

**Women, Management and Work Conference, 30-31 July 2009 Sydney
Macquarie University, Faculty of Business and Economics**

JUGGLING THREE BLACKBERRIES AND HAVING A LIFE

Good afternoon everyone ...

Perhaps you had a morning like mine, it could have been any morning but it was today.

It was extra important that I was out the door early today, which means 8.15, my husband has been away all week and the kids knew they all had to make some effort to help....so we're all dressed, showered, fed, bags packed, lunches made and minutes to go...I'm in my nice suit, hair dried even make up....and then 'mum I think maisy is sick....the 4 month old puppy looks a bit strange...fast forward 5 mins there I am almost naked in the laundry bathing a dog covered in numerous bodily fluids'....

First clue to having a life don't take yourself too seriously and have a sense of humor, it can sometimes turn stress into something more bearable.

It's a juggle for most of us, for me it's children, marriage, running a business and how to fit in all the other things I want to do. For you it might be caring for older parents, running for parliament, studying, playing sport, doing voluntary work.

Having 1, 3 or 30 blackberries won't always neaten the domestic chaos that many of us live in. Sometimes all the balls fall in a heap and you wonder why

you bother, your career is a joke, you want to ditch the blackberry, it's too hard. Simply you don't feel you have choices.

One of our mentors Arthur shared some of his thoughts with me the other day on life. He is a man in his 70s, he's had two marriages, lots of kids and about 5 careers, ranging from builder, stock broker and back to farmer and the 2nd last one was particularly lucrative.

He was warmly reflecting on his 40s as I told him I was about to celebrate my 41st birthday. His comments have stayed with me. He said you know Sophie you're 40s are really the time that you start making decisions about your life....most of us take up study job because we get the marks at school to get into a certain course...then we take 1 of 3 jobs offered to us, then we mostly marry the person we're with in our mid-late 20s, pop out a few kids and suddenly we're 40..many of us wonder how we got there!!.

Now you're there you can really start making some considered decisions about what you want to do for the next 40 years

It made me think about the choices I've made and what influenced those decisions at different times in my life...and it also made me realize how little time many of us dedicate to thinking about these issues and how passive we are about changing them...

too hard,

that's just how work is,

I've got a big mortgage,

my husband wouldn't understand,

the kids really need me at hm,
my boss would never agree to that....we've all said them at some time when we
can't see options.

There are choices available to all of us to get the life we want but they all have an opportunity cost which we need to weigh up...and we probably need to re-assess our position every couple of years. Finding balance and juggling all the competing aspects of your life can be done but it involves asking some hard questions and giving honest answers.

Do you need to work 60 hours a week to be effective at your job?

Are drinks on Friday leisure or work?

Are those 730am meetings really critical to attend?

What are your goals?

Do you waste time on email, at meetings, watching tv, playing on your phone?

Could you negotiate to trade 10 hours of work each week for 10 hours with your children, partner, parents or to be on a board, spend time at your children's school, study, paint...

I think it boils down to one fundamental question that in our mentoring business is the most commonly asked by mentors and the toughest to answer –

What would your personal and professional life look like to feel happy and successful?

We fix our teeth, our cars and our superannuation each year but we don't really do an audit on our lives that often and consider the big questions – am I happy, when I consider my family, work, other interests and commitments – is this the best choice for me? And if the answer is no... what steps can I make to bring about some change?

This afternoon you will have the opportunity to think about your lives, all the different parts of them – family, work, leisure, self, community, other

Are you living the life you want to?

Are you are happy with the balance?

Are you where you thought you'd be at this stage?

How can you create the life you want?

How can you find more time for the things you want to do?

ME

In my own life I have managed to balance my professional and personal interests and commitments with varying degrees of success during the past 20 years.

At the moment the balance seems to work: I am 41, running a small business in mentoring – a family business (I work with my mother), mother of three young children, 2 dogs, married to a man who also works in family businesses. My other professional responsibilities incl being VP of the P&C where my children go to school, Director of the Griffin Theatre company and a member of the SE Area Health Service Human research ethics committee.

I have followed my interests, taken risks and seized opportunities to work with good people and to always be learning. This mix has appealed to my short attention span but perhaps been at the expense of a more conventional linear career path.

One of my enduring interests has been women's health. I worked as a receptionist at a family planning clinic when I was at university, then did my final thesis in political science on abortion law reform. In my subsequent travels to south America I could not get past the poverty exp by women and children and how simple public health measures could alleviate so much suffering.

