

Make room for a new kind of working mom

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Upgrade the definition of SAHM



Interview with rana florida

Mothers are essentially lumped into two broad categories — stay-at-home mom and working mom. But these labels don't fit every mother.

There are plenty of moms who don't want to give up their careers to raise children full-time, yet they still want to be with their children most of the time.

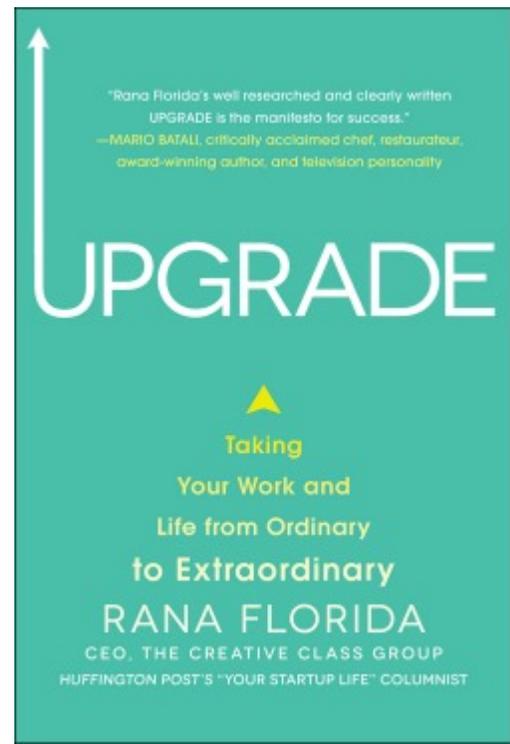
So where's the happy medium? How do you get an employer to give you the flexibility that's needed as a mother? Is it possible to change the mindset of an entire culture?

Rana Florida is the CEO of the Creative Class Group, the author of Upgrade: Taking Your Life and Work from Ordinary to Extraordinary and is known for her unapologetic commentary on women in the working world and her appearances on the Today Show. In her compulsively

readable book, she discusses why the work force needs to change to accommodate accomplished and determined mothers who merely need flexibility and understanding in order to live the kind of life they want while raising a family and still working. Too much to ask? Impossible to have it all? Not necessarily.

SheKnows: There are plenty of women who don't want to give up their careers, yet they still want to be with their children most of the time rather than counting on someone else to raise them. Can you comment on how this trend of lumping mothers into one of two categories — working mom or stay-at-home mom — needs to change... or, hopefully, is changing?

Rana Florida: There's no reason women should have to give up their careers to have children. Our society and businesses need a total overhaul. It's time to support working moms in the workplace. As Hillary Clinton so aptly said, "It takes a village." Employers need to step up and provide on-site day care. If they can't afford it, they need to provide women with freedom and flexibility to manage their workload on their own time.



SK: How does the work force in general need to shift to accommodate accomplished and determined mothers who just need some flexibility and understanding in order to live the kind of life they want while raising a family and still finding fulfillment through their job?

RF: In *Upgrade*, I mention Robert Pozen, a senior lecturer at Harvard Business School who wrote in the *New York Times*: "It's 5 p.m. at the office. Working fast, you've finished your tasks for the day and want to go home. But none of your colleagues have left yet, so you stay another hour or two, surfing the web and reading your e-mails again, so you don't come off as a slacker. It's an unfortunate reality that efficiency often goes unrewarded in the workplace."

"I don't believe that chaining people to their desks actually makes them work harder or delivers better results."

Pozen mentions a study published in 2010 by University of California, Davis Professor Kimberly D. Elsbach and others. The study "interviewed 39 corporate managers about their perceptions of their employees. The managers viewed employees who were seen at the office during business hours as highly 'dependable' and 'reliable.' Employees who came in over the weekend or stayed late in the evening were seen as 'committed' and 'dedicated to their work.'"

This idiotic thinking has to change. I don't believe that chaining people to their desks actually makes

them work harder or delivers better results. As long as they are delivering results, is it really necessary to micro-manage them or control their hours?

SK: For many moms, freelancing seems like the only option to work and still be home with your children. But if you haven't already established yourself as a freelancer before having kids, it can be tough to find success and a decent income. Is freelancing still a woman's best bet for living the kind of woman-mom-professional life she wants?

RF: Every woman in the workforce has to take a stand. It's insane that women have been made to feel guilty or wrong for juggling both. Women need to push back on the strict policies and hours. But they have to be accountable too. When given the freedom and flexibility they must deliver and make themselves invaluable to the company. Once that happens, employers have no choice but to accommodate the flexibility.

SK: For women who have been home with their children and who have given up their jobs to do so, how can they "upgrade" their categorization of being a stay-at-home mom so that potential employers will see that they are capable and worthwhile employees? They are moms after all, who do 57 jobs at once.

RF: Keep learning, continue to grow, read, experience new things, take classes, take lessons, listen to webcasts and podcasts in your areas of interest. Constantly push yourself to try something new every day or learn something new. Many stay-at-home moms find themselves in a rut, unmotivated and feeling down. Don't let that be you. Stay plugged-in. Keep growing.

SK: Far too many people look down on the stay-at-home mom, like she's given something up in deference to her children, that she's living through them. It would seem that people automatically assume a stay-at-home mom has nothing in the fire, she's merely changing diapers, cleaning toilets and making dinner. This stereotypical, 1950s, dinner-on-the-table-at-five shadow hovers over us, even in this modern age. What are your words of advice to a woman who's feeling boxed-in, stuck or like she's asking for too much by wanting more?

"The children we raise today will be our leaders tomorrow. Let's create structures that can support both."

RF: We are going to look back at this era as oddly as we did when we allowed smoking on airplanes. It's unnatural, wrong and it's detrimental to the health and well-being of our children. Leaving young children — starting at the age of 2, for some — with strangers or in a strange place away from parents and family for hours a day is inherently wrong. There has to be an integration of work/life. The children we raise today will be our leaders tomorrow. Let's create structures that can support both.