

## How Women Work Conference Magazine

A short personal story aimed at the organisations' target demographic and annual conference attendees.

### Creating My Own Potential

There is a huge, gaping hole where my life used to be. After quitting my job and flying thousands of kilometres to live in a country that I had never even visited before, I am now a *trailing spouse*. No job, no family, no friends, no connections, no prospects. This has been a massive leap of faith.

When the jobless life isn't going smoothly here in Qatar, it seems a lot like previous times I've been unemployed. The feeling of having no purpose and being a financial burden to my husband was bad enough when it was out of my control, but I *chose* to give up work, and that magnifies it by a hundred.

There is another difference this time though. In the UK, I never knew how to get where I wanted to go and while the bills still needed to be paid, I never seemed to really try. Here in Qatar, I am faced with a whole new set of parameters, and I am grabbing the opportunity with both hands. Now is my chance to do something, so I am doing everything. I am trying.

Trying new things has become essential in Qatar. That *trailing spouse* label has turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as I am free to expand my realm of experience however and whenever I want. From volunteering with interesting organisations to starting my own freelance business, I am gaining new skills, adding to my CV, meeting inspirational and like-minded people, and giving myself a purpose at the same time.

And this is just the beginning. I have no idea what I may be doing this time next year, what job I might or might not have, who I may be working with, or even what field I could be working in. Qatar really is an open forum and I feel empowered by the possibilities. It is just down to me to make it happen.

## How Women Work

**I created unique and engaging content for a weekly blog and newsletter. The target audience was ambitious, professional women based in Qatar and aged 25-50 years.**

### **Keep Spinning Those Plates**

Finding that ever so elusive equilibrium between work and the rest of your life can be, to say the least, tricky. It is so easy to become defined by what we do and how productive we are, and for women in particular there is still that burning question that it seems we always ask ourselves: can you have it all? With the holiday season just around the corner for many of us, we thought it was the perfect time to reassess that work/life balance - because even though the answer to that question is a resounding yes, we know how stressful it can be getting there.

There is a great quote from the former CEO of Coca Cola Bryan Dyson that may make you re-think your priorities:

*“Imagine life is a game in which you are juggling five balls. The balls are called work, family, health, friends, and integrity. And you're keeping all of them in the air. But one day you finally come to understand that work is a rubber ball. If you drop it, it will bounce back. The other four balls ... are made of glass. If you drop one of these, it will be irrevocably scuffed, nicked, perhaps even shattered.”*

It's brilliant that we are able to build a successful career, have a good relationship, a happy family and maintain a social life, but it is so important to sometimes shift your focus a little, and to put your own wellbeing first. Now is the perfect opportunity to grab yourself some 'me time'. So with that in mind here are three ideas on how to de-stress and re-boot:

1. Get active. Physical activity is great for the body and the mind. It is also a perfect way to spend quality time with the family. Try something sporty or simply go for a walk.
2. Be present. It is a trap we all fall into on a regular basis: thinking about the next job whilst still doing the current one. Make a conscious effort to be mindful of the moment you are in, whether you're at home cooking dinner or driving to the office, take it all in.
3. Get inspired. There is nothing as refreshing as trying something new. Maybe it's that art class you always wanted to try, a new sport or simply taking time to visit a museum you haven't been to before; it can all help to reinvigorate your mind.

Putting this kind of thing into practice can make handling all those other aspects of life and work easier. Everything in life starts with good health, so make yours a priority this month; relax, unwind, spend quality time with family and enjoy life. After all, a healthy and happy self can only lead to growth and success in everything else.

## Leader of the Pack

For me, the idea of being a boss is a double edged sword. Despite a growing number of powerful female bosses in the public eye, I am all too aware that a woman in a leadership role is, statistically, an exception rather than the rule. As such I have witnessed first-hand the particular degree of skepticism that a woman in power receives from both men and other women. It appears to me that our perception of what a leader is continues to include certain personality traits that are typically seen as masculine. Strength, dominance, presence and authority – these are intimidating characteristics for an average young woman like me to try to embody. This leads me to ask myself: how can I become a leader without sacrificing what makes me, me?

