

The Third Shift

Managing Hard Choices in Our Careers, Homes, and Lives as Women

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Chapter One: The Myth of Androgyny

Who Are We Supposed to Be?

Why could one never do a natural thing without having to screen it behind a structure of artifice?

Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*

She's just turned forty, and she feels every day of it. Gwen Allen₁ has made it big time. She is the highest-ranked executive woman in her company, a major Silicon Valley computer manufacturer. As an "early badge" employee and one of a handful of females with an elite technical degree in manufacturing engineering, she worked at a furious pace for sixteen years, finally earning promotion to vice president and general manager of a crucial and rapidly growing product division. Known and respected as a strong people manager with great manufacturing instincts, she is now trusted to build the company's future. Beyond her elite title, the company has rewarded Gwen's efforts with an enviable amount of stock. Even on the days that the NASDAQ goes into free-fall, Gwen is a millionaire three times over.

As for real life, Gwen has struck gold there, too. She is the mother of three great kids, all in elementary or nursery school, and all doing well. Her husband-turned-consultant is proud of Gwen's career but admits that he doesn't see enough of her. Although no slouch himself, he's not as driven as his superstar wife. As a veteran of the high-tech wars in a software start-up, he understands the mind-numbing hours executives spend on the job, and the seductiveness of the raw intellectual challenges of high-tech business. Beyond his consulting practice, his job is to work with the nanny and make certain all the pieces fit together for the family. Gwen, however, constantly battles an inner voice that tells her she's not spending enough time at home. The family tightrope sways quite a bit from time to time, but no one has fallen off. Yet.

Lately, however, something has changed. The higher Gwen climbs in the company, the worse she feels. After the glow dimmed from her promotion, she was left only with the cold reality of the vice presidency. It's not exactly a Louisiana chain gang, but the hours are long, the competitive problems complex and worsening, the personnel issues relentless. She cries regularly, as much as once a week. Her tears help release the pressure for a few moments, but afterward nothing really changes. Inside, she's deeply ashamed. What's wrong with her? Can't she cut it?

Gwen has never been a great sleeper, but now her insomnia feels out of control. She regularly wakes up in the middle of the night, exhausted but unable to keep her mind from performing countless instant replays of the day's highlights. Worst of all, she lives with an icy trickle of fear that never goes away completely: with all her success, why does she still feel like a failure?

The Dream Is Dead

Gwen Allen is suffering from the identity challenge, the most basic of the three dilemmas (identity, task, and balance) that create angst and uncertainty in contemporary women. Played out in the corporate workplace, the identity challenge involves the choices a woman makes about who she is at work. It surfaces most often in a male-dominated environment, although even women working in a "pink ghetto" environment such as nursing or elementary school teaching can face the identity challenge, particularly if they are interested in moving up the ranks.² In Gwen's case, how much of herself can she reveal? How much of herself should she ignore? Should she try to become like the men since they can't, or won't, become more like her? Should she follow the nostrums for entry into the club, strategically arranging her days and relationships to charm her way into the comfort zone of men in power? Or will hard work and excellent performance pave her way to acceptance?

One of the reasons the identity challenge is so difficult to manage at work is because it colors every choice a woman makes as she develops her leadership style. It affects the little issues. (Gwen, for example, still wonders whether she should sit next to other women in a staff meeting, or try to become more gender-blind.) It also impacts the grander questions (should she forge new ground for women as she rises up the corporate pyramid, or lie low, awaiting the day when she is truly an insider?). It's exhausting to cope with these continuous anxieties day after day, a third shift that has expanded to an endless shift.

For many women I've seen over the years, this distress appears unavoidable, the inevitable result when two disparate workplace cultures, one male and dominant, one female and subordinate, grind and writhe below the surface like the genderized equivalent of California's San Andreas Fault. Thirty years into the feminist movement, we have not yet reached either a general cultural equilibrium or specific rules of engagement to determine how men and women are to partner effectively in the workplace. Instead, taking only the female viewpoint in this book, we have the women, as the subordinate culture in most workplaces, seeking to learn more about the dominant culture--often finding out more about how the men operate than they know about themselves--pleasing them, accommodating them, and disguising their real selves when necessary. This deprivation hurts both sides, because the subordinate and dominant groups lose valid knowledge about each other during the charade. Moreover, the subordinate never really feels truly comfortable, because she assumes the role of the outsider, a trespasser rather than a resident, until the persona becomes more real than one's inner self.

In her groundbreaking work on the psychology of women, Jean Baker Miller points out that "a subordinate group has to concentrate on basic survival. Accordingly, direct, honest reaction to destructive treatment is avoided. Open, self-initiated action in its own self-interest must also be avoided."³ Is authenticity at work truly incompatible with subordination? If so, the women's movement has further wonders yet to perform.

The next step to being one's self at work is to move women from imitating men and the dominant culture to developing a feminine professional identity of their own. This is a difficult transformation that--as we shall see in this and other chapters--evolves over time with experience and conscious reflection. The important point to highlight here is the universality of the identity challenge. No matter how senior, how wise, or how outwardly successful the women executives that come into my office for executive coaching, they all have had to come to terms with this issue. Those who don't acknowledge the problem--a condition I term "gender denial"⁴--are not only less successful in achieving their goals at work; they can also be walking time bombs, likely to wake up one day and repudiate

all that they have gained in search of something, or someone, they cannot yet envision.

Highly driven professional women with significant parental pressures can suffer the most. Their expectations of themselves and the workplace are often the highest. No wonder Gwen Allen has indisputably arrived at her breaking point, a deeply painful meltdown ensuing from years of trying to fulfill contradictory demands of her work, her family, and her self-imposed internal needs for increasing achievement as well as personal satisfaction. The elaborate and disciplined systems she has always relied upon to keep her balance while on the working woman's tightrope so long keep her personal high wire from swaying dizzily beneath her feet. She's afraid to look down, to turn back, or even to take another step forward to safety. All the major symptoms are there: exhaustion, sadness, lack of trust in her own instincts, decreasing self-esteem and sense of inadequacy, inability to act or make decisions, and "a peculiar, unassailable, overwhelming bewilderment."⁵

That Gwen is a demanding, self-critical perfectionist makes her situation more extreme than the norm. But the underlying dilemma paralyzes and torments thousands of contemporary working women, hitting overachievers the hardest. Sociologist Martha Beck, author of *Breaking Point: Why Women Fall Apart and How They Can Re-Create Their Lives*, attributes this phenomenon to a deeply rooted double bind our society imposes upon women. American women are caught in the cultural schizophrenia of mutually exclusive expectations, facing increasing pressure (and opportunities) to assume increasingly active responsibility in the workplace, while at the same time encouraged to remain in traditional roles in a society hammered daily by haunting media exposés of neglected children. The unstated subtext is that street-corner violence, adolescent drug and alcohol addiction, and even teenage pregnancy would be lessened if mothers stayed at home and tended their flocks. On the other hand, the second income of working women makes our consumer society hum. True androgyny--acting out both gender roles simultaneously--is a myth, rather than a reality for most women. The dream is dead. Instead, it's all a question of trade-offs.

