

Traduzioni a cura
del Career Service



Portrait of Her

Silvia Burini

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a conversation with
Antonella Franch

Medical Director of the Venice Eye Bank

Let's start from your roots. Your path, from your training to your leadership at the Eye Bank in Venice, is impressive. Was there a moment or a person who gave you the spark for the ophthalmology and cornea?

Actually there was. When my mother was 40 years old, she began to have some eye problems that unfortunately we didn't recognise in time; after several visits and examinations with various ophthalmicist and not only – I even remember taking her to a healer – she was finally seen by Professor Giovanni Rama in Mestre. He couldn't save one of her eyes but saved the little sight she still had in the other. At that time, I was graduating in Medicine and writing my thesis in experimental oncology. My mother's suffering, and the environment I experienced at the ophthalmology department in Mestre, deeply affected me. So I decided to change my specialty and become an ophthalmologist. My passion for the cornea was ignited by witnessing Professor Rama's surgical skill and human intelligence. He was my great mentor. When we were in Africa together, he once told me: "Do what's right, don't exaggerate or hesitate, do what will give you a sure result". With these words he meant that we should cure people in the best way possible while also thinking about the context where they were living and especially think about the result. The cornea is the window through which light comes in, it's the most superficial part of the eye but what's fascinating is that it can be replaced with one from a donor through a corneal transplantation. This surgery is very fascinating because it is continuously evolving; once we used to replace a small piece at full thickness, but now we selectively remove only the pathological part, so we no longer perform transplants at full thickness, but rather lamellar ones, anterior or posterior slats depending on the location of the problem.

In the healthcare and research world, female leadership is becoming increas-

ingly present, but still faces some challenges. What is your view on leadership and what qualities do you think women bring to positions of high responsibility, especially in a technical field like yours?

I'm a tutor of several residents, so I'm in contact with many young future ophthalmologists and with great satisfaction I noticed great preparation and seriousness. I wouldn't draw a distinction between men and women, it's important that they have enthusiasm, the desire to improve empathy and, very important, the ability to be kind. To be authoritative you have to be an example, show that you believe in your work, that you must not settle down but keep striving to improve yourself. Every Monday we have a meeting in the morning where we take turns presenting a clinical case. This will foster a group, sharing with each other, a discussion and progress. I'm convinced about the importance of having a code of ethics, a value system that ensures respect for others, even in difficult situations. It's about telling the truth with tact, acting with integrity and knowing how to motivate others to preserve both the meaning and the joy of their work. In Venice, in our team we are all female doctors except for one man. It was a coincidence, since there were more women than men on the rankings list, but it's working very well.

Venice is the city where you work and live. How much does being immersed in such a unique place, full of history and art, influence your approach to work or life? Is there a place in Venice that particularly inspires you or that serves as a refuge for you?

In Venice you live surrounded by beauty. We are privileged. Every morning, I discover something new on my way to work; a statue, a patera I had never noticed before, a ray of light striking a row of angels along a cornice I'd never seen before. It's an incredible city; luckily, I leave early in the morning, when the city is still quiet and the crowds aren't overwhelming. There's a bench along a canal in a small public garden where I stop occasionally when I'm facing a problem. It helps me think. It's close to Ca' Foscari.

Research and Innovation requires a constant open mind. Is there a book, a film or a work of art that, even though it's not a medical theme, has had a significant impact on your view of life or on how you deal with complexity?

That's such a nice question. A person

who is very important to me introduced me to Bion and his theory of groups. The importance of meeting regularly, setting tasks with clear objectives that must be discussed and understood by everyone in the group. Our team is composed not only of doctors but also of nurses, technicians, secretaries and orthoptists, the latter a very important figure for us ophthalmologists because they support us during visits and in carrying out instrumental tests. It's essential to recognize early on if certain dynamics begin to emerge, for example, self-satisfaction or disengagement, or the development of conflicts that create tension within the group. The key is to identify these basic assumptions, as Bion calls them, before they lead to the disintegration and failure of the entire project. It takes effort and commitment, but the result is rewarding.

You lead a major institution like the Eye Bank. What's the human and social impact of this institution, and what does it mean to you, on an emotional level, to know that your work helps restore sight to people?

