



For Women Who Want To (Or Have To) Work in Retirement

Carol Orsborn

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How to Find Meaning – and a Job – When
You've Been Downsized at 50+



Carol Orsborn Interview

Lin: Welcome to this hour's telesummit program. I'm Lin Schreiber, founder of Revolutionize Retirement and EncoreCareerInnerCircle.com, an exciting new community where prime time women fifty plus are gathering to explore, discover, define and go for a fulfilling encore career and encore life. If you want to gain clarity, get focused, be supported and build confidence as you move into work and a life you can happily and authentically embrace in the next stage, I invite you to join the community at EncoreCareerInnerCircle.com. This call is part of our first annual Encore Career TeleSummit for Women Fifty Plus where we're presenting twelve experts on twelve essential life work transition topics over the course of this weekend.

Our expert in this hour is Dr. Carol Orsborn, an internationally recognized author, blogger, public relations veteran and thought leader on issues related to boomer women, adult development and boy, a really crucial one for all of us, work life balance. Carol is a senior strategist with vibrantnation.com, the leading online community for smart successful women fifty plus and she previously served as senior partner with a marketing firm affiliated with the top ten advertising agency and is senior vice president with a global public relations company. A pioneer of the business and consciousness movement, Carol has written over fifteen books on the connection between success and the quality of life including the book we're going to be talking about today The Year I Saved My Downsize Soul.

So how do you find meaning and a job when you're over fifty and have been downsized from your work, and is it possible to keep your spirit intact while losing your job, dealing with rejection and uncertainty and seeking a new way to make a living? Carol began keeping a daily journal of her tumultuous journey through a recessionary time not unlike our own, struggling to make sense of both personal and professional hardship. Along the way she found herself testing spiritual principles she'd been sharing over the course of the fifteen books she'd authored ultimately embracing – and I love this – the despair and delight of what it means to be fully alive because it really is the two, not just one or the other.

In these challenging times we need to make fullest use of all of our resources if we hope to empower our dreams and respond to change with creativity. Today Carol will provide specific tools and guidance that you can apply immediately to your most pressing personal opportunities to tap inner resources and bring about the best possible outcome. So in the next fifty minutes you'll discover one boomer woman's personal example and the spiritual principles that sustained her during challenging times. What it takes to survive a time of transition, energizing new sources of strength and providing inspiration to others, tangible tools and techniques - we love those tangible tools and techniques – to manage personal change and growth even in the most challenging times and how to utilize surprising sources of untapped problem solving capabilities to address and resolve specific issues.

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Carol I'm so excited to have you here. Welcome to the 2010 Encore Career Telesummit for Women Fifty Plus.

Carol: Well thank you. I'm so glad you're going this, it's certainly needed.

Lin: It is needed and it's just it's so much fun and the information is so incredibly valuable and I so appreciate you're coming on because a lot of the women listening on these calls have been downsized or have been retired ahead of their time and having had that experience, not in my fifties or sixties but in my thirties. In my thirties I was totally devastated so I just love the title The Year I Saved My Downsized Soul because it took me a lot longer than a year to save my soul.

Carol: Well I just want to clarify one thing. You said it was a recession not unlike our own and I have to clarify it was this recession.

Lin: It's this one, that's right.

Carol: It was just a really long recession.

Lin: It has been that's true. I apologize. Alright so tell us how you survived this recession.

Carol: Oh my gosh. Well I mean the first thing is that I was downsized really early on as a number of boomer women were. Primarily because I think many women of my age group, we're at the peak of our careers and had achieved like thought leadership positions. So we weren't in the front lines anymore and one of the first things that went in this recession as opposed to other recessions was the leadership in many cases. Those people who were doing the promotion and the long range thinking and the planning and being the spokespeople and things like that so it was many people in the peak of their careers. But it was so early in the recession and hadn't been declared a recession yet so I of course went to my fall back position where I tend to always go which is thinking that I had created this for myself somehow and what did I do wrong and I was the only one, all that kind of stuff.

Lin: The usual place that many women go to right?

Carol: Oh totally and I mean a big break through for me was, honest to God, I was probably one of the few people in the planet that was thrilled when they announced this as a recession because that allowed my husband to say to me see it wasn't you that's broken, it's the economy that's broken.

Lin: Yay!

Carol: So I mean you shouldn't be happy it was broken for all of us but at least I it wasn't a matter of I hadn't done well enough because I knew darn well I had been doing a brilliant job.

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Lin: So who did you write the book for?

