

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



Episode 3
Published: 29 January 2016

Host: Annemarie Cross

You're listening to Women in Leadership podcast Episode Three.

Annemarie: Hi I'm Annemarie Cross and I'm your host of Women in Leadership podcast. The podcast to empower you to reach your full potential, whether you are a woman already in leadership or you are an aspiring leader. Now my guest today is Karen Chaston and she is inspiring women to empower themselves, she's also an author, a speaker, a radio host, brave heart women resonator and former CFO of a publicly listed company. Surprisingly it took her son's death for her to become more aware, grateful, healthier and energized so she could live in her essence. While she was perceived to be very successful Karen was living a ground hog day existence, working, eating, drinking too much, always in fight mode, totally denying her feminine side, she was running on empty, unfulfilled, not understanding that adrenalin in a woman's body causes burnout, exhaustion and disconnectedness, now she spends her days inspiring women to empower all seven areas of their lives and to live their essence, and we are so grateful to have Karen on today's show and she's going to share why it is not selfish to put yourself first and the benefits and results that are going to happen, and when you start to put yourself first. How the health of your employees is directly co related to the health of the company's bottom line very important, as well as the importance of understanding who you are on a bio chemical and physiological basis. All key things, so welcome to the show Karen.

Karen: Thank you Annemarie for having me I'm really looking forward to chatting with you.

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



Annemarie: You were a CFO of a publicly listed company and I know that there are many listeners who are aspiring to secure that senior leadership role, however the wisdom and insights that you are going to share today, they are so important for us to know about, even before we get to that senior level role, because when we do, we don't want to lead ourselves to burnout and exhaustion, all those things that you experience when we're trying to keep up with our male counterparts. So tell us a little bit about your experience as CFO?

Karen: My experience was that I was the one that was the first one in every day and normally the last one to leave every day.

Annemarie: Mhmm

Karen: And I was always aggressive, always had so much to do. Far too much to do, and I would race to the gym in the morning, and I'd race to the shower, and I'd race and have my breakfast at my desk and that was my life, and then I'd race home and most probably plonk myself on the couch and do nothing, fall asleep and then do it all again. And what I learnt was I was not doing myself any favors by always putting myself last.

Annemarie: mhmm

Karen: And that was the reason why I always felt exhausted, was overweight, always felt tired and just never ever had enough energy and always felt like I was chasing my towel.

Annemarie: And I know I was always speaking to a lot of women and perhaps this was for you too Karen, they're trying to prove something, they're really trying to make sure that they are making an impact within the workplace that's what we all want to do of course, yet what happens is we

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



are working consistently on that overdrive mode which really is not healthy for anyone men or women.

Karen: No it's not and to understand as I do now, what adrenalin actually does in a woman's body, it's not that great in a man's body, but it's a thousand times worse in a woman body, and when you continually lean on adrenalin it just is continually; not only is zapping your energy it's actually producing Cortisol which is acidic and Cortisol has a tendency to eat away at our organs which is the reason why we put on fat. So that the adrenalin and the Cortisol can live in the fat, so ladies if you're hating your fat start thinking it.

Annemarie: So let's think back, what was the turning point for you, when did you kind of have that AHA! Moment when you were like "I just can't do this anymore"

Karen: Well as the universe likes to do, it sort of gives you a couple of little nudges or a little sort of slap on the back, so something to actually make you reassess yourself.

Annemarie: mhmm

Karen: So the first knock that I got was my husband and I woke up one Sunday morning to find our 27 year old son dead at our back door.

Annemarie: Oh

Karen: Which wasn't good, it was very unexpected, he had gone out the night before with his mates, his girlfriend had gone out separately, and he had a little bit too much to drink, but that wasn't what killed him, he came home and he fell over and everything shook up inside of him and what we found out in the autopsy the next day was he had really bad lungs and when he fell over

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



he couldn't catch his breath and that's why he passed away. Though at the time I was; I didn't have time to be a grieving mother. I more or less straight after the funeral went back to work, and probably worked even longer hours and certainly was you know more into that sort of mode. So the universe wasn't happy that I didn't listen the first time, so a year later I was made redundant, which for about two days I was annoyed about, even though it was my decision, and then I took a breath, and that's what most women don't do. But to take that loving conscious breath the one that goes right down into your belly, where you slowly breathe it in and then you slowly breathe it out. That's the breath of life and that's where your intuition lives in your belly and that's why it's called a gut feeling. And to breathe into there and to start to activate the vagus nerves the nerve ending of the vagus nerve. The vagus nerve goes from your belly all the way up to your hypothalamus which is in your brain and by activating that you start to go into your parasympathetic nervous system. Now we have a sympathetic nervous system and a parasympathetic nervous system. The sympathetic is where your adrenalin is where all of those sort of things happen and now I'm not knocking adrenalin we require adrenalin though we don't require to live in it 24*7 and the main reason why we have it is so we can run away from a Saber tooth tiger and I haven't seen any of them

Annemarie: No, not recently, not in the corridor, not near the water coolers or the corridors lately.