There are two problems that I see as the biggest obstacles for myself in becoming a leader in the workplace. The first is my lack of credibility, and my willingness to buy into it. Women tend to be more self-deprecating than men, and I am guilty of not advocating for myself and underestimating my abilities, more than anyone. Chances have passed me by simply because I never thought to recommend myself for them - I never even considered *myself*, so why would anybody else? The second is my fear of being seen as bossy and unlikeable. I have bought in to the antiquated perception that showing myself to be driven and assertive will be viewed distrustfully by my co-workers, and that I could be socially snubbed as a result. This has, until now, been enough to put me off striving for what I want. Add to that the issues of work-life balance that I have been asking myself about since my early twenties, and it is not hard to see why Sheryl Sandberg blames ‘dropping out’ for the startling lack of female CEOs.

Yet, as Sandberg herself has demonstrated, it is no longer essential to channel a man in order to be a leader. Instead I have come to see that the characteristics more often associated with women - emotional intelligence, communication, creativity, inclusivity and likeability – can actually make me an even stronger and more effective leader. Being involved with the How Women Work community has allowed me to connect with other capable and ambitious women that have made me feel more confident in my abilities and choices. Now when I use the term leader, I not only mean a manager, a CEO or a supervisor who leads people and runs projects – I mean somebody who can lead themselves too. This I have found to be a work in process for me, as trusting my own capabilities and reaching for my own goals is my most demanding role yet.

Being the boss of myself is the first step I have taken in adjusting my attitude towards female leadership, and whilst societal attitudes towards our abilities and the barrier of this perception can be extremely restrictive, I am realising the importance in recognising my own unique power. It is just a matter of harnessing this power to become whatever I wish to be.

## The Career Network

As a relatively new addition to the expansive ex-pat community here in Qatar, I have been throwing myself into job-hunting lately. I started in the way I usually would; uploading my CV to online agencies, using job seeking websites and making copious applications to jobs I liked the look of. But as I have become further immersed in Qatar life, I have been struck by how different the job-seeking scene really is here.

A significant amount of new people I meet tell me they did not gain their employment through a regular job listing or traditional application process. Instead, more often than not, I am told it was through a friend of a friend, a new acquaintance, or a chance encounter. The power of networking is huge in this country, and the enormously varied society found here is an absolute hotbed of opportunity.

The ability to network is an important skill to have no matter where you live in the world. The vast majority of job openings are never advertised, and so a career network can be an invaluable starting place for information and job leads. Here in Qatar the constantly evolving community makes keeping good contacts a little more difficult, but if you are able to put the time in, it also offers an ever-growing source of prospects just waiting to be tapped.

Another benefit of networking to find a job is that you build a community of people that will help and support each other at all stages of their careers. The real success of networking is in not only the potential to move your own career forward, but in the opportunity you have to help somebody else too. And it can all be through something as simple as getting to know someone!

The How Women Work community offers you many valuable opportunities to network even if you are not a natural extrovert. Through the engaging workshops, the open online forums, the jobseekers' conferences and the interactive format of our flagship event, the annual How Women Work conference in March, you have many an opportunity to make new friends and contacts merely by participating, without ever having to walk up to a stranger to strike up a conversation. Sound good? Join us at the upcoming events!

## War, what is it good for?

The workplace can be an intense environment. Stress, different personalities, long hours and close quarters can all contribute to a situation that is ripe for disagreements. Unfortunately these stresses and more exist outside of our work too, meaning conflict is found in all aspects of life; so it is important to be able to deal with it effectively when we have to.