I'm very proud to be the Medical Director of the Eye Bank of Venice. It's a foundation founded in 1987 from an idea of Professor Rama and has grown from a small hospital room into an important facility, with innovative research projects, researchers studying endothelial cells and retinal pigment epithelium cells, laboratory technicians working on and preparing corneas for transplantation for us surgeons, people promoting donation, and so much more. The thought of being part of such an organization makes me feel good. When we unwrap an eye after a procedure that we know will yield a successful outcome. It's a magical moment, it's hard to describe, it leaves you speechless.

Beyond the hospital, you have dedicated time and energy volunteering in Africa. For your personal growth, how important has it been to step out of your European 'comfort zone' and experience such a diverse healthcare environment and what lessons have you brought back to your daily work?

I first went to Africa with Professor Rama and later on my own. At first it was traumatic, because I was ashamed of not being able to operate despite the years of medical studies and the first years of speciality. Surgically I didn't know how to do anything, I felt like a nobody. Fortunately, Rama was there. That experience made me understand that we

have to be independent and capable of doing as many things as possible. I realize now that I've mentioned Professor Rama several times. I've always thought it is essential to have a great teacher, and I consider myself lucky to have known him and followed him for a long time.

We know that your profession is extremely demanding. How do you balance your responsibilities as a head physician, research and your private life? Do you have a 'secret' for recharging your energy and maintaining a clear head?

I simply have an amazing husband.

Looking back at your career, what piece of advice would you give to young Antonella, the one who was attending university, what would you tell her about making choices, pursuing ambitions or managing challenges?

Do what you want to, but do it well, really well and with great passion. Try to follow a great teacher and learn as much as you can. Whatever you do, add some enthusiasm and make it extraordinary.

Antonella Franch

Originally from the Trentino region, director of the Ophthalmology Unit at the Venice Civil Hospital, is a leading figure in Italian ophthalmology and an expert in corneal pathology and surgery. Franch has always been closely involved with the Eye Bank. Since March 2025, she has been Medical Director of the Veneto Eye Bank Foundation. An ophthalmologist and student of Professor Giovanni Rama, founder of the eye bank, she has collaborated with the Mestre institution at a very young age, becoming one of the first doctors responsible for harvesting ocular tissue for transplantation. She was also the first Director of the Cornea Clinic, a facility strongly supported by Giovanni Rama, who was the first to recognize the importance of concentrating on particularly serious clinical cases in referral facilities to ensure high-quality standards of care. Always committed to promoting donation, she is also the Director of the Cornea and Ocular Surface Centre of Ulss 3 Serenissima and the Veneto Eye Bank Foundation, created in 2012 to meet the needs of patients suffering from severe diseases of the cornea and ocular surface.

My skills *Capacità al centro*

Sara Bonesso

Associate Professor at Venice School of Management and Vice Director of the Ca' Foscari Competency Centre

Federica Bressan

Research Fellow at Venice School of Management

Women leaders in STEM: How to Persevere in Order to Achieve your Professional Goals

Despite the increase of female participation in the workspace, women remain significantly underrepresented in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. This gender gap persists at an educational level, where only 35% of women graduate in these fields a trend that has remained substantially unchanged over the last ten years (UNESCO 2024); the underrepresentation is significant especially in areas connected to engineering, computer science and physics, compared to biology, chemistry and mathematics.

Once they enter the workforce, female representation in STEM sectors drops to 28.2% compared to non-STEM sectors, where they represent 47.3% of the workforce. The underrepresentation is not limited to the initial phase, but it also persists later on in career transitions. The gap in the progression from entry-level to C-suite positions is more accentuated in STEM occupations (42%) compared to non-STEM ones (46.3%). Women's careers are also characterized by discontinuity and interruptions until the eventual retirement from the workforce caused by multiple roles that they still hold today within the family (primarily a caregiver), that strongly impacts their capacity of persisting and progressing in their professionalism. This phenomenon is particularly clear in work environments with a predominantly male orientation and work organization, like the STEM fields. This data significantly impacts, on one hand, the consolidation of the stereotype that scientific subjects are majorly attuned to men, and on the other hand the weakening of women's perception of their own self-efficacy.

To better understand this phenomenon and the behaviours that allow women to pursue their professional path and acquire a leadership role in their organizational environments, the results of a

study aimed at analysing the individual and contextual factors that can influence the persistence and professional progression of a sample of women in the STEM field will be illustrated.

