

PR whiz puts trust in her business savvy: To foster effective leadership, Kathy Bloomgarden strives to live ethically

By Donna Jacobs

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It's 6 a.m. and Kathy Bloomgarden -- CEO of one of the world's largest independent PR agencies and just-published author -- is up.

Mug of green tea in hand, she heads down to the gym in her Manhattan apartment building. She has company: her husband, Zachary, a leading endocrinologist who specializes in diabetes.

She jogs indoors so she can watch BBC news, CNN International and some U.S. news during 45 minutes on the treadmill and 15 minutes on stationary weights.

Back upstairs at 7 a.m., she spends the next 90 minutes answering 30 to 50 top-priority messages from Europe.

"I want to finish all the e-mails before going into the office," she says. "Otherwise, people in Europe wouldn't get responses until mid-afternoon."

Her company, Ruder Finn, has offices in London, Paris, Basel, Switzerland, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Singapore, Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Sydney, as well as Washington, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

The New York office, at 57th Street and 2nd Avenue, has about 500 staff.

"It's probably the largest concentration of PR people in the world," she says, "because we've grown organically and a lot of other agencies have grown by acquisition."

With another 150 staff working in the other 15 offices, New York headquarters "optimizes" the 24-hour work cycle, because the sun never sets on this company.

She travels half the year and follows a "jetlag diet."

"Crossing time zones a lot, it helps to eat lightly. It helps you to reset the clock. When I am travelling for business, I try to hit the ground running, to be immediately in the new time zone."

She also hits her weekends running. On Saturdays and Sundays, she researched and wrote her just-published first book *Trust: The Secret Weapon of Effective Business Leaders*.

Arthur Levitt, former chairman of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, wrote: "Trust is not just a book for business people. Dr. Bloomgarden has authored a hugely readable and compelling definition of how living ethically is a predicate for effective leadership."

She packed the book with fast-moving anecdotes about the fall of crooked executives at Tyco and Enron and about rescues of such mismatched mergers as AOL and Time Warner. She also interviewed excellent CEOs who better their companies and -- idealistically and profitably -- the world around them.

She is a good friend and admirer of New York Times chairman and publisher Arthur Sulzberger, Jr. and of Daniel Vasella, chairman and CEO of Novartis pharmaceuticals. Both figure prominently in the book.

She's hard on managers who punish or fire their most loyal workers -- workers so dedicated that they risk careers to deliver bad news. She is equally hard on executives who lie to shareholders, to media, to The Street -- and to themselves. And she tracks many a business failure to a CEO's refusal to simply listen.

If she had a personal motto, it probably would be one word: "Understand."

She has a master's and Ph.D. in political science from New York's Columbia University. She speaks, "in varying degrees of fluency," French, Italian, Chinese and Russian, and reads German "in newspaper vocabulary."

Why so many languages? First, she wanted to understand her French neighbours as a child, so she learned French, then Russian and in high school studied Italian. She took Chinese immersion at Stanford University in California and went to China to study.

"I was always fascinated by languages and the ability to communicate with people in their own language, which removed a kind of barrier."

Maybe her other motto would be "Move," which coincidentally is the name of Ruder Finn's trend-tracking online magazine MOVE! She talks quickly and runs her own high-performance engine on a lean fuel mixture.

Her breakfast is nutrient-free: Black coffee after a morning of exercise and intense communication.

"That's fair," she laughs. "That's just my habit."

She answers her other 150 e-mails at the office, many involved in managing reporters' requests or in contacting journalists whose style and interest best match clients' stories. Mornings, too, she meets with her creative team where the day's assignments are discussed and divvied up.

Lunch for the five-foot-six-and-a-half, 112-pound redhead is a light salad at her desk. She tries to drink a litre of water a day.

Also around lunch, the people in Europe she works with are ending their day, so she's on the phone for final chats. By then, European journalists have filed their stories and she starts on the next day's work.

In the afternoons, she gets her team together again to review findings, recommendations and conclusions. If a client company is researching something really new, Ruder Finn looks at whether a competitive product is also in development, looks for how consumers will use the product, looks for the most interesting publicity angle.

Toward the end of the work day, she fields e-mails from staff in Asia, where a new day is dawning.

She gets home in time for family hour, 8 to 9 p.m. and despite the lateness of the hour, the couple cooks dinner.

"When you are married to a diabetes specialist, you understand the importance of eating well. We don't eat ordered-in food," she laughs, "because we never know about trans fats and all these horrible things people put in food.

"And we don't eat meat," she says. "As long as I can remember, I did not like eating animals.

"We're not fanatic," she adds.

They eat fish, eggs and dairy products and a typical dinner might be poached fish and green vegetables.

"We really like all vegetables. My husband loves pasta and bread."

Among fruits, he favours pears; she likes strawberries. Dessert is rare, perhaps sorbet.

"We definitely have a glass of wine since we're travelling so much. He lectures a lot. So we really try to make this a time to relax and talk -- it's kind of a religious thing."

Then she works from 9 to 11 p.m.

"Normally, I save things I really have to think about, or things I have to write, for the evening."

How does she keep a balance between home and work?

"Some people like to have a separation, but I actually like to integrate work and home."

She is co-CEO with her brother, Peter Finn, in the firm their father, David Finn, co-founded and whose diversity of clients includes Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer, Verizon, Target Stores, El Al and the UN.

Working with her brother is "great," she says.

"We really are very complementary. We have totally different skill sets. He's really great at taking care of a lot of details of the agency day to day."

Introvert-extrovert? She laughs.

"It's fair to say our style tends in those directions."

She joined the family business in 1980 and specialized in a previously untapped client source -- health care companies. This overlapping interest with her husband produces great dinner and weekend discussions.

"We grew to have the same interests," she says. High school sweethearts, they married when she was 19, and had three children while she was still a student in her early 20s. They lived over a pizza parlour in the Bronx.

Two of their children, Rachel and Keith, work at Ruder Finn. Their younger son, Matthew, in second year at California's Loyola Law School, is interested in ethics, intellectual property, and art and music copyright law and the Internet.

Her time-and-stress management tips:

1. Have a routine. "That's why I answer e-mails before I go to work. Everybody is happy. I'm not leaving anyone unanswered and it's worse when (later) four or five things are happening at the same time."
2. Answer everything that requires response and prioritize.
3. Be aware of time zones.
4. Have a really good team. "And make sure everybody is committed to the same kind of standards -- very clearly having accountability or responsibility, so you know you can rely on each other. Often you find in teams that aren't well organized, everyone is trying to do the same thing. So try to get everyone to do something well defined so, also, they can have some pride in what they're doing."

She uses weekends "to think and to catch up on news trends" and to read the articles and e-mail attachments she's set aside.

Does she ever have a Blue Monday?

"Sometimes I have Blue Sunday nights -- if I haven't gotten through my pile of work or what I wanted to finish. Then I'm like 'Oh, weekend gone!' "

What gets her up early every day?

"Before I go to bed, I e-mail a bunch of stuff and then when I get up, I generally have a lot of responses or exchanges on projects we're working on.

"In the morning, I'm looking forward to finding out how things have progressed."

Next week: Bloomgarden and the best of Trust: The Secret Weapon of Effective Business Leaders.

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Photo: A normal work day for Kathy Bloomgarden starts at 6 a.m. and ends at 11 p.m. That's what it takes to run Ruder Finn, one of the world's largest PR firms.