

RAHUL PRASAD: Thank you Samer, for pushing our creative limits.

Our next speaker, Whitnee Hawthorne, is a champion for moms. The founder of the Savvy Working Mom and the VP of a Fortune 500 company, she has been coaching women for over 15 years and has been featured in Motherly, HeyMama, and on the podcast “The Mom Hour.” Whitnee will talk about the unfair bias’s mothers face in their day to day lives and will advocate for solutions which better support our working moms. Please welcome, Whitnee Hawthorne.

**‘WHAT CORPORATE AMERICA NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT WORKING MOMS’
– WHITNEE HAWTHORNE**

WHITNEE HAWTHORNE: It all started in the 80s. That’s right I’m an Oregon Trail millennial, a Xennial. Meaning I grew up analog and digital. I remember getting my first Walkman, you know, with a cassette and begging my mother to have Santa bring me a discman when CDs became a thing. Upon entering college my very own laptop, which I used to download way too many songs from Napster.

Growing up in the 80’s. I had Strawberry Shortcake...Rainbow Bright...and She-Ra all of whom showed me I could do anything! I also had Barbie, who didn’t look like me, but had a lot of cool stuff. Like most kids, I wanted cool stuff. The message I took from these dolls was, I can do anything and have cool stuff.

Now, you might think that these dolls and what they represented, most shaped who I am today.

But, what most shaped who I am today came from my mother and grandmother. What I got from them is, you can do anything, you can have cool stuff, as long as... YOU WORK FOR IT. Whether it’s to put food on the table or take a cool trip to SEAWORLD, you can have, if you work for it.

My Grandma, GG, is an amazing woman, at the tender age of 86 she still travels, dances, and goes to late night dinners. In addition to raising 6 wonderful children, she also worked. She worked, right alongside my grandfather, in the funeral home where we grew up.

In fact, she wanted a job that had not been open to women before and became the first female security guard at United States Steel, the mill in our town.

And then there is my mother, her 2nd oldest daughter. After graduating college, my mother married and became a housewife. But when I was 5 years old my parents divorced and her days as a housewife were over.

There was no alimony or child support and so my mother began to work. A few years later, she went back to school and got a Master of Education and became a teacher... all while raising three kids.

And now here I am, living a life I really enjoy, VP at a Fortune 500 company, married to an awesome guy, and raising two beautiful boys.

Working mothers aren't new. We've been around forever, and whether we are security workers, teachers, or corporate execs, we all have one thing in common. Becoming a mother has made us better workers and leaders.

Now, I know you might think... hold up Whitnee... I dunno about all that." Women have kids and then get distracted from work. They just don't show up the way they used to." At least that's the narrative used to justify the systemic career disadvantage, in pay, perceived competence and opportunities, working mothers face. Which some call "the motherhood tax."

Research shows that men and women have similar earning potential through their 20's, but once they hit childbearing years, the pay for women steeply declines... and it never goes back to even...

Motherhood is at the heart of the gender pay gap. We are seeing this exacerbated by the pandemic. Economists estimate the pandemic

A decade to end up, right back, in the same inequitable place.

And what's more disparaging is that men often make more money once they become a parent. The narrative goes, women get disengaged and unpredictable while men become more loyal and hard working.

To compound this, the pressure is also put-upon women to sacrifice their jobs to stay home and take care of the children, when affordable childcare is not available.

This means time lost in the workforce, time lost in building networks, earning tenure and being available for new roles and promotions. That time is impossible to make up.

The motherhood tax is unfair and unjust. The associated narrative is wrong. The idea that women should be solely or primarily responsible for the children they bear is flawed.

And dads, I'm not looking at you, I'm placing this fully at the feet of our society. Because here's the thing...

The Euro monitor boldly... and honestly stated that the shrinkage of the working-age (15-64) population is the single biggest danger for the economic health of cities. Guess how we get a working age population? Having and raising babies. And we continue to expect women to raise them. It's shown that on average women work 60% more on household and family needs than their male counterparts. This disproportion of household support skews even higher for mothers of young children. And of the parents staying home to take care of kids, 90% are women.

We expect women to raise children and we also need women to work. With minimum wage not being a living wage in most areas, we now live in a world where many require dual incomes to sustain a reasonable quality of life. And in single parent households, that single parent providing for the child is most often a woman. We also need women to round out the volume of workers required in the world. About half of the global workforce is made up of women. If women leave the workforce, there simply aren't enough men to fill in the gap. And women in the workplace create competitive advantage.

You know what happens when women work for you? You make more money! According to McKinsey, the most gender-diverse companies are 21% more likely to experience above-average profitability.

We benefit when women raise children. We Benefit when women work, in our offices, on our shop floors, in our schools and hospitals.

Still, society asks women who have children, to work like we don't have children and to parent like we don't have to work.

If you do both the things you win... the motherhood tax!"

And it's odd to me, because as the primary caregiver, we mamas develop a set of skills that any organization would envy in its competitors' employees.

When I went back to work, after maternity leave. I leveled up. I thought my time at grad school would be the key driver in shaping the type of leader I would become. While it was intense and I grew immensely through that process, it has nothing on becoming a mother. Motherhood is a true...leadership...bootcamp. When you become responsible for a life, the stakes are too high to mess up. You can't really fool around or sit on the sidelines when the going gets tough.

