

BY **BUVANA DAYANANDAN ('86 MMS)**

Confessions of a BITSian Woman

Tips from a BITSian on making one's career work while striking a work-personal life balance.

My name is **Buvana Dayanandan** and I am a 34 year old woman with a wonderful family and 2 beautiful children - 5 and 2. The past five years of my life have primarily been about being a mom. I am sure many women of my age can relate to that. Prior to having kids, I had a flourishing career in a consulting firm specializing in projects for Wall Street firms where I grew from being a Consultant to a Technical Services/Business development Manager with a portfolio of engagements at JP Morgan, JW Seligman, AIG, Chase etc. Subsequent to that, I made a conscious choice of taking a slow-down in my career upon having the kids, as well as moving to the West Coast owing to my husband's (also an BITSIAN) job at Juniper Networks. Through all these life changes I had consciously put my career in the back burner, and took some consulting assignments at Cisco Systems, a very family friendly place - working from home, flexible timings etc.

I don't regret my choices one bit. However, now that the child bearing years are behind me, my hunger and passion for self growth and achievement come back at me with a fury. Now, I am a full time employee at a high tech firm trying to make a mark and perform roles that are strategic and progressive. It is not easy, with the kids. The balance between trying to be 100% at work and giving 100% as a mom is not easy to achieve.



Day by day, I evaluate my performance in each of these areas and some days I can say I did wonderfully and some days terrible at both. But these are some of the realities of life. Interestingly, I did try to be a stay-at-home mom but found that it was not for me. So, for all those young women out there- especially from BITS, we know we are as good as other men (and women) in their undisrupted careers.

How do I make it work? I work a relatively short day at work- 9 to 6 and then catch up on some more work after the kids go to sleep. I have also hired a nanny to help me with the pick up of the kids from school and hence allowing me to be late at work if there is a need to be on-site. My husband and I stagger our work timings, I try to leave early so that he can drop the kids at school and I come home to

feed them dinner while he is working late at work. Bottom line, being the spouse of a working mother, puts pressure on the men folk too. Hence, a very good understanding of roles and responsibilities is imperative to make it work.

Be aware that being a woman does pose some real-life challenges especially with family, children and pure societal pressures.

Here are the key takeaways from my post BITSian life experiences that I would like to share with the women as well as interested men:

- If you have plans for graduate studies, chalk them out clearly and take into consideration things such as education loans etc. It was not financially viable for my family to sponsor my education abroad so I took some education loans.

GENERAL INTEREST

- **Clear communication with your family about your plans:** This is so that they can consider those early on. Setting expectations, even with parents, is not a bad idea at all; along the lines of 'I want to work for at least a couple of years before getting married etc.' I do realize that it is not that acceptable for some families that are very conservative. Once you are married, of course, you have to work with your husband about your plans.

- **Communicate your goals:** Hope that he is aware of your long-term goals-career, children etc. and you are jointly planning your goals (just as he should plan his). After all, if your career takes off, he may have to be a househusband taking care of the kids!

- **Be aggressive in your pre-children years:** Then set the stage for cruise control during the childbearing years. Stick with the company that you had been prior to having your children so you could



plateau at that level and take off from there after the child bearing is over.

- **Pick companies carefully:** Try to choose companies around the time you are ready for a family; try to be with a company that is very family friendly. Having said that, now even Management consulting firms such as Booz Allen Hamilton, are known for their women friendly work policies.

To Dos

- ❑ Make your husband aware of your goals
- ❑ Be aggressive in your pre-children years
- ❑ Know your key values
- ❑ Enlist the help of your spouse from the beginning
- ❑ Pick companies that value work-life balance

- Be clear on a long term strategy and the kind of work that you like to do. It is especially important for women, since if you are like me, who like a sense of achievement both in their career as well as in their family.

- **Know your key values:** Very important – know what motivates you? Don't get swayed by what society expects you to do especially about your being a mother or a woman. As a mother, you will always do the right for your child; be it a stay-at-home or a fulltime working mother. You and only you can know what works best for you.

- **Enlist the help of your spouse from the beginning (before and after kids):** These are changing times with more families where both parents work. We need our husband/significant other's support. After all, child rearing is a responsibility of both parents. We are the first generation of women who have these challenges especially since many of us live abroad and do not have the support structure of parents to help us take care of the kids and realize our professional goals. I have a friend who has her parents living with her and they drive to drop and pick the kids from school and most of us know what a luxury that is and one that most of us don't have. So, for all you men that are reading this article, your support and understanding is paramount to the success of your woman. Behind every successful woman, is a man that helps out and works at making the whole work-life balance viable?

One may ask if that dilutes both parties' abilities to reach further since it is a balancing act. That may be true in the short term. What makes it work is communicating clearly with each other and it's so much about splitting responsibilities 50/50. Life is a relay race where one partner makes up for the other and hopefully, the team wins in the end.

- Above all, realize it is not going to be easy but that you along with your spouse and your support structure (nanny, parents and whoever else) could make it work and make the best out of your situation.

Good luck!

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