

# Preparing Oneself Professionally and Loving One's Work

*Eva Beattab*

*Eva Beattab — a mother and a grandmother — works at Strathmore University as the Registrar of Admissions. In her work she deals with over 2000 students per year. She first got to know about St Josemaría when she joined Kianda College in 1964 as one of the first Kenyan women to be trained as a professional secretary.*

## 1. PREPARING ONESELF PROFESSIONALLY

Most of us spend the greater part of the day doing one job or another and therefore it is important to prepare ourselves professionally in whatever work we wish to do in life. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá in a chapter entitled 'Study' in *The Way*, in point 332 has given very good advice in this area. He wrote: "There is no excuse for those who could be scholars and are not".

But it is not necessary for everyone to be a scholar. On the other hand everyone must be trained, competent in his professional work, work with prestige among his colleagues, and be known for his integrity and for his learning or skill. In the same chapter referred to above, in *The Way*, 334, Blessed Josemaría states that "Study — any professional development — is a serious obligation for us".

In the early 1960s, the 'wind of change' was blowing through Africa, bringing independence, self-government and opening vast opportunities. Like most young people, I was looking forward to training in a career and joining the working ranks to help build Kenya. This is what motivated me to choose a teaching career in the first place.

With the proper preparation in our specific careers we will be able to work with human perfection. During the period I have referred to above, the public and the private sectors were keen to sponsor young African people for courses of their choice in order to fill the posts left by the departing non-Kenyans. I

dropped the teaching course and joined Kianda College to do a one-year secretarial course. I made good use of the sponsorship and worked hard.

Again, with regard to study Blessed Josemaría emphasized the need to use time intensely. He wrote: “You have a warhorse called study. You resolve a thousand times to make good use of your time, yet you are distracted by the merest thing. Sometimes you get annoyed at yourself, because of your lack of willpower”<sup>1</sup>. This message helps me to guide our students in making a study schedule and sticking to it. For example, Beatrice was an ‘A’ student but could not balance her social and academic life. She spent a lot of time with her friends and her grades in Certified Public Accountants (CPA) course were dropping further down at the end of every month. We both drew up a timetable for her studies. At the beginning it was difficult for her to lessen the time she dedicated to her social activities. However, she eventually managed and concentrated more in her studies. After two years she went to university for a Bachelor of Commerce degree. By the time she finished her degree course, she had already obtained her CPA certificate, having won two Kenya Accountants and Secretaries National Examination Board’s (KASNEB) prizes. She is now a senior auditor with KPMG Peat Marwick. Another case I remember is that of Rose. Rose is a mother of five and took a secretarial course in the late 1980s in Kianda College. She was not aware that she could continue having children while she followed her course. When she told me of her dilemma, I explained to her the situation and in fact she had her last three children (one is a set of twins) while she was pursuing her course which she finished with fantastic grades. Blessed Josemaría was keen to teach that each person is an individual and should be helped to achieve his/her potential in his/her different circumstances by those in authority.

With my husband’s moral support, I was able to continue improving my secretarial skills and later on was able to pursue other courses in IT and management. It was in Kianda College where I learned that there is a better and higher aim in studying beyond acquiring skills. About two years ago, I decided to pursue a diploma course for the National Examination Board in Supervision and Management (City and Guilds, London) that was being offered in Strathmore. One of my juniors also wanted to do the same course. I felt challenged to have to sit with my junior doing the same course and my boss was not sure I would feel comfortable with the situation. The knowledge and the experience we both gained have strengthened our work relationship. I am able to delegate a lot of work to this lady, gaining time to concentrate on more important jobs. Her morale has been boosted and she feels more motivated. Little by little, she is

<sup>1</sup> *Furrow*, 523.

grasping the fact that we have to do our work well for supernatural reasons, a spirit emphasized by Blessed Josemaría. He wrote in *The Way*, 340: “Study. Study in earnest. If you are to be salt and light, you need knowledge, capability”.

## 2. LOVING ONE’S WORK

I got my first job in 1965 and at that time my main objective was to supplement my husband’s salary so that we could have a comfortable family life. However, I later appreciated the fact that I could serve God by serving people because work is a service and it is through work that we encounter a new light and new vision to enrich our Christian life. Blessed Josemaría in a chapter entitled ‘Working for God’, in *Friends of God*, 61 wrote: “Professional work, whatever it is, becomes a lamp to enlighten your colleagues and friends”.