I remember once, myself, my husband and my then 4-month-old were on a plane heading to New Orleans, his hometown. The baby was in his own seat, the window seat, I was in the middle and my husband was in the aisle. The unthinkable happened. Baby boy had a blow out! Yes, poop was everywhere, and we could not ignore it. There was no waiting for the plane to land and despite

all the “concerned” looks no one was coming to our aide. We had to act and act fast. I had already pulled and place all the baby things in arms reach, so I scooped them all up, covered the babies messy back with an extra blanket, and then, since my husband was on the aisle, I attempted to pass him our little bundle of poopy joy along with the accoutrement to clean him. The look on my husband’s face, sheer terror!

Now my husband is and has always been down to parent. He changes diapers, feeds, and bathes the kids, and he has never referred to parenting as babysitting. He’s a dad, and so that terror wasn’t about the mess. It was about the fact that we were 30K feet in the air and without a proper changing table. We were in uncharted territory. And as he pushes the baby back towards me, he says, “you go, I’ve never done This before!”. I push the baby back at him and say, “You go! I’ve never Done this before.” So here we are pushing the baby back and forth, and I step up and say, “Fine I’ll figure it out!”. I say the right words to get my husband to clean the car seat, then I take the baby, I change the baby and that was that. Was it easy? No. Did I figure it out, yes. Cause that is what mamas do. Day in and day out, we figure it out.

We are the bearers of solutions, grit, and tenacity. So, when I returned to work, I returned stronger. it was hard, don’t get me wrong. Being away from my son sucked. Trusting him to the care of a stranger was almost impossible. Missing out on developmental milestones was tough.

I struggled to figure out how to meet all the new demands that had been put upon me. How to function when I wasn’t sleeping more than 90 minutes at once. How to find time to pump. How to be present at work while I missed my son. How to be present with my son, when all I could think about was a work project.

I cried in a bathroom more than once.

I struggled, and I evolved. The skills I learned as a mother helped me to do that.

I work in a competitive and dynamic industry. Once I was in a meeting where high stakes decisions were being made. A real corporate blow out situation. The room dripped with emotions and urgency. Everything was critical. When others would jump into reactive mode, pushing “the baby” back and forth trying to figure out how to move through uncharted territory, I was calm and centered, able to ensure we didn’t lose sight of the big picture and that each voice was heard.

People were disheartened, frustrated, and even scared. I was able to see them for who they are and understand their needs.

The decisions weren’t easy to make. We were resource constrained and up against immense pressure to drive change. When we would get stuck on a

successful path forward, I would offer up unique and innovative solutions, what I have dubbed, “the mama MacGyver effect”.

My son went to bed around 7:00PM. This meant that if I didn’t leave work at a decent hour, I would not see him. And so, I learned to set boundaries. But that didn’t mean getting less done, it meant leveraging others more. It meant empowering my team to level up. It meant delegating the work that would free me up to focus on the areas where I could make the most impact. It meant learning to say “no”, so that myself and my team could deliver on what mattered most.

It meant, evolving into a better leader. And the proof is the pudding. About 18 months after returning to work from my maternity leave, I was promoted.

I know that it was motherhood which made me a better leader. I also know I could not have done this alone.

Seeing my mother and grandmother work gave me the confidence to know that it was OK, if I worked and that it was not a detriment to my son’s life. Because I saw them manage the responsibility of work alongside the responsibility of raising children, while not just staying sane but also enjoying life, I understand that work life balance is a myth.

I saw my grandmother support grieving families and attend to the deceased during odd hours and often on weekends.

A teacher’s day doesn’t end when the students leave. I would see my mom bring home papers to grade and reports to complete.

I understood that work and life are not separate, and the goal isn’t to balance them but instead, like a beautiful piece of music, to ensure that there is harmony across all areas of your life: your career, your children, your marriage, finances, personal development, and spirituality.

I also very clearly understood that society has set it up where that harmony must be created by the individual. -

The world is still figuring out how to support working mothers in finding that work/life harmony. Meanwhile, just like my grandmother and mother, I was clear that I would need to figure out what works for me and make that work.

Having the support of my husband to help pitch in at home allowed me the mental space needed to recover from the stressors of working and momming.

And having a boss who did three very important things, let me shine at work even through the storms created when momming and working collide. He gave me

grace as I adjusted back to work-life after maternity leave. He gave me flexibility to attend to, not only emergencies, but also important moments in my son's life. Most importantly, he created a supportive environment where the fact that I was a mother, didn't mean that I was a substandard worker... He used his position to create a culture that didn't put me in a position to be shamed for needing flexibility, and he offered me the same opportunities as others. He used his power to be kind, to advocate for me, and to shape my day-to-day work experience for the better.

His choices allowed me to showcase the leadership skills I mastered when I became a mother, and to become a stronger leader.

A working mother's manager has the power to make or break her ability to thrive.

Some of us mamas want to work, some of us mamas must work. Either way, the world needs us mothers to work.

I feel hopeful that governments and businesses are coming to that realization and are on the path to making supportive change. Yet, that change is slow going. Still, there is something that can be done, right now. The partners and managers of working mothers can step up and do what's in their immediate power to support us.

Moms are multidimensional human beings. We have hopes and dreams for our children and ourselves. When we do better, our families, communities and places of employment do better.

We want to excel at our jobs. We've got the know-how and the will. What we need is your flexibility, advocacy, and support. Send this talk to your HR department and ask them to have the managers of women going out on maternity leave, to watch it.

Share this talk with the manager of a working mother, and then have a chat about how they can use their power to support keeping mothers in the workplace. If you're a working mom, this life we live is not easy. I see you. I am here in solidarity with you. You are amazing, strong and the skills motherhood is developing in you are a benefit to the world.

Mamas, partners, managers, let's come together to repeal the motherhood tax!