Karen: Whereas your parasympathetic nervous system is where your Oxytocin is your Serotonin and your Dopamine which are your feel good feelings. So we require a mix of both of them and we should be living in our parasympathetic nervous system and then just go in and out of our sympathetic one. Because we require it though as a female we should be living in our essence and just going in and out of our masculine.

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



Annemarie: That's so important to be aware of and I know that there are a lot of details there that you explained if there's someone who may not have heard that before, we'll certainly share how people can get in contact with you to find out more about that particularly if they recognize that if how they've been living their life is kind of similar to what you were doing. So Karen let's talk about why it is not selfish to put yourself first because I mean obviously if we are not taking care of ourselves we cannot show up the best possible person who we are at productivity, all that kind of thing. So you've got a number of different benefits and results that you know yourself that you experience, once you did start to take time for yourself, share a little bit more about that.

Karen: Okay so the reason why it's not selfish to put yourself first is, and I didn't even get this until I was well into my fifties and I'm a very smart woman. We are the only person we are going to spend our life with, our whole life, so why do we put our-self last? Why do we beat ourselves up? Why aren't we looking after ourselves in all seven areas of our life and in all seven areas of our lives for people who don't realize are mentally, professionally, financially, socially, family, physically, and spiritually. So most of us will be more guarded to one or two of them, though there are seven areas, seven days of the week, so we should touch in all of them over that period, but what's really important to understand is when you look after yourself, when you are topped up in overflow then you can be as women naturally are. We can be the givers, the nurturers, we can go into empathy, because we're not exhausted, we're not in burnout, we're not in resentment.

Annemarie: I love the way that you've explained that and I think being aware of all those seven areas is often just to do a check-in you know have I taken time out to do some exercise or just take a breather, because when we are in imbalance, even though some of the key areas in that

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



seven areas are working well, they may be inhibited or blocked because some of the other areas in our life, we're really not taking care of.

Karen: Exactly

Annemarie: And then lets you know as a CFO you had the same incredible talents and strengths to deliver to that role, yet because you were so burnt out and you weren't taking that time to replenish and to re-energize yourself, you were finding that you were running on empty, so you know to take that time out whatever that means and I know for myself I recognized you know the MBTI that I'm very close between extrovert and introverts and the difference is extroverts get their energy, they're energize themselves by being with other people whereas introverts like to be very much on their own, they like to dwell on their own thoughts, just have some quiet time. I'm there much more now, I love that quiet time, so if I'm out and about during the day, and you know with clients and meetings and so forth and I don't take some time to look after myself and if I'm on the go, go, go mode associating myself with people I'll get to the end of the day and I'll just, I won't even want to talk to my family, it's like "please don't say anything to me now, just give me ten minutes and let me unwind". It's so important to be able to recognize that and have self-awareness, so that we can do what we need to do just to replenish yourself.

Karen: Totally, I totally agree and I actually recommend to my clients that the first 45 minutes of each day they actually do spend it on themselves, so that they have had their meditation, they have had a bit of an exercise, that you know as much as I love gyms. Gyms are very adrenalin focused, you really go, go, go and they are not relaxing, and personally I don't even go to a gym anymore, because I find that you get more things from, you know doing a bit of a walk and then doing what I actually love is for 15 minutes I get my rate up by actually running up and down the

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



stairs of my house, then I sit for 15 minutes and meditate. So I'm actually meditating with my heart beat really active, so I'm really activating that heart energy within me and it's amazing the awareness that comes to me just for having my heart pumping like that.

Annemarie: You know what I just did recently, I purchased a chair and a footstool put it in the corner of my room, I used to have the gym in there but I took it out after I heard one of the women who was a sleep expert and said "you have to get all of that stuff out of your room if you want to have a really healthy sleep". So that's what I did, but I sit in there every morning, I read a book, do some meditation. I call it my prayer chair, and I say that's where the real things happen, but I tell you what having that focus where I'm just able to connect and really think, it really does open your mind and there are things that come out of that time that I have spent in the morning that I'm sure that I would not have thought about had I been up running straight out the door and on full flight.

Karen: Totally, yeah you would not have been tuned into your intuition, and I had the privilege of last weekend spending a couple of hours with Oprah.

Annemarie: Did you really, wow!

Karen: In Sydney, with 22000 other people, but she was only talking to me and she actually showed us, because she meditates in her garden and it was a really beautiful secret and that is now ingrained in my memory as well.

