

# Life is a Juggling Act

*Work, life, kids and commitments – it's tough to juggle it all, leaving many of us feeling we haven't got the right work-life balance. Jovel Ong finds out how Annie Yap, CEO of The GMP Group keeps all those balls in the air.*

**W**alk the corridors of any company and you will hear the same lament, "I have too many balls in the air!" Life in our time-strapped, chaotic world has become a juggling act, both at work and at home.

We are all jugglers now, and we all have to learn how to do it better.

Entrepreneur Annie Yap – who won the Leading HR Entrepreneur Award at the Singapore HR Awards 2005 and was nominated for the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises' Entrepreneur of the Year Award this year – could certainly provide some useful tips.

The 34-year-old is CEO of The GMP Group, which won the Ernst and Young Enterprise Award recently; a mother of two young boys; and into her second term as President of the Singapore Staffing Association (SSA).

As you hear her count the number of activities she engages in regularly, on top of running The GMP Group, raising a family and leading the SSA, you feel a tinge of envy and a sense of wonder.

"I spend time with friends and parents, and on my religion and hobbies. I swim and jog regularly. I have a passion for cooking. I also like to travel, and do so at least twice a year, once with my family and once with a group of friends," she disclosed.

When I asked her how she manages the juggling act, Annie readily credited it to the strong support she has from many people. She also cited the late Dr Giam Cheng Lan, founder of The GMP Group and her mentor, as one tremendous source of influence.

According to Annie, Dr Giam was a proponent of work-life balance even before the term became popular, and she was passionate about the business. Annie recalled, "She believed that GMP had a bigger role to play and would grow. It is this belief that drives and motivates me to build the company."

Since taking charge of The GMP Group in 2001 at the age of 29, Annie has grown the company from a small staffing firm with a modest workforce to a 160-strong company that ranks amongst the leading homegrown recruitment and employment companies today.



Last year, GMP recorded S\$90 million in revenue, almost four times the amount in 2001.


The GMP Group has been expanding its service offerings and regional footprint in the recent three years. On top of recruitment services, the company now offers outsourcing, career advisory and executive search services. The GMP Group network includes offices in Malaysia, Thailand and China. Come early next year, the Hong Kong SAR will join the list.

According to Annie, a balanced work-life, as advocated by the founder of The GMP Group, has been essential in helping her cope



with these challenging times. Annie has been strongly promoting work-life balance at her workplace by incorporating practices to help everyone achieve fulfilling professional and personal lives. Work-life initiatives at The GMP Group include a five-day work week and flexible work arrangements.

Staying back late at work is a practice that gains frowns at The GMP Group. And the CEO walks the talk: At 6pm everyday, Annie promptly slips out of her executive role and revert to being a young mommy. In the haven that is her home, her attention is with her two children, and there isn't a PC, laptop or Blackberry to distract her from her family.

Focus, I learn, is the key to juggling. 

### The humanCapital Q&A

*These questions are based on the questionnaire that French novelist Marcel Proust answered at 13. It was a popular parlour game for youths during his time. At age 20, Proust answered the same questions, but his answers were somewhat different, indicative of his traits at 20. We developed a similar set of questions for Annie Yap, whose answers give us insights to her personality.*

**What is your idea of perfect happiness?**

Freedom, joy and bringing happiness to people.

**Which living person do you most admire?**

My dad.

**What is your greatest fear?**

Losing something or someone I love.

**What is your favourite journey?**

The journey of bringing my kids up and knowing that they will be people who can contribute to the society.

**On what occasion do you lie?**

When I am faced with a situation in which the truth will hurt the other person.

**What is your greatest extravagance?**

My houses! I have three houses – two in East Coast and one in the West. I stay at one of the East Coast properties; the other is rented out. The last one is unoccupied.

**What do you dislike about your appearance?**

My tummy.

**What is your greatest regret?**

I don't have any so far.

**What or who is the greatest love of your life?**

My two kids.

**When and where were you happiest?**

Now is one of the happiest moments. I have my kids, friends, family, colleagues and clients who are supportive and my company is doing fine.

**Which talent would you most like to have?**

To play the piano because I'm not musically-inclined.

**What is your current state of mind?**

At peace.

**If you could change one thing about your family, what would it be?**

I would like to have a daughter in the future.

**If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?**

Nothing.

**If you were to die and come back as a person or thing, what do you suppose it would be?**

I would still want to be myself.

**What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?**

When there is no peace, no freedom.

**What is the quality you most like in a man?**

I like someone who has God in his life – he should be a Christian.

**What do you most value in your friends?**

Their loyalty. Standing by me when I'm low and being willing to spend time with me when I need them.

**Who are your heroes in fiction?**

Wonder woman. (Pause) No, I'm just joking. I don't have any. But in real life, it is my dad.

**What are your favourite names?**

Anita, because I like Anita Mui very much. If I were to have a daughter in the future, I would like to call her Anita.

**What are your greatest achievements?**

My two kids. My role in GMP. The managers and leaders I have groomed.

**What is your motto?**

Success is a journey, not a destination. We have to constantly improve and clinch a higher peak.