Carol: Well okay. I started writing this book, I think earlier you asked like what were some of my coping strategies and skills and specific things I did that kept my spirit up during this horrendous transition. Writing the book was really the first thing but I didn't write it as a book for other people, it was really my own journaling. I journal on and off and when I was in the peak of my career I was way too busy to do the kind of introspection and asking the kind of bigger questions that I know nurture my soul. I wish I had the discipline when times are great to keep my spiritual practice up but it was part way into the fact that I was going to be downsized and then being downsized so that suddenly occurred to me that I was not practicing any of the skill strategies, processes, exercises that I know keep my spirit at peak performance.

One of them is journaling and so I began to write down what was going on internally, not just record I made this phone call or I should do this or that, but rather, what is going on inside of me. The minute I did that I recognized something really important which was that I changed my perspective from victim to witness and that was huge. Just making that one little perspective switch all of a sudden said to me, "Oh I get it, I'm in the middle of a story." You can't judge how the story is going to end when you're still in the middle of it. Right now, I'm in the change and challenge and drama part of it but I know about stories and I know that at some point something is going to happen to me again and so I'm going to be here just to record it all.

Lin: So just the simple act – I say simple, for some people it's not so simple – but the simple act of beginning to journal was what shifted the perspective?

Carol: Yeah and I think we all have different spiritual practices that we can apply so I think the first thing is just remembering. What happens with most successful women when they're at a moment like being downsized is that they go into hyper warp speed to get that next job in place without going through any of the feelings, the perspective, taking the opportunity to go deeper, feel the pain. We don't want to do any of those things. We want to go straight from a high to another high and I have been working with this material for quite a while now so I've bumped into so many women who say, "You know I went straight into getting my resume out thinking I was going to jump straight from this to that and if that had happened, it would have been a disaster. I would have just gone from something that wasn't right for me for a long time into something just as not right for me."

So the truth is that most of us, when we go from that hyper state don't get hired anyway because it's sort of clear to whoever is interviewing us that we're desperate. I once saw a wonderful sign above an interviewer's desk that says please don't bring your desperation here we're already oversupplied.

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Lin: I love it. You know what you're talking about though is an expression that my coach told me years ago which I just love which is you then you're downsized, you don't know what they next thing is and so you're in the place of no longer but not yet. You're in that...what a lot of clients describe to me is, "Oh my gosh I'm facing the big black hole" or "I feel like I'm in the big black hole" but there is a lot of juice in the big black hole if you can allow yourself to stay there right?

Carol: Well it's very interesting. Almost every religion and spiritual philosophy has this place that is the equivalent of the void. In eastern philosophy it's nothingness, in Christianity it's the dark night of the soul. So there's all these different ways of describing of it and so I ask people when I'm doing these resilience workshops, I say to them if it's such a horrible place why does every religious belief and philosophy put it up as this incredibly high place. You're almost like striving to be in this place. The answer is that in the void is where the status quo has the lightest hold on us. We are most able to make the kind of deeper changes that can put us on to a new track or a better track and so if you don't panic when you're there, if you understand that it's stage two of a three step transition then you can actually learn how to look for the opportunities and the richness in the middle of the nothingness.

Again I know we're saying these things very lightly, these are lifelong practices. The good news is that, I'm sure a lot of your listeners, are they all at midlife and beyond?

Lin: Yes.

Carol: Okay. By the time we're at midlife and beyond we've had enough life experience that if we can just break the pattern of panic and sit quietly sooner rather than later our intuition, our gut, our creativity, our resourcefulness does start bubbling up. We just have to remember to live face forward.

Lin: Yeah, and how...I mean it's easy to say and yes many of us have reached a certain age where we're able to do that more easily than when we were younger but still sometimes you've been downsized, I've got to make a living, the panic sets in. What's something you can do to just quiet the panic so you can be in that place?

Carol: Well alrighty. I think the first thing is telling the whole truth. A lot of people think when they tell the truth they'll say I've been fired, nobody is going to want me anymore, nothing good will ever happen to me, I'm worthless. I mean they think that's what the truth is so telling the whole truth requires that balancing the negative with the positive. It's like wait a minute everything that society found useful about me up until last month when I got downsized is still in me as long as there is a need out there somewhere for what it is that I have. It's just a matter of sorting through all the possibilities until the round peg goes in the round hole. That's part of it.

