

KATHLEEN CLEARY PRESENTS

THRIVING in the middle



How to Keep Your Career, Sanity and Happiness Intact While Caring for Aging Parents So You Can Bring Balance and Money Into Your Life

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**Simple Steps You Can Take TODAY to
Combine the Love and Care of Your Aging Parents
with the Successful Life and Career You Envision**

By Kathleen Cleary

Are you struggling to build your career or business while also trying to stay on top of the needs of your home, family, aging parents, friends and others?

Do you often find yourself in a state of overwhelm, going through your day and not really accomplishing anything?

Are you frequently so distracted by your To-Do List that even when you are with your family or those you love, you aren't really connecting in any meaningful way?

It's hard enough to keep the many different balls we juggle everyday in the air while building a career and running a home. When our parents' health begins to falter and their needs increase to the point where we need to step in, life becomes very tricky indeed.

It's a dilemma faced by millions of working women today. It comes at us from many, many different angles—strokes, Alzheimer's, heart attacks, early dementia, cancer, COPD, broken hips, emphysema and on and on.

The precarious balancing act we've been managing takes on a whole new multi-tiered character with new worries, concern, stress, conflicted emotions, family negotiations, logistics and quite a bit of overwhelm.

If we were having trouble trying to keep our head above water before, these new challenges can really impact our life unless we have strategies and support in place to help us not only survive but thrive through these challenging years.

This is a journey I've been on for many years and I understand what it is like to build a career or a small business, while balancing those many balls in the air. As my own parents' declining health began to impact my life, I learned to depend even more on the lessons I'd learned to keep life running smoothly.

Our boys were 10, 12 and 14 years old when my Dad had his first stroke. The day I found him crumpled on the bathroom floor in his boxers, unable to get up from a fall was a pivotal moment when I knew life would never be the same.

The next nine years were painful as we watched this brilliant and towering Harvard Business School graduate deteriorate with multiple strokes and increasing dementia.

Crossing that threshold from 'cared-for' to 'care-giver' was a step neither one of us wanted to have happen. Helping my Mom take care of his every need was simply not a role I had ever anticipated having to fill.

We arranged for help and support (both at our own home as well as at my parents' home) so we could continue to run our businesses and feel happy and whole while devoting a lot of time to helping my folks.

We managed to keep my Dad at home with Mom until that day in 2004 he was peacefully called to his eternal rest. As hard as it is to admit, it was a huge relief to see his suffering end.

My feisty former Navy Wave 'gunnery instructor' Mother has enjoyed a long and wonderful life. At age 91, on Easter Sunday, Mom's COPD progressed to a stage that required hospitalization. It frustrated her to sacrifice her planned flight to California and Tennessee the next day to see my brother and sister.

Life on Oxygen 24/7 began.

I feel extremely blessed to have had my Mom in my life for such a long time. Recently, I've been watching her weight drop and her energy and mental acuity deteriorate.

It's not unusual to end up in the ER with her when her oxygen levels drop significantly. We're trying to keep her in her house for as long as possible and I know we are treading on thin ice these days.

There've been moments over the years when I've felt stressed, over-worked and trapped by the demands and responsibilities of our businesses combined with successfully raising our boys and keeping up with my parents' declining health.

I did, however, learn many lessons I'd like to share with you that will help you stay positive, healthy and joyful while creating a happy home life, successful career and the ability to stay on top of your parents' growing needs, such as:

- How to stay healthy and sane when your plate is over-flowing
- How to achieve a sense of balance so you feel joy, love and purpose everyday
- How to determine what is truly important and what is draining you unnecessarily
- How to be brutally honest with yourself about your time and talents
- How to successfully market and grow one's small business
- How to ask for help and build a team of support so you can actually love your life while achieving your goals at work and at home

If you apply these lessons to your life, you'll be able to:

- Double (and sometimes triple) your free time
- Take care of those you love as well as yourself
- Feel gratitude for the privilege of offering your parents as much love and dignity as possible as they age
- Escape the feeling that you have to be glued to your career or business to be successful
- Enjoy GUILT-FREE time for yourself
- Have the life and career you envision without sacrificing your priorities and values

7 Steps to a Happier and More Peaceful You

Step 1: Take an honest assessment of your time



Time—it's the same for all of us. 24 hours in a day, 168 hours in a week, 52 weeks every year. Many of us never really take an honest look at how we spend our time.

For one week, lay out the actual number of hours you spend on all activities: sleeping, grooming, chores, errands, cooking, laundry, commuting, child care/elder care, husband/partner, working, self-care, health and friends.

It's a good idea to include time lost because you felt too exhausted to do anything productive.

Once you see how you spent your time on paper, it'll be apparent to you what your actual priorities have been (in other words, where you spend most of your time). Compare these to what you feel your TRUE priorities actually are.

