

Breakdown Breakthrough

Overcoming the 12 hidden crises of working women

By Kathy Caprino, MA

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Are you a professional woman longing for a radical change?

You are not alone.

According to my research—a yearlong national study in partnership with the Esteemed Woman Foundation—seven out of 10 women today, particularly those in their middle years, say they are facing a major turning point in their professional lives. After devoting years to building successful careers, they feel that their professional lives and identities no longer work. As a result, most are facing at least one of 12 hidden work-life crises, including chronic health problems, financial bondage, and painful losses of the “real me.”

There is good news, however. A professional crisis—or “breakdown”—is sounding an important wake-up call that, when answered, can lead to real and lasting change in how you work and live. In other words, breaking down opens the door to breaking through.

Breaking down—identifying the crises

A true professional crisis is more than a “tough time.” For most women, it feels like a no-turning-back situation—a point in time that demands reckoning and reevaluation. So how do you know when you’ve reached that point? If you frequently find yourself saying, “I can’t do this”—the desperate cry, or negative mantra, of work-life crisis—and consistently have deep-down feelings of disempowerment, you may be experiencing one or more of 12 hidden crises. Among them:

▶ **Suffering from chronic health problems**

Failing health—a chronic illness or ailment—that won’t respond to treatment

The mantra: “I can’t resolve my health problems.”

▶ **Losing your “voice”**

Contending with a crippling inability to speak up—unable to be an advocate for yourself or others, for fear of criticism, rejection, or punishment

The mantra: “I can’t speak up without being punished.”

▶ **Facing chronic mistreatment**

Being treated badly, even intolerably, at work—and choosing to stay

The mantra: “I can’t stop this cycle of mistreatment.”

▶ **Feeling trapped by financial fears**

Remaining in a negative situation solely because of money

The mantra: "I can't get out of this financial trap."

▶ **Wasting your real talents**

Realizing your work no longer fits and desperately wanting to use your natural talents and abilities

The mantra: "I can't use my real talents."

▶ **Struggling to balance life and work**

Trying—and failing—to balance it all, and feeling like you're letting down who and what matters most

The mantra: "I can't balance my life and work."

▶ **Doing work that isn't you**

Longing to reconnect with the "real you"—and do work you love

The mantra: "I can't do work that I love."

Breaking through—getting started

A professional crisis is telling you that change must occur—now—but that doesn't mean it will be easy. (Most likely, it won't.) Still, one step at a time, you can begin to create your own breakthrough. Ten tips for getting started:

▶ **Listen to your body.**

Your body is always communicating, but are you listening? From minor aches and pains to major forms of disease or malaise, pay attention to what an ailment may be saying to you—not just about your body, but your mind and spirit, too.

▶ **Heed your hunches.**

Your intuition, or inner voice, is an invaluable source of information. Start developing a keen awareness of the "dialogue" within you—even asking questions and waiting for the answers. Rarely, if ever, will your gut-level hunches lead you astray. Follow them!

▶ **Say "no" to an either-or life.**

Are you focusing on just one aspect of yourself? Don't do it. This is not an "either-or" life—it's an "everything" life. Reconnect with a talent or dimension of yourself that you love, but has gone by the wayside while you over-identified with a single role or function.

▶ **Speak up.**

Speaking the truth sounds simple, but it's not. Still, it's essential to learn to express yourself, or you'll feel stuck. Throughout the day, at home or work, ask yourself, "What do I want to say here?" Then take a risk and put it out there.

▶ **Embrace "good enough."**

Many women strive, even slave, to be the best—driving themselves crazy in the process. If you're one of them, "practice" accepting good enough where it makes sense and is

appropriate. Soon you'll discover that "good enough" makes room for "perfect" – in areas that *really* matter to you.

▶ **Figure out what you're most afraid of.**

Get in the cage with your fears. One by one, take them on and face what you're *most* afraid of. How is it driving you, limiting you, and wearing you out? Deal with these issues once and for all, and you're sure to get unstuck.

▶ **Get real about money.**

Money is simply an energy form—with no particular qualities in and of itself—yet it can be the means to either limiting or expanding yourself. Take time to understand your own beliefs and history around money. (Are they healthy?) And even if it's not the ideal situation yet, find a way to balance what you *need* to do with what you *want* to do—honoring your integrity and your heart along the way.

▶ **Stop making excuses.**

We're all good at making excuses for not acting on our dreams. Take a long, hard look at your own excuses, see them for what they are, and let them go.

▶ **Be open to angels.**

Odds are, there are a number of "angels" in your life—people who love and support you, believe in you, and will give you the gentle push you need to venture into the unknown. Be open to their help and act on it. You might be steeped in doubt or fear, but they're not.

▶ **Find a role model.**

You might already have a role model—from your own mother to Mother Teresa. If not, get serious about finding one. Look for someone who brings to light the qualities and successes you admire and aspire to, and whose story resonates.

Breaking down—breaking through

Finally, relax! *It's not all up to you.* There is a "higher dimension"—someone or something bigger than you—to help you break through and reach for your dreams. Step back, let go, and say "Yes!"

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). Founder and President of Ellia Communications, Inc., a women's executive and work-life coaching and consulting company, Caprino is a trained psychotherapist, seasoned career and life 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.