

An Australian Woman's Life

...her satisfactions & frustrations,
hopes & dreams...

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Research Overview

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Written by:	Lisa Gorman, Principal, Living Purpose
Prepared for:	Interested and Inspiring Australian Women
Source:	Questionnaire "A Woman's Life", February - May, 2007
Researcher:	Lisa Gorman, Facilitator, Coach, Author - " <i>I Believe in Me: 7 Ways for Women to Step Ahead in Confidence</i> "
Distribution:	Sent via email to 500 women. 129 questionnaires were received from women in NSW, ACT, Victoria, SA, NT, WA and Queensland.
Status:	Of the women surveyed, five were still single, three were in same sex relationships, one was widowed and fourteen were divorced, separated or single mums.
Families:	There were 21 women who were not mothers at the time they completed the questionnaire although four women were expecting babies. The majority of women had two children, and there was an even distribution of women with either one or three children. Eleven women surveyed had four children and one woman had five.
Work Status	43% of women worked part time, 38% of women surveyed worked full time, 17% of women worked long hours - some in excess of 51 hours per week. Of the women surveyed two were unemployed, one woman was a full time student, twenty-four were self employed.
Purpose	<p>Late in 2006 I made a commitment with Life Success Publishing to write a book titled <i>I Believe in Me: 7 Ways for Women to Step Ahead in Confidence</i>. This book is in alignment with my life's purpose of nurturing growth and is an extension of the work I have been doing for 12 years in teaching women in Australia Post that they can achieve their goals and work co-operatively with others to be successful.</p> <p>In February 2007 I recognised the need for a focused research project to support the book's specific aims and topic areas. The questionnaire, <i>A Woman's Life</i>, was developed to provide supporting statistics and qualitative commentary for the book, thus ensuring I was on track with my thinking and direction.</p> <p>It is also with gratitude that I prepare this report as a feedback opportunity to other women. The report will be made available via a newly designed website, www.livingpurpose.com.au, and various women's support groups who will have access to its content in the hope that it inspires women's continued personal discovery and success in life. Initially, though, this report will be disseminated to sixty three of the 129 women who participated in the research and who indicated that they were interested to read the results.</p>
Dedication	This research and resulting book is a way to give back to the many women I have met in the last twelve years who have been so open to really understanding who they are and setting purposeful goals, so they could <i>Step Ahead</i> . Ordinary women today are just extraordinary, in so many ways. I dedicate this research to all those women that are doing the most amazing job of partner, mother, worker, house-keeper, shopper, first aider, carer, friend, daughter, sister, aunt, neighbour and so much more. Even when we think we can't, women usually can!

Introduction

In 2007 and in most households, women remain the primary caregivers of their children and aging parents. They are frustrated by the lack of contribution from other family members to maintain the home, to feed and clothe its members. Women are torn between going for their goals and helping their children achieve their own personal bests. In this decade, women are shouldering the burden of contributing significantly to the family income often because they have to, not because they choose to. Women are losing touch with their friends as their available time has become so limited. Also, regular exercise is seen as a hope for the future and getting some 'me' time is something many women just dream about.

Ask yourself, are you completely satisfied with your life?

Are you happy with your career progression, the challenge and stimulation your work provides, the advancement opportunities or flexibility your employer gives? Perhaps you are self employed and that means you are working very long hours from home so you can also look after your little ones? Have you been able to complete study to support you in your field of interest? Do you feel well rewarded financially for your hours of labour and do you believe that you will have sufficient savings in your retirement years?

Are you looking after yourself?

These are some of the questions put in the first section of the research study headed up as Work, Professional Development and Income. The other two areas of interest were Home, Work Life Balance and Personal Development, and Health, Mental and Physical. Based on the thirty five questions in these topic areas, women have made their ratings and commented generously on their Satisfactions, Frustrations, Hopes and Dreams. Some of their comments are shared below. Following these, some conclusions are drawn and questions put to keep us thinking about where women go to next.

As you read this report, compare your life experience to those of other women you know. Perhaps you can use some of the information from other women's experiences shared here quite openly and honestly. You might find that you totally agree with what is being said or you may agree in part. Whatever the case, think about what this means to you and how this information can be helpful for you in your future days.

Satisfaction!

A remarkable 74% women surveyed were either happy or very happy with their lives overall. Some felt grateful for the challenges that life had presented them with. Having said that, women surveyed also shared their health issues, their family concerns or their relationship heartbreaks. Almost in the same breath, these women would then go on to say that there were other positives in their lives.

Here are some comments from women that may ring true for about relationships!

Relationships

A Western Sydney Small Business Manager shares *"My partner is so wonderful. He partners me 100% and takes on all roles in our household and family unit as a joint process. In other words he cooks, cleans, makes appointments, takes kids to doctors, does shopping etc., etc."*

A single woman managing production in the clothing industry states *"I have a strong relationship with my husband and we share a lot of the household work. We both have similar pressure and hours of working so we both understand if either of us has to work back or on weekends."*

A Western Australian woman shares that *"In spite of my multitudinous health problems, I am fortunate to work in a supportive environment, have a loving partner, see my son out of the woods of his own problems and look forward to the future with some optimism."*

A NSW Administrator shares *"I AM satisfied because I have a really great family, and although they are all teenage boys, they are considerate and help with the household chores fairly well."*

It is undoubtedly the case that women thrive inside loving supportive relationships. Those relationships that go one step further and provide practical assistance around the house get the top marks from women.

