

## Are You Empowered in Your Career? 12 Strategies to Gain Strength, Confidence, and Clarity

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Professional women have made tremendous strides in terms of drawing on our strengths, abilities, and confidence in the workplace in recent years, but it's clear that we have a long way to go before we are using our female power with self-assurance and ease.

Based on my national in-depth research study **Women Overcoming Crisis: Finding New Meaning in Life and Work**, and my work with hundreds of professional women each year, I have found that even high-level, high-achieving professional women report battling insecurity and discomfort in using their voices to lead powerfully and say "no" or "yes" when necessary. Many professional women do not serve as their own advocate, nor do they experience feeling supported or mentored by other colleagues in the workplace. They also reveal a reluctance to embrace new opportunities that may lead to greater advancement and leadership, particularly if the change in responsibility or focus takes them out of their comfort zone.

Clearly, there is a palpable power differential experienced by women in the workplace, and the leadership styles of men and women remain widely divergent, contributing to gaps in understanding, acceptance, and trust. In the end, my research participants and clients report experiencing less than a rock-solid sense of empowerment and self-confidence in their work lives.

These gaps of power can lead to personal and professional crisis, and a deep desire to transition away from the current professional track to a radically different one. In fact there are no fewer than 12 "hidden" crises working women face today, including "I can't balance life and work," "I can't get out of my financial trap," "I can't use my real talents," and "I can't succeed in this crushing competition."

### **How can women gain empowerment, and avoid professional crises altogether?**

The following approaches, suggested by research participants and clients who have successfully reinvented their professional lives, are very powerful and effective:

1. **Remember, you are a *many-faceted* individual. Your life is a mosaic. Your current job does not *define* who you are in this world. Let go of what isn't working.**

Over-identification with any role in your life can lead to emotional difficulty and limitation. You are *more* than your current job or professional identity. If you don't like who you are at work or what you are focusing on, you need to either find ways to change your style or behavior to your liking, or find new work or a different workplace that allows you to be and to express who you truly are.

2. **Stretch and grow at all times...say "yes" to new opportunities that excite you (even if they make you nervous)**

Again, you are more than you think you are. You possess a broader array of skills, strengths and capabilities than you are aware of at the moment. If you are offered an opportunity that

allows you to stretch in a new area, and this area feels exciting to you, go for it! The expansion you'll experience will allow new preferences and strengths to emerge. Be committed to continually expanding your knowledge and skill base. Move away from needing to be an expert at all times. Have the courage to be a beginner again, and don't shy away from trying new things.

**3. Get out of denial when things aren't working**

Staying in the dark about what makes you unhappy only prolongs your suffering, and postpones the action that eventually must be taken. Get hip to what isn't working in your life and work, and begin to create a meaningful action plan for addressing what needs to be changed, added, redirected, or released.

**4. Don't let your ego make decisions for you**

Make sure your ego doesn't lead you around by the nose. Ego-based decisions are those that lead you to actions that simply inflate your ego and your sense of outward domination, power, control, and recognition. Often these ego-based decisions point you in a direction that is not in line with what you are truly passionate about. Integrate your ego perspective with your intuition, your higher thinking skills, and your understanding of what you value and appreciate. Make decisions that reflect who you are and wish to be in life.

**5. Let go of perfectionism and over-functioning**

Many professional women in particular suffer from perfectionism and the need to over-function and over-control both their work lives and home lives. In order to avoid the crisis of "I can't balance life and work," we must move away from the need to be perfect and the need to do everything ourselves. Start empowering all others in your life (your spouse, children, friends, parents, colleagues, employees, and others) so that they may gain a greater sense of their own independence, self-reliance, self-confidence, achievement and productivity, and can oversee and execute appropriately what is theirs to handle. Let go of what isn't yours to manage.

**6. "Always go where the energy is."**

Start tuning into your energy level and your intuitive guidance. Expand your focus on all those projects, people, or endeavors in your work life (and personal life) that give you a lift in positive energy. Incorporate your instinct (your gut) when you make decisions. On the other hand, activities, people, and roles that deplete your energy just thinking about them are to be avoided. Follow your energy.

