

Executive of the Month

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Success Magazine: How do you define success?

Jennifer MacPhee: My personal definition of success is that success is a parallel of both personal and professional paths. First and foremost is family—I am blessed with two happy, healthy children and a wonderful husband. We are surrounded by both sets of parents—which is one reason we chose to stay in upstate New York, in addition to being very fond of the Capital District. Secondly, I have been fortunate to have had the challenge and opportunity to excel in my chosen career.

SM: As a child growing up in Clifton Park, did you dream of ascending to your current leadership role as a bank president? How did you come into this role?

JM: Growing up, I honestly never envisioned a career in accounting or dreamed of working for a bank. I went to Shenendehowa High School where my interest in math was fostered, and then Ithaca College where I majored in accounting. At that point I saw my future working for a big eight accounting firm and becoming partner. I never thought about being in the banking sector. I focused on my initial goal and worked for Coopers & Lybrand where I excelled in the tax accounting sector. I then was recruited to work for a regional bank in the finance department reporting to the CFO. Over the years, he advised me to develop my career in the



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private banking sector as he saw promise with my background and skill-set. I subsequently accepted a position in the private banking and trust sector and years later joined Fleet which became Bank of America to be a part of their private banking division. I was then offered the position as the Bank of America Market President for the Capital District and Hudson Valley region. I have been fortunate enough that Bank of America has continued to challenge me with increased responsibilities and allowed me to remain in the Capital District area.

SM: You are a people/number person (which is a rare 1 in 10,000 people). How easy was the transition from CPA to Market President and head of private banking for Upstate New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware, given your skill-set?

JM: That's a great question. You really hit on the major reason that I switched to the private banking market. When I was a CPA doing tax returns and then working in the tax department, people would comment on the combination of my personality and skill-set. That was when the CFO that I worked for encouraged me to go into the private banking sector. His observation was that my people skills were not being utilized to their fullest extent. I made the switch from finance to private banking and I have not since looked back.

SM: You are in a very demanding position as head of private banking and Market President. Although you work and live locally, you now have a larger territory and greater demands on your professional and personal life. How do you achieve balance?

JM: That is the million-dollar question. I set ground rules up front, which are non-negotiable. I try to set limitations on events, no more than three nights per week. That is enough to ensure that I am doing my job well, while not giving up things that are important to share with my family. I am also fortunate to have flexibility in my travel schedule. I travel two to three days a week and strive to be extremely organized with my calendar. Between my son's travel baseball games and my daughter's gymnastics, we really only have one or two weeks in the year where we can enjoy a family vacation. In fact, we're going to Disney in April...you just have to learn to make time for those things that matter most in your life, like your family, while understanding that there will undoubtedly be times when your work has to come first.

SM: Do you bring your Blackberry on your trips?

JM: I have always stayed connected either by cell phone or Blackberry, but this time I've decided to leave the Blackberry at home. I have a cell phone, and everyone knows how to reach me in case of an emergency. It's crucial to have a very strong leadership and management team that is capable of handling all situations. If you can't go away for one week and leave your executive team to make decisions—then you are not managing well and entrusting your team to be leaders.

SM: What do you look for in an executive?

JM: I look for a leadership and management method that is similar to my own. I believe in a can-do attitude. I look for varied outlooks, skill-sets, and personalities to give me a range of different perspectives on related business matters. I do not want a "yes" person. I want to hear from all my managers—their differing opinions. I want candid feedback.

SM: With such a busy schedule, how do you maintain your health?

JM: I am challenged finding time to exercise—often not being able to maintain a workout schedule of just once or twice per week. Fortunately, I have an excellent metabolism and am able to maintain a healthy weight. I was an athlete growing up, and I still go out and play sports with my children. I have just been blessed with good genes and health.

SM: As a woman in the finance world, you have achieved a great deal. What advice can you give to women attempting to reach their career goals?

JM: I feel that my opportunities have not been any different because I'm a woman. With that said, I think that the challenges are different. My first piece of advice is that you need to surround yourself with other female executives who can share how they're dealing with their challenges. I am very proud to be affiliated with the Female Executive Women's Group in the Capital District (FEW). I've been selected as chairwoman for 2009, which is an exceptional honor. The group gets together on a regular basis, and we share our vision for the future. I get a different kind of value out of this group than many of the other professional organizations that I am affiliated with. You really need to sur-

round yourself by people with whom you can share your thoughts, visions, and issues.

SM: When the kids are sick at school, who gets the phone call to pick them up?

JM: Well, I am first on the calling chain but if I am busy or out of town, my husband will get them. Fortunately, we've only had one phone call in six years from the school nurse—again, lucky with the gene pool.

SM: You have been lucky, but there are surely times when things haven't gone well. When you're down-and-out and the pressure is on, what do you do?

JM: My husband is very supportive. He is first to receive the phone call, when things go wrong. My Executive Assistant, Mary, is number two on my list—she is phenomenal. I think everyone needs a strong team, and Mary is tremendous. She is the epitome of the can-do attitude. Nothing gets her down, and this attitude is essential. So, with my amazing support system and my own positive outlook, I am able to get through even the toughest days.

SM: What one word describes you best?

JM: Perseverance. I don't believe there's anything that can't be accomplished—I will always figure out a way. You need that competitive spirit to make it work, especially in a large complex company with so many resources available. I truly believe the only limitations are the ones that people put on themselves.

