

# Kathy Naasz: balancing family & work

Written by Judy Chapman

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Kathy Naasz

Garden State Women recently had an opportunity to catch up with Kathy Naasz, Assistant Professor of Business, SIFE Director, who walked away from a high powered, senior level, global position with AT&T to achieve a better work-life balance while pursuing a long standing interest in giving back by teaching at the university level. She is now at Centenary College in Hackettstown and making an important difference in the lives of the young people studying there.

**GSW:** Kathy: when and how did you decide to switch career from working in industry to teaching at Centenary College?

**Kathy:** I had been approached with an opportunity to teach as an adjunct at Monmouth University for a Global Business course and accepted the position and found out that I really enjoyed it. Following that, I taught Intercultural Communications at Raritan Valley Community College.

**GSW:** What was your prior industry career path?

**Kathy:** The majority of my professional career was at AT&T, where I started in the prestigious Bell Laboratories, it was truly 'the job to get' as an engineer. I then advanced to become one of the youngest Global Executive Directors, holding several positions in Sales, Marketing and Strategic Planning. As a business consultant, I worked with several large corporations, such as American Express, Safeco Insurance, Thomas Cook, London Electric, JP Morgan and EuroTel.

**GSW:** What was your college education background prior to launching your career in business?

**Kathy:** I have a B.S. in Electrical Engineering and an M.S. in Management from Stanford University. When I was going to school in the late 80's, having a combination of technology and management was very sought after. There were not many women in Engineering back then either.

**GSW:** At Centenary what have you been teaching?

**Kathy:** I am an Assistant Professor in the Business Department and I teach Sales, Marketing, and Business Strategy. I strongly believe in applying theory to practical solutions and have the students learn experientially, whether it is through creating Marketing Plans for actual small businesses or testing out a business strategy through a computer simulation. The SIFE project approach fits perfectly with this philosophy.

**GSW:** This year you have taken on additional responsibilities at Centenary College as head of the SIFE program you are re-starting. Tell us about the SIFE program. What is it? When did it first start at Centenary? Why was there a lag in keeping it going? Why is it important? How many students are involved at Centenary? What are some of this year's projects? Do you have many young women participating in the projects?

**Kathy:** SIFE is an international nonprofit organization that works with leaders in business and higher education to mobilize university students to make a difference in their communities while developing the skills to become socially responsible business leaders.

Centenary College had a successful SIFE team since 1996. During the last school year, the team was inactive due to a transition from the prior leadership from an advisory perspective, but by no means a lapse in support from the College's administration. I decided to take on the challenge, as I believe that it is a calling to help others—help the students to bring about change in the world through business principles and help people in need to learn how to continue to help themselves.

We have about 20 students on the core team, which functions as a class, and another thirty-five or more involved in the SIFE campus organization. We are the third largest organization on campus and we went from 0 to nearly 60 student in less than a month and have the largest SIFE team in recent years. We have strong participation by female students, from various races and cultures; it is truly a blessing to have such talent on the team.

We focus on local and global projects. To provide two examples, we are addressing the need to support minorities in attending and completing college, with a focus on Newark, New Jersey. We are launching a business in Guapi Colombia, to engage artisans to develop products for markets outside of Colombia.

**GSW:** Besides your teaching and leadership role at Centenary what are your other interests and passions?

**Kathy:** A great question. Is there time for anything else? My other passion is being a wife and a mother. I have two girls, ages 7 and 10, and I enjoy spending time with them. I am always thinking of new business ideas or helping local businesses via informal consulting. My other main passions are healthy living and languages. I am a certified Yoga instructor and I speak three languages and am recently studying a fourth.

**GSW:** What advice can you give other Garden State Women who may have an interest in switching into college teaching mid-career? What are the pros and cons of transitioning into academia? What factors are critical for success? How can college level teaching opportunities be

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found?

**Kathy:** It is through change and learning that we grow and improve. I would encourage anyone thinking of shifting a career to plan for it (evaluate the pros and cons) and if it makes sense, just do it! The end point is not as important as the journey. If it is something that year after year, you have the desire in the back of your mind, and it will not go away, then you need to move forward and fulfill it. That is how teaching was for me. I could not get rid of the feeling that I needed to share my skills with younger people. The best way to enter teaching is to try to find adjunct teaching opportunities and get experience in the on-ground or on-line classroom. Also, share your passion and write an article or two and get it published.

**GSW:** Most women are really busy these days, do you have any thoughts to share on how to juggle all the balls?

**Kathy:** In reality, it is all about balance and priorities and making sure that both professional and family needs are met. For me personally, I had found that my balance was off in my prior position, and I did not have much energy left for my family. I shifted my definition of success once I took on the role as a mother. Sure it is great to have a high-paying career, but time with my children was more important to me and luckily, I was able to excel in a teaching career that allows for improved balance and is also, personally, very rewarding.