

Stop What's Stopping You

Get out of your own way and have it all!

By Kelly Smith, www.JaneInTheJungle.com

So how's life? Are you doing what brings you happiness and fulfillment, or are you trying to figure out what will make you happy? Do you sometimes feel that everyone else gets first dibs on your time and energy? Do you ever feel too overwhelmed and shut down to care about making yourself happy?



Growing up, my mother was very oppressed, and it made me sad. I didn't know whether to feel sorry for her or to lose respect for her for being such a victim. She wasn't allowed to work and she had no money of her own—her life as a mom was that of slave. She wanted an upper-class neighborhood and lifestyle for her kids, and she knew if she divorced my dad, we would lose that—she didn't want to be “a poor single mom on welfare.” She wanted to work, but she had no skills or earning power.

My mom was definitely a visionary. She wanted to be a part of the liberation of women through the Women's Movement, but she felt trapped. She would secretly read Gloria Steinman (one of the most effective female activists of the 60s) and assured me things would be different for me.

Today, despite the freedom women experience in the world, we still deal with the residue of society's conditioning—including rules about the roles we should play and the way we provide value. This conditioning, along with the accompanying emotional scars, runs deep. A lot of my esteem issues—and the esteem issues of my sisters (other women)—date back to being raised by women who were trapped by believing they had to play a certain role.

I began working with women in my mid 20s as a certified Re-evaluation Counselor, where I learned that what stops women is themselves or other women, referred to as “Internalized Women's Oppression.” The theory explains that women are brilliant, powerful, intelligent, capable, attractive, and talented. What gets in the way of living from this empowered place is our beliefs and rules about how we should play our roles. We put others' needs before our own and neglect self-care. We have trouble requesting help when we clearly need it—“we should be able to do it all.” We nurture and make others feel comfortable, yet when we

need to speak up and hold others accountable, we stop ourselves and instead play the victim.

At some point, in a corporate role, we may have to fire someone, challenge a man's thinking, or say "No" to someone with a lot of power, and this intimidates us because we are used to pleasing others rather than operating as their equal. Women who stay true to themselves run the risk of negative labels like selfish, bad mom and the "B" word. Many believe they must choose between success and romance with a man who may feel threatened by a powerful woman.

Maria Shriver, in an interview in *O Magazine*, recalls her drive to prove herself, separate from being a Kennedy. Her mother and others in her family defined themselves by their accomplishments, and she felt significant pressure to measure up to the family name. She eventually felt lost in the *doingness* of life, experiencing achievement as an empty victory; the restlessness inside her never went away, each accomplishment needing another to stay worthy and relevant.

One day, Maria had an "A-ha!" moment that awakened her life's purpose. She asked, *Who am I being in the world?* After marrying movie star (and later, Governor of California) Arnold Schwarzenegger, the demands on her time grew. She wanted to be emotionally present for her children and to balance life on her terms. She redefined success, left her job, and quit caring how others perceived her.

Today, Maria believes she is valuable, even if she never accomplishes another thing. She contributes to the things she's passionate about and allows herself space to "just be." Her spiritual evolution is what is most important, along with her relationships with the people she loves.

As women, our work today is to make sense of our internalized messages and the insidious ways that they eat at us. When a woman's self-image is skewed by faulty programming, her sense of worth is diminished, which gets in the way of her Big Dreams. These issues run deep, and while we see some women making huge strides, we also see our teen daughters struggle. I've had many conversations with women who are concerned that their daughters feel less significant, valuable, intelligent, or capable than their male counterparts. There is huge pressure for them to look and act a certain way, and they look to boys for approval. They downplay their worth and question or second-guess themselves.

So what is the cure? How do women become unstoppable?

We learn to live authentically!

Living authentically means we accept responsibility for our lives. As the guardian of our happiness and fulfillment, we are honest about where we are on the journey, how we struggle, and what we need to overcome to manifest our brilliant, powerful best. Gail Evans, a former CNN reporter, states in her book *Play like a Man, Win like a Woman*, a woman's real power is in self-actualization (knowing who we are and how we tick) and learning the game of business.

Living authentically means we accept responsibility for our experiences. We don't remain tight-lipped when we sense something is awry—we trust our intuition. We speak our truth in an empowering way. We ask for what we want or need, and say no when appropriate.

Living authentically means we accept responsibility for understanding ourselves intimately, without pretense or shame. We focus on our spiritual work of forgiveness, personal growth, integrity, and acceptance. We live proactively rather than reactively, and we reject ego-driven defensive mechanisms like withholding information or affection, sarcasm and aloofness.

We can and should be powerful, self-sufficient women, able to pursue the things that matter to us, to find a fulfilling balance between work, contribution and family, and to practice habits of self-care like eating healthy and exercising because we want to be healthy and honor our bodies, not to match up to society's image of what we should look like.

As a woman, you are phenomenal, exquisite, powerful, and special!

- Make a commitment to be true to yourself and to honor your voice
- Ask yourself, *What do I want?* and give yourself time and space to hear the answer
- Give yourself permission to say NO and to make direct requests
- Take empowerment courses that will help you evolve spiritually (Email Kelly for a list of recommended courses)
- Invest in coaching to strengthen your self esteem, support you in getting to the next level, and provide direction for accomplishing your goals
- Get educated about money and/or support for handling your finances