



Stanford eCorner

Balancing Your Life and Your Career Successfully

Randy Komisar, *Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers*

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Komisar explains that there is no balanced life in being a CEO. It is a 24/7 job and is all-consuming. After being a CEO, Komisar decided to cut back and bring his life back into balance so he could have time for all the things he enjoyed. It is essential to stay ethical and never put yourself in a situation where you can't say no and cut back. Maintaining a balanced life is a dynamic quest and changes as your priorities change. People who know and respect you can be a powerful resource in helping you find this balance.



Transcript

Well, this is the life's practice. I can tell you that for most of my career, my life was certainly much less than balanced. What I've noticed personally in my career as it developed was--and it comes out in the--I'll plug my book--it comes out in "The Monk and the Riddle", which is this arc in my own development where there was a time in Providence, Rhode Island when I had first graduated from Brown and was hungry for life, hungry for experience, where I go away to rock concerts and taught at Johnson & Wales College in the evening program in Economics and helped run a community development program and actually helped people get a community newspaper started, where I was just hungry for everything, where there was a sense of great fulfillment, and I had no money. I had no money. None of these things paid any money. And none of them hoped to pay any money. But there was a sense of incredible satisfaction from the diversity of the experience and from learning at light speed. I then went through--I started to get in a more linear career. I went to law school, and even though I was not a... I was an unusual lawyer in a sense of the way in which my career progressed.

It was relatively linear. And even when I went into business at first at Apple and later at Claris, it was relatively linear, and even when I went on to become a CEO. I never intended to be a CEO. I never cared to be a CEO, though Campbell sort of put the line in the sand for me and said, "You need to be a CEO in order to give yourself. You've got this opportunity. Take it. You may not want to be a CEO your whole life, but take it. Learn what it means to run and operate one of these things and lead it. And then you can do what you want with your life." And I took the bait. But it was still linear.

Being a CEO is a 7-by-24 job. There is no balanced life being a CEO. It doesn't happen. It can't happen. It can't happen. You've got to love what you're doing. It's got to be your life. That being said, I then cut back dramatically after that to take more control of my life because I began to realize what was missing. Now I had money. I was a lot less happy than I had been in Providence.

And I knew that. I was conscious of that. And I asked myself why. How can that be? I had money and opportunity. I had money and opportunity and power--in a small pond, but still, I had the three things that everybody thinks that they are looking for in a career. What was wrong? I was limited. I couldn't look at the whole horizon. I could only look at one slice of it. I couldn't indulge those things in my life that didn't make money, that I loved so much, whether it was film and cooking or traveling or cycling or whatever it was. I was missing these things.

And so I created a life that gave me a lot more control, and by the way, a lot less money. That's tradeoff. That's tradeoff.

You know, I am very comfortable as a virtual CEO. It's not the way to maximize your return. So you have to begin to, first of all, make a prognosis in your life and decide what it is that you're willing to shift around. In my case, it was money, and power, to some extent. I mean, I gave up both of them when I gave up operating roles to create a different sense of satisfaction for me in the way in which I work with these organizations. I think, in life, balance is a dynamic question, not a static question. I think people, when they talk about a balanced life, they expect that the pendulum just stops right in the middle and everything is great.

I have found in my life that that's not the way it works. The pendulum is here, then it's here, then it's here, then it's here. And what makes it balanced is having a holistic view, both across time and across the field of operations that you're indulged in, that lets you understand that, OK, I'm here now but I'm going to be here then, and giving yourself some level of control to do that. I'm going to talk about ethics, I think we've got next, with Tom Byers at the National Venture Capital Association. And one of the things we're going to talk about is, how do you stay ethical in an industry or in an institution that may be stretched around performance and begin to push you towards the edge of what you think is ethical? And one of the things that comes up is, never put yourself in a situation where you can't say no. I think that applies to a balanced life. Never put yourself in a situation where you can't say no. Where you can't come back. What that means is, there's two sides to the equation. One is money and quality of life that comes in.

And the other side is, what are you spending? What are you doing with your time? What happens with that? A lot of people think you just increase the revenue side of that equation infinitely, and that buys you peace and satisfaction at the other end. Au contraire. Because as you build that infinitely, you incur a lot of obligations in the process that mean that the other side of that equation doesn't foot out the way you thought it would. And so it's keeping both ends in mind at the same time and understanding the tradeoffs. Because at some point in your life, your kids are going to be the most important thing to you. And at some point in your life, your education is going to be the most important thing to you. And at some point in your life, potentially making money is going to be the most important thing to you, because maybe you've got to get the house that you really wanted to take care of the family. And that's a dynamic balance. And I think the way to keep as close as you can a balanced life is to pay attention to what's important, to ask yourself hard questions so that you can be careful with your priorities, and to make sure that both ends of the equation foot out. I tend to think the best way to do that is to have a group of people around you who know who you are, who you respect, and who share your values.

It doesn't matter what they did with their lives. It doesn't matter if they're firemen or CEOs. It matters that they know you and that they have values you respect and that they're your touchstones. I have a friend in my life who I've had since I was three years old, four years old. Still in my life. He actually lives--we've just by coincidence ended up living in the same places and he lives right here in Palo Alto. I'm very close with him. He is a scientist, works with the Veterans Administration doing research in psychology. He's never ever given me the satisfaction of respecting what I do. Never.

Never. I don't think he could tell you what I do, and he doesn't give me any regard for it. That's been one of the best things in my life.