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Sometimes when you tell the whole truth you realize I don't have resources, I don't have anything I can fall back on. So I will have to say that sometimes the first thing you have to do is figure out how you're going to survive in the meantime and that maybe the part time thing, the networking thing, the temp job thing, the moving in with the folks thing. Whatever it is that can get the panic level back to a serviceable level so that...the point is for most of us, many of us aren't truly in that survival mode, at least not immediately. So if you can figure out how you can take the edge off of it so that you can allow yourself that twenty percent or forty percent or as much as possible to do the deeper more introspective work or go back to school, even if you're fifty years old. I got my PhD when I was in my early fifties and funded myself through – that was a different recession and I funded myself through that recession with student loans and it was crazy. I was paying for both my kids and myself through the loans also.

Lin: Oh my gosh! Well and I have a friend who got her masters in her mid sixties so anything is really possible right?

Carol: When you take a look at that longevity potential, they call it longevity bonus and the fact that so many...I mean some of us are in careers that honestly if you're going to tell the whole truth, you're going to have to say age isn't as real in the number of our careers. If some of us were just biding our time knowing it was just a matter of time before we got tapped. If you look around your office and everybody is in their twenties and thirties and you're in your fifties or sixties there is going to be a point when, unless you're the CEO which you may be, there may be a point when that knock comes to your door, and the career that you've been doing all of your life, there's whole fields that are going away. People that were agents in the publishing industry and certain kinds of traditional marketing, the snail mail kind of stuff, things are really changing dramatically. So it made a lot of sense for me to go back to school and to go into debt and do all that kind of stuff and it's worked out incredibly well for me. I'm just sorry I didn't do it sooner.

Lin: So you went back to school but there a lots of other options and what I'm hearing you say is that it's important to kind of make sure that your basic needs are taken care of, that it doesn't have to be an all or nothing. Like I'm working full gear making big money or I'm broke and not making any money at all, that there is some place in between to start with.

Carol: Yeah and I think a lot of people do make the mistake of thinking they're going to replace like with like and I certainly did that. In my book *The Year I Saved My Downsized Soul*, a lot of the book is about the fact that I received a job inquiry as soon as I was let loose from a very similar type position and firm and assumed of course, I was at the top of my career at this one company, I'll just do the same thing for this other company. So most of the book is me chasing around this red herring just thinking that God owed me the same job or bigger or better and never really stopping to think to myself, "wait a minute there's things I would rather be doing." We get hyper, we get into these crazy jags and a

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lot of people waste a lot of time trying to replace like with like before they do that thinking and grieving process all that kind of stuff.

So I think that I lucked out in that...I say I lucked out now. In the book it was devastating but the truth is that job never materialized, it was always a fantasy. Something was just messing around with me but in the interim I started to fill it in with little projects and that turned into a job that is beyond my wildest dreams and would never have had the courage or foresight to think about. I mean basically I'm spokesperson and strategist for a web site and when I started my career, we didn't have web sites, we didn't even have the web. How could I have envisioned the most amazing thing in the world to me? So yeah, I do think step number one is to expand the possibilities beyond replacing like with like at least on the temporary basis and just to do enough so that you can get your survival needs handled. This is not a time to be thinking about saving for retirement or putting lots of money away. You can give yourself three months or six months or a year, that's just about survival and allow yourself the time to try and envision what you're going to do for the next thirty, forty years of your life.

Lin: And do you think it's okay to tap into retirement resources? I'm not saying clean them out completely but to take a certain percentage of the resources that you have to buy yourself the time?

Carol: Yeah. You know I had a life coach too and I asked her that exact same question and she said to me well that's what those emergency funds are for.

Lin: Yeah, for that rainy day.

Carol: Oh, you mean I can actually use my rainy day funds, this is the day it's raining?

Lin: Yeah, it's so funny. I notice a lot when I work with clients is that most of us, many Americans have many options available to us. We may not want to utilize them or go down that path but we have them and so often we're not even willing to explore the options. Yes that is definitely an option. Okay so step one is expand the possibilities and make sure that you're getting your basic needs taken care of. Two is staying in the void – that's what you said – to make sure that you can just allow yourself to be in the void so that you can be on that I guess journey of exploration?

Carol: Well I like to...yes the void...I'm saying that the religious perspective on the void is that by allowing yourself to be in that transitory space for a longer period of time you can let go of the status quo and reinvent yourself basically but I don't like to think of it as the void. I'm calling it what most people call it but I think of it more as...well I guess I can...the best way I can describe it is by going to the image of a spiral and I was inspired by this reconsideration of what the void is by my main teacher which has been the I Ching. I don't know if you remember the I Ching?

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Lin: Yup I do.