A Developmental Catch-22

It would all be laughable if it weren't so counterproductive--the basic human tendency to analyze an unsatisfying situation and then look around for someone to blame. Men as a group constitute a convenient scapegoat for the women's identity dilemma, but effective strategies to proactively manage it may be more fruitfully sought by turning to the field of human development. Borrowing from the work of Mary Catherine Bateson, women "compose a life" from different themes and roles, forming a richer but much more varied mosaic than men's linear progress through life and career.⁶ Only recently has the broader field of human development acknowledged that "life structures"--the underlying patterns, designs, needs, and choices in a person's life--operate somewhat differently for women than men. Freed from Adam's rib, women must establish their own distinctively feminine standard of success, prizing improvisation as genuine achievement, rather than slap-dash accommodation to a masculine developmental clock.⁷

Nor do the yearnings and private satisfactions of women perfectly mirror men's inner needs. A woman's identity is based upon relationships, not just deeds, at work as at home. Gwen Allen, for example, never feels a true sense of accomplishment with completing a project at work unless the work is done well and the participants have felt good about their involvement. The pure getting-it-done-right isn't enough for her. She is far from unique in this regard. Joan Kofodimos, a researcher at the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina, and an experienced organizational consultant, observes that men seek "mastery" throughout their organizational lives, "the experience of developing and exercising one's abilities and powers," while women are more likely to

seek "intimacy," or connectedness with others and with their inner self.⁸

In a decade of work as an executive coach, I have observed this phenomenon more often than not. Because the corporate workplace demands attention primarily to tangible results, women often place additional expectations and burdens upon themselves by trying to achieve excellence in two spheres: an outcome, and a distinctive legacy that can be traced back to their different developmental paths as they grow to adulthood. On their good days, the need for a stricter standard of success enhances their satisfaction and productivity. On their darker days, self-doubts remove the pleasures of heightened self-awareness and sensitivity to others.

Consider the following example of mental gymnastics I tracked in one of my female clients, a project manager who had released a software upgrade on time and with minimal bugs but had experienced great discomfort pushing her team to meet the deadline. Her inner third shift involves the dialogue she maintains with herself, vacillating back and forth between self-awareness and self-doubt:

In presenting this portrayal of an actual third shift, I did not exaggerate the language in the right-hand column of self-doubt. I have seen the most competent women at the vice-presidential level demur at decisions because of personal doubts about how to manage their need to relate well to others while at the same time drilling down and nailing the project goal. I have worked with numerous high-level men who are also quite indecisive, but their reluctance to make the call stems more often from the need to properly play the politics and not offend any critical players. Women--not all, but so many that I have seen--are more likely to worry about hurting others' feelings; there are clear data from the workplace in support of visibly different developmental needs of men and women. This can be hard for men to understand, let alone to value.

Real Men Don't Bond

Thus the first difficulty stemming from the identity challenge for women in a corporate setting is that the dominant workplace culture--usually developed and designed by men--values first and foremost mastery and tangible accomplishment. The intimacy-oriented approach is quite rare among male managers, despite all the joking about male bonding. In Kofodimos's study, the men experienced tremendous discomfort with intimacy, often avoiding it actively. I've often noticed how human nature tends to devalue what can't be easily understood or practiced. It's no surprise that even though women crack open glass ceilings daily and experience statistical success in entry-level and midlevel hirings, the core identity of corporations remains firmly masculine.

Paradoxically, the more that women seek intimacy in the work setting, the more they become outsiders, and the more their relational needs at work are seen as threatening, uncomfortable, or inappropriate to men. If women mask their feelings and intimacy needs, they become less authentic and the workplace inserts a powerful wedge between their behavior and their true needs as women. To be sure, the strength and persistence of the wedge varies according to the individual woman, but it is a true case of denial to insist that men and women possess the same needs in their adult working lives. The developmental catch-22 of the workplace creates a no-win situation for the identity of working women. This is why Gwen Allen looks successful on the outside yet is slowly disintegrating from within.

As if the mastery-versus-intimacy problem isn't tough enough to manage, thousands of women groan under an even more daunting load on the corporate tightrope. These women actually want to integrate their mastery and intimacy needs, rather than settling for only one. That is, they want to meet both needs, at the same time-- a truly audacious

goal that even highly ambitious and interpersonally skilled men would never try to pull off. Yet most women executives I've met try to stagger beneath this double load, raising once again the specter of the myth of androgyny.

On the one hand, integration may reflect a superior level of ability and morality on the part of women, as feminists such as Carol Gilligan would have us believe. Women, Gilligan implies, are superior to men because they can acquire adult power without losing their innate feminine sensitivity and compassion.⁹ Her book, *In a Different Voice*, struck a deep chord within the field of adult development because it contrasted significantly with the view of the day, first articulated by Erik Erikson, that adult development requires separation from others, rather than intimacy, and that it is an adolescent, unrealistic yearning to attain integration of both needs.¹⁰ Gilligan was among the earliest to conclude that this party line of adult development fails to consider women. In biting language, she likens the male adult development cycle to Virgil's journey, an "arduous struggle toward a glorious destiny."¹¹ Relationships constitute a clearly subordinate role in this journey and may even inhibit "individuation"--updated terminology for the separation that Erikson articulated as central to healthy male development.

Women in the corporate world can become frozen between two standards of adult development. Masculine separation looms as an "empowering condition of free and full self-expression, while [feminine] attachment appears a paralyzing entrapment and caring an inevitable prelude to compromise."¹² The real irony is that relational abilities, or "emotional intelligence" as it is currently termed, increase in importance as one moves upward in the corporate world.¹³ The soft relational skills--self-awareness, empathic, and social skills--are more critical than pure intellect for success in the upper echelons. Women have no monopoly on these soft skills, but in my experience of the past decade they are more likely than men to value them.

Take the case of Maria Rodriguez, an energetic regional sales director for a multinational pharmaceutical house. She extracted her last promotion over four equally talented peers (three men and one woman) because she had a reputation for bringing people together. Her new job involved integrating two formerly separate geographic territories that had historically been at odds with each other--the legacy of her predecessor, an overtly competitive manager whose motto was "take no prisoners."

Maria came into her new job with solid experience and plenty of raw brainpower to back up her time in the trenches. But the key success factors were her willingness and ability to personally work with each peer--no matter how defensive and irritating, or how large their egos--and emerge from her discussions with commitments and win-win decisions. In her own way, she also took no prisoners. Her peers would be the first to say that it was no use fighting her; as one confided to me, "In the end you'll lose, and you'll even like losing to her!"

The downside of Maria's approach, of course, is that it takes time, hours of it, because this relational approach is so labor-intensive.

