

Just Do It

PAMELA ARWAY, AMERICAN EXPRESS' PRESIDENT FOR JAPAN, ASIA, PACIFIC AND AUSTRALIA, KNOWS HOW TO ACHIEVE THE ELUSIVE WORK-LIFE BALANCE. SHE REVEALS HER SECRET TO ALEXANDRA KOHUT-COLE

WHEN PAMELA ARWAY reflects upon her career in which she broke the glass ceiling, she sometimes wonders how she reached this point.

Perhaps it's to do with how she makes decisions. "You can go for 100 per cent perfection, but I go for speed and 95 per cent perfection. Otherwise, you can take forever to do something. By then it's too late and the competition has passed you."

Arway is pleasantly surprised by Singapore remarking, "Asia is advanced compared to other places. A lot of women own their own businesses and are senior in corporations and government. This is an advanced society." Pleased that opportunities for women are opening up globally, she says, "Companies are becoming more diverse in their hiring practices. It makes sense because there's such a war on talent. You don't want to leave out 50 per cent of the population."

Arway's parents were tough on her during her childhood. "They had an expectation which became my expectation" which was to do well in school and be in the top three, she says. She would be disappointed if she were not, illustrating high standards of excellence even then. "I was driven from an early age by a desire to do well and to make my parents proud of me." There are three Arway sisters. "We are all the same," she says. "Quite competitive with a good parental upbringing."

In 20 years working for American Express, Arway has never been bored: "I've had many jobs and moved around the world. Whenever I mastered something, I would make a change." Not in her nature to do the same thing over and over, she likes taking on new challenges.

Arway's average working day will, more often than not, run to 10.30 pm as her parent company is in New York. To cope with such intensity, she says, "I have an incredibly supportive husband who has moved with me and doesn't get uptight when I go away. If I am really stressed I go for a long run and, somehow, it just evaporates."

Fiercely disciplined, Arway acknowledges it's hard not to work on weekends, but she sets herself strict boundaries. "It's easy to be on the laptop all the time, but I don't do that."

Jogging three times a week, she and her husband often take their dogs to Sentosa beach for a run. "It's really important, with the kind of schedules we keep, to be fit in order to keep up the pace." Growing up in Canada, she is an outdoorsy person who likes to hike, swim and play golf with her husband. "I'm not very good, but it's enjoyable and allows us to spend time together," she says.

Canada is still home to Arway, but she adored living in New York, remarking, "How can you not?" For 10 months she was CEO, American Express, Australia, before moving to Singapore where she now enjoys the shopping malls, golf courses and the beauty of the reservoirs.

Travel is also a passion, especially within Asia. However, she no longer simply lies on the beach. "My desires have changed. I want to experience and learn about the cultures."

Arway maintains the one motto that best defines her is the one she borrows from a line Nike used - Just do it. "I don't like to sit around or take a long time: I'm an action-orientated person." As such, she exhorts colleagues to "get the facts, do their homework and not wait around. Let's get it done."

Pam Arway puts her success down to strong parenting during her childhood



PHOTOGRAPHY LUCY LEE

HAIR: LYRA JOANNA NG; MAKE-UP: ALETHEA TEO

AT A GLANCE

STATUS Married

ACHIEVEMENT

Breaking 90 at golf

CHILDHOOD

AMBITION

To be a teacher

TREASURED

POSSESSION

Photo albums of childhood, family and friends

FAVOURITE

BOOK

Lord of the Rings

EARLY MENTOR

Her parents

NEXT AMBITION

Breaking 80 at golf