



***Ella Koscik
Chairman & Co-CEO,
Management Decisions, Inc.***

Perfect Balance: Three Children and a Business

Everyone's ideal scenario may not be married to your CEO, have three small children under the age of 5, AND be the owner and chairman of a fast-growing information technology staffing enterprise. Forget everyone else. It's working exceptionally well for Ella Koscik and her husband, Joe, and for their company, Management Decisions, Inc. (MDI).

MDI is a full-service IT staffing and consulting firm based in Norcross, GA. Ms. Koscik became 100% owner in 1994. By 2001, her company was #5 on Atlanta's list of the "10 Fastest Growing Women-Owned Firms," #306 on *Working Woman* magazine's "Top 500 Women-Owned Businesses in the U.S.," and has been on the *Inc.* 500 list for three years straight.

Ella Mortland Koscik's path to owning her own successful company started in Pittsburgh, PA where she grew up. The fourth child in a family of six children, she was always energetic and outgoing, but not necessarily a stellar student. After high school, Ella attended Clarion University for two years. Impatient to get on with her life and burning with energy, she decided to go to work albeit without a clear focus. She went through a lot of different jobs. One job took her to Virginia where she did secretarial placement work and ended up with her own accounts.

Finding her niche

It didn't take long for Ella to discover that she was very good at this kind of work. As her expertise in the staffing industry grew, so, too, did her reputation. Ella was soon recruited by another company and actually helped them grow their bottom line revenue from \$4 million to \$14 million in just a few short years.

"What happened next was a little surprising," she said, "since I thought I had clearly demonstrated my value to this particular business. But maybe it was providential in the long run." What happened was that Ella was fired—reportedly for personal differences with a key individual in the company. It appeared that her meteoric rise in the staffing industry had come to an end.

Actually, it was a major turning point. It was then that she met Howard Leff who was the owner and founder of MDI. It was 1993. What transpired from there sounds more like a

movie script than reality. Howard offered Ella a 50% stake in the business in lieu of salary and in exchange for her help in rapidly growing the business. Mr. Leff wanted to retire early.

Amazingly, his wish was about to come true. Within six months, his half of the company was worth more than when he owned the entire company himself. “I quadrupled the bottom-line,” Ella explained, “and in return, I was able to buy Howard out completely – which was a good deal for both of us.”

A blueprint for life and work

Today, Ella says that she is first and foremost a wife and mother. In second place comes her self-described role as “part-time chairman” of MDI. Part-time or not, she’s still in control and going strong.

In 1998, Kosciuk hired her husband as CEO and also added a strong COO. Besides these management changes, she credits MDI’s success to the ability “to find and retain consultants that can deliver results to our customers.” While this objective is anything but simple to accomplish, Ella says she has her own blueprint.

“What differentiates MDI from our competitors?” she asks. “Well, I’m not really sure. I don’t even know exactly what the competition’s doing. But I do believe in hiring and empowering the best people, and I know my own strengths and weaknesses. This is a big plus for any entrepreneur.”

And like a good entrepreneur, she sees to it that decisions at MDI are made quickly. She also puts her faith in the organization in the center with its people. At present, Ella said she has no plans for either an IPO or a merger or acquisition. What she does expect is to continue to diversify while keeping MDI’s core competence in IT staffing in tact. She sees no let up in sight to the need for IT talent, even during the down times.

Turning to personal insights, Ella reflected on her own inspirational role models. Somewhat surprisingly, this thirty-something year old staffing guru doesn’t have a list of high profile men and women whom she would like to emulate. Instead, she talked about her *part-time nanny* – a woman who has several children of her own and works hard to care for them. Ella clearly values the assistance her nanny provides her in achieving balance in her own family life.

“As a mother of three and an entrepreneur,” she said with a beam on her face, “I think things are going pretty well.” She’s also happy when she talks about the foundation she started which contributes to worthy causes, especially related to children.

What she didn’t mention was the fact that it was she who started the Atlanta chapter of the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO). She’s also a member of two mentoring organizations, Georgia 100 and Daughters 2000 – both focusing on female achievers.

What's next

In the immediate future, Ella plans to utilize her own considerable strength in sales to grow the company even further. “Let Joe stew over the financials,” she says, “and let the COO run the day to day operations. That’s not what I need to do.”

Instead, it appears that she’ll direct her experience, vitality, and self-confident manner towards making her consultants and her customers happier than they’ve ever been. She believes the results will follow. She’s probably right.

Interview completed September, 2001
By Susan Hitchcock, VP-Client Services
Turknett Leadership Group
Creator of the *Age of SHEroes* Project)