The approach used in the research was based on Savickas's Career Construction Theory (CCT) (2005). CCT is a conceptual framework that focuses on decisional processes and transitions, which holds that individuals actively build their professional journey by interpreting past experiences to shape their future.

The central construct of CCT is Career Adaptability, defined as the necessary competence to handle present and upcoming work challenges. This competence is structured into four dimensions of self-development, which are activated in different ways depending on the stage of professional development:

- Career Concern: The reflection on one's future and the conscious planning of one's career.
- Career Control: Decisional authority in career choices and demonstration of proactivity
- Career Curiosity: The exploration of the context and the opportunities, while remaining connected to the evolution of the field of reference.
- Career Confidence: The perception of effectiveness in one's work, demonstrated by overcoming challenges and acquiring new skills.

The application of CCT in STEM contexts allows the possibility to analyse how professionals mobilize these adaptive resources to navigate less favourable environments and persist in the pursuit of their aspirations.

The research was mainly based on the results of a qualitative survey which involved 21 female leaders working in structured organisational contexts in the engineering field. The sample, with an average age of 44.7 years and a background mainly linked to engineering but also architecture, holds junior and senior leadership roles (e.g., Project Manager, Technical Leader, members of the Board of Directors). Adopting a dynamic perspective – from education to consolidation in their leadership roles, the research involved semi-structured interviews focused on career transitions, difficulties encountered, retention factors and adaption strategies implemented.

The results showed how the path to leadership is characterised by a continuous process of adaptation in which

professionals actively explore opportunities and contextual constraints.

Among the main obstacles they encounter in their first work experiences, and which lead them to change organisations – but not fields – are tasks perceived as unstimulating and not in line with their interests, unsupportive managers, difficulties or impossibility of balancing work and personal life, and a perception of inadequate pay compared to their role, responsibilities and male colleagues in similar positions.

Among the factors that encourage loyalty to the organisation are the possibility of using work-life balance tools such as hybrid working or flexible hours; recognition of their value through assignments that allow them to develop their skills; regular meetings to discuss one's achievements and future goals; mentors (even informal ones) who help with both integration into the work environment and acquiring technical and specific skills related to the organisational context; the presence of women in top leadership positions who serve as role models; more generally, the perception of an inclusive organisational context that values the individual regardless of gender.

It's important for organisations that want to promote inclusion and gender equality in organisational contexts with a predominantly male workforce, to have a clear understanding of the critical elements that require particular attention in order to favour the presence and growth of women within their ranks.

These can be summarised in a few points: first of all, supporting them in the transition from a technical role to a more managerial one, strengthening their confidence in their abilities through constant and structured feedback and the implementation of ad hoc training programmes. Secondly, it is essential to invest more in mentoring. It is fundamental for personal growth to have constant interaction with a valuable person who can help them grow and understand how to manage increasingly complex problems, both from a technical and emotional point of view. Another important enabling factor that emerged from the research is the possibility of accessing forms of flexible working, such as hybrid or remote working. A fourth aspect concerns the possibility of promoting professional networking within the sector in order to increase the network of knowledge and support to stimulate persistence in

this professional field. Finally, promoting a process of self-awareness in building one's career, which in turn improves the level of confidence in one's abilities and self-efficacy, including through the activation and support of external figures such as coaches.

Overcoming the gender gap in STEM requires systemic intervention that addresses both structural barriers (bias, inequality) and individual adaptive capacity. The research results show that women who persevere and achieve leadership positions have been able to select or shape work environments that support their control over their careers and their continuous development. Ensuring flexibility, investing in strategic mentoring and supporting management transitions are essential actions for transforming STEM environments into ones that are equally accessible and sustainable for women's careers.



Wanna Be Her

Bianca Bagnoli

Student at Ca' Foscari University of Venice

in conversation with

Claudia B. Unali

Translator, teacher and international HR specialist

Introduction

Words are not only tools of communication, but they are also bridges between cultures, disciplines and people. To translate, to teach and to mediate between different linguistic and cultural systems requires not only technical precision, but also sensitivity, curiosity and the ability to listen: these are qualities that turn every text, every lesson and every encounter into an opportunity for mutual discovery. Claudia B. Unali works as a specialized translator and as a teacher of Chinese and English language and culture. She also works as a HR consultant in multicultural contexts and collaborates with Italian universities on orientation and training programs. After living and studying in China, she founded TeaCup Translations in 2016, a project that combines linguistic precision and a passion for culture. Author of *Chinese for Pessimists* manuals published by Orientalia, she promotes a way of teaching based on empathy, attention to detail and the belief that every language is a way to observe and understand the world and all the people who live in it.

