

MUM'S THE WORD

Juggling family life and a job still seemed to be the exception not too long ago. Today, it's the most natural phenomenon for women to have it all – beautiful intimate family time and a fulfilling career. We speak to four working mothers whose hand not only rocks the cradle but whose finger is also on the pulse

Writer Vivienne Tang



**CARA G MCLROY
CO-FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF
GENIE JUICERY**

A popular model and TV host, Cara G McIlroy is also the co-founder of Genie Juicery, a natural juice cleansing company. Her entrepreneurial spirit hasn't slowed down a bit since daughter India was born. Instead, the Hong Kong-based half Australian/half Singaporean mamma feels more determined than ever to be a good role model for her little one and juggles modelling gigs, company expansions and well-deserved family time with her three loved ones.

What does being a mother mean to you?
Being a mother means everything to me. It's the greatest gift I ever got. I've always really loved children, and to have my own child is such an amazing blessing.

What are some of the challenges of becoming a mother?
It's definitely challenging to be a working mum and hard to find a balance, but I love it, and I'm making it work. I could use some 'me' time to get some rest and rejuvenation. What's very unique about both of my careers is that I don't work regular hours, so I'm able

to be at home with India quite often.

How do you juggle work and family life?
I try to enjoy weekends with the family: Jesper, India, Roxy (my dog) and myself. So we go for walks as a family, and Jesper and I have taken the role of parents in our stride, as we do everything ourselves, because we don't have our families here. All of these precious things, like having dinner together, bath time and walking our dog, are all special times that we spend together outside of work.

You also have your Genie Juicery business. How does that fit into everything?
Of course India is always going to be my first priority, but I have a lot of things going on with my business. We're opening a store at IFC, Hong Kong, and we're expanding into retail. There are so many things going on. I'm very busy, but I'm doing my best to do it all.

Do you ever feel guilty for working?
Yes, I do feel guilty when I work sometimes, but we all have to work, and now I'm even more driven in my career. I want to set a good example for my daughter and show her that you can create your dream if you work hard. I want to be able to give her all the things that maybe my parents couldn't

afford when I was younger. Usually she's at work with me though.

Does your other half support you in what you do?
My husband is a godsend. He is such a devoted husband and dad. He's always there to help when I have to go to an event. He's always at home taking care of India. We share that responsibility as equally as we can, and he's 100 per cent supportive of me. He's always there as an emotional support when I get home, when I'm tired, when I'm grumpy. So we make a great team.

What are the most rewarding aspects of having both, a beautiful family and a fulfilling career?
I think children learn a lot when they see their parents working hard. Also, I would love to be a stay-at-home mother, but in reality I have to work. Nowadays, I think it's quite common that both parents go back to work. We're very lucky; even though we both work, we both still take care of our daughter.

Do you have a philosophy or a motto?
My philosophy is to dream big and live life with open eyes, to see everything and be empathetic towards people and animals.

**DAVENA MOK
FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF
A-VIBE**

Born and raised in Perth, Australia, Davena Mok started her career in journalism, but her love for events and pop culture soon led her to set up her own PR and marketing company, A-Vibe, in Hong Kong. Today, she fuses a hectic job with a busy family life by being highly organised and strategic with her spare time. When she's not at swimming lessons with Lovella and Dante, she likes to plug into Hong Kong's creative scene.

What does being a mother mean to you?
Being a mother means being a nurturer, to be someone who is always full of love, who is always caring, always wanting the best for her children...and just being there with them, whether it's through happy times or sad times, learning development phases, etc.

What have been some of the challenges of becoming a mother?
You can't just do things on a whim, like going to the movies or going out drinking until midnight. It's not about you anymore, your life is about someone else. And you just

give up a lot of stuff, like your personal care. You're ready in five minutes. You can eat a meal in five minutes. I never skip meals, you just eat really fast. The kids always come first.