All the key players have to be approached individually as well as in group settings. They have to be checked back with and stroked. There's no let up. For the first ten or twelve years of her management career, Maria was willing to put in the extra time. The rewards of accomplishing the goal and keeping the troops happy were enough. Her third shift was healthful rather than demonic. But somewhere along the line, Maria began to feel that she was "losing her edge," as she put it. The old thrill was gone. Her children had all successfully finished college, and her husband was happily launching his third start-up.

The harder she tried to feel connected to people at work, the emptier she felt. In our sessions together, we traced the root of her problem. For years, she had been fighting an uphill battle in her company to make people count ahead of products and technology. For many years, she felt that she was making progress, but recently a new division president had been hired who set her work back by a decade. This new boss was interested purely in results, and he managed through intimidation. Whether he was threatened by relational needs or simply unable to relate to them, the new president made it clear to everyone that Maria's style was ineffective and too time-consuming. "She just isn't tough enough," he insisted.

Of course, "it wasn't personal," but after a particularly terse and unsatisfactory meeting between the two of them, Maria allowed herself to feel--for the first time in years--that her need to attain both happy campers and successful accomplishment was adolescent and unnecessary. Her third shift was like an internal dial of her own mental health, the needle creeping from self-awareness over to self-doubt. She began to lose both her confidence and her eagerness to come to the office. She worked for the new president for another six months, her needs sidelined again and again until she learned to ignore them, to recast them, and even to turn against herself, thinking there was something the matter with her. One day she simply resigned, giving up much she loved in the company, but knowing she no longer fit. After a brief search period, she found a new job with a competitor with exciting responsibilities, a compatible boss, and a work culture that seemed more attuned to her values. Who is the real loser here?

This is how a woman's hold on her true identity begins to slip, one day at a time. It took Maria Rodriguez six months, Gwen Allen sixteen years, for the process to percolate through the haze of promotions, stock options, and successful strategic initiatives these women launched at their respective companies. The internal tug-of-war left both women exhausted, defeated, indecisive, and self-questioning. Gwen certainly doesn't feel the way a vice president should. Most days she doesn't feel like anybody at all, just a bundle of nerves. Since she is the only female vice president, who can she ask what she is supposed to be feeling? Surely not the other women on the ladder below her. She's supposed to be their shining star, the woman who has made it and can do it all. The myth of androgyny has duped Gwen, just as it has duped others into the belief that women don't have to pay a price for their position on the corporate front lines. If true androgyny is a dead hope for today's exhausted and puzzled women, what should they do next?

The Keys to the Kingdom

In 1994, Mary Pipher published *Reviving Ophelia, Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. Thousands of panicked mothers across the nation yanked their preteen daughters from middle schools and junior highs, thrusting them into all-girl academies. Even the public school systems have tentatively begun to research the legality and efficacy of same-sex classrooms. Pipher depicts American adolescence as physically and emotionally dangerous for girls. "Something dramatic happens," she writes; "just as planes and ships disappear mysteriously into the Bermuda Triangle, so do the selves of girls go down in droves. They crash and burn in a social and developmental Bermuda Triangle. In early adolescence, studies show that girls' IQ scores drop and their math and science scores plummet. They lose their resiliency and optimism and become less curious and inclined to take risks. They lose their assertive, energetic and tomboyish personalities and become more deferential, self-critical and depressed. They report great unhappiness with their own bodies."¹⁴

For the Gwen Allens of corporate America, who escaped Ophelia's fate as preteens, it appears that the danger is far from over just because they've reached adulthood. Of course, it doesn't happen to everyone. A recent study of one thousand women, published in *Working Mother*, reported that multiple roles agree with ambitious women, who report

happier marriages than their less ambitious counterparts, even when combining stressful professional lives with family responsibilities.¹⁵ The ambitious women were also more likely to perceive themselves as good mothers than were those who characterized themselves as less ambitious.

Why these results? The study's authors offer up a no-brainer: successful women are more positive and have more energy to begin with. Everything in their life works better for these exciting, powerful women with well-rounded lives. These women feel good about themselves because they are clear about who they are. The multiple roles in their lives contribute to their strong sense of self, rather than fragmenting their identity. Their third shifts support rather than tear down their belief and confidence in themselves as working women.

But there can be a thin line between the profile described by the *Working Mother* survey and the Gwen Allens of corporate America. When the high wire starts to unravel, the woman doesn't merely stumble; she tends to plunge downward through the thin safety net our society provides for working parents. Hence, Gwen's unhappiness despite all her success. It's more than overload; it's her very identity at stake after years of the androgynous life. Not every woman need end up like her. Indeed, many may feel quite content with their corporate careers. But for every such fortunate woman are many others who are struggling to fit into a workplace that is slow to recognize, value, and act on their crucial needs as women--from the freedom to use a "softer" feminine style, to the flexibility to better balance family life with job requirements. The identity dilemma occurs when workplace practices and values collide with a woman's true personal beliefs and inner needs. The symptoms, first and foremost, include a third shift that brings pain rather than pleasure to its owner.

Making Your Third Shift Work for You: Managing the Identity Challenge

With closer examination, we can identify a number of practices to help women better navigate their professional lives and use their third shifts to their advantage. These practices stem from twenty years of work with adult learners in graduate courses, private clients in my consulting practice, and structured sessions with women in my research interviews. Each can serve as an important starting point to help women develop a positive working identity without sacrificing the inner territory of their souls, or without requiring everyone else to make all of the changes.

- Look in the mirror regularly. Face yourself. Face your demons.
- Develop an effective breakaway strategy, either virtual or the real thing.
- Go against the grain. You can't help others without starting with yourself.
- Take a risk. "Jump at the sun."
- Jettison part of the load. If you keep carrying it, no one else will.
- Enlist support. Change efforts require encouragement and understanding from others.
- Invest in yourself. Is your credit more important than your sanity?
- Be realistic. True, lasting harmony in our society is elusive.

Look in the Mirror Regularly

Of all the steps, the hardest is this first one. For most of us, facing our true selves can be a difficult chore, one we shun without provocation. It is never easy to detach and spend the hard time necessary to look in the glass and accept the image that stares back. In Gwen Allen's case, her natural achievement drive, her excitement at the new intellectual challenges unfolding at work, and her complete preoccupation with the everyday demands of leadership kept her from dawdling in front of the mirror to review her own progress and personal growth. Early in her career, she deliberately submerged too much

reflection about where she fit into the system. As a woman in manufacturing engineering, she was already an oddball. Why spend even more time fretting over something that couldn't change? Better to learn how to operate successfully with the men around her. Besides, she wasn't looking for a fight. She was looking for a chance.

Approaching her thirtieth birthday, Gwen and her husband decided it was time to start a family. Having succeeded in everything she had tried to date, she was certain she could combine motherhood with a career. After her oldest was born, she strode confidently back into the workplace, certain she could handle the new pleasures and challenges of a child. Oddly enough, the entrance of a baby into her life was the very first time that gender raised its head. Naturally, she worked with many male parents, but none of them had abdomens jutting out like the prow of a ship after nine months. For the first time, she noticed that others were treating her differently--nicely, but differently all the same. She just ignored the special treatment.

