

# 6

## **THE HEART AND SOUL OF A PROFESSIONAL WOMAN**

“The most difficult thing to explain in life is the simplest truth called love.” -Ramanathan Srinivasan

óóóó

### **THE MEANING OF WORK**

Earlier I focused on the work/life balance dilemma. And I encouraged you to think of your life holistically. When people generally think about work/life balance, they think about spending time with their children. In this chapter I am going to focus on work/life balance as it relates to your relationship with your spouse, partner or significant other and your role as a professional woman. I was once upon a time a woman who was defined by her work. I am proud to say that I am no longer that woman. The definition of who I am as a person is so much more now.

We must be willing to give as much energy to our professional pursuits as we do to our personal ones. There are lots of great books on health, financial wealth and friendships. I want to deal with the impact

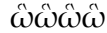
that your professional choices and leadership behaviors can have upon what I think of as the most important relationship that you will have on this earth, and that is the one with your spouse or significant other.

In chapters 1 and 5 I said that work should be a part of your life, not your whole life. While I believe it, I can't say that I have always practiced it. I haven't gone into much detail about how work impacted my personal life other than to share the life-changing conversation I had with my daughter. This time I intend to share more about the impact that my focus on my professional life has had upon the most important relationship I have on this earth, my marriage. I am sharing this part of my life with you in the hope that you will be able to avoid some of the pitfalls I unfortunately fell into and had to figure out how to get out of. I have also included a very special interview with my husband, Michael. Mike and I have been married for twenty-seven years. The relationship we have is my most valued accomplishment. Like all married couples, we have been through our share of storms. Anyone who has been married and hasn't had any storm experiences is either not being truthful or living in denial. Why? Because blending the desires, personalities and at times, poor behaviors are challenging. And like it or not, we have all selfish natures. We all want what we want, and we want everyone else to understand what we want regardless of how it impacts them.

**Mike and I have been married for twenty-seven years. The relationship we have is my most valued accomplishment.**

I grew up with parents who had outstanding work ethics. They didn't miss a day of work no matter what. Keep in mind, these people worked two and three jobs all the time. Many times the extra jobs would be the two of them working together, serving at a party for some wealthy family in the city. There were many sacrifices made on their part. But as I look back upon it now, it was through those sacrifices that they expressed love to each other. My generation was different. We didn't have the limitations that were placed on my parents' generation. We were the first generation to have the opportunity to go anywhere we wanted to go, become whomever we wanted to be. While it would be difficult, it was still possible, and all because of the sacrifices the generations before us were willing to make.

So work has always played an important role in my life. It was what you did to express your love to the most important people in your world. What I would quickly come to realize is that for my generation, the division between work and life would not be as clear as the generations before. The sacrifices to fulfill your dreams were rattled with layers of confusion about being everything to everyone. What I'm talking about is more of an internal nature. I am talking about the ability to separate your role as a professional from your role as a woman and as a wife. And if you are not married yet, please take this journey with me anyway. It will help you be better prepared for the future should marriage or long-term partnership with a significant other become a part of it.



## **MIKE'S STORY**

I want to thank my husband for agreeing to be included in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of this book. I have come to so appreciate the journey he went through as a result of being married to a “nontraditional” woman who was driven for professional success. And I am humbled in spirit in recognition of his strong desire to play a significant role in the lives of our children. For a long time it was the woman’s role to support the man’s professional desires. Those times are going away. But the role reversal trend began with men like my husband. They were the quiet giants that no one understood. They were the ones who were able to, by the grace of God; learn that men and women should have the rights to pursue their professional dreams. They are a part of the school of parents who have taught their sons and daughters to enter into a relationship on equal footing. They themselves were not taught that.

Having been raised by a very strong woman, my mother’s number-one rule was to always be able to take care of yourself. It is a positive life lesson that I will take to my grave. Although she and my father had a wonderful relationship that ended only with his death, I think she longed for more professional achievements. Unfortunately, for the time and season in which she was born, it was not possible. So in many ways she has lived her dreams through her children. She used the passion that she would have probably used being a great businesswoman to lift our desires to experience professional success. And remember, I told you that my parents were the kind of people that went to work no matter what. Their work ethic was one of excellence.

I grasped onto the desire to experience success like my life depended upon it. I was going to be one of the first generations to have new opportunities, and so I had and still do have a deep sense of responsibility to make good on the sacrifices my parents and forefathers and mothers made so that I could have these opportunities.