Relationship with me!

A Sydney Office Administrator says *"I am satisfied because I made a huge effort over the last 3 years to make time for myself, my interests. I was being swallowed up by being a mum and yet felt guilty for needing my own time. My partner never felt any guilt so I decided to let the guilt go. I'm a much better mum now."*

A Sydney Women working in investment banking states *"I am satisfied because I have made time in my life for the things that are important to me and have a lot of support from my partner and friends."*

It's so interesting to note that there is such a pay-off for us if we spend time with people we love and do activities that bring us joy. I love the Sydney Administrator who has let go her feelings of guilt. Why were we put on this earth? Was it to cook and clean and put order in our life? I'm just not so sure about that.

In my own business

A Blue Mountains Day Spa Owner says *"I am satisfied because I am my own boss and I really love what I do. I have a fantastic team of women that I feel blessed to work with and have had the opportunity to nearly fulfil my dream."*

A Manly Director of a Health & Fitness Company says *"I am satisfied because I have made a conscious choice to start my own business and I love my work"*

A Blue Mountains Naturopath says *"I am working for myself and get to direct myself within my career and shape my own path as far as my workplace goes."*

Of the 24 self employed women, each of them had similar comments as those above. They loved what they were creating for themselves and the sense of control it gave them for their future. A common theme was the passion that they held for their work or their industry and the challenge it provided.

Passion & Opportunities

A Victorian Saleswoman says "I am happy because I am now doing work that I love which is empowering and I get to communicate with people who are like minded."

A Sydney Postal Services Manager says "I love my family and they are very supportive of me and my career. I also love my job and find it challenging. I have been given chances to advance my career and 'Step Ahead'."

A Victorian Marketing Manager says "I realise that I have the ability in my chosen career to ascertain positions of power in the near future in which I will then be able to make more of a contribution and challenge the thinking of the company."

A Graphic Designer working in Sydney and from her home says "I am satisfied because my workplace is really flexible with work arrangements. Of my 14 hours per week, 7 are from home and the day in the office is quite flexible. My own business arrangement is satisfying (although tiring!) because it gives me the opportunity to work from home and care for my child full time."

Working at or working in your passion area and actually doing what you love to do really helps you to shine inside and out. You will more easily learn and become the expert you have the right to be. Loving the work you do helps you to maintain such a positive attitude that any challenges you come across are not threatening at all. Challenges or problems, indeed, become opportunities for learning and improved performance.

Learning

A Sydney Postal Delivery Officer shares that "I am satisfied because I am learning who I am on the inside and how to express me with great passion and confidence."

A Film Editor says "I am satisfied because I have the ability to learn more and am able to bring this into my working life so I feel confident that I will continue to fulfil a satisfying working role."

A Western Australian Asset Controller says "I am satisfied because I set myself a goal to complete my study program at University (Bachelor of Commerce in Accounting) and my CPA studies and I have achieved this goal."

Putting learning as a priority for women can have some excellent pay offs. Whilst I recognise that it can be extremely difficult for some and add enormous pressure to our already busy lives, the competence and confidence it can bring is enormous.

Challenges

A Sydney Postal Delivery Officer says "I enjoy working and look forward to the daily challenges as they present themselves."

A Sydney Postal Worker says "I am satisfied because my supervisors trust me when they give me other jobs to look after."

Some of the dissatisfaction for women is with the routine slog or lack of challenge in their work. It's good to know that one large postal services company is providing challenge and opportunity to many of its employees.

Balance

A Dubbo Accountant shares *"I work really hard but balance my family life as well."*

An ACT Project Officer says *"I am maintaining a good life balance for my current situation and am pleased with my personal and professional achievements given my circumstances."*

A Queensland Change Manager shares *"I think balance is really important - I love all aspects of my life and I think it is because I make sure I keep things in perspective and focus on my relationships, being healthy and happy and doing things for me and my family."*

Getting some balance is a key concern for most women today. I suppose you might find it interesting that these three women are geographically spread, not necessarily indicating that you can only find balance on a commune or in an alternative community. It can be done!

Achievement - Personal, Professional, Financial

A Northern Territory Intelligence Officer states *"I am currently in an area where I am appreciated and allowed to work relatively independently and that my spouse and I worked on alternative investments to superannuation as we knew we would never gain enough super for it to be capable of supporting us in retirement."*

A Dubbo Health Practice Manager shares *"I am satisfied because I have come from starting the main part of my career as a trained nurse, and achieved thus far up to Senior Policy Analyst for Head Office for a time. I still have some time to go and other goals to achieve."*

A Sydney Project Manager says *"I have achieved a high level of success both personally and financially in my field and do not feel hindered because of my sex."*

Some women are clearly giving attention to their future requirements and setting satisfying career goals along the way. It is good to read about these stories, but they were few and far apart. When you do some reading in the 'Frustrations' section of this report you will find that only five percent of these women were satisfied with their savings to date and with their ability to fund their retirement years. Even this NSW Secretary admits that it is a joint process *"I am satisfied because my husband and I have planned for our retirement."* I would suggest that most women in partnerships do not think that financial independence is necessary or a priority, until their relationships are threatened or fail.