Carol: It was a book of wisdom and divination that came from the ancient Chinese thousands and thousands of years ago and they observe nature. One of the things that they observed in nature is that everything grows to its greatest point and then starts to turn into its opposite. So when you take a look at the moon for instance, when it reaches its fullest moment it starts to wane and the same thing with many of the cycles of nature. They reach a fullest point day and night and the seasons and all that and there's an ebb and flow to them and we're very good when things are growing and progressing in our lives. When we're in the upward part of the spiral we know how to drive and push and make things happen and it's appropriate if you bring the right skills and perspective at the right time in your cycle then you elongate the cycle, you make it as long as possible. What we don't do in the society is know what to do when things start waning for us. So we call it the void and it seems really scary because it's as if we've fallen off the charts. It's as if there is like this one straight path we're supposed to be on that only offers more and more success whereas age doesn't work like that. It has its burgeoning and its waning.

So in the E-Ching philosophy and a lot of what I've practiced in my own life and try and teach is okay well how do you look at the downward part of the spiral as being part of a whole cycle in which everything furthers. In other words you stop thinking about it as being falling off the charts and failure or whatever. You think to yourself instead that I'm in this dynamic spiral and right now I need to use a different set of skills. Instead of the pushing and driving skills, I need to receive and let and surrender and accept and be open to information and opportunities beyond my will and control.

Lin: And so what I'm seeing when I hear you say spiral is that you're in the upward movement of the spiral right. Now in the waning part, you're coming down and if we allow ourselves to be open what happens is that you're pushed up. When you get up into the growth part again you're higher than you were the last time.

Carol: Right but when you're at the bottom of any of these spirals, things fall apart on us and every time they fall apart on us you think that you're way back at the beginning and you remember the first time things fell apart at you at the beginning of your career or when you flunked out of grad school or whatever.

Lin: Whatever!

Carol: But the truth is every bottom is higher than the last bottom. So you can't say, "oh here I am again, oh no it's all falling apart on me again, oh I'm back to where I began." That is never the case because of all the knowledge and the experience and the additional people you've networked with. Another key thing is that you've got to get rid of your old

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expectations that it's going to be just like it was last time and instead you hold this place in your heart where you're willing to be pleasantly surprised.

Lin: Yeah because the expectations can really get you right. If you're expecting the same kind of job as you had before you're cutting out all the possibilities of what might be even better.

Carol: Well not only that but I'm talking about the expectations that's going to be whatever it is, even if you end up with the same job, that it's going to be hard and horrible and terrible and those kinds of expectations. That we expect to be out of work to be this horrible period. Think of the worst time you've ever had in your life and that's what is going to happen. I tried to think of about...rather to like imagine how could this be the best possible time? How could I make...if I was going to look at this as being...how can I get the best outcome possible and the best experience possible regardless of the fact that looking at me from the outside in, it looks like things are falling apart. But I know so much more than I used to know, I even know more people and there's more technology to help us get connected and to do our networking. So I think a lot of people have entered into this position again in the sort of panicky desperate mode and aren't taking full enough advantage of all the possibilities which is that this could also be a very rich and full and deep time.

Lin: Well and I'm hearing I think again about just shifting your perspective because you can look at it like the world is falling apart or you can shift your perspective and say, "wow maybe there's some opportunities here, let's see what they might be."

Carol: Right. Well that is exactly what I'm saying. The only thing is that I'm not a positive thinker and I should...

Lin: I know that about you. [Laughter]

Carol: I think that forcing positive thinking doesn't work and I know a lot of people teach that right now. You know think it and you'll will it, you'll will it and you'll have it and think it and others. I stand with E-Ching. I'm into an embrace it all person. I think that when we just only think positive and only try and be happy then we end up working with a very narrow band of the human potential. I prefer to expand. I want to be everything I can be but includes things like bitter sweet sorrow, and righteous anger and just flat out letting loose with a great big cry. I love all the emotions and I think that there's a way that you can bracket your emotions so that you could let yourself have whatever it is your having and still find ways to operate in a business like way when you need to. In fact I'm happy to share a little exercise that works for me.

Lin: Oh that would be great.

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Carol: And again I love career coaches I have to say and they've given me my best ideas but I was at a moment when I was being very...trying to keep myself very upbeat when really I was just...the cork was on the bottle of grief, let's just put it that way. I didn't...I was afraid to let the cork out because I thought I would be consumed by it and not be able to function. A career counselor said to me well you need to go and buy yourself a candle that's the same size as your grief and I thought well gee that's a pretty big candle. She said don't worry they've got big floor models, they've got some...they've got four feet tall candles if that's what you need. So that was step one. I went out and I bought the candle and then she said okay now what I want you to do is I want you to light this candle for something like fifteen minutes or half an hour or whatever every day until it's completely burnt or until you're not grieving anymore and while the candle is burning you feel all your feelings.

