The Art of Balance...A LISA CONFESSIONAL

February 5, 2018 By Lisa Vento Nielsen

As you guys know, I am unemployed and trying to figure out what to do next - which is ironic as I used to run a small business about careers and finding work - I still cannot get over the irony. Check out my blog The Next Step, as I am offering FREE resume reviews and edits to anyone who also had the cancer plot twist adventure.

When I graduated college, I gave the commencement address and I spoke about how life is like a "choose your own adventure" book and the only real "choice" we had made for ourselves at that point was our college choice (maybe) and major (usually). I spoke about how we had a whole adventure ahead of us almost 20 years ago and never did I ever think my adventure would take me through breast cancer. NEVER.

During my college time, I also got the chance to move to Italy and build amazing friendships that have lasted these 20 years. I had plans after getting my MBA to be the CEO of a large company. I wound up working really hard and moving up many corporate ladders, gaining tons of skills and talents along the way. I honed and used my communication skills to be the only person who would be asked to travel around the world to give presentations and training on all things professional. I became a college adjunct professor on the side to really feel fulfilled as helping those students reminded me of where I was and how far I had gotten.

I never thought I would get married or have kids and bam, one day in December of 2001, I was out with friends, met my soon-to-be husband and within 11 months we were living together (trust, my father LOVED that—NOT!), and a few years later, we were married. I kept climbing that ladder but my husband had some health issues and then all of a sudden, we thought we would try to have a kid and nine months later, my daughter was born. It was like she was there and ready to be born.

I balanced work and motherhood terribly. It was so hard with my husband dealing with issues and not a lot of help at all. At times, I cobbled together help but at the time, my father-in-law was suffering from pancreatic cancer, my mom worked full time and my dad was busy with his stuff, too. I forced myself to still try to be "Lisa, corporate extraordinaire" when in reality I was scared, postpartum and just a mess.

I also found that although I had met my goals and was making 6+ figures and had the title of Vice President that I did not think it was what I wanted at all. I guess that happens sometimes but for

me, it was a big time shock to the system that what I always thought I wanted was not what it was cracked up to be. That big time job that fought to hire me by offering my tons of money was actually not as hands-on or meaty as I thought it would be. My waist line was bigger, my heart was at home and I struggled big time.

I thought being a mom was all or nothing. I think about my childhood and how I felt when my mom left the house and it was all too much for me to process how to be a mom and still be me. I did not have the tool set to do that. I had been raised watching my grandma give up her life to care for us, knowing my mom could not handle being a full-time mom and living with my dad and I punished myself daily to keep my life out of the equation. I did not care about ME anymore.

Then add in a few miscarriages—one which started when I was at work and my mom constantly trying to help me by telling me to stop working so I could focus on my daughter and boom, I went out on FMLA and never went back.

All of a sudden, I was home and no longer an income-generating person—could no longer say I was vice president or get dressed or get out of the house, it seemed. I was depressed and anxious thanks to the huge influx in hormones and my own unhappiness. When I conceived my son, I spent the nine months with bated breath, expecting another loss. He made it here and I calmed down but still never ever thought about what I wanted to do. I did not think I had a choice.

I worked odd jobs, teaching college courses, tried to be an entrepreneur and took a disaster job-full time right before my diagnosis that I am assuming was part of my path but left me shattered and feeling like less than a human when I tried to do it during chemotherapy and was let go the day after my last chemo.

Now, I sit here and this is all pouring out of me because I am at a crossroads again, my friend. A chance to pick my own adventure, to figure out what that means, what this new future is for me. So long as I am here and healthy, that is awesome but it is just not enough, I think, to keep me that way. You see, if I am not “busy” enough, I worry, I think, I consider each pain and figure it is cancer coming to kill me.

I have an enemy in my sites and it is one I must defeat to be here for my kids, my family, my husband and for the good things I want to accomplish still in my life. I know at any time, this enemy can raise up and take a hold on my organs and lead to my death. I DO NOT WANT THAT (who would?).

I am up for a couple of great opportunities but the old insecurities come back—the ones I never had until I tried to be the uber mom the one who did not miss anything, who put my kids first above everything and did not care for myself. I know I cannot be that person anymore as it could very well kill me. But my problem is that I do not know what person I AM. Am I a hard worker still, could I go to work every day (even summers) for full time and maybe miss out on things with my kids?

Will it make them stronger people to see me rocking my career with my new one-boobed, pixie haircut and new mentality of how much I matter? I know no one on their death bed have said they wished they worked more but I look back at all of the things I once accomplished and could do and think about and wonder how much I gave up to live up to an expectation that does not really exist.

I think about the bills piling up and the sense of self-worth that comes from paying one's own way in this world and how much we have been unable to do that once I stepped out of the workforce. I think about how my kids are growing up and that maybe, just maybe, having a working mom will help them know that life is a precarious balance.

Most of all, I think about how cancer is not welcome here anymore and how I can still be in charge of my life and what I need to do so people can learn from me, with me and through me that life isn't over till it's over.

What do you think?

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