

# Leslie Valencia

Arthur Murray Dance Studio

**Success Magazine: What does success mean to you?**

*Leslie Valencia: I do not measure my success with possessions or bank account balances. I think my greatest success is the relationship I have with my twin daughters, a loving man, and also being able to own a business doing what I love! I am a huge goal setter, and always strive to reach the next thing on the list! Success is living every day to its fullest.*

might sound familiar. Raising children completely single while owning your own business doesn't make you a hero, it makes you crazy! Stress can do terrible things to the body, and in my case I believed it surfaced as breast cancer. I believe that the stress from all of my extreme hours and work contributed to my cancer. I was not running my business, my business was running me. After surviving my bout with breast cancer, I knew that I was given a second chance. I learned that I must live my life with more balance. I learned to stop and breathe once in a while, and do the cha-cha when I'm stressed! My dad used to say "do what you love and the money will follow." And so, I did.

**SM: How did you achieve balance in your life?**

LV: As a business owner in my youth, I did not have enough balance in my life. I worked hard during the day, and most of my clients were scheduled in the evenings. I missed my nights with my baby girls, but I maximized my time that I did get to

spend with them. I've always approached life with humor—there is always something to find funny and to laugh about—most often myself! As Winston Churchill said, "When going through hell... keep on going!"

**SM: You have an incredibly intense schedule between running your business and your philanthropic work. How do you do it?**

LV: Time management. I manage my time down to the second. I do my fundraising in the morning and then work at my business the rest of the day.

**SM: What personal characteristic helps you to accomplish all that you do?**

LV: Passion. I am a breast cancer survivor. I have found that people who have made it through the fire are the stronger for it. I have a passion for whatever I do. As I was lying in my hospital bed on New Year's Eve, I promised myself that next year at this time I would be celebrating life in an evening gown...maybe a pink one! It was at that time that I came up with the idea to start a fundraising event called the Pink Ball to benefit the local organization To Life!

**SM: What is the Pink Ball and how does it link to To Life!?**

LV: To Life! educates women in our community about breast cancer detection, treatments, and related health matters. The Pink Ball is a fundraiser that I began, to help raise money for To Life! so that they can continue to help those with breast cancer in any way that is needed. We have many participating hair salons who donate their time, money, and products to help women who



**SM: How have you learned to live your life to the fullest?**

LV: Faith. Every morning I awake and thank God for the new day, and look forward to going to work. I really love my staff! They are all fun loving people that have similar goals to my own—making Arthur Murray more than just a dance studio. We want it to be a place where people can belong. To live a full life, there is no room for negativity. Only positive thoughts move you forward.

**SM: How did you come to this realization?**

LV: Shortly after my twin daughters were born, I suddenly became a single mother. I had just opened a new Arthur Murray dance studio franchise in Latham. There were bills to pay and diapers to change. I worked tremendous hours while trying to build my business, and still be an effective mom. I must say it was overwhelming. I always felt that when I was at work, I should be with the babies, when I was with the babies, I should be at work...to many women this

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may have lost their hair as a result of chemotherapy. To Life! can also provide education about reconstruction options to women facing a mastectomy. The first year I started the Pink Ball, we had a little over 200 people in attendance. This year, we anticipate almost 400 guests! It is just so exciting to see how this event has grown!

**SM: You seem to have great passion for what you do, why?**

LV: I have been given a second chance at life. Your perspective completely changes when you have been given the opportunity to “do over.” Thanks to Dr. Jeffrey Rockmore at the Plastic Surgery Group, I went through reconstruction. I told him before I went into surgery,

“when life gives you lemons...ask for grapefruits!” I have a new body and a new dance studio in Saratoga Springs. My business has seen a total rebirth. People want to learn to dance. It is not just those couples looking for dance lessons three months before their wedding. We get people who have a love for life and want to have more fun. Dancing is healthy and great exercise. It gives me such joy when a couple comes in saddened or bored with life, and they leave holding hands and communicating. It is bringing people together and helping them find a new zest for life in their relationships.

**SM: What inspires you?**

LV: The word enthusiasm comes from two Latin words combined to mean “God within.” I never want to lose my enthusiasm for life. Life inspires me. I am blessed to be able to dance, teach dancing, and work in the field that I am passionate about. I can change people's lives by giving them a skill that makes them happy, bringing them together with other people, and helping them enjoy their life to the fullest!

**SM: How do you want to be remembered?**

LV: As the girl who made people laugh.

**SM: What will be your legacy?**

LV: That I changed lives through my enthusiasm for life, my humor, and my ability to dance through life in very high heels.



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