After her second child was born, Gwen again promptly returned to work, focused on how to keep her new family from inconveniencing either herself or others at work. She downplayed any maternal image that might leak out at work. She groomed herself meticulously each morning to eliminate lurking Cheerios from her hair, and she purged her office of all but two small pictures of each child. She concentrated on the practical, assuming the whole trick was straightforward scheduling. With her third and final child, she allowed herself the luxury of four months of maternity leave before returning to the office, having learned from her first two. With her middle daughter, Gwen's comfort with the situation became somewhat more precarious as she endured a year of nursing into a breast pump behind the closed doors of her office, since her daughter couldn't tolerate formula or cow's milk.

Gwen stayed upbeat through the entire experience, knowing it was a transient dilemma. It will get better, she told herself, though she was torn every day as she left work with reports undone, or left home with a baby in tears in someone else's arms. Struggling to control the disparate parts of her life, she simply picked up the pace, literally running from home to work, meeting to meeting. I can well imagine that there was little time to look into the mirror. A day at a time, Gwen continued to lose herself, until the authentic woman underneath the juggled balls was buried as deeply as last year's headline news.

It all finally came crashing down after her promotion to vice president. Transitions--even the positive ones--can yank a woman like Gwen right off the working woman's tightrope. It was clear to me that her promotion was a turning point because the new title involved even more work and responsibility, with the added dimension of a subtle yet crucial change in her leadership style toward a more hands-off approach. Now she was managing a large organization without really understanding everything about the business. She had to delegate decisions, not just work, to senior people she barely knew and didn't necessarily trust. She had to give up control, even as she was perceived as being more powerful with her new rank. And with the exception of the lone human resource professional on her staff, she managed all highly competitive men, several of whom were still fuming that she'd been promoted over them. When Gwen finally took a real look in the mirror, she took the first step of acknowledging the severity of her problem, rather than running away from it. She stopped using her work as an anesthetic, her busyness walling her off during the day, her exhaustion a narcotic at night.

To nourish her first small glimmer of hope and change, I urged her to get away. For the first time in years, she took a few weeks off, without planning an elaborate family vacation. With minimal but typically efficient voice mails to her staff, she arranged to be absent for three weeks--a short period, but in the company where she worked a veritable

windfall of time. Another woman, one whose personality was less hard-driving or less extreme, might not require such a complete time out. Another woman might have made many other choices and compromises along the way, taking longer at home with each child, trying part-time work for the first year while breast-feeding, putting up more family pictures at work and not worrying about how others saw her, or even--God forbid-- temporarily turning down a promotion, sensing it would be incompatible with three young children. But like many other women who've come into my office with manic third shifts, Gwen didn't do any of these things. So she had to take a different step to help find herself again.

Develop an Effective Breakaway Strategy

"I decided to run away!" Gwen shouted with a giant smile as she burst into my office for our last visit before the sabbatical she had maneuvered for herself. Joking aside, in our masculine, westernized culture, deliberately removing oneself from the firing line is often seen as weakness, rather than a sensible and life-affirming strategy, a kind of workplace hooky and an unjustified absence in many of Silicon Valley's high-tech palaces. Nonetheless, if you seek to understand your own choices and make clearheaded decisions about your life, it can be extremely useful to take yourself out of the game temporarily. Some women are able to extend their vacations for this purpose, or take sabbaticals or unpaid leaves. Naturally, many women must make do with "virtual" breakaways: stolen moments, afternoons, or evenings when they are not distracted by other demands.

Taking a true sabbatical or breakaway from your work can involve career and financial risks. But I remain firmly convinced that it's a strategy well worth fighting for, even if your company is one that frowns on the practice, and even if it seems out of reach financially. An analogy is our love affair with the biblical Moses. Most people's vision of this great prophet is a single powerful image of him striding defiantly out across the desert, the Israelites in tow. They forget about the years he spent in quiet solitude, resting in the hills as a reclusive shepherd, preparing himself for the real work ahead. For women apprehensive about their true reputation in a male-dominated workplace, a breakaway may accurately be feared as career-limiting. But it is senseless for women depleted from mental, emotional, or physical exhaustion to delay their breakaway for too long, or naively assume that a vacation with the family or a few moments of quiet meditation substitutes for the real thing.

The real thing is a voyage of self-discovery, a test of one's third-shift voices. Though many will disagree, I firmly believe that most contemporary working women with children at home simply cannot develop the requisite psychological disengagement for genuine, deep reflection without getting away physically. It is equally clear to me that not every woman requires this extreme form of breakaway strategy. Moreover, some women, like Gwen Allen, can afford a true sabbatical extending over several months, while most others may have to manage with a week or so, or even less. The latter women have to live with a virtual, armchair breakaway: say, an afternoon off in a quiet place removed from one's normal surroundings. The results associated with each strategy may vary, however.

A breakaway is not simple rest but a sustained, solo, deeply personal journey, involving mental and spatial distance from the workplace with the objective of reflecting and, if necessary, healing. For women like Gwen who have reached a breaking point, healing is not possible without time away from the source of the pain. Time out, however, need not be expensive, because the destination for a breakaway is development of a new perspective about one's life and one's choices. One can go to the mountains, the seashore, a dump motel outside town, or a solitary walk down the road, so long as one makes a clean exit, leaving cell phones, pagers, and even the most well-meaning friends and

loved ones behind. If taken regularly, breakaways can require no more than a day off or an occasional weekend away (which, granted, is a stretch for single mothers without close family in the area). In my experience, by taking some regular time out for yourself you can avoid the depth of trauma that Gwen Allen was experiencing; you can also avoid taking months off work, which might be a luxury you can't afford.

To put it another way, a true breakaway involves sacred time, a concept familiar to followers of eastern and Native American religions but suspiciously New Agey to most American executives. In these cultures, sacred time typically involves physical removal from one's routine daily life, whether in a trek to a remote hillside, within a community of peers in a sweat lodge, or in a quiet garden where profound meditation can occur naturally. Of course, pursuing sacred time in our modern culture requires practical adjustments, but in principle they may be as much psychological as physical.

There may be envy mixed with the skepticism, but most executives break out in a rash when they hear a phrase like "sacred time"--no matter how piteously they themselves whine about the need for their employees to take time out to think and "become more strategic," "get out of the weeds," and "look at the big picture." These same executives can become like cardboard caricatures, with limited opportunities to retool or renew. No wonder they have difficulty thinking outside of the box.

