



# Feel the BURN

Women are  
buckling  
in a  
professional  
war of  
attrition

By Andrea Kennedy

Senior associate Tracy Steffens starts getting urgent emails from East Coast clients as early as 6 a.m., just around the time her two-year-old daughter raps on the shower door to expel mommy from her morning rinse. Steffens tries to wash her hair at night to save time, but some workdays last until midnight, and when she gets home, she falls into bed. Sometimes sleep comes easy, other nights Steffens lies awake pondering the day's anxieties.

Her husband has been away on work for half of his two-day assignment, and they're way overdue for date night. No matter; there wasn't time to find a sitter anyway. Laundry is piling up, dinner hasn't been planned, the dogs need to go out and a gift was never bought for that kid with the upcoming birthday.





# Diane L. Dusseau

Managing Director, Sacramento\ Rancho Cordova, Wells Fargo Insurance Services

**W**ith more than 20 years experience and impressive leadership qualities backed by a down-to-earth professional philosophy, Diane Dusseau is ideal for her new role as managing director of the Sacramento area offices for Wells Fargo Insurance Services USA, Inc.<sup>1</sup>

Dusseau just relocated back to Northern California in January after 10-plus years in Seattle in executive roles with Wells Fargo and Arthur J. Gallagher & Co. In addition to familiarizing herself with staff and community, Dusseau will consolidate its Sacramento and Rancho Cordova offices into one larger Rancho Cordova location. While this may seem daunting to some, she is a veteran of the business, recently having combined offices in Seattle, with a history of growth through new business, acquisition of talent, and strong client service.

In Sacramento, she's in charge of the brokerage's 225 employees and \$40 million in revenue with nearly \$1 billion in premium in the greater Sacramento region. She says about her style, "Leadership isn't about me and what I can do, but how I can help my team accomplish our goals. I strive to provide a strong foundation for my staff so they can succeed and shine in their roles."

Wells Fargo Insurance Services<sup>2</sup>, based in Chicago, is the world's fifth-largest insurance brokerage and the largest in the Sacramento metro market. They provide deep expertise in property-casualty and workers compensation, employee benefits consulting, surety bonding and personal insurance across a wide range of industries.

"We're improving services and outcomes for clients even in these difficult economic times," notes Dusseau.

"We continue to develop unique products and specialized programs to grow while retaining in-house consultants including benefits helpline, loss control, workers compensation, wellness, and compliance attorneys."

As Dusseau and her family settle back into California, she'll be looking to establish strong business ties in Sacramento and to serve the community by participating on local non-profit boards. "I'm thrilled to be back, and look forward to working with the Sacramento community."



**Insurance  
Services**

<sup>1</sup> Wells Insurance includes Wells Fargo Insurance Services USA, Inc. and Wells Fargo Insurance of West Virginia, Inc.

<sup>2</sup> Ranking includes Wells Fargo Insurance Services USA, Inc., Wells Fargo Insurance, Inc. and Rural Community Insurance Company.

Steffens tries to be a super attorney, super wife and super mom. Some days, she's just super exhausted. To top it off, a lingering social stigma prevents women like Steffens from publicly discussing their struggle for fear of perceived weakness by coworkers and associates (Steffens is not her real name).

Sometimes Steffens catches herself thinking about the additional pressures women face in the business world that men may not even consider, like the daily mental scheduling that includes planning for day care, groceries, laundry, dinner, birthdays and holidays. There's also the unfortunate fact that Steffens clothes are fitting tighter these days because it's been forever since she hit the gym. Will coworkers interpret her fuller figure as a sign of personal failing?

"At the rate that I'm going, it can't continue much longer," says Steffens, now in her early 30s. "I'm at the point that something has to give."

"It's very frustrating for someone like me and other women in my situation," she adds. "All we've ever done is just go, go, go, go. We went straight through college and got advanced degrees. We did everything we could to get where we are, and now we're kind of looking back going, 'Gosh, I wonder if I should have slowed down. I wonder if this was the right decision.' But you almost get to the point where it's like, 'Well, I can't do anything about it now. Am I'm going to flush seven years worth of post-high school education and almost seven years of experience in my profession down the toilet?'"

According to a November *Forbes* blog, many do. Author Larissa Faw says the trend of women "burning out" is reflected in the lack of female business executives in today's workforce. Clearly she hit a nerve; the blog post drew 128 cheers and jeers and more than 14,000 Facebook shares.