Lin: Great idea.

Carol: Yeah, and then at the end of the half hour – you set the timer or whatever – you blow the candle out and then you send out your resumes again and you get back on it. I've used this so many times. Sometimes when you really think about it it's not a very big candle. Sometimes it's like birthday size candle and you light it for three minutes, you cry your little head off for three minutes and then you're done and sometimes it really is a tragedy and it's going to take you some time to get over it. So the point is you can have all of your emotions and you can function. Maybe not all at the same time but certainly in sequence and as part of if you take this period of your life and you ritualize it. You think of this as I'm in this transitory ritual which indeed is what ritual is really about. Ritual is about creating this transitional space where you let go of the status quo and you don't know what's coming in place yet.

When you look at ancient cultures, when you look at pre-modern cultures and then you take a look at traditional religion or whatever, often the rituals were doing exactly that in an artificial means. They were basically taking you...sending you out into the hut in the woods or tying you to a stake and having ants crawl on you or whatever. Fortunately I guess in our society we always do get downsized you know.

Lin: Yes we do, don't we.

Carol: But it's still a...it's creating what I would consider like these moments in life that are ritualized if you understand the potential in it to be life changing in a positive way.

Lin: Well and also I think what's really brilliant about embracing your emotions and again you're not going on a job interview and you're being hysterical, that there's a place for it. But what's so beautiful about it is that, because those were your words I used in the introduction, the despair and delight of what it means to be fully alive and it is. It's not

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just about oh everything is wonderful and fine and wonderful, it's about all of the emotions, the good, the bad and the ugly and then you are fully alive.

Carol: Well if you take a look at truly powerful people they are usually people that have like depth and stability, nothing shakes them, it's that kind of thing. They are...they have a different kind of strength than our society teaches. Our society really values pushing your way through and things that are consistently strong in that way tend to become brittle and in truth brittle things break pretty easily. So if you take a look at spiritual philosophy, many of them were based on this idea of flexibility, the ability to expand, to embrace and to more like the willow tree that bends with the wind that kind of thing. I mean it's very easy to know what kind of strength that you've been relying on because if you are in a mode where you've been downsized and are job hunting or in transition and if you are allowing yourself to like flow over and around the obstacles and even momentarily get pent up behind dams, like that kind of thing, then you've got that kind of flexibility that's going to serve you. Eventually you're going to get to your goal whereas if you become rigid you're like an icicle hanging off of a roof and when you fall you're going to shatter.

So if that is your experience, if right now you're sitting there and feeling shattered you had a false strength and it's understandable why you would have had a false strength because our society only values that kind of bravado which was I think much more...perhaps made more sense in our parent's generation. Like the World War II pull yourselves up by the bootstraps kind of, you know, but I love the U.S. military. They came up with the perfect term for our times. Have you heard of VUCA .

Lin: No.

Carol: Okay. It's an acronym for volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous.

Lin: I love it. VUCA, okay. We're really living in VUCA times.

Carol: Yeah and so the military gets that you can't bring World War II gun ho strategies in VUCA times. It takes a different kind of resilience to be able to keep yourself motivated and to forgive yourself and others and to provide yourself the best opportunity for success when things are ambiguous, complex and unclear. It's like how is the military operating now and the same is true for those of us seeking employment or livelihood that these are VUCA times? I mean I don't think there is a person in any industry that isn't going to tell you that things aren't the way they were even six months ago or a year. So we need to bring that same kind of resilience to the livelihood creating thought process.

Lin: Yes and also all the research for positive aging points to resilience as being one of the key qualities that you need in order to really not just survive whatever is coming in the next ten, twenty to thirty years or forty years but really thrive in it. So why not start applying it right now if you don't have it right?

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Carol: Well yeah and again women at midlife and beyond I think have a head start. I think we're going to do extremely well during these kinds of times because many of us have had the experience of parenting or mothering or we were there at the beginning of women's lib and we've had to deal with difficult organizations and we've had to learn how to do the dance and how to deal with forging new territories. I mean we've always been pioneers. Our generation of women we've been pioneers our entire lifespan so you know what's new.

Lin: And we're not going to stop now right?