**7. Know your passions and talents, and find work that emphasizes them**

So many professionals (women and men alike) haven't taken time to understand what they are passionate about in life — those endeavors that bring joy and positive energy. This is an essential step to take to avoid professional crisis. Discover and identify specifically what stimulates you, know what you are uniquely talented at and excited about, and move toward these endeavors. Find new ways to bring them forth in your personal and professional life wherever possible.

**8. Decide what your life *outside of work* needs to encompass**

In order to achieve essential work/life balance and be confident and strong personally and professionally, you must know what balance means to you. Get as clear as possible about what your life *outside of work* needs to embody and express in order for you to live the life you desire. Once you know, then your priorities will become clearer, which in turn allows you greater conscious control over how you manage your work life.

**9. Realize your value. Don't underestimate yourself and be your own advocate. Believe in yourself and your potential.**

According to the views of most of the working women studied, men seem to be more skilled overall in perceiving their own value and taking advantageous action based on an unwavering view of their current and potential contribution. Women are in an earlier stage of development in their ability to embrace and express their worth and value in the workplace and at home.

Start by understanding and appreciating your own value. Focus on speaking and acting from a strong sense of self-worth. If this is difficult for you, reach out to friends, family, and colleagues that you respect, admire, and trust, and ask them to tell you all about the strengths and talents they admire in you. Believe in yourself and understand the enormous power you have to positively impact your own life and the world around you.

**10. Elicit outside support; gain new, unbiased and expansive perspectives**

How do you identify clearly what has to change and how to change it? Get some unbiased, empowering help, which can come in many forms including an outside mentor, coach, a Mastermind group, career counselor if needed, or someone who has done what you wish to do who can provide beneficial guidance. Helpful support is neutral, not biased, and aims to help you *on your path* (not someone else's) by providing fresh insights and perspectives on how you can draw on your vast potential to achieve what you desire.

**11. Develop short- and long-term goals for all areas of your life. Act on these, and review your progress, continually**

If you haven't already, it's time to sit down with a pad and outline both short- and long-term goals for your life and work that reflect who you are at your core, and what you wish your life to mean and contribute going forward. Make your goals concrete, specific, behavioral and measurable, and don't limit yourself only to what you think is possible. Develop goals that reflect your true potential, and what you dream you can do. Once you commit these goals to paper, break them down into bite-sized, doable mini-steps, and begin to take action. Revisit your steps and your goals regularly.

**12. Be authentic to yourself. Take positive, courageous action and use your voice in empowered ways, always. Don't be afraid to put yourself forward.**

It's time to step up. Trying to be someone else professionally or personally simply doesn't work. Do and say what is authentic and appropriate for you. Develop an integrated style that embodies your values around leadership, authority, power, delegation, execution, relationship, and communication – a style that allows you to express who you are and what is

important to you. The more you act and speak authentically, the more it will become immediately apparent if and when you need to make a change in your professional life.

Employing these strategies regularly will not only help you avoid professional crisis altogether, but also bring you forward on a life-long path of professional and personal fulfillment, empowerment, confidence, and joy.

Bio:

Kathy Caprino, MA, is a nationally-recognized women's work-life expert and author of *Breakdown, Breakthrough: The Professional Woman's Guide to Claiming a Life of Passion, Power, and Purpose* (Berrett-Koehler, 2008, [www.breakdownbreakthrough.com](http://www.breakdownbreakthrough.com)). Founder and President of Ellia Communications, Inc. -- a women's career and work-life coaching and consulting company dedicated to helping women achieve *breakthrough* -- Caprino is a trained psychotherapist, seasoned career and executive coach, and sought-after writer and speaker on women's issues. She is a popular blogger on business, workplace, and career topics and trends, and as a top media source, she has appeared in more than 100 leading newspapers and magazines and on national television. Contact her on the Web at [www.elliacomunications.com](http://www.elliacomunications.com).