

Balancing Act

By Jonathan Solomon

Character list

Abby – Accountant at Cosmi Pharmaceuticals

Brigitte– Operations Manager at Cosmi Pharmaceuticals

Courtney – Instructor of Ballet, Yoga and Running classes

Drusilla – Attendee of Ballet, Yoga and Running classes

Emily – Attendee of Ballet, Yoga and Running classes

Scene 1 – Takes place in an office. Brigitte is sitting at a desk. There is a spare chair. Brigitte is arranging paperwork around her desk. Abby walks in. She is looking very nervous and apprehensive. She knocks on door. 5 minute 45 seconds.

Brigitte: Come in. Oh, hello Abby. I was expecting you. And right on the dot. You're always on time!

Abby: Hello Brigitte. I have my outlook calendar to thank. It's important to me that I'm punctual and to not let you down.

Brigitte: Yes, I notice that you place a very high standard on yourself. Sometime I wonder if you have an inner whip?

Abby: I think it's called having a work ethic?

Brigitte: Well, whatever you want to call it. I know you work very hard. Have a seat.

Abby: Oh it's not going to be a brief meeting? (Sits down).

Brigitte: I think you know why we're having this meeting.

Abby: Did I make a mistake with the calculations? I have been an accountant here at Cosmi Pharmaceuticals for over 5 years. I thought my attention to detail was spot on.

Brigitte: No. It's not about your quality of work. You are the living embodiment of attention to detail. I'm afraid I have received a complaint against you.

Abby: A complaint? About what? Who would make a complaint against me?

Brigitte: Sonia.

Abby: That sloppy, lazy, mediocre and inattentive person? (pauses). Oh, I meant, Sonia, my colleague, the junior accounts clerk?

Brigitte: Yes, Sonia the junior accounts clerk. You know that Sonia is the only child of the owner of Cosmi Pharmaceuticals?

Abby: No, I wasn't aware. What about Sonia?

Brigitte: Well it appears that at 4.55pm yesterday you required a project to be completed by close of business.

Abby: Yes that correct. It was end of month and accounts needed to be reconciled by then.

Brigitte: Which Sonia was not able to complete.

Abby: Still correct.

Brigitte: And then you started to yell at Sonia for, let me check, (looks for piece of paper), 2 minutes and 4 seconds.

Abby: That long? You sure? I was only giving feedback.

Brigitte: Hmm. According to the 3 witnesses, John, Jack and Fiona, they appear to think it crossed the line from feedback to Sonia being charged with committing a punishable offence. I have the full transcript kindly provided to me by Fiona. Oh bless Fiona's amazing word-for-word memory.

Abby: It's a conspiracy! They're all trying to get me fired!

Brigitte: Let me read the transcript. It may refresh your memory.

Abby: Ok.

Brigitte: Alright (takes deep breath). "Are you out of your mind. How did you get this job? Who did you sleep with to get here? I work my butt off and you haven't been fired yet. I can do your week's worth of work in one day. Why do I have to work with you? Instead of being at work you should be back at school learning actual skills to use in the workplace". And then the rest of your delivery was a string of unintelligible swearwords. Sonia was left in tears.

Abby: I didn't think it was that bad. It was constructive criticism.

Brigitte: Abby. Claims for workers compensation are bad for business. I had to offer Sonia a week-long holiday to the Hamilton Islands to stop a claim being lodged. I had to work hard to appease her father.

Abby: So that's why she didn't come to the office today.

Brigitte: Abby, she wasn't going to come back to the office at all.

Abby: Not very resilient is this Sonia is she?

Brigitte: Abby. I called you into my office to see how perhaps your "working style" could be improved. I have this great quote that may shed some light on this matter. Ah, here it is. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. All play and no work makes Jack a mere toy".

Abby: Who's Jack? Did he used to work here?

Brigitte: No, this is a quote from the writer Maria Edgeworth. Look Abby. Have you heard of the expression 'Work/life balance'?

Abby: I've heard of work.

Brigitte: And I think that's where our problem is. You live to work rather than work to live.

Abby: Did you just drop another expression in there as well?

Brigitte: Abby, outside of work, what do you do?

Abby: I buy takeaway, watch the news and then go to bed.

Brigitte: Do you live by yourself? Any partner in the picture?

Abby: No, I live on my own, thankfully. I couldn't possibly live with other people. My nerves would get tread on so easily. People are noisy, smelly and so inconsiderate. I prefer the stillness, thank you very much.