Carol: Oh absolutely not and what's really interesting it's like a lot of people were like, "oh it's such a shame this generation is never going to be able to retire." This is not a generation that I think ever wanted to retire. Now that we're told we can't retire all of a sudden it's like we all in a big puddle about it but...

Lin: Right, we weren't planning to though initially right.

Carol: Yeah. I mean a couple of years ago before the recession AARP did a survey. It found out that eight out of ten boomer women never expected to retire because they didn't want to. They found it meaningful and purposeful and everything so now that we've all lost our 401Ks and we have to work it's like...

Lin: Oh no.

Carol: I think we need to remember that the wanting is still in there and it's that wanting that motivates us and again not going into that desperate place. We were going to work anyway so again we've got...if we have thirty, forty years ahead of us we better be...we better take this moment right now to be very careful about setting ourselves up so that we have good attitudes and good careers and good options and are doing things that are going to keep us interested.

Lin: Okay so I've got a couple...I've got a lot of questions for you. So you said three steps. We have to expand the possibilities, stay open in the spiral, what's the third step?

Carol: Did I say three steps?

Lin: You did. Are there more than three? Well what's the next step after staying open in the spiral?

Carol: The three steps I think I was...I have at least ten steps maybe more.

Lin: In the book right?

Carol: The three steps in particular I was talking about were the three transitional...the three steps that have to do with ritual. If I was going to give any advice at all I would tell

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people to think of the career or livelihood creating space as ritual. So the first step is to understand and to feel the point of impact of being separated from the status quo. I mean unless you go through that grieving process you're going to derail the organic process if you try and replace what you had too quickly and ironically it's going to end up taking you longer. So step one is when you are...when you get bad news or you're separated from the status quo or you get...you've initiated a process that is the beginning of the ritual.

The middle step, step two is that liminal space and that's a word out of ritual theory and how you navigate the unknown. There are many, many steps and ways within that but the larger category, the step number two is to recognize and understand that you are in a transition and it's going to...you're going to feel like the ground has been taken up from beneath you. So that's the second stage and we can revisit that one because I've got lots more advice about what to do in that stage. The third stage is the reentry into the status quo and that's the good news stage. That's when you've figured out what you're going to do when you've started your business or you've gone back to school or you've gotten your job or whatever. So those are three steps that I was talking about.

Lin: Of ritual. Okay so what do you do when the ground is gone, what are some other things that you can do?

Carol: Well we were starting to get at it a little bit before which is this notion that you can basically multitask. You can have all of your emotions and operate as well. So, one of the things that I want to say is that you don't want to go to extremes. On the one hand if you try and replace what you were doing too quickly you risk derailing the process. On the other hand I do know women who think to themselves well I'm too shattered by this I can't take action. They sort of like freeze like deer in the headlights. It's like they just freeze. So, on the other hand you can take action before you really know where you're going. You can take baby steps and sometimes they are really intsy-winsy baby steps. Some of us – and I would put myself in this category – got pretty shattered by the rejection of being downsized or let go or fired or whatever. You can sit there and think to yourself I don't know...my life doesn't make sense to me anymore. I don't know how to put it together for myself, I don't think I have any skills, I can't even imagine myself working again or applying for another job.

I have a friend that was in a situation like this and she did what some of us might think to be well that's a crazy job hunting strategy. What she did is she started to do crossword puzzles. The point being is that she recognizes herself that she needed to find something that she was good at and start to rebuild her ego, start to rebuild her sense of confidence in herself.

Lin: Great idea.

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Carol: Yeah and for her it was crossword puzzles. So she got the most advanced...she was very good at crossword puzzles anyway but she decided she was going to just advance her skills at solving crossword puzzles and that's what she did. She cracked the toughest crossword puzzle book on the market and then she felt she was ready to start applying for jobs again.

Lin: Wow, I love it. Great idea, great idea.

Carol: Yeah.

Lin: What else, what are some other ways?

Carol: Well let me think. I have some real practical tips.

Lin: That would be good.

Carol: I think that internships if you allow yourself to fantasize about what was that thing you always wanted to do but you got on the wrong track. There are paid internships which are great but even unpaid internships at any age. Some people will say well I don't want to start at the bottom again oh my God but the thing about...what I've noticed is that women at midlife and beyond is they take up internship whether it's paid or unpaid because of everything they bring to it they move very quickly up through the ranks from internship to getting the job offer to, you know. Even if they don't get the job of their dreams within that track they learn enough just from being exposed to the new field to start their own company in the field or to realize that yeah they do want to go back and get more schooling or whatever. So I'm a big believer in paid internships.

