

PERMISSION GRANTED BY PATTY AUBERY

Goodbye, I sobbed as my mother's hand slowly went limp in mine. It was July 3, 2012, and the strong-willed defender and ever-present supporter of my remarkable life was gone.

It had been a good journey, the two of us. Through life's ups and downs . . . across a career that spanned from unexciting to extraordinary . . . and now into an uncertain future without her, my mom had been with me and my family every step of the way.

By that point in my life, I'd been the President and chief rainmaker behind one of the most successful publishing brands in history: Chicken Soup for the Soul. Its two founding coauthors—Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen—were famous and rich beyond belief. But few people outside of the company really knew the sheer force of will and determination it had taken to build that empire—or about the role I had played during countless nights of working late, weeks of stress bringing hundreds of book titles to print on time, and managing licensing deals that ran the gamut from television to recorded music to greeting cards, pet food, calendars, educational products and more. I was also Jack Canfield's Chief Executive Officer, his greatest champion, and the guardian of his career.

But all that was about to change.

"Promise me," my mom begged on our last day together, "promise me you won't hide behind that man. I didn't raise a daughter to be invisible.

Promise me you will show up and be seen." I promised my mom that day. I could no longer hide. It was time to give myself permission to be seen. Permission granted has been my mantra ever since.

* * * *

What does it take to build a billion-dollar brand for someone else? What kind of woman would spend 18 years of her life creating a legacy for someone else to leave behind?

During the heyday of Chicken Soup, I not only oversaw the production and publication of 230 different Chicken Soup titles, I also co-authored 14 of the books myself. I remember the week we had seven different books on the New York Times bestseller list at the same time. It was a Guinness World Record, and yet I still felt it was all luck. If hard work had a hand in it—or in any of the other monumental achievements we enjoyed in those days—I gave the credit to my business partners, Jack and Mark.

When the time came to promote the 14 different Chicken Soup for the Soul titles that I had coauthored with the two of them, I traveled the country doing booksignings and television appearances—once when I was pregnant with my second child. One of my books, *Chicken Soup for the Christian Soul*, rolled out with the largest first printing ever for a nonfiction title. Yet I never gave myself permission to OWN my success. I was waiting for someone to acknowledge me . . . to tell me I had arrived . . . to put me up on some pedestal that didn't even exist. I waited a long time. Until, one day, I didn't wait anymore. We've all heard the saying, If it's meant to be, it's up to me. So, relying solely on the same determination and force of will I'd employed for years, I began a journey to the different life I knew was my calling. I gave myself permission to combine the personal-growth and human-potential knowledge I'd studied, lived and produced for years and bring it to the women's market as a champion for others who needed to step into their own limelight.

My first assignment, a women's retreat in Santa Barbara where a dozen professionals, entrepreneurs and authors gathered, was the ideal format for me to teach what I knew. It was filled to capacity with women who wanted to learn from me. And I was scared to death. Reaching out to my friend, Teresa Huggins, I asked if she would co-facilitate the weekend training with me. Candidly, I had no idea how to run a retreat alone, and I certainly didn't have the confidence. But I had made a promise, and the promise needed to be kept.

As the women eagerly assembled at our luxury location that first day of the retreat, I reflected that it was almost a year to the day after my mom had passed away. I'll never forget the fear of stepping out on my own in an industry that had been dominated by men I both knew and worked with—and I probably said 20 words that whole weekend as Teresa guided the women in their studies.

But together we did it.

I did it, and I survived.

What I realized during that scary, beautiful weekend was that everything leading up to that point was all perfect. The only one who could have given me permission to be me, was me. In order to fully step into my power, I had to become my complete self. When I showed up fully—as I did that weekend—I realized that I was also giving other women permission to do the same.

It was so simple, yet it still felt so difficult. But still I leaned into this new version of myself and began a beautiful journey. The awesome part of it was that I had really lived it: I was doing what needed to be done, I just wasn't owning the results.

I also realized that, early in my career, I was so busy being busy that I didn't take the time to celebrate my success. Additionally, I'd felt guilty about trying to be a mom and an executive at the same time. Within a year after my husband Jeff and I were married, the first Chicken Soup book started to take off. It had taken five long years and 16-hour days to bring this labor of love to fruition, to find a publisher who would take a risk on us, and to market the book to bestseller status. Within weeks of the book starting to take off, I discovered that I was pregnant with my first son. What was I to do? Should I quit my amazing job and raise a family, or struggle onward as a working mom?

