
Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

October 2004

“You’re Fired!”: A Success Story

By Kathryn Nelson

“**Y**ou’re fired!” These two words are uttered weekly by infamous American corporate real estate tycoon Donald Trump on *The Apprentice*, the latest of reality cum entertainment television shows exported from the United States. Now a part of American pop culture, Trump’s new trademark phrase adorns t-shirts and is parodied by the likes of Jay Leno and other personalities of late night talk. Despite its newly satirized status, as most people would agree, getting fired is probably one of the worst things that could happen on the job...or is it?

Ann Quon, current Director of Asian Development Bank’s (ADB) Office of External Relations and former CNN Anchor, challenges the notion that getting fired is the end of the world, let alone your career. During the Manila Women’s Forum’s September meeting, Quon shared her personal experiences and insights on the challenges, choices, and unplanned changes that working women face today.

Quon started her career in journalism over 20 years ago in Hong Kong, ascending the ranks of its English newspaper, the *South China Morning Post*. After four years of long hours and hard work as a reporter, she was named Political Editor. Shortly thereafter, in 1984, Quon became the first woman to be promoted to Editor of the *Post*’s Sunday edition. While she was concerned that she rarely saw her husband or young children, it appeared that she had “arrived” and secured her place in the world of journalism...or so she thought. Two years later, the *Post*, facing an extremely competitive media market, needed to cut costs. Management reviewed the budget and

went after senior staff, since they had the highest salaries. Although she had been with the paper for 11 years and was doing a great job, Quon was fired. It was a devastating blow for her both personally and professionally.

A few months later, Quon picked up the pieces and attempted to transition from print media to television. Having only local television news reporting experience from which to draw, she auditioned for a CNN anchor position but failed her first screen test. Determined to become a CNN anchor, she applied to work at a local Hong Kong television station where she was hired as the evening news anchor. In a matter of months, she was spotted by CNN in Hong Kong and was asked to come in for a second screen test. This time, she was ready. In 1998, Quon was hired as a news anchor for the Hong Kong-based news programs and worked for CNN for two years. At the beginning, she remembers, television media, and CNN in particular, was still very male-dominated. Before trailblazer Christiane Amanpour became the first “Million Dollar” female news correspondent, male anchors commanded higher salaries than their female counterparts as CNN was trying to position itself in the business of network news.

Quon thrived at CNN, enjoying the unexpected and varied nature of the work. She learned to think on her feet, dealing with last minute changes just before going live on the air. She recounts a particularly hectic interview during the East Timor referendum on independence. Just seconds before going on air she learned she’d be interviewing the President of Portugal. When she asked the producer for his name, she was told they were not sure what his name was or how to pronounce it, but they’d let her know

before the actual interview. It was chaotic but exhilarating.

In the early 1990s, CNN’s nonstop coverage of the Gulf War led to the rise of the 24-hour news network. For Quon, the “news never stops” live television news cycle was even less forgiving than her daily deadlines at the *Post*, making it even more difficult to balance the pressures of home and work. Like most of the changes in Quon’s career, her departure from CNN to accept the Director’s position at ADB’s Office of External Relations was unplanned. In 1999, her husband had sent an email message of congratulations to an old friend who had just been named a Member of the British Empire (MBE) by the Queen for his work with street children. Her husband innocuously joked in that email that he never saw his wife because of her long hours. That friend

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Next MWF Meeting

When: 6:30 p.m., Monday
October 18, 2004

What: Daryl Newton, a cross-cultural trainer with *In Touch*, will speak about cultural adaptation and Filipino culture in contrast to Western culture, including some concepts from the *In Touch* seminar “Introduction to Living in the Philippines.”

Where: Alison Wescott’s home, 11 Narra Ave., South Forbes Park, Makati City

Bring: A contribution to the potluck dinner.

October meeting: 6:30 p.m.,
Monday November 15, 2004

("You're Fired!"... From page 1) happened to be the head of the Office of External Relations at ADB and he was looking for a deputy.

While the schedule at ADB is somewhat more manageable than at CNN, the work is no less demanding. As Director of ADB's Office of External Relations, Quon faces the complexity of managing communication with the diverse internal and external constituencies of the Bank's 63 member countries, representing 63 different cultures across the globe. Quon compared her experiences at CNN with the last four years at ADB, observing that she left a male-dominated career in journalism to work for a male-dominated organization, where gender equity is still an issue. She noted that it took 35 years for ADB to finally hire its first female Vice President. With the Bank's recent reorganization two years

If Life Was Fair

If life was fair...Every time you exceeded the speed limit...you would be ticketed. Every time you mis-used company time for personal business...you were fired. Every time you lost money for your company...you were docked the same amount in pay. Every time you lied...your nose would grow. Every time you made a mistake...you got called on it. Every time you made a promise to God...HE would hold you to it. Thank God that life is NOT fair sometimes.

ago, Quon is hopeful that change will occur at a more rapid pace.

Looking back, Quon reflected on the challenges, choices, and unplanned changes that shaped her career, spanning three decades and involving transitions from print media to television broadcasting to public relations. Embarrassing at the time, Quon now considers getting fired "a badge of honor" and may have been one of the best things that happened to her. When the door to the Post closed, the door to a new career in television, eventually at CNN, opened. Her experiences underscore the importance of resilience in the face of change, and remind us that, (1) failure and rejection are part of the process, and (2) some transitions aren't choices but are unplanned and unexpected, so learn to expect the unexpected.

Quon concluded her remarks by offering a few words of humble advice: "trust the power of positive thinking, know that there is no magic formula, and don't dwell on problems but focus on the solutions. It's the only way to move your career forward." Following her comments, Quon entertained questions and a lively discussion ensued focused on the difficulty of making the right career choices, balancing motherhood with a career in journalism, and gender inequities in the workplace.

In recent months, news of Donald Trump's latest failure, the bankruptcy of his Atlantic City casino, made headlines. In order to become fiscally solvent again, he fired himself from the CEO position. In response to the media

hype surrounding this decision, "the Donald" asserted that the casino's bankruptcy was not a failure but part of the business cycle and that the change in his position with the casino was necessary to ensure continued growth and success. While his self-firing is somewhat ironic in light of his role on *The Apprentice*, his response reflects the same understanding implicit in Ann Quon's badge of honor: that failure is part of the process and does not negate your past, present, or future career success. □

The Manila Women's Forum

The Manila Women's Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, to talk to women of various cultures, and to share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join. The current officers are **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair, Programs, Treasurer, and Newsletter. **Susan Nishihira**, Programs. **Heather Davenport**, Database. **Beaulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter, Website.

Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter, which is also sent to non-members. A contribution is collected at each monthly meeting: P20 for members, and P40 for non-members. Please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 812-3932, Tel/Fax 813-0168, or at lumbao@mozcom.com for more information about MWF.

Visit our website – a work in progress
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