Lin: I'm a big believer in even unpaid internships because in my forties I took an internship at the ABC affiliate in Boston because I wanted to be in television production. You're right, what I brought to the table was a thousand times greater than the twenty year olds that I was interning with and I just moved right into a position and it was awesome. I mean it was great so yeah you're starting at the bottom but you're bringing so much more to it, you dazzle people with it.

Carol: Yeah and same is true about going back to school too. I was nervous about that, going back to school at my age with people that were so much younger but I realized that I didn't get caught up in the nonsense you know.

Lin: Yeah.

Carol: I knew what I was doing, why I was there and I knew how to talk to my often younger professors as peers and say to them that doesn't make any sense to me to do this, I'd like to do it this way and I often got my own way. So I had a great time going back to school at my age. Let's see, I guess another thing is don't do things that feel...if it feels really painful like you're hitting your head against the walls stop doing it.

Carol Orsborn Interview

Lin: Good.

Carol: And as an example of that I mean I have had so many women come to me and say, I keep putting my resume out on monster.com and they never respond. Stop putting your resume on monster.com then. It's like yeah...and I mean there is...this electronic world of throwing your resume out there and you put thousands of resumes out. I would rather see you go to one good networking event or make one difficult call for you somebody that you feel could be helpful to you where you have to go to the edge of your comfort level to ask them for assistance or whatever. That's another thing I'd like to say too is that I think a lot of us have been shocked that our...how completely some of our former friends and associates seem to have forgotten us the minute we're not in their active network anymore. It's almost like we're pariahs or something and it's a phenomenon. It's not you personally. It's people who are still employed or working or who were getting things from you or thought you were powerful or whatever, if they were there for any of those reasons.

Plus I think the number one reason that they might withdraw is I think a lot of people would genuinely love to help but they don't know how and so aside from thinking that what you have might be catching I think that some people have the legitimate concern that if they even make contact with you that they don't know how to help. So I think it's helpful for you as a network to learn how to make it easier for people to continue to help you by saying things like...giving them specifics. Send them an email and say to them I'm doing fine, I'm networking out here. Don't sound desperate, just say it would be great if we could have coffee together. I don't expect that you know anybody or know of any jobs or anything but it would be just great to chat around about the business and see how things are going since I've left the business or keep in the loop or whatever. To really lower the expectations of what you're expecting from them so that they don't go into any kind of a panic mode.

Lin: Like you're going to ask them for a job or something.

Carol: That's why they are terrified and if they don't have a job they don't know how to help. So you've got to give them really easy ways to help and one of the ways is just to say oh can we just chat about how the field...you know what you're seeing, trends in the field or something like that. So they know what the expectation is and that you're not asking them for a job.

Lin: You know Carol I think it would be really valuable if you could share with our participants sort of how...you were chasing that job around right. I'm chasing and chasing and it never materialized. How you kind of got from that to this amazing job that you have at Vibrant Nation. Like what were the...what was the process that you went through?

Carol Orsborn Interview

Carol: Well again I was very focused looking for another big job and so I wasn't thinking about my own resources, what I had available to me. Only when I began to realize that they were just...what specifically happened in my case is that they had hired me everything except for flying me out to New York for the interview. So ten emails and twenty phone calls over three months just asking about when the ticket was going to arrive, I started to get a clue.

Lin: Did you think?

Carol: So I went...I started going...and it wasn't until then really that I pulled out...you go to conferences, you collect names, cards, you're on Internet, LinkedIn or whatever and I stumbled across a card of somebody I had sat at a table with at a conference. I remembered thinking at the time this is a cool guy and it's really, really a cool web site. It turned out to be Stephen Reiley the CEO of Vibrant Nation.com and at that point the web site was really not much more than a glimmer in his eye. I remember thinking to myself oh well there's a million startups, none of them actually get funded and nothing ever happens with them but gosh wouldn't it be great to be able to transfer from the marketing side of things where I was to actually being internal to a media that was designed specifically for the market that I'm an expert in. Wouldn't that be incredible if I could be a spokesperson and offer strategic counseling and represent them at events and speak for them and write for them. I put together this amazing fantasy in my mind and then I dismissed it because how many startups actually get funded you know and didn't think another thing about it.