Often, you will find that you are devoting an unhealthy portion of time to your career or business at the expense of the other areas of your life, including your health and mental well-being.

Look, none of us are getting out of this game alive. We've got one life to live and it's important to make it as joyful and fulfilling as we can without regrets. You want to be the 'Master of your Destiny' rather than the 'Victim of your Circumstances'.

Step 2: Learn that 'No' is not a selfish word. Eliminate your time drains



To be able to honor your true values and priorities, you often need to let go of what is draining your time and your energy.

There's many, many reasons why we agree to do things when we really don't want to do them. We don't want to disappoint our friends, our spouse, our children; we're concerned about what others will think; we don't value our own time enough and many more.

To achieve real balance, you're going to have to learn to say "No". The next time you are faced with a request for help or a time conflict, ask yourself, "If I say yes, will I gain a feeling of accomplishment and happiness?" If not, explain your schedule won't allow taking on anything new.

There will be times when you'll have to make a choice to put your family, your health or your social life ahead of your work. Equally, you'll be faced with times when you have to make that hard choice to focus on work rather than your family or friends.

Chances are pretty good that there are plenty of things currently draining your energy that are not helping you move forward in your career or business or interfering with your true priorities.

You want to take a serious look at everything that takes up your time and make the hard choices to eliminate anything that takes you away from your priorities. Some items you can simply let go – resign from a Board, step out of a volunteer commitment, whatever is no longer serving you.

Don't confuse difficult choices with no choices. Once you've made a choice to eliminate the things that drain you, you'll start to enjoy an immediate improvement in the quality of your life.

STEP #3: Build a Team to Support You



At different stages of your life, you will need different kinds of support. When the boys were very young, I found a Nanny to take care of our baby in the evening so I could bathe and read to the other two and put them to bed without holding a crying baby at the same time.

When I decided to write a book, we had just purchased our retail store. There wasn't an extra hour in the day to focus on research and writing—until I hired a full time sales associate so I could stay home two days a week and get the project done.

As Dad's health worsened, we arranged help several mornings per week so Mom would have a break from bathing, dressing, lifting and preparing meals. I took over that job on Sundays and several evenings per week—it became my own special time with my Dad, a true gift.

Recently I sat with the Director of the Council on Aging to get a list of the various services and organizations I can turn to as Mom's disease worsens.

Assess your current situation and figure out what tasks can be delegated to ease the burden so you are free to do the things that matter most to you. It may be hiring a Virtual Assistant, a visiting nurse, a bookkeeper, a gardener (unless you love to garden!), a housekeeper (even if it's once per month) or extra staff at your business. You may be able to swap time with a friend to take care of each other's kids so you can get some things done.

If you work for an employer, be a team player and a hard worker. Be sure your skills are being utilized well and let others shine in their brilliance in areas that are not your strengths.

If you are building a business, your time should be focused on SALES and MARKETING so your business can grow. If it's income-producing, you should be doing it. Everything else should be delegated.

STEP #4: Create Boundaries

Decide for yourself what your boundaries are going to be. If you're a solopreneur, let your clients know when you are available and when you are not.

You know when you are most productive and when your energy lags. Plan your most important work activities around your most productive hours.

If your work allows you to close the door and walk away at 5:00 or 6:00, do so!

It is really crucial to start calendaring in your personal priorities in addition to your work responsibilities.

If you decide that you will hold Sundays sacred for yourself or your family and friends, honor that time and do whatever it takes to get your tasks completed during the week.

If you value exercise (and you should!), calendar your workouts into your schedule for the time of day that works best for you and protect that time. Do the same with activities that are important to you each week that are not related to working (lunch with your mother or friends, attending your children's events, taking a walk in nature, reading or meditating). HOLD THIS TIME SACRED. Even if it's just 20 minutes, it will make a difference.

You may have to get up earlier in the morning to make this happen but you'll quickly come to value this time/gift to yourself.

You'll be refreshed, renewed and happier. When it's time to focus on business, you'll be energized and alive, doing a better job because you won't be resenting your work or business for keeping you away from your true priorities.

STEP #5: Your Attitude is More Than Half the Battle

Keep the Big Picture in your mind at all times. Once you know what your true priorities are, it'll be so much easier to make the choices that keep you aligned with your values and integrity.

Accept that you are simply one person; not a superhero. There'll be times when some things you had hoped to accomplish won't get done—or not in the time frame you had planned. Learn to be okay with that.

Stay focused on the present and don't let what didn't get done distract you. Keep moving forward.

If you are juggling a dozen projects and feeling overwhelmed, take a deep breath. Give yourself some space. Let some things slide so you can do what's important in that moment.

