Fifteen years ago, my husband and I went into business for ourselves — not so much by choice (we weren't forced), but instead by desire. It was our desire to have a life where we elevated each other and made room for our four daughters to be the priorities in our lives.

We didn't completely know what we were getting ourselves into, but we knew we were committed to this dream.

It was at this time that I learned a valuable life lesson, and one I consider my most important to date: What I was and not willing to do for money.

It is in the moments of pure fear and desperation that you begin to face the hard decisions of how to balance family, marriage and work. How should I prioritize work vs. family activities? How many hours away from home are too many? These are struggles faced by many business owners – especially female – trying to balance work and family.

I chose to invest in my family and my marriage and to let the work balance itself. That doesn't mean I chose to stop working. Instead, I chose to work differently: to consider every impact my choices would have on my relationship with my partner and with each of my children.
Sometimes, that meant walking away from opportunities that held great potential, but I knew each time I chose to walk away that I was being true to my heart and to the needs of our family.

Along the way, there were challenges, but the many joys and rewards have outweighed them. My marriage weathered the storms and my children are thriving, happy young women. And I continue to work.

I am convinced that by following my heart and doing what I know was the right thing to do for our family, that the investment was well worth the sacrifices we made.

Some tips that have helped me throughout my life and career:

• Be deliberate! Set your goals in action by writing a personal mission statement that includes what you are and are not willing to do in your life and career.

• Surround yourself with the right people. Jim Rohn says that "you are the average of the five people you spend the most time with." Make sure those people emulate what you are striving for.

• Step out of your comfort zone. "We were not made for comfort, we were made for excellence," a wonderful quote from Pope Benedict XVI. Our comfort zone is meant to be a resting place to recharge and reenergize. Don't stay there too long.

• Self-evaluate. At the end of the day, check in with yourself and examine how you did that day. Keep a journal of where you went wrong and how you will correct that moving forward.

• Enlist accountability partners. We need truth tellers in our lives – those friends who can tell us what we don't want to hear and hold us the standards we have set for ourselves.

• Embrace your strengths and seek help to handle weaknesses. This is critical to business owners. We cannot be all things to all clients! But, we can be our best by learning to delegate and let go of the things others can help us shine at.

The Edge: 10 lessons learned from 50 years in business

Finally, and most importantly, BE AUTHENTIC. Be who you were meant to be so that you can do what you were designed to do — without sacrificing integrity or honor.

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