

FLEX ACROSS THE LIFE CYCLE ...

During an interview last week I was asked about the similarities and differences families face when caring for children and caring for aging loved ones ...

One similarity is how gender plays out.

Frustrated with the situation, the journalist asked, "What's the most important action we could take right now to make significant change around this?"

I had two answers. Although it won't happen in the near term, my first answer was to implement excellent public policy - like the solutions discussed on our last [Thursday with ThirdPath webinar](#).

My second answer - provide resources to couples to share in the joys and responsibilities of care work. When we teach couples to share in the care of their children, they also learn how to share elder care responsibilities.

So how do we really change things?

Yes - in time change will happen more rapidly - even in the political arena. To speed things along, it helps to have families modeling how a shared solution - where families have time and energy to meet their care needs - is good for families, businesses and communities.

Bottom line: Both men and women need flex!

Whether caring for babies, aging parents, or seriously ill loved ones - both men and women benefit from flexibility. I learned this from a ThirdPath community member who found out she had cancer over the summer, when she wrote:

"It is a little less overwhelming to take on life's next challenge, or to hand off different responsibilities when you are already sharing care. I am incredibly grateful to ThirdPath for getting me on this path, and would be in a worse place without what you have helped me to learn."

Read on for more insights, including how her illness has helped her further clarify her priorities.

Or join our next Thursday with ThirdPath webinar (12/11 @ 12:30pm ET) when two men share how they have been following a third path - an integrated approach to work and life - while caring for their aging parents. Expert, **Amy Goyer**, will also be joining this webinar.

Download a [free copy](#) of Amy's book - *Juggling Work and Caregiving* - or read our two page [summary](#). We have also included an [excerpt](#) from the chapter - Your Caregiving Team. It does a great job describing how to build a team of support when you are providing care for a seriously ill or aging loved one.

ThirdPath's mission ...

We may have started with a focus on sharing in the care of children, but clearly our progressive mission is leading the way for men and women making changes across the life cycle.

With wishes for good health and success in all aspects of life.
/Jessica and the ThirdPath team

Your caregiving team - advice from a seasoned caregiver ...

Amy Goyer's book - Juggling Work and Caregiving - is full of good advice. Here is an excerpt from her chapter about the importance of developing a caregiving team:

Team members play a variety of roles ...

Whether they are family members, friends, volunteers or paid professionals, make a list of everyone who is currently involved in your loved ones care, or who supports **you** so you can be a caregiver Consider the following options:

- Family members
- Neighbors (your loved ones and yours)
- Friends (yours, or the friends of people you care for or of other family members)
- Members of faith communities
- Paid or volunteer services, such as, a house cleaner, handyman, companion, meal or grocery delivery, chore services
- Medical, health, social service or geriatric professionals
- Financial, legal and technology advisers
- Gatekeepers - people who regularly interact with your loved ones and who may be the first to notice a change or problem (people such as the mail carrier and yard worker)

Team members contribute in different ways ...

Amy also notes, everyone will contribute at different levels, and they will likely fall into one of the following six roles:

Big picture - Family members and geriatric care managers who keep an eye on the big picture, and communicate the overall planning and status of things

Single responsibility - Someone who is willing to coordinate one chunk of caregiving, such as managing finances, or a household task

Ongoing - Paid, or volunteer caregivers, neighbors and friends who

help with the everyday aspects of care

Single task - Someone who is happier accomplishing a specific time-limited job with clear instructions

Special projects - A team member who steps in for an emergency or one time circumstance

Backup - Team members who are great at stepping in when plans go awry

Match team member roles with their personalities and availability ...

One team member may be more hands-on, while another prefers tasks such as, "dealing with finances and paperwork; conducting research; making phone calls; cleaning; organizing; running errands." No matter what, keep the lines of communication running smoothly between team members. Amy includes practical suggestions for how to achieve this, as well as advice for what to do when the things aren't going so well.

Bottom line, Amy reminds us, "Your caregiving team is made up of people who have different relationships with the people you are caring for, and with lots of history and the possibly of baggage."

Caregiving can cause flare ups of old resentments. But luckily Amy's book includes a number of suggestions for how to get things back on course.

I'm going with death defying ...

One of the participants in our work/life integration groups shared a few insights about what she's been learning as she deals with cancer.

Although her life changed dramatically in just a few short months - the work she has been doing to create a team at home and prioritize what's most important to her - has helped her more successfully navigate these challenges.

August 2014 - "Summer is almost over and I did not do the things I originally planned. Instead I did lots of stuff that would have never crossed my mind. I would not call it an adventure, but I would call it death defying.

"At the beginning of the summer, I worked out a reduced work schedule with my job so I could handle the kids summer schedule more easily. I had all these plans to take the kids to the pool and do all this fun stuff. The week after school let out, I found out I had cancer, and the doctor visits, tests, and freak-out-stress crying jags took over. I am very happy we were still able to go on our family vacation (it happened at just the right time), but other than that all our plans went out the window.

"I hate the word 'survivor.' It feels like some sort of ideal I cannot live up to, and I suppose I am not a survivor yet anyway since I am still in the middle of this. I also don't like 'fighter.' I cannot fight this thing that I don't understand. I picture myself holding onto a trapeze with one finger and my family and friends holding the net and a team of doctors and nurses on the trapeze platform waiting to swing me back and forth. It's death defying.

October 2014 - Gas tank and energy reserves

"In the past I thought of my energy resources as a main gas tank and a reserve tank. I gave my best to my job and coworkers, switched over to my reserve tank for my kids after school, and then my husband got the last bit of the reserve, and art got the dregs and fumes. To admit that I treated my family to the more tired, cranky and less patient me does not make me feel good.

"With cancer, I am learning how to use my energy resources more wisely. Continuing with the gas tank metaphor, I am now constantly running on maybe a quarter tank, pretty close to 'E'. I have no reserve tank. Yet, I still have to work. The dollar does not go as far as it did when my parents were raising me. But I can't give my best self to my job anymore. I wish I had learned this before I had cancer.

November 2014 - Thanks for being there

"When I turned 40 this spring, I felt so positive. I felt that this was going to be a great year. Then the cancer thing popped up suddenly turning this year into the worst year ever.

"However, having to talk about what I am going through as part of my learning process for better work/life balance has made things a little more manageable.

"I am not one of those people who believe that there is a reason for everything, or that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. NO ONE should ever have to go through cancer- NO ONE EVER!

"But the ThirdPath calls and peer support calls have given me another way to process all of this, and I can see it molding me anew."

To learn more about work/life integration and to access some of our free resources, [take a look at our website](#).