

What wellbeing really means

By Ruth Ostrow

THIS is my last column in *Weekend Health*, as I will be moving to *The Weekend Australian Magazine* after a break. But I wanted to end my time with some open speculation as to what wellbeing really means.

I have had quite strong views about it all.

Since making my seachange to Byron Bay I've tried to practise and teach what I call work-life balance. That is where all the different components of our lives work together in harmony.

A former workaholic, I was alarmed to discover what years of pushing myself had done to my body, my soul, and my relationships. And as a former finance journalist in the 80s, I had also observed what years of driving ambition and stress may well have done to so many of the entrepreneurs and businessmen we admired back then.

As the decade drew to a close many of those I'd interviewed had had major health scares. Some like talented, exceptional businessmen Robert Holmes a Court, Larry Adler – founder of FAI – and Floyd Podgornik, the man behind Melbourne's famous Florentino's restaurant, had died for a variety of reasons. Others I'd written about had lost marriages, their peace of mind, and some even freedom as jail loomed. Some, like Christopher Skase, fled the country. I emerged from the '80s with the motto: "What drives you, can drive you over the edge." And I have been teaching as much for the last few years.

But then the other day I had a chance encounter which made me rethink work in terms of our overall health and wellbeing.

Glenn Wheatley, the man behind Johnny Farnham and Little River Band, has been in Byron Bay giving a talk to the Chamber of Commerce about his years of fame, fortune and loss. Like so many success stories, Wheatley's dream run came to a screeching halt at the end of the '80s. His demise came with the crash of the Pyramid Building Society where he had parked his money. He had just sold his house to fund his business when Pyramid collapsed, and he was left with \$10 million in debts.

Sleeping on the floor of his mother-in-law's house, as everything he ever owned including valuable records and guitars were auctioned to pay his debts, he hit the place that so many of the entrepreneurs I knew had gone. "Many nights I cried myself to sleep," he told a captivated audience.

But not one to stay down for long, he followed the mantra of Winston Churchill: "Never give in, never give in, never give in!" and over time he resurrected himself.

Still enjoying the fruits of his close relationship with John Farnham he has recently joined a syndicate which has become partner in the highly-successful Blues & Roots Music Festival in Byron. I'm at the festival having coffee with Glenn as the music roars around us. He is glowing, grinning from ear to ear, and a tribute to what I would call wellbeing.

"I'm happy. That's my secret," he says. We talk about workaholism. I tell him my hypothesis – that you can't be truly happy or healthy if you are obsessed with any one facet of life, particularly career, money or power. "You need your life working in balance. Each facet has to be given attention. You seem to be a driven man and yet you seem content. How is this?"

And then he explains the ingredient I have been overlooking. "I am not obsessed, I don't work as an obsession – I work out of passion. When you are passionate you don't mind the down times – it's all part of the challenge and the joy of it. I watch audiences and still get a buzz from what I've achieved. I feel so alive, so satisfied."

The other thing he has passion for is his family – wife Gaynor and children, and his close friends like John Farnham, who has stuck with him through thick and thin. He says that although he doesn't have a hobby as such, his work-life is balanced by relationships. "I have real love in my life. It gives me a deep sense of contentment in everything I do."

I recently reported on findings that there's good stress and bad stress. Glenn and I decide that good stress is when we follow our hearts. When we follow our passions, fulfil our life purpose, and take risks that invigorate rather than deplete us. It's not so much what we do, but how we do it – with what feeling, with what motivation – that counts in the end.

He has given me a new viewpoint. Perhaps it doesn't matter how hard or passionately we work – as long as we are laughing a lot, and enjoying what we do, and have lots of love in our lives. Passion and pleasure seem to be an important ingredient in "overall" success.

And there it is again – the message I have learned from my time in *Health*: joy is a true bolster to wellbeing. May you all live long and prosper.

My new column starts in *The Weekend Australian Magazine* in July. See you then.

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