1 Trust your gut. I had just finished my master’s degree in industrial engineering when a mentor inspired me to join the pharmaceutical field. I took a leap of faith and discovered that working in the pharma industry is totally aligned with my purpose in life. It is my way of contributing to society by generating access to innovative products and, in the case of vaccines, positively impacting public health around the world.

2 Know your strengths—and work to improve your weaknesses. Taking the next step starts with theory, experience, and practice. I had a clear development plan, and I knew the areas that I needed to work on in order to advance. After evaluating different educational alternatives, I decided upon HBS Executive Education’s General Management Program (GMP). It gave me concrete tools and insights to hone my skills. For example, I wanted to increase the speed of my decision-making process, and the case study discussions within my living group were the perfect way to practice and improve my skills.

3 Trust your team. When I embarked on GMP, I prepared my team in advance. I empowered them to continue our work, and it provided a unique opportunity for them to demonstrate their leadership and gain exposure to people with whom they don’t frequently interact. Because my team was able to take the reins, I was able to completely disconnect and immerse myself in the program.

4 Your network can be your best ally. It’s important to build a strong network in both your professional and your personal life. I have classmates, colleagues, and friends around the world who can introduce me to new cultures and share best practices across a broad spectrum of sectors beyond the pharmaceutical industry. I’m thankful I have the GMP network and the broader Harvard network; a year after graduating from GMP, I also joined the board of the Harvard Alumni Network in Colombia.

5 Establish limits for a more harmonious work-life balance. By establishing limits—for example, how much you travel, when you need to be at home, and how many projects you take on—you can excel in your dual roles as executive and parent. In my career, I’ve decided to say “no” to some opportunities in order to maintain the balance that my family and I need. Inevitably, there’s another way to accomplish the same goal—even if it takes longer or requires a different path.

6 Get creative. My daughter Valentina was five years old when I attended GMP. My husband supported my decision and gave me the confidence that Valentina was going to be okay while I was away. To give her comfort in my absence, I made a big poster that had a message and a surprise every day. It was magical for her because she thought a fairy carried small gifts all the way from HBS!