

Life/Work Balance; it's a conscious decision

By Simma Liebermann

I don't know why so many articles on life/work balance seem to focus on people who suddenly decide they've had it with working all the time and within one hour quit their job, buy a yacht or a jet, grab their family or their best friends or their dog and travel the world for a year or two. They then get touted as the role model for the rest of us who either like our work, can't leave right now, or just want to enjoy life at home. Besides, being in balance is more than just what you do with your time, its also how you feel and think all of the time.



Photo by Joan Babkoff ©2006

The reality is that wherever you go you take yourself with you. I can go to the woods for a week to meditate, but if I've never meditated, or gained some inner peace or learned to be happy with who I am rather than what I do, I'll go up to the woods and count the minutes until I can leave or find some way to distract myself from myself.

Life balance is more than how we spend our time, its also how we feel about that time and how present we are each moment. It doesn't always take one major event to want to change or to know something is not right for you. It's often a series of things.

I've studied the subject, changed my unbalanced ways and eliminated some major stresses, and there are still times when I know I need to slow down and reassess my priorities.

In this article I feature four people from very different backgrounds who realized they needed to jump off the never-ending treadmill of stress and overload, and make some

3/6/2007

www.workforcediversitynetwork.com

Reprinted with the permission of the author.

concrete changes. These are four people who found different ways of achieving life/work balance without sailing the seas or flying the skies for a year.

Conscious Change

Ross Pike has been managing partner of Diversified Maintenance Systems, a facilities management company for the last year and a half. When I interviewed him, he was calm, and focused. I learned that he wasn't always this way. There were times in the past when he didn't take the time he wanted with his family, and when he did, he was often tied to his Blackberry. "Before I was with Diversified Maintenance, I was Division President for another organization. I was responsible for over 7,000 employees. I had no personal time. It was always the customers time. My day started early and ended late. I had to keep up with east and west coast time."

"I was a hamster on a treadmill, always working, and always tired. I needed to make a change. I decided to be open to new opportunities where I could go home every night and spend real time with my wife." Soon after a colleague one of the owners of Diversified Maintenance, called. When his friend told him they were seeking an additional partner for their company, and asked Ross for recommendations, Ross suggested himself.

Within six weeks he had left his old job as Division President of a national organization and became an equity partner of a much smaller organization. "I left people that I really liked, and took a big cut in my annual salary, but I get to see my wife every night. I also get to spend more time with customers and less time with so much paper work. I was constantly tired and could barely stay awake until ten. Now I enjoy staying up with my wife and watching Boston Legal until eleven. I go to the gym now and take long walks, and my wife is happy because she can give me a longer to-do list.

Balanced and Beaming

Catalina Ganis is Executive Vice President and Managing Director of Elliot Executive Source Ltd. and Senior Vice President of Elliot Associates Inc., divisions of The Elliot Group LLC, a nationally recognized executive search firm specializing in the Hospitality, Food Service, Manufacturing, Distribution and Retail Service Industries.

Catalina helps spearhead client development, long range strategic planning and is also responsible for managing senior level executive search assignments. She is the chairperson of the Multicultural Foodservice and Hospitality Alliance. Catalina has been active with the Organization of Chinese Americans (OCA) Westchester Chapter in New York and the Chinese School of Southern Westchester. She is married and has three children. After speaking with her it was clear to me that she and her family know how to work together as a team and support each other in developing a good life balance.

Before she worked at Elliot Associates, Catalina worked in the hotel industry where she was on call 24 hours a day. "We worked too many hours and the wrong hours. I knew that I needed to change how I was working. Now, I have the luxury of being able to work at home when I want. I make my own schedule and the work always gets done. It's important to me that I am able to spend time with my family. When I travel I make sure

3/6/2007

www.workforcediversitynetwork.com

Reprinted with the permission of the author.

that I take flights that allow me to see my children either in the morning or at night (I will leave the house at 4 am to make that early morning flight so I can be home by 8pm that same day).

The work I have now also enables me to be involved in my children's classes and activities." Her parents and sister help her, and she and her husband support each other. "In order to have a good balance in our lives it is crucial that we learn to let go of things we can't control and to not waste time complaining about the decisions we make. I also made a conscious decision to take a position with an organization and people with whom I share a similar mindset and values and where I am able to be flexible After all, I want to attend my kids practices and sports games (its not just for them, I need to do it for me." "I learned to be realistic about what I can do with my time, so we eat a lot in different restaurants. I don't have to spend time cooking and our whole family can enjoy our meals together. I know I'm in balance now because I can sleep at night.

