



*Giselle Rufer: how to design a creative life*

## On My Watch

For women in business, one of the great challenges is how to juggle family and profession in an affirmative manner. Giselle Rufer, founder and CEO of Delance Watches, looks back at her life weaving together the workplace, school and home.

**A**t the age of four, I dreamt of becoming what I had termed a cowbee, which represented the female version of the cowboy. It seemed like such an exciting life ahead. Later, having read the lives of the saints, I decided to become a saint. But faced with such a vast challenge, I ultimately became a tomboy and was prepared to stand up and fight for each and every cause. When a teacher nicknamed me “Don Quichotte” I pertly responded, no, Madam, I am Doña Quichotte. Later on, I discovered my artist’s name: Giselle Delance (editor’s note: Delance means “of the lance”). I carefully stored it away for the future – if I were an artist, I could live all the lives I wanted!

At the age of 15, I had to work in my mother’s shop, where I did an apprenticeship in commerce. I remained her assistant up until the age of 22, at which time I married. This familial professional environment taught me an enormous number of things, in particular the ability to work twelve hours a day and still keep a smile on my face.

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### Back to school

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My husband and I settled in Lausanne. I realized, though, that with my diploma in commerce, I would never be able to find a job that was as interesting as working in my mother’s firm. Since childhood, as the eldest of five children and as the daughter of a firm-owner, I had gotten into the habit of working hard, of making decisions and being responsible.

So once I was married, I decided to return to school and by the age of 26 had received the Swiss equivalent of a scientific high-school diploma. In 1969 and 1971 my two children were born. I did an arts apprenticeship that allowed me to work until the age of 36 as a teacher assistant at the university and a teacher of art in secondary schools. There was lots of activity, lots of part-time work, lots of voluntary work, but none of it really satisfied me. It was all very atomized, and I could not make out a common goal.

So I decided to do some sort of training that would allow me to work full-time. At 36, I launched into a course of studies at the engineering school in Biel. I emerged at the age of 40 with a solid diploma to my name and the only woman in that class, an “engineeress” in business IT.

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### In the system

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I was quickly hired as an engineer by a large company, but soon noticed that I was being treated more as a woman and less as an engineer. I was always the one chosen to organize meetings, write up the protocols and perform the menial tasks usually relegated to the secretaries. I had no desire to prove my competencies in this way, so I went on the search for another job.

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Quite by accident, I came across an ad for someone creative, enterprising, attracted by challenge and capable of thinking differently. That tickled my fancy. “I am that person,” I told them, “even if you happen to be looking for a man.”

When they asked me why I thought I could meet the challenge even though I had no experience as a sales manageress, I answered something along the following lines: These watches are targeted towards children and I am a mother, I know what mothers like. I am surrounded by children, and I know how to attract children. I have taught, and I know what teachers need to feel good about being teachers. I have sold watches, and I know how to motivate sales people to sell well. All of this is the result of 25 years of work. What I do not know, I will learn very quickly.

They chose me to launch the Flik Flak watches, and it was a great success. I must admit that I often had to work twelve-hour days, seven days a week, but it was truly exciting and I learned all about the distribution process in the watch business.

But while traveling throughout the world wearing a Flik Flak on my wrist, I realized that I did not really like the existing watches for women. Something new had to be created, and I was going to be the person doing it.

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### Taking wings

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From that moment on, I became impassioned with the meaning of time: I realized that time meant life. My desire to create a timepiece symbolic of both the passage of time and eternity was born at that very moment. Three years after working at Flik Flak, I had the good luck to be named Product Manageress at Omega.

It was an entirely different job, but I was well equipped to carry it out. I was an artiste, and engineer and a saleswoman, all the qualities one might need. I finally convinced the board to create a watch for women. Unfortunately, three years later the CEO changed and that was the final curtain for the women’s watch. And the tagline was that if women all wanted to go to

work, well they just had to adjust to a man’s world. But I had to remain true to my own ideals, so I left Omega and founded Delance, where I was finally able to create a watch that was a symbol for women’s time, women’s talent, women’s values and women’s dreams.

My enterprise allowed me to discover who I am, and although I suspected that I was capable of doing all I do, I could never be sure until I had accomplished it. I travel worldwide all alone, from exhibition to conference. On occasion I have spoken in front of a thousand people, in a foreign language; the television, radio and press come to ask me for comments in French, German and English. What a life! So much joy, and so much toil.

I just received the “Entrepreneur of the Year 2008” award. It is a wonderful recognition that moves me profoundly and will also provide me with a great deal of publicity. Nevertheless, it is important to keep one’s feet on the ground, so I am continuing to work at full steam.

Looking back, I note that I have stepped in and out of professional life several times. To each person, woman or man, I would like to share this: The most important thing is to try to be all you can be. Find your talent and develop it, learn without any moderation. Live 100 percent, love yourself, and above all laugh, laugh, laugh ... Life goes by very quickly, so do not waste a second. Take my word for it, the word of a watchmaker. ■



Giselle Rufer

#### Giselle Rufer will be speaking at the following events

**March 1, 9.45 a.m.–4.45 p.m.**

SVEB-Frauentagung “Wieder-ein-stieg”  
forum czf, Fabrikstrasse 12, Berne  
[www.alice.ch/frauentagung](http://www.alice.ch/frauentagung)

**March 6, 8 p.m.**

“Destins de femmes: plusieurs vies en une”  
Sociét’hall, Moutier  
[www.upjurasienne.ch/moutier](http://www.upjurasienne.ch/moutier)

**March 27**

„Vom Businessplan zum Unternehmen”  
ETH, Zurich  
[www.btools.ch](http://www.btools.ch)

**April 24, 8.30 p.m.**

“Femme et Argent”  
F-information, Geneva  
[www.f-information.org](http://www.f-information.org)

**May 8, 8 p.m.**

“Une carrière de femme: Giselle Rufer”  
Espace femmes, Fribourg  
[www.espacefemmes.org](http://www.espacefemmes.org)

**March 11, 6.30 p.m.–8 p.m.**

«Du rêve à la réalité»  
Centre de formation Première Impression, Geneva  
[www.premiere-impresion.com](http://www.premiere-impresion.com)