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Lauren Haw: 'Everything we do has a pretty good megaphone'

Zoocasa CEO talks about her start in real estate and the importance of balancing data with privacy

CYNTHIA MARTIN

THE LADDER

Lauren Haw, 33, is the CEO and broker of record at the full-service brokerage Zoocasa, one of Canada's top online real estate search sites, based in Toronto.

One cursed blessing is everyone's in love with real estate. Everything we do has a pretty good megaphone. It also means if you go to a dinner party, you can't hide. If you're at the park, you never get to turn off. Everybody has an opinion of what's going on in the market and they want to hear yours.

I got my real estate licence in 2012. If you're good – intelligent, give amazing advice and work in a client's best interests – it's 24/7. You need to dive in and study, not the craft of sales, but where asset values are going and give people the right advice; almost a mix of being their therapist, financial adviser and negotiator. It's almost horrifically exhausting, you're doing deals at midnight on Sundays. You get the highs of working with a family, finding the next best step for them at the expense of your personal life.

I have a 19-month-old and a two-month-old. Breastfeeding takes a lot of time. I have to plan my days and schedule around

closing my door so people don't get the pump baseline in the background of phone calls.

I never wanted to be a front-line agent forever. Not selling any more, there are many aspects I miss. I try to find the best agents to know clients are in good hands. That sounds gratuitous, but it's true. Transactions can put the interests of agents and clients at odds so it's even more important you're hiring and training people who have a strong moral sense.

Everybody has the lemonade stand, other pursuits; I wanted to be financially independent. I was raised in Scarborough, got my first job at 14 to have spending money and save for things which seemed important then. I worked long hours as a lifeguard and swim instructor at a private pool, then at 15, a city [of Toronto] pool, in the union.

Early on, I saw differences in employee interaction and motivation through two strikes. Two months one summer, I didn't get to work – my only pre-university savings opportunity. If your motivation is that you can't get fired, those are different motivations.

At 18, I went to Queen's University for commerce, first year signing up for College Pro Painters. It was an amazing experience. They know if you do [certain things] you'll have good results; I did, morning, noon and night. It was absolutely the best business training because I learned the buck stopped with me. By the year's end, I was much more interested in running a company. I loved working with my team, hiring, training and helping people grow. I'd hired a roster of painters depending on

me – if I couldn't produce jobs, they wouldn't save for tuition. That responsibility motivated me to continue growing teams and building companies.

We acquired Zoocasa's URL in 2015, rebuilding the website to scale out our raison d'être to a larger audience built first with users in mind. They're educated, care about school zones for kids, but affordability's a big issue. Instead of going to different websites, they can filter by zone and homes providing income from a separate suite that families, quite frankly, need to afford a home.

The sharing economy opened opportunities for homes to be seen more as assets. A portion is investment, but for the large majority, a large portion is utility.

There's an expectation information is free and data should be readily available, but it takes a background team filtering, coming up with interesting facets and ways of presenting information and trends. People joke that when you're around a Starbucks, prices rise; we took that on to see if we could prove it. The market's moving to open source, however, it's important we consider privacy. We have to be careful we're providing information to consumers that's distilled, adds value and doesn't create lightning rods for anger.

Done is better than perfect. Get it out there. Start now. Test your ideas and thinking against as many people who will listen. Everybody who's been successful in business will tell you execution matters. You can have all the ideas in the world, but you have to get it done.

Special to The Globe and Mail

Work/life balance is a myth

The concept implies a negative that needs to be offset by a positive – an outdated, needlessly stressful approach

MERGE GUPTA-SUNDERJI

OPINION

Leadership speaker and consultant, founder of Turning Managers Into Leaders

For years, nay decades, there's been talk of work/life balance – that delicate equilibrium between the time you spend at work and that which you dedicate to family, social and leisure activities, and personal interests.

The overriding objective of work/life balance is that your personal life should not suffer at the expense of your work responsibilities. The widely held belief has always tended toward compartmentalizing each to successfully walk the tightrope between the two.

It's long past the time to let this obsolete idea go.

Work/life balance is a myth, a non-achievable nirvana that few (if any) have realized. Instead, it's time to embrace work/life blend.

BALANCE IMPLIES TWO EXTREMES

The word "balance" implies that a negative – work – needs to be offset by a positive – life. But there shouldn't be anything negative about earning a living.

Even if you're not crazy about your job, it is still where most people spend the bulk of their waking hours, so it is time to accept reality.

Work/life blend acknowledges that trying to isolate work from life is not only impossible, but also places immense amounts of anxiety and tension on those trying to do so.