Regardless of whether you can take an extended leave or must squeeze your breakaway into a rigid schedule with limited financial resources (I discuss some ideas for this later in the chapter), the crucial essence of the breakaway strategy is dramatic departure from the status quo, which is necessary to catalyze self-reflection, questioning of your values and true identity, as well as creative development of new choices and practices for your return to the world after the breakaway period. To stimulate your own voyage of self-discovery, reflect as follows:

Questions for Reflection During a Breakaway

- What is the role of work in my life?
- What do I expect from my work?
- What changes have I experienced over my life in my relationship to work?
- Am I happy about these changes?
- What brings me joy at work?
- When do I feel unhappy at work?
- What is the "right" work for me?
- What changes in my life will make me happy? So why don't I make those changes? What is blocking me?

In Gwen's case, her breakaway period didn't solve everything, but it crystallized many feelings she had spent years trying to ignore. Most significant of her learnings was her response to the first question on the list, the role of work in her life. After her breakaway, Gwen knew with startling clarity that she would never again allow work to have such a choke hold on her life. In her case, she was clear that she couldn't have gained this perspective without the time away. But she also couldn't imagine life without an important job where she could constantly test herself and hone new skills. She wanted to come back, and she needed a senior, visible position with considerable challenge; but she had learned that she didn't need any more visibility, any more seniority, or a grander title than the one she currently possessed. Using Gwen's own metaphor, in the tapestry of her life the silver thread of a senior vice presidency was not sufficiently different from the golden thread of executive VP. For her, the rewards for the higher-level position fell woefully short compared to the additional sacrifices she would need to make. She had

enough.

From the actual work itself, Gwen expected the opportunity to see tangible results from her efforts as a manufacturer of innovative products. She took particular pleasure in guiding her team to new levels of quality with each successive product generation. This satisfied her intense achievement need and desire for mastery. She realized that though she liked most of her coworkers, upon reflection she knew that she could walk away from nearly all of them in a heartbeat. Her important relationships and her need for intimacy were met elsewhere, with close friends and family. This revelation allowed her to loosen up the demands of her third shift somewhat because she could see that she didn't have to agonize over every personnel and business decision at work, trying to make other people happy.

To skip to the bottom line for Gwen, we found that the right work for her involved lifelong change and continuous learning. If she reached a point where she became bored or felt slighted by her decision not to pursue a further promotion, then she would take a lateral move elsewhere, maybe even to another industry where she could learn something completely fresh. Flashing her dimples at me, she mused, "I might even go out and start my own company. Why not?"

Go Against the Grain

During an emergency in an airplane, the flight attendants always tell parents to put on their own oxygen masks before affixing the yellow plastic cup to their child's face. This clearly goes against the grain for most mothers, but in a grave emergency the wisdom of placing oneself first makes sense. Still, for women like Gwen the need to break away may be compromised further by their fears that they already spend too much time at work and should therefore give any remaining time and energy to their children. Giving up one's needs is laudable at first, even noble on occasion, but it then becomes a bad habit, one that occurs without thought.

Sainthood, however, is only acceptable in saints. It is often not until middle life that serving others at the expense of ourselves catches up with us. But why wait until our forties? In his refreshing best-seller, *The Aroused Heart: Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America*, David Whyte reminds us of the perils of this path: "Finally reaching the height of our powers at midlife, we approach the very temple of our identity. Everything for which we have striven is represented by this place. Work becomes, as we sacrifice everything on the corporate altar, the be-all and end-all of our identity."¹⁶

In literature and at the movies, we laugh at the caricature of the all-sacrificing Jewish (or Italian) mother. Who actually respects that woman? Gwen must ask herself what she really gets from dedicating her life to pleasing and serving others. You don't need to be Sigmund Freud to guess that Gwen feels fulfilled by helping others accomplish their goals. Maria Rodriguez derived exactly the same sense of inner satisfaction. Indeed, it is this very skill at developing subordinates and building an organization that has gained both women their senior titles. But Gwen took it to extremes, turning her greatest strength into a weakness, in both her personal and professional lives.

Other women have succumbed to this trap. Elyssa Franklin is only thirty-one, but she's already wondering if medicine is the right career for her. After a daunting number of years given over to cramming physiological and scientific facts into her consciousness as an undergraduate, a medical student and intern, and a resident, she is now in her first specialized year of an ob-gyn residency, the field she chose for herself after a wise and

compassionate gynecologist in college helped her through a difficult abortion.

Elyssa is astounded by the draconian cuts to patient service she observes at the public health facility where she works grueling back-to-back shifts. Everyone around her simply seems to accept them, so she has held her tongue. Nor has she said anything about the surprisingly crude, locker-room humor that blankets every procedure when the patient is unconscious. She had picked her field especially because it involved more contact with women, overlooking the fact that it is a low-prestige, low-paid specialty. Although peopled with a larger percentage of female physicians than any other specialty, it is nonetheless ruled by masculine practices and expectations. This is what disturbs her most. She knows that the profession is changing, but will it happen fast enough for her? She wonders if she should change her specialty, or leave medicine altogether, or put her head down and bear it, or try to become a change agent. "Some days I feel like I just want to run and hide," she admitted to me. "Is this what I really should be doing with my life?"

It was clear to me that Elyssa was one of that special breed of women who take the imperfections they see around them very much to heart. She simply could not stand idly by because to her inaction was a kind of silent collusion. On the other hand, her position as a young resident gave her few options to influence a system she felt was wrong yet could be improved. We began to search for ways she could influence something, first openly and nonjudgmentally discussing her lifelong tendency to take too much upon herself. Throughout her career, I told her, I thought she would always need an objective way to gauge whether she was doing fine, or whether she was simply being too hard on herself.

We began with her current situation, seeking to discover if it was really her profession that was a poor fit for her, or her inability to act on her beliefs that was the true problem. We discussed what was appropriate and realistic for residents to improve, as opposed to senior department heads. This helped to remove some of her worst guilt while constructively identifying concrete workplace conditions and practices that upset her (but that she could indeed act on without undue risk to her career).

We also took steps to identify when Elyssa's third shift of self-doubt became most strident; we quickly concluded that it flared up when her sleep patterns were disturbed by her working hours. As a useful technique, I suggested she actually keep a two-column journal of her third shift, tracking it across time and the hours worked as best as she could, given the little bit of time she could find for herself as a resident. This practice proved highly effective, allowing her a clearer perspective without ignoring or discounting her feelings, the positive ones as well as the negative. As women, we become healthier and more powerful as we integrate, rather than substitute one aspect of our third shift for the other.

In Gwen Allen's case, the need to effectively align her own values with those of her workplace led her to a similar impulse for action. We discussed how she could have the most impact as a leader by her attention to "human asset" issues, deliberately focusing on the people elements and the work culture, delegating to her strongest subordinates some of the process-oriented, strategic-planning components of her job. The idea is to make her mark as a leader by building upon her strengths rather than trying to do everything herself. The question she might want to ask herself is, "What do I want to be known for as a leader?" This deliberately narrows the expectations and will probably greatly improve the results and the legacy she leaves behind her in the organization. It also forces her to focus on building and expressing a unique workplace identity.

