



Interview with the authors

Trisha Ashworth and Amy Nobile

After years working with companies including American Express and Levi Strauss, authors Trisha and Amy made their biggest career move yet – into motherhood



What were the best things you did for your imaginary children before they actually arrived?

Oh, we were perfect mothers before we had kids! We played for hours with building blocks and puzzles and taught them to speak French before they were three. Oh, and we showered every day and our children looked cute at all times

But surely motherhood just comes naturally?

That's one of the biggest misconceptions mothers have going into motherhood. For many of us, the skills we need as mothers don't come so naturally; and the skills we built in our career don't transfer so well, either.

Reinventing modern motherhood? Isn't that like reinventing the wheel?

After doing our research, our goal became clear: to help mothers love motherhood as much as they love their children. Instead of trying to live up to our expectations of what we each think a 'good mum' should be, we learned that it is important to reassess what motherhood looks like for each of us, individually. There isn't a right or wrong way; it's about realigning our expectations with reality.

Isn't judging others the backdrop for such great dramas as *Desperate Housewives*? Won't it be dull if we all become nice, accepting people?

Ha! It may be fun to watch on television, but what we heard from real mothers is that they are sick and tired of hearing about the Mummy Wars and would rather focus their efforts on feeling happier in motherhood.

What have been your greatest failures and successes? And how do other mothers react to your new SuperMum status?

We're anything but SuperMums! At first, Amy took on so much responsibility with her children and thought she could do it all. She failed to ask for help, even from her husband; once she and Paul talked about their roles, things became a lot easier. The men we interviewed said, "Just tell us what to do and we'll do it." We discovered that a lot of times we wait around expecting men to figure it out. Amy has learned how to better balance work and family by asking for help when she needs it. Trisha felt a lot of pressure to overachieve as a mother. To her, that turned into over-scheduling and constantly feeling overwhelmed. She has realised that it's OK to make time for yourself and not feel guilty about it.

How you ever heard the questions in *The Bitchy Mum Quiz* (right)? And how did you find time to write this book?

The quizzes were born out of comments and questions we heard from various mothers. The judgment we all feel from other mothers can seep into our bloodstream, if we're not careful. We need to realise that the key to letting go of the judgment is to realise that we're all in this together. As for the book, we had to set boundaries for ourselves, but that made it easier to take time for our families.

After all your research, what are your top tips for mothers?

There are three crucial steps. First, be honest. Break the silence and stop pretending that everything's OK all the time. Secondly, redefine your expectations. Let some things go if necessary. Thirdly, once you've made your choices, make peace with them. This can be truly empowering; don't let anything else take precedence over your choices and don't feel guilty about them.

I was a really good mom before I had kids...

C'mon, we all know we've done it: sat on the couch or behind the steering wheel and thought, I would never do that. I would never let my kids eat in front of the TV; I would never let my kids watch TV, period; I would never let the nanny put them to bed; I would never waste my time with all those ridiculous classes; I would never let my child whine her way into getting a treat; I would never let my child stay up too late. And then we have a second (or third) child, or we go back to work, or our spouse starts working longer hours, or we just get too damn tired, and there we are, along with the rest of the mothers in the trenches, doing the very things we judged them for not so very long ago.

Most of the time we judge another person's actions not because they're truly horrible, but because they are different from ours. In other words, we judge to validate our own choices. Judging others convinces us that we're valuable and important, and that we're doing a really good job.

Judgment can also turn the envy that we might feel for other mothers on its head. One minute we think, Oh, God, what would I give not to work and to have a nanny and a great car and spend time with friends, like that woman does? The next minute we think that same mother is the worst person ever for spending three hours a day away from her children while she does the family errands and goes to the gym. And then we have to confront the fact that we, too, are just human, and our seven-year-old's idea of heaven is an afternoon alone playing computer games.

The Bitchy Mum Quiz

RANK THESE QUESTIONS in order of bitchiness:

- ☐ You let your kids watch a movie on a school night?
- ☐ You've got 20 hours of help a week? Aren't you a stay-at-home mum?
- ☐ Is your daughter still in Pull-ups?
- ☐ Oh, you stopped breastfeeding?
- ☐ You didn't make it to Jake's soccer game?
- ☐ How do you guys manage to take so many date nights for yourselves? Don't you feel selfish?
- ☐ Oh, your babysitter picks your kids up from school?
- ☐ Do your kids feel cramped sharing a room?
- ☐ That's so cute – he has Spider-Man shoes and a Spider-Man lunchbox. Does he watch a lot of TV?

Extract from *I Was A Really Good Mom Before I Had Kids* by Trisha Ashworth & Amy Nobile, Chronicle Books, £11.99.