Having A Career And Having A Life

Tips on balancing your professional and your personal life, outside of work, was the main theme in Wednesday's Breakout Session, Having A Career and Having A Life – Being Single And Successful.

Moderator, Denise Patrick, Vice President of Marketing and Creative Services at Pierpont Communications, and her distinguished panelists agreed that single women, today, face many internal and external factors within their professional life; compounded by a need to juggle business with pleasure outside the walls of work. "As a single person" said Janet Clark, Chief Financial Officer for Marathon Oil Company, "it is easier to get sucked into work and forget that there is a world outside of work. You have to make commitments outside of work because it forces you to fulfill those commitments. It creates a great balance between professional and personal activities."

Whether it is volunteering your time, exercising, or going out with friends, these outside commitments help shield you from burning yourself out. Samina Farid, Chairman of Merrick Systems, expressed the need to take time for you and not always work, work, work. "I was burning out when I got promoted," said Samina "I finally started to go out with women friends, especially high level women friends, and realized, these women are taking time off to enjoy extracurricular activities, so can I."

Having a life outside of work is half of the puzzle, but what about the internal and external strains of single women in their professional lives? Women in the workplace have to deal with many issues including, but not limited to, workplace gossip, personal lives spilling into work, and gender biases. Ms. Clark recalled an experience where she could not go on a business trip with her male boss because the boss's wife did not like it. "Being a young, single woman," said Ms. Clark "there are men that are uncomfortable being around you for whatever reason." Vall Gibbs, President of Bank of Texas, had to deal with gossip on her return from a business trip with her boss. Subtle questions from fellow staff members with definite overtones of, "So, what did you two do on your business trip." All of these situations can put a single woman under fire from co-workers and create an awkward working environment. "It is awkward," said Ms. Clark "but you have to overcome that if you want to be successful."

Internally, there is also a misconception that a single woman's time is not as important as another co-worker's with a family. What can a single woman do if she is constantly called upon to work extra shifts for co-workers with family issues? "If something is important to you, you have to speak up and say, 'I can't work this shift because I have other commitments'. At the same time, recognize that if you get called on to do extra, it should be seen positively on you at work, that you are a go getter and always willing to do extra. Those people are the ones that get promoted." Mrs. Gibbs agreed stating, "If there are important things to you; your time is valuable so don't be afraid to speak up."

Ms. Farid believes both answers are correct but also depends on how you handle the situation. "It really depends on how you handle it," said Ms. Farid "you cannot be whining and complaining about the situation. Tell people ahead of time when you have plans outside of work, but realize that there will be times when you have to suck it up and go to work. But, make sure you get credit for the work and people recognize it."