



## NAVIGATING LIFE AND YOUR CAREER IN YOUR 30S: ATL AIRPORT EMPLOYEES SCHOOL US ON HOW TO BECOME PILOTS OF OUR OWN LIVES

By Brianna Rhodes

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*From left to right: Jai Ferrell, Jennifer Ogunsola, Joy Brown (Photo: fotojet.com)*

Family, self-care, health and travel are a few essentials needed to help three Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport employees run their lives to help run the busiest airport in the world.

Jai Ferrell, the director of marketing and creative services; Jennifer Ogunsola, manager of policy and communications; and Joy Brown, special events manager, are steering their lives. And they are making it look easy while doing it!

Want to know the key to their success? Mastering the art of balancing their lives and careers.

We all know how stressful it can be to balance both, with one sometimes outweighing the other, but these three hard-working women are giving the inside scoop on how you can successfully take control of your life and learn how to spread your wings and fly!

One of the first steps Ferrell learned about mastering her life and career was figuring out what mattered to her most.

“I’ve learned, going through this process of life, that your job is only a small segment of who you are,” Ferrell says. “Often many overachievers like myself value things like our work, our accomplishments, the medals and the trophies that we get, but there’s more to life than those things. It’s the people who you touch. It’s your family; it’s your spirituality; it’s your mental stability.”

Ferrell notes that she likes her job, but she loves her life. She has been unemployed, and that experience contributed to her learning how not to place too much value on her career.

“I was laid off a couple of years back, and I just remember feeling a sense of less value of myself and being very depressed because in the words of one of my mentors, ‘I was a team that never lost,’” Ferrell says. “I quantified my success or my value of myself with my job, so then what happens when that’s not available?”

Ogunsola agrees with Ferrell. She believes what matters to her may be different from what matters to other people, but she says some things are permanent, like family, friends and health.

“It’s just good to give attention to those things that are permanent in your life, because your career, it’ll always change,” Ogunsola said. “As you grow you’ll want more, you’ll want to do more...and so that’s going to always grow and change, but there are some things in your life that are permanent that need equal attention and honestly sometimes more. So just to be an overall healthy, happy individual, I think that you need to give attention to things outside of your 9-to-5.”

Although you have to make time for family and friends, all three women believe alone time is needed to help you regroup or recharge. But figuring out how and when to do that is up to the person. Sometimes it can be as frequent as each day, or it can be at specific times throughout the month. Brown determines her alone time depending on the business of the work week.

“I try to plan my time, and I look at what my work week looks like,” she said. “Sometimes it’s a hit, and sometimes it’s a miss.” “When it’s a miss I definitely will find the time somewhere within that week to just kind of catch my breath and do what I like to do, whether it’s working out with my trainer or just coming home doing absolutely nothing and just unwinding and letting my brain just have a break.”

Ferrell finds solace in going out and treating herself.

“I’ve learned the art of dating and loving myself,” Ferrell said. “What that means is being able to go to a restaurant and have dinner and be in my own company and not have to pick up a phone and just being present in those moments.”

Ferrell, Ogunsola and Brown all agree that self-care is vital in order to decrease stress. They all find it necessary to fit their self-care routine in their schedule as much as possible. Some of their methods include working out, traveling, getting facials, manicures, praying and spending time with friends and family.

Ogunsola finds self-care especially important for health reasons.

“I have multiple sclerosis,” she said. “So a part of my self-care is making sure that I don’t overwork myself. When my body says you’re done, for me to be done and listen to it....I’m so ambitious and so driven that I would just push myself, and I realized pushing myself in that space forces me to wind up in the hospital, and so I kind of slowed down in that aspect of just like really listening to my body.”

“The things that I thought were important, and that many ambitious young people think are important aren’t as important as you think when something threatens your life and your health,” Ogunsola added. “So you start to rethink things, and you think about things in a different way.”

Brown also said whenever she got to the point of burning out her health would be affected. She would be sick all the time, and she couldn’t figure out why, but she would always be stressed at work.

“Don’t work yourself where you get to the point of the complete burnout where you’re just sick and tired,” Brown said. “It affects your mood, and you’re having conversations with your people and coworkers and your peers trying to figure out what’s going on when it’s right in front of you. Try to catch it before getting into the headspace because once you get into that headspace, it’s just not good.”

Brown no longer lets her job stress her or consume her anymore. She does it by just allowing certain things to go.

“I have to constantly remind myself that it will either be there tomorrow, or you will figure it out,” Brown said. “Move your brain on to something else. It’s too much. You don’t want to overwork or overdo anything. I know I will easily burn out, so I constantly have to sort of give myself that pep talk.”

Ogunsola and Ferrell say that the people they work with, especially their directors at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, make it easier for them to balance their lives and careers. Ogunsola believes that the people you work with sometimes matter more than salary because it’s challenging to be the only person in a work environment who truly understands the importance of life.

Ferrell says that she can balance both factors well because she has the opportunity to be herself.

“People don’t leave jobs; people leave leadership,” Ferrell says. “I have permission to be 100 percent Jai at this job. So because my leaders support me, and they trust me which is a really big part of it that I am given creative permission.”

But, don’t think that perfecting that balance just came naturally for these women. They emphasized they experienced many trials and errors in their 20s to get where they are today.

They all figured out and learned what was important to them and what made them happy in their 20s.

“For me, in my 20s I felt like the weight of the world was whether or not I completed a task at work and before I left for the day,” Brown says. “Yes, sometimes that can be very critical, but a lot of times it's not always that critical. In my 20s, I was the girl who was there early and working late and then when I was off I was still working.”

“When I realized it was affecting my relationship with my friends and my family, that's when I took a hard look at how I managed things,” she added. “I tried to reel it in and realized that sometimes it's not that deep. It will be there, and it will be taken care of. You manage work; don't let work manage you. It won't always be easy, and it won't always be a perfect work-life balance, but it does get better.”

For anyone struggling with juggling both life and work, Ferrell developed and crafted a career portal based on her personal experience. It's called “Fly with Jai,” and she articulates her experiences as a professional, as a woman and as a woman of color in a different space. It's a five-step process, and she compares it to a flight plan such as choosing the destination, checking in, traveling with a companion, boarding and taking your flight. It simplifies the whole idea of what women should do to navigate and move through life successfully.

Overall, all three women agree the process of taking control of your life can be laborious, but they all agree finding the balance is crucial to being the best woman you can be.

“Figure out, by any means necessary,” Ogunsola said. “Figure out what brings you joy and what brings you peace. Once you figure that out, stay in that space.”



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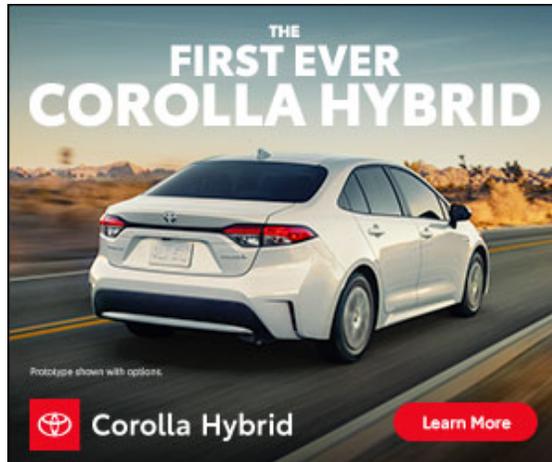
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