

Why “Mother” Should Be on Your CV: A Look at Leadership, Resilience, and Caregiving

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Abstract

Being a mother is frequently viewed as a "gap" on a resume, a stop in career advancement that needs to be justified. The significance of caregiving to society and the skills it fosters in individuals are both misrepresented by this framing. This article questions the idea that motherhood represents absence rather than growth by drawing on developmental psychology, neuroscience, leadership theory, and introspection. As highlighted by the attachment theory and neuroscience, early caregiving reduces stress, supports resilience, and predicts long-term health outcomes (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Ainsworth et al., 1978; Feldman, 2017). Public health and economic evidence show that caregiving yields immense social and economic benefits that surpass most subsequent interventions (Heckman, 2006; Shonkoff et al., 2009). Leadership research proves that qualities such as teamwork, emotional intelligence, resilience, adaptability, and ethical judgment are paramount for good leadership. All of these qualities are critical for daily care (Heifetz, 1994; Goleman, 1995). Personal reflections show how these skills are a part of practical settings. It covers pregnancy, early caregiving, teamwork, and professional empathy. My resilience and adaptability have grown as a result of being a mother, and I now talk to clients and coworkers differently, seeing them as former children who are looking for understanding. Being a mother does not automatically depict leadership. It offers a strong opportunity to represent the skills most valued in the workplace. We should not refer to it as a "gap". This phase must be accepted as an experience that promotes social welfare and individual growth.

Keywords: *Motherhood, Leadership, Attachment Theory, Emotional Intelligence, Professional Development, Work-Life Integration*

Introduction

Women's contributions were mostly limited to domestic caregiving for a large portion of history, and they were hardly ever recognized in formal economic or professional contexts. Women joined the offices and businesses in the 20th century. Since then, we have referred to them as strong, independent women. This became a career identity, but women who spend their whole day being mothers are considered unemployed. Motherhood became a disruption. This was a "gap" in the Curriculum vitae (CV). While in reality, it deserves to be counted as an experience. This ideology became immensely stronger. Women who took time off for pregnancy or early childcare were often thought to be less dedicated. This was seen as a sign of less ambition or lost productivity.

This perspective is often misrepresented. In this article I argue, that being a mother is not an absence. Companies often look for people who are resilient, adaptable, and emotionally intelligent, but these are the very skills needed to deal with the difficult challenges of caregiving. The issue is that they are not seen in professional evaluations because they are developed at home instead of at work.

This is not a clinical study, and I am not a psychologist. I would refer to this work as a reflective article that defines how motherhood is framed in the workplace by referencing both personal experience and scientific data. I hope to challenge the concept that motherhood is a "gap" and make the case that motherhood should be listed on a resume as a growth experience rather than a weakness. This report will consider development science and leadership theory to support the arguments.

Evidence from Developmental Science

The way we are cared for in the first few years of our lives has a big impact on who we become. John Bowlby (1969/1982) referred to this initial connection between an infant and carer as "attachment," demonstrating that a secure bond enables children to feel safe enough to explore and grow. Later, Ainsworth explored this further in her "Strange Situation" studies, which showed that babies who had sensitive and consistent carers were more likely to feel safe and confident in new places. The study found that babies who received steady, sensitive care usually developed secure attachments, they were better at trusting, regulating their emotions, and showed resilience (Ainsworth et al., 1978). A meta-analysis confirms that secure early attachment predicts better emotional and relational outcomes across life (Groh et al., 2014). In contrast, when care wasn't consistent and neglectful, children were more likely to form insecure attachments (avoidant, ambivalent, or disorganised). These early patterns leave people at greater risk to later in life get anxiety, difficulties in relationships, and stronger stress responses.

Neuroscience supports these theories. Early caregiving significantly alters the brain's structure and the body's stress systems. The hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis controls stress, and it is formed during these formative years. It supports infants to develop healthier cortisol rhythms and lowers the risk of depression, anxiety, and chronic illness in later life (Gunnar & Quevedo, 2007; Shonkoff et al., 2009). Neuroimaging shows that attentive maternal care strengthens neural circuits that controls emotional regulation and social cognition (Feldman, 2017).

Public health research furthermore explores this viewpoint. The "first 1,000 days" from conception to age two are now recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2018) as a critical window for long term health and developments. Early experiences also shape gene expression and stress regulation (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010). High-quality early care lowers lifetime risk of mental and physical illness (Shankoff, Boyce, & McEwen, 2009), and improves academic and social outcomes (García, Heckman, Leaf, & Prados, 2017). It predicts greater social stability, whereas neglect increases developmental and health risks.

When talking about economics the lesson aligns with the above theories. Nobel Laureate James Heckman demonstrated that investments in early childhood education yield greater returns than almost any other type of intervention. Heckman (2006) and Heckman & Mosso (2014) estimated that every dollar spent on caregiving during these years has long-term benefits in health, education, and productivity, with long term annual returns of about 13% (García, Heckman, Leaf, & Prados, 2017; García et al., 2020). Conversely, later remedial programs are more expensive and less effective.