Adding Value

It is great to read about some women who love their job because of the contribution it makes....

A Victorian Sales Supervisor states *"I am satisfied because I feel that I add value to the community"*.

Focus on the Important Things

A NSW Health Worker says *"I am happy because a few years ago after a tragic incidence in my family I chose to take control of my life and do what was important to me first. I decreased my hours of work to allow me to have more time with my family. I exercise 3 days per/week at the gym and walk/run 5 kms 2 days per week. I chose to forgive the people around me with which I felt conflict and I now take complete responsibility of where I am and what I am doing with my life..."*

A Victorian Sales Supervisor said *"As I get older I have a different appreciation of things that I took for granted or things that I thought were important. Solid reliable friendships and relationships with my partner and children have much more meaning. Enjoyment of things such as having a nice*

garden, being able to physically walk a long distance, laughter from simple things such as watching the dogs playing..."

A Victorian Administrative Co-ordinator shares "I am happy because I have plenty to live for. Even though I complain about my weight, diet or health, I'm still alive, so there shouldn't be any reason why I cannot be very happy."

10% of women commented about their happiness which had to do with 'the simple things in life' or that 'they couldn't find a specific reason not to be'. In regards to their health, both physical and mental, there were *very few* women satisfied *with both* their mind (intellectual and emotional) and their body (wellbeing, size and fitness). I wonder if this is a reflection of the perception of limited time available to be spent on 'me' or a different priority being placed on the 'important' things.

Final thoughts on Satisfaction

A NSW Professional Services Consultant simply says "I am happy because life could be much worse. We're all healthy, we have a good relationship with our children, and we have plenty to look forward to."

This statement shows a level of maturity and an appreciation for life itself. Using contrast as a strategy to appreciate our circumstances is a powerful way to really feel happy. A sense of optimism and future opportunity is also there which is really indicative of someone that believes growth and better results are yet to be achieved.

Frustrations!

Whilst most women feel good about their life *in general*, there are still many demands and challenges to cope with. Women living a full life seem to manage numerous commitments; only a very small percentage, though, are totally satisfied with each specific area of their life. The many demands on a woman's time are apparent and truly test the depths of her physical and mental capability. Sometimes women are pushing themselves beyond reasonable limits. Rarely do women find time for themselves.

No time for me!

A NSW Clinical Psychologist says *"There is a great deal of pressure on my time. I manage work and I mostly manage to meet the children's needs but in the squeeze I get lost - there is simply no meaningful time left for me or my needs."*

An ACT Nurse is *"...exhausted. I am very aware that I am stretched to the limit but seem powerless to find a way out of it at the moment. Backing off my hours will result in less money & increased financial pressure, quitting my study seems like a pointless thing to do as I only have nine months left and the results will be worth it eventually. My back hurts, I couldn't be bothered going to the gym anymore, and while I worry about my patients level of hydration and amount of urine output I forget to drink & don't pee nearly as much as they do!"*

A NSW women working in the Health Industry states *"Work occupies so much time and maintaining skills and education level for the job also consumes time. I am physically too exhausted for friends and the home most of the time."*

After reading these three comments from women in the medical field, you might start to think that it's only women in that profession that are over burdened. You would be wrong there; here are some more women's views...

A Newcastle Manager in the Communications industry says *"It's taking a lot of effort to manage the balance and is only possible because my husband is home at the moment (the younger children only went to school this year). We don't have much time for friends because I am studying on top of a full work load and 20 hours of travel a week. However, we are managing to keep the weekends for the children/family and the sport/outings they require. Sunday is a family day, so the only time I get for myself is Yoga on Monday and any time I squeeze into lunch. I have no time for any friendships. I'm working during the week, with the children or studying on the weekends, so it only leaves time for an occasional BBQ. I am too busy at work to want to call people during the day and too tired to want to do so at night." Friendships have got to be maintained on Christmas cards."*

I felt tired just reading this, but immediately inspired because of the following comment *"I am happy doing what we are doing because we have chosen it quite clearly."* This wonderful woman went on to speak about her hopes and plans and the reality or hard work that will be required in achieving her goals - which include changing her career direction. More from her later in this report!

A NSW Small Business Owner knows that her actions result from years of conditioning. *"I have developed the habit of putting everything and everyone before me. I begin to consciously change it then before long I am back in that feeling and wondering why I am not feeling great, when the simple answer is I have put me last..."*

A NSW Police employee says *"I am dissatisfied because life is so demanding. Sometimes, I feel I forget my own needs."*

A Customer Service Agent working out of Sydney Airport remarks *"It seems regardless how far women have progressed in achieving equality we're still the ones doing 75% of the household work"*

and family commitments whilst still thanking our partners when they do choose to contribute some help! It also doesn't help that regardless how much I want to achieve professionally I still insist on being the primary caregiver and war with myself about being a mum first and anything else second..."

