

Louise Webster

**A New Way for Mothers: A  
Revolutionary Approach for  
Mothers to Use Their Skills  
and Talents While Their  
Children Are at School**

Made by Blinkist



These key insights in blinks were written by a team of experts at Blinkist. We screen the world of nonfiction to choose the very best books. Then, we read them deeply and transform them into this concise format that brings you the most inspiring ideas from the text.

Maybe these blinks will inspire you to dig deeper, or maybe they're enough to start you thinking and then on to something new. However you read blinks, we hope they help you become an even brighter you.

# What's in it for me? Learn how to fulfill both your professional and family ambition.

Let's face it. Our society's workplaces weren't designed for working mothers. In recent years, some employers have attempted to be more accommodating, but most of them still expect mothers to work full-time. On top of this, mothers routinely face naive stereotypes that treat motherhood as incompatible with the professional world.

Thanks to social obstacles like these, mothers who take time off to raise a child often struggle to reintegrate into employment. This needs to change. Mothers represent a wealth of talent that, currently, is untapped. But how to use this talent without compromising on caregiving?

By taking a closer look at the stereotypes of motherhood, these blinks will show you that having children doesn't mean you need to put your life on hold, that mothers actually make for fantastic employees and business leaders, and that mothers can achieve career success without skimping on their parenting.

In these blinks, you'll learn

- how persistent social signals disempower women;
- how to take advantage of your children to network; and
- why it's so hard for parents to share care work equally despite their egalitarian ideals.

## **Motherhood can help you rebuild your career according to your values.**

All too often, women have to sideline their personal values if they're to succeed in male-dominated workplaces.

This was certainly true for the author when she worked in public relations. She'd always put kindness, collaboration, and support above competitive practices. But, in that work environment, these values were seen as weaknesses. So, like a good employee, she quietly tucked them out of sight.

But this led to a disconnect between her personal identity and her work identity. Working toward goals she didn't believe in and acting on values she didn't agree with, she began to feel like a ventriloquist's dummy being moved by someone else's hand.

**The key message here is: Motherhood can help you rebuild your career according to your values.**

She'd become so brainwashed about the nine-to-five routine that she thought this misalignment was normal. Everyone's dissatisfied at work, right?

Then she became a mother, and her outlook changed completely.

One of the greatest gifts of those first few years of motherhood was the way it thoroughly deprogrammed the old nine-to-five mentality. In fact, those years were so intense that they forced her to cut pretty much every unimportant activity from her life so she could focus all her energy on supporting her child.

For the first time in her life, the author learned the joy of working in alignment with one's values. She loved taking care of another life. It just felt right.

A few years later, she decided to step back into the professional world. But, like many women who become mothers, she didn't want to go back to her old way of life. Motherhood had given her an opportunity to rebuild her career, and she wanted to work toward something she believed in. So she brought her love of mothering to her work.

She launched a website called *beyondtheschoolrun*, which is dedicated to connecting mothers and supporting their search for fulfilling work. Because she created her business in an area that she cares about deeply, she loves what she does, work flows naturally, and it connects well with her care work. Today, *beyondtheschoolrun* is a successful business with a thriving online community.

The point is, work isn't just about paying the bills. If we want to achieve true success and satisfaction in our work, it has to fit with our values. That's why the first step on your career journey is discovering what really matters to you.

# **Mothers make great employees and business leaders.**

Why does society start treating women differently the moment they become mothers?

Have you ever noticed, for example, that waiters and cashiers will usually direct payment questions to the father while overlooking the mother? It's just automatically assumed that dad controls the family finances.

And, to take another example, fathers are a lot more likely to be asked what they do for a living than mothers. Even when a woman is a full-time caregiver, she rarely gets asked what she did before becoming a mother or what she plans to do after.

Constant social cues like these betoken a widespread expectation: once a woman becomes a mother, her career is over. Motherhood, it's assumed, is incompatible with the professional world.

**The key message here is: Mothers make great employees and business leaders.**

People might not mean any harm when they assume a mother is a full-time caregiver. But this assumption can be extremely demeaning, as the author knows from personal experience.

Once, while on her way to an important appointment, two men helped the author lift her child's stroller onto a train, and they asked her where she was going shopping. She was so taken aback by the assumption that she must be going shopping because she's a mother that she didn't feel like telling them she was actually off to Downing Street to speak with the prime minister's advisor.

Mothers who face disempowering assumptions about their lack of career prospects are, inevitably, going to feel disempowered. But why does society assume mothers are ill-suited to the workplace? After all, motherhood is an immensely challenging, formative, and empowering experience that equips women with many valuable skills.