Well, when I realized that the ticket to New York wasn't coming I went through all my cards and I stacked them up in order from what I thought would be the most incredible to the least incredible and this was at the top of my stack. I called Stephen and sure enough they got funding. They were just at the stage...you know it's the miracles that happen in life because now Vibrant Nation is a big, big deal and I think there's...I can name you just about two hundred of my own friends that would love my job. But then because it was so early he had just been funded and they hadn't even launched yet that I gave him a call and said to him is there something that I...I described my dream thing to him and is this something you would consider. He said well just put it together, put it down in writing and let me see a proposal and so I did and as we often think in these cases that yeah well sure, you know. I'll never forget this because we had gone to the country and we were sitting out in the middle of a field basically with cows and things and I had this date to talk to him and I thought...I didn't even think he was going to be on the phone. I was so bruised by everything that had gone wrong with me and instead I picked up the phone and he says well we're interested. Oh yeah, just like that. I mean it's like from months and months of chasing something around to 'we're interested'. So I'm in Los Angeles and I flew out to Louisville where they're headquartered.

Lin: They sent a ticket. [Laughs]

Carol Orsborn Interview

Carol: The ticket got sent and I mean I had so many requirements. I didn't want to move, I wanted to be virtual, I mean A to Z and it started great and it's only gotten better. So I think everybody at midlife and beyond deserves that one job finally where you get to use all of your skills and abilities and it feels like you were heading in this direction your whole life. I really believe that's there for everybody and sometimes when you're trapped in a mediocre situation or you get the adrenaline rush going where you think that the career you're in or the job that you had was like everything you don't know what...the miracles don't happen. There are miracles all around us, we just need to get to that moment in life where we can reach out and grab it or it grabs us in this case. So I'm a believer in miracles.

Lin: And you are living proof that if you just kind of take the time and go on the journey that there is that great...that you can create something incredible for yourself so congratulations. So let's just take...we've only got a minute or so, so let's just say a little bit about Vibrant Nation because I am in love with vibrantnation.com. It is a fabulous web site and if you are listening in today and you don't know about Vibrant Nation go there immediately and sign up it's for free. Who writes the incredible like the headlines for the amazing blogs that are on there because every single one of them I want to read when they come in?

Carol: Well we have a subject line. Most of them...well really our content is generated by the women in our membership. So we have...we're closing in on like seventy five thousand successful, smart women, fifty plus. It's free and it's all about the conversation. So maybe you've heard about the marketing to mom sites or the mommy sites but there was nothing for women fifty plus. So this is our forum, our way of talking about whatever our interests or concerns are. It can be anonymous or it can be names so some people end up using it for asking for career advice or talking about opportunities and things like that. Other people are talking about parenting adult children and those kinds of issues.

Lin: Should I leave my husband after forty years and whatever.

Carol: And a lot of it I've got to say, I mean we've been very serious today here but a lot of it is just what's the best moisturizer, you know.

Lin: That's right.

Carol: Is the one that they sell at the drugstore for twenty nine dollars really as good as the one that's three hundred dollars and are panty hose still in style or can I wear leggings at my age. So you know we're not trained, our generation isn't trained to use the Internet in this way. We don't know that there is a community where we can have that instant level of trust and vulnerability and fun and so it is a very...I won't call it a secret because people...

Lin: Well seventy five thousand women know about it so it's not a secret.

Carol Orsborn Interview

Carol: Yeah, but go...but please I would love everybody to go to vibrantnation.com and if you want to follow me personally you'll see my picture all over the place. I'm Carol Orsborn and I write a blog on there called Inside The Nation and you'll find me.

Lin: And you also write a blog for our sponsors. Real powered by Humana, realforme.com, a great one on work.

Carol: Well yes and in fact that's how we met so.

Lin: I know.

Carol: Right I blog for Humana. I specifically talk about career and work life balance and volunteering, anything that has to do with...well see I believe that beneath it all we are all really looking for meaning in our lives. Whereas in previous generations work was just about making money, our generation we really want to do something meaningful and again I believe that society is evolving and I believe that we can both make money and do something meaningful. So that's my wish and dream and hope for all of you.

Lin: And that's a perfect place to end. Carol thank you so much for joining us today, we've loved every second of your being here.

Carol: Oh what a joy.

Lin: And thanks to those of you who joined us for this first annual encore career tele-summit call. If you're listening live have a great rest of your day and I look forward to seeing you back again tomorrow at noon eastern daylight time when our expert will be Executive Director of the Transition Network Betsy Werley. Betsy wants you to know that smart women don't retire, they break free and take risks and she'll be showing you how as we kick off day two of the encore career tele-summit for women fifty plus. Again that's tomorrow at noon Eastern daylight time, meanwhile to your wonderful encore career possibilities.

End of Transcript