

# The guilt trap

Working mothers are facing a new problem—guilt. Monica Shepherd talks to Gabriele Wehler about eliminating the effects of such guilt and improving morale in your workplace.

In 1963, feminist Betty Friedan wrote of ‘the problem with no name’ facing repressed housewives. Her ideas encouraged women to leave the home, enter the workforce and pursue careers. In 2010, Friedan would be proud of the ever-increasing percentage of women excelling in the workforce. However, working mothers, and indeed their employers, are facing a new problem. Although it’s not often discussed, this time it has a name—guilt.

Today, many women are freely making choices about returning to full-time employment after having children. For others, financial pressures and responsibilities are the main influencing factor in their decision to be a working mother. Given that recent studies have shown that young children do not necessarily suffer from their mothers returning to work, the discussion is therefore not about whether the choice is right or wrong, but ensuring that women, their families and their employers are accepting of the implications their choice has and making lifestyle changes to adapt accordingly.

Look around your office or workplace and you’ll see desks adorned with the framed faces of off-spring who wait patiently for the post-5pm appearance of their working mother. These Supermums can actually be the best employees—they are armed with multitasking skills, they’re highly organised and can think on the go. However, how many of these mothers are effectively hanging up their ‘mum’ hat as they walk out the door in the morning and keeping their ‘career’ hat firmly on their head throughout the day?

Juggling pressures of home life and career can cause many women to lose focus and be less efficient at work, causing errors and relationship issues with their colleagues. As an employer, it is important to be aware of the impact of working mother’s guilt and stress on your business, and the ways in which you can facilitate a supportive culture.

Life coach Gabriele Wehler of Clarity Coaching knows firsthand the difficulties of being a working mother. As a solo parent for 10 years, she juggled multiple commitments including study and employment while raising her son. She knows that not having the tools to deal with these demands becomes destructive for the individual, their family, their relationships and their performance at work.

Wehler recently conducted research to gain further insight into the issues and pressures facing today’s working mothers. More importantly, she has used this information to develop the tools required to help women enjoy both their life and their career without feelings of guilt, depression, anger and resentment.

More than 200 women participated in the study in which they were asked to respond to questions relating to their life as a working mother and how guilt and other related stressors affect their family, their role in the workplace and themselves. Wehler’s findings showed that 71 percent of women experienced moderate to extreme levels of guilt and one in three working mothers said this guilt negatively affects their enjoyment of work. Their concentration and efficiency levels are reduced and their lifestyle (lack of sleep,



poor physical health, weight issues and social withdrawal) can lead to increased absenteeism.

Ensuring the wellness of your staff is always a hot HR topic and much has been said about raising awareness about work-life balance amongst your employees. However, despite the fact that working mothers are aware of the necessity of ‘balance’, feelings of guilt and anxiety often override any desire to take time out, with one-third of mothers hardly finding time to exercise and some making poor choices to help them cope with stress, including drugs, alcohol, coffee, binge eating and poor food choices.

Armed with a greater understanding of working mothers’ issues, Wehler developed her Switch Workshop—a five-week course which helps women learn how to create more time for themselves and their family, strengthen relationships with their children, partners and colleagues, and gain inner peace and happiness—resulting in improved health and increasing their confidence in pursuing advanced career opportunities. The workshop takes participants through the process of evaluating and analysing their personality, their values, strengths and weaknesses and their goals (see [www.claritycoaching.co.nz](http://www.claritycoaching.co.nz)).

Becoming aware of who they are, where they are and where they want to be gives them a starting point for switching their thinking in

order to realign their values and make positive change. By learning stress management tools and better coping mechanisms, women are empowered to reframe their ways of thinking and begin the process towards shifting the guilt.

For one participant, feelings of guilt about being away from her children were affecting her performance at work. When her husband was made redundant, she also had to deal with pressures of being the sole income earner and at the same time, changes in her company meant she was required to take on a new role. Lacking the confidence to handle the responsibility to be a decision maker meant she felt overwhelmed by the challenge of added demands.

