

# FINDING YOUR BALANCE

BY LORI VOEPEL

What I learned in Ladder Down is that I was not alone in my struggles over how to achieve life-work balance, and how to build my book of business on top of it all.

**B**alancing a law practice, motherhood and business development isn't always easy, and it rarely means all are perfectly balanced at once. My life experiences and the Ladder Down program helped me learn this valuable lesson and provided me with the tools and perspective I needed to truly succeed.

I am one of those "older" moms who focused on my legal career after law school and delayed starting a family until I felt settled in professionally. After two clerkships with Arizona appellate court judges, I dove into a busy and high-profile criminal trial and appellate practice at Kimerer & Derrick P.C., where

I honed my skills as a legal writer and practitioner while helping clients overcome the most difficult life experiences they would ever face. I then joined my current firm, Jones, Skelton & Hochuli P.L.C., to build an appellate practice and develop business, which has been both challenging and extremely satisfying.

By the time I married and became a mother, I had become accustomed to dedicating my attention to my appellate practice, business development and professional commitments, yet I was highly motivated to put the same level of energy into becoming a mother. And here is where my lessons on attaining life-work balance really began. Fortunately, my daughter was very young when I learned about Ladder Down, which was in its formative year. At first, I wondered how I could possibly add one more commitment to my already hectic life. I took a chance, applied for a spot and, when I was accepted for the 2013 class, I went for it.

What I learned in Ladder Down is that I was not alone in my struggles over how to achieve life-work balance, and how to build my book of business on top of it all. Nor was I alone in believing that achieving all these goals required me to become "superwoman." In reality, it meant learning to develop and use organizational and business development tools based on my own personality and needs, setting specific goals for myself, and learning how to network with other women lawyers for support and referrals.

The lessons I learned and relationships I built through Ladder Down have helped me to realize being in balance doesn't mean being perfect. It means

finding the balance that works for you and your life.

Sometimes my busy appellate practice requires my near-total attention, like now as I prepare for an upcoming Ninth Circuit oral argument while juggling other appeals and assisting trial attorneys with urgent matters. At times like these, I sometimes still feel like I'm falling short as a mother, especially when, like last night, my daughter begs me to snuggle with her on the couch instead of working on my computer.

Other times, like earlier this fall with school, youth sports and dance classes all starting the same week, my daughter's birthday one week later, and two Girl Scout meetings in one month I committed to hosting, I need to shift my focus to shopping for uniforms, leotards, backpacks and party supplies, readying the house and pool to host events, and getting everything prepared to help make my daughter's new school year and birthday as enjoyable as possible.

At those moments, as I see work deadlines looming and realize I still need to prepare a presentation for an upcoming business development trip, I sometimes feel out of whack professionally. Yet, this is what being a lawyer and mother is all about. And I wouldn't change it for the world. I just have to remind myself that balance is not giving "equal time" at all times to both jobs. It is attending to the tasks at hand knowing that everything will get done.

When I shift my perspective in this manner, as Ladder Down has helped me to do, I can step back and appreciate the fact that while busy, my life is meaningful and whole. Sometimes, I am my daughter's hero – like when her gymnastics birthday party was successful, and everyone had fun, and when our two Girl Scout meetings in one month came off without a hitch. Other times, I feel tremendous satisfaction as an attorney, such as when I experience a big win before an appellate court or when I'm able to really make a difference in someone's life, such as succeeding in a 14-year long effort to overturn a wrongful capital conviction and see my innocent client set free.

At times like those, all is well with the world and I am at peace, even if I am not always in "perfect" balance.



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