

## STRIKING A FINE BALANCE: SHIRLEY PORJES

By Jennifer Peng

**F**or 17 years, Shirley Porjes (MBA '86) has carved out a career path within Procter & Gamble, progressing through the ranks of the finance and accounting areas. Currently, she is the associate director of customer business development finance for P&G Canada. She recently took time out of her busy schedule to speak with Jennifer Peng about the choices she's made along the way.

**JP: One of the biggest challenges for today's companies is retaining the best human capital. How has P&G managed to keep you for more than 15 years?**

**SP:** There are three factors. First and foremost, it's the people: they're smart, dedicated and committed. They set a very high standard, and they continually challenge me. Secondly, P&G is a very ethical company, so I feel good about working there. I never have to second-guess myself in terms of whether or not my values line-up with the company I work for. The third reason I've stayed is because the work has been truly challenging. I have a wide variety of roles. And although I've chosen not to move from the Toronto location, I've still been able to build a very rich portfolio of experience.

**JP: You are the mother of three children. How do you manage to juggle motherhood with a senior management role?**

**SP:** I would start by saying, it's not easy. To quote a good friend of mine, "you can have it all – but not all at once." That saying really resonates with me. It tells me that you need to make choices and decide, at certain points in time, what is most important to you. For me, right now, it's my kids. They are still very young, so they are my priority. At the same time, I've chosen to continue to work full time, so I need to deliver against that as well, and I've had to give up some other things – but that's o.k. You really need to have two things to make it work: One is an incredibly supportive husband who shares the work with the family. And the second is a supportive company. If I need to, I can run out and take my child to the doctor. The work still has to get done, but there is flexibility.

**JP: Are you seeing a trend within P&G towards striking a work/life balance?**

**SP:** I would say yes. P&G is very open, and its managers understand the challenges and needs of our people – and not just the women. We have



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just had our first example of a job-sharing arrangement among senior managers. We also have a fairly flexible work schedule for arriving and leaving; and there are work-at-home possibilities, if that's what is needed.

These values mean that more people stay at P&G. We haven't solved all the problems – work/life balance is still a challenge. We are, though, working hard at it.

**JP: P&G is known as one of the world's most responsible companies. What aspects of corporate responsibility are you involved in?**

**SP:** As part of our commitment to social services in our community, we are very involved in the **United Way** campaign. In fact we're the largest contributor to United Way in Toronto for the consumer products industry. There are all sorts of other corporate events to participate in, including United Way's kick-off event called P&G Leaps and Bounds, where one of my kids proudly held the P&G banner for the entire walk. As well, we have lots of in-house, private events that go towards raising both our spirits and awareness of people who are less fortunate than we are.

**JP: What do you do for fun?**

**SP:** Any spare minute I have, I spend with the family – particularly the kids. I really enjoy it, whether it's watching my daughter figure skate or my son play hockey. We try to take good extended holidays – not just a few days here and there – at least three times a year, to get some high-quality family time. My personal passion is golf – I absolutely love it, and in terms of time with my husband, it's a wonderful way to spend a few hours.