



Spyglass Issue No. 3
Wednesday 20.06.2007



Shaun Budnik

Tumbling to the Top:
Shaun Budnik
by
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When Shaun Budnik first discovered gymnastics as a young girl, she thought tumbling around on a mat after school was fun. She continued tumbling because she liked the tricks she learned to do. Far from her mind back then was the idea that the process of becoming a good gymnast would be a major factor in preparing her for business success.

Today, Budnik is the president of the Deloitte Foundation, a not-for-profit organization funded by the Deloitte US Firms that works in support of higher education. She is also a partner at Deloitte & Touche USA, working in Partner Matters, where she specifically focuses on succession planning for the organization's partners. Previously Budnik, who has more than 17 years of experience, also served as partner-in-charge of the Deloitte US Firms' Assurance Practice in Stamford, Connecticut, advising clients on accounting and SEC matters.

Since she joined the 'Big 4' accounting firm in 1998, Budnik has been a catalyst for the advancement of women. In 2001, she was named National Director of the US firm's Women's Initiative (WIN) where she was focused on developing leadership and networking opportunities for employees and colleagues. WIN supports the Deloitte & Touche USA firm's commitment to advance high-talent women professionals through innovative career development, mentoring, leadership training, and leadership succession programs.

In 2007, the USA firm was awarded the Families & Work Institute's Corporate Partnership Legacy Award for its workplace programs and research.

Shattered: How did you get involved in sports as a child?

Budnik: My parents had divorced and I lived with my mom who went to work each day. After school, I went to the YMCA where they had gymnastics. I found tumbling fun. Then I started learning tumbling tricks. I didn't get any formal training but I did tumble every day after school.

Shattered: Did you continue in gymnastics as you advanced in school?

Budnik: Yes, I was on the gymnastics team at New Trier High School in Winnetka, Illinois. I was self-motivated by then and had developed a passion for gymnastics. I got a lot of support from my father who came to all my meets.

Shattered: You were in college right after US Title IX mandated gender equity in federally funded programs. Do you remember any programs that were offered because of the law?

Budnik: Few colleges had gymnastic programs – or competitive sports for women. By then, I was looking at schools for their academic programs. What I did was teach gymnastics at private gym clubs. In this sport, the girls’ routines and equipment are different from that of the boys. I taught only girls at local private gym clubs.

Shattered: Where did gymnastics take you?

Budnik: Gymnastics helped me get into dance. I could express myself with the creative side of gymnastics. One time I was dancing in a club and was asked if I would audition for a movie. I did audition and I got a part in *Pink Nights*, an independent film released in 1985.

Shattered: It sounds as though you were on a whole new career path.

Budnik: I did more auditions including one for the TV show *Fame* but Janet Jackson got the part. I also auditioned for the movie *The Color of Money* but Demi Moore got that part. Acting helped me with poise and my presentation skills but after a few more auditions, I decided to focus on school.

Shattered: Where did you go to college?

Budnik: Loyola University in Chicago. My father was an accountant and he mentored me. After I graduated, I was hired right away as an auditor at another ‘Big 4’ firm – not Deloitte.

Shattered: You started at Deloitte in 1998. In late 2000, an article was published in the *Harvard Business Review* entitled, “Winning the Talent War for Women: Sometimes it Takes a Revolution” that describes the overhaul that Deloitte undertook to keep women on the partner track at the firm.

Budnik: You’re right. Deloitte became very female-friendly. And I liked that. When I started, I was expecting my third child. And by 2000, I had made Audit Partner. By the way, my husband Greg is a partner at Deloitte.

Shattered: What did you learn from your experiences as a gymnast?

Budnik: Discipline. Gymnastics totally prepared me for college and the workplace. I learned how to be a member of a team. And I also learned suffering. That is, “No pain, no gain.”

Shattered: What do you do now for exercise?

Budnik: Lots of people are doing triathlons and I am, too. Last year I ran my first triathlon. I was cycling outdoors and would also run. Then I added in swimming, I even had a lesson to teach me how to swim for a triathlon. My goal for my first triathlon was only to finish it. This year I have the same goal – but to be a little bit better than last time.

Shattered: You have three daughters. Are they active in sports? Are they gymnasts?

Budnik: No gymnasts in my family. My husband has tried to get them interested in golf. But they haven’t taken up golf. To me, golf isn’t a sport. My oldest child is on a soccer team and takes three dance classes. My middle daughter loves dance and is on six or seven dance teams. The youngest plays softball and takes two dance classes.

Shattered: Is there a difference in a playing a team sport versus excelling in an individual activity?

Budnik: In gymnastics you can achieve individual goals and still help your team win. When you perform independently, you aren't part of something bigger. Sports with goals are best for children, a sport like soccer because it's all for the team.

Shattered: How does playing sports translate to the office?

Budnik: Fields that attract and employ individuals with high intellectual ability can succeed with their minds. But are they good well-rounded performers? Introverts are probably not future leaders. Highly technical people have success but a different type of success. A lot of well-rounded leaders get that way because they play sports. Even a sport like gymnastics teaches you that you have to do something over and over again to get it right. It gave me the mentality to keep trying until I got it right.

Shattered: Even with great sports programs, Title IX to mandate gender equity in sports, and encouragement, the US has an obesity epidemic. What do you see as the future of sports for girls and boys?

Budnik: I'm concerned for kids. Food matters. The right kind of food. Some children who play sports are so active they feel they can eat anything they want, like cake, ice cream, whatever. We need to teach our children to eat healthy foods for healthy bodies.

Shattered: The Women's Sports Foundation tries to answer the question, "Are females less interested in sports than males?" but they haven't found any evidence to prove that one way or the other. They do state, "... at an early age (six to nine years old), they are equally as interested. However, participation opportunities decline sharply as girls get older." In fact, they found that, "If a girl does not participate in sports or physical activity by age 10, she has less than a 10% chance of being active at age 25." What does this say to you?

Budnik: We have the responsibility to model good health for our kids. And to motivate children who may be reluctant to be active. We need to get kids into sports early so that they are comfortable in their bodies. When I was head of the Women's Initiative at Deloitte, I seemed to notice in particular how women are judged by their looks before their talent. When at a meeting, men's looks aren't a factor the way women's are. We need to focus on the total person and the talent that they have to contribute.