At home, Gwen might discuss with her children how they really want to spend time with their mother. It is often quite a jolt to find that spending two extra hours to make homemade brownies, as opposed to buying the packaged kind from the bakery, makes absolutely no difference to anybody but oneself! Better to spend the time playing a card game or shooting a few hoops, if those are activities that the kids really enjoy.

It is also worth remembering that many employees and children always want more than any single boss or parent can--or should--give them. A significant portion of professional development for employees at work, as well as personal development for children at home, is letting one's dependents learn and grow on their own. Indeed, this is probably what Erikson had in mind when he identified separation as a healthy element of growth. Women who take on too much may sometimes be denying others what they need the most.

Take a Risk

Every day for the first week of her breakaway, Gwen had to physically restrain herself from calling the office. She seemed to be experiencing more, not less, stress by staying away. Away at school all day, her children didn't need her. She filled the time with extra sleep, listless afternoons of reading, and numerous trips to the gym, alarmed to find that she had little more energy in the evenings to play with her rambunctious young children than she normally did. She feared that her strength and enthusiasm might never return. She worried that her peers were plotting behind her back while she was gone (and, of course, they were).

Her husband counseled patience, never Gwen's long suit at any time in her life. She hung on, and very slowly the fog started to lift. One morning, nearly three weeks into her breakaway, Gwen woke early with a noticeably higher level of energy. She decided to take an additional three weeks off and told her boss she'd call when she was ready to come back. Finally, six weeks to the day after Gwen left her elegant office behind, she called up Ron, the brashest and most ambitious but also the strongest of all her direct reports. "The keys to the kingdom are yours, Buddy," she said. "I'm taking six months' leave." Ron tried halfheartedly to hide his glee, and Gwen tried not to shudder, but she felt as though someone had just walked over her grave.

Hanging up the phone, she paced and ruminated. Had he won and she lost? At Gwen's level, a lengthy breakaway was undoubtedly career-limiting. Tom Peters could hang out in a Vermont farmhouse, and John Sculley could probably get away with time on his yacht between engagements, but for Gwen, a self-imposed sabbatical was political suicide. In her company, the corporate culture was like the last few moments at the Alamo. All hands were expected to keep firing until no one was left. The strategy worked because, unlike the Alamo, there were always fresh young recruits on the way to replace the dead or departed.

I tried to help Gwen see that transitions always involve loss as well as gain. She was losing her blind and unquestioning loyalty and the sense of security she always experienced when working long and hard at a problem. She was also losing the adrenaline-charged excitement that accompanies life atop the anthill. It was an unnerving, difficult time for Gwen; she was taking an enormous risk to step back and literally forge a new and broader identity for herself. Her career had always served as the true north of her entire adult life; she squeezed everything else that mattered to her around it.

At forty, was it now time to forge a different path, or change how she traveled on the one she had chosen? Anna Quindlen once remarked about women that "no matter what

choice we make, we're going to get nailed for it. So we might as well choose what makes us happy."¹⁷

During her time away, Gwen recalled an exhortation from her childhood: "Jump at the sun. You might not land on the sun, but at least you'll get off the ground." She realized that she wanted to return to work. Her professional career wasn't more important to her than her children, but it was as compelling. It was who she was. But if she returned, she would need to change her perfectionist ways, remove herself from the details, and simply let a few things in her life go. What seemed like simple common sense to others felt like tremendous personal risk to her.

Jettison Part of the Load

The field of psychotherapy has established that profound individual breakthroughs involve three steps: (1) enlightenment, (2) experimentation with new behaviors, and ultimately (3) internalization of the desired new behavior and attitude. The essence of the breakaway strategy is its power to lift one out of the whirlwind and into the calm eye of the storm. The solitude affords the opportunity for enlightenment to occur--if one is willing, and if one dares to see oneself as others do. Breakaway without the next step--experimentation with new behaviors--never achieves a visible, concrete result. I knew that nothing would change in Gwen's life unless she followed enlightenment regarding her demons with actual, sustained changes in the daily conduct of her life.

Tremendous willpower is needed for highly driven managers like Gwen to truly transform how they accomplish their goals, even when their behavior is clearly self-defeating. This is because their visible behaviors--such as the need to perform every detail themselves--is not just a habit, but a representation of themselves as human beings. Leaving out anything represents failure to them, not simple forgetfulness. By taking the time to think through her perfectionism and to initiate discussion of it with others, Gwen enlarged her perspective. She reluctantly realized that her achievement drive had imprisoned her. She placed extraordinary demands on herself as well as others, rarely allowing herself to see how unrealistic the expectations were. Because she was so well liked and respected, her staff tended to rescue her, rarely giving her realistic feedback that she was taking on too much by herself. No one wanted to hurt Gwen's feelings, and she literally became cocooned, with no external pressure to change.

During her breakaway, her activity level ratcheted way down, allowing her defense system to shrink back as well. Some of the external messages from others began to seep into her consciousness. Perhaps for the first time, Gwen actually heard her husband when he said, "You don't need to bake those cookies yourself for the school assembly. Just stop at Safeway on your way to school." Or "The house is clean enough. No one is going to be looking through the closet. Relax and go out for a walk." Or "The kids are fine. You don't have to feel guilty if you want to take a nap." She began to see parallels with her style at work, thinking back through all the Saturdays she had come in to the office just to clear off the clutter on her desk and complete quarterly reports exactly the way she thought they should look. She had always assumed, as do most workaholics, that someone else was in even worse shape than she was (hence she was fine). If she stayed at the office all day Saturday, she'd point to a colleague who stayed until closing time on Sunday. Similarly to Elyssa's journaling, we began by tracking Gwen's activities rather than her third shift, both at home and after she returned to work. She was going to put her perfectionism and her penchant for detail to new use. She jotted down how she spent her time in half-hour increments. By the end of the month, she was able to see a clear pattern. Her knee-jerk reflex was always to overdo. If her intent one morning was to simply pick up a few toys in her daughter's room, she'd end up going through the closet looking for giveaway items. If she began reading a book for fun, she'd stop a chapter into the volume and pick up the latest issue of Forbes, thinking she'd better catch up on the

industry. By monitoring how she spent her time, she was able to figure out that a surprising amount of what she took on didn't really need to be done.

Focus on the essentials. You have to jettison part of the load; there's no other way.

Enlist Support

Barbara Killinger, a Toronto psychologist with years of experience treating workaholics, suggests that underneath their superhuman exteriors workaholics are deeply dependent upon approval and admiration from others.¹⁸ She terms workaholics the "respectable addicts," describing how our modern society prizes work above all else, accepting if not encouraging workaholism while vociferously decrying drug, alcohol, and other addictions. Of the many practical suggestions Killinger advances in her book, one rises above all else: allow others to be in charge on occasion. At their roots, perfectionism and workaholism are about control.

