

DRESSED FOR SUCCESS

She's one of the UK's most successful BUSINESSWOMEN but at a cost.

Apprentice star and mum-of-two KARREN BRADY talks ambition, GUILT and why she's branching into FASHION BY ANTONIA HOYLE

Karren Brady manages a staff of 800, juggles several jobs and has two teenage children. So it's hardly surprising that she's tired.

Even at the end of what's been a long day, her BlackBerry still flashes incessantly as she gets ready for her *Fabulous* shoot. After suffering from a brain aneurysm six years ago (yep, she's overcome a life-threatening illness, too), she vowed to take it a bit easier. But that hasn't happened.

"I haven't had a break for 11 months and I feel frazzled," says Karren. "But if you work and you're a mother you have to accept that you'll always be last on your list."

"I've really grafted. It hasn't come without sacrifice. I left school at 18 and didn't have a day off for 13 years. I'm not superwoman, but the hard work paid off. I'm in a happy place."

Currently vice-chair at West Ham United and Lord Alan Sugar's sidekick on *The Apprentice*, Karren, 43, is channelling what little energy she has left into her latest venture – a clothing line with BHS in aid of Wellbeing of Women, the charity for which she is an ambassador. Her immaculate style and finely-tuned

fashion sense are behind her collaboration with the store, which has created four workplace dresses, which she is modelling for us on these pages.

"I don't have any aspirations to be a designer," Karren says. "But I do know what's important in terms of being stylish, but not too trendy. Your clothes at work can give you

confidence. My clothes depict my personality – understated, smart and professional. I've never dressed for anyone other than myself."

And certainly not for the sexist latches she's encountered in the footballing world. As the then-23-year-old managing director of Birmingham City, Karren was not only surrounded by men twice her age, but also mocked by the players.

It would have terrified most girls so young, but she made mincemeat of her doubters. When one footballer leered: "I can see your tits in that top," Karren famously replied: "Well, don't worry, when I sell you to Crewe, you won't be able to see them from there, will you?". She was as good as her word, and the player in question was swiftly on his way. Nevertheless, you get the impression she wouldn't be quite so cavalier today.

"When you're 23 you have a thicker skin," says Karren, who married former Birmingham City player Paul Peschisolido in 1995. "When you're older you're more careful, particularly in a world of social media, where your 16-year-old daughter reads what other football supporters might say."

Working MUM

Her children – Sophia and Paolo, 13 – were barely out of the womb before Karren was back in the boardroom. She had just eight weeks' maternity leave after Paolo – and even less the first time.

"I'm too embarrassed to say how long I took off," she says. "It wasn't long enough, but back then work-life balance and flexible hours didn't exist. I didn't understand that a career lasts a lifetime. You think if you're not there it's all going to end."

"I worked up until the day I had my daughter. I remember being so tired I would actually slump on my desk."

These days she's all in favour of women taking maternity leave: "If you can take time off, you should."

In the early years of motherhood, Karren says she was so sleep deprived she thought she might go crazy.

"I'd be in meetings thinking: 'am I here or am I asleep?'" she says. "No one can prepare you for the sheer exhaustion. I'd be up all night feeding, and at work all day trying to be perfect. Then you just collapse and realise 'perfect' doesn't exist. You just accept you're doing your best."

Karren's high-profile career started 20 years ago, when she persuaded publishing boss David Sullivan, a former client of hers when she'd previously worked in radio advertising, to buy Birmingham City Football Club and make her the MD. →



With husband Paul and daughter Sophia (right)



Dresses,
£38 each,
BHS

'I CAN'T be in two places at once, but I'm a GOOD mum'

In 1997, she oversaw the flotation of the club on the stock market, sold it for £82million in October 2009, and joined West Ham United in 2010. She's also a director for Syco, Arcadia, Mothercare and Sport England, and chairman of Kerrang! radio. Oh, and she's written five books, a mixture of advice and fiction.

But she says the guilt of being a working mum has only become worse now Sophia and Paolo are teenagers. "You think it gets easier, but they need more advice and guidance," she says.

Karren spends four days each week in her Knightsbridge flat, while the family remain in Birmingham, but admits Paolo longs to see more of her.

"My son says: 'You're not going to London already are you, Mum?' The last couple of years have been difficult because my family don't want to move to London. I can't be in two places at once, but I think I've found the balance. When work is busy I work, when home life is more important I'm at home. I think I'm a good mum. My kids are successful and happy-go-lucky."

A fine BALANCE

Husband Paul, 41, who was manager of Burton Albion until he was sacked in March, is a pillar of strength.

"He knows my work is an important part of who I am. When the children were very young and we lived in Birmingham, he was playing for Fulham and wasn't home for four nights a week, so our careers go in cycles."

It all comes at the cost of a good night's sleep, however.

"When I'm in London I start early and finish quite late. I'm not going to tell you how early," she says, embarrassed. "You'll never see me at dinners, premieres or parties. They're the things I sacrifice."

Since 2010, Karren has been Lord Sugar's right-hand woman on *The Apprentice*, and is about to appear again on the new series of *The Young Apprentice*.

"The most amazing thing about *The Young Apprentice* is the maturity of these kids," she says. "It's amazing. And you don't see it on screen, but when one of them is fired, Alan Sugar always makes an effort to speak to them afterwards. He doesn't want them to feel embarrassed."

With hair and make-up perfected (she jokes that this has been a big job



Dress, £38, BHS

– "they've just put the scaffolding up"), Karren steps in front of the camera in one of the dresses she helped create.

"I've never had the body to wear anything too sexy," she says. "I like an A-line. I'm bigger on my bottom half and have always dressed for my shape."

Her favourite designer is Roland Mouret, and she adores a Victoria Beckham dress her husband bought her. But she also loves Dorothy Perkins, Topshop and Zara, and has just bought six pairs of jeans from Wallis.

She admits she's not immune to the odd fashion faux pas, though.

"I bought a dog-tooth, lime-green-and-white jacket and matching ski pants when I was 16!" she laughs.

It's hard to imagine that now. Karren radiates self-control, confidence, and happiness. "Sometimes you can get too het up worrying," she says. "It's far better to enjoy what you do and embrace it." **f**

● BHS is donating £10,000 from the sale of Karren's dresses to Wellbeing of Women. Visit Wellbeingofwomen.org.uk.

Tell us what you think on Twitter #FabMagKarrenBrady

KARREN'S TOP FIVE WORKWEAR RULES

CHOOSE DRESSES

Sometimes women can feel boxy in restrictive jackets. Separates are quite difficult to combine, and suits can be expensive. Dresses are always feminine, and if you get the fit right they can be sophisticated and powerful too.

PUT YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD

Good, comfortable shoes are important – I know that from being on my feet for *The Apprentice*. I don't think there should be a maximum heel height, as long as you can walk in them. When I wear high heels very few men are taller than me, which I quite like.

ACCESSORISE WISELY

I don't like loads of jewellery and big earrings. They detract from what you're trying to say. A great handbag can finish off an outfit brilliantly. Mine is Prada, and my husband bought it for me a couple of Christmases ago. It's a mushroom colour and goes with everything.

AVOID HEAD-TO-TOE BLACK

I hate it – it feels funereal and formal. Navy and cream are a smart combination and berry red is an elegant but modern colour. Patterns are hard to wear, but colour blocking and black and white work well.

BE APPROPRIATE

There's a fine balance between being under and overdressed. Find the line that suits you. Understand the relationship you have with your business and dress accordingly. Look smart and be comfortable. There's nothing worse than wearing something too tight, too short and too obvious to a business meeting.