A NSW Public Service employee says "I am dissatisfied because it falls on the mum to do everything, washing, cleaning, cooking etc. Kids may help out occasionally but only when it suits them, not realising that it has to be done all the time."

A NSW Teacher says "I never seem to have fun, always feeling guilty about what I should be doing. Children require an enormous sacrifice of self and commitment of time and energy. When there is only so much to go around, something has to give and for me that has been self."

"No time for me" is a serious issue for women today. Either there is just no time for me OR women are not demanding time for themselves. Perhaps they are personally disorganised OR they haven't asked for help. Maybe they have made too many commitments; perhaps they say 'yes' far too often. The powerful maternal pull and associated responsibility for child rearing can sabotage our own success in other areas of our lives and keep us from investing time on our most important asset – *me!*

How do I get some FUN?

A woman working for a Government Private Enterprise in Customer Service says "I don't have time to enjoy things I want to do. There is no time for sharing with family. I come home so tired, my job requires lots of energy and it's stressful, I don't really enjoy working much with the public as people are so rude and not compassionate anymore. There is no time for fun stuff or even learning which makes me so depressed."

There were a number of women who expressed similar frustrations. It is true that fun and enjoyment can be gained from a multitude of experiences, sights, sounds even smells. It is not always the case that at all times in our life we have the awareness or emotional intelligence to be able to tap into this valuable resource.

What about some time to relax?

An Owner/Operator of an Administration Support Company simply states "I've always been brought up to take care of everyone and everything else first, so I find it hard to 'take five' for myself without feeling guilty".

A Victorian Marketing Manager says "I know that I don't take enough time out to relax and do things for myself. If I'm not working, I am doing domestic duties in the house or assisting in its renovation or catching up with family or friends. I feel that I don't take enough time to simply be alone, read a book, listen to music and reflect - time to de-stress!"

A Sydney small business owner admits "There is never enough time for me. I welcome the fact that I love to look after the children, and be part of a business at home at the same time. But there never is enough time for me. Over the years, I have been told, 'take time for yourself' but there are not enough hours. At this moment it is 11.10 pm I should be in bed asleep but I feel I would like to share my experiences with you."

Only yesterday a friend said to me, "I would love to have a whole day to just lie on the lounge and read a book". Many women feel the same. Do you? If so, have you done anything about allocating that day just for you? No? Then when will you do that?

Is there anyone that will help me?

A Blue Mountains Secretary states *"My children are not very helpful around the house, but maybe I have not allowed them to be responsible for their own lives. They rely on me for many small tasks that they should be able to accomplish. I am working on changing this!"*

A Logistics Officer in the Australian Defence Forces is *"dissatisfied because basically I am a single mum (even though I am married) and I don't believe in the mentality that 'women manage the house'... as in all the cleaning, cooking, etc, etc, etc.*

A Queensland Police Investigator could use some help. *"I am dissatisfied with the amount of effort my children put in around the house. I am giving up trying to get them to help - it is just too stressful!"*

Family members who do not help at home appear to be a major reason for dissatisfaction. Some women have become resigned to this situation and a few had vented their disillusionment with their partners. It seems, though, that most women in the survey were not doing anything about this concern - short of letting me know about it!

Learning and Development

A Sydney Practice Manager in the health care industry says *"I feel I have underachieved academically as I was always working to provide for the family and caring for children. I feel I missed out on the opportunity to study and have the recognition that afforded as it was also a financial measure of your ability. I also missed the academic stimulation study could have afforded me."*

A Queensland Executive Assistant states *"I did not have the opportunity to educate myself as I had to leave school at Year 10 as my parents could not afford to put three children through university."*

Clearly, education is important to women today; some women who missed their 'parent funded' opportunity for study are still carrying their disappointment with them, decades later. I see this as a huge chance for improved life satisfaction in their future. It is never too late to return to past hopes and dreams; 'better late than never'.

Personal Relationships

A Victorian Administrative Co-ordinator shares *"I am a single mum and therefore have no support. My teenage boys solely rely on me and working full time certainly puts a strain on my relationship with the boys."*

A Western Sydney woman confides *"My husband and I have grown apart. We are not really a team anymore... we are only together for the sake of the children. I sometimes feel as though I get the short end of the stick. I don't take regular time out just for me as I know I should, until it all gets too much and I feel I have to pamper myself for my sanity's sake. I think it's part of being a mother that you care for the children (& probably everyone else) first and feel guilty when you look at your own needs."*

A Sydney Adult Educator says *"I still do not feel fully secure in my relationship. I'm not yet confident (although this could be a trust issue of mine) in my partner's motivation to provide for me emotionally and especially financially when I have kids. I lack confidence in today's male in understanding and accepting their role in a relationship. I question whether this lack of trust/confidence is attributable to my own personal insecurities, my partner's personality or the general make-up of today's society i.e. the lack of a well defined role for women and men in the 20th century and the high rate of divorce."*

A Queensland Executive Assistant shares *"I am happy with my lot at this stage of my life. My only disappointment is that I have not been fortunate enough to meet a suitable life partner."*

The emphasis put on the importance of relationships is shown in a number of ways. The comments above provide a snapshot of the difficulty some women have when that emotional support and connection is missing, or indeed even if we are still not sure of the viability of the relationship.