For example, motherhood teaches women how to organize their time for maximum efficiency, how to think and plan for the long-term, and how to use support and create community networks. All of these are vital business skills.

Instead of being treated as less capable, mothers should be praised by businesses for their perseverance, adaptability, and tremendous work ethic. More than that, mothers should know that it's possible to create a flourishing business or a thriving career despite the demands of motherhood. In fact, if you can raise a child, you can probably run a business, too!

## **We can learn from children how to rediscover our natural talent.**

We tend to imagine that the older we get, the more talented we become. But, in truth, it's the other way around.

As children, we're incredibly creative and adaptable. We can apply ourselves to new activities and pick up new skills with ease. But, as we grow older and begin to focus on a narrower range of interests, we lose touch with our natural capacities.

**The key message here is: We can learn from children how to rediscover our natural talent.**

Ironically, one of the reasons for this is education. As we progress through school, we learn that we're good at some things and not good at others. But limiting beliefs like "I'm no good at math" or "I can't sing" can prevent us from attempting to learn new skills or pick up new hobbies, a pattern that can carry over into adult life. Adults who are dissatisfied with their career think to themselves, "Well, it's too late for me to change course now" – and, with that mental shrug, they don't even try!

But we can change our beliefs. The author, for example, was told time and time again that she couldn't write. In school, she received poor grades in English. She even lost an early job at a PR agency because they told her she couldn't write. But she chose not to be discouraged and instead kept practicing. And look at her now! She's published in the *Guardian*, one of Britain's leading newspapers, and she's even written a book.

We need to go back to that freer time before limiting beliefs crept in – that time when we would try anything and do whatever felt right. Fortunately,



mothers are well-positioned to rekindle this youthful spirit because they have the perfect role models – their children.

That's right; mothers need to learn from their *children*. And the first thing they need to learn is how to be fearless again. For example, inspired by how easily her child could speak in front of strangers, the author volunteered to do a public presentation. Like many of us, she had always avoided public speaking, fearing that she'd embarrass herself. But, once she finally ripped the Band-Aid off and got onto that stage, she felt exhilarated and realized she had a knack for public speaking after all.

So, just keep trying things, and pretty soon, you'll unlock skills you never knew you had.

*“You must do the thing you think  
you cannot do.”*

## **Mothers should take advantage of their parent network for support.**

For the author, motherhood seemed like the perfect setup. She'd get to leave her stressful corporate life. She'd be able to do all her work from home. And she'd be free to spend her time focusing on what she really cared about – looking after her newborn.

But that picture-perfect future life never materialized. When she left the city to raise her family, she began to miss the city. She missed her social circle, which had provided comfort and support. She had plenty of stress-free time to spend with her child – but she also felt isolated and sad.

**The key message here is: Mothers should take advantage of their parent network for support.**

This isn't a unique experience. Many new mothers report feeling isolated within the first few years of motherhood. And isolation isn't good for maternal well-being. This is why the first thing you should do if *you* feel isolated is acknowledge that you need support.

Support can come in so many forms that we often don't recognize it when we see it. It could be as simple as receiving recognition for your work, or encouragement to push on with an idea. Or it could be someone else looking after your kids, so you have some time to yourself.

In the author's case, she had the wherewithal to realize something important: if being a mother had the power to disconnect her from her old community, it probably had the power to help her build a new one.

How did she do this? Well, she let her child create a network for her. Children create bonds frequently and easily, so whenever she noticed her child had made a new friend, she would become friends with that child's parents. By creating a network of parents in this way, the author effectively constructed a support network of people with similar needs. This network enabled her to unlock extra time for work during the week when her children were playing at a friend's house.

The great thing about a community of parents is that they come from all walks of life and have diverse experiences and careers. It's by taking advantage of her parent network that the author runs a successful business today.

## **Business life and family life should be in harmony with one another.**

At first, it can be a little disorienting to switch so frequently between your role as a parent and your role as a businessperson. Small wonder that new mothers sometimes arrive at important work meetings with a bag full of baby wipes rather than a laptop.

The best way to resolve this disorientation is to keep these two sides of maternal life distinct and separate. If you don't, you might find yourself in the undesirable situation of being worried about work when you're with your children and worried about the children when you're at work.

**The key message here is: Business life and family life should be in harmony with one another.**

To separate these two sides of your life, the first thing you need to do is set up your own dedicated workspace in the home – ideally somewhere out of bounds for the kids. That doesn't mean you always have to work at home. It just means there's always a place where you can squeeze in some work when you've got the time.