Brigitte: I think we identified another issue. Lack of patience. Any hobbies? What do you do on the weekend?

Abby: Don't really have any hobbies. Just potter about my home. Read the newspapers. Nothing exciting.

Brigitte: And another issue right there. Lack of excitement. Abby, I am going to try and make you see the lack of balance in your life. It looks like it's all work and no excitement. Perhaps if you had a broader perspective of life, you may soften the edges of your personality, so to speak, and get on more cordially with Sonia.

Abby: Me being cordial with Sonia? Highly unlikely. I rather staple myself to my desk.

Brigitte: Ok. Well, I have a three strikes policy...

Abby: You have three? I have a one-strike-and-you're out policy. You are being way too generous.

Brigitte: and I hope to see some changes otherwise I may have to let you go from this company.

Abby: That's so unfair. I didn't do anything wrong.

Brigitte: Abby, I need to have a friendly and collaborative team. To help you get more balance, I have booked you into a ballet class.

Abby: Ballet? I've never done ballet before in my life. I won't know how to do anything.

Brigitte: Feel the excitement of learning a new skill.

Abby: Feel the dread you mean?

Brigitte: Abby, it will do you a lot of good. You might be surprised where your excellent work co-ordination skills can take you. Here are the details (hands over sheet of paper). You need to attend and hopefully you will see there is more to life than just being an office worker.

Abby: Highly unlikely.

Abby leaves.

Scene 2 – Ballet class – Courtney, Drusilla and Emily are in a studio doing a warm-up routine before the real lesson begins. They are waiting for Abby. Courtney and Drusilla are doing the dance routine while Courtney is monitoring their progress. Music is being played for this. 4 minutes.

Courtney: And one, and two and three and four. And one and two and three and jump and one and two and three and leap. And back and two and three and four. (Then stops music). Great work Drusilla and Emily.

Drusilla: I love your choreography Courtney.

Emily: That's why I keep coming back for more classes.

Abby walks in.

Abby: Hello I didn't realise I was late. I'm required to attend this ballet class.

Courtney: Hello, you're right on time actually. Drusilla and Emily came a bit early and so we were just warming up.

Drusilla: Well welcome, and you are?

Abby: I'm Abby.

Courtney: Aah, yes, Brigitte booked you in?

Drusilla: Oh I love Brigitte.

Emily: Me too. she's so friendly, talkative and wise.

Drusilla: Yes definitely wise.

Abby: Oh, does she come to classes?

Courtney: Occasionally Brigitte attends. Ok, well let's get started on some basic exercises. Let's go through the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th positions. Drusilla and Emily can demonstrate these positions and then we will go through each position one by one.
(Courtney plays music)

Drusilla and Emma demonstrate positions. Courtney then stops music once demonstration ends.

Courtney: Thank you Drusilla and Emily.

Drusilla: And if you have any questions just ask.

Emily: We won't bite!

Abby: I'm not sure this is my cup of tea. I think I will go. Sorry to bother you.

Courtney: But you only just arrived.

Drusilla: We're really nice people as well. We won't hurt you.

Emily: It'll be fun. Once you start I'm sure you'll begin to relax.

Abby: Relax? I'm not sure what that word even means.

Courtney: Ok. We'll let's try the first position. Ok arms out here. That's good. Ok now turn your feet out.

Abby demonstrates poor balance and falls over.

Drusilla: Oh, Abby, are you ok?

Abby: I didn't realise ballet was this dangerous, maybe I need to go.

Courtney: Nonsense. I think you are unaccustomed to these moves. We'll move to the second position. Ok. Arms out across by the side and legs spaced out.

Abby holds into pose but somewhat wobbly and not convincing.

Drusilla: You're doing great.

Emily: You're holding on Abby!

Courtney: Now let's move to third position. Move one arm up in the air and slide the right foot in front of the left. Oh dear you've fallen again.

Abby falls.

Abby: How embarrassing. I don't ever slip up at work like this. I need to appear perfect at all times. Sorry but this ballet class is not for me. I don't want to be laughed at.

Drusilla: Who's laughing?

Emily: I don't think any of us are laughing at you.

Courtney: Well, if Abby wants to leave, she can leave. We're not going to hold you a prisoner against your will.

Abby: Yes, I think I will leave actually. I am not well co-ordinated at all.

Drusilla: we're sorry to see you go.

Abby leaves.

