

On your mark...

...Sprint and leave the marathon behind to become a fully-engaged person—and a more effective professional

BY DEBORAH PENTA

In early November on a quest to seek renewal, I had the privilege of spending four days experiencing the “Power of Possibility” at Canyon Ranch in Lenox in an effort to recharge my batteries and discover innovative ways to live a healthier and more balanced life.

This was the result of a promise I made to myself to lead a more engaged life congruent to my personal values and to be more present to those around me.

Spending four days with limited to no access to my Blackberry, cell phone, laptop, wine and civilization in general made me skeptical as to whether I’d survive. I was 100% committed to getting every last

morsel out of the experience to improve my well-being and overall effectiveness and to get my full financial value out of this personal investment. My hope was to return a rested and more sensible workaholic and a more energized leader.

THE EXPERIENCE was reflective, serene and meaningful. The result was revitalization, greater clarity and focus and the feeling of inner peace and continuity with my values. I felt healthier, happier and enjoyed an emergence of new ideas. My mind was open and my body was restored. It was almost as if I pulled into a gas station and got fueled up with super premium on high octane.

So, what does this have to do with leadership?

The entire act of taking a step back and disengaging from work allows you to have more energy when you reengage. Most of us know how valuable vacations are as we get away and allow ourselves the benefit of escaping from the reality of our professional roles. I always bring a journal or a notebook with me because while I am disengaged from work, my mind opens to new ideas. The entire process of disengagement allows your creativity to emerge and expand—offering innovative solutions to problems and ideas that have meaning.

Recently, I obsessively read *The Power of Full Engagement*. This extraordinary book discusses how professionals can be more effective by integrating enlightening principles of life balance. In this compelling book, Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz prove that by managing your energy and not your time, you can truly emerge and get greater results as a leader and in all aspects of your professional and personal life.

Based on the success they had with world-class athletes, the authors developed a program that helps executives develop a

mastery of setting priorities and following a plan that keeps them in check with their life vision and values. This philosophy is one that I find exceptionally rewarding and one in which we should all consider to help us become more engaged leaders.

THIS BOOK RESONATED with me and was reminiscent of the reasons why I took the drive to Lenox and initiated a commitment to live a healthier, more well-balanced life. It also justified for me that taking time away from everything, even for just a day, offers an unsurpassed energy boost. During the holiday week, I took out the calendar for all of

2008 and began scheduling disengagement sessions, including more frequent vacations with my family, quarterly solo trips to recharge my batteries, professional development excursions and more.

In *The Power of Full Engagement*, the authors articulate the difference between marathon and sprint runners. They explain how marathon runners push themselves “far beyond healthy levels of exertion...many long-distance runners look gaunt, sallow, slightly sunken and emotionally flat.” They then encourage us to take a look at sprint runners. “Sprinters typically look powerful, bursting with energy and eager to face their limits.”

Are you a tired long-distance leader without enough energy to effectively lead your team to the finish line? Or, in contrast, are you a spirited and energetic zealot who leads your team to consistently cross the finish line?

Effective leadership starts with you. Not necessarily the professional you, but the person who is stripped of her role. It’s the person who holds the vision, the passion and the values to drive successful outcomes. Unless we are willing to master the effective use of our energy and build our lives based on our precious values, we will never achieve greatness.

A friend once told me that life is not a sprint, but a marathon and to enjoy the journey. I challenge his thinking. By the time we win the marathon, there will be no energy left to enjoy the rewards.

We’d like to know your thoughts. Please email me at dpenta@femaleleaders.org.

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