

Celebrating Mothers on Mother's Day: Mothers as the soul of a nation in lockdown

by

Marius Meyer

Today is Mother's Day and what a unique day it is to celebrate. We celebrate and honour our mothers on this special Sunday. Yet, it is a different and strange type of Mother's Day, given the unique situation and circumstances of a lockdown.

There is a debate currently going on whether the lockdown has been successful in achieving its objective in curbing the spread of the coronavirus and in enabling us to "flatten the curve." While I will leave that to the epidemiologists, virologists, other health experts and the media to decide, there is only one thing I am 100% certain of today: Without mothers, the whole idea of the lockdown would have been a total failure in any case. If we are forced to stay home, it must be a happy place and mothers are the people who make that happen. My deepest sympathy to all people in households without mothers during the lockdown. Thus, if you are in the same home as your mother on this Mother's Day, you are blessed and today is the day to heap extra pampering, but continue sharing your love tomorrow.

Despite the inconvenience and discomfort of the lockdown, let us celebrate and honour our mothers on this Mother's Day. And yes, many of us will indeed have mixed feelings about Mother's Day today. Some of us are still staying with our mothers and traditionally, and in other cases, if it was possible for you, you would visit your mother on Mother's Day, or phone her if she stays far from you. This Mother's Day, many of us, like myself will not see our mothers. I would never have imagined that it would happen in my life that I will not be allowed to see my mother, especially not on Mother's Day. Sadly, many people have lost their mothers during the lockdown, without having the opportunity to spend her last few days together or to say good bye, in addition to the uncomfortable situation of several restrictions on funerals.

Today my mother is spending her Mothers' Day in an old age home, and given the lockdown I can only phone her. As a child, I have learned so many life lessons from my mother and I still apply these lessons today. The top five things I have learned from my mother are as follows:

- Pursue opportunities in life. Go for everything.
- Prioritise your education. Study and achieve.
- Compete with yourself, not other people.
- Always do your best.
- If you can't say something good about another person, don't say anything.

I want to challenge you to reflect on the lessons you have learned from your mother, and write it down today. It will make this Mothers' Day lockdown day 45 a more special day today, even if you are no longer staying with your mother or if you are isolated from her today. And share it with your mother if you can. Also think about how many of your mother's good qualities you have inherited. That is one

of the greatest values of motherhood – the goodness of your mother is passed on from generation to generation. In fact, I want to posit that society survives because of mothers. No sacrifice is too great for a mother. The mind and love of a mother is in her hands and in her smile.

Meryl Streep asserted: “Motherhood has a very humanising effect. Everything gets reduced to essentials.” While this happens every day in the life of a mother and a family, isn’t this even more true during lockdown? Mothers need to prioritise the essential things to focus on and to ensure that the family survives in terms of their needs such as food and entertainment. We also have to admit that mothers have that very unique and special skill to do five things at once. That makes women and mothers in particular much more effective than men when working from home, because most men can only do one thing at a time. George Herbert said: “One good mother is worth a hundred school masters.”

If it wasn’t for mothers I would say that the lockdown was not sustainable. Mothers are the heart of society, and in today’s time, a society in despair. Mothers give us hope and a sense of survival and perseverance in living from day to day. Charles Lamb stated: “A mother’s love grows by giving.” Not only do we need giving in our families, but also in society at large as we have witnessed the devastating situation of people standing in queues to receive food parcels.

Perhaps our leaders and politicians can also learn from mothers during this time of making regulations for different levels of lockdown. They can learn from mothers on when to say yes and when to say no and to always speak the truth. Mothers have the ability to think of everything a child needs. A day is complete when a mother goes to bed.

Mothers are leaders. They develop good children and influence fathers to be better fathers. Furthermore, single mothers are fathers too. Mothers are leaders in family wellbeing. Since your first days on earth, your mother was looking after your health and nurtured you throughout your childhood. Mothers enable children to grow into adults so that they can set them free.

Linda Wooten said: “Being a mother is learning about strengths you didn’t know you had, and dealing with fears you didn’t know existed.” That is exactly the strengths we need during this difficult period of lockdown. We must be able to learn new strengths and deal with the fears of being infected with the Covid-19 virus, in addition to the fears and realities of businesses closing down and being unemployed. The big five South African problems of inequality, poor education, unemployment, poverty and economic junk status are further amplified during this extended period of lockdown.

On this Mother’s Day we also have to honour our mothers working in essential services, in particular our doctors and nurses and other medical and support staff for risking their health and lives in serving patients during the coronavirus epidemic, a time that is most certainly the most stressful time of their careers. After a stressful shift of being in the frontline of the battle to contain Covid-19, most healthcare workers continue with another shift as mothers, grandmothers, wives, girlfriends, sisters and other social roles at home.

Although we celebrate the role of mothers at homes, families and society at large, I also want to ask management teams to consider the importance of motherhood for business. All of us were born from mothers and need to thank our mothers for their role in our achievements and successes at school, university, work and life. Moreover, I want to call on all managers to allow the most important quality of mothers, i.e. caring to become a workplace virtue embraced by all companies during and after the lockdown period. We need to create and build caring companies with caring managers and caring employees. That will require significant organisation culture change to create a real caring company putting people and their health first as we rebuild our companies and economy.

The previous century was dominated by our belief in intelligence (IQ), we then moved to emotional intelligence (EQ) at the turn of the century, and more recently to social intelligence (SQ), and now to love intelligence (LQ). If we want to understand and bring LQ into the workplace, we need mothers to coach us on how to transfer their knowledge and skills of love from home to work. Without a mother's love the world would be one big careless place. Staying under your mother's wing for at least two decades, prepares you to fly high for the rest of your life. You may have achieved a lot of successes in your life since you have left your mother's house, but your mother's love stays with you for the rest of your life. But you should not hold on to that love, share it with others and make the world a better place. Motherhood is selfless love. The unconditional love of a mother is the purest form of love in society.

Mother Teresa said: "A mother is the heart of the home." These words are so relevant today and indeed true as most of us are staying at home during the lockdown. Without mothers as the heart of the home, staying at home for such a long period would have been unbearable. Mothers are the heart of society. Mothers are the soul of the nation during the lockdown. Let us honour our mothers not only by appreciating them, but also by staying safe, healthy and staying home. Think back about those nights how relieved your mother was when you returned home safely as a teenager. Mothers are caring role-models sustaining families, societies and nations. A special thank you to all our mothers on this Mother's Day, hopefully the first and last Mother's Day for all of us in lockdown today.

This article is dedicated to Prof Ingrid Woolard, Dean of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at Stellenbosch University, who lost her mother the previous week. My condolences to her and her family during this difficult time of bereavement.

Marius Meyer lectures in Strategic HR Management at Stellenbosch University and is Chairperson of the SA Board for People Practices (SABPP). For more information about the coronavirus and Covid-19 visit www.sacoronavirus.co.za