

THE GREATER ADVANTAGE, INC.

marketing and performance coaching for business and life

2008: Get a fresh perspective on life

By Kim Bettie

The great debate continues. Is it really possible for women to have it all? An even better question is, "Can we handle it all?" We want to get more joy out of life. However, the number one killer of joy is burnout. For nearly 10 years I worked as an executive coach for General Motors. The executive women I coached were breaking the glass ceiling, but at the expense of their peace of mind.

Despite our best efforts, it appears the evidence is stacked against us. Given the demands and pace of life today, our quality of life is suffering. Finding balance can literally mean the difference between life and death. Many of us complain about being over extended. As a result, we are not taking very good care of ourselves. One in three Americans is overweight. Our eating and drinking habits are responsible for six out of ten deaths. Coronary heart disease is the number one single killer of women over the age of 25. The effects of chronic stress are major contributors to our escalating health concerns.

So many women are growing weary of unsuccessfully juggling multiple roles and sacrificing one aspect of life for another. The meaning of work and related time commitments must be balanced with the time, energy, and satisfaction devoted to family and friends. Women who put work first, or give work equal priority to their home life, are experiencing higher rates of depression and role conflict than those who put relationships first.

I will never forget the robust conversations with my mother about how my life would be radically different than her life. Unlike her I was going to have it all: health, fitness, the perfect career, a loving husband, and adoring children. I believed I would have the time and energy for my husband, children, home, church, community, as well as, me-time. I got all I asked for and more. However, this was no fairy tale ending.

All of my successes came back to haunt me. Instead of living my dream life, it turned out to be a nightmare that ended in divorce. I had no time for myself, very little energy, and even less joy. I struggled in every way imaginable to find balance and fulfillment. Unfortunately, I was not prepared to live my new life. It would take a major shift in perspective for me to overcome the barriers to really living my vision and enjoying my life.

As I considered my condition, I was reminded of a parable in the Bible that warns "No man puts new wine into old bottles: else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish." "Bottles" were made of goatskins sewn together at the edges to form watertight bags. New wine expands as it ages, so it had to be put in new, pliable wineskins. An old wineskin has become too rigid and will burst under the pressure and spill the wine. This is what I believe is happening to women today. We set out to live a new life of promise, but we put the new life into old "wineskin", and many have reached the breaking point. We need a fresh perspective, a life-changing new method... a new "wineskin".

In 2004, I started my own business. I decided to use what I learned in corporate America to reach my own life goals. Now, I am privileged to make a living coaching hundreds of people – mostly women – as they make plans to live the life they always imagined. The majority of my clients are between the ages of 35-50. Most are African-American professional women. Some are married, but most are single or divorced. I take them through a process to shift their mindset to success and create a strategic vision for life.

We must be liberated from the inside out with a new life-changing mindset. I let my version of a perfect life go, and created a shared vision with God, using Proverbs 31. This rare and valiant woman juggled many more roles than I ever could have imagined with grace and dignity. As I focused on Proverbs 31, I began to change from the inside out. I embraced with joy the roles that once overwhelmed me, as actual gifts from God. I have found peace that surpasses my own understanding. I have stopped complaining about balancing my different roles in life. I now pray for renewed strength. This type of balance is about being poised with the gracious tact to cope and handle every aspect of life.

"A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life. She gets up while it is still dark; and she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls. She considers a field and buys it and out of her earnings, she plants a vineyard. She sets out about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for the tasks. She sees that her trading is profitable; her lamp does not go out at night. She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy.

Her husband is respected at the city gate where he takes his seat with the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes. She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come, she speaks with wisdom and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.

Her children arise and call her blessed: her husband also, and he praises her, 'Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.' Charm is deceptive; and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate."

It is a best practice to find a real life role model to bring more focus to your vision. We are in dire need of role models to demonstrate the successful navigation of a woman's life in the 21st century. We need a variety of role models to represent all of the women in America today. Lately, I have been hearing more and more women refer to Michelle Obama as their role model. A woman recently came up to me after a speaking engagement. She said, "When you talk about the Proverbs 31 woman, I think of Michelle Obama." She was excited about the possibility of her being our First Lady.

I believe Michelle Obama embodies the true spirit and poise of this woman of biblical proportions. It has been helpful for me and others to see and hear her speak openly about how she achieves balance, as she supports her husband's campaign for President. God has uniquely fashioned us to have a potent effect on the behavior of others with the visible strength emanating from us.

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