Emily: What a shame. Although I think her attitude needs to be slightly adjusted.

Courtney: Slightly adjusted? It needs a total revamp. I can sympathise with Brigitte. She briefed me about Abby and her workaholic tendencies.

Drusilla: What's the deal with workaholics?

Emily: Well from my psychology studies at uni it occurs when the feeling function doesn't inform judgment.

Drusilla: I had no clue what you just said. Was that English?

Courtney: I think I'm following. So if you're not connected to your emotions, you lose sight of the bigger picture, like family and friends.

Emily: Yes exactly. Workaholics need approval and the only way they can achieve that is by completing ambitious projects at work. Yet the ironic thing is, is that nobody really cares..

Drusilla: Aah, I definitely steer clear of ambitious people. It's like have a huge gap in their life and use work to hopefully fill it up.

They all shiver at the thought. Music is played again and they resume dancing.

Scene 3 – Office – Brigitte is sitting at a desk. There is a spare chair. Brigitte is arranging paperwork around her desk. Abby walks in. She is nervous and apprehensive again. She knocks on door. 2 minutes and 30 seconds.

Brigitte: Come in. Abby, please take a seat.

Abby: I guess this is not going to be another short meeting either.

Brigitte: I would like to say yes, but I can't, not after what happened this morning.

Abby: Can I explain?

Brigitte: Please listen to me first. I just arranged Sonia to take a holiday to the Margaret River. We are lucky she hasn't lodged a Workers' compensation claim.

Abby: But Sonia makes mistakes at work and it takes me hours to fix these up.

Brigitte: Abby you need to improve your communication skills.

Abby: I communicated what I felt had to be communicated.

Brigitte: Yes, well this email you sent to Sonia this morning – you thought it was an appropriate email?

Abby: I just wanted to bring my message across.

Brigitte: You carried out a character assassination and CCed the whole office.

Abby: Oh, that was an accident...

Brigitte: I don't think so Abby. It was one very angry email. Capital letters everywhere and a very liberal application of red and bold fonts. You even utilised threatening arrows. Let me read an extract. "Your inability to learn from past mistakes indicates you need to see a neurologist. Clearly something is not working in your brain. You're a disgrace to the accounts team." Now explain to me how you thought that was professional.

Abby: I may have gotten a little bit carried away...

Brigitte: A little? You're not showing any remorse Abby. Let's see how we can rephrase some things you said about Sonia,

Abby: But she's lazy...

Brigitte: You mean, Sonia needs incentives to achieve her targets.

Abby: Has absolutely no attention to detail.

Brigitte: You mean, Sonia has opportunities for improvement in detail-oriented tasks.

Abby: She takes overly long breaks and gossips too much with staff.

Brigitte: You mean, Sonia ensures she takes breaks regularly to refresh her mind and engages socially with fellow colleagues, adding to a collegiate environment.

Abby: Well clearly you have a way with words.

Brigitte: This is your second strike Abby.

Abby: Oh dear.

Brigitte: And you didn't even complete the full ballet lesson I booked you in.

Abby: Well,, I had balance issues.

Brigitte: Yes, you do. You need to get this work/life balance sorted out.

Abby: No, I meant I kept falling down.

Brigitte: Well, keep getting back up again. As part of your second strike I have booked you into a yoga class.

Abby: Not another class. And why yoga?

Brigitte: You need something to quieten your mind. It will do you good. And please make the most of it.

Scene ends.

Scene 4 Yoga class studio – Courtney is preparing the yoga class. 3 minutes.

Drusilla and Emily walk in with yoga mats.

Courtney: Good evening Drusilla and Emily

Drusilla: Hey Courtney

Emily: Hi Courtney.

Courtney: Today, we will be having a slightly different class. You remember Abby from last week?

Drusilla: Yes, the poor girl.

Emily: Yes, did she lodge a complaint?

Courtney: No complaint but Abby will be attending the class. Brigitte has been having a challenging time with Abby and has booked her for today's class.

Drusilla: I'm fine with that.

Emily: What will the focus be on?

Courtney: Improving Abby's sense of balance.

Abby walks in.

Abby: oh hello, it's you all again

Courtney: Yes I run a number of different classes

Drusilla: Good to see you again

Emily: Hey Abby.

Abby: I think I know your names. It's Courtney, Drusilla and Emily?

Drusilla: That's right!

Emily: You've got a good memory!

Abby: Thanks. Wow, I've never been complimented on my good memory before.