82% of women surveyed were in long term relationships. From all the comments gained, there were only 2 women who were highly dissatisfied with the quality of their relationship and who remained living with their partners. There were many women, though, that were dissatisfied with the time available for their partners, who usually fell in line after the children and their work commitments. Alternatively, some women's partners worked away or worked very long hours and one woman's partner was disabled which added extra pressure. Of the 9 women that were separated or divorced, most rated their satisfaction with relationships as moderate to high - which probably indicates that they had moved on!

Maintaining Friendships

A NSW women working in Conservation stated *"I am relatively dissatisfied because on top of at least 7 hours of work each day I travel at least 3 hours. This cuts into my time for seeing friends, exercising etc."*

A Central Coast woman shares *"I don't seem to have the time, energy or inclination to nurture friendships new or old. Between work, study, family, housework, travel to & from work (1 hr each way) and exercise there just isn't time. I'm working on it though... My partner has recently gone through a massive upheaval with his career and it's been difficult to maintain our relationship."*

How impressive is this?! In the face of enormous pressure and the difficulties of holding together her own most precious relationship with her partner, there is still the need and want to be connected with and bound to friendships. The strength of women never ceases to amaze me. What doesn't surprise me is that friendships remain one of the key support structures in women's lives today. 33% of the women surveyed were unsatisfied with the amount of time they were giving to maintaining friendships. 7% of women were most dissatisfied, rating the question between 1-3 on a scale of 1-10, where 10 indicates absolute satisfaction.

A final word from a Sydney HR/Recruitment Co-ordinator...

"I find it very hard to catch up with friends as we are all pre-occupied. I find it especially hard to catch up with female friends as they are always saying they are too busy and the reason usually relates back to their man. It seems women feel more responsible for the partner in their lives and that it's their duty to be there for every decision/move that their partner/husband makes."

Financial Concerns:

A Western Australian Woman working in hospitality is dissatisfied *"after working hard all my life I've only ended up with debts... I am also dissatisfied with the amount of hours I am able to work and the income I can earn because I have multiple medical disabilities that preclude me from fulfilling my employment potential."*

A NSW Teacher says *"the only way to increase my income is to remove myself from the classroom, i.e. take executive positions."* Clearly this would not be an easy choice as this woman goes onto say *"I love my job. I have a great deal of independence in a job which is both intellectually and creatively challenging."*

A Victorian Coach & Trainer shares *"I am dissatisfied with my current income levels, but I know and trust this is a temporary situation."*

A Blue Mountains Community Worker admits that *"I have reached the top of my pay scale - no where else to go in this organisation. I can't put anymore into super and we don't have a salary sacrifice program. I will have to go on the aged pension because my super will not be enough to support me in retirement."*

A NSW Teachers' Aide says *"I feel I'm not making a difference with the kids I have. There seems to be no funding for the ones crying out for help and the ones that have been given the label ADHD etc get the money and the help, though don't necessarily need it. The amount of hours I work can really hardly make a difference. The hours can also be cut at anytime without notice. If the child you are to help is away you are basically sent home. The reality is there is no way I could support even myself with such a job..."*

Concern about financial health, including current savings, potential to earn increased income and sufficient monies available in retirement, was the most consistent concern among women. In fact 95% of women were dissatisfied with this aspect of their life. That's a fairly big result for a survey group that includes women of all educational levels, geographical locations, professional levels and job distinctions.

Career Dissatisfaction

A Sydney Marketing Executive Assistant shares *"I have made a few bad choices in the roles I have applied for and accepted. Had I been more confident in my abilities, I imagine I would be working at a much more senior level to what I am now."*

An Australian Defence Force Officer is dissatisfied, *"...my current advancement is being restricted by my supervisor not allowing me to seek temporary assignments in high positions..."*

A NSW Country Mail Officer says *"My job lacks challenge and I find the work unstimulating. Also I am still a long way off from retiring so I need to add a lot more savings before I can retire."*

A Blue Mountains Customer Service Officer says *"Banking was not what I wanted to do! I am a widow receiving part parenting payment and part wage. If I do extra hours my parenting payment goes down - no incentive to work more! It's hard to save for retirement with 2 young sons. I'd like to feel a sense of achievement with a good income that doesn't compromise my motherly instincts!"*

A Sydney Police Investigator is disappointed with her career direction at this time. *"I have not achieved what I had originally set out to achieve promotional wise. I think it has a lot to do with my confidence after receiving a few knock backs. As a result I had redirected my energies elsewhere and I have more emphasis on my health but I'm happy with that, at the moment."*

A Victorian Training Developer is in a position that *"is not her passion, my job is too idle, I'm not using my creative ability and work under a hierarchy that makes me uneasy. I feel trapped in a routine."*

A Canberra Business Analyst in the Public Sector says *"I am dissatisfied because I don't really feel that the work I perform makes a positive impact on the world or helps people. I would rather be in a role that is more creative and/or where I feel I could make a real difference to the world."*

A Victorian Marketing Manager says *"I have hit a ceiling at my workplace with no room to grow. I am not sufficiently challenged in a strategic sense, mostly due to the organisation not being proactive. Also, at the end of the day, I don't feel that my work is actually appreciated by the franchise community I service and I don't fundamentally feel that my work is really contributing to the betterment of society."*

What a rich feedback area this is! I was very tempted to cut back some of these comments – and these are only a small number of the opinions provided by women who are obviously somewhat dissatisfied with their careers at this time. The underlying themes include women making poor choices around job selection, women staying in a job for too long, women allowing others to hold them back from opportunity, woman doing work that they are not passionate about, women doing work that isn't meaningful – creating a sense of inner conflict and underachievement.