The second thing you need to do is structure your week by sticking to a routine. People who work in an office have a structure built in. It's simple – you work when you're in the office and you don't work when you're not. But when you work from home, you've got to create a structure so that your role as parent and your role as professional remain distinct. A routine will ensure that you know which hours of the day belong to which role.

Try to keep your work to weekdays and relax a little on the weekend. Also, on Monday, try to schedule a weekly activity; this helps to set the tone for the

workweek. For example, the author begins every workweek by creating a video blog for her website. This means she always goes into the week with a sense of momentum.

Ideally, both sides of a working mother's life – the personal and the professional – should operate in harmony, each keeping you fresh and rejuvenated for the other. The best way to achieve harmony is to completely align your work schedule with your child's school calendar. This will help keep your needs in sync with your child's; you work when they work, eat when they eat, and, most importantly, take a vacation when they take a vacation.

## **Creating equality between spouses is beneficial for everybody.**

If you're a mother, you probably consider yourself the main caregiver. Mothers tend to regard fathers as, at best, semi-competent helper parents.

Even when couples start a family with egalitarian ideals – where no one has to give up their career, and both parents are equally involved in caregiving – the bulk of responsibility often falls to the mother.

**The key message here is: Creating equality between spouses is beneficial for everybody.**

The trouble is, many barriers that prevent parents from living according to their values. Number one among them is the workplace expectation that fathers are going to be the main provider. For this reason, even though the father is often entitled to as much parental leave as the mother, he'll rarely take as much, for fear of seeming uncommitted to his job.

Due to this initial imbalance of time spent with the baby, mothers become more competent with the basics of childcare, simply because they get more practice. As a result, the father often defers to the mother, which reinforces the pattern of the primary and secondary parent.

To make matters worse, some mothers engage in what's known as *maternal gatekeeping*. This is where a mother, perceiving the father as less competent, will intentionally limit his responsibilities and access to the children. Even if these mothers have good intentions, this is counterproductive, because it prevents fathers from figuring out how to parent for themselves.

So remember: even if it seems like a bad idea to give the father more responsibility, this is the best way for him to develop his parenting skills. And, the more time he spends with the children, the more hours the mother will have for work.

It's also good for your children's development to give them solo time with dad. Studies show that children benefit from bonding with both parents and from experiencing different parenting techniques.

Another way to involve the father is to leave specific tasks only for him. If he works during the day, then maybe he can be responsible for bath time or storytime before bed, giving mom some regular time off.

Remember, the care work you put in helps dad achieve his career goals, so it's only fair that he also puts time in to help you achieve yours.



## Final summary

The takeaway message from these blinks:

**Mothers are an extraordinarily talented group of people with much to contribute to business and the community. However, thanks to several structural barriers and out-of-date stereotypes, mothers can struggle to reintegrate into the professional world. But there is a way. By pursuing what they love, organizing their life around the children, and surrounding themselves with a supportive community, mothers can achieve career success in the hours available to them and live a fulfilled and happy life.**

Actionable advice:

### **Create your career story!**

The process of building a career or a business is a life-changing journey of discovery and personal growth. But it can also be an overwhelming prospect. Where should you even begin? The first step on your journey is to create a long-term vision and plan for the future. That means you need to decide where you want to end up, and then figure out how to take the steps that will get you there. Which skills do you need to learn, which experiences might benefit you, and which communities should you connect with? Try creating a visualization around your career, where you clearly lay out your journey into a series of small, manageable steps.

### **Got feedback?**

We'd sure love to hear what you think about our content! Just drop an email to [remember@blinkist.com](mailto:remember@blinkist.com) with the title of this book as the subject line and share your thoughts!

**What to read next: *Getting to 50/50*, by Sharon Meers and Joanna Strober**

If you found these blinks helpful, then take a peek at our blinks to *Getting to 50/50*. There you'll discover more information and tips about how to find balance as a working mother. The emphasis this time is on the benefits of creating a fair and equal household.

In these blinks, you'll find down-to-earth solutions to make a good impression at work and still make it to your child's ballet recital. They cover strategies you can use to deal with gender bias in the workplace. And they have a few tips that dad can use right now to make your life a little easier. You can find all this and more in our blinks to *Getting to 50/50*.

# Nice work! You're all done with this one.

We publish new books every week at [blinkist.com](http://blinkist.com).

Come and see – there's so much more to learn.

Inspired to read the full book?

[Get it here.](#)

Copyright © 2014 by Blinks Labs GmbH. All rights reserved.