



Newsletter

10 years of balancing, 1999-2009

Be Balanced* is now 10 years old and has recently revised their website. This is a good opportunity to talk to owner Elise Victoire-Van Doorne about ambitions old and new. In the beginning, *Be Balanced* was about supporting a coaching style of management. Now it's increasingly about authentic leadership. Elise's approach is focused on reflection and setting a course. Uncertain times are exactly the right time to stop and think to achieve a new balance. Elise's approach helps: *Be Balanced invites you to reflect on development!



How did you start?

Choosing Be Balanced

I previously worked in health care, as a physiotherapist and manual therapist. After a few years of work experience, I started studying again. In 1996 I completed my studies in *social and organisational psychology*. My first client was *Shell*, where I started as an HRM consultant and worked for 12 years. My company was called *Buro Balans* at the time. I quickly changed the name to *Be Balanced*, due to its international character.

The name *Be Balanced* is about the many choices people make to stay balanced and be able to keep going. Whatever your work, you are continually confronted with dilemmas that are about seeking a new balance. You are continually weighing short- and long-term results, your feelings and thoughts, your home and work situation, your ambitions and the company's interests - among many other examples I could mention.

Why are businesses seeking balance?

Coaching dilemmas

The need for a more coaching style of leadership arose in many companies. Managers learned to listen better to their employees. They were seeking a balance, for example, between more direct, solution-focused steering and developing innovative solutions in consultation; between guiding and inspiring and supporting. Creating support and lasting acceptance became important, as did developing communication skills.

In addition to a number of leadership programmes, I developed a special workshop on *work and life balance*. This is often a theme in guiding managers: if I say yes to that, it implies a 'no' to other things. A career development, for example, can result in stress despite promotions, prestige and intellectual challenges. Not every manager finds it easy to adjust to the demands of upper management. Sometimes this requires concessions that do not correspond to one's own values or fit the personal situation. If you know your values, you can set limits earlier. This is extremely difficult. It is still important to make choices and not to overstretch yourself.

This also applies to an increasing number of women at the top: to what extent can they maintain and use their own identity and specific feminine qualities? Women often appear to have more drive to cooperate to give everyone a chance. These are valuable competences that businesses are appreciating increasingly. However, these changes create new dilemmas: as the sole woman in a group of men, how do you avoid going along with the group culture or stereotypes: 'mother', 'butch', 'seductress'... and how do women retain the courage and energy to persist and make concessions consciously?

**Why do
managers
seek balance?**

Personal and business goals

Managers are constantly wondering whether they can stay true to their core values and talents and to what extent they must adjust to peer pressure. It is ultimately about credibility; being able to look in the mirror and say 'I acted according to my conscience!' After all, the higher the position, the more visible they are to the organisation and the greater the impact of their values and behaviour. For senior managers, how to maintain a bond with other layers of the organisation is an important issue.

Furthermore, in the past ten years, the emphasis has shifted from *coaching* leadership to *authentic* leadership. It is important to ask yourself about your personal history and how it relates to the organisation you are working in; do you fit the organisation and what are your obstacles? The ability to be yourself in a rapidly changing complex world has become more important. Achieving personal ambitions can support the development of company interests. Here, too, it is about finding the balance between your own degree of autonomy and engagement with others.

**How does
Be Balanced
support managers
and teams in
practice?**

Reflecting in teams

I provide support for teams (including management teams) with these dilemmas by means of workshops and training sessions. Incidentally, guidance is not just for managers but for professionals as well. Some dilemmas in the workplace can only be solved if management takes responsibility and sees where and how its role is significant. That is why I often devote attention to managers separately through coaching.

Reflection and developing self-awareness are at the core of my approach. After all, asking yourself questions about who you are and thinking about your - implicit - convictions, habits and patterns enables you to reconsider and arrive at a new balance. It is about consciously *slowing down* to make balanced decisions from calm and attention. My role, of course, is to make this open to discussion *together*, in mutual respect. This requires a certain vulnerability; leaving your own questions and doubts undiscussed in fact creates an obstacle to learning. It proves to be a sign of strength if you can let go of that. Authentic leaders discuss their mistakes and learn from them.