Inequity

A Wollongong woman working in Local Government states *"I don't believe the organisation follows its own EEO policies. There are way too many men in positions at the top."*

A Sydney woman working for a leading international Motor Corporation says *"Being a female and a single mum I've been overlooked for a promotion even though my experience was obvious."*

A Police Investigator based in Sydney states *"I am disappointed that within the company in which I work jobs are perceived as being awarded based on EEO principles, so outwardly there is no or little gender discrimination. In promotional interviews in the last few years there have been fewer and fewer women applying for promotion. In the last round of interviews, the ratio was 4 women in a total of 44 applicants. I personally rated all the women applicants as capable as their male counterparts of doing the job however the ratio was reduced to 1 woman and 11 men for an interview. That to me speaks of sticking to the ratios and not based on merit which left me disappointed with the process."*

It is still apparent that whilst companies and public service departments have solid policies and procedures to achieve fair selections of candidates into positions, what actually occurs can be quite different. This reaffirms to me the value of developing strong networks, careful preparation for interviews and the need to use appeals processes on occasions.

Volunteer Work:

A Blue Mountains Welfare Worker said *"I am dissatisfied because I would like to retire and become more involved with my grown up kids/grandchildren and do volunteer work and study."*

A Victorian Retail Manager says *"I haven't made enough of an effort to do worthwhile community service. As I get older I understand how valuable that is."*

A Western Sydney Woman shares her disappointment with giving up community work. *"I am dissatisfied because I have recently ceased volunteer work that was valuable in personal growth, contribution to community and career building. I miss that, however, finance dictates my course."*

A Blue Mountains Teachers Aide would *"love to do so much more in the community. With my husband often away during the week I can only really do the immediate needs of the kids, cleaning, food etc. I have all these dreams, there just doesn't seem to be enough hours in the day. I would love to help others out more and feel part of the community much more than I am now."*

Working in the community is a satisfaction area for so many women, and as we read here, when we stop volunteering it can leave a real hole, not only for us personally, but obviously for those that benefit from our giving. 50% of women were dissatisfied with their ability to give back to the community, and 20% of those women were very dissatisfied.

Health & Fitness

A staggering 33% of all surveyed women *commented* on their dissatisfaction with their health and wellbeing and their desires to improve in this area.

A Western Sydney woman shares “I am completely dissatisfied with my overall health and wellbeing and I feel that it is unfair, why me? Why now? I never thought that it would happen to me and I wasn’t prepared for this in my life. I’d heard of others getting this kind of illness but never really understood the impact it has on one’s life. It’s not just a physical thing, but an emotional rollercoaster too, it completely takes over everything you do... I had no idea how important my health was to me prior to this. I had always put my kids, husband and work ahead of myself as I thought I was a superwoman and invincible, and now I’m paying the penalty for not taking better care of me. I should have listened to what my body was trying to tell me for years, more importantly I should have acted on it and had more ‘me’ time without feeling guilty.”

8% of women that spoke of poor health said this resulted from medical conditions, as in the above example. Most women said they just didn’t have time after they’d attended to everything else in their lives. 27% of women were most unhappy about their body weight and tone, 24% felt their fitness and strength were poor and 17% of women were unable to maintain their energy throughout the day.

It was interesting to note that most women could appreciate that their health would be better if they could maintain an exercise regime and had the discipline to eat well. And yet, this is, next to lack of financial planning, the one key area that women can make a difference to without the need for further education, substantial monetary investment or the ‘finding’ of too much extra time in their day. As we can see from the Western Sydney woman’s personal experience, if we ignore our own needs for too long, we truly risk developing a chronic condition that may be difficult to overcome.

Dealing with Conflict

A Sydney Marketing Executive says “I am reasonably dissatisfied with the way I deal with conflict. I almost always take the ‘flight’ instead of the ‘fight’ approach.”

A NSW Country teacher shares “I am not good at confrontation because I would prefer to work my way through situations, rather than sit down and talk about them, so I miss opportunities to say what I feel. I take all criticism personally and I feel responsible for results that sometimes are the responsibility of others.”

A Sydney Business Owner admits “I am dissatisfied in the way I deal with conflict. Sometimes it can be confusing and contradictory to me. I feel if everybody gave each other a chance to live harmoniously and to work things out amicably, there would not be an confrontation. I generally feel threatened, insecure and upset as not all things go the way I hope. I try not to apply confrontation to others just to avoid the situation.”

