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## Dancing a fine line: Floating from ballroom to boardroom



Daniella Koren dancing with instructor/partner Victor Russu. Koren, CEO of a health care marketing company in Montvale, uses ballroom dancing to help keep her life in balance. A quick learner, the former River Vale resident now dances competitively.

Most of the time, Daniella Koren is founder and president of a growing health care marketing company, wholly committed to her 30 employees.

All of the time, Koren is a wife and mother, wholly committed to her husband and two children. Some of the time she is a competitive ballroom dancer—and that time is all hers. “It’s my way of carving out time for myself,” said the 40-year-old Rutgers graduate.

On a recent afternoon, after a quick tour of DKI Direct’s new headquarters in Montvale, Koren slipped away from work and across the border into New York, to a second-floor studio overlooking a busy strip of Rockland County highway. There, she and her dance partner/instructor Victor Russu spent the next hour or so practicing intricate routines to the atmospheric strains of tangos, waltzes and fox trots.

Intensely focused and soon perspiring from the effort, Koren had seemingly crossed more than the state line. She had passed into another world. “For that hour or so, I’m able to forget about all my other responsibilities. Nothing ever, ever pops into my head. It’s an amazing thing to me,” she said.

Ten years ago, Koren founded DKI Direct in an office in her home at the time, in River Vale. Koren said the company represents all of her accumulated professional experience—in advertising, pharmaceutical marketing and Web-based technology.

Koren, who now lives in Suffern, N.Y., describes the company’s function as “patient relationship marketing.” “What we’re really trying to do is encourage a productive dialogue between the patient and the physician,” she explained.

Clients such as Sanofi-Aventis, Novartis and Genentech pay DKI Direct to reach out to patients and determine the best way their health care needs might be served. DKI Direct does that through direct marketing techniques such as online surveys and informational e-mails that tell a patient which Web sites might be helpful to them, or what types of questions they should be asking their physician. “People need to feel comfortable asking questions,” said Koren. “We help them know what questions to ask.”

### Dancing Through Time

Daniella Koren, President, DKI Direct:

1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
Studied ballet as child in South Jersey.	Danced while obtaining philosophy degree at Rutgers.	Dancing put on hold for career and family.	Competes as ballroom dancer.

Koren said her business has benefited in recent years from the drug industry’s shift away from television advertising that reaches millions of viewers but doesn’t capture a targeted audience to more focused methods of marketing. The company’s move to Montvale is its third in 10 years, each necessitated by growth.

DKI Direct seeks to capture the millions of consumers surfing the Internet seeking information on specific illnesses and direct them to information and possibly treatments provided by DKI’s clients. Breaking the stereotype of the hard-charging, all-business executive, the youthful Koren is easygoing in person, quick to smile and downright friendly.

DKI Direct, she concedes, was started not as a way of rising to the top of the business world and getting rich in the process, but as a way to find a balance in her life that didn’t exist working countless hours and commuting to a high-powered advertising job in Manhattan.

“I wanted a better quality of life,” she said. “My goal is work-life balance.” That’s where the dancing fits in.

About a year ago, a neighbor who had recently started taking ballroom dancing lessons persuaded Koren to give it a try. Koren, who had studied ballet as a child, was immediately hooked.

What began as lessons quickly progressed into a partnership between her and Russu, one that has taken them to competitions around the state, and most recently to Columbus, Ohio, where they finished fourth among 30 couples.

Russu, owner of the Fred Astaire Dance Studio in Bardonia, N.Y., said Koren’s background in ballet helped her make the jump from student to competitor in a matter of months. He said he knew after her first lesson that she was special. “I told her, ‘You’re going to be good and you’re going to compete at a high level.’ She didn’t believe me at first,” Russu said.

For Koren, the dancing has added a whole new dimension to an already full life. The goal-oriented Koren said learning new steps gives her a sense of accomplishment completely separate from her corporate life. “When I see myself mastering a technique, then I feel I’ve reached a new sort of goal, one not related to my business,” she said. “It requires thinking as well as moving, and it’s very technical. It’s a beautiful art.”

Not one to build walls around any single element of her life, Koren said she decided last summer to share her new passion with her employees. So in July she took the whole office on a surprise field trip to Russu’s dance studio. “I wanted to give them a fun break and I wanted to share something I do on my personal time. I like them to see me as a person. They loved it,” Koren said.

The pictures taken that afternoon and now taped to Russu’s walls attest to that.