Whatever work we do, should then be done well and with intensity. I have at the moment five jobs — as a wife, a mother, a daughter-in-law, a grandmother and as the Registrar of Admissions in Strathmore College. I, like most people, have the tendency to be lenient with myself and sometimes worry about my health and about getting enough rest. I usually change activities when I am overtired. After a hard day’s work in the office, it is refreshing to sit down at the evening meal with my family and discuss the things that happened to each of us during the day. Blessed Josemaría was very fond of family get-togethers. He wrote in *The Forge*, 702: “Professional work — and the work of a housewife is one of the greatest of professions — is a witness to the worth of the human creature. It provides a chance to develop one’s own personality; it creates a bond of union with others; it constitutes a fund of resources; it is a way of helping in the improvement of the society we live in, and of promoting the progress of the whole human race [...]” My close relationship with my mother-in-law came about almost accidentally. In 1981, I was very ill and for six months I could hardly move. My mother-in-law nursed me and gave me such tender care that I will never forget it. Little did I know then that I would be able to pay her back here on earth. She had a stroke 16 years ago and I have lived with her for the last six years. Her condition gradually deteriorates but it has given me great pleasure to be able to play my part in looking after her.

No doubt we should love the work that we do. If we like it, we will do it well with human perfection, in an exemplary manner. In order to work well we must consider what we do and how we do it. It is not enough that we do good things. We have to do them perfectly, finishing off each task well, down to the last detail — that final touch that turns good work into a work of art. As a member of the Management Board, I am sometimes requested to prepare Admissions

reports for board meetings. I have to conduct in-depth research, in addition to collecting statistics, so that I am able to comprehensively answer any queries that may arise at the board meeting. Such a report could be in the form of an Annual Report which would involve collecting data from the different schools regarding student enrolment and compiling information on activities in the course of the year, including pressing cuttings. Sometimes it means comparing information from rival colleges to plan and prepare for the following year. I need to make a real effort to work intensely and maintain an enthusiasm to finish all tasks with the same eagerness with which I began them, rather than abandoning them. To show that we love our work, we should finish off things and take care of little things and details. Little things are discovered by our sensitivity, our ingenuity, our enthusiasm and our effort to love what we do as a service to others on every occasion. When conducting interviews for new students I find that some of them become very nervous and I have to reassure them so that they settle down and perform better in their entrance examinations. The tutorial system that is used in Strathmore College has enabled me to get to know some students intimately and at times the friendships created have led to long-lasting family friends.

In order to do a job well, we should be very well organised and also be able to prioritise our activities. A typical day in Strathmore could start with an early morning meeting to review the previous day's activities and to set new ones and deadlines. In an interview which Blessed Josemaría had with a journalist, *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer*, 88 he said: "When there are lots of things to do you have to establish priorities, to get organised. This applies for both home activities and office work. A homemaker should not feel that her job is less important than that, for example, of a teacher. She, too, has to prioritise her tasks and put details in what she does just like a person working in an office." Highlighting this point Blessed Josemaría said in *Conversations*, 89: "In these matters it is easy to be misled by mere numbers and think that the work of a teacher, who sees hundreds of people pass through his classes, or that of a writer who reaches thousands of readers, is more valuable. That is all very well, but how many people are really formed by that teacher or writer? A mother has three, five, ten or more children in her care and she can make of them a true work of art, a marvel of education, of balance and understanding, a model of the Christian way of life. She can teach them to be happy and make themselves really useful to thousands around them".

Our children will be the politicians, economists, doctors, teachers, etc., who will play an important role in structuring the destiny of their nation. Women should be prepared to work in public life whether at the community, social, civic, political or professional level. Blessed Josemaría was once asked what he considered the specific tasks of women in public life and his answer was that the pres-

ence of women in the whole range of social life is a logical and entirely positive phenomenon. However, I have found that a woman has to work harder than her male counterpart to equip herself for the challenges in her professional life and if she wants to play an active role in public affairs she has an obligation to prepare herself adequately, so that the part she plays in the life of the community can be responsible and positive. I take it as a challenge I sometimes have to work harder to prove my worth. This could be in work output or gathering information to justify a point.

If we want to be happy in life and to reach genuine self-fulfillment, in whatever field, we should prepare ourselves very well professionally. Once we decide on the area in which we want to work, we dedicate ourselves to it passionately (and with a lot of precision).