There are usually two types of workplace conflict, either a disagreement regarding a business issue which often escalates to a general mutual dislike, or a simple clash of personalities. In some cases conflict can be a good thing - differences of opinion can fire up positive debate, initiate the effective exchange of ideas, and spark creativity. But for the most part they are counter-productive – particularly where personalities are concerned.

If left unaddressed, conflict in the workplace will not only lead to the unhappiness of those directly involved, but other employees also, and this can in turn have some far reaching consequences. As well as causing problems for the business concerned, such as poor customer service, increased absenteeism and a downturn in productivity, disagreements of this kind can also spill over into personal lives and relationships by causing more stress for those involved.

When conflict is not dealt with proactively and quickly it rarely resolves itself, in fact it is more likely to become a bigger problem. A good leader is able to recognise that the two major causes of these problems are a lack of effective communication and the tendency for us to let emotions drive our actions, even at work. But even if you are not in a specific leadership role it is good to have an understanding of workplace conflict and ways to avoid, or at least minimise, it:

- Have an open mind – it can be easy to forget that different people perceive things differently, so understanding your colleagues' point of view is vital for diffusing conflict as well as avoiding it altogether.
- Listen carefully – often when we communicate with somebody, particularly in an argument, we are just waiting for our chance to talk again, but by listening properly we can understand their motivations and be in a better position to negotiate a solution.
- Get help – assigning a mediator to the situation can be a really useful way of diffusing disagreements between two people, as they can be objective.
- Tackle it head-on – ignoring the issue won't make it go away, so getting to the root cause and finding a solution as early as possible is the best way to minimise disagreements before they can mutate into something far worse.
- Use the conflict – whether you are involved with the disagreement, a leader trying to solve the issue or just a witness to the workplace problem, conflicts can be an excellent opportunity to learn about team building, leadership and to stimulate innovation.

Hopefully these tips will give you some useful ideas on how to turn conflict into a 'win win' scenario for everyone, at work and in life.

## Let's Get Personal

Times of national and even global religious celebration and festivity are often centred on your immediate family and friends, and it is wonderful to have time with those you love; but it can also be a time that makes you think about the bigger picture. The world is a big place, so it is easy to imagine that as an individual you might not have much impact. Your actions often influence the people closest to you, but the ripple affect can sometimes extends much further than you may imagine.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is an area of business practice that has been around for a while now, and which is continuing to develop in companies of all sizes. This is a great step forward in corporate ethics and policy, but on an individual level it sometimes misses the mark.

That is where Personal Social Responsibility (PSR) comes in as a tool for workers at all levels to contribute to the world around them, locally and globally. PSR plans are a great way for those that are freelance workers or that are self-employed to contribute to the greater good. They can also empower you to address the areas of your own work life that you may be finding unsatisfactory.

Personal responsibility is about taking ownership of your work life choices and understanding your accountability in the work place – whether that is in an office or in your own home. PSR action plans can be detailed or quite simple, but the aim is to be the change that you want to see. Some general tips for personal responsibility, at work and in your personal life, are:

- Reduce the negativity you might add to your environment eg. gossiping at the office, responding unconstructively to emails
- Ensure your daily decisions and actions are in line with your own values
- Visualise contributing positively every day eg. assist a colleague with a task, smile at a stranger

Personal responsibility is the freedom to create our own lives, and social responsibility comes when we realise that our actions have consequences beyond us. By empowering ourselves to take control of our choices, professionally and personally, we can positively impact the world around us and improve our own happiness and wellbeing at the same time.

## Celebrating Qatar: Happy National Day!

National Day in Qatar really is something special. As a celebration of Sheikh Jassem bin Mohamed bin Thani's succession as ruler and founder of the State of Qatar, it is an opportunity to celebrate those that have worked to make Qatar a great country. It's also the perfect time to shout about the brilliant women that have helped to shape Qatar over the years and their contribution to the diversity that now enriches the country.