How do you juggle work and family life?
I'm just really organised. Work-wise I'm really efficient, and I try to be as efficient as I can with my seven staff. And then with my husband, we actually share a calendar, so we know where each one is going, or if we're supposed to do something together. And I'm quite strict, I don't do overtime. I start work around 9am/10am and then I finish by 6pm or 7pm, and then I'm logged out. So over the weekend and over night, I don't check my emails. I believe that you need to learn to log off. So I think you need to have that personal determination and willpower and boundaries to just not be available. If people Facebook or Whatsapp me for work, I tell them to please email me. So I use my inbox as my to-do-list. I clean out my inbox very efficiently. We also have two helpers, and I think that makes a huge difference. There's a kids' calendar, and their helpers are told that we're doing this and that tomorrow. So everything is about briefing and being organised. You have to

choose what you want to do with the kids. I can't be home at 5pm/6pm to bathe my kids. I don't need to feed them. My helpers can feed them. So we do swimming classes with them every Saturday. You have to just know what you can be there for, and be there for 100 per cent and not let it be a burden on you, but for it to be something that you love doing with your kids.

Why did you set up your PR and events company A-Vibe?
I set up A-Vibe on a whim, with no business plan. And I did it with a friend, and after six months we decided that we couldn't work together, and I continued the company on my own. So 12 years later is where I'm at now.

Do you ever feel guilty for working?
What my husband and I do is we dedicate half of Saturday to the kids and all of Sunday, and Public Holidays. So for us, we offset the guilt because we're always home at night and put the kids to bed by 8:30pm/9pm. We don't really go out.

Does your other half support you in what you do?
I think when women learn about being working mothers, you just move into superwoman mode, and the superwoman mode is incredible. You don't have to sleep, you can keep working, you can switch from mummy mode to professional mode. You can be really stern at work, but then go home and look after your sick child. But Lance is a very supportive husband. So he's hands-on, if he can see that I'm tired, he'll let me sleep in. It's just important to work as a team.

What are the most rewarding aspects of having both, a beautiful family and a fulfilling career?
My sanity I think. I'm used to working, I love working. I don't think I could ever give up working. For me it's a good balance of both.

Do you have a philosophy or a motto?
You just really have to have passion for what you do, whether it's being a mum or working. If you don't have passion for it, then it means your heart isn't in it, and then maybe you shouldn't be doing it. But if you have passion for something, then everything is doable, whether its no sleep, long hours, stress. Your passion will get you through it.



**GRACE LAM
FASHION STYLIST**

Super stylish Grace Lam, who recently left her Senior Fashion Style Editor role at Vogue China to go freelance, is enjoying her newfound freedom. The Hong Kong-born, London-raised stylist embraced motherhood one step at a time and is now convinced that being a mum is one of the best things she's ever experienced. Already immersed in mamma's fashion world, baby Theo's style will definitely be one to watch.

What does being a mother mean to you?

Being a mother means you don't have your own life anymore, but you are willing not to have your own life anymore. It's a whole new world to me, because I never thought that it would be this difficult, but you just cope. Humans are quite amazing creatures, because we just adapt to any situation, and having kids is definitely one of them. It's the hardest thing I've ever done, for sure, and you have no control over it. So if you're a person

like me, a control freak, highly organised... throw all that out the window.

You've recently gone freelance. Could you ever imagine giving up work completely to be a stay-at-home mum?

Yeah, totally. I actually really enjoy it. Me freelancing now is perfect, so I can step out for a bit and see people, go to cocktails, press days and parties, and then I go back and be a mum. I think I'd be quite happy with that. There is nothing better than bringing a nice person into this world, and I really think it's down to the upbringing. I feel that if I nurture my son to be a good person and not harmful to anyone, then hopefully it will make a difference.

Why did you go freelance?

Every mother told me that the first two years are really important, and I don't want to miss out. I feel with my job before, I used to do quite a bit of travelling, and always very last minute. I don't think that I could do that

anymore. So basically, I just want to spend more time with him and have my freedom.

How do you juggle work and family life?

First of all, I have a very hands-on husband. God, if I didn't have him, I wouldn't survive. And that's why I just hope for every woman out there who wants to have a family to have a very helpful husband, because even mentally, it's really important for him to be there for you, even if he can't help. Even if he's just there saying, "You know what honey, it's going to be fine." It just makes a world of a difference. I know some dads who don't help, and they've never changed diapers. It's quite shocking. I think to have a very helpful and understanding husband is the most important thing in the world. And then, if you can buy help, just spend money on it [laughs].

Do you ever feel guilty for working?

Yes. I just rush home, and not because it's a guilt thing, but more because you want to be with him, because he's this tiny little thing. But then again, we have cameras at home, so I can always watch him.

What are the most rewarding aspects of having both, a beautiful family and a fulfilling career?

