

For Annette M. Walker, the visionary president of City of Hope Orange County, one of the most defining moments of her life occurred when she was a college student.

“Sometimes our biggest challenges in life end up being the ones that teach us to handle things that we couldn’t have imagined,” says Walker, who learned she was pregnant her junior year and, as a single mom, gave birth to her daughter the first week of her senior year. “I didn’t plan to have a child then, but it became one of the most defining moments in my life. Everything in life seemed like smaller challenges compared to that.”

That pivotal time in Walker’s life reinforced the importance of always putting family first. It would also shape the way she would balance personal and career obligations.

Walker married her now-husband Chuck when their daughter was 18 months old. Together, they have raised six children and 15 grandchildren while balancing career demands.

“We are fortunate that we found our way back to each other. I have a wonderful husband who has always been my biggest supporter,” she says of Chuck. “He’s always there with encouragement and love.”

The Boss Mama Paradox

Repeatedly named one of the most influential leaders and top women leaders in U.S. healthcare, Walker leads City of Hope’s \$1 billion expansion in Orange County, California, which includes a

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network of advanced cancer care, a comprehensive cancer center, and specialty cancer hospital opening in 2025.

Getting to this point in her career took decades of hard work. As she balanced her homelife and career, she came to a realization.

“There are a lot of things about being a woman and a mom that prepare you to be a good leader,” she says.

Yet, Walker knows from experience that it isn’t always easy to be both. She speaks about a phenomenon she calls the “Boss Mama paradox.”

“As mothers and as leaders, we are never one or the other. We are always both and always try to hold both in tension,” she says.

Her advice: Get your work done and allow yourself to leave for the school performance or soccer game. “We must honor our priorities and make deposits in all the bank accounts: work, partner, children, and self,” Walker says.

When balancing work and family, Walker encourages parents to approach their personal life with the same dedication and energy as their career. The reality, she says,

is that most people only have about 20 years with their children before they leave home and about 50 years in their careers.

“You may be the CEO of a company right now, but sooner or later, you’re going to leave that job and title,” she says. “If you have children, you’re always going to be a parent.”

Blessed Beyond Measure

If there is one driving force of Walker’s career and home life, it’s an endless pursuit of purpose.

“I believe that we’re all born with a purpose,” says Walker. “Our job in life is to identify our purpose and learn how we can use our gifts to make the world a better place. You don’t need to become a CEO, but you need to find meaningful work that’s best for you, your partner, and your family. No one should expect you to do more than your best.”

For Walker, meaningful work has meant both raising a family and having a remarkable career in healthcare; as she leads a team, she also considers family. In the same way she wants her children and grandchildren to be the best version of themselves they can be, that feeling translates into the workplace. “We should love and want the best for the people we work with and invest in their futures,” she says.

“People often ask me how I’ve managed to have such a large family and a great career,” she continues. “You need a great partner, and I believe God wants to bless us all immensely, but you need to have courage to say yes and be brave enough to accept those opportunities. Because of this, I’ve been blessed beyond measure.”

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Annette Walker with her four daughters, Sarah, Jessi, Melissa, and Emily.

Motivated by
MEANING

City of Hope Orange County President Annette M. Walker finds purpose uplifting others at home and at work.

Annette M. Walker stands in front of the specialty cancer hospital opening in Irvine, California, in 2025.