I was involved in everything as a child; every sport, every association, every student council, etc., you name it, I was on it. I didn't learn how to cook until I got married. I could clean the house like an award-winning maid though, because my mother valued a clean house and because my rear appreciated the lack of strong spankings when the house was clean to her liking. I don't know how you grew up, but I really encourage you to think about it as you read this chapter because it will help you to put into context the learning. You may have grown up as the good girl or the rebel. Or you may have grown up being satisfied with little. Whatever your past, you need to understand the old tapes if you are to succeed in balancing your personal and professional desires.

The mask I wore for the work environment helped me survive and succeed, but it didn't work so well at home. Why? I came to realize that my husband was not one of my employees. In fact, he told me as much. I would come home still in "professional" mode and ask him to "debrief me on the week's activities so that I can get with my assistant to see if my schedule will allow me to participate." I was hard. I wasn't soft and loving like a wife should be. I couldn't seem to let go of who I was in the business environment to become who I wanted to be in the family environment. My empathy and compassion quotient had been diminished substantially. After all, in the business

world there are no excuses for not obtaining results, right? And the way I saw it, there was no room for what I perceived to be excuses. I had become the “tough love” queen.

One year we moved to Louisville, Kentucky. We were living in Agoura Hills, California, before that. An opportunity presented itself for Mike to work for a top television station on a top show in Chicago, so I decided that I would accept an offer for me to take a stint in the corporate offices in Louisville. It was a decision that would afford us great growth but would challenge us to the very core. Mike and I saw each other on the weekends as he lived in Chicago Monday through Friday and came to Louisville on the weekends. The show he worked on was short-lived and wasn't renewed after just a few episodes. But he landed another job at the station on a morning show, so the long-distance relationship continued. I know you're probably wondering why he didn't just get a job in Louisville. Well, the experience he gained while working in what his industry considers to be the top location, Los Angeles, overqualified him for everything.

After the show he was working on was cancelled, we decided that the kids were spending too much time with sitters. I was traveling every week, and we had little to no time together with the long-distance relationship. So Mike came home. It was a major decision at the time. No one in our circle of friends' husbands were staying home and taking care of the children. Or at least they didn't admit it.

I don't mind telling you that this was one of the most difficult seasons of my life. Here I was at the top of my game, advancing to the Vice President level, but my personal life was falling apart. My husband wasn't happy. My kids knew the sitter better than they knew

me. I didn't have any close friends, didn't know any neighbors. All I had, or at least all I thought I had, was work.

As the days passed, the intensity of the transition took its toll. I was paying a price that at first I didn't realize I was paying, and second didn't know what to do about. I was resentful that my husband was at home because of images I had of a man's role. I was mad because I couldn't find the formula to make it all work when the truth of the matter was that corporate America was not set up to make it work for a woman. This is another area that I appeal to you as you advance to use your voice to change. You can call it flex-time or pay for performance, but it is damn near impossible to work 80 hours a week and have any quality of life. I don't think that men can do this either. It is just that they have always had the luxury of having a wife at home who would assume responsibility for all facets of the family. How many times have you heard older gentlemen at their retirement parties talk about how they owe all the credit to their wives for raising the kids and taking care of the family.

As a result of my lack of understanding, I threw myself even more into work. It was a real mess. I didn't understand what my husband was going through, and I didn't know how to help him.

Now you may not ever reach the point where your husband will stay home, but you will certainly reach a point where your relationship will be challenged because of your professional choices. My hope in featuring this interview is that you will gain perspective for what your partner might go through or is going through and that you will give yourself permission to allow some of your natural God-given traits of compassion, collaboration and care balanced with tough

love to shine through. Even though these traits haven't gotten to the point where they are valued in the workplace to the same degree as getting business results are, things are changing and these skills will be critical for managing people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

(I conducted this interview with my husband at our condo in Los Angeles. It is an interview filled with emotion and lots of tears on both sides.)

### **What was the impact on your career as a result of choosing to support your wife's career?**

The initial words I used many years ago were "career suicide." In reality it wasn't that dramatic, but it certainly felt like it. It was probably more of a hit to me emotionally accepting that my wife was going to be the major breadwinner. And there were so many significant implications, such as how we were going to take care of the kids. The demands placed on Trudy as a result of her promotions were extensive. She spent what felt like an enormous amount of time on the road, leaving me to assume the stay-at-home-dad role. Although things are changing, there is still a stigma or label placed upon men who stay at home to care for the kids. I think that I was probably one of a very small population of men who were facing the challenges I faced.

From a physiological standpoint, it was tough. I felt isolated. I couldn't relate to the women who were stay-at-home moms, and they certainly couldn't relate to me. Society seemed to show disapproval in both subtle and overt ways. The looks I would receive when taking the kids to a school activity or shopping at the grocery store sent a signal that suggested, "There must be something wrong with him if he's

home taking care of the kids.” It impacted my confidence and even challenged my faith at times. I started to question my own existence. I no longer felt like I had a purpose.

