

A Gozitan Multi-functional Mother

CARMEN BAJADA

Introduction

Being a mother of four children aged between five and sixteen, with a full-time job as financial advisor with one of the leading banks in Malta, as well as being a local councillor and a part-time student at the University of Malta (Gozo Campus), means that I have to use my time as wisely as possible. This article explains that these roles need not conflict with each other – on the contrary they may complement each other.

Juggling between one role and another does entail sacrifice, sheer hard work and sometimes sleepless nights. There were instances, for example, when on the eve of an examination I had to find the time to help my teenage daughters with their studies as they were also sitting for an examination the next day.

The essential skill needed for this purpose is time management, and the essential attitude is a belief that women can and should contribute to the well-being of their community and to society in general.

Being a Mother

Being a mother should not prevent a woman from being a leader, and taking assertive stances in line with the values she upholds. The role of a parent need not stop a woman from furthering her education and in utilising such education for the benefit of her family and her community and society in general.

The early years of children are challenging for both parents. No matter how busy and engaged they are it is important that they give their children a sense of being loved. As a mother I make it a point to express love and affection to all my children, knowing that a gentle cuddle, a little encouragement, appreciation, approval or even a smile can go a long way to boost their confidence and well-being. I do my utmost to be available for our children whenever they need me, expressing interest and involving myself in their activities as much as possible.

Although my role as a councillor is demanding, I do my very best not to allow this to hinder my role as a parent.

I believe that young children need quality time. I enjoy playing and doing craft projects with them. I spend many afternoons and evenings with the family at Ramla Bay or Hondoq Bay during the summer months. During school terms I do my best to dedicate Sundays for my family. Moreover whenever I have an appointment in Malta and know that our children can come with us I insist that we go together. When my appointment is over, we often go to museums, historical places, and attend other cultural events. Even when I have to go abroad I do my best to travel as a family.

It is also important that women be a bit assertive when it comes to setting time for meetings. During a seminar organized by one of the Maltese Trade Unions, I was influenced by one of the contributor's talk and her approach regarding the involvement of women in committees and boards. She sat on various boards as a director, and she was very assertive regarding the setting of times for the meetings. Men usually do not have to cater for their family's daily requirements (cooking and being home when children return from school),



A family portrait

but it is usually they who schedule the meetings. As a mother I always make it a point that I am home when my children return from school, thus whenever I am asked to attend a meeting at that time, I ask for the meeting to be delayed by half an hour to enable me to meet both commitments.

I must admit however that I need my husband's help to fulfil my family obligations. For example, since I utilise most of my leave to attend university on Saturdays, it has become extremely difficult for me to attend all the functions organised at school during office hours. Here my husband's support is extremely vital. He attends functions which I do not manage to attend, keeping me informed of the outcome and when possible taking videos of activities in which our children participate, so that we can see them together at home.

Being a Councillor

Being a councillor is hard work and time-consuming. The key role of a councillor is to act as a voice of the local people: helping individual residents, developing strategies and services for the local community as a whole. I do my utmost to prepare for and participate constructively in all meetings of the council, committees and working groups. Most council meetings take place on at least one evening per month and meetings usually finish around mid-night, sometimes even later. Moreover there are also day-time commitments. These include meetings with other bodies, such as police and other authorities to ensure that local needs are met by all public services.

Keeping up to date with today's dynamic environment entails that a councillor attends various seminars such as those relating to EU Funding. Councillors have to make tough decisions sometimes involving conflicting interests. To be able to take fair, sound and informed decisions based on the facts, a councillor needs to do a lot of reading of reports and correspondence which I usually do in the early morning hours. I also have to be on the alert for any news and information which affects the community of Xaghra.

A councillor needs also to maximise his/her knowledge of the law and relevant policies in areas such as development control and licensing.

Councillors have to follow a strict code of conduct which governs their behaviour. I admit that making decisions about planning and licensing applications and policies are the most difficult. The Xaghra Local Council has to face and take stands against development planning decisions which are considered to be detrimental to the community, even though very profitable to the developer. A case in point was the development of twenty-three villas near Ramla Bay.

Although there are sometimes adverse repercussions for the councillors as well as their family members, including being bullied and intimidated, when taking certain stands regarding planning permits, I believe that a councillor has to shoulder the responsibility that the local community entrusts in them.

Thus although to become a councillor one does not need any formal qualifications, a councillor needs to possess considerable information about planning and environmental concerns. In addition, a councillor needs to be a good listener, have an enquiring mind, have the confidence to speak in public and have the commitment to work with others.



Mother and sons participating in village Easter function

The Roles of a Mother and Councillor can be Complementary

In many instances the role of a councillor and a mother complement each other. For example as a council we are in direct contact with the local school, and often involve ourselves in youth work and adult education. We are also involved in libraries and community centres, parks, museums and sports centres, refuse collection and recycling, parks and traffic management, roads and pavements maintenance and environmental health. I am sure that my children's knowledge on these issues has increased since I become a councillor. My knowledge on these matters has a spillover effect on their knowledge regarding these areas.

I feel that my role as a Councillor is helping my children to be more altruistic, as this role requires commitment to the principles of honesty, integrity, objectivity, openness, accountability and respect for others. I believe that the behaviour and character one hopes children will adopt and live are modelled by the behaviour of their parents. I try to show them by example in addition to verbal explanations.



Diploma in Commerce Graduation

Our children very often get involved and participate in the voluntary work I am involved in as councillor. They enjoy participating in cultural activities organised by the Xaghra Local Council, like for example, Ġgantija Awaken, Clean up the World and visits to the historical places in Xaghra.

Being a Student and a Mother

The knowledge I gain through my studies also has positive spillover effects on my family. For example as a result of my University course I have improved my knowledge of financial management, and this has been of benefit for managing family finances. In addition this has been useful to me as a Bank employee.

Part of the course I am following involves behavioural studies and this has had beneficial effects on my ability to understand people better, including my immediate family.

As a result of my studies I also improved my knowledge of time-management, a skill of major importance in my role as mother and councillor.

Conclusions

The most important thing for me is to attempt to attain a good balance between work, study and the family, giving priority to the immediate vital tasks to be carried out. As argued in this article, these roles can complement each other.

However there are times when life is very hectic and the pressure is heavy. Balancing three major roles is not an easy task but I have to do this for the benefit on my children, my community and myself.

The most important skill required to attain this end effectively and efficiently is time-management and this combined with motivation and dedication renders my life very satisfying and rewarding.

Carmen Bajada is currently attending a course at the University of Malta (Gozo Campus) leading to a Bachelor Degree in Commerce. She is a financial advisor with one of the leading banks in Malta, as well as a local councillor for the Xaghra Local Council.