At the age of 21 armed with my degree in politics & history and a yr of travelling the world my plan was to pursue a career in the health area. However love interests at the time swayed my view and I ended up in Darwin where he had a

12 mth job. I wkd in the Darwin fpa clinic at night and weekends but my main job was as a researcher at the Nt museum researching ww2 shipwrecks in Darwin harbor...it was a dream job I researched primary records and naval archives, learnt to dive, and wrote my first report for publication to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Darwin. A career in maritime archaeology was dangled before me but I decided that I really wanted to work with people not artefacts and felt I could use my research skills in health to make a greater contribution.

I returned to Sydney without the boyfriend to do my Masters in ph as a way of gaining access to this world. After my degree I spent the next four years as a researcher and project manager. I was employed by Sydney university and the NSW health dept and was based in hospitals and community health centres at westmead, Liverpool and Queanbeyan. The issues incl asthma and air pollution, hiv testing, domestic violence and pnd services for women of nesb. Success to me was the chance to work on exciting policy issues with experienced people, to be challenged, the hope that I was contributing to new and better policies, and understanding the many govt systems. Money wasn't really a consideration. They were all 12 month contracts with little ongoing security.

In my spare time I worked at a womens health clinic and voluntarily for an overseas aid agency in sydney and decided that was my long term goal. Personal life was not a priority as I was heading to a war zone or a remote village in a developing country to do my bit....

On the eve of going to China for the 1995 UN Conf on women my own personal health problem at 27 put me in hospital with a diagnosis of crohns disease. I was off work for 3 mths and my prospects of wking in places with poor health care looked unlikely. I suddenly saw 30 looming, a low bank balance, a weird disease and no reliable men in the picture....what was it all for?

I left Sydney for a short consulting job in Canberra and another boyfriend hoping his shining career would solve all my problems...this is always a mistake. Most people don't want to accept responsibility for their own career let alone their partners. A crisis always focuses the mind and as Keating got thrown from power and all of Canberra was depressed I too did my own soul searching about where my future was and how I was going to get a life!

When in doubt throw yourself in to a challenge and invest in professional development. What's the course you've always thought about doing ?

One day driving to my sad, grey workplace in a Queanbeyan winter I heard a man from Treasury Barry Sterling being interviewed about the Vincent Fairfax leadership program. It involved 9 weeks away over 2 yrs to explore ethics in leadership all funded by the Fairfax family. I applied and was one of 15 lucky souls to be accepted. I had a mentor, worked in a BHP mine on Groote Eylandt, camped solo, abseiled off cliffs, met canberra's decision makers and people who had faced huge ethical dilemmas: politicians, corporate criminals, religious leaders and parents of chidren who have been brutally murdered discussing capital punishment. In the 2nd year I went to India to investigate female infanticide and child slavery and the role of aid agencies

It was a gift and an extraordinary personal challenge.

I had an instant Aust-wide network and the opportunity to do some serious reflecting and rigorous thinking.

At about the same time one of my referees suggested I contact Plan Australia in melb as they were looking to fill a role. So, I got my wish to work in overseas aid. Melbourne is not Calcutta but working for a global not-for profit company was a great experience. I started as an adviser to the CEO and then moved to Communications Mgr. We had to raise money, no one in Aust seemed to care and Pauline Hanson was calling for overseas aid to be stopped. I learnt a lot about marketing, the power of the media, corporate governance and how not to manage staff. Tantrums and chaos were very commonplace as people's personal passion got in the way of their capacity to work with other people.

I had a mentor for 2 of the 3 years in Melb which provided a safe, calm place to discuss issues. He was the head of the Red Cross, late 50s and had a background in business and federal politics. When we discussed my next move he encouraged me to take my skills to the corporate sector. I was curious about the other side and looked forward to earning more then \$42k a year. My mentor was also a new grandfather and his focus on family definitely highlighted my lack of it. He asked me one day whether I was serious about my current bfriend? We both knew the answer!

Compared to my 20s, my 30s seem slightly less adventurous, but all the most important events have happened ... I found the right man got married and had 3 children. I have worked in communications for a public relations company and the NSW govt agency in science and medical research and then joined my

mothers business in 2007. For 7 years I was a Director of the family planning nsw foundation which kept me connected to the health sector.

I do juggle many more activities and roles now but with greater ease and having a supportive husband has been pretty important. Personal relationships sustain us all and we need to cherish them.

