

A Million-Dollar Life

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Delivered at the Women's Entrepreneurship Conference, Dayton, Ohio, June 24, 2010

Ladies, entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs: How would you feel today if you signed a contract for **1 million dollars?**

Proud? Thrilled? Jubilant? Completely ecstatic?

94 years ago today, on June 24, 1916, that's exactly what happened to Mary Pickford – an American motion picture actress and one of the greatest female stars of all time.

In the early 1900s, Mary Pickford achieved international fame by performing in and producing silent films. People called her “America’s Sweetheart,” “Little Mary” and “The Girl with the Curls.”

1916 was a banner year for Mary. That's when she agreed to make 12 films in 2 years for the handsome sum of 1 million dollars. **That agreement made Mary Pickford the first female film star EVER to win a 1 million dollar contract.**

Now let's face it. That would be quite an accomplishment for any of us today – but especially for a woman in 1916!

But Mary Pickford was an entrepreneur. She was making her own way in the world – just like you have been doing with your own businesses, or just like you are planning to do.

Throughout her career, Mary racked up plenty of achievements.

She starred in 52 feature films. She cofounded United Artists film studio and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. And she personified “business savvy”: The more **popular** her films – and the more **money** they made – the **higher pay raises** Mary negotiated for herself!

By the 1920s, Mary's silent films were bringing in more than 1 million dollars apiece. By 1929, she had won an Oscar for best actress. And although she retired in 1933, as movies with sound became more popular, in 1976 she won an Academy Honorary Award for her lifetime of achievements in film.

It's true: Mary Pickford did some wonderful things for motion pictures in America. But there's one thing she didn't master quite so well. And that was balancing her life and her family with her passion for filmmaking.

Consider this:

Mary Pickford was married three times and divorced twice. She had very little time off during her acting and producing career – which meant she had very little time for herself. And the relationships she had with her two adopted children were constantly uptight, unstable and in turmoil.

It's sad to say, but after she retired, Mary became an alcoholic and a recluse, and in 1979, she died.

Professionally? Mary had it all.

But personally? Mary's life was way out of balance.

Where did Mary go wrong? And what can we do – as entrepreneurs or aspiring entrepreneurs – to make sure things go right for us?

I learned the hard way.

My husband, Mike, and I raised 5 children in 4 decades in 3 different states: Ohio, Arizona and California. And in the midst of it all – just like you – I wore plenty of other hats besides wife and mother.

I studied business administration and social services. I worked in real estate selling homes. I served as a public information officer and an executive assistant. And I directed a volunteer program at a crisis center for abused and neglected children.

When our family finally came back to Ohio in 1993, after my father became ill, my work at the crisis center in California inspired me to start two Court Appointed Special Advocate programs, or CASA programs, which train community volunteers to advocate for abused and neglected children.

The first CASA was in Greene County, and the second was in Warren County. In 2008, while working at Warren County CASA, I started Women in Business Networking, the Miami Valley's leading organization for women in business.

So why am I telling you all this?

Because I must admit to you that through many of these years, I felt overwhelmed by many, many pressures.

There were pressures at work and at home. Pressures from family and friends. And even pressures to maintain my own physical health.

More often than I care to remember, I experienced physical, mental and emotional exhaustion.

I always felt I had to put everyone else first – and only then see if there was any time left over for me.

Usually, there was not.

And so for me – just as it was for film star Mary Pickford – the result was an unbalanced, out-of-control lifestyle.

Today, however, things are different.

What do I do today to keep my work, and my life, in balance?

I START MY DAY WITH ME!

How?

I take time to BE QUIET.

I start every day by taking 20 minutes to read inspirational, spiritual or motivational material by authors such as Charles Swindoll or Andy Stanley. Does this passage by Charles Swindoll ring true for you?

“Honey, where did you put my socks?”

“Mom, I hate meat loaf. Can’t we order pizza?”

“You do realize that the deadline is tomorrow, don’t you?”

“We missed you at Bible study. Were you just too tired?”

As women, we constantly juggle the needs of everyone around us. We face enormous expectations and responsibilities the minute we get out of bed each morning. And in the midst of all the overwhelming demands on our time and energy, we often lose sight of who we are.

After reading something like this, I always take a few minutes to meditate and visualize. ...

Taking time to be quiet has made a profound difference in my life. **But I also take time every day to PLAN AND PRIORITIZE.**

Making a to-do list gets my tasks for the day down on paper so my day doesn’t just “happen.” I take the time to figure out what needs to happen first, second and third. And I keep my list with me throughout the day to check off items as I go. Any tasks left over from today go on my list for tomorrow. And I don’t worry about it.

I also make sure to ADD SOME EXCITEMENT to every day.

That means doing something fun or special with the people in my life who mean the most to me.

When our youngest son Stephen was little, he and I started taking a “buddy day” every Wednesday. I’d pick him up from school, and we’d go to Dairy Queen or the library for an hour or two. Stephen really looked forward Wednesdays, and so did I. To this day – even though he’s 31 years old, Stephen still talks about our “buddy days” and one-on-one time with mom.

Adding excitement means adding variety to my day! I never want to fall into the trap of “following the same old routine.” By doing new and different things, I stay balanced and gain energy.

So one day maybe I’ll skip lunch, and go shopping. Another day I might stop at The Greene, and watch the children splash in the water outside. And maybe tomorrow I’ll meet a friend for lunch at the Dayton Racquet Club, which gives me a boost because it’s such a high-rise, upscale, out-of-the-ordinary place.

Adding excitement can mean being spontaneous. Last week Mike and I returned from a seven-day Alaskan cruise with 16 of our friends and family (and I must say – what a terrific, absolutely awesome vacation it was!).

Our oldest son Michael picked us up last Monday evening from Greater Cincinnati airport, and we enjoyed a wonderful dinner at his home in nearby Northern Kentucky.

But as we got ready to leave, two of our grandchildren – 12-year-old Madison and 8-year-old Chandler – begged their father to let them go back to Springboro and spend the week with us.

So instead of worrying too much about unpacking, or catching up with the mail or paying the bills, Mike and I took last week to enjoy time with our grandchildren – doing kid stuff like feeding the goats and eating ice cream at Young’s Dairy.

Saying “yes” to Madison and Chandler added even more excitement to our week of excitement in Alaska.

And that brings me back to our famous female film star, Mary Pickford, who took little time off and little time for herself or for her family during her years of acting and filmmaking.

Remember this: Mary Pickford was an entrepreneur who could negotiate a 1 million dollar contract in the film industry. But she could not balance her work – and her profound success – with her life.

But I believe YOU CAN!

I believe that work/life balance is not about finding the physical time to do all that needs to be done in a day.

Instead, it’s about giving yourself – **at the start of each day** – the cognitive space to process, organize and respond to all the “thinking” demands of life within our complex society.

But this can only happen if you **START EVERY DAY with YOURSELF**.

So before you get ready to sign your first – or perhaps your next? – 1 million dollar contract, ladies, remember to take time every day to be quiet. To read something that inspires you. To think and to meditate. To plan and prioritize the tasks you will do. And to add some excitement to every day so you can have a life that’s meaningful. Peaceful. And truly full.

If you do these things, I guarantee you will end up a real superstar – not only in the eyes of your colleagues and coworkers, but in the eyes of those who mean the most to you: your spouse, your children, your family and your friends.

Thank you, one and all – and have a fantastic conference! ◀