It is evident from the fields of psychology, neuroscience, public health, and economics that providing care is not a disruption. This supports human growth.

Leadership Skills We Claim to Value

Leadership theory highlights the importance of caregiving for parents, even as developmental science emphasizes how important it is for children.

Ronald Heifetz (1994) shows a comparison between adaptive challenges, which call for ingenuity, experimentation, and resilience, and technical challenges, which can be resolved using current knowledge. The strongest adaptive challenge is parenthood. It is unpredictable, emotionally taxing, and devoid of a single solution.

Organizational psychology mentions the characteristics of good leadership, such as flexibility, resilience, making decisions in uncertainty, emotional intelligence, moral discernment, and teamwork. All of these are paramount for caregiving. Adaptability becomes a test when routines break down. Sleepless nights are what builds resilience. When a baby only uses cries and gestures to communicate, they are simply making decisions while being uncertain.

Parents have to practice emotional intelligence on a daily basis to co-regulate their children's stress (Goleman, 1995), a concept further refined in empirical models by Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2004). They use ethical judgment when weighing the needs of oneself, one's family, and one's child. Teamwork is vital while sharing caregiving with your partner, family members, or a larger support network.

These abilities are paramount for good leadership. According to research, stronger team cohesiveness, resilience, and organizational performance are supported by leaders who possess high levels of emotional intelligence and adaptability (Cortellazzo, Bruni, & Zampieri, 2023; Ahmad & Zulkifli, 2024; Raman & Poon, 2023). Ironically, these abilities are largely disregarded when developed through motherhood, despite being praised in professional settings (McKechnie et al., 2020).

Reflections from Experience

My own pregnancy and early motherhood experience made these lessons very real, in a way that theory never could.

Pregnancy completely changed my sense of certainty. During my training as a researcher at The University of Oxford and pharmacist, I learned to plan and control my days well. However, pregnancy taught me that not everything can be predicted or controlled. There were days of strength and clarity, and others of nausea, exhaustion, and frustration. I had to learn to adapt, to love with uncertainty, and to stay patient while still holding on to my long-term goals.

After my daughter was born, I stopped using words as a tool, as she only made small movements and cried. I tried using my acquired professional skills of data gathering and evidence-based decisions. Therefore, listed the potential causes to her cries: discomfort, hunger, fatigue, and overstimulation. Sometimes I was right, but a lot of the times I wasn't sure. During these moments, I practiced empathy and tenacity, learning to steady myself so that I could steady her.

Even the smallest decisions had significant effects. Every choice I made, including how I held her, how quickly I responded, and how calmly I spoke, had developmental significance and shaped her resilience and sense of trust. From the outside, what appeared to be standard caregiving was actually the creation of emotional security.

Being a mother also changed how I define productivity. Lessons in prioritization, poise, and concentration under pressure were learned by responding to emails and messages with one hand while holding a crying baby and preparing her milk while calming a crying baby waiting for her milk.

Collaboration became essential. I became more dependent on other people to help me and I had to manage emotional shifts that came with postpartum recovery. The experience underscored that postpartum depression is real and a serious condition, one that deserves both recognition and compassion. Coordination with family and sharing responsibilities with my partner demonstrated that leadership is not independence, but rather interdependence.

The biggest shift may have been in my perspective of those around me. I started to see coworkers, clients, and teammates as individuals who were shaped by the care they received and who were once infants yearning to be understood, in addition to being professionals in their current roles. This viewpoint helped me modify my interactions to promote harmony and trust, soften my responses, and increase my empathy. I approach every professional interaction through this lens now.

These were practical lessons rather than theoretical ones. Motherhood was a rigorous apprenticeship in flexibility, fortitude, and empathy rather than a period of absence.

Conclusions

Frequently, motherhood is characterized as a gap on a resume and a hindrance to career advancement. This framing is inaccurate and unjust, as it fails to reflect the social and professional value of motherhood. Science shows that early caregiving influences attachment, resilience, and stress management, which benefits both individuals and societies, according to developmental science. According to leadership theory, among the most highly regarded professional abilities are flexibility, emotional intelligence, and the ability to make decisions during uncertainty. These are the very skills refined through motherhood, often with more intensity, consistency, than the workplace.

Not all parents develop these skill sets automatically. Growth requires self-awareness and practice, just like any other experience. Being a mother offers the chance for a person to develop these traits that companies value most, but does not automatically make someone a leader.

In the early stages of caregiving, many women must relinquish demanding roles. This should be interpreted as a short-term change that develops unique strengths that are transferrable and deeply relevant to leadership roles. Mothers' aspirations should not be questioned when they return because their time away was not wasted; rather, it was training of a different kind and building the new generations character.

Therefore, I believe that being a mother is not a gap. It is a form of leadership in its most human and enduring sense. Until the value of motherhood is acknowledged once again, CVs and institutions will remain incomplete.

Conflict of Interest

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Sole author

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