Having children definitely changes your life and for many of us it is the first time we are treated differently from our male peers at work. In our mentoring business maternity leave is often a time women seek a mentor to manage the transition of leaving and returning to work. I did not manage it well but got better with experience. For my first baby I took 12 months leave from the PR firm I was working for. I was a snr account director and had been on secondment for the past 6 mths working at MLC when they were sold by Lend Lease to National Australia Bank. When my eldest son was 6 mths old I enquired about part time options which we had not really discussed when I left. Their interpretation of this was 5 short days say 9-4, rather short sighted for a company that employed mostly women under 35. I was desperately in love with my new baby and just quit. I didn't fight as I didn't love the job enough and didn't see myself committed to a future in financial services PR.

It probably was the right decision for me but I mostly counsel people against making such rash decisions. Take a breath, it's an emotional 12 months after you have a baby, give yourself time to make considered decisions in consultation with your employer.

When I joined the NSW govt a few years later I was offered the job 5 mths pregnant with my 3rd child. My boss knew I could do the job, offered me flexible hours, days, wk from home – in short options. As a result I was super committed , worked hard and loved the job.

Since having children part time work has been my norm and I have tried 2,3, 4 days. I currently work 4 days and finish one day at 230. Apart from being able to spend more time with my kids, part time work has given me the freedom to work on the board of the family planning foundation, join the p& C, join the ethics committee at the local hospital. I also got involved in the lobby group around RU486 a couple of years ago. This connects me to a whole range of people who are all deeply committed to things I value and this gives me energy. I may not work this schedule forever but for now it works for me.

I am now part of a small team that runs McCarthy Mentoring. Mentoring is about people, relationships and trust and can be defined simply as a wiser and more exp person assisting another to grow and learn.

We work across Australia with lawyers, academics, political staffers, bankers, newly arrived refugees, musicians, arts administrators, pilots, engineers and small business managers...and everyone is searching broadly for the same things to find some space in their busy lives to work with another more exp person to help them find their voice, clarify their goals and realize their potential.

The immediate task is often to assist people to manage transition... the mentee is often moving into a new role, a new industry, managing a promotion or redundancy...at all these stages we have a critical look at ourselves, check our

direction, promote our strengths and plan our next move. It all sounds pretty obvious and it's not rocket science but having yr own personal sounding board can be a great help.

Our business provides mentors to people in all these situations and in all sectors

It is a real privilege working with our mentors and mentees and you find that everyone has an interesting story to tell esp when they go beyond the resume. Corporate HR mgrs who become ski instructors, journalists who become farmers, lawyers who start up IT businesses. It is an incredibly optimistic enterprise and I am constantly amazed at people's capacity for change. Running a small business is very satisfying and has definitely given me a feeling of control over my time.

I have found working with my mother a really positive exp, the different perspectives we bring to issues and problems is creative and a strength of our business.

In summary: So what have I learnt?

Sophie's Top 10 tips for having a life

- **Identify goals & make a plan.** Throw it all up in the air and think deeply about these questions – What would your personal and professional life look like to feel happy and successful? How much risk are you prepared to take to have the life you want?
- **Be passionate about something.** What do you care about? What are your passions? Is this an area you want to pursue professionally or just keep as a hobby? Building, knitting, bushwalking, organizing events? Do you want to spend more time on hobbies, community interests, family?(kids or parents)
- **8 hrs wk, 8 hrs sleep 8 hrs play** – declutter, work with purpose, delegate things that are not so important, have some fun
- **Find a mentor** – wise counsel and a sounding board can be very valuable. Ask them the stupid questions, look at options, how do become a partner, how do I speak up at a meeting, can I get a new career at 40, How did you do it?
- **Invest in your health**
- **Build & nurture relationships**
- **Keep learning & developing skills**
- **Communicate your aspirations & put up your hand for leadership roles—**
 , are you on professional or industry committees, boards? Are you having a say in the future of your organization, profession or your neighbourhood?

- **Take a long term view of your working life.** Hang on by your fingernails during the years with children many women kick in in their late 40s and 50s.
- **Get involved in your community**

2. One2One Mentoring cards–

Of the 60 possible goals lets choose 10 that you can commit to in the next 12 months to determine your perfect life.

As a group

Think about what you are sacrificing, what's important to you and why

What are your real priorities?

All to do this on their own (15 mins)

3. Group session:

Within your groups let's compare your answers and see if there are common themes? (use paper provided)

Who has ideas on how we can achieve these goals?

How do you interpret this goal?

What does it mean to you?

How can you commit to it?

What change is required in your life to make it happen?

4. Conclusion