The inequity of females in executive positions is not news. Though women have for years been primed for executive seats, a recent census by research specialist Amanda Kimball of the UC Davis Graduate School of Manage-

ment found women hold fewer than 10 percent of the state's top business leadership positions.

Even women who reject the notion that females inherently face additional responsibilities that amplify the stress of professional life will note the existence of more external barriers.

"I think that whole concept of burnout is a bogus concept orchestrated by those who don't want to acknowledge the glass ceiling," says Robin Swanson, communications director for California State Assembly Speaker John A. Pérez and founder of Swanson Communications.

Swanson, who is in her thirties, despises the term "burnout" altogether, calling it bad branding that sets women back 50 years. "I don't think it's a matter of burnout," she says. "It's a matter of overcoming obstacles."

Since her days as a political consultant on Capitol Hill, Swanson has seen what she terms "shutout" — not burnout — keeping women out of high-ranking positions, political panels and even Sacramento's Capitol. She calls it a "troubling national trend."

"I think that women need the same incentives as men to stay in the game: promotions, raises, recognition, maybe a little flexibility," she says.

Additionally, Swanson says workplace role models must go a step above acting as mentors to act also as advocates. "The only way to generate a movement is to not only find an outlet for your own voice to be heard, but to reach out to others who face the same challenges you do," she says.

On a personal level, Swanson says she is dedicated to deflecting burnout within the workplace by speaking out against gender inequities and outside the workplace by adapting her lifestyle, not her work schedule.

For example, she's replaced morning exercise with taking time to pack lunches. She cooks less and eats take-out. Laundry doesn't always get folded, and kids might go to school with bed head. She credits her husband for co-managing the house, her hair product for expediting blow-drying time, and her military upbringing for

"I suspect that women do feel burnout, but they don't put it in those terms. They say 'I'm leaving the workforce to focus on my family,' rather than 'I'm leaving the workforce because this sucks.'"

— Amanda Kimball,  
research specialist,  
UC Davis Graduate  
School of Management





# MARY NORRIS

## Vice President, Wells Fargo SBA Lending Division

It makes perfect sense that Mary Norris would reach the level of success that she's achieved in the Wells Fargo SBA Lending Division. A native Sacramentan who grew up working in a local, family-owned, small business, she has much in common with the clients she helps every day. "I think that's why I have such a passion for what I do," she explains. "I have a firsthand understanding of what it's like to run your own small business and of the work, effort, and blood, sweat, and tears that go into it."

If Mary's professional passion is small-business lending, she couldn't have picked a better employer. The country's No. 1 SBA lender in dollar volume, Wells Fargo enjoys a legacy of service to small businesses that reaches back

some 160 years in America. Today, the bank's commitment remains as strong as ever to work with small-business owners and help them access the capital they need to achieve financial success, retain employees, and add jobs.

Given her innate desire to help small businesses in her hometown succeed, it's no wonder that Mary has been a member of the Wells Fargo team for over 24 years. "I have the greatest job in the world," she says, "because I get to go out every day and meet so many small-business owners, so many great people, and work with them to help them realize their life's dreams."

Mary and her husband, Darrell, have two children, Rachel (21) and Nick (18), and she remains actively involved with the schools her children attended,

serving as President of the Loyola Guild at Jesuit High School and as a member of the Board of Trustees at St. Francis High School. Mary is also actively involved with Commercial Real Estate Women (CREW), an organization dedicated to furthering the success and influence of women in all facets of the commercial real estate industry. Last month, CREW honored Mary with its annual Woman of Impact Award, a fitting tribute to someone whose professional and civic work has touched the lives of many.



**WELLS  
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the strength to rise with a 5:30 a.m. alarm. And if you send her an email past 10 p.m., don't expect a response till morning. She's in bed.

Sometimes things just don't get done, but for Swanson that's okay.

"I've learned not to let the perfect be the enemy of the good," Swanson says. "You figure out what's important, and you do the best you can."

Swanson has two stepchildren and is expecting her first baby in May. She doesn't plan on scaling back. While she appears to have struck the balance that scores of other professional women are seeking, it isn't easy and some women struggle more than others.

"There are certain obstacles you will never be able to get over," says Steffens, who prefers homemade meals even when acting as a single parent while her husband is away. "It's not humanly possible to work [as much as you think you need to], be there for your kids as much as you want to be there for them, spend time with your significant other and spend time with your social life."

Steffens' do-it-all mentality mirrors that of many working women aspiring to meet, if not supersede, perceived expectations in and out of the workplace.