And I couldn't get Trudy to understand what I was experiencing. For those of you who know Trudy, you know that she is a no-nonsense, get-it-done-no-matter-what kind of person. I needed her emotionally. And sometimes I felt that her “results-oriented” corporate mind-set didn't serve us well. I needed my wife to understand the space that I was in. I needed her to appreciate what I was doing, to value it. Over time she became far more sensitive, but in the midst of the journey it was tough.

### **So how did you adjust?**

I constantly reminded myself of the importance of one of us being with the kids. Prior to us making the decision to put my career on the back burner, the kids were spending way too much time with sitters who weren't family. I kept myself going through prayer, determination, and faith that I was doing the right thing for the family.

**I don't take my career for granted.  
I enjoy the work I do now more than ever.**

It really was difficult. I wouldn't always express myself fairly to Trudy. It would be truthful to say that during this time I resented her and her success. But I constantly remembered some things that Trudy says a lot, and that is, “We all have seasons of life,” and “There is

something to learn from every experience.” I challenged myself and she challenged me to dig deep. As a result, I am a different person today than I was back then. I don’t take my career for granted. I enjoy the work that I do now more than ever. I am proud of the investment we both made in the children, as they are now adults and really good people. Even though Adam has Down syndrome and can’t fulfill what some would call the “normal” dream, he is happy and working and independent, and I am pleased to know in my heart that as a father I contributed to that. Most fathers will never have that experience. Most fathers of people I grew up with and a lot of the fathers of my kids’ generation don’t have an emotional connection with their children. They have left all that to their wives. I have been fortunate enough to have had a different experience.

### **What was the real root of the emotional challenges?**

Honestly, it was a big hit to my ego. The pressure I felt as a result of comments or unspoken signals from our own families was tough to deal with. It was three years of intense pressure but significant growth. The experience really taught me how important it is to stay humble. I didn’t realize the role that humility plays in one’s ability to embrace self-leadership and to lead others.

For men, when your confidence is rattled it is difficult to cope. Perhaps that’s true for everyone, but I think particularly men because most men are raised feeling that they need to be the breadwinner, they need to be in control, and their needs should come first. I was raised like that. I learned early on that men should be considered first in everything. It tainted my perspective and, yes, at times, made me very

arrogant. I had to talk to myself and work through the feelings, emotions, and fears so that I could honor the vows and responsibilities I had to my family. I didn't want to be selfish. I wanted to put my family first and most importantly, I wanted to make sure that the family stayed together.

I had to talk to myself and work through the feelings, emotions, and fears so that I could honor the vows and responsibilities I had to my family.

**What advice would you give to a man who might find himself in a similar situation?**

I believe that 98% of men won't want to hear what I am going to say, but it's about being willing to be submissive. Trudy and I are both believers. The Bible tells husbands and wives that they are to submit to each other. Most people stop at the part that says women are supposed to submit to their husbands. And most men are not willing to play a support role. They feel like they've got to be number one and call the shots. I was lucky that I had a spouse who looked out for my needs. Trudy tried to include me in everything. She took my feelings into consideration. I can't say that I always treated her fairly while in the role of stay-at-home dad. But as men, we have got to set our priorities straight. We should never underestimate the power of the impact we can have on our children.

I would also say that a man who is committed to his marriage should want to be supportive of his spouse. He should focus on building her up. Push away any guilt feelings you can. Don't discount or belittle the role that the mother takes on with the kids. Make sure that the children have a clear understanding of why mommy is not home. Lift her up. I have come to realize that the challenges women face in the work environment, primarily caused by men, are real and can have a major impact upon a woman's ability to be who she wants to be.

Both parties need to learn to appreciate the other's needs. And become active in the listening part of communication. Stop and take temperature checks, as Trudy would say. We are still working on this one for me. If I don't see a problem, I don't think there is a problem. I've learned that it is wise to create opportunities where you can monitor and talk openly about situations.

**I would also say that a man who is committed to his marriage should want to be supportive of his spouse. He should focus on building her up.**

I would also advise men to recognize that they should be actively engaged in the upbringing of their children no matter what. We need to stop thinking that the be all and end all is about professional success. That certainly is a part of it, but there is so much more.

**Did you ever feel like Trudy was mistreated, and if so, how did you handle it?**

My natural behavior is to be very protective of Trudy. But I couldn't do battle for her. I really had to learn to trust her ability to stand on her own. Trudy and I were always in contact with each other. There was never a time when 24 hours went by without us connecting. I wanted to know who was with her when she traveled. We had a deal that she would call me once she was in for the night. And I had to trust that once that call was made, she was where she said she was.

