



There has been a lot written about what, when and how women should to pursue their career dreams whilst managing their biological/evolutionary responsibilities. A recent statement I mulled over is 'Women can have it all but not all at the same time'.

Aside from the obvious that the statement is true for anyone, male or female I have personally pondered over my own ambitions and the recent decision I took to 'fold' my cards in order to give more time to the things that required more focus in my life.

Almost 4 years ago, I was invited along to A VMware diversity council event, sold by the promise of free bubbles and canapés, I took my seat, ready to sit through a talk and have a chance to raid the buffet and chat to a few people after. I was always a fairly ambitious but adopted a head down bum up approach that many of us do.

The speaker took the podium, and what I was expecting a vibrato delivery of a corporate robot, devoid of gender or personality, what I heard was a stark contrast to that which made me sit up in my seat. A soft Irish accent, delivered with humility and humour, recounting her Journey from developer to CIO in just a few years.

A workaholic's reflection on achieving balance Knowing when to hold 'em and when to fold 'em by Catriona Walkerden The speaker, Grainne Kearns, now Jetstar CIO, spoke authentically about the need to develop a network, and put into it as much as you take out. The need to use what you have, working smarter not harder and that the head down bum up approach does not always pay rewards, especially to the minority female population in the IT industry.

That 30 minute talk changed my life. I went home talked to my partner (now husband) about what I wanted to do in my life and set about a plan to get more involved with the industry.

I researched some organisations that involved women and IT, there were some local ones and national but I decided to offer my help or services to females in IT and Telco (FITT). By some strange fate, FITT were looking for marketing volunteers and I became involved straight away, by some even stranger fate a role on the management committee came up 3 months later, after short contemplation and concern over the time commitment, I jumped at the chance.

The three plus years that followed has given me something a course or job experience never could. I got to contribute to a think tank comprised of some of the most brilliant dynamic women from a range of disciplines all committed to a world where gender diversity wasn't an issue anymore.

I got the best observational mentoring a fledgling leader could imagine, watching big picture strategy discussion, program management and conflict being managed by some exceptionally smart women. In my own development, I began to speak and write (my passion) on a topic (gender diversity) that I was becoming a subject matter expert on. I wrote for the Diversity Council of Australia, Technology decisions and Women's Agenda and interviewed with so many publications including Marie Claire and BRW.

My role at FITT 100% kept me from post natal craziness when I had my baby girl Nina in 2014. I gave myself 12 months off my role at Optus business but 6 weeks off FITT, knowing myself well, I'd go crazy without weekly responsibilities and mental stimulation.

A year came around and I was ready to come back to work. Optus to their credit offered me a promotion, I told them I only wanted to work 4 days and they said, whatever you want to do we'll make it work, I felt so excited at the opportunity but a slight twinge of how the hell am I going to make this work with FITT responsibilities and now, a baby.

So how did I make it work? Well, at first, I crammed everything in, which was a huge novelty. Being back at work I was on a high, I loved being back in a routine and mentally stimulating environment whilst having a finger on the pulse of the industry through FITT. By three months in, the novelty had worn off and I was exhausted. The reality of having a 24 hour role as a mother, committee member and manager setting up a new team and function, took its toll.

I only realised on a rare weekend of relaxation, my wedding anniversary that I hadn't had a single moment of downtime to think about my hopes and dreams. Every minute that I wasn't working, I was mentally berating myself over a to-do list that was never done. Coupled with that was the sinking feeling that I was losing energy for the role I played at FITT which was often the source of my guilt, having delivered 110% as in days past.

I made the decision to quit as I shared a glass of wine with my husband in the Yarra valley on our wedding anniversary. He hadn't wanted to say anything but was relieved that I had come to the conclusion myself. Something had to give. My last strategy day with the FITT team was this weekend, and while partly I wish I could continue forever, I know it's time to allow someone else a turn and myself a break.

And so, ruminating on the comment, 'women can have it all but not at the same time'. I have to say I agree but the same principle applies to anyone. It's a well-known fact that attempting to be a jack of all trades, one becomes a master of none, and so I resigned my revered committee position at FITT. I decided instead to focus my energies on making the most of the promotion I'd been given at Optus and focus inward instead. Isn't that the old head down bum up approach, I hear you ask? Hell no!

My FITT network has taught me that there are smarter ways to get things done and to use femininity, including empathy and compassion to drive the right outcomes you need. I'm more aware of my power and capabilities. When all is said and done, I've had to learn when to hold em' and when to fold 'em. But did I win? Absolutely.

For more from Techno Femme, click [HERE](#)