

My Answer to the Question, “How Do You Do it All?” (Hint: Think *Dancing*)

By Nancy B. Rapoport

I have been a big-firm lawyer, working 80 hours a week, and I have been a law professor, working less than that (but still keeping busy). I'm now the Dean of the University of Houston Law Center, and I'm back to my old 80-hour-a-week life. I love what I do, but the day-to-day stresses of the job would be overwhelming were it not for my hobby, which is competitive Latin (and, soon, competitive ballroom) dance. I dance pro-am with my teacher, Billy King.

“I have a to-do list that probably looks as long as yours, and I probably get to as few things on mine as the rest of you do on yours.”

People ask me all the time how I manage to “do it all,” and my answer is always the same: I don't do it all, and what I do, I do poorly. Although that answer has some hyperbole, there's more than a little truth in it.

Here's a typical day for me: I come downstairs to coffee that my husband, Jeff Van Niel, has made for me, and I pry my eyes open. We talk for a bit. He goes off to work. I check email, then I either go to a breakfast meeting or head into work. I have a to-do list that probably looks as long as yours, and I probably get to as few things on mine as the rest of you do on yours.

During the morning, I alternate among meetings, phone calls, *more* emails, visits with alumni and some students or faculty, letters, and occasional planning time for longer-term projects. I eat lunch out with alumni or I work through lunch while catching up on things. The afternoon is a repeat of the morning.

On bad days, crises take up most of my time. On good days, the pile in my “out” box increases and the pile in my “in” box shrinks. If I don't have a dinner event to attend, I rush over to the dance studio and take a couple of hours of lessons. I head home, kiss my usu-

ally-already-asleep husband, and take another look at email and whatever personal mail has arrived. I play with our cats, if either of them is in the mood to play, and I crawl into bed and watch TV until I fall asleep.

On the weekends, I catch up with around 700 emails that have accumulated, I try to prepare for class (if it's the semester that I'm teaching), and I work on articles or reports. People who think that academia is the perfect life are right, but not because it's a short week. (It's because we get paid to read what we want, write what we want, and teach what we want, usually at the times that we want to.)

There is no such thing as a balanced life, but there are compromises that I make that help my life feel more balanced than it actually is. We need so many things to be a part of our days: work, friends, family, exercise. When we can combine some of these things, it's more likely that we'll fit more of them in. And for me, dance helps me with exercise, with friends and family (my husband makes my jewelry and helps with my costumes), and gives me something to enjoy when other parts of my day haven't been easy.



Nancy B. Rapoport is Dean and Professor of Law at the University of Houston Law Center. She practiced last with Morrision & Foerster in San

Francisco, and thereafter launched her academic career. She served as Dean of the University of Nebraska College of Law from 1998-2000 and has held her present position since 2000. In 2001, she was elected to membership in the American Law Institute, and in 2002, she received a Distinguished Alumna Award from Rice University. She is a Fellow of the American Bar Foundation and a Fellow of the American College of Bankruptcy.