

Has Your Wake-Up Call Arrived?

By Kathy Caprino, MA

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A wake-up call is a resounding signal received that change is necessary in your life. Often we get this type of call when a crisis or deeply challenging situation has emerged.

Clients ask me, "What is *crisis* in our lives? How can we tell we're heading into crisis, versus simply going through a really bad patch?" What are the signs of "breakdown," as I tend to call it?

As defined in the Webster's dictionary, a "crisis" is:

- An emotionally significant event or radical change of status in a person's life (as in a midlife *crisis*)
- The decisive moment (as in a literary plot)
- The turning point for better or worse, as in an acute disease or fever
- A paroxysmal attack of pain, distress, or disordered function
- An unstable or crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending; *especially*: one with the distinct possibility of a highly undesirable outcome (as in a financial *crisis*)
- A situation that has reached a critical phase

Clearly, we're talking about a "no turning back" situation - a time in which a re-evaluation is called for. The definition of "crisis" used in my new book ***Breakdown, Breakthrough*** (Berrett-Koehler, Nov. 2008, www.breakdownbreakthrough.com) pertains to the occurrence of a deeply troubling, heart-wrenching, or grueling event or series of events that brings you to a recognition, finally and irrevocably, that change must occur *now*. Crisis pushes you to your knees, and stretches open your awareness that to repeat this experience (or this feeling, event, or situation) again *in the same way* would be close to intolerable.

A wake-up call in the professional arena means that you suddenly know beyond a shadow of a doubt that *how* you work, *what* you work on, *who* you work with or *who* you are when you work, and *where* you work -- these elements are causing damage to you, your life, your body, and your spirit. A wake-up call often seems to strike out of the blue, yet we rarely get to this point without some warning signs along the way. Crisis may look different for each person, but there is one unifying theme that defines it:

Crisis wakes up the individual who faces it. This wake-up call demands our attention, and often leads us to have a "breakdown" or compels us to "break down" once and for all what isn't working, and shed it. Crisis reveals that significant revision in life or work is required immediately.

If you've had any of the following thoughts or considered these actions in the past six months, you may be heading towards a wake-up call, and now is the time to hear it, and embrace what it's trying to tell you.

Have you ever:

- Allowed money and financial "benefits" to keep you in an abusive relationship at home or at work?
- Called in sick just because you couldn't face what was on your plate that day?
- Flirted with sabotaging the work of your boss or colleague because s/he's been so awful to you?
- Wondered to yourself, "What the heck is the purpose of what I do?"
- Snuck out of the office, and lied about why you are leaving, so that you could see your child's soccer game (or performance, concert, etc.)
- Realized that you can't remember the last time you did *anything* for yourself?
- Blamed yourself for "not fitting in" and feeling so alone in your current situation?
- Believed you might have a nervous breakdown just getting done what has to each day for work and for home?
- Fantasized frequently about another field(s) or area that would be very exciting to focus on?
- Sensed that you are missing important aspects of your family's life, and will never get them back?
- Thought to yourself, "I don't want to do this one more day."

If you've had any of the above experiences and thoughts, you're most likely heading for a major turning point in the road, and it's time to grab control of the wheel.

Is a wake up call on its way to you?

If so, embrace it. Change is vital and good. Take this opportunity to explore your needs and wants fully, and realize they are not to be ignored. Uncover some potential new directions that excite you. You don't have to know the "hows" right now. Just flesh out one area you'd deeply like to explore, then take a step to research it and test it out. The key is to sense how your energy *feels* when you consider and examine this new direction. If you feel good, then keep moving towards exploring it.

The first step on the path of aligning your life to your satisfaction is realizing that you're stuck only if you perceive yourself to be. It's never too late to reinvent yourself or your work (trust me – I've done it!), and expand your skills and abilities to reach toward a new direction that represents a better fit.

After all, aren't you worth having a career and life you love? I know you are.

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 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.elliacommunications.com.