Since moving to Qatar it has been eye-opening for me to learn about the women that this country is home to. For example, the work of H.E. Sheikha Al Mayassa as a Chairperson for arts and cultural institutions, such as Qatar Museums, is as inspiring as it is expansive. Having stepped away from her original career in the Foreign Service to pursue her passions, she has found a balance that many women seek: '...I found that working in the culture sector is the perfect bridge to combine my interests, and my priorities in bringing up my own children' ([Qatar Museums](#) interview May 2014). Her contribution to Qatar's cultural landscape alone is remarkable, but to have achieved it whilst taking care of a family is arguably even more so.

Life in Qatar enables all women, from all backgrounds, the opportunity to design their life around their needs and interests. The short film [I Am a Qatari Woman](#) from Doha Film Institute gives us a brief insight into this, giving a snapshot of the life of a regular Qatari woman. It is an example of a woman happily excelling as she lives, works and raises her children here.

Women are a vital component of Qatar's vision of unity and growth. With more and more women running their own businesses, working freelance and taking ownership of their careers, they are shaping the future of this country. Organisations like How Women Work offer the women of Qatar extra support in achieving these ambitions, and our workshops aim to empower you to develop your career and to grow professionally in the areas that you are most passionate about.

This is my first year seeing the events and build up around National Day, and it is definitely an exciting time to be here! So let's celebrate Qatar and all it has to offer us; how will you be getting involved this year?

## Happy New You!

Happy New Year to you all! Whether you celebrated Christmas or not, I hope you are feeling merry and full of good cheer. At this time of year it may seem like you are being bombarded by the 'new year, new you' message from every angle and it can feel a little overwhelming. However, whilst personal change is possible at any time, the ceremonial closing of one year and the beginning of the next really is an excellent opportunity to spark your creativity and get re-inspired. With only three months until the How Women Work Conference, it is time for us at HWW to shift up a gear: why not join us?

Starting fresh in 2015 doesn't have to mean making any massive promises straight away; in my experience those huge New Year's resolutions tend to lose steam quite quickly. Instead, perhaps try breaking it down a little. First, define what your final big goal is in a very clear way, including by when you realistically want to have achieved it. Then, split that goal into regular intervals of smaller goals with their own timelines, making sure that they contribute to your main one along the way. By starting with a smaller, more manageable, set of goals, that final objective will hopefully not seem so unattainable. Plus the regular milestones that you will achieve will help to keep you on track.

Incremental, steady progress can be much longer lasting and much more satisfying, but keeping motivated can still be a challenge for everyone at certain times and we all need a little help to stay focused. Here are some tips that may help you keep your eyes on the prize:

1. Try to enjoy the process – nothing will scupper your plans more quickly than the boredom of trying to reach them over a long period.
2. Concentrate on the immediate goal in front of you – if you have broken your end goal down into smaller milestones, then focus on each one at a time.
3. Track your results – make sure you celebrate those milestones when you reach them, even if it's only with something small, reward yourself.
4. Create a motivational vision board – whether it is a collage of images that inspire you or a quote that you find encouraging, surround yourself with positivity and make sure you have easy access to it when you may feel like giving up.
5. Have a clear reason for pursuing your goal – the 'what' that you want to achieve will only happen if you have a good 'why'.

These tips and strategies can be applied to pretty much any ambition you may have, from moving up the career ladder to losing weight. Perseverance is the real key, so keep going and let us know what you want to achieve in 2015!



## Judge A Book by the Cover

Now that 2015 is in full swing and we are all feeling strong and positive about keeping our resolutions going, it is a great time to think about what we are projecting into the world and how we perceive those around us. In a country like Qatar, where a huge portion of the population is new and trying to make friends or network for business, first impressions are crucial. Within just seven seconds of meeting somebody new, we make hundreds of assumptions about them, based solely on what we perceive about things like their hairstyle, clothes, handshake, and voice. So how can we put our best foot forward and project what we wish others to know about us?

