

Water Woman

PR MAVEN LAURIE BATTER'S LIFE AND WORK REFLECT HER DEVOTION TO THE POOL AND SPA INDUSTRY.

IT'S 6 A.M. WHEN LAURIE BATTER STEPS into the pool. Popping under to check that her goggles aren't leaky and the water is clear, she takes off for her one-mile swim — every day of the year.

Be it Christmas, her birthday, deadline day, or Tuesday, you'll find Batter doing laps before she takes on the day, completing a medley of strokes in the waters of a nearby timeshare's pool. Some of her best PR ideas, she says, come to her amidst the swish-swish of her arms and legs.

She began swimming recreationally while working at a YMCA in the mid-1970s. It stuck: In two weeks, she says, she was hooked. "It sets the stage for her day, and gives her a chance for reflection and introspection," says her longtime partner, Bruce Macklin, a self-employed real estate appraiser with whom she shares a home office. "She's living the benefits of that arena and a daily dedication to its improvement."

This is not an anomaly: Throughout Batter's life, there's an unmistakable pattern of — to invoke a business-world cliché — sticktoitiveness. Batter's devotions develop quickly and don't fade. She rises at 4 or 5 a.m., so that even prior to her swim, her brain is buzzing. She boots up her computer, makes a pot of coffee, and scrolls through her Blackberry before taking the three-minute drive to the pool. Her day, post-laps, is spent creating awareness of her clients' brands, shaping their persona, influencing their growth, and jockeying for editorial placement. While Bruce makes breakfast, she'll respond to media requests, conduct conference calls, maybe do some writing. "Really no day is the same as the next," she says, "which is part of why I enjoy my work so much."

Responding via email with lightning speed and thoroughness, even by today's standards, it's easy to notice Batter rarely isn't working — she hasn't vacationed in eight years — but she doesn't play the over-worked card. She doesn't see it that way: "We are not just makers of pools and hot tubs," she says, waxing poetic. "We provide a safe haven

LAURIE BATTER



Owner of Batter Up Productions

from the craziness of the world; we create a place where family and friends can relax and enjoy and experience the beauty, fun and health benefits of pools and hot tubs."

She began Batter Up Productions in 1989 with one client on her roster. In 1995, Batter met Macklin at an outdoor concert in Carlsbad, Calif., where they still live today. "In a crowd of 2,500 people," Batter recalls, "I picked him out." It stuck.

These days, she works with as many as 10 clients at a time: AquaCheck, Watkins Manufacturing and the National Swimming Pool Foundation among them.

Batter helped the Spa and Pool Industry Education Council launch its fundraising campaign. SPEC president John Norwood says he admires her "tenacious" advocacy of her clients, fearlessly presenting new ideas and concepts to better-position her clients. "You get your money's worth," he quips.

Batter's manufacturing experience inside in the pool and spa world means she understands the daily challenges the industry faces. "It has helped me be sensitive to the pressures facing owners, executives and managers," she says, "including the fact that they are wearing multiple hats."

It's this vantage point, in part, that makes Batter great at what she does, says Dr. Tom Lachocki, CEO of the NSPF. His foundation has worked with Laurie for seven years. "She has great determination, and she's unique in that she has knowledge of and passion for the trade area," he says.

SOCIAL MEDIA MOVES THAT DON'T WORK

Being too sales-y.

"I think people tune that out. I find it offensive, to be honest," Batter says, "because that's not really engaging somebody. And that's what social media is about."

Neglecting your blog.

"To be remembered and followed, you need to update your blog at least once a week," Batter cautions.

Lacking discretion.

"People can become aggressive interacting with people online. There are places for that, but if I were advising a business person, I would caution them on what kind of persona they're presenting."

Posting too much.

"It just becomes noise. Knowing how to pace your communication so you're not offending is key." A couple times a day is good, Batter says. Engage your fans, ask them questions, or give information they can utilize.

Batter has been repeatedly named to The Who's Who in Aquatic Leadership in the United States, and she's a member of the International Swimming Hall of Fame's International Advisory Committee.

"She's not just a person who works in the industry, but she has the unique perspective of a water-lover," Lachocki continues. "She's one of my heroines."

Batter had a sunny, go-getter disposition from young, having witnessed an iron-clad work ethic in both her parents, who brought up Batter and her three sisters in Woodbridge, CT. Her entrepreneurial father and "resilient" mother were self-sufficient and pennywise. "As young girls growing up in the '50s," Batter remembers, "life was different for women. Yet, my parents wanted us to go to college, get educated and be able to take care of ourselves."

She was raised to be driven, and it stuck. As a child, she did chores to earn a 25-cent allowance. Since then, "I can't remember a time I wasn't working," she says. In college, in Cleveland, Batter had a job and a full course load. In her first aquatics-industry job after

graduation, she spent eight years with Polaris, until 1989, when she launched Batter Up.

Her degree, in art history, also stuck with her: In her leisure time, she and Macklin attend gallery openings, and pieces she has done herself are displayed in their home. Macklin's favorite, a pastel of a peaceful, napping woman, hangs over the couch in their family room.

"Really, Laurie is my soul mate," Macklin says reflectively. "You really can't slip a cigarette paper between the perspectives of each of us. We have remarkably similar views, and it makes for lots of harmony around the house."

In the coming years, Batter aims to grow her knowledge in media relations, social marketing and creative marketing, as well as her client base. She has designs on the green industry and healthcare, she says, even possibly forming a virtual agency. "I imagine I will slow my business down at some point, maybe not actively seek out new clients," she says, "but I expect to keep my hand in it as long as my clients want me around."

In the nearer term, she hopes to finally take that vacation. ■

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