

PARENTING ON CUE

with **Queenie Tan**



POC 136 : Choosing to stay at home isn't 'giving up a career'

Today, we're gonna have a conversation that I think a lot of people don't talk enough about. And this is definitely gonna affect a lot of us especially those who are stay-at-home moms or moms who are considering on taking time off from work to be home with their children.

So everytime I speak to parents or read comments on Facebook, I would hear parents say things like "I had to sacrifice my career and put a halt to it" or "I have to let my career take a back seat." And I hear this a lot. And I can totally feel you, whether you are a long-term stay-at-home mom or you are just taking some time off to be home with your children. I can totally understand that.

And I think this is the reason why I decided to have a conversation about it because I think that a lot of parents feel really really fulfilled when they're at work, because they feel like they're doing something purposeful at the end of every month that you work. There is an immediate gratification where you're paid for the work that you do, at the end of the year you get a bonus so you know that people appreciate your work. And after 10 years, they give you a golden handshake. There's a lot of elements where we can feel like we're doing something that matters, something that is truly important. And to have that and to give it up, or to put it on hold for a while is hard because we've been doing it for a really long time.

But I think one of the things that parents would appreciate would be for us here to acknowledge that the work that we do as parents is a huge job. And we're not always going to see any kind of immediate gratification because we are working with children. And with your jobs, you are qualified, you are trained, some of you went to college and studied and specialized. So a lot of us got really good at our jobs because we have training, we have years of experience. But for all of us here who are moms, a lot of us didn't get any training at all. I was just really lucky because I decided that I wanted to go into early childhood education so that I could be a mom. And as such, I've used that as a career path.

For me, it lined up that way. For a lot of people, it does not line up that way. So they go into

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parenting, almost blind, considering that we haven't all been trained for it, we don't all know applied childhood psychology. We don't all know how to handle difficult situations with young children. So it is a really difficult job because it feels like it's a hit or miss most of the time.

But the thing is that, and it also doesn't help that as children grow, their needs are constantly changing, and we have to keep up with their changing needs. And we have to keep up with our roles as parents that will evolve with those needs. And we are constantly learning, and as soon as we figure something out, something else pops up. You have to figure that thing out. And so it's a really big job.

And I think that at the end of the day, if we do this really well, if we dedicate a lot of ourselves to being the best parents that we can be. And just being present with our children, and figuring out how we can cope with sleepless nights, and washing dishes in the sink, it is a really important job. I would say that, of all the jobs I've done, from teaching pre-school to writing curriculums, opening, managing schools in China, of all the jobs I've done, the most important job I'm doing right now is me being a parent to my children. Yes, I work from home, sometimes, I work outside, it depends on the projects I have. But all that, to me, is secondary. Don't feel bad if that's not secondary to you. If you think that's more important to you, that's absolutely fine.

There was a point in time where my career was really important to me because I was very good at it. There was a point in time where I was head hunted by schools, and I have projects lined up, and I was lecturing at universities, and I was up for a promotion, and I even got a scholarship. But a lot of that, I had to choose. I chose... I mean, nobody forced me to. But I've chosen to let a lot of that go because it wasn't important to me. After a while, I realized that I was a little bit older maybe a bit more mature, and my boys are a little bit older, and I realize that I'm needed at home. Well not at home, but I'm needed with my boys more than anything else. And I think that that is a journey that would be very different for all of us.

And having this conversation about it, and being able to re-evaluate, to see where we stand with regards to what we really want for ourselves and what's important to us right now. I think that it is important for us to realize what is on top of our priority because nobody would sit down and

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say "we need to figure out what your priorities are, we need to allocate the right kind of time and attention to it." I think this is a time where we can sit down and really think about what is important to us right now. And it's not permanent, I mean, it could change. A lot of people, a lot of parents I know, decide to put the children on the top of the priority list for the first few years while they're young, and some people decide that they can outsource parenting, and that is also a very personal choice, while they focus on something else. And some parents have to go away for a while because they have mental health issues they need to sort out, or things they need to get help with. That is just the way life is. There's really no ideal.

What I'm trying to do here is to have this conversation so that we can sit and really examine what our priorities are. I tried to have this conversation with a parent the other day. And she was really triggered by it. I could see that she was really struggling. She quit her job, she was home with her children, and she was really really struggling to adjust to her new role. And when I asked her to think about what is important to her right now, she said something like "what do you mean by what is important? of course my children is important. Of course I quit my job so that I can be home with them, but it's not turning out as I expected." Yes, it is hard, especially when we are trying to re-examine what our priorities are, and things don't always turn out the way we want them to be. Things don't always go as planned. And at a certain point in our life, sometimes, certain things are a lot more a lot clearer to us than before.

I urge you to do this, if you had a chance right now to change something in your life about parenting or work that you're not happy with, what will that be? Give yourself permission to just imagine how life can be for you right now. Even it is crazy and out of this world, just give yourself permission to for that. So that was the position I was in. I was so unhappy at the time I was successful with my career. I was unfulfilled as a parent. So I gave myself permission to dream about how I want this to look like. And I saw myself traveling the world with my boys. I saw myself waking up whenever I want to wake up. I saw my boys choosing and taking full control on what they want to learn. And as crazy as it sounds, I had put quite a lot of work to make that happen. And we have been living that life for almost 4 years now. We have been world schooling for almost 4 years, come September, it would be 4 years. So it is possible for us, just be curious and imaginative about what we want our life to look like, how we want our parenting to look like. And then if it is indeed something that you really want, then you can actually plan and work towards it.

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But I just want to open up this discussion so that I can get you to be a little bit curious about it. This is not going to be an immediate thing. Any kind of change will take time. It took me almost forever to get to where I am, to be able to do what I do today. But I want you guys to know that you're not going to be stuck. If you think you feel stuck, you're not going to be stuck forever. There's always a way out but it's gonna require some kind of clarity as to what you think is important to you. And if it feels like it sits peacefully with you, then it's okay, but if you find yourself or catch yourself saying something like "I sacrificed my career or I put my career on hold for them." Then it seems like the choice you made is not sitting well with you. And I'm not saying go back to what it was before but I'm saying that it might be a good time for us to get curious as to how we can do it differently. And even if we can't get to it 100 per cent, we can inch closer to it because we have a plan in place, we know what we want, then that will definitely bring us to a much better place.

So that is basically my train of thought. I see so many parents who feel so stuck. And in many instances, I want to go there and scoop them out, and rescue them so that they can see how I do it differently, and see that there is a possibility to do it differently. We always have a choice, but the first thing we need to do is get curious how you want it to look. And then you can start mapping some plans to get you closer to it. So that's all what I have for today. I hope this helps you feel less stuck. Like what I said, you can change this. It's not gonna happen overnight but do give yourself permission to dream and have a vision on how you want it to look like.

Thanks for listening guys. I'll see you again next week. Remember, happy and confident parents have happy and confident children.