Survey participants were asked how satisfied they were in dealing with conflict. 7% of women were highly dissatisfied in this area and felt less capable in dealing with difficult situations. A total of 51% of women were less than satisfied with their ability to handle conflict. Combining these two groups, the majority of women’s lives would clearly benefit from improved conflict management.

Hopes & Dreams

Working and Waking Hours

A Western Sydney Customer Service Officer shares *"I am unhappy that shift work destroys your sleep patterns and wish for a normal working cycle."*

A Blue Mountains Administrator says *"I want to be a morning person instead of wanting to sleep in every morning!"*

Apart from these comments there were various wishes that women's jobs would 'fit in' more easily with the family and partner's work. There was some level of discontent with being 'left with the baby' as some partners worked long hours. On the other hand, women truly loved the idea of being a mother and being available to their children when needed. So really, women hope and dream about the best of both worlds – family and career. I guess there are no surprises there!

Personal Development

A Sydney Customer Service Agent says *"There is much I want to learn both professionally and personally. I feel constrained by time and obligated to home and family. I do what I can myself, I also want to broaden my outlook, but a lot of these desires are sabotaged, either by myself or others demands/perceptions of what I should or shouldn't be doing."*

A Western Sydney Clinical Psychologist shares that *"...when the children are older there will hopefully be enough of me left to engage in these activities then."*

A Queensland Police Investigator says *"I am dissatisfied because due to my lack of motivation I have not progressed as far as I would have liked to with my study."*

A Blue Mountains Nurse admits *"I am not allowing myself time to develop my mind because I feel my family comes first which doesn't equate to a balanced happy lifestyle! But I need to be proactive in deciding to take on a new challenge."*

I love to read women sharing their challenge and then providing the solution in the same breath! Many women stated that they felt disappointed or frustrated by their lack of attention to personal growth and gaining the satisfaction that mental stimulation provides. This development area that women are clearly missing out on, if given some attention, would significantly improve their quality of life.

Health & Fitness

A Sydney Clerical Worker says *"I would love to be healthier and fitter."*

A Victorian Mother and Office Administrator says *"I would like to spend more time caring for my body and keep it toned and supple as well as strong."*

A Blue Mountains mum says *"As I get older my health becomes more important to me. Both my parents died in their mid forties and I am not far from this age. I feel that I must do something to improve my health, very, very soon."*

Most women who were dissatisfied with their health or fitness also identified that they would like to do something to become healthier or fitter. Most did not indicate what becoming healthier might entail for them or how they would become more fit.

Free Time

A Sydney Administrator shares *“I would like to spend time reading but never seem to find the time, always end up in front of the television instead.”*

A Blue Mountains Teacher says *“I wish I had more time to read and gain more knowledge.”*

Clearly the hope to ‘find the time’ is an underlying theme for women. From the comments above you might conclude that they feel they need time to ‘appear’ so that they can have their needs met. 27% of women were totally unhappy with their ‘free time’ situation, i.e. it was virtually non-existent. A further 53% of women were dissatisfied and wanted to or recognised that they should give more to themselves “if only I had the time!” ...

In the Community

A Teacher’s Aide shares *“I have all these dreams, there just doesn’t seem to be enough hours in the day. I would love to help others out more and feel part of the community much more than I am now.”*

A Queensland Police Investigator says *“I am dissatisfied because I would like to contribute in a more direct way to society but I don’t seem to have the energy or enthusiasm. This flows through to other areas such as I may have time available but I don’t feel that I am putting the time to good use.”*

A Blue Mountains Graphic Designer adds *“I very rarely have time to read a book, go for a walk by myself or do anything spontaneous. This then also relates to question 11 – sadly my contribution to society is restricted to donating money and getting involved in one-off charity events, rather than anything in an ongoing capacity.”*

Women seem to have a strong compulsion to care and nurture inside and outside of their families. Giving to others in our community is important and it was another area of common response from survey participants who expressed their frustration in being unable to do more.

We would all recognise that volunteer groups, committees and organisations are powered by a small number of dedicated participants. It seems that a generation ago, our mothers who were not in the paid labour force as consistently as women are today, were much more available to fill the needs of community groups. The level of dissatisfaction women feel today really reflects a genuine disconnect between their ‘traditional’ hopes and expectations in contributing to vital volunteer work.

Money

A Queensland Manager shares *“I want to increase my pay and then be able to afford to work part time.”*

A NSW Central Coast Social Worker says she wants *“More flexibility, shorter hours, more pay!... the usual really!”*

A Manly Business Owner says *“I’m happy to work as much as it takes to earn what I think I am worth, doing a job I love.”*

Women want to have brilliant lives, a good income, a job they love and to be available for other important people and activities. Some women have achieved this already. I wonder, therefore, is it reasonable to expect that we can all reach the lofty heights of success in all aspects of our lives?

Solutions

Having identified their satisfactions and frustrations, their hopes and dreams, women surveyed were given the opportunity to request solutions to any of their challenges. The most common solution sought was to do with finances. Among other things, women asked for

- Better ways to generate sufficient income for retirement...
- Information on long-term financial options for women
- Solutions to the super/retirement problem
- Improved wages
- Quickly increasing my income
- How to manage for retirement
- Home load affordability for single people
- Practical ways of saving

Combined with the survey group's admission to being ill-prepared for retirement (67% of women believed they would have insufficient savings for retirement, including superannuation) it seems that most women are financially illiterate. With the exception of most women in business and one woman who worked in the finance industry, financial understanding is generally lacking and the gap in women's knowledge obviously creates a strong area of need.

