

Creating Victories:

Breaking the Cycle of Overcare - Part 1

You promised yourself there would be time for doing something for yourself LATER – when you finished taking care of something your partner, children, house, parents, etc., etc.

But you didn't. When you had time, you couldn't even think about what you wanted. Even when you knew what you wanted to do, you could not seem to think clearly about how to do it. And anyway, you would tell yourself, "Where would I find the time?"

If this sounds like you, you are experiencing OVERCARE. It occurs when you are so busy doing for everyone else that you don't have time for yourself to do something that nurtures and fills you up, like working on a goal, reading a book, or having lunch with an old friend.

Its ok, you say. You like doing things for others because it makes you feel good. You admit, however, that you feel overworked, under-appreciated and drained.

That's overcare - the loss of balance between caring for others and caring for yourself. Overcare is a risky behavior because there is little return on the investment. It sets up a vicious cycle that, in the end, will leave you physically depleted and emotionally impoverished. Overcare has one end: burnout. You need to break the cycle. Here's a quick guide on how you do it:

1. NOTICE OVERCARING.

When you are overcaring, you are tired, stressed and filled with worry, resentment, and negative feelings. You usually don't have one good thing to say about yourself and may even be suffering from low-grade depression.

How do you know when you are in overcare? Awareness is the first step. Start noticing if you overcare with everything, or just with certain people or certain situations? For example, do you give up something you want to do because your child has a last minute and unwarranted want? How about the aging parent who calls you at the last minute, expecting you to drop everything to take him or her to the doctor's office – to keep an appointment they've known about for a month. And you change your plans and do it.

When you find you are doing overcare activities, ask yourself this: "Am I the only person who can do this...or do *I think* I am the only person? If you think you are the only person who can [organize the family holiday, volunteer for the Home & School fair, etc., think again. If you weren't there, those people would find someone else to help them.

Or, is there any other way to handle this? One day my mother urgently needed postage stamps and asked me to get them for her. My first thought was to do it, but I live an hour away and would

have had to change my entire schedule. Instead of doing that, I asked her to call her local post office and have them deliver the stamps to her. Her postman did and she took care of the important mail. My mother had her need met – without *any* overcaring on *my* part. In addition, she felt good that she handled the problem herself.

There is an old adage that says, "We teach people how to treat us". If you are in overcare it is because you let the people in your life know it is ok to keep asking for favors, usurping your time, interrupting you and getting whatever they want – at your expense.

This month, begin to notice how often, when and with whom you overcare. Keep a log.

Any questions? Send them to info@victoriouswoman.com

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Breaking the Cycle of Overcare - Part 2

CHOOSE GOALS.

You work on everyone else's agenda but your own. *Maybe it's because you don't have an agenda.* What is *your* agenda?

If you don't know, ask yourself: "what do I want to do?" or "If I knew **for sure** that I could be, do and have everything I wanted, what would my life include?"

Make a list of 50 things you want to do before you die.

Don't censor your thoughts and write more if you can. Do you want your masters degree, a promotion, travel, to join the local theater group, learn to play golf or to use the internet?

Write it down. Don't feel discouraged if ideas don't come to you right away. That happens, especially if you aren't used to focusing on your own goals.

Here are a couple suggestions for getting into a victory-choosing frame of mind:

- Meet with friends and share. Listening to different thoughts can open up possibilities in your mind. Also, with a group, there is likely to be some giggles that

give way to laughter – and humor often breaks a mental log-jam so that new ideas can flood into your consciousness.

- Go through different kinds of magazines and notice what pictures interest you. For example, you may see a picture of a woman either wearing a particular suit or working with children in a classroom...and realize that you would like to manage an office, or remember that you once had a dream to be a teacher.

Next, star your top ten ideas.

Look those over and PICK ONE to start working on now. Once you do, shape it into a goal. That means to make it very specific, in the present, with a deadline. For example, "I have my masters' degree in communication by May 2007".

Once you have your goal, **make a plan.** You already know how to do this, usually for everyone else, now it's your turn. Divide your plan into three main segments. Divide those segments into step-by-step activities, the smaller the steps are, the easier to do.

Finally, **take action.** Do **one** thing, however small, **every day** to take you toward your goal. To keep yourself on track, create a "victory team" by gathering a few women with the intention of meeting regularly to discuss your goals. Agree to help each other by getting regular and honest feedback and support. At the end of each meeting, make a commitment to your victory partners to accomplish one step by your next meeting.

There is *magic* in victory teams. Your victory teammates agree to hold you accountable, and you won't want to disappoint them. You can do the same with a mentor or a personal coach.

This month work toward getting your own agenda and thinking about who will be good victory team members.

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Breaking the Cycle of Overcare - Part 3

ESTABLISH BOUNDARIES

Over the past two months, you have noticed how you overcare, created your own agenda and formed your personal victory team.

All this is GREAT. Now, however, as you take one step after the other toward your personal victory, others in your life may be resistant to your changes. Don't be surprised, even the most supportive friends and family may need some time to adjust. One way that you can protect yourself and further insure your victory is to learn how to say "no" when people ask, and over-ask for your help.

There are many books on the subject of saying no, including books about setting limits and having boundaries. **Buy one.**

Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- Stop giving an immediate response when being asked to do something. Instead, say, "Let me think about it and get back to you tomorrow." This allows you to decide if and when you will have the time. If you choose to say 'no', it will be in good conscience and with respect. A 'yes' means it can be on your time and schedule. Most importantly, the person who asked will know that you aren't an "easy" yes.

Also, consider implementing the "24 Hour Rule". This idea

came from a woman who told her spouse, parents or five children that anything they wanted from her needed a 24 hour lead: the cupcakes, the ride, the favor – anything. If it was less than 24 hours, she said 'no' without guilt. Not only did she have better control of her life, the people around her (particularly her five children) learned to be more responsible for themselves.

If you follow these three critical steps and "Notice Overcare," "Choose Your Agenda," and "Establish Boundaries," you are well on your way to building healthy skills and living a more satisfying life.

Are you thinking "yes, good ideas, but..." consider this: if your boss came to you and asked you to develop a project, would you make time? If your child put off a school project until the last minute, then needed your (considerable) help, would you do it? Would you, without thinking twice, say 'yes' to others, no 'buts' about it? Then how do you think it is OK to give the other people in your life more consideration than you would give yourself?

Also, think about your children. Children learn what they live. What are you teaching them about personal responsibility, and self-respect? Are you teaching the cycle of overcare?

Creating a healthy balance between self-care and caring enables you to feel good about yourself and still care for others, which also feels good. It is the way to break the cycle and build a healthier and happier you for the good of yourself, and all the people and things you love! Make victory happen. **You can do it!**

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