

A Day in the Life of... Sonja Belle

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sleep family
friends work
exercise me
relax home



Being a wife, a step-mother of two, an occupational therapist, a company owner and managing director, an elite athlete, a high performance manager of junior athletes and a university tutor doesn't leave Sonja Belle much time to twiddle her thumbs.

But then, Sonja's not the kind of person to twiddle her thumbs even if she had the time. Sonja's pace is fast, yet calm and organised. It has to be. As the saying goes, if you want something done, give it to the busiest person!

Perhaps that's why, despite her already busy schedule, Sonja was approached to be North Cottesloe Surf Life Saving Club's high performance manager – yet another role in her everyday juggling act.

Sonja admits she's a perfectionist and is her own worst enemy. She won't do things by halves and is yet to learn to say no!

Perth VITA caught up with Sonja on a typical working day.

6.15am: Sonja feeds the dog and eats breakfast while catching some of the TODAY show. And that's the extent of her television viewing.

7am: Sonja is generally at her desk before 7am for some solid work during what she finds is the most productive period of her day. She runs her business, Occupational Fitness Solutions, from both her home office and from MTM Physiotherapy in Leederville, where she has consulting rooms. Here she works alongside her husband, Mike, who is a physiotherapist and co-director.

8.25am: If it's one of the two mornings a week that Sonja tutors, she rushes off to Bentley to teach occupational safety and ergonomics to Curtin University occupational therapy students for two hours.



Managing her health consulting business involves Sonja coordinating subcontracted physiotherapists, occupational therapists, psychologists, occupational safety and health consultants, employment consultants, dieticians and fitness trainers. She also consults as an occupational therapist, assessing and writing reports for up to three clients each week. Other tasks include tender writing, strategic planning and quality assurance duties.

1pm: Lunch is generally a 15 to 20-minute break for Sonja who, if at home, “throws something together” before returning to her desk or running out to do some errands. Quite often it’s lunch on the run.

In recent months, Sonja has been coordinating trades people working on consulting rooms for two health business. She tries to do the majority of this work from her mobile while driving between appointments.

Since October 2005, Sonja has been spending an average of 10 hours a week in her role as high performance manager at North Cottesloe SLSC. Her position involves coordinating training, competitions, trips and functions for the junior high performance squad. Most of her working days are interspersed with phone calls from the club, Surf Life Saving WA, athletes, parents or coaches.

Then there’s her own training to fit in. Sonja is a successful beach sprinter and has numerous national and world medals to her name. But with success comes training, travel, competitions and, inevitably, a bit of physical exhaustion. So far this year, a few of Sonja’s working weeks have been crammed into less than five days to allow for regular trips east for competitions. However the hard work has been worth it, with Sonja winning two medals at the World Surf Life Saving Championships in Victoria in February and two medals in the Australian Surf Life Saving Championships in Queensland in March.

3.45pm: Sonja wraps up her day around this time and heads off to training, which can include track sprinting, beach sprinting, weights, recovery or yoga. While most of her sessions are in the afternoon, she also does some mornings and will often try to get to the gym during the day between appointments. She also has regular weekend competitions. Her track session at Perry Lakes is often followed by a beach session at North Cottesloe, by which time it’s 7pm.

7pm: Chances are when Sonja finishes training she may have a meeting at the surf club, after which Mike may meet her for some dinner. “I realise the pace I operate at is not sustainable for the long term,” says Sonja. “As such, I look a different strategies to manage my time better and assist with stress management.

“I have a cleaner, I try to do yoga once a week for some time out and while training is a chore it’s also an outlet. It’s a social time as I am good friends with the people I train with, and it’s a good endorphin and stress release.

“I also try to have some time out for me each day, doing some reading, having a cup of coffee or buying some flowers.”

Mike and Sonja cherish their evenings at home. Mike’s the cook, and, after dinner, they usually talk about different aspects of their lives and keep their business and personal lives separate.

9.30pm: Sonja tries to get to bed at 9.30pm but it’s often closer to 10pm. She usually reads, taking the newspaper or journal articles to bed. Then it’s sleep time.

Mike’s children Zac, 13, and Maddie, 10, live with Sonja and Mike every second weekend and for longer periods during school holidays. At these times, Sonja and Mike spend as much time with them as possible, as well as taking on the ever-present parenting chores.

It’s a busy life but it’s Sonja’s way of life and she loves it. Her passion for all she does is evident in the success of everything she takes on.