On one occasion, though, my emotions got the absolute best of me. We had gone to the Kentucky Derby. It was a big day. We were dressed sharp. Trudy looked so beautiful. I was happy to be there with her. Some of the world's most famous actors, business people, and politicians were among the guests. The day was filled with fun. Although Trudy and I don't usually bet, we spent a few dollars but at best broke even. The service was outstanding; the sun was burning bright. I even smoked a cigar. It was a great experience. I was actually disappointed when the day drew to a close. Shortly before we were scheduled to be at the bus stop I asked Trudy if we had time to go and get a couple of gifts for the kids. Trudy told the meeting coordinator that we were going to get the kids some gifts and that we would meet them at the bus. Trudy has this thing about being fifteen minutes early everywhere, and so we got to the location where we were scheduled to meet everyone else early. We hunted for this bus for the next fifteen minutes. It wasn't like it could disappear. It had been decorated with

the company colors and there were huge balloons attached to the top and a sign that called out the company name. But there was no bus.

Trudy began to get aggravated, so I asked her to call the meeting coordinator and see if maybe we were on the wrong side of the stadium. Making a long story short, we were not on the wrong side of the stadium; the bus had left us. As a man I was absolutely insulted. As a husband I was pissed. There were only two people of color on the bus--how could they have missed us. This was an intentional act of total disrespect. I was really capable of inflicting physical harm. This wasn't the first time that Trudy and I had been so grossly disrespected. It was like we were invisible to most of her colleagues, definitely her boss. The only saving grace was the president of the company and his wife were truly good, fair people.

I used to get furious about the mind battles that Trudy was put through. But other than exchanging a powerful handshake coupled with less-than-friendly eye contact with her antagonist, there was nothing I could do. But man, was it hard sometimes.

### **What do you wish you had done differently?**

I wish that I had dealt with my own insecurities better. The whole experience was a catalyst for me doing that. The growth was enormous for me personally. I found that my value was not equated with just the financial contribution. The depth and breadth of what I could offer was sharpened, and I wish that I had just leaned into the change earlier instead of fighting it because I discovered so much about myself.

Mike, thank you again for doing the interview.

As you can see, as powerful, professional women we have all kinds of challenges notwithstanding the relationships that are most important in our lives. I am so grateful to Mike for putting up with all the stuff I had to go through in breaking the glass ceiling, but I don't wish any one of you to have any of the same experiences.

Women can experience professional success without it being at the expense of the family. We shouldn't have to choose between family and work. But, taking a dose of my own medicine, we are either going to continue to be a part of the problem because we don't speak up, or we are going to drive the solution by identifying ways that we can reinvent the way the game is played. I can suggest some ways that you can help yourself draw the line between work time and family time.

- Be present in the moment. When you are at work, be all there; and when you are at home, be all there. No Blackberry or phone calls during family time, unless it is an absolute emergency.
- Mean your yes and your no. Decide your boundaries—determine what elements you must have in your professional life and in your personal life and then develop life principles that allow you to live by them.
- Make a daily transition. Physically, change your clothes and shoes. Mentally, prepare yourself to go from one part of your life to another. Be intentional about setting goals for your

personal life too; apply the same level of energy in both worlds.

- Include your family in your career decisions. Help your family feel like they are the most important part of your world (and they are) simply by asking them for input on the choices you make about your career.
- Recognize that living out of balance all the time is not sustainable. We all develop lifestyle patterns, and if we are not careful we can adopt patterns of running top speed on the treadmill of life on a daily basis. If you are doing that, there are two possible reasons: You are trying to impress someone, or you have lost perspective and accepted insanity as a way of life. Challenge yourself to always leave work at a certain time of day unless there is an extreme emergency. Everything will be waiting for you when you return.

Women represent a large percentage of the workforce so it's unlikely that the need to constantly examine the balance between personal and professional choices will go away anytime soon. That's why I think it is important to have open dialogue with your spouse, partner, or significant other and create a means of communicating that works for both of you. There is no relationship more important than the one with your significant other. I know I'm repeating myself, but one day every one of our careers will come to a close, and when that

time comes, if we have taken care of our personal business, we will have a life to continue on.

## Points Worth Remembering

- Treasure your personal achievements.
- Practice open communication.
- Make sure you have the discussion about what impact moving or advancement would have on the relationship.
- Recognize that your partner is the one that supports you; don't take the support for granted.
- Be willing to understand your partner's journey.
- Be open to rewriting the roles of men and women.
- Teach your children that relationships are about gender equality.
- Educate corporate America on the impact that having the woman as the primary professional in the family comes with sacrifices that they need to support and care about.