Psychologist Dr. Robin Zaslo of The Anxiety Treatment Center of Sacramento says the burnout felt by women like Steffens is real and widespread among her demographic.

"We are seeing a generation where children are being raised in schools where there are high standards," she says. "They develop very perfectionist behaviors and feel they have to be perfect. If they don't have an education and have a family and are at the top of their field, they feel like in some way they're not achieving their greater good."

Barbara Kelley, journalism director at Santa Clara University and co-author of "Undecided: How to Ditch the Endless Quest for Perfect and Find the Career — and Life — That's Right for You," has observed firsthand collegiate women who reached out to professors eager to help them succeed and who cried at the thought of a B.

Now in the workforce, these ambitious go-getters may feel like they're spinning their wheels on the road to self-actualization, in what Kelley calls the enduring "Mad Men" workplace. Women may face frustrations while finding their footing in a nascent female professional paradigm, lacking accessible female executive role models, detached from the good ol' boys club or aggravated at working the same jobs as men for less pay.

"You're thrown into (the workforce), and it often isn't what it's cracked up to be or what you expected," Kelley says. "All of a sudden, it just doesn't look that good."

Kelley, like Swanson, also believes the term "burnout" misses the mark. Rather, she suggests overachieving females ready to take on the world are getting slapped in the face by reality — a reality of great, unrealistic expectations that they have to do it all.

Steffens, for example, knew she signed up for an inherently demanding job. The trait even attracted her. At first.

"It's a challenging profession, and for a long time that motivated me," she says. "But since I've had my daughter, it's been different. My priorities switched."

Now, an internal tussle between attorney and mommy instead leads to depression and fatigue.

"A lot of people in my profession feel they can't be 100 percent at both," she says. "What ends up happening is you feel that you're subpar at both. I think that's really a struggle, particularly for people like myself who are very much type-A personalities, who want to be the best at everything they do."

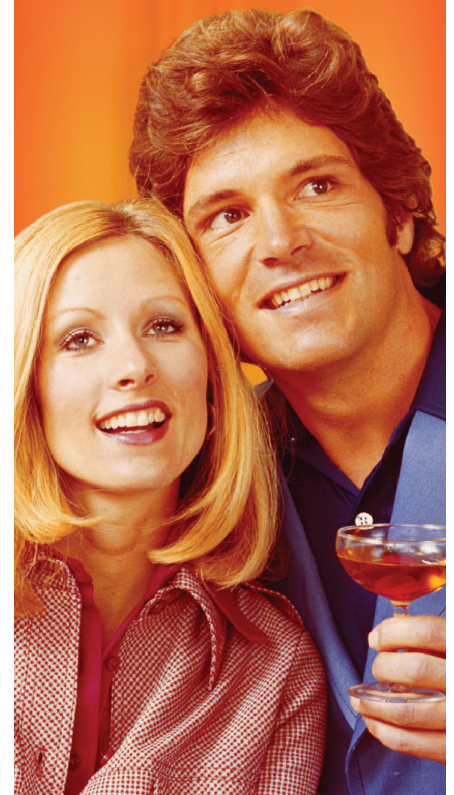
Local psychologist Dr. Trudy Helmlinger says many women — with and without children or spouses — are hardwired for burnout. These nurturers typically over-give and put others' needs before their own, sacrificing self-care and promoting their own exhaustion.

"They have a mindset that it's a catastrophe if they are selfish," Helmlinger says. "It's a catastrophe if they

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# Jeanette Towne

*Transforming business communications through the power of collaboration*

Generally, companies seeking to implement the latest advances in technology into their business models understand that such a luxury only comes at a steep price. But what if there was a solution available that offered these game-changing advances while affording significant savings at the same time? This is precisely what the team at Synectic Technologies, specialists in voice, data, wireless, and Internet communications, delivers to their clients every day.

"The first thing we do for our clients," explains Synectic President and CEO, Jeanette Towne, "is to take a holistic look at their business, conduct a complete investigation. We find out where they're bleeding, where they're not communicating, and where they're spending too much money." The technologists at Synectic then make recommendations for converting every platform of the client's business over to the latest communications advances, all in easy-to-understand terms. These proposed changes consistently result in significant savings

— hundreds, and often thousands, of dollars monthly — for Synectic clients.

