

## Balanced pattern knits work, life comfort

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Knitting work/life balance into the fabric of your life brings a great deal of satisfaction and happiness, according to Marcie Stern, a personal and business coach based in Homewood.

Stern, who gives workshops and talks with a special focus on work/life balance, did that herself earlier this year—literally.

“I started a knitting project, a scarf with a beautiful array of colors and textures,” said the coach, who has a master’s degree in health administration and has worked in strategic planning, project management and team development.

“The scarf quickly became a metaphor for creating balance between my personal and professional lives,” she said.

“Through my knitting I saw the richness and beauty of my life after making major work/life changes.”

And the changes were major: Since 1988, she had been working full time in downtown Chicago, commuting daily from her suburban home. Stern and her husband, Scott, a home builder, have two children, ages 7 and 3, and she was away from them for long hours.

“I wanted more time with my children, more flexibility and more satisfying work,” she said. Her solution: She started her own consulting practice.

“I now work three days a week in the office, which is a few minutes from my house, as opposed to five—but I put in the same amount of hours,” Stern said. “The difference is I have more flexibility.”

That means she drives the kids to preschool, volunteers for school and community organizations and works out at the health club. Since she shares an office with her husband, she says, “at the end of the day we might get 15 to 20 minutes alone together.”

Taking charge of her life took a lot of thought and planning. Knitting the scarf took two months.

“The finished scarf was symbolic of the fact I had created a new life,” she said. “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts, just as in knitting, where you

work with individual yarns but when you pull them all together it’s easier to see the importance of each part.”

Knitting was symbolic, too, of risk taking.

“I ripped back my first 12 attempts at knitting this scarf,” said Stern. “In the context of a balanced life, the notion that everything has to be perfect is too much pressure. If you make a mistake and ‘drop a stitch,’ forget it. Be easy on yourself.”

Figuring out how to change your life for the better takes time, just as knitting does, she says. “Persevere in spite of criticism and do what it takes to achieve your goals, no matter what. Stay strong in your commitment to work/life balance and honor your definitions and priorities.”

And articulate what you have to do by either writing it down or sharing it with others.

“The patterned row in the scarf was challenging, so I decided to name the stitches out loud as I performed them,” she said. “By doing that, something magical happens: It becomes more real.”

The more you take charge of your life, the easier it becomes to pursue your dreams. “As the knitting project unfolded, I noticed I was becoming more confident,” she said. “It was almost as if automatic pilot kicked in. Making changes was becoming more natural and things began to feel more balanced.”

Measuring the work on her scarf, she says, was symbolic of measuring her progress in combining the personal and professional elements in her life. “By checking your work and progress along the way, it gives you a chance to measure how well you’re doing,” she said. “It’s important to make an assessment of what you want and your plan to achieve it. Once I did that, I never ripped back again.”

The scarf is completed—she gave it as a gift—and Stern, who is busy building her private practice, doesn’t have immediate plans for another knitting project. But she feels a “tremendous” sense of accomplishment.

“You don’t have to take up knitting, but you do need to take control of all the elements of your life, as if it were a knitting project—and then blend them together in the pattern you choose,” Stern said.

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