Through attending the five-week workshop and discovering who she was and how she could adjust her actions, she gained trust in herself and her abilities. Her confidence in fulfilling her roles as both a mother and an employee meant less stress in the home and a greater focus and efficiency to deal with work matters. "I can be happy with my job and know that me being at work is good for me as well as the family. I have confidence at work to tackle difficult situations."

An analysis of the post workshop effects in comparison to the initial study showed that feelings of stress had dropped by 30.5 percent and guilt had dropped by over 47 percent—with one participant

measuring a 78 percent decrease. Participants in the workshop said it changed the way they felt about their work, they enjoyed being at work and guilt about having a career was reduced as they felt more confidence in their relationship with their children. A more balanced outlook and positive attitude had an impact on relationships with colleagues. Efficiency levels improved as women gained the skills required to better focus their attention on work issues without the distraction of external problems.

More than 85 percent of working mothers who participated in this study said they would take up wellness and/or life coaching assistance if it were to be offered by their employer. Human capital contributes directly to the performance of your business. Therefore, investing in the wellness of your staff is crucial in order to maximise and retain talent in your company. Assisting in 'switching' the way your employees think will undoubtedly bring benefits and results including increased productivity and a much improved staff morale where employees know that 'the problem with a name' is acknowledged in a supportive company culture. **et**

*Monica Shepherd is the director of writing and editing business Mark My Words.*

## Prove Your Contribution to Financial Results

### ROI Workshops with Drs Jack & Patti Phillips

The Phillips are returning to New Zealand in February 2011 to run the following workshops at the Brentwood Hotel in Wellington:

#### ROI Certification

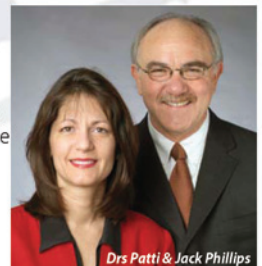
- Five-day workshop leading to the *Certified ROI Professional* designation
- Fully master the skills needed to implement a comprehensive, ongoing ROI initiative for your organisation in this five-day workshop. Gain the skills to become certified in the ROI Methodology™ and learn how to sustain the measurement and evaluation process on a continued basis
- Receive ongoing, personalised coaching while conducting an impact study. Once competency in the ROI Methodology has been demonstrated through this study, certification is established. No other workshop provides access to the same level of expertise as ROI Certification
- 28 February - 4 March 2011; \$3,500 NZD pp + GST

#### Measuring the ROI in Leadership, Coaching and Other Soft Skills Programmes

- This two-day ROI competency building workshop emphasises applications for leadership development, management development, coaching and other soft skill areas
- The content covers developing application impact objectives, collecting various types of hard and soft data, isolating the effects of the programmes, converting data to monetary values, tabulating appropriate programme costs and calculating ROI
- 2 - 3 March 2011; \$1,800 NZD pp + GST

#### Measuring ROI in the Public Sector

- Two-day ROI workshop customised for the Public Sector
- Come learn a simple and credible approach to measuring the return on investment while focusing on issues specifically relevant to measuring and evaluating programmes in government settings or for organisations that use government funding
- Quickly see the advantage of the process as six types of data are collected and analysed - this data represents qualitative and quantitative data, developed from a variety of sources
- 28 February - 1 March 2011; \$1,800 NZD pp + GST



*Drs Patti & Jack Phillips*

#### Forecasting ROI

- One-day interactive workshop on the use of ROI
- This workshop focuses on predicting the success of a programme before it is implemented
- 4 March 2011; \$1,200 NZD pp + GST

**A 5% discount is available for NZATD, HRINZ and NZIM members.**

For information about ROI workshops in New Zealand, email Beryl Oldham at [beryl@oldham.co.nz](mailto:beryl@oldham.co.nz)

ROI INSTITUTE™

