

## **Coaching for Balance**

*By Shelley Page Baur*

As people struggle with ways to make meaning of work/life balance challenges, a new career consulting service is flourishing, according to Memphis-based executive coach Jill Stem, SPHR. Increasingly, companies are investing in “executive coaches” and individuals are retaining “life and leadership coaches” to improve their performance.

Based on the premise that self-awareness is a pre-requisite to developing better relationships and transformational leadership skills, coaches help clients take a current snapshot of their lives, determine what changes must be made to achieve desired results, and co-create personalized plans to keep them on track.

Mrs. Stem is VP/general manager for Lee Hecht Harrison, a global leader in career services operating more than 170 offices throughout the world. As one of 150 executive coaches in the company worldwide, Stem says her typical coaching relationship begins with a 160-item “Personal Directions Questionnaire.” This self-discovery tool helps clients identify what motivates them and gives them their highest levels of satisfaction. Comparing those findings with current behavior, clients are enabled to see how balanced – or not -- their lives are in a variety of dimensions so that a plan of action may be designed and agreed upon. Through periodic in-person and/or telephone sessions the coach checks on client progress, holding them accountable for modifying behaviors that result in higher levels of life satisfaction and overall balance.

Stem recalled the story of a client whose long-term relationship failed, just short of the altar. Distressed because her fiancé stated that he “couldn’t marry someone whose work was the number one priority,” the client arrived, seeking help. “She was totally puzzled, not seeing herself that way at all,” Stem recalls. “Taking the ‘Personal Directions Questionnaire’ allowed her to see her true lifestyle preferences and how she was out of balance -- not only where work edged out romance but also where she fell

short in her desired level of physical fitness.”

According to Stem, the client decided to tackle the physical fitness area first. Action items included making time and creating opportunities to exercise. While in town, elements of the plan included taking the stairs vs. an elevator, parking across the lot instead of close to the door, joining a health club and adhering to a strict, weekly workout regimen. When traveling, the plan included pre-determining safe walking routes, selecting hotels with fitness centers, and using timed, efficient routines for exercise in the hotel room itself – all to prevent the typical excuses that sabotage new fitness commitments.

By now, client and coach were ready to address the issue of romance. The plan recommended exploring activities that she really enjoyed, including attendance at an art camp, where she connected with people who shared her interest in art. She began to do the art work that had been a life-long interest. She also began dating a couple of people that she liked, thus enhancing the romance aspect of her life.

With six months of collaborative work, the client was well-pleased with improvements in both targeted areas, and her level of satisfaction, well-being, and job performance had improved substantially.

“That’s the bottom-line,” says Stem. “Companies will invest in good performers to help them become better, if they are coachable. If the employee sees the need to change, a coach can become the catalyst and ally to encourage the desired results.” Stem predicts the executive coaching sector will continue to grow, with certification and professional organizations now in place to support standards of excellence in this relatively new segment of career counseling.

Email ShelleyBaur with your most challenging work/life balance issue, what you did to overcome it and/or what you would do differently to find balance in your life. Shelley

Page Baur is committed to building people for life and leadership through transformational learning experiences. For more information about her topics, seminars, and consulting services, email [shelley@shelleybaur.com](mailto:shelley@shelleybaur.com).