Hard and Soft Skills

Working in such a broad field requires accurate specialization in the areas in which one intends to operate, in addition to language proficiency. The hard skills necessary for technical translation, language teaching and international HR consulting demand in-depth study and constant updating within the sector is required. As for soft skills, the ability to organise and manage time, to communicate clearly and directly, and to be able to adapt to dynamic and multicultural environments are essential. Since this work involves close contact with university students, empathy and motivation are crucial aspects.

What was the desire and the reasons that led you to found TeaCup Translations? Did this career path work right away or were there difficulties?

TeaCup Translations was formally founded in 2016, when I was 33 years

old, but the idea had been developing for some time. After about ten years of working experience in collaboration with translation agencies, international architecture firms, schools and training institutes, as well as major Chinese and American companies as an international HR specialist, I realized that I wanted to focus on the tasks I was truly passionate about. With TeaCup Translations I created a project that harmoniously combines my skills and experience, while offering specialised and advanced training services for university students and supporting them during their transition to the professional world. I noticed that many of those struggling were university students: that's where my idea of developing study aids came from. I also wrote two Chinese grammar manuals aimed at helping students pass university exams and HSK certifications. The path worked well from the start, thanks to the solid foundation I had built during the previous years. Over that decade, I had the opportunity to work, specialize and train through specific courses and working experience as an employee, or as an external collaborator, while establishing a trusted client base that continued to support me after I became independent.

What advice would you give to someone who wants to pursue a career path similar to yours?

If someone wants to pursue a career path similar to mine, right now they would find it considerably easier thanks to innovative technologies and the accessibility of remote training programs offered by universities and institutions both outside and inside Italy, and the costs are more affordable. My advice is to take full advantage of the resources available to explore and to understand which path best matches your interests and opportunities, and then to take proactive steps to pursue it.

You specialize in Chinese language, in the medical-pharmaceutical and scientific-technological sectors. What academic path did you follow? Were there any gaps you had to fill?

After earning my bachelor's degree at the Sapienza University of Rome, I continued my studies in Beijing, attending both Beijing Waiguoyu Daxue and Beijing Yuyan Daxue. After that, I specialized in medical translation at the SOAS University of London and in International HR management at the Universities of Oxford, Durham and Cambridge. I have continuously pursued further education, obtaining refresher diplomas in languages, HR and translation, both in Italy and abroad, mainly in the United Kingdom and China. We are talking about twenty years ago, so I cannot say that I always had a clear idea of what I wanted to do in the future. I chose the paths that most excited and aligned with my abilities, then transformed the skills I gained into experience, and eventually into a profession. The fact that I still dedicate time and effort to ongoing training and updates demonstrates that gaps naturally exist

throughout a professional's development. This constantly reminds me that maintaining a humble and curious attitude toward innovation, progress, technology, and human interaction are key to providing high-quality services to clients.

You have several professional projects: the books on Chinese grammar, the Career Workshops, your work as a translator and the editorial translation course, as well as teaching in the GMC – Global Management for China Master's program. How did you come up with these ideas?

The idea for the manuals actually came from my students. Over the past fifteen years, they always told me that they wished to have my notes, explanations and advice. So I collected and updated all my material, dedicating it to anyone seeking new inspiration. Both of my manuals are appreciated by students and teachers alike, who often recommend them as study materials. At teachers' invitation, I frequently participated in live classroom meetings to give orientation sessions for students. On these occasions, I answer their questions about issues that concern them, study methods, post-graduate training, career guidance and specialization paths. The Career Workshop is one of the most requested services among both students and teachers, thanks to its direct and practical nature: it was created to help students during their transition into adult life and toward a fulfilling profession. I always welcome collaborations for courses and teaching opportunities with enthusiasm, as they allow me to explore new environments and bring my expertise where it's needed most.

Before TeaCup Translations, did you have other professional experiences?

