

Is it possible to be a good CEO and a good mother?

Howard Winn



Su-Mei Thompson, chief executive of the Women's Foundation.

SHARE

2 Likes
2 Shares
13 Tweets
0 LinkedIn Shares
0 Google+1s
0 YouTube Shares
5 Comments

Email Print

With the approach of International Women's Day on Saturday, there is a frenzy of women's events this week, propelled mainly by the indefatigable Su-Mei Thompson, chief executive of The Women's Foundation.

But last night was the turn of Intelligence Squared, the organisation that provides a forum for political, economic and cultural debate. Last night's debate was a cracker with an all female cast speaking to the motion "The Hand That Rocks the Cradle Cannot Rock the Boardroom". In other words, does a good mother have time to be a good chief executive?

Speaking for the motion were Debora Spar, author of *Wonder Women: Sex, Power, and the Quest for Perfection*, and Allison Pearson, an award-winning journalist and the author of the global bestseller *I Don't Know How She Does It*. Against the motion were Helena Morrissey, chief executive of Newton Investment Management, founder of the 30% Club and, amazingly, mother of nine children, and Zhang Xin, co-founder and chief executive of Soho China. The debate was moderated by BBC World News presenter Zeinab Badawi and indeed the BBC is to broadcast the debate, which gave it an added frisson.

The debate was won by those speaking for the motion, with 51 per cent of the votes, compared with 48 per cent against and 1 per cent who said they didn't know. Those for the motion argued there just weren't enough hours in the days to do both jobs properly, while those against who were both chief executives of their respective companies with 13 children between them argued they were living evidence that they could. There were some lively discussions and edgy exchanges as to whether they could be good mothers.

Pearson had some that drew the most laughs and good one-liners about men who thought toilet paper was replaced by the toilet paper fairy. More seriously, she noted that women in the West were beginning to die of stress-related diseases just like men, "a tough price to pay for equality". "Women have made the world, men can run it."

Interestingly, about 85 per cent of the audience were women, and as one said: "Where were all the men? They're the ones that should be listening to this."



LAI SEE
HOWARD WINN