

Working at Home Doesn't Stop at the Front Door: A Contribution to the Growth of All

Bryan Sanderson, CBE, Chairman of the Home Renaissance Foundation

It's an honour to be invited here with such a distinguished group. I have spent many years at or near the top of international business and not for profit organisations. Mostly male dominated certainly the business groups. Yet it has been my invariable experience that the most efficient decision making bodies are those with a balance of both genders in approximately even proportions – not one token female as is still too often the case.

Why do I make this assertion. Mainly it's because the experience of running a home and raising a family generates skills and judgment which are both transferable and vital to the success of any organization. Let me tell you a story; a true story from my own experience.

About 15 years ago I was one of the five managing directors running BP, a major international oil company. We had just completed a takeover of one of our US competitors and were feeling pleased with ourselves. As well we might – we were at that time the fifth largest company in the world with sales of over \$200 billion in c. 80 countries around the world. But we had a problem, the company (AMOCO) we had taken over had colours of red, white and blue on its gasoline stations whereas BP's were green and yellow. Furthermore AMOCO had a greater presence than BP especially in the US

where it had many more outlets. We had to choose one single brand and colour scheme. Both sides accepted that we should have one brand only but each were equally emotionally attached to their own brand. We asked a group of way-out Californian consultants to give us a view, red, white and blue or green?

They came back after a few weeks' intensive market research and said much to the satisfaction of me and my colleagues that green was the way to go. It had of course become synonymous with care for the environment and therefore very attractive. Just as we breathed a sigh of relief, they said the green is good but your logo is all wrong. We had not even asked them to examine the logo but they'd done it anyway. The logo was a green shield with BP written on it.

They asked us "what does the shield convey to you". We, all males of course, said words like security, reliability, strength. They then asked whether we were aware that more than 60% of gasoline sales were to women – driving the family car to schools, shops etc. We did not know - we should have done but we didn't. Women when asked about what the shield signified said warlike, masculine, scary and then went off and bought Shell.

The outcome, we stayed with green but changed the logo to the flowery symbol you see today. Sales increased by 10%.

The specific message from this anecdote is to register that women running homes are the biggest buyers of many products from food to household items to gasoline. Their perceptions and their sensitivities matter. The broader message to any company is you must learn to value this and other skills.

Running a home requires inter alia:

1. Brilliant time management and change of pace to cover the incessant differing demands of young children, working, cleaning and administration of the house.
2. Emotional management. Women need to be able to be firm with lazy workman then gentle with a sick child the next. Understanding, empathy and patience are needed.
3. Openness and lack of class consciousness to be able to work with people from all sectors of society and make them part of your home team. From lawyers and teachers to painters and refuse collectors. They all matter.
4. Management of conflicts of interest when priorities clash. Keeping your head when the world seems to be collapsing around you.

I could go on but you get the point. These skills are all transferrable and essential to a successful business. Above all perhaps managing a home brings a sense of proportion about life/work balance.

Work in the home is tremendously important, inherently valuable and has crucial repercussions on the good of society. This reality is one rooted firmly in common sense, but one that is also set aside from many contemporary conversations about economic and social development.

It could easily be argued that many of the crises affecting society today have their roots in the neglect of work in the home. The great challenges faced by the world at present are those of caring for younger and older generations, of care for the environment and of building up just and fair economic and social relations. Though it may not be immediately evident, these issues all hinge on the home, and the work of the home in particular. The home is then the starting point for a tide of change. The most vulnerable whether young or old are entitled to care in the home. When we do not provide it society itself is threatened.

This is why, as a think tank, the Home Renaissance Foundation promotes a greater recognition of the work of the home, that is, the work that goes into creating healthy and congenial home environments. After all, how can we indeed hope to create a more humane society, if we forget the home? This is the space where the most fundamental needs of individuals and families are met.

One of the key ideas behind our work is that: “Domestic work is not merely a collection of services such as laundry, cleaning, and cooking. It is a values system in which science, art, psychology, culture, skills and an aptitude for management all play a part.”