But Gwen's workaholism, like that of many other executives, also stems from a broader cultural endorsement of overwork. Going against the tide of our Calvinistic, work-obsessed culture requires tremendous internal stamina and courage, particularly for women who have spent decades trying to batter their way into the corporate citadels. Placing one's work in perspective, then, requires a change in one's role models and associates to include networks beyond the workplace. It also requires an exceptionally strong sense of self.

As Gwen's breakaway allowed her to begin seeing herself through new eyes, she needed new insights and perspective in her life along with clear feedback, but also unconditional support during this transition period. For the first time in her life, she began to need the company of women. Also for the first time, she actually had time to fit them in. She joined a fitness center, not just to pare a few pounds from her thighs but to deepen her relationship with several other career women who seemed plagued by similar workplace ills. She no longer felt so alone, and she didn't take herself quite so seriously any more.

Gwen also carefully enlisted the support of the two individuals in her life whom she most respected: her husband and an old friend from college with whom she maintained close contact. When she first returned to work, Gwen had turned to her boss for support-- before quickly realizing that her own breakaway was extremely threatening to him. At best, her boss, a very nice guy, was ambivalent about the "new, improved" Gwen. At worst, he was cynical and clueless. Gwen knew that he would probably never feel quite the same about her again, but she doggedly began to rebuild his confidence, involving him closely in her efforts to prioritize and focus her assignments. She passed a lot of work to her staff that she would have taken home previously.

During this period, I also encouraged Gwen to take advantage of other types of professional support. Many of my other clients benefit tremendously from developing closer working relationships with in-house organizational development specialists who can give them practical, concrete, and inside advice to help shift their management styles, while building on their true inner identities. In fact, a great many of these OD specialists are women who have chosen these staff positions precisely because they enjoy the opportunity to counsel others.

Gwen was able to share her personal goals with such an individual in her company (it turned out to be a he), ultimately distancing herself from her work and leaving more details to others. She focused on getting her division to perform at the same level as before her breakaway so she could regain credibility with the company. From the OD specialist, she also learned to use a magical phrase whenever her employees came to her

office with problems to solve: "How do you want to handle this? Give me several recommendations, and tell me which one you like best."

The one stubborn fly in the ointment was Ron, to whom she had passed the reins during her extended breakaway. He just couldn't get over her return to her old position, and he fought her at every opportunity. She would have loved to somehow regain his trust and loyalty, but she realized that this was definitely a battle she would never win. She finally had a meeting with him; the emotional session ended with her committing to find him a new position elsewhere in the company at a significant promotion from his current level. Her breakaway had taught her that there were simply some hills it was better not to climb.

Gwen's return to work was surprisingly stressful for her, even though she was deliberately trying to juggle fewer balls. We were both fearful that her good intentions would dissolve and she would find herself quickly flailing again, retreating to old habits and practices. Without continued support--each in very different ways--from her boss, the OD specialist, her husband, and old and new friends, her resolve to change would have been inadequate to the task. Indeed, willpower alone is rarely sufficient for successful senior executives to change. In *Beyond Ambition*, Robert Kaplan, senior fellow at the Center for Creative Leadership, emphasizes that sustained change requires a set of people who will cooperate with the executive as she tries to be different.¹⁹ From a strictly practical standpoint, this is not always possible, or at least in many of the companies where I consult. Moreover, experimenting with new behaviors is unsettling and destabilizing. For achievement-oriented executives like Gwen, with high need for control, it is a tremendous personal triumph of will over habit to explore and act on a new self. A combination of external pressure and external support is the best prescription for internalizing new behaviors over time and forging a new identity. This is also why a formal breakaway period acts as a profoundly useful antecedent to genuine change for women like Gwen. (Again, many readers do not need, nor can they afford, so extreme a strategy.)

Invest in Yourself

By talking with a new group of women, most of whom were a bit further down the corporate food chain than she was, Gwen realized just how fortunate she was to have the financial strength to take several unpaid months away from work. In most cases, finances preclude a woman's breaking away to press the reset button. For women without Gwen's plush stock options, what can be done?

It is heresy, no doubt, to suggest that taking time out must transcend other, more immediate financial needs. Except for women in families at the very bottom of the socioeconomic scale, where absolutely no financial flexibility is possible, the bulk of middle-class women can rearrange their short-term financial requirements if they so choose. The difficulty is putting one's own needs first, not dealing with the creditors. Think about it. The average American family is saddled with significant amounts of unsecured credit, the legacy of years of catalogues and credit cards coming uninvited through the mail. For women at the breaking point without a financial nest egg, an unpaid month away from work can only be paid for by maxing out a credit card. I've talked with women who routinely run up their credit lines to the limit every day for jewelry, clothes, and furniture. Yet they resist putting their credit on the line for something incalculably more important: themselves. Is such a practice risky? Awkward or embarrassing? Most likely. Can it be done? Assuredly. Is it any crazier than doing nothing at all, grinding away at work every day, making no changes, and pretending that things will get better?

Alternatively, I've listened to women in my study talk about hanging on by their fingernails at work for a six-month period, shutting down every optional expenditure until thirty days of breakaway money is carefully sequestered in a bank account. This requires thoughtful discipline as well as a firm eye on the goal. The strategy must be temporary--waiting for years rather than months is a senseless sacrifice. As a permanent strategy, a less severe approach is to regularly question one's minor daily purchases: the extra lunch out here, that third pair of black slacks there, the name-brand running shoe instead of the house brand at Penney's. Over time, with regular small sacrifices, most middle-class families can probably keep thirty days of living money in an account as a security blanket.

Does a thirty-day grace period do the trick for every woman suffering from superwoman's disease? There is no magic breakaway pill that suggests what the appropriate time is for a woman to rediscover what is truly important to her. Not every woman even needs a full-fledged breakaway. Rather, she needs the feeling of control over her work life, the sense that she can make a choice and take a different path that fits her true needs and identity, should she so choose. Obviously, the trick is for a woman to avoid letting herself get so overextended that she can dig herself out of her situation only with extreme measures. This means monitoring one's stress level and making time for oneself regularly, in small but frequent doses. Above all, it means investing in oneself.

To end this section, I include in this discussion the plight of the single mother. The idea of a breakaway--of even an afternoon--must feel out of reach for this hardworking woman. However, it is possible for even a harried woman in this group to set limits with the children; ask them to play quietly for a bit longer; put them to bed earlier than usual; ask a friend, neighbor, or family member to take a child for an afternoon or evening; or use the TV-babysitter more than she might like on an afternoon when she is desperately trying to think through whether she needs to make some changes in her life. Because these elusive, catch-as-catch-can moments may feel sporadic and random, I strongly advise you, in this situation, to keep a journal to fill in during the solitary moments. This helps you pick up the thread of your earlier reflections much more quickly and accurately between the breakaway moments you manage to steal from your busy life.

