

Breakdown Breakthrough

Overcoming crises by
empowering yourself

By Kathy Caprino, MA

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Women are discovering their professional lives and identities are no longer working. Often this hits in midlife, and manifests as a full-blown crisis. There are 12 common crises professional women face, all sharing one common theme—disempowerment—the inability to advocate effectively for yourself or move forward in positive, self-affirming and satisfying ways. These hit hard, and have a significant negative impact emotionally, behaviorally and professionally.

Based on my research with over 100 midlife mid-level to high-level professional women, these crises occur on four levels: women's relationships with themselves, with others, with the world, and with their "higher selves." Disempowerment crises include challenges such as "I Can't Balance Life and Work," "I Can't Find Ways to Use My Real Talents," "I Can't Get Out of This Financial Trap," and "I Can't Do Work that I Love."

After building successful careers, many women realize what they've been trying to achieve is no longer sustainable or desirable. Nine out of ten say they're facing at least one crisis, and many women are experiencing on average three at the same time. While men face similar challenges, women experience them uniquely and differently from men. Women need new empowered thinking, supportive programs, and a substantial revision to the career model that was tailored to men's needs.

What Women Want

What are professional women longing for when "breakdown" occurs? They struggle with the absence of one or more benefits of a fully empowered life. They yearned for, but couldn't find the way to:

- Honor or express their various facets
- Respect the work they and their colleagues do, and be respected in turn
- Be treated fairly
- Earn the money they need to
- Expand their self-reliance
- Achieve "quality of life," flexibility, or control over what they do and how
- Balance important life roles
- Make a significant positive difference in the world and in the lives of others
- Utilize their voices, talents, and abilities
- Contribute in ways that reflect their unique needs and values without being negatively judged

Professional breakdown involves realizing that you are struggling—and failing—to attain a positive life experience that includes: passion, power, purpose, security, integrity, self-reliance and balance. You know you're in breakdown mode when you decide you don't want to go on for one more minute experiencing this situation or challenge in the same way you have in the past. For some, addressing crisis and making room for positive life change requires a good deal of inner and outer work. But for others, small tweaks in one critical dimension are enough.

Women are successfully dealing with major mid-life transitions, and are reaching new levels of success, integration and satisfaction. Finding positive approaches to life and work is not only a possibility, but a necessity and a blessing for those I've interviewed and worked with.

Overcoming Professional Crisis: A New Guide for Empowered Living

Overcoming professional breakdown not easy, but is doable. One interviewee, an organizational design consultant turned

life coach, stated, "I realized that my purpose in life is to express who I am as fully and creatively as possible, and to do so required a powerful 'shedding.'" Another interviewee said that "getting in the cage with my fears" was transformational for her.

This "shedding" of what holds you back and facing your fears are part of a critical three-step process:

- 1) Step Back.** Gain a new, expanded, and empowered perspective of what is working and what isn't.
- 2) Let Go.** Of actions, beliefs and behaviors that keep you stuck.
- 3) Say Yes!** To yourself and the power you have to embrace your life visions. Say yes to moving forward to the life you can't live without.

Achieving breakthrough from our challenges and power gaps helps us break down what isn't working and breakthrough to a more authentic, fulfilling, and joyful life through conscious choices from an empowered position. Once we marshal our abilities, talents, and resources, there's no limiting how far we can go. The first step is to recognize that the time for change is now.

Don't miss Kathy's 10 great tips at www.pbwconnections.com.



Kathy Caprino, MA, is a work-life expert and author of *Breakdown, Breakthrough: The Professional Woman's Guide to Claiming a Life of Passion, Power, and Purpose*.

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