

Proceso selectivo para ingreso en la Carrera Diplomática

Resolución de 28 de diciembre de 2022 (BOE de 31-12-2022)

TEXTO DE INGLÉS DEL SEGUNDO EJERCICIO

(17-03-2023)

Anyone who has ever chosen to walk away from a job which – to the outside world, at least – has power, status and profile, will have done a little fist pump for Jacinda Ardern this week. The New Zealand Prime Minister announced that she's standing down, five years after becoming the youngest female head of government in the world at age 37.

Yes, while we have been busily wondering about “quiet quitting” (doing the bare minimum at work) and “rage applying” (spamming multiple companies with your CV in the hopes of a higher salary), Ardern has flipped the switch and simply walked away. On 7 February, her new life will begin.

“I'm leaving, because with such a privileged role comes responsibility – the responsibility to know when you are the right person to lead and also when you are not,” she said. “I know what this job takes. And I know that I no longer have enough in the tank to do it justice. It's that simple.”

We've all had that “nothing left to give” moment, but political leaders aren't supposed to act on it. Self-preservation for a politician means clinging onto power until their knuckles turn white and their hands have to be forcibly prised away. By contrast, Ardern's definition of self-preservation seems to mean: I'm about to burn out, I've done what I can, and now I'd like my life back, thanks very much.

And, of course, what we don't fully understand, we criticise. So she has been accused, by both her supporters and opponents, of running away because her popularity ratings have dropped ahead of this year's elections, of being weak, cowardly and far worse things I don't want to repeat here.

“See, women can't have it all,” has been the toe-curling sentiment echoed across social media and several headlines. To me, that depends on what your definition of having it all is. Yes, she has had to delay getting married to her partner, Clarke Gayford, and her daughter Neve is about to start school – and we know that being a world leader isn't exactly compatible with full-time family life. Especially not when your five years in office have seen a terrorist massacre, a pandemic, a volcano eruption, a housing crisis and possibly the world's most awkward hug from Australian PM Scott Morrison.

But I don't see it as “can't have it all” so much as “don't want it all”. Work isn't everything, even when you're Prime Minister. Life doesn't stop and neither does ambition – the same ferocious drive that it takes to get elected and run a country (or a company) doesn't just evaporate because you've climbed that particular mountain. It swerves, shape-shifts and finds a new outlet. Perhaps Ardern, like so many of us, wants to find out what that might look like. Perhaps she's also very tired and has 300,000 unread emails.

In her decision to step down, Ardern is showing her leadership instinct until the end – trusting your gut and, when the moment comes, doing what's best for you. There's nothing weak about admitting you no longer have the stomach to give a particular job your all. There's nothing weak about knowing your own mind or being able to set boundaries. Understanding yourself well enough to bail out? That takes strength. That's self-care... well, she is a millennial.

“One of the criticisms I’ve faced over the years is that I’m not aggressive enough or assertive enough, or maybe somehow, because I’m empathetic, it means I’m weak. I totally rebel against that. I refuse to believe that you cannot be both compassionate and strong,” she told the New York Times in 2018.

That compassion has to extend to yourself – otherwise, what’s the point? Championing kindness and empathy, as she has throughout her premiership, looks hollow if you can’t apply them to your own life. It sets such a good example not to flog yourself to the bitter end for someone else’s sake. The immense effort it takes to become an elected world leader must take a serious dose of self-belief, but it takes self-knowledge to admit that your energy stores are depleted, and it’s time to quit. Not to let your previous ambition get in the way of your new one.

And quitting is empowering, trust me. The cultural narrative is that we should feel shame or failure, but actively ending a chapter of your life and walking forward into a new era can make your heart pump faster and your brain fizz. It should be celebrated that you have the imagination to see yourself existing somewhere else, doing something else.

Looking at it through that lens, how dare we shame Ardern for choosing to do something so positive for herself? For knowing that this particular tank is empty.

Of course, we can’t all throw the towel in when there’s nothing left in the tank. But we can always quit on some level: a toxic friendship, too much time on social media, being so hard on ourselves. And we can think ahead to making bigger changes – that’s part of what has set Ardern apart from this generation of politicians, swaying with the populist breeze. Instead, she made a plan and acted on it. Can you imagine the relief?

Claire Cohen.