Be Realistic

True, lasting harmony in our society is elusive. Highly driven career women talk a good game about searching for harmony, but observers may very well wonder. Why do their choices so often take them away from peace? Why are they forever adding more to their plates, rather than less? Why do they continue to want it all? Psychologists advance the hypothesis that such women (and men) are trying to drown out internal negative emotions--fear of failure, fear of boredom, fear of laziness, and even fear of self. Such individuals build their external lives into palaces of achievement, taking highly visible jobs where others can look up to them. They hear other women talk about balance and wonder what's wrong with them. They are always trying some new scheme to change themselves and slow down, but the changes never seem to take. They can control astounding responsibilities at work, yet they can't seem to get themselves under control. Even when they don't mean to, they raise the bar ever higher for themselves.

This type of frenetic, type A behavior is well known in male executives, but the female version can be much worse, since these women add the universe of domestic obligations to their already bulging portfolio of job demands. In our patriarchal society, where women do not have wives--a nanny or a housekeeper is a limited substitute, at best--overload is inevitable, and the cycle of activity becomes ultimately self-defeating rather than rewarding. What Gwen Allen and her ilk have forgotten is that the central task of successful adult development is self-acceptance, a state dependent upon who one is, rather than what one does. In the algebra of life, this is an equation that is far harder to

solve for women whose paid work leaves such an indelible stamp on their lives. Activity and achievement without self-acceptance yield results alone. But the real scorecard for women--the one that includes the third shift--requires harmony for a true win.

My conversations with more than one hundred women made it very clear that women today dislike narrow choices, such as staying at home or going to work. They are shooting for a higher goal, balance across the two spheres and simultaneous satisfaction of one's feminine and masculine needs through life choices. But is this not the myth of androgyny? In the kingdom of science there exist only rare, androgynous mutants in plants and animals with physical characteristics of both sexes. The difficulty in attaining this nirvana-like, androgynous state leaves women feeling incomplete, frustrated, and deeply self-critical, with only mediocre performance in both spheres. In fact, the more one seeks a satisfying professional identity by moderating each choice, the more elusive harmony actually becomes. For women with high standards, balance becomes an unacceptable, and largely unsatisfying, convergence to the Confucian middle because there is no zone of excellence where the inner woman feels complete and successful.

Harmony, therefore, is attainable only for women who truly accept trade-offs; it continues to be elusive for the rest. Harmony, not just balance, is the real prize that women desire, above even choice, equal pay, and equal work. Harmony is a reward reaped in concert with a series of lifetime choices, rather than a single event or job. The greatest requirement for attaining harmony is honesty. Elsa Friedlander, a youthful seventy-two-year-old in my study, concurs. Trying to decide whether to start an entrepreneurial venture at her age, she colorfully voiced her quandary: "At my age, I ain't exactly gonna go out there and become a pitcher for the Yankees, am I? I have to be realistic. I have to set my goals on something that's important to me. But it would be nice to know if there were a ladies' softball league out there somewhere, for old broads like me. We'd just take the bases a little slower, that's all."

The final ingredient for harmony is sufficient self-confidence to listen to oneself. If harmony is a matter of meeting one's own expectations, it is inevitable that one's secret, unvoiced dreams and expectations will clash at times with the hopes of others. Listening to one's inner voice, rather than fulfilling only the demands of friends or parents, children, bosses, or the larger society, is the final key. On the day that Rosa McCauley Parks held onto her seat in that Alabama bus, and in the lonely days that followed in a Montgomery jail, this otherwise quiet and ordinary woman, a poorly paid seamstress, listened to herself, allowing her voice to be heard. For today's working woman in search of harmony, the place to begin is inside oneself.

What's Next

The next chapter examines some further implications for a woman's identity in the corporate workplace. Specifically, it addresses gender denial--wishful thinking that many women retain in believing that gender is largely irrelevant to one's professional identity, needs, and success. The women portrayed in Chapter Two possess multiple layers of identity, from their innermost spirit to their attitudes and beliefs, to their behavior and professional style, to the visible and tangible appearance evident to others. To remain true to themselves, women must make workplace choices in harmony with each layer of their identity. They must make peace with their internal third shift while learning how to use their external behavior, style, and appearance to advantage. In short, these corporate women must learn how to best play their own gender card.

Notes

1. Gwen Allen (a fictitious name), like the other case studies in this book, is actually a composite of several women from the interview data, rather than representing a single,

real individual.

2. I would argue that even women working in "more female" atmospheres work in a surprisingly patriarchal work culture. Elementary education, for example, always the province primarily of female teachers, is very much colored by the masculine influence of educational leadership. Principals and superintendents, more often than not, are men. Or take publishing, replete with high-level females doing the workaday tasks, thereby an industry superficially on womanly ground. Yet widespread corporate acquisition of independent publishers means that the real players are still men, the real decisions handed down from the males at the helm of the Fortune 500 media giants.

3. Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988, 2nd ed.), pp. 9--10.

4. Gender denial is a main topic of Chapter Two.

5. Martha N. Beck, *Breaking Point: Why Women Fall Apart and How They Can Re-create Their Lives* (New York: Times Books, 1997), p. 7.

6. Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing a Life* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989).

7. For many years, the entire psychology industry--both its practitioners and its scholars--considered development as a formal discipline of study relevant only between birth and adolescence. With the 1978 publication of Daniel Levinson's classic *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (in collaboration with Charlotte Darrow, Edward Klein, Maria Levinson, and Braxton McKee; New York: Knopf), it became clear that predictable stages could describe adult development, in males at least. At the same time, Levinson also noted that a separate study would be necessary to discern whether predictable passages occurred in the lives of adult women, a research project he completed nearly twenty years later and published as *The Seasons of a Woman's Life* (in collaboration with Judy D. Levinson; New York: Ballantine, 1996). From both studies, he verified what we observe around us every day: distinctive periods of separate adult life, involving a "novice" phase in early adulthood, followed by a period of "midlife transition" and concluding with a "culminating life structure" in later adulthood. Each successive era brings its own challenges. Transitions can be painful, and each stage bears the fruits of developmental progress gleaned during earlier seasons. The pattern is straightforward, characterized by alternating periods of building, maintaining, and transitioning.

8. Joan Kofodimos, *Balancing Act: How Managers Can Integrate Successful Careers and Fulfilling Personal Lives* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993).

9. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

10. Erik Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1964).

11. Gilligan (1982), p. 152.

12. Gilligan (1982), p. 157.

13. Daniel Goleman, *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1998).

14. Mary Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (New York: Ballantine, 1994).

15. Special Report, "The New Achievers," *Working Women*, Dec.--Jan. 1998, pp. 22--27.

16. David Whyte, *The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1994), p. 209.

17. Anna Quindlen, *Thinking Out Loud: On the Personal, the Political, the Public and the Private* (New York: Random House, 1993).

18. Barbara Killinger, *Workaholics: The Respectable Addicts* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Firefly Books, 1991).

19. Robert E. Kaplan, with Wilfred H. Drath and Joan R. Kofodimos, *Beyond Ambition: How Driven Managers Can Lead Better and Live Better* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991).