It's the perfect balance. I think nowadays I have more respect for full-time mothers (now that I know how much hard work it is), because you know what, when you have a job, it's a break. You can switch off for a few hours or a day, but being a full-time mum, you have no break whatsoever. It's actually so much tougher than working. So I have a lot of respect for full-time mums.

Do you have a philosophy or a motto?

"How you treat people is the way you want to be treated", I think that's the most important thing. Especially in our industry, there are different types of people and because everything is so appearance-based, you see a lot of uneasy things, and I've met a lot of nasty people, fake people. But I always think, you never know what's going to happen... who's going to be more important than you eventually. I try not to be bitchy to people so it doesn't fire back at me, and this is what I want to teach my son when he grows up. You should treat people the same way you want to be treated. That's my main thing, and also "Never work for free".



**NEALY FISCHER
FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF
MAYYA MOVEMENT**

Having lived in Israel, New York and now Hong Kong, and having been a leader in the yoga and wellness industry specialising in workshops for women's wellness for the last 18 years, Nealy Fischer recently set up MAYYA Movement to inspire women on an even greater scale, educating, empowering and encouraging them to live their dreams after bearing children. When she isn't trying out new healthy recipes, she's dedicating time to her four kids, Ben, Eitan, Ayla and Liam.

What does being a mother mean to you?

It's like having a mirror in front of you every single day, reminding you about what's most important.

Why did you set up MAYYA Movement?

I've been in Hong Kong for ten years, teaching yoga, cooking and doing retreats. I just always had an entrepreneurial spirit and had a vision of how I wanted things to be done. I wake up in the morning with ideas, and I sort of want to make them happen, and not wait for the corporate office to approve them. I spent about six months contemplating what my core mission was. Everybody has a reason why they're here. So I contemplated what my message to the world was, that if I

died tomorrow, what would I wish that I had done. So I came to the understanding that my mission is to inspire other women about living healthy and mindful lives.

There is a ton of information and many resources, and Hong Kong is starting to boom in this field. There are people who have never eaten healthily before, who are now turning to Paleo Diets and vegan diets. I'm on all these chats on Facebook, and there is just so much clutter. What I'm trying to do is to simplify the choices to ultimately make healthy living accessible, transformational and effective. With the MAYYA event we've hand-picked the experts and the methods that are saying, "Try this. Go home and try eating this way. Follow these recipes from these people. Try this form of exercise. Do this type of yoga. See how you feel. Take these supplements. Wake up in the morning and remember why you're doing it, find a motivation, connect with a community of people who have like-minded values and go out and change your life."

I understand that you have a limited amount of time. You don't want to be cooking three meals, one for your husband, one for your kids and one for yourself, which I did for years by the way. I would have my salad and they would have something else, right? Now it's like, there's a meal for dinner, how can we all find something.

How do you juggle work and family life?

Every day is a challenge. Every single day [smiles]. You just have to be really organised and understand that something is always going to have to give. I'm in a start-up mode right now where my family is suffering, and anyone who is telling you that you can have it all without your family suffering...it's a myth. So we have stressful days, and I have to give my kids a hug at the end of the day. You have to be creative about making time.

Do you ever feel guilty for working?

I try not to ever use the word 'guilty'. I think as women, we just suffer from that all the time. 'Guilty' means that you're not making an informed choice. So this has been really thought out and really informed, so I don't feel guilty. I do have moments when I have to be really clear about what my values and my intentions are and understand what I'm capable of and in the long run how much my kids are going to need me. It's not guilty, but just being thoughtful and honest with myself.

Does your other half support you in what you do?

He's been amazing, but it's difficult because I was always there before, even though I was always working...we're so fortunate in Hong Kong. I have help. There's a system. My house just runs, but it means you have to be a very clear manager and learn how to delegate.

What are the most rewarding aspects of having both, a beautiful family and a fulfilling career?

My mother was a full-time mum, and I have a tremendous amount of respect for mothers who decide to stay at home. I think that people are different and that our calling and our purpose are unique. When I'm home, I always feel like there is something else that I'm supposed to give, and that isn't to diminish my role as a mother. I think there are sacrifices, but I'm one of those people who just feel pulled to help on a bigger scale, and I do hope that one day, my kids recognise that what I'm doing is of value, and if I can inspire them through my journey, then somehow they can see me as a model of health.

Do you have a philosophy or a motto?

I often tell myself to live my life like it was my last. 🌱

