



'I FOUND SUCCESS WITHOUT STRESS'

Joanna Kane, 49, from Bournemouth, Dorset, ditched her high-powered job in favour of a better work-life balance.

TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD, I WAS THE epitome of success. I'd always been a high achiever and very driven. By the age of 34, I was appointed the first female board director of a recruitment company. I had all the trappings of success: a generous salary, five star holidays, an apartment in central London and a sports car. But inside, I wasn't sure it was all it was cracked up to be.

I was moving at such a pace there was never any time to slow down. I was working 60-hour weeks and if I exercised, it was gruelling high-impact routines. I'd keep myself going with caffeine and sugar and grab food on the go. My husband, Seb, was very supportive but as time went on, I started to suffer from lots of minor ailments such as digestive and sinus problems and headaches. Life was so busy I'd run to the chemist and pop a pill, as I didn't have time to go to the doctor. The stress I was under also caused anxiety and chronic insomnia. I'd have trouble getting to sleep and would sometimes only manage to grab a couple of hours a night. The irony was, I was so busy I didn't even have time to stop and register that I wasn't happy.

“With the right approach, you can be happy, healthy and successful.”

Two years into the job, Seb and I went on a three-week holiday to Malaysia. It was my first proper break in a long time, and it gave me a chance to reflect. I realised that I had material success, but I wasn't fulfilled. I felt physically and emotionally run down and I knew I couldn't carry on like that. It was a real wake-up call, and when I got back from holiday, I handed in my notice. My bosses were shocked and tried to persuade me to stay, but my mind was made up.

Seb and I decided to spend six months travelling around South America. It was an amazing adventure, the stress had gone and we decided to try for a baby. But back in the UK, I got the biggest bombshell of my life when I was diagnosed with endometrial cancer. Luckily it hadn't spread, but after surgery to remove it, I was told that I'd never be able to have children, which was devastating. The doctors reassured me that stress didn't cause the cancer, but I did know that chronic stress wasn't good for your immune system, which you need to fight off disease. It confirmed for me that I didn't want to go back to a stressful office environment.

After I'd recovered, I started working with a corporate coach. Although I wanted to do something more meaningful, I still wanted to stay within the field I know so well. I just wanted more balance and less stress in my working life. The training made me realise so many things about myself, such as my perfectionist tendencies and that I was always so hard on myself. I never really felt like I deserved to be where I was.

For the first time in a long time I really began to look after myself physically and mentally. I changed my diet to make sure I was eating lots of vegetables and raw food, did meditation and practised yoga. The life I'd led before wasn't sustainable and it would have eventually led to burn out. Working with a corporate coach had been so enlightening that I decided to train as one myself, and in 2004, Seb and I started our own company called Trailblazers, working with executives.

People are always going to have stress, you can't eliminate that, but it's about the way you choose to deal with it. People need to see they can still be successful and get results but be happy and healthy at the same time.

Now life couldn't be better. I have a successful business and I'm a mum to two beautiful boys – one through adoption and another through surrogacy. Seb and I have also written a fictional book based on our experiences called *The Suited Hippy and the Stress Junkie*. I travel all over the world doing corporate coaching and we've just set up an online programme to make it more accessible. I'm living proof that you don't need to be stressed to achieve success.

● For more information about Joanna's coaching & consulting company, visit thetrailblazers.co.uk.