

Real perspective

Belief in yourself will take you further than a 10-year plan.

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“I’m living proof that you can be successful without career goals,” *Real Simple* Managing Editor Kristin van Ogtrop (English ’86) told the audience at last fall’s U.Va. Women’s Center Jill T. Rinehart Leadership Lecture.

Friendly, generous and down-to-earth, van Ogtrop embodied the spirit that has made *Real Simple* one of the nation’s most successful multimedia brands: keep it simple so you have time for what really matters.

U.Va. education

U.Va. gave van Ogtrop more than an academic education. For more than decades, things she learned outside the classroom have also served her well:

- “U.Va. taught me to have fun. My career missteps ultimately led me to where I am now — and I have fun.”
- “Don’t be a square peg in a round hole.” After struggling with the sciences as a pre-med student, van Ogtrop switched her major to English because she was getting good grades. She was naturally good in English and it was a great decision.
- “The social graces really matter. Make conversation with everybody. Look presentable. Understanding this has greatly helped me in the corporate world.”
- “Enthusiasm trumps almost everything else.”
- “Do all the things you need to do to prepare for your career, but also do the things that will make you an interesting person.” One of the things van Ogtrop most enjoyed about U.Va. was its interesting, multidimensional people. Van Ogtrop hired Julie Wilson (alum?) as her assistant because she danced. “She had done all the right things, but she also had personality. We all want to be surrounded by people who are creative and fun.”
- “My best advice to students: If you do the thing you’re good at, success will follow.”

Real success

Van Ogtrop describes the biggest responsibility of her job as determining the “smart moves” in guiding her brand’s development. She has obviously chosen well because when she arrived in 2003, *Real Simple* was a magazine, and in less than five years, she created what *Adweek* calls “a model for spinning off smart brand extensions.” The *Real Simple* brand now includes international print editions; an award-winning website; television (the weekly PBS program will be replaced this year by a daily syndicated show); radio [is it still on radio?]; multiple product lines sold exclusively at Target; and mobile content for Verizon Wireless.

In addition, van Ogtrop has won multiple National Magazine Awards, and *Real Simple* has repeatedly placed on *Adweek*’s prestigious “Hot List” of the industry’s top 10 magazines (No. 2 in 2007).

Van Ogtrop is happily married and has three children. Her first job in publishing — one of the industry’s most sought-after, entry-level positions, as *Vogue* Editor Anna Wintour’s assistant — not only gave her the career niche she had been seeking but helped clarify the work/life balance she wanted. Armed with a master’s degree in English from Columbia University, van Ogtrop answered phones and got coffee — and discovered, for the first time, “a place where I spoke the same language as those around me.” There, she learned how to put together a magazine according to the highest standards of beauty and editorial content. But the relentless Wintour’s 80 percent work, 20 percent personal life balance “was not attractive to me,” van Ogtrop said. From then on, from *Vogue* to *Premiere*, *Travel & Leisure*, back to *Vogue* and then to *Glamour* before arriving at *Real Simple*, van Ogtrop maintained her commitment to family time, high standards at work and to having fun.

What really matters

So, how to get there? In the same spirit that leaves *Real Simple* readers quietly reassured things will be ok even if the house is not perfectly de-cluttered and dinner not home-cooked, van Ogtrop gave the U.Va. community more than magazine-career tips and offered to ideas to help students – ages 18 to 80 – negotiate life itself. Above all? What really matters. “Believing in yourself is the only thing that matters — that’s what will see you through.”

Kristin Van Ogtrop’s Simple Strategies

1. Read everything you can get your hands on.
2. When you’re in an interview and people ask what your favorite magazines are, don’t say only *Vanity Fair* and the *New Yorker* because everybody names them.
3. When you’re starting out, be willing do anything except if it’s dangerous, unethical or illegal. You won’t always be answering someone else’s phone.
4. Your boss may not be smarter than you, but she knows more.
5. Graduate degrees are a waste of time.
6. Be wary of setting five-year or 10-year goals. Let life take interesting twists and turns.
7. If you’re good, the work will find you.
8. You’ll find you’ll drop some balls, but that’s ok.
9. Your greater regrets are based on inaction rather than action.
10. Believing in yourself is the only thing that matters — that’s what will see you through.

Bonus Advice from Amanda Armstrong ('04, van Ogtrop’s former assistant):

1. Meet and talk to everybody you can.
2. Write whatever you can.

To learn more about Kristin van Ogtrop, read the fall 2007 issue of *Iris: A Magazine for Thinking Young Women* published by the University of Virginia Women’s Center. You can get it by [subscribing here](#).

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=yqD76FXWJiYElxwV4ya2Kw_3d_3d]

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