

The Corner Office, and a Family

Most Big-Company Women CEOs Are Also Mothers, Book Finds; 'You Plan Not to Have Guilt'

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(See *Correction & Amplification* [below](#).)

Abstract:

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The long held idea that women must choose between climbing the corporate ladder and having a family is constantly being challenged and one needs to look no further than the 11 CEOs of Fortune 500 companies who are also moms to see it. While this number is still small, the chance of becoming both a CEO and a mom are greater now than ever before. Women who have made it to the top, cite making concessions, having a supportive spouse, and flexibility as some of the key features that helped them get where there are today. They also point out how sometimes their viewpoint as a mother has helped them improve things in their work place.

Ursula Burns joined a rare breed when she took command of [Xerox](#) Corp. in July 2009: She became just the 22nd woman ever to run a Fortune 500 company.

What isn't so rare is that she's a mom. In fact, all but two members of the female CEO elite at big U.S. businesses have motherhood in common. The finding, uncovered by author Douglas Branson, throws a curveball at the "mommy track" idea, and the belief that women must choose between being mothers and reaching the corner office. "You have a better chance of being a mother and becoming a company CEO than you did 15 years ago," says Mr. Branson, a University of Pittsburgh law professor whose new book, "The Last Male Bastion," examines female chief executives.

At present, there are 12 female CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, 11 of whom are moms. [Campbell Soup](#) Co. late last month announced its next CEO will be Denise Morrison, a senior executive with daughters aged 29 and 31. Xerox's Ms. Burns, who spent decades moving up at the company, has a 17-year-old daughter and 21-year-old stepson. Her predecessor, Anne Mulcahy, has two offspring as well. All three executives declined to comment for this story.

Corner Office Moms

Name and Fortune 500 company:	Year became CEO	Number of children
Marion Sandler, Golden West Financial	b-1963	2
Jill Barad, Mattel	1997	2
Meg Whitman, eBay	1998	2
Carleton Fiorina, Hewlett-Packard	1999	a-2
Andrea Jung, Avon Products	1999	a-2
Anne Mulcahy, Xerox	2001	2
Patricia Russo, Lucent Technologies	2002	2
Mary Sammons, Rite Aid	2003	2
Susan Ivey, Reynolds American	2004	a-5
Brenda Barnes, Sara Lee	2005	3
Paula R. Reynolds, Safeco Insurance	2006	1
Patricia Woertz, Archer-Daniels-Midland	2006	3
Indra Nooyi, PepsiCo	2006	2
Irene Rosenfeld, Kraft	2006	2
Carol Meyrowitz, TJX	2007	2
Angela Braly, Wellpoint	2007	3
Laura J. Sen, BJ's Wholesale Club	2009	2
Ellen Kullman, DuPont	2009	3
Carol Bartz, Yahoo	2009	3
Ursula Burns, Xerox	2009	a-2

a—at least one stepchild or adopted child

b-co-CEO

Sources: Douglas Branson, author of "The Last Male Bastion" and WSJ reporting

The prevalence of mothers in the corner office hardly means women's careers aren't disadvantaged by parenthood. Men with children are more likely to rise into management than women with children in most major industries, including retail, health care and financial services, according to a U.S. Government Accountability Office report on the gender gap released Sept. 28.

The 79 cents manager moms make for every dollar earned by manager dads "has not budged since 2000," the report concluded.

The fact most big-company female CEOs have children may just state the obvious—that the highest achievers can handle big challenges, suggests Claudia Goldin, a Harvard economics professor who has studied earnings penalties linked to motherhood.

Still, a look behind the scenes reveals some of the usual work-family trade-offs. In a management career crammed with frequent business trips, "I didn't make it to every single sporting event of my two children when they were growing up," says Stephanie Sonnabend, CEO of [Sonesta International Hotels Corp.](#) since 2003. "You make it up in other ways."



Bloomberg News

Xerox CEO Ursula Burns, shown last month, has a daughter and stepson.

