendo a la "ecología del hombre". Durante muchos años, las empresas no se preocuparon por sus impactos en el entorno, pero hoy en día ha cambiado. Hay regulaciones, certificaciones de calidad, legislación y sanciones que han hecho a las empresas más sensibles a su responsabilidad social con respecto a la contaminación generada en la naturaleza. Sin embargo, es verdad que muchas empresas hoy en día sistemáticamente contaminan el entorno donde trabajan y con el que trabajan sin darse cuenta. Cuando un trabajador no puede desempeñar sus roles de marido/mujer, padre/madre, o hijo/hija, debido a unos horarios rígido o interminables, o a constante viaje, está siendo despojado como una persona, además de que su relación conyugal o parental se encuentra en peligro.

Si no hay tiempo para disfrutar de la familia, el número de hijos disminuye y las casas no se hacen. La realidad es que el abandono o la omisión de las familias significa que los valores no se transfieren, los buenos hábitos no se desarrollan y la sociedad se pobreza. La familia, la empresa y la sociedad viven realidades que forman un triángulo en constante evolución que se enriquece o desvalora a través del aprendizaje positivo de las personas en diferentes áreas de su vida. Oscar Wilde dijo que a veces "somos capaces de destruir lo que más amamos." Mirando lo que está pasando a nuestro alrededor, ¿no estamos destruyendo este lugar de coexistencia par excellence que es la familia?

La contaminación del río se corrige en algunos casos gracias a las fábricas de pescado, que han salvado más de una especie acuática, pero las personas no se desarrollan como fácilmente que los animales, y si no dejamos que la familia cumpla su función, ¿qué será el nuevo "fábrica humana"? Como escribió el escritor francés André Frossard, “las civilizaciones antiguas fueron destruidas por los invasores bárbaros; nuestras tienen bárbaros dentro de ellas.” Deben cuidar de la familia para que no trabajen en contra de sí mismos.

Si dejamos de ver esto, si dejamos de dar importancia a uno de los motivos principales detrás del declive de matrimonios y problemas educativos dentro de la familia y la escuela; o si miramos indiferentemente al hecho de que muchas mujeres directivas (actuales o posibles) se imponen un techo de hormigón en su carrera profesional para evitar cualquier conflicto entre su vida profesional y familiar; o si consideramos que eso es un problema secundario el hecho de que hay medidas discriminatorias en las empresas no solo por razón de sexo sino también por la maternidad (no debemos olvidar que a una mujer sin obligaciones familiares - hijos, padres o dependientes - se le considera en poca "problema"), estamos evitando la realidad y sus posibles soluciones.