Two people talked about the need to manage their frustrations with their current job whilst they transitioned into a new career. This is an area of interest to me and one that I will be working towards assisting others with in future.

Other individuals were seeking various solutions to personal challenges including

- Quality of working life, more specifically...
 - Flexibility in the hours worked
 - Possibility of working from home
 - Making the time at work much more effective
 - Being recognised for the work I do
 - Improved supervisor management
 - Career advancement
- Further education
- Work / Life Balance, being an involved parent as well as achieving career goals
- How to improve health, and specifically...
 - A cure for Fibromyalgia...
 - More energy
- How to improve business outcomes, including
 - How to pay staff in the early stages
 - Better marketing to generate better income
 - Self discipline and motivation to get out there

The Most Successful Women

10% of women surveyed were identified as being highly satisfied in most areas of their lives. They didn't rate their lives perfectly and they too were seeking solutions to certain challenges which indicates that these women have a strong personal awareness and self improvement focus.

Every woman in this group believed health and fitness was very important; they each exercised almost daily and either used meditation or yoga or personal learning strategies to maintain their edge. All of the women showed high levels of personal discipline. Most spoke about the importance of quality time with family and friends and also spoke of the necessity to keep things in perspective. Most had goals and were working to achieve more. Half of the group were in business for themselves and the other half, like the first, were most passionate about or almost 'in love' with their work.

It is clear to me that when women look after themselves first – physically, intellectually and emotionally – and have quality time with their family and friends and then engage in meaningful work that they love to do, they are happy and satisfied.

Conclusions

It is interesting that exactly 50% of women wanted me to send them a copy of this final report. Of the 76% of women who expressed dissatisfaction with one or more areas of their life, just 30% were seeking solutions to various challenges they experienced.

I wonder if we use a three step process of 1) **awareness** (50%) 2) **enquiry** (30%) and 3) **action** as the basis of personal growth, could we follow a downward trend (in relation to the numbers at least) and estimate that only 10% of people will actually do something with the new information they receive? If this is the case, does it then mean that the majority of women have wasted their time contributing to the research? I hope they don't think so. Their contribution has helped create a dynamic view of women today.

This research has reaffirmed to me that most women are not focusing sufficiently on their personal development, wellbeing or future financial security and that finding a happy balance in life is a common struggle.

74% of women were either satisfied or very satisfied with their lives in general. The most frequently cited area of importance and satisfaction given was in regards to relationships.

69% of women commented about their dissatisfaction with their lives in relation to work, professional development and income. It appears that the area of professional development and success often comes second (if at all) to maintaining the family unit or fostering happy and healthy relationships.

91% of women acknowledged that their health and fitness was either important or very important to them. 33% of women commented that they wanted and needed to improve their outcomes in these areas.

58% of women were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the ability to deal effectively with conflict.

80% of women feel time-poor. If women had more time they would do things 'just for me', contribute to society through volunteer work, do regular exercise and/or get together with others to maintain friendships.

10% of the women surveyed felt satisfied in most areas of their lives. Common success factors between that group of women included:-

- Disciplined approach to looking after themselves (physical, intellectual, emotional)
- High value placed on relationships (family and friends)
- Personal improvement attitude
- Goal achievement orientation
- Genuine passion for their work

The Real Challenge

The findings from this report provide an opportunity and a challenge. Many of the needs identified here could be met by receiving education which would require the use of women's personal time. The dilemma of course is that women claim they do not have sufficient time now to achieve what they want to achieve.

I believe, however, that the more value we place on people or activities, the more priority we will tend to give those people or activities. Using the most successful women's group as an example; we can see that they are mostly satisfied with their lives. They find time for the most important things in their life and a huge part of that is in maintaining themselves; giving their bodies and minds the nourishment required so that they can recognise a good life and feel satisfied with what they have.

The real challenge is to do with how the majority of women value themselves in relation to other important people and priorities in their lives. To gain a different outcome, women need to do something differently to what they are currently doing. This will require them to think differently about themselves... and often that won't occur until they are exposed to the learning required!

It remains a challenge to convince women that they are worthy of the time and financial contribution required for personal development. Women need to develop a belief that they really can be happier, more successful and more fulfilled; that they have the ability to affect their future in a positive way. Confident women can step ahead when they realise just how valuable they are.

I've discovered that when women are happy, they and their families are nurtured and loved. When they do quality work, women are satisfied and feel valued. When women contribute to community, they have an enriched life experience.

Perhaps the next challenge for most women is to realise what makes them happy, truly happy, and set about pursuing the quality activities that add value to their lives and relationships, bringing them back into balance.

I Believe in Me: 7 Ways for Women to Step Ahead in Confidence (www.ibelieveinmethethebook.com) shares more insights from Australian women and shows you ways to remain focussed on the important things in life that bring you satisfaction, success and happiness.