For about ten years, I gained work experience collaborating with translation agencies, where I mainly handled technical, scientific and medical-pharmaceutical texts. I worked in press offices and back offices for international architecture firms, taught in language schools and training institutes, and later joined large Chinese and American companies as an International HR Specialist within multiethnic and multilingual recruitment teams.

What have been the most significant moments that shaped your professional journey?

First of all, the times when I performed tasks that later turned out to be unsuitable for my personality: even though I enjoyed them, some of them did not reflect some key aspects of my character and eventually led to discomfort. Because of that, deciding to move from being an employee/collaborator to becoming self-employed was a pivotal moment that positively shaped my career. It also confirmed that the experience I had previously gained could serve as a solid foundation for my independent professional path.

You've had an unconventional career path. In your professional journey, have you noticed issues related to inclusivity? Or moments when improvement was needed in that regard? For sure I have noticed the need for improvement, both in university and in the field of international human resources. Thanks to the increasing awareness of language use, for example, we can now acknowledge significant progress in these two areas in recent years, but there is still room, and need, for improvement.

Other than your academic path, what moments in your life do you think pushed you toward this career path?

There were certainly factors connected to my regional origins, to inspiring people I encountered along the way, and to some firm decisions in my personal life that, on one hand, shaped my identity as a woman and, on the other, defined my professional role.

Have you had female role models in your life?

Absolutely. In my private life, I had an English teacher in high school who particularly inspired my passion for languages, which later led me to study Chinese and English, as well as Finnish, Japanese, Latin, Spanish and currently Scottish Gaelic. In my studies and profession countless female authors, scientists, doctors, researchers, and revolutionaries have been role models: I cite Michela Murgia, my late fellow countrywoman, as a representative of all of them. I dedicate an affectionate tribute to her in the second volume of my manual, hoping it will inspire the students who read it.

Claudia B. Unali

Claudia B. Unali is the author of the Chinese grammar manuals *Chinese for Pessimists* – volumes 1 and 2, published by Orientalia Editrice and currently used in various university courses. For more than fifteen years, she has been teaching Chinese to university students who struggle with the language, while also working as a medical-pharmaceutical translator and as an International HR Specialist. She also prepares candidates for ministerial exams for Chinese language teaching positions and conducts workshops at universities, companies and training institutions focused on career guidance and on job opportunities related to the Chinese language. Born in Italy in 1983, she has lived in China, Northern Europe and the United Kingdom, deepening her study of languages and cultures. A tea and traditions enthusiast, she loves British formality and Chinese ritual.



Women & Sport

Laura Aimone

Talent handler, event organizer, and artistic director of Endorfine Rosa Shocking

**in conversation with
Tatiana Yakimova**

Coach in rhythmic gymnastics and co-founder of Olympic Stars

Let's start with a classic question I ask all my guests at the Festival. What do 'Endorphins' mean to you?

I think your festival and your program are very important. I wasn't aware of your program, but I immediately understood the value of the project. To me, 'Endorphins' means sensitivity and understanding, and, in this Festival, I felt understood. When working with children, girls and even men in institutional roles, it's often not easy to find someone who grasps the delicacy of certain topics. In Endorphins I felt that you really paid attention to what we do and to female empowerment.

How did you discover rhythmic gymnastics and what is your very first memory associated with this sport?

I started at 6 years old. My mother, who is an emergency doctor, one day was called to a gym where a girl had been injured. She was impressed by how graceful and beautiful the gymnast's movements were, and she decided to take me there the next day. I remember standing on the doorstep, so small compared to the huge space in front of me, I was looking at the older girls that were training. From that moment on, gymnastics became part of my life.

Was it immediately clear to you that it was your sport, or was it a rough start?

It was a disaster! For a long time I thought that it wasn't the sport for me. I was chubby, immature and undisciplined. The coaches were really tough and I wasn't one of the best. At the age of 11, my mother asked me to choose whether I wanted to continue gymnastics or if I wanted to switch and try art school. I tried it, but after two days I was back in the gym. From that moment on, everything changed: I started to understand the value of consistency, planning, and setting some goals. That's when I understood that gymnastics was my path.

Were there any moments in your career where you felt like there was not a foothold for you?