From Solo to Stability

Lia Shigemura has been the diversity director of ABM for a little over 6 months. While some people leave the corporate environment for their own business in order to gain a better life balance, Lia gave up her own successful business to get back into corporate life. "I loved having my own business and due to hard work and good fortune, I was very successful. Much of that success, however, meant that I was constantly marketing myself and selling.

The cycle was unending and relentless. When I wasn't with a client or in meetings, I was on the phone. Life planning became difficult as I found that I often placed my clients' need over my own." "I had been vaguely contemplating working within an organization for a while, but hadn't begun a serious job search when a former colleague, who had recently been hired by ABM Industries, asked if I was interested in applying for a challenging position as director of diversity, inclusion and training. I saw it as a terrific opportunity to become involved in the ground-up development of such important company strategies and initiatives.

With the work I do now I can help create change that will positively benefit 75,000 people and their families. The scope of my position is tremendous and offers many opportunities. And the energy that I used to devote to marketing and selling (and worrying) is now better spent on productive aspects of work that I much more enjoy." Lia misses some of her international travel she likes not living on airplanes, and gets to spend more time at home and on vacation with her partner of 14 years, Helen Zia." I can now sign up for classes like yoga that are more than one session because I have a better idea of my schedule.. I can actually relax and be more present with my partner. This is a wonderful journey."

When I spoke with Lia, I knew she was serious about this because she was on her way to Carmel, California to relax for a week by the water.

Taking Flight at Fifty

Marcie Lee Thomas is a principal consultant for HCMS Group, Inc. (Human Capital Management Services), a health information company. She loves what she does which is developing educational programs and managing client accounts. “Since I began working for the founders and principals of HCMS (over 11 years ago), my life is a lot more balanced. I work with people who share the same philosophy and who treat people as assets and not as liabilities. Our clients also agree with our philosophy. I didn’t feel that way in other work environments”. Before Marcie worked with HCMS staff she worked for a county agency that provided health care programs for county employees.

“We were expending our intellectual capital, but received no recognition for our good work. There was no mechanism for employee appreciation or recognition. We provided for the care of others without receiving care for ourselves. It was stressful, and I always felt responsible for outcomes even without the necessary control to effect change”. I wasn’t fulfilled workwise and I realized that I was not in balance with who I was as a person.”

Marcie went on to tell me she was contemplating leaving but hadn’t made any moves until “I saw someone get shot outside of the building where I worked. That was the moment when I said that all the benefits, job security and retirement were not worth the stress, nor could those things help me feel better about my job.” She was fifty years old when she embarked on a new career. Other people told her it made no sense to leave her county position at that age and couldn’t believe that she would take that risk. “From the minute I started working with the principals here, my stress began to lift. I finally felt that I was valued for my contributions and for the results I achieved.”

When I asked her what she did outside of work she replied “I love to travel especially to Europe and Hawaii. I love visiting Paris. I exercise, dance, read, attend classes, and take time to go on spiritual/personal growth retreats. I used to take vacations to get a break from stress, but it was still there when I went back to work. Now, I’m feeling in balance when I start my vacation and I’m still in balance when I return.”

All four people Marci, Lia, Catalina and Ross are very different from each other but they all knew they were working too much, too hard and not getting what they needed to balance their personal and professional lives. Lia left her own business to work for a large corporation, and Ross left a large organization to become managing partner of a much smaller business. Catalina and Marci both knew that they needed more flexibility to put their life in balance, pursue other interests and feel in control of their time.

Each person made a conscious decision to make a change, and be open to new opportunities. As we enter a new year, take an assessment of what you do and how you live your life. Do you complain about your job, relationships, or lack of personal time? As you assess your life, if you find any areas that you don’t like, make a conscious choice to change and be open and willing to try new opportunities. Don’t wait, start today.

Simma Lieberman's diversity training seminars can help your organization or company. If you are interested in hiring Simma for a diversity seminar, [click here](#) for more information.

Simma Lieberman helps organizations and individuals create more profitable cultures. She is a consultant, speaker and author on Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, Differences and Dialogue, and Power Living. Simma is the co-author of the book "Putting Diversity to Work, how to successfully lead a diverse workforce" (Thomson Learning 2003) Call Simma at 510-527-0700 to discuss how she can help your organization become more profitable or e-mail Simma@SimmaLieberman.com