This is undoubtedly why Synectic Technologies has recently enjoyed unprecedented growth; "38%, year over year, for the past four years," according to Towne, "in an economy in which many other businesses, unfortunately, aren't doing so well." That kind of exceptional success also landed Synectic on the Sacramento Business Journal's Top 25 Fastest-Growing Businesses list last year. The No. 1 provider of Voice over IP technology in the Northern California region, Synectic was also named Avaya SME Business Partner of the Year for 2011. The business world knows Avaya as a global provider of collaborative communications systems, software, and services, best-of-class tools that the Synectic team brings into the reach of their clients.

In addition to providing the Avaya products, Synectic Technologies offers a comprehensive list of services within the realm of communications, including carrier services

via AT&T, XO Communications, and TelePacific Communications; C-7 low-voltage contracting services to install fiber optic and voice/data cabling; and a 24/7 technical contact center located at their headquarters in Northern California, offering remote monitoring of Avaya solutions, providing their clients with unparalleled support. "We're a one-stop shop," explains Towne. "We shop your rate, we do your hardware, your software, your Internet, your telephone lines, and we save you money." Over 15,000 satisfied Synectic customers in the Northern California region would most certainly concur.



don't care more about other people than themselves."

Steffens knows the feeling. She carries an 80-percent work load at her firm — still at least 40-hour weeks — and sacrifices every ounce of "me time" to care for her daughter, manage the household and support family and friends. She can't help but sneer at the sight of holiday cards touting moms with time to volunteer at school, go on play dates and do yoga five days a week.

At the same time, however, Steffens realizes that by not allowing herself "me time" she prompts the vicious cycle that delays her own recovery from burnout and depression. She just doesn't have the energy to do anything about it.

"You're so exhausted with work and family and everything that you don't make time for yourself," Steffens says. "You don't give yourself those kind of releases, whether it's with friends or exercise or whatever it is to help you pull out of it."

Even at work, she considers bathroom breaks casualties of time. In fact, research from the Captivate Network shows that women are 35 percent less likely to take relaxation breaks during the day than men, just the type of overwork that could lead women to burn out faster.

Steffens says she's often considered scaling back from her career. Many other women simply dismiss themselves from professional work. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that as of December 2011, women were almost four times as likely to have removed themselves from the labor force claiming "family responsibilities."

Kimball from the UC Davis study also suggests the prevalence of burnout causing women to exit the workplace could be higher than people realize, considering the natural tendency to cast the departure in a positive light to avoid the stigma

"I've learned not to let the perfect be the enemy of the good."

— Robin Swanson,  
communications director,  
office of California State Assembly  
Speaker John A. Pérez,  
and founder,  
Swanson Communications

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associated with being unhappy — or worse, the perception of failure.

“I suspect that women do feel burnout, but they don’t put it in those terms,” she says. “They say ‘I’m leaving the workforce to focus on my family,’ rather than ‘I’m leaving the workforce because this sucks.’”

Shannon Kelley, co-author of “Undecided,” also says that in families who desire a stay-at-home parent, women are more likely to step down because they commonly earn less income than their husbands. It’s tough to ignore, too, that women bare the biological and cultural expectations of head caretaker.

Whether or not they are married or a mother, women may also experience higher rates of dissatisfaction and burnout from their jobs because they attach different expectations to their careers. Men, still saddled under the gender stereotype of breadwinner — which no doubt contains a distinct batch of pressures — seem to be more

concerned than women with the size of their paycheck, says Kelley. Women place more emphasis on emotional returns.

“For women,” she says, “[work is] supposed to be meaningful — your passion, important to society — and you’re supposed to be great at it.”

Barbara Kelley adds, “It’s easier to avoid all the dissatisfaction that women face when your purpose is so clear.”

However, meaningful work can also come at a cost. Twenty seven year old Veronica Delgado, owner of local arts communications firm Vera Icon PR, boasts that she has at least 15 different projects going on at all times.

With clients like Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission, Sacramento’s Arts and Business Council, and myriad artists, Delgado says, “There’s an abyss of needs I have to fill.”

But when preparing for a 31-day arts event, Delgado didn’t give herself a sin-

gle day off for four months. After the project’s launch, her body revolted, and a planned vacation was instead spent nursing her body back from exhaustion.

“I just had a blackout,” she says. “My brain stopped working.”

If accomplished women like Stefens and Delgado burnout of the workforce, local businesses will continue to lose valuable talent.

Psychologist Zaslo recommends women actively seek balance in their lives, speak up if they feel overwhelmed or experience family stressors, and not be afraid to vocalize their successes. Employers can also help by creating a flexible work environment.

“Companies can reach out to people to promote policies to help employees find a good work/life balance before burnout ever happens,” Kimball says. “That way, everybody wins.” ■



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