We can have our opinion of somebody all sewn up before we even know a single thing about them, and we often don't even realise it. This natural instinct enables us to assess situations for danger, and we are being equally judged all the time too. Unfortunately, in a lot of cases, judging a book by its cover can be seriously misleading; particularly if our assumptions are negative. Often business interactions rely heavily on good first impressions, and we can often unwittingly miss out on great things because of this.

It is a two way street though, and whilst we can learn to be more open to new people and to look beyond appearance we should also take responsibility for what our own appearance is projecting and how this can influence the way other people respond to us. Although we cannot stop people make those snap decisions about us, we can try to make it work in our favour. Here are some helpful tips for being the best version of you from the very start:

1. Be at ease – if you are uncomfortable or on edge, you will probably make others around feel the same and that is not a good first impression to leave. Calm confidence will make others feel at ease too.
2. Be an individual – making a good first impression doesn't mean losing your individuality and conforming to what you think other people want to see. As long as you dress appropriately for the situation you are in, personal style can be a bonus.
3. Be polite – give your full attention to whoever you are meeting. Rude or disinterested behaviour is just as memorable as attentive and polite behaviour, so consider how you want to be thought of later.
4. Be positive – your attitude shows in all you do. Whether you are feeling nervous to meet new people or are facing criticism from your boss, try to see the best in the situation and be upbeat about it where possible. A positive attitude and a smile can go a long way!

Every encounter you have is a chance to meet new people and network your way to something great. Our conference in March is going to be a brilliant opportunity to make a good first impression on other like-minded women, so hone those skills and make sure you use those seven seconds the best way you can.

## **Be the Change: Part 1 - Something New and Different For Us**

With our annual conference almost here, I have been thinking about this year's theme and how I can apply its message to my life. In order to 'Be the Change' that I want to see, I must first start with myself. Since moving to Qatar in September, I have noticed myself getting stuck in a rut. I can see my husband and me quickly getting used to, and sticking to, what we find comfortable. After the massive upheaval of coming to live in a new country it is understandable that we would be grasping for some sort of normalcy, and this is most easily found within a routine – but that is not what we came here to do.

A whole new way of life is what I was desperate for when we moved here: less work stress, more career opportunities, better pay, great weather and more free time seemed almost guaranteed. In the 5 months that we have lived here this has for the most part proved true, but human nature loves a good schedule and so I find my weekdays merging into one similar blur and, in the recent cooler weather, our weekends becoming a lazy persons guide to life. So since the New Year I have become determined to nip these winter blues in the bud.

I am snapping us out of it by actually doing things, by ticking some items off of my must-do activities list and grabbing new experiences as they come along. From starting the yoga programme that I had been meaning to do, to going to watch a professional tennis match, to cooking my first beef stew this week, change really is good. Next up on the list: A Falcon Festival, the Qatar Color Run, a photography course and dune bashing.

Shaking things up, even just a little, has been enlivening, and I have found myself feeling much happier and healthier as a result too. A positive mind really does make a positive life and by making myself experience all of these new things, I am being the change that I want to see in my life.

## Be the Change: Part 2 - Change Your World

The environment in which we live is a key contributor to what makes us the way we are. As much as I would like to think that I am my own person, capable of changing or developing myself completely using only my will-power, at times it is very clear that external factors are the real cause of my behaviour. In attempting to engage with this year's conference theme and to 'Be the Change' I have become aware of the difficulty I have in changing my habits. I am mostly concerned that once the New Year buzz wears off so will my renewed enthusiasm for transformation, and my determination along with it. So, to counteract this I am going to work backwards: I am changing the world around me in order to change myself.

The approach may sound counterintuitive, and I have my doubts, but time and again this method is proving itself. We are all more reliant on environmental triggers than we even realise. It can be as simple as eating an unhealthy snack whilst watching a film, reading in bed before I am able to fall asleep, filling a big plate with my dinner just because, or clicking on Facebook every five minutes whilst using my laptop. In my mind all of these things are associated with one another, but it is just out of routine that these habits have formed.

