

Jobs & Careers with James Caan February 2012

We speak to Victoria Brannen, CEO, Maya Asset Management, about being a woman and a mum in the world of business

Jobs & Careers: Have you come up against any obstacles as a female entrepreneur in a business world that still remains dominated by men?

Victoria Brannen: Yes, I worked within the car industry for a number of years and it has, at times, been quite challenging. I suppose how I've learnt to overcome it is by seeing it as an issue for the individual male in feeling limited by working on an equal footing with women and not seeing the benefits greater diversity brings to business. There's been a lot written recently about how the banking crisis and the state of the economy is potentially quite driven by the male ego. I do think it's something that you feel the effects of in larger organisations; that sort of male superiority becomes an attitude. I think at the moment, there are a lot more female entrepreneurs starting up than we would have had in previous generations, which is probably brought about in large by not necessarily having to choose between business and family, although I don't think the attitudes of people towards female entrepreneurs is changing at the same rate. However, if you look at where the economy is now, then growth is expected to come from the small and medium-sized enterprises and I think most of the female entrepreneurs are operating in that zone, so perhaps the attitudes will change when our contributions become that bit more visible.

J&C: And do you find it difficult to balance work and family life?

VB: I wouldn't say I find it difficult, but there are a number of additional considerations that you have to make, especially as my family happens to be quite young, that can present maybe some greater challenges. The key for me is creating a stable and consistent environment so that when we've got ups and downs going on at work, it's not being echoed in your home life. There are times when there are demands put on me: time, mental pressure, and also needing to go away, and I think if you can make those pressure points have a limited negative impact on your family life, it provides huge relief. In my personal circumstance – and I know everyone's got different arrangements – I'm very fortunate that it's my mother who looks after my children when I'm not there and because she can give them that consistent routine, they are very happy and it just works for us. But yes, there are times when you miss the occasional thing at school; that's life I guess.

J&C: You were shortlisted for the 2011 'Mumpreneur of the Year' Business Hero award; how does it feel to be recognised as a successful working mother?

VB: I was thrilled to be shortlisted, especially among such accomplished businesswomen. It enables you to recognise your children through your work in a very positive way and I think that clearly supports that there are additional challenges that you face as a woman being successful in business when you have young children.

J&C: What advice would you give to a mother who has young children and is looking to get back into the workplace or even start her own business?

VB: I think it all comes down to the individual. There are always people out there that are going to tell you "this is good for your child; you should be doing this" but I think only you know your family and your children as you do. If it's important for you as an individual to work, which it is for me – and my children actually respect that, as does my partner – I think you commit to that; you make sure that you know if your children are happy at the end of the day and if things don't seem to be working out, then change it. But I don't think there should be any barriers to being a mother and to being able to go back to work and say that you enjoy it.

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