Annemarie: Yeah, you were talking earlier about intuition and that gut feeling and think that so many women, we tend to discredit that, and you know I was recently at a networking even and I had the privilege of hearing Megan Quinn and she was from net a porter and very successful

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



business I think the last time they had it valued she was saying it was about 4 billion Euros, so a pretty successful business I would say, you know at that level.

Karen: Yeah if you value your market return

Annemarie: Oh well absolutely, but you know one of the things that she said that she recognized was one of the key areas is that intuition is the relationships, is taking time out, everything that you are talking about today she really felt was important. She said you know that driven go, go, go, that real direct hard, you know she said she does not operate her business that way, never has, never will, she said a lot of male driven organizations are taking a step back and revisiting, relooking at the way they are doing things because in this day and age it just doesn't work anymore. You know you need to have everything that you said, far more into the workplace. So let's talk about how the health of your employees being directly co related to the health of a company's bottom line. Because I'm sure as a former CFO this was something that you witnessed.

Karen: Oh totally, the burn the 3 O'clock burn out, a waste of money and everything that is to a company if you think you've got a 100 employees and for an hour everyday if not longer, because it starts at three and depending on what they've had to eat at lunch it could even go on longer. While they are digesting a heavy lunch and everything to actually have people at desks especially after 8:30 at night and a lot of company's do that. It's not good for us at all, it's not good for the brain to be on the computer after 8:00pm or 8:30 every night. You're not giving us time to regenerate, to actually come and because you are already in a tired you're going down, down, down, you'll be better off sending everyone home at 4:00 O' clock and having them come back the next day refreshed or taking them outside and let's go and play basketball for the afternoon for a couple of hours, then let's go back to work, because you've regenerated everything, you've

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



got a bit of exercising, you've got the heart pumping again but just to sit continually at the desk especially how I used to is so unhealthy for your employees and you're actually not even getting the benefit that you think you are, you are not getting the twelve hours out of the person, you'll be lucky to even be getting seven.

Annemarie: Yeah, and you know I think now people are recognizing and thankfully so that everyone has different times during the day where they have their most energy, where they're at their most alert state and can generate some really great work and so I think what's important for leaders to recognize and even ourselves is, recognize what is the best time of day for you and ensure that that's the time of day that you really schedule all of the things that you need to get done, all the important things and then at the down times, the lower energy times that you do, do things that may not necessarily need to take so much of your time, focus and energy because a day that ends at 7:30 or whatever and goes to 7:30, 8:00 O'clock that is just absolutely ridiculous and no one

Karen: It is absolutely

Annemarie: And no one can operate at that level and continue to be; particularly when we're looking at women who often, if it was right that we just had our work that would be fantastic, but many of us have children, have spouses, have a home, have other external activities that we like to do, and so we need that balance, balance is just so important, yes?

Karen: It totally is and I can remember a few years ago now I remember listening to a speaker at a seminar and he said about every hour and a half we have to get up and do something, because the brain cannot endure what the bum cannot.

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



Annemarie: [Laughs]

Karen: And I thought that made so much sense and it's good for the workplace. Every hour and a half, get up walk around, have a drink, just walk away for a moment and it's surprising just by doing that even if you go and do three deep bellied breaths it's amazing how reenergized you are how clearer you think and it's being tied to that desk, it does not work for you and it really does not work for your employer at all.

Annemarie: And I think even studies have proven, particularly not in white collar or corporations but in hands on work, if you are doing the same task hour, after hour, after hour that open up the possibility that you can have an accident, because you; I can't remember the term, someone mentioned there is a term for that, it's like your brain switches off, so you've got to move, you've got to shift you've got to do something differently to reenergize yourself, so I think no matter what career you're in it's such an important lesson. So Karen we had a question that came in from Ashley Danielle Stigge and I hope I have pronounced your surname correctly Ashley, if I haven't please forgive me. She is the founder and CEO of Life in Color Changes and this is her question and it's a really great one. In working with other women CEO's what do you stress is the key factor for avoiding burnout, as you put your unique stamp on what it means to lead at a high level, in other words , what do you recommend is a critical element to integrate your authentic self, with your ability to lead?

Karen: I'm a great believer that everything comes down to your level of self-esteem. So the higher your self-esteem, the higher you can collaborate, the higher you are willing to delegate and through just knowing who you are and knowing where you're going, you will do everything to honor yourself and through honoring yourself you become the example, you become the person

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



that everyone wants to work with whether it's male or female. But more importantly you have women who aspire to be you, and you are happy to delegate. Women who have confidence but no self-esteem, they are the ones that are always in their fight, they are always thinking someone's going to tap them on the shoulder and go you know what as good as what you're at get out of the damn way to where you think you belong, but they're the ones that are always protecting themselves and therefore they're always aggressive and don't want to delegate because they believe if they delegate someone would go well why do we need you?

