

Column: Women can have it all

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Emily Barnes

My mother was the type of woman who woke me up at 4 a.m., put me in the car, and took me to my aunt's house because she had to go to work.

When I was young, I slept next to her at night. Once, my estranged father broke into the house and attacked her while she was sleeping. I remember trembling in the bed, watching this happen, but what most struck me was how my mother got up off the ground and beat my father back to the point that he fled and never attacked her again.

I remember looking at her from the bed, terrified, and asking, "What are we going to do?" She said, "I've got to go to work."

My mother was absolutely clear that I needed to find the person that worked the hardest and work harder than they did. My mother would break down on the side of the road on the way to work, leave the car, hitchhike to work, and then call me to go fix the tire and pick her up.

I come from a low-income, rural family; my parents were line workers. When I was in high school, my mother quit her well-paid factory job and went to college. I watched her life and her world view completely change.

When it was my turn to go to college, my father discouraged me. He said, "Why would you go to college when I can get you a job at the factory making \$16 an hour?"

When I was a college junior, the factory closed. My little town was devastated. Virtually everyone there was unemployed and unprepared for any other kind of work. I was grateful I didn't listen.

I held on to school tightly. I remember thinking "if I just get this degree, I'm going to be OK." Because I was willing to take every opportunity to volunteer, to work, to learn more, to do more, I positioned myself to success. I never once said, "I need to slow down." I followed my mother's lead and worked hard, constantly, to build a life I wanted to live.

I am a millennial, female leader in higher education, a field traditionally dominated by older

men. I have often been the youngest person in the room and one of none or two women. I often felt invisible because no one expected me to speak, but I always speak.

Since I became a mother, I haven't slowed down or stayed home. Quite the contrary. My girls have come to work with me, and when they awaken at 2 a.m. wanting a drink or a hug, they find me at my computer, burning the midnight oil to have it all.

Sure, I bake cookies with them on weekends, but they know that I am a mommy and a university provost and interim president. They see me in multiple roles -- and they learn, I don't have to sacrifice one to have the other.

Just because we're born female or in a small town doesn't mean we have to settle into expected roles. I want my girls to have choices that don't include fear or desperation. Because of where I started, my climb is steep, but every day, every minute, I am purposeful about keeping to my vision and achieving my goals.

What used to be considered weaknesses -- youth, inexperience, motherhood -- are my greatest strengths because I can appeal to different groups and show that leadership can look different.

I work in an industry where traditionalism is suffocating us. As a nontraditional leader in higher ed, I think differently and bring opportunities that traditional leaders may not.

Women have to accept that their path will look different than their mother's or grandmother's. Today, there are 12.3 million women-owned businesses in the United States, according to the National Association of Women Business Owners. In 2018, women started 1,821 new businesses every day, and businesses led by women collectively generate \$1.8 trillion annually, according to the Women's Business Enterprise National Council.

The female leaders I've worked with wanted to make more than money; they created opportunities for others and room for voices not regularly heard.

I want to be all these roles at once, and I don't see why I can't. Being a mother does not have to preclude an important career and vice versa. I want my children to believe they can do anything, go anywhere, have it all.

Today, my mother has a master's degree in social work and she's a licensed counselor. As we mark the 100th anniversary of the 19th amendment and women securing the right to vote, it's especially important to celebrate the contributions that we as women make -- not only as voters and candidates, but as women building the economy and lifting each other up, creating collaborative workplace cultures, inspiring all people to do better, be more, and achieve beyond their wildest dreams.

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https://www.theoaklandpress.com/column-life-lessons-from-rowing-finding-purpose-on-the-water/article_0f90fdd6-5f2c-11ea-b4f1-03881eb89934.html