Her daughter and son, now 23 and 21 years old, accompanied her on business trips to Curacao, Egypt and Peru, she says.

Highly successful CEO mothers also often enjoy extensive support from their husbands, some of whom decide to skip the fast track. Gregory Ciccolo, Ms. Sonnabend's husband, was a promising tenor when he dropped plans to join a small European opera company for six months in 1994. Both say she requested his sacrifice because she

needed to travel more following a Sonesta promotion.

Mr. Ciccolo recalls feeling disappointed. He soon stopped singing professionally, and now runs a small recording studio. "Have I been able to replace the possibility of singing around the world? Not really," he says. "In terms of tradeoffs, this was fairly big league." But, he adds, "we were going to be a lot more financially secure with her job than mine."

Mary Dillon, who since June has been chief executive of U.S. Cellular Corp., was a brand manager at Quaker Oats Co. when she gave birth for the first time in 1990. She says her husband, Terry, quit his job as a biochemist after the second of their four children arrived, so he could parent full time.

The setup, still in effect, offered "the flexibility on schedule and travel that has been required for my various positions," Ms. Dillon continues. Her children range in age between 11 and 20.

[Patricia Woertz](#) was a rising oil-industry star when she and her husband, a logistics consultant, agreed her career would take priority, according to an [Archer-Daniels-Midland](#) Co. spokesman. The mother of three was divorced by the time she began leading the grain-processing giant in 2006. Ms. Woertz declined to be

interviewed for this story.

Several CEO moms say they advanced partly because they created strict boundaries between work and home. "If you can compartmentalize, you can focus," explains [Yahoo](#) Inc. Chief Executive [Carol Bartz](#), whose three children are aged 21 to 31. "You plan not to have guilt."

After work, for instance, "When you walk in the door, you should be ready to say, 'I am home now,'" and not check email until later, Ms. Bartz says. She joined the Internet concern in 2009 after leading [Autodesk](#) Inc.

A number of women at the top say they drew on their experience as parents when climbing the ladder at the workplace. "I learned plenty about how to be an effective executive from raising my children," Ms. Dillon says. When she served as global marketing chief of McDonald's Corp., she drew on her experiences as a mother of four to push a world-wide expansion of healthy menu items, such as fresh carrots.

Ms. Bartz—famously combative—says parenthood taught her the value of picking battles at home and work. "If you discipline children on everything, they don't know what's important," she observes. "Not everything that happens in a company is priority one."

Other CEO moms found that child rearing reinforced the importance of setting clear expectations. "Being consistent is the most common trait in parenting and managing," says Laura J. Sen, head of [BJ's Wholesale Club](#) Inc., a warehouse retailer. She has a 20-year-old son and 22-year-old daughter.

Based on their parenting roles, some female business chiefs have sought to ease staffers' work-family conflicts by introducing perquisites such as "flex-time" and sick-child facilities.

When Janet Dolan ran [Tennant](#) Co., a maker of industrial-cleaning products, she rarely summoned her management team on short notice for routine meetings past 5 p.m. Last-minute late sessions with Tennant's highest boss years earlier sometimes caused child-care problems for the executive mother.

"I went to the CEO and said, 'This might hurt my career. I can do anything on 24 hours' notice. But it's very hard to do anything on one hour's notice,'" Ms. Dolan says.

He agreed to try to give longer notice.

Ms. Dolan's seven-year CEO stint ended in December 2005. Her sons currently are 28 and 25 years old.

Similarly, BJ's lacked employee wellness and weight-loss programs before Ms. Sen became its first female CEO in 2009. Thanks to her two kids, she says she tends "to have a more maternal view in terms of how we treat people."

Correction & Amplification

The 79 cents that mothers who are managers make for every dollar earned by fathers who are managers "has not budged since 2000," according to a U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee summary of a Government Accountability Office report on the gender pay gap. This article on Monday incorrectly attributes the comment to the GAO report itself.

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