
I have just returned from a punishing schedule at the most competitive business school in the world, Harvard Business School in Boston, and ironically feel calmer and more revitalised than I have for years! I attended a week long program, the Women’s Leadership Forum, with 60 CEO and senior executive women from all corners of the world. Twenty-three countries were represented on the program, with all gathered thirsty for knowledge, renewal and learning in relation to effective leadership approaches. What we had coming was far from what we expected, rather than an MBA type look at innovative strategies for turbulent times (which I thought would be right up my alley being in the TAFE system at the current time), we were exposed to what some have termed the softer side of Harvard. In fact one participant said she had been searching for stillness for years and had to come to the most competitive business school in the world to find it. Others in the group suggested that this research-based, highly competitive institution is doing some course-correcting, after producing generations of MBAs who are highly productive, yet unhealthily intense”.

The result was, we were taken on a journey of personal reflection on values, meaning and purpose in the way we lead, and on how we measure meaning and quality in life. Taught by some of the brightest minds in the world, with content based on their extensive research we reflected on, amongst many other things, our addiction to being “plugged in” 24/7. Harvard Professor Leslie Perlow, whose recent book, *Sleeping with Your SmartPhone: How to Break the 24/7 Habit and Change the Way You Work*, brilliantly used her research to guide us through some very powerful exercises focusing on how we are using the limited time and energy we have across the different parts of our lives and selves, and asked us to consider the balance and quality of our lives.

Similarly we focused on the culture of “superherosim” with Harvard Professor Francis Frei, and how in fact trying to be excellent at everything can lead to mediocrity. In addition to focusing at a deep level on the importance of authenticity in leadership, we also worked on personal professional challenges with some of the best minds in the world. The result was very powerful, reflective intense, fun and incredibly inspiring week. I felt very fortunate and privileged to be able to attend the program, and am more than happy to talk further to anyone who may be interested in attending.

Liz Harris

CEO, Challenger Institute of Technology and sharing my experiences further.