To break this vicious cycle I know that my first step towards is to acknowledge these bad habits. Then by prioritising a few, and perhaps writing them down, I will hopefully be making myself more mindful of when this behaviour occurs. Being mindful of the situation is a good start, but not entirely reliable, so I must also make physical adjustments in my environment; for instance not taking a book to bed with me, making sure only healthy food is in the house when planning a film night or designating just one specific timeslot or device to use for social media during the working day.

This all goes hand in hand with taking social responsibility, by putting mindful positivity energy into the world through my actions, I am not only bettering my own life but I am potentially bettering the lives of those around me. In making destructive behaviours more difficult for myself to engage in, I am hoping to reduce my own propensity for failure and therefore change my world, and the world I live in, for good.

### **Be the Change: Part 3 - You Can Do It!**

With all my attempts to 'Be the Change', I have found one of the hardest aspects to be actually thinking I can do it. For me, this goes beyond willpower or wishful thinking, as I struggle to imagine the changes actually taking place and sticking. I think this stems from a combination of things: firstly a chequered past of failures in areas like diet, exercise and outlook; secondly, as a result or in conjunctions with that, a real lack of belief in my abilities at nearly every level. Don't get me wrong, I am not a simpering wreck of low self-esteem, but I think a lot of the time when it comes to the crunch I have a problem with truly thinking I can achieve my goals.

Perhaps I have been dreaming too big, but the end goal always seems very far away and the road to attaining it more often than not gets too rocky for me to traverse. So along with the smaller changes I am making this year, to adjust my life slowly, I am going to adjust my mind. I have recently rediscovered this quote by founder of Ford Motor Company, Henry Ford:

*Whether you think you can, or you think you can't – you're right.*

When I started to consider the meaning of this quote I realised that it really is that simple. There are things that are difficult to control, the world around us is a big place and we are not the centre of it, but it is possible to control what we personally put out into that world. The actual power of thought is a highly debated topic, but I can't deny that when I consciously try to think positively, even in the face of obstacles and frustrations, things do start to turn out better - and I say this as a cynical, glass-half-empty devotee of twenty-seven years.

From now on then, I will be aiming higher. Whether it is at work, in my relationship, with my diet or my hobbies, I will be setting the bar high. And whilst having a real belief in myself seems like a difficult task, especially in this world of happy selfies and overblown Facebook statuses, what it really comes down to is just swapping negativity out, and positivity in. When I think of it like that, it's nearly impossible to imagine I could fail.

## Be the Change: Part 4 - Only Connect

Connection can be tricky to define. If you based it on things like Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, you could be forgiven for thinking you have lots of connections with lots of people. But it is ironic that in this time of mass high-speed communication across multiple platforms, it can be so easy to feel alone. The idea that we are all connected just because we are all in contact is an easy fallacy to believe. Even though I appreciate the ease with which I can regularly chat to my family half-way across the world, it is still difficult to maintain a real connection in that way. It all takes a lot of time and effort - but it should, shouldn't it?

When I really consider the best relationships in my life, those ones that have any real depth or substance, it is clear that they are the ones that I have taken time to cultivate. Not only this, but it is also obvious that these relationships can only thrive when both parties have invested their time, emotion and effort. Perhaps this sounds obvious, but it's easy for me to get hung up on how many 'likes' my latest Facebook status got, or how many times my witty tweet was re-tweeted or favoured, and to forget that none of it is actually connecting.

Social media has an important and ever-developing role in our lives, but our online profiles are often just a projection of what we want the world to see. They are rarely natural or spontaneous, and they usually offer quite a one-dimensional view. I know that we project all the time - at work, with family, with a partner - we are always showing different aspects of ourselves, but the big difference for me is that I can't curate my personality 'in real life'. I find that most people I meet can't either. Sooner or later real personalities, beliefs, stories and ideas come out, and that is where a real connection with another human can be forged. This is what we regularly experience at How Women Work, when parts of the community come together in 'real time' for a workshop or conference. I think that is where personal growth can really happen, through human interaction - meaningful dialogue, eye-contact, a hand-shake.