Drusilla: I'm sure you have friends that pay you compliment.

Abby: What's a friend? I don't have too many of those.

Courtney: Well, it's great to see you back. I've planned a really good class. It's to help improve your balance. Drusilla and Emily will be here to help you stop you falling. Ok, let's get ready.

They all get their mats into position.

Courtney: Now let's focus on our breathing. Take a big deep breath. And exhale. One more deep breath and exhale. Now the first position is "the chair".

(Courtney demonstrates position).

Abby: That looks simple. (Achieves pose)

Drusilla: Well done Abby.

Emily: You're doing great.

Courtney: Now moving onto the second position, "the rocking horse pose". So gently moving to and fro. Keep the momentum going.

(Courtney demonstrates position)

Abby: I think that's doable. (Achieves exercise).

Drusilla: Awesome, Abby!

Emily: Keep up the good work.

Courtney: Ok let's move onto the "grandfather clock" before moving into the plane tree pose.

(Courtney demonstrates exercise).

Abby: Oh, that looks really tricky.

(Abby attempts exercise but Abby falls taking Drusilla and Emily down with her.)

Abby: Oh dear, what a mess I've made. I feared something like this would happen.

Courtney: Are you all right?

Drusilla: Yes, I'm ok,

Emily: Not a scratch.

Abby: I think I'll go now. I've made such a fool of myself. I'm clearly still very unbalanced.

Courtney: But Abby, you're doing fine. Don't let one mishap ruin an enjoyable class.

Abby: Sorry, I have to go.

Abby gets her things and leave.

Drusilla: What a shame. Oh I meant, what a shame she couldn't overlook the fall.

Emily: Perhaps she's a perfectionist? Not the best character trait to have according to my psychology studies. It can lead to obsessive behaviour.

Courtney: Give her some time. Maybe one day she will remember being in a supportive environment and come back for more. To cope with this stressful moment, let's de stress with the Standing Forward Fold with shoulder stretch.

(This exercise is performed.)

Scene 5- Office – Brigitte is sitting at a desk. There is a spare chair. Brigitte is arranging paperwork around her desk. Abby walks in. She is nervous and apprehensive again. She knocks on door. 2 minutes 10 seconds.

Brigitte: Abby, please come in.

Abby walks in silently.

Brigitte: Abby, I'm incredibly disappointed in you. Sonia has reported that you have completely stopped communicating with her. She feels totally snubbed. Are you giving Sonia the silent treatment?

Abby: Well, nothing I do is ever right when it comes to dealing with Sonia. If I look at her I know I can't restrain myself yelling. I have deleted her email address so that I can't send her any strongly worded "feedback".. By keeping to myself, at least friction can be minimised.

Brigitte: But the silent treatment is an insidious form of anger. You think you are punishing Sonia by keeping to yourself but you are actually poisoning yourself. Can't you feel the negativity inside you, just eating away at your mental health?

Abby: Feelings? I can't say I have many of those. What are they? I stay focused on tasks and ensure they get completed correctly and efficiently. Feelings get in the way.

Brigitte: Am I talking to Abby or a machine?

Abby: isn't that what businesses want? A machine doing a job well, free of human error?

Brigitte: But as a society, we need to engage people as well, whatever their level of skills. Participation in the everyday running of society is important too.

Abby: I'm confused now. I don't know what you want from me.

Brigitte: I just want you to get on with Sonia.

Abby: Well, it's not going to happen,

Brigitte: Well, that's strike 3.

Abby: Does that mean I'm fired now? Please don't fire me.

Brigitte: Abby, I am unsure as to why you care so much about this job. I wish you could only see how unhappy you are now.

Abby: I almost have the deposit for my seventh investment property.

Brigitte: Your seventh, why so many?

Abby: My parents always wanted me to have a big property portfolio.

Brigitte: This is getting beyond ridiculous. Stop trying to please your parents. You're a grown-up.

Abby: But if I don't please them, they'll stop loving me. Then I'll have no-one else to love me.

Brigitte: Oh, Abby. Look, I'll extend my three-strike policy to a four strikes. This time you're going to a running group. This is a last ditch effort to change the way you work with people here. You can go now.

Abby leaves.

Scene 6 Running Group at a park 2 minute 45 seconds

Courtney, Drusilla and Emily are in running gear.

Courtney: What great weather.

Drusilla: Oh, I just love the great outdoors.

Emily: I shouldn't be saying this but I love running past all the shirtless male joggers.