Annemarie: mhmm

Karen: But to be the center of the company where you are more or less just delegating to everyone else and you're just steering the ship, but more importantly you're steering yourself, because you are healthy, you are vibrant, you are passionate and you are living in your essence. Which is what everyone aspires to be.

Annemarie: Yeah

Karen: I hope that's answered the question.

Annemarie: I was just going to say I just loved that, and we can use what you have just said across so many other elements in our careers too, even if we're not senior leaders, CEO's, or CFO's because I remember a lady was saying to me, and this relates to self-esteem, their work place had flexible hours and though she would make sure all the work was done completely, so she could leave at the end of the day and go and pick up her son, and that was obviously quite a lot sooner than some of the other people who were not on flexible hours, and as she was leaving some of the male colleagues, her male colleagues would say "O we were going to have a

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



meeting, oh you're leaving aren't you?" and she knew she had done her work, she had achieved the results that you know and her RIY and all of that and yet there was still this level of guilt when she would have to say "yeah I am leaving", but when we have that real self-esteem and when we know that we've done a good job then that guilt, we don't carry that around with us because again that can cause stress. That can really help in that area too, wouldn't you say?

Karen: Totally, and more importantly you stop caring about what I think about you.

Annemarie: Yes I'm just going to repeat that because it just cut out a little bit. What Karen said was "you don't care what other people think about you", that is so, so true and so powerful.

Karen: Yes it is and it's always a great thing to believe that it's none of your business what anyone else thinks about you, so don't waste any energy on it.

Annemarie: So Karen if you were to share with us the one lesson that you believe that you've learned throughout your career that has really supported you in becoming the leader that you are today, what would that be?

Karen: The big thing would be to honor who you are, to only be in competition with yesterday you and to learn to live in your essence. Now I've said that a few times now and a lot of people don't really understand what I mean by essence. So I'll explain it quickly, so the essence is your essence of life and it's completely different for everyone, because we've all had different lifelong personal experiences, lessons, all those sort of things, we all will have a different essence in our life, and for me it's to be in love and gratitude, to continually create new experiences, to be myself in every situation, to live in the moment, to be positive and have a good sense of humor and to invest in quality time and quality relationships. I'm a great believer that until the day we

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



die, we will learn and grown, and I just think having that sort of attitude makes you willing to sit back and listen, because everyone has something to teach you, everyone has something that you don't know.

Annemarie: Well thank you so much for coming on the show today Karen, it really has been a pleasure speaking with you and I think the message that you continue to share is so important for us women no matter where we are in our career, whether we are aspiring to be a leader or whether we are already in a senior leadership role. To take time out, to nurture ourselves, how is our self-awareness and once we do take the time to do that we will find that yeah we really can continually work at our optimal level without stepping into that burnout which we certainly don't want. Karen how can people get in contact with you?

Karen: So people can email me, my email address is karen@karenchaston.com.au, or you could just go to my website which is the same name and I would just love to hear from you. I'm also on LinkedIn, on Twitter, on Facebook, so please reach out, I would live to be in contact with everyone.

Annemarie: Terrific

Karen: Because I am just here to help serve

Annemarie: I love that so now it's over to you, Karen and I want you to join the conversation, to let us know what has been one insight that you are taking from today's show particularly when it comes to looking after yourself, taking time out to really refresh and rejuvenate. What action are you going to take? So to join the conversation all you need to do is go to annemarielcross

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



.com\podcast3 leave your comment below the show notes and Karen and I can't wait to read your comments. So the link again is annemariexcross.com\podcast3.

So today's inspirational message is: "Courage is not the absence of fear, but the conquering of it" and that was from Dan Millmen. So I wonder: what is the one thing that you've been putting off doing because you fear rejection, people's opinions or you fill in the space. Maybe something's come out that you can really resonate with after hearing what Karen had to share today, so our challenge to you is, do it just take action and you'll really be pleased that you did.

So that brings us to the end of another episode with another fantastic guest and I hope that you'll join me again next week, now before you go I'd love to connect with you further, so all you need to do is go to annemariexcross.com\podcast connect to find all the ways that we can connect and keep the conversation going. While you're there I would love if you could do our triple 'S' steps, so what are the triple 'S' steps Subscribe, share and shout out. So subscribe to our podcast on iTunes the details over at annemariexcross.com\podcastconnect, share the podcast with your colleagues and of course shout out by leaving a comment and a rating for the show on iTunes. Really appreciate it and I cannot wait to connect with you again next week, make it a great one. Bye for now.