What I love most about looking up from my phone and connecting with somebody is the way in which it can really change my outlook. It takes me out of my own head, that self-centred bubble that social-media makes so easy, and it gives me another perspective. Personally, it is a work in progress for me to break out of my tech habits, to expand my real life social circle and to really connect. But I really believe that the positive effort it takes to interact with others will in turn come back to me ten-fold, and in the meantime I hope small changes like this can only benefit my wellbeing and personal development.

## Be the Change: Part 5 - It's A Balancing Act

I have now been working on my personal goals of change and development for about two months, and I think it would be the perfect time to assess how it has been going. Self-assessment can be difficult, and in the past I have been particularly rubbish at it. I have a tendency to go a little overboard by criticising every slip-up, chastising myself for every mistake and agonising over what I should have done better. I am a lazy perfectionist, and that can be really exhausting. But this is the year of change! So for once I am going to give myself the benefit of the doubt and gently look back at the last eight weeks and all that I have done.

The first point I should make is that my world has not been turned upside down. In many ways though, everything is really different. It feels different. I am far more aware of things that are affecting my wellbeing, such as what food I am eating, how much physical activity I am doing, how much time I am allowing myself to relax and the way in which I am prioritising my time – but in a positive way. I now make an effort to no longer be frantic and overly controlling about these things. It is an hourly battle but that negativity is fading away, and in its place I now consciously try to make sure I am doing what feels good for me.

A huge part of this attitude change relies upon me acknowledging the things that are out of my control. Mental positivity and a stress-combating lifestyle have gone a long way for me in the last few weeks - I gained employment, I have lost a little weight, I have thoroughly enjoyed some new experiences - but life hasn't suddenly become one big, happy party since January 1<sup>st</sup>. Bad days still happen and bad things still happen in my life, stress still finds me and sometimes I still even eat pizza. The difference for me now is that I know it doesn't mean complete failure or that I should give up all of my positive new practices.

Life is about balance, not sudden or severe lifestyle changes that are impossible to maintain. A positive outlook and positive actions most of the time are not undone by a couple of less productive things. Everyone needs that day on the sofa doing nothing once in a while, and as long as I know that the next day I will get up and do better than I think everything is going well. Maybe there has been a seismic shift after all.

## Be the Change: Part 6 - Keep on Keeping On

Change can be slow, especially big change. If, like me, you are looking to make adjustments to your life that will last, then it is fair to say that patience is definitely a virtue. Last week I talked about my biggest realisation so far, and how giving myself a break once in a while is actually okay. Acknowledging the need for balance between strictly following self-imposed rules and giving them all up completely is the key to maintaining my sanity. At the same time I am hoping that it might go towards ensuring the longevity of my life changes, and that the process could even be enjoyable too! I have also come to realise that the end result is not what I should be focusing on, and so my latest challenge is going to be viewing the process as a good thing, and not just something to endure.

It is easy to think of things we want as an end result sitting in the distance, waiting to be attained. But unless we are talking about that McQueen handbag I am pining for, life goals are rarely so easily measured. I have old thought patterns that keep insisting that the right haircut, outfit or lipstick will bring me true happiness, but the older I get the more I realise that all these things are just temporary fixes. I might get some fleeting joy from them in the moment, but in the long run none of them add much to my life. Things that really matter tend to take a little longer to attain, and I am learning that they take even longer to maintain.

One of the best things I have learned since taking up yoga has been the real meaning of the word practice. In general, we refer to the act of doing yoga as 'practicing' yoga, something which we don't tend to say about other physical activities. This turn of phrase is based on the yogi philosophy that the point isn't to perfect postures or be the most flexible, it's not about looking the best or trying to out-do everyone else in class; it's not even about trying to out-do yourself. Instead the focus is on doing whatever you can each time you step onto your mat – if you are having a bad day just relax, breathe and take things easy, if you happen to feel brave then try a new pose or stretch that bit further. But maintain your practice.

