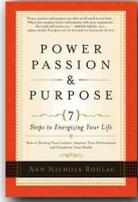


Author Prescribes Slowing Down to Add Power, Passion, and Purpose to Life

—By Noelle Robbins

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Many women know the drill. And drill is exactly the right word to describe daily schedules that are hassled, harried, hurried and verging on mechanical: rising early and rushing out the door; hours of commuting; nonstop work demands; and meals sandwiched between chores and phone calls. All followed by a restless night's sleep.

Add spouses and children to a routine that is repeated every day, day in and day out, and the situation takes on an increased sense of urgency and intensity.

Women often pride themselves on handling these multiple tasks and responsibilities with smooth confidence and energy. That is, until they crash and burn. According to Ann Roulac, author of *Power, Passion, and Purpose: 7 Steps to Energizing Your Life*, women who experience unexplained illness or depression may be sabotaging their own success and happiness with their speedy lifestyles, apparent vitality and nonstop career pursuits.

In fact, Roulac's 30 years of experience as a leader and consultant in national and international finance and real estate, have led her to one inescapable conclusion: Working women are in the midst of a "wellness crisis." Roulac says that the combination of fast-paced work environments, economic uncertainty, cultural and social challenges, and the evolving global community can all lead to feelings of powerlessness that "can undermine a sense of comfort and wellbeing." Even immediate access to information made possible by computer and cell phone technology may be more bane than boon.

Roulac, however, is convinced that these stresses can be met with constructive and empowering changes in both individual and corporate approaches to not just surviving, but thriving in the fast-track business world. The key? Connecting early on, in the college years if not before, with personal life purpose. She defines life purpose as each woman's "skills, talents and unique world view." But she emphasizes that it goes deeper than that.

Discovering life purpose means, "Knowing what you are here to learn and what you are here to contribute."

And Roulac feels strongly that women have much to contribute to the current global business environment. "Corporations need CEOs with women's natural qualities of nurturing and taking-care." She is concerned with what she sees as a "neutering of femaleness," both emotional and biological, as "young women pursue success."

In the course of her work over the past 15 years Roulac has noted a disturbing trend, "Many women believe they need to be as tough as men, and they aren't happy." She says, "Men and women are different and companies need both to be successful."

According to Roulac, each phase of a woman's career offers rewards and obstacles. In the first five to 10 years of professional development, youth and enthusiasm can fuel women with seemingly inexhaustible physical and mental resources. In prime mid-career years families may present new demands and requirements for flexibility. And even in the so-called empty nest phase of life, successful working women may still face responsibilities for children and aging parents.

Identifying life purpose early on in the growth phase of a career can reduce the likelihood of stress and burnout throughout a busy work life, and can increase the opportunities for engaging in work that is personally fulfilling. When women feel connected to a life purpose they realize the benefits of approaching career choices, and business decisions, with a calm certainty that Roulac says "can keep them moving towards what they like, which in response to expectations and obligations, can create more health and success."

Roulac says, in an ideal world, young women would graduate from college with both a degree and a firm sense of who they are and what constitutes their purpose in life. She adds that CEOs with whom she has worked say, they wish her book was required college reading for young job seekers before they start working.

But she is quick to reassure women that identifying and connecting with a life purpose can happen at any point in life, if space is made to allow the process to occur. Her book offers numerous action plans that can be used to consciously connect with life purpose. Different approaches will resonate with different personalities. Roulac knows that the irony, of course, is finding time, in fast-paced lives, for personal reflection and growth. Her advice is to focus on a single practice, to start. Her number one choice? Meditation.

Roulac says meditation can quiet and focus the mind. And she has ample evidence from her work with individuals and corporations that this can lead to personal benefits like better sleep; it can also result in improved job performance and better decision making. She notes that just taking a 15-minute break in the midst of a chaotic and confusing work atmosphere, disconnecting from the energy of a dysfunctional business situation, will help clarify options and boost constructive responses to challenges.

Based upon her years of study in ancient belief systems and practices, there is a strong spiritual element inherent in the strategies Roulac recommends. Making a spiritual connection may help women "know their purpose and have more passion, energy, meaning and joy in their lives. And more fun."

She adds that, "Companies that are the best places to work have strong spiritual foundations. They want to do good, to make a contribution." Roulac is convinced that when businesswomen embrace their power, passion and purpose their influence will be felt throughout the corporate world. The result? More emphasis on work/life balance; surges in creative productivity; enhanced personal health; and, hopefully, fewer Enrons. Changes easy to feel passionate about.

Noelle Robbins is a USC Health Journalism Fellow and a freelance writer specializing in women's health and lifestyle issues.