In teams, it is often about creating transparency, openness and development. Tensions in co-operation between people are dissolved when people feel secure; people will then value each other's input and influence and every issue can be resolved. Technical or intellectual solutions are virtually never the focus here, being open to each other's differences and appreciating them all the more so. This requires self-knowledge and interest in others. I prefer to work with teams to ensure team learning. The cooperation that arises from this, results in more effective teams that have better meetings (including virtual ones), share more and learn more by discussing mistakes.

What are the advantages of your approach?

Hard results

Every day, I notice that working with existing teams and departments ultimately creates togetherness and unity. Putting limiting factors on the table that are truly relevant means that people can go on, and want to, often with renewed energy. Obviously it is always about discussing subjects related directly or indirectly to work. It is not about navel-gazing but the link between your own personal development and the work goals you want to achieve.

I often hear managers say: 'Elise, we don't want any soft stuff. No soft workshops!' I always ask what that means: what is soft? The answer I always get is something like: 'that *sensitive stuff*'. Later, when the workshop is over, we often laugh about it. What is considered soft is often quite tough and in fact exciting, scary and difficult. It requires you to show yourself and indicate where your needs are; to put your blind spot up for discussion, what you have trouble with and what you find difficult. There are many expectations for employees such as self-guidance and self-development, assuming that these individual qualifications reinforce the core values of the business. This approach is not soft – it's hard, but with a heart. It ultimately contributes to efficiency and effectiveness, i.e., to *hard* results!

In what way does Be Balanced's working method reflect your personal experience?

Connection between reason, feeling and body

My scientific and medical education has taught me above all to reason and to use my knowledge and experience in my work. I am also making more and more use of my intuition and feel-

ing and use *my own body language* as a touchstone. When it is difficult to give a quick, reasoned answer, I consciously create silence to get in touch with my inner guideline. I have also had to learn to deal with my habitual patterns and convictions that stand in the way of my further development. But now I also know that I cannot avoid these painful areas. If I am able to accept them and embrace them with a certain gentleness, I can go on; I will be unbalanced less quickly and remain able to continue working positively on my goals.

My personal history recurs in my working method as a coach and process guide: I have learned to stand up for myself and I know the atmosphere of competition in a scientific context. By travelling and living in new countries, I have also learned to connect where there was no connection before. You develop a feeling for it. In teams or organisations where there is competition and conflicts, where personal interests are placed above group interests, I look for bonds to bring new life to cooperation and communication. To put it another way, I facilitate renewed reciprocal contact. My role as a coach and process guide is that of *devil's advocate* or *mirrorer*, or *protector and reassurer*. It is alternately serious and humorous. I always work with the intention of supporting others in their own development, not to be right or to know better.

**How will
Be Balanced
continue?**

New steps towards the future

For me and others, 2009 has been a year of reconsideration: where am I now and where do I want to go with *Be Balanced*?

In recent years I have mainly worked for international businesses, in English. In 2009, I made a serious move towards Dutch non-profit organisations and government. Here, too, *Be Balanced* supports managers in making a shared vision and organisational goals clear; answering questions about cooperation, inspiration and personal and organisational goals. This is also about slowing down, reflection and attention to each other. I find it enriching to be able to work with these companies, and in my native language, no less.

All my projects are on location at companies. I am increasingly being asked after training sessions and workshops to continue at an individual level. I have literally created space in my range of services for coaching, intervision and supervision. I have set up a nice, peaceful work area for managers who wish to get away from their workspace.

In the early years of *Be Balanced*, I mostly worked independently and alone. In the next few years, I will continue to work together with Anja van Servellen and Mariet van Hoogevest of *Servest training & coaching* (see <http://www.servest.nl>). There are new workshops and training sessions scheduled, developed together with independent colleagues. Further professionalisation and growth are priorities for *Be Balanced* and exchanges and cooperation with colleagues are important in this. My aim with these is to contribute to better social interaction in the workplace and in society.



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To maintain my own balance, I will continue to look around myself for inspiration. I consult my personal supervisor and participate in a supervisor group. I like dancing, music and theatre and exercise in my spare time. My children are my greatest mirror and my best coach. I try to enjoy brilliant people and moments that bring me back into balance again every time.

Finally, to emphasise my further professionalisation, I have a refreshed house style and website after 10 years, so that everyone can find information on *Be Balanced*.

Visit <http://www.be-balanced.com>

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