Whether you're chairing a meeting, buying groceries, making a sales presentation, taking the dog to the vet, Skyping in on a conference call, dropping off the dry-cleaning, researching a prospect, picking up takeout, dealing with staff absences or running on the treadmill, they're all threads in the very fabric of your existence.

So trying to separate the individual fibres in the pursuit of work/life balance is not only unrealistic and stressful, but unnecessary.

Work/life blend is fluid. It recognizes that we don't need to compartmentalize the different strands of our life.

It gives one permission to flex seamlessly from one area of life to another. In the end, everything still gets done, but just not in clearly defined time periods such as 9 to 5, or 6 to 8, or whatever.

Work/life blend is what allows me to visit my dad in the hospital during the day when his doctors are more accessible, and write this column in the early evening before the family comes home for dinner.

It gives me permission to get on a worldwide conference call at 4 a.m. to accommodate colleagues on the other side of the world, and go for a swim at our neighbourhood pool at 2 p.m. when the facility is less crowded.

SHIFT FROM BALANCE TO BLEND

So what will it take to reposition from balance to blend?

It doesn't just happen, it takes a deliberate and thoughtful mental shift.

Don't think that work/life blend is a magic potion though. There are still trade-offs to be made. Embracing blend over balance does not mean that you'll suddenly have the capacity to get more done.

There are still only so many hours in the day.

So identify which pieces of your life are the most important – time at the gym, attending after-school softball practice with the kids, crafting the board presentation – schedule them into your calendar, and give each of them equal seriousness and significance.

When you define priorities, inevitably they are followed by the B-lists and C-lists, activities that fall under the nice-to-haves but don't make the A-list grade. So recognize two things:

■ First, you'll have to let many of the items on those B and C lists go.

■ Second, it's okay if your limits occasionally change and things shift from one list to another.

As with any other habit, changing your mindset from work/life balance to work/life blend won't happen overnight. Accept that it is a journey, not a destination.

Shifting your philosophy from balance to blend means you can reduce the pressure that comes from trying to isolate and compartmentalize.

Paradoxically, when you seek to blend, you'll end up with greater balance.

Special to The Globe and Mail

Should I leave my boss's department over his behaviour?

BRUCE SANDY
JULIE LABRIE

OPINION

NINE TO FIVE

THE QUESTION

I have had two friends with ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder]. I am no stranger to anxiety, social anxiety and PTSD myself. My boss, who admits openly to have extreme difficulties to concentrate on mundane tasks, who is impulsive and constantly physically active, even when sitting at his desk with a laptop, is unable to let me finish sentences when I talk about sensitive topics. He yells at me during a meeting where I try to discuss this. However, two weeks later, he denies to HR that he yelled.

And he claims it is only my perception. Is this all just his ADHD, or is he a mean boss and does it mean I should leave his department?

THE FIRST ANSWER

Bruce Sandy
Principal, Pathfinder Coaching & Consulting, Vancouver

I hear and appreciate your concerns about your relationship with your boss. I recommend that you focus on attempting to set clear boundaries and developing a more collaborative working relationship with him as opposed to diagnosing him.

Be clear with your boss that you would like to design a more effective working relationship. Say that you appreciate his enthusiasm and that you would like

to finish your own sentences and thoughts before he leaps in.

Indicate that you do not appreciate and will not tolerate being yelled at and that you are open to having discussions and debates.

Also, be curious with your boss and ask if he is open to some feedback on how he is showing up and his impact on you. If he is open to this, then start to design a new working relationship leaning into your awareness of mental-health issues such as anxiety, PTSD and possibly ADHD.

Be sensitive, not blaming. If he is not open to this and/or possible third-party help from a coach or counsellor and he continues his bad behaviour, then start looking for another position.

THE SECOND ANSWER

Julie Labrie

President, BlueSky Personnel Solutions, Toronto

Since speaking to him directly about your concerns hasn't helped, consider asking HR to mediate a conversation and agree to report back on progress. This way, your issues with him are fairly documented, too.

In such a meeting, establish some communications guidelines and boundaries. Can you both agree to point out – in the moment – when something is bothering you in your interactions?

For example, if you feel your boss is starting to yell at you, get his consent in advance, to share this with him as it happens – such as, "Right now, I feel like you are raising your voice at me," or,

"May I have just a moment to finish my thought?"

If he's yelling, this may stop him in his tracks and help him realize how he is coming across. If he is more of a passionate speaker who just gets excited and louder in the moment, he can clear up any misunderstandings with you. Hopefully, you'll both become more conscious of each other in this process.

The key question to ask here is: Can you make this relationship work for you? If at the end of the day, you find you're both still not compatible, that's okay. In that case, give yourself permission to explore other options.

Got a burning issue at work? Let our Nine To Five experts help solve your dilemma. E-mail your questions to ninetofive@globeandmail.com.