I think this is a perfect analogy for life, and I have been trying to implement the same idea into other aspects of my life. It all ties in nicely with the idea of balance too – persevering through bad days and trying again for a good day. The very process of change is where I know I will find the most satisfaction from continuing to learn and grow. For now then, I am going to keep on practicing.

## **Be the Change: Part 7 – She Needed A Hero, So She Became One**

International Women's Day was on Sunday and so it seems fitting for me to talk about inspiration. There are some incredible ladies out there who deserve all the recognition they get and more: see Emma Watson, Amy Poehler, Dr Amal Al-Malki and Angelina Jolie for some of my favourites. I find these great women so motivating, and they really are role models for me; I admire their achievements, their attitudes to life, their political stances and their authenticity. Because I do look up to them so much, it is easy for me to want to emulate them, but imitation is unsustainable in reality, and that is why through my own journey to 'be the change', I intend to also be the inspiration.

The encouragement that can come from self-motivation, I believe, is so much more powerful than anything that external forces can offer. Over the last few months I have begun to realise that change really does come from within, as cheesy as it sounds. No amount of enviously reading fashion industry success stories will make my life into one, and I can read about the benefits of yoga online as much as I like but it won't get me up in the morning to do it. I have to make those things happen myself, and that takes dedication every single day.

Communities like How Women Work and support networks like the Mastermind and Soul Sisters groups can be a great help when you feel overwhelmed by having to do it all alone. There are other women with aspirations and ambitions out there, who are on a similar journey and sharing those journeys can be incredibly helpful and motivating.

In order to foster this commitment I have been on a steep learning curve, but I think the key is to love and trust that inner voice we all have. To trust that I do know what is right for me and I do have my own best interests at heart, and to use that to move towards my goals. Trying to get to the root of what is really making me want to make life changes has allowed me to find true and continuing motivation. There are of course still times when it waivers and I need a little boost from my heroines, but I know that I am much more likely to make changes that will last if I focus on myself rather than them – and if I help to inspire others in the process, then that is just an added bonus!



## Be the Change: Part 8 – Snap Out Of It

Humans are definitely creatures of habit. Since the beginning of the year I have started to realise just how much. At first I found it difficult to break out of old routines and habits, and then I started to so easily fall back into them at the slightest sign of trouble. Neither of these scenarios was particularly surprising, but now it has dawned on me that I have actually developed some new habits this year, and I am not entirely sure how healthy they are. I knew making changes would be a huge challenge, but I never even thought to look beyond that...

Habits in themselves are not necessarily a bad thing, but I tend to think routine can lead to a lacklustre life, in which one floats along in a mindless daze never questioning the norm. As somebody who likes to question the norm - to travel a lot, move house a lot, buy new things, try new things and push myself - I would like to think that I am not a creature of habit. But maybe I am, and maybe it is just human nature.

We all like security, and nothing is more secure than the safety of knowing what is going to happen next. Even on the smallest end of the spectrum - it's nice knowing you have that delicious salad (or pizza) lined up for dinner, or that you have that weekly nail appointment locked down; and most of us also appreciate it on a bigger scale, like knowing we have a place to go home to, or a loved one we can really rely on, for instance.

Unchecked though, routine becomes habit, and habit become mundane, and then even good things seem boring and uninspiring...and then you need a change. Events like How Women Work's Resilience Retreat can be a great way to snap you out of this kind of rut, by getting you to reinforce your goals and reignite your passions. I think there is so much value to be found in this kind of thing, not least the opportunity to re-focus on why we do what we do in the first place.

So while I know that we all get stuck in our ways sometimes, I am going to make a conscious effort to keep mindful and to keep optimistic, because those kinds of habits never get boring.