From this understanding spring forth two of our organisation’s most penetrating contributions to contemporary thought:

Firstly, we understand the need not merely to balance work and home life, but to value both work in the marketplace and work in the home as professional work. Work in the home is real work, and can be carried out with a professional approach, with vocational drive and technical skill.

Secondly, this professional vision of work in the home leads us to understand its impact on educational outcomes, character formation, physical health, wellbeing, professional competencies and social progress, to name a few areas.

We tend to see business and society as separate. They are not, they are closely linked.

A dichotomy evident in contemporary thought is that of the work of the home and work in the broader market. They are seen to be rivals, with the latter taking the cake in terms of social prestige, legal and political recognition, and perceived importance in our society. This is detrimental to sustainable business practices, and unfair to the millions of people who look after their homes, and the care of the people in them, with a professional outlook.

Every worker, and that includes every homemaker, has a home, and needs to care for that home, whether directly or through contracting and overseeing services that allow for a healthy and balanced home environment, and in turn family life, to flourish. Care of the material and social environment of the home impacts people in the same way that the material environment at a BP facility can have a profound impact on the overall success of the operations, and the risks involved. The homes of the nation impact the productivity and overall wellbeing and morale of the employees of any firm. Without the stability of schedules and routines, healthy and balanced meals, clean and welcoming spaces for work, sleep and family enjoyment that the home provides, stress levels and the ability to work well outside the domestic sphere are seriously jeopardized. Inside and outside the towers of company headquarters and the ivory towers of academia, we ought not forget this. We need to seriously examine how corporate practices, at all levels, can actively take the realities of family and home life into account. It is not merely about balancing two competing worlds, but understanding how the success of each is a strength for the other.

One clear way in which this is obvious is in human development and skill formation. Men and women, young and old benefit from participating in housework, in the noble work of the home, by building skills. Teamwork, for example, is such an important asset both in the home and workplaces outside the home, and across age and gender boundaries. More and more studies emphasize the importance of soft skills for social and economic prosperity. The UK National Careers Service defines this type of skills as “personal qualities and attitudes that can help you work well with other and make a positive contribution to organisations you work for”. These skills are more difficult to acquire than most technical skills. In the United Kingdom in particular, recent research points to the soft skills such as communication, teamwork, self-management, decision-making and taking responsibility as vital for all workers.

These soft skills developed in the home are key to organisational performance. Recent research estimates that they are worth £88 billion in Gross Value Added to the UK economy each year, around 6.5% of the economy as a whole.

Another area of growing recognition is that of domestic and care work. This is coming to the fore as a key social issue in ageing societies throughout the world. Though scarcely ratified, the International Labour Organisation's Domestic Workers Convention entered into force in 2013. Raising the rights floor for paid workers in homes throughout the world, and calling attention to the dignity and value of domestic work of various kinds. This type of recognition has been long in coming, but is a positive step forward in fostering political and economic structures that reflect the professional nature of the work of the home.

In her recent book "Who Cooked Adam Smith's Dinner?", Swedish journalist Katrine Marçal describe unpaid work as "...work that is undervalued and excluded from the statistics we use to measure economic performance." She says that: "Today our economics focuses on self-interest and excludes all other motivations. It disregards mothering, caring, cleaning and cooking. It insists that if women are paid less, then that's because their labour is worth less...". It is time for this narrative to be changed.

Social trends are bringing everything back to the space of the home – from shopping, to eldercare, to professional work of all kinds – and we increasingly seek to reproduce the home atmosphere "away from home". We need to be ahead of the game in understanding how these trends will affect economic and political structures, and be proactive about reiterating the value of work in

the home, both paid and unpaid, and foundation to all else. The home is where true development and growth begins.

I will end by paraphrasing Moses and the Old Testament. He says in Deuteronomy what will determine the future of the people will not be strength whether military or demographic but the values and ideals that permeate society, justice, compassion, welfare, social responsibility, love of neighbour and stranger and care for the poor, lonely and disenfranchised. Don't even think you can survive without these values. You can't. They are learnt in the home.