Yes, many. In sports you cannot always rely on stability. Last year, for example, we competed at the World Championships in Bulgaria: we worked hard, but the results didn't come. It wasn't easy, but I understood that my job as a coach is not only to give the kids the technical foundations, but psychological ones as well. These days I focus a lot more on the mental aspects, because the preparation is not only physical.

What was it like to experience the international competition as an athlete at such a young age?

I was 13 years old when I participated in the Asian Games. In rhythmic gymnastics you already compete at a high level as a teenager, and that brings a lot of pressure. But back then, everything was tough. Training conditions were strict, we would spend months away from our families, not going to school, just training in the gym. It was a different world: less awareness, but a lot more determination. Kids nowadays are more sensitive, more aware, and I think it's a big step forward.

When did you decide to become a coach and why?

I started coaching seriously when I was 25 years old. At the time I was studying law, but I felt that it wasn't my path. I wanted to work with people, to share energy. When I moved to Qatar, I had the opportunity to join the Gymnastics Federation and after that I opened my own club. I wanted to create a space where girls could train safely, respecting local traditions but with an eye focused on international competitions. That's how Olympic Stars was born. I wanted to give Qatari girls the opportunity to practice rhythmic gymnastics while respecting their culture. At the beginning, there were no gyms that allowed girls to train without the presence of men. With my Qatari partner, we built a structure that could offer a safe space. Now we have three locations and one of them is dedicated to the girls that follow more conservative traditions. I also wanted to let the community know about rhythmic gymnastics: in 2016 I had to explain to everyone that it was an Olympic sport! Today, thankfully, things are different.

How did you meet director Danielle Beverly, the author of the documentary about you?

In the beginning, we wanted to film a short advertisement for the gym and we contacted Northwestern University. Danielle, who was a professor there at the

time, came to visit our gym. She didn't do a one-minute advertisement, but she did five years of filming! She is a very inspiring woman: she immediately understood the value of our project and the female strength that moves it. I remember the first day of filming, on 18 February 2018, on Sports Day: a special day that I will never forget.

Do you see something of yourself as a child performer in the girls that you train today?

Technically yes: Russian school methods are really recognizable, and some of the girls have some of those traits. The biggest difference is in their attitude. My gymnasts are friends, they support each other even though they compete against each other. In my time, we had rivals, team spirit didn't exist. Today they are proud, determined and really smart. We call one of the girls 'ChatGPT' because she is really good at school and in the gym. I'm proud of them not just as athletes, but as people. Sport results matter, but building them as strong, sensitive girls is the real achievement.

How do you approach a team with such different cultural backgrounds?

They come from all over the world: Syria, Madagascar, India, the USA, Spain, Egypt and Tunisia... It's incredibly rich in culture. Qatar is a crossroads of cultures, and this is reflected in sport as well. I've adapted to many local traditions and today I can easily communicate with families from different religions and backgrounds. The differences are there, but the language of sport transcends them all.

In this regard, do you think the language of sport is international?

Absolutely. Sport unites more than anything else. My girls have friends from all over the world, they share the same challenges, the same emotions, the same victories. It's a global and supportive community.

What surprised you the most when you first watched the film?

What surprised me the most was how young and motivated I was! Watching myself, I almost felt jealous of that version of me. It was interesting to see how Ms. Danielle Beverly managed to narrate 5 years of life, with its ups and downs, the pandemic, competitions, in a gentle and natural way. There's no drama, only truth. I was simply living my daily life: training, growing, building.

What is your vision for the future of Olympic Stars?

Our journey is not over. I want to bring my gymnasts to the highest level and help new generations grow. I already have a Syrian gymnast who will compete at the Rhythmic Gymnastics Junior World Championships. I'd also like to organize international events here in Qatar, to develop rhythmic gymnastics in the country and to open it even more to the world.

Your ability to balance being strict and understanding comes through in the film. How do you maintain that?

I believe that my role as a mentor should be more predominant than just being a strict coach. Rhythmic gymnastics is a delicate sport for teenagers. The girls go through physical changes, emotional ones and they have to perform in front of thousands of people. If I focus only on the results, I risk losing them. My job is to train them as athletes, but also as stable and self-aware individuals. The results will come when there is balance.

If you had to give just one piece of advice based on your story on how to live a more 'endorphinic' life, what would it be?

Every person is different, but I would say: relax, do what you love, make everyday count. Define what you want in life and go for it! Positive energy will grow from that.