Smile. Smile on the phone. Smile at your customers. Smile at a stranger. You'll feel better, you'll make someone else feel better. Read something funny. Enjoy laughter and the energy boost it gives you. Look for the humor in life.

People like to work with people who exude positive energy—and this often opens the doors to money-making opportunities for you.

Express gratitude daily. Remain conscious of all your blessings. Even the tiniest blessings. Notice the beauty around you—in nature and within those whose paths you cross.

As your blessings fill you with happiness, carry those feelings into your relationships. Uplift others—everyone carries burdens.

Celebrate your accomplishments. Keep a victory journal. Reward yourself. When I've achieved a major goal, I'm off to the spa for an entire day—fitness classes, laps in the pool, yoga, lunch, a massage, steam and sauna, a good read by the fire. Nothing nurtures me like extreme pampering.

Know what fuels you and keep re-filling. It could be the company of good friends, a great book, fun exercise, travel, soul-nurturing retreats.

Step #6: Nurture a relationship with a spiritual entity

Connecting to your inner wisdom and to something greater than yourself will provide you with an inexhaustible source of calm and balance. Sometimes it is difficult to stop the noise in our heads and the discontent in our hearts.

This is a journey that is different for each of us. We call upon the Divine in many ways (God, Trusted Source, Infinite Intelligence, Nature, Allah, whatever it may be for you). Our souls are fed in many different ways: music, art, nature, dance, relationships, meditation, etc.

It's vitally important to spend quiet time with yourself and reflect on your life and what's most important.

When we pay attention to our own Wise Self and the Divine Power that is all around us, the love in our life expands—love for ourselves and others.

This is a topic that is too deep for a short report but it's an area that you should not ignore if you truly want to live a balanced and whole life while building your business.

Step #7: Learn from Those Who've Already Walked Your Path

I've seen it over and over. Those who find a coach or mentor to learn from move along faster on the road to living the life they want. Look for people who've already walked down the road you are traveling on and achieved the goals you've set for yourself.

Study their systems. Read their writings. Listen to their webinars and tele-seminars. Join their masterminds. Invest in their services. Learn how they've brought balance into their lives when they became caregivers.

You do have to do the work to have a successful career or business but you don't have to do it alone, spinning your wheels wondering if you are doing the right things. You don't have to reinvent the wheel.

You'll gain resources, advice, wise counsel, support, thoughtful brainstorming and useful feedback that will help you to keep moving forward.

In fact, one of the most common mistakes I see people make is to decide that they CAN do it all themselves.

And that is the fastest path to truly feeling trapped by one's life and overwhelmed by all that is on your plate:

- Tasks and demands come at you from all angles
- Your most important relationships suffer as you don't have the time or energy to devote to nurturing them
- You become the very last person on your list and your physical, emotional and spiritual needs are rarely met
- You keep running down all these different rabbit holes trying to learn the latest and greatest without any real focus on what needs to be done today
- You work long and hard hours without seeing any real growth or progress in your career or business
- As joy and passion begin to drain away, you don't recognize the person staring at you in the mirror
- You find yourself on a fast path to burnout at a time when your family and your parents need you most

As I mentioned earlier, we all have one life to live.

Be sure to make your life one without regrets, without resentment, without burnout but rather one of passion, purpose, and abundance.

It IS possible to have a successful career while ALSO caring for parents and living a life that brings you joy. If you are feeling trapped by the demands of building a career or business while caring for aging parents, your family and your life, let's talk!

A GIFT FOR YOU!

I'd like to offer you a complimentary 20-minute **Caregiver's Career & Life Balance Breakthrough** Session. We'll roll up our sleeves and take a look at the biggest struggle you have in your career or your life. We'll begin creating a plan that helps you combine your life and career with caring for aging parents, so you can make money while loving the life you live.

To schedule your 20-minute free call, email me at:

Kathleen@thrivinginthemiddle.com or call 413.822.1280

About Kathleen:

Kathleen is a Coach, Speaker, Author, and Caregiver specializing in balancing life while caring for aging parents and achieving career or small business success.

Kathleen can help you create the plans and systems you need to help you get focused, make decisions, set priorities, and increase your time and energy so you can bring more money and balance into your life.

A former restaurateur and Realtor and a current copywriter, Kathleen mentors working women caregivers through her '**Success Secrets to Career and Life Balance for Caregivers**' program. She also owns a retail store with her husband.

She's the author of the biography, "If This is Heaven, I'm Going to be a Good Boy," the Tommy Leonard Story, available at Amazon and bn.com.

Kathleen is honored to be on AWAI's (American Writers and Artists Institute's) Copywriter's "Wall of Fame" and featured in the ebook, "Getting Started as a Copywriter after 50" written by Tammy Lawman and edited by Bob Bly.

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