Courtney: And I really enjoy overtaking them as well.

Drusilla: I'm not surprised, Courtney, you are super fit.

Courtney: I listen to my body and it tells me it rather be outside than stuck in front of a computer all day. Speaking of which, Brigitte advised that Abby will be joining us today.

Drusilla: Oh, poor Abby. She is really harsh on herself.

Emily: Totally agree. She needs to be kinder to herself. It was one mishap.

Abby enters.

Abby: Hello Courtney, Drusilla and Emily. Surprise! I'm back at another shot at redemption. I think Brigitte is going to fire me any moment.

Courtney: Hello Abby. Everything is going to be fine. How about we just enjoy this class for the moment, one step at a time.

Drusilla: One running step at a time

Emily: First we should probably do some stretches.

(They all do stretches. Abby follows what Courtney is doing.)

Courtney: ok, we all ready?

Drusilla: Yes! Let's sweat it.

Emily: Let's do this!

They run as a group in a circuit around the stage.

Courtney: Abby, you look like a natural runner.

Abby: Oh, thank you. I used to do cross country in high school.

Courtney: And you didn't continue?

Abby: No, I stopped. I guess the HSC came along and it was like I had to spend every moment studying. There was pressure for me to do well.

Courtney: Oh, that's a shame. Well your HSC score doesn't define you.

Abby: That's sacrilegious! My parents would disagree with you.

Drusilla: Goodness, sounds like you had tough parents.

Emily: Mine always said I had the rest of my life to achieve what I wanted. They were always supportive of what I wanted to do.

Abby: Are you saying that my parents were wrong?

Courtney: I think maybe find something you enjoy doing. And I think you enjoy running. You're looking relaxed.

Abby: You're right, I don't think I have felt this relaxed since, since... I can't remember.

Drusilla: It's a great feeling. I always feel better after a run. It cleanses away all my anxieties, stresses and fears.

Emily: You should join us for the fun run next weekend.

Abby: That sounds exciting. I will do!

Courtney: Abby, you have a faster pace, don't let us hold you back. We can meet you up again at the end of the road.

Abby: You sure?

Courtney: You're free to go as fast as you like.

Abby then runs ahead (off stage)

Drusilla: Look at her go! She's a talent. Oh and look at her overtake all those five shirtless male joggers

Emily: Most certainly she is a talent. She will do really well at the fun run.

Courtney: Yes, she may even win a trophy.

Scene 7 – Office – Brigitte is sitting at a desk. There is a spare chair. Brigitte is arranging paperwork around her desk. Abby walks in. She looks confident. She knocks on door. 2 minutes.

Brigitte: Come in. Oh hello Abby. Did we have a meeting scheduled? Let me check my calendar.

Abby: You haven't scheduled a meeting for me.

Brigitte: Oh, in that case you wanted to see me about something?

Abby: Yes. Here, I wanted to give this to you.

Abby hands over envelope to Brigitte.

Brigitte: This is not what I think it is? (Opens letter). It is what I think it is. You're resigning. I'm sorry to see you go but I think you have made the right decision.

Abby: Thanks Brigitte. Can I ask you a question?

Brigitte: Sure. Ask away.

Abby: You've been fairly patient with me. What's your secret?

Brigitte: it's not really a secret but I cut people a lot of slack, a lot more than your average person.

Abby: Well, I hope that one day I'll have reservoirs of patience to draw from.

Brigitte: Good luck Abby. Now can I ask you a question?

Abby: Sure.

Brigitte: How did you change?

Abby: Well, it was the running that did it. Can you believe I won the fun run in the female age division. It was like I woke up and this is the real me. An active person who enjoys the outdoors. I lost sight of that and became this isolated and rigid personality. I had a chat with one of the shirtless male joggers and we're dating now. We go jogging together and it's really nice not having to say anything but to just enjoy the peace and quiet, to be content in each other's presence. And of course, I have a new group of friends. Courtney, Drusilla and Emily have convinced me to return to their ballet and yoga classes as well.

Brigitte: I'm so pleased for you.

Abby: And I apologised to Sonia. She looked like she was going to call the police but I explained to her that I was leaving and that I was sorry about my past actions. We actually hugged, can you believe it?!

Brigitte: That's out of this world Abby. Well done!

Abby: Thanks Brigitte. You've helped me come this far. All the best Brigitte.

Brigitte: All the best to you too Abby.

Lights out.