I wanted both. I knew I could do it. But was I being selfish? I knew in my bones that being at the helm of Chicken Soup for the Soul was a once-in-a-lifetime career opportunity, but with that knowledge came tremendous guilt, too: not being there for every mealtime, saying goodnight over the phone from a hotel room thousands of miles away, and missing the little celebrations like a smiley face returned on a crumpled page of homework.

What I didn't know at the time was that being immersed in building that brand—building something celebrated and lasting—was one of the greatest gifts I could have given to my boys. I became an accidental role model. I showed them what it looked like to live one's passion and life purpose—and that, when you do live authentically, everything else falls into place.

Happiness, health and wealth are actually byproducts of pursuing something you are passionate about!

What a concept.

I just wish that I had had a woman mentor back in those days to stand beside me and tell me it would all be okay. If only a female role model had been there before me and could have shown me the way. Instead, I navigated those waters alone. And there were many days I truly felt alone. When I was at work, I felt I should be at home. When I was at home, I felt as though I should be at work. The guilt was ever-present, nearly driving me crazy.

I remember the defining moment of my struggle: as I sat in my publisher's private jet, flying to a book signing, I was riddled with guilt that I should be at home with my husband and boys. Here I was on a private plane, living my dream—yet I was miserable. So miserable in fact, that I knew I needed to make a decision. I had to give myself permission to be present and enjoy that moment. I had to let go of all the other stories in my head. I decided—then and there—that, when I was home, regardless of the time we had together, I would be present with my family. When I was at work, I would do the same.

I suddenly realized that—in order to assuage my guilt—I'd actually been looking to others for approval. I waited for approval from my husband, my neighbors, my business partners, anyone who would say, Patty, you're doing the right thing.

The reality was that approval was something I needed to find on the inside. I needed to grant myself permission. And so, over the years, this mental battle remained a constant theme in my life. I would get the message—give myself approval—just until the next obstacle or limiting belief showed up, causing me to think, Didn't I learn this already?

But what were those obstacles, really? They were actually opportunities which would take me to the next level of success. They were stairsteps on my journey. And each level brought me more awareness about my own desires, as well as more conviction that I had the ability to choose. They were also lessons that allowed me to be more compassionate towards myself and, in turn, be more compassionate toward others.

* * * *

What did I ultimately learn that I can now pass on to other women? At the end of the day, no one goes it alone. Success really is a team sport and it does take a village. What I needed more than anything back in those days was a cheerleading squad not only to cheer me on, but to say, You can do it. We believe in you. As a woman, I was a tremendous cheerleader for my husband, my kids and my business partners. But when it came to me, I couldn't summon up the same enthusiasm. I had to eventually find it for myself.

And I did.

I reached out to other women I admired like Janet Attwood who wrote *The Passion Test*, and Lisa Nichols from the movie, *The Secret*. They could see in me what I couldn't see in myself. And when I shared my hopes and dreams with them, they were there to hold me accountable and cheer me on. They were there to make sure I showed up no matter what—letting nothing get in the way. It was a huge thing to have that support. It was so powerful.

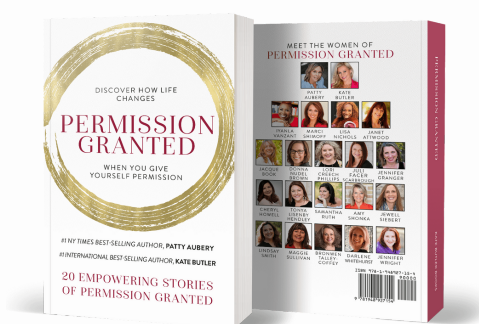
I decided as a result of these supportive relationships that I would pay it forward. For the first time in my life, I knew for certain that I was living my life purpose. I vowed to help others live their life purpose, too. I pledged to motivate and support other women to live the life of their dreams—giving them permission to never settle, never play small, and take credit where credit is due.

It's the kind of permission I never received from anyone until I granted permission to myself. Today, my boys are grown and in their 20's. My husband and I have survived 27 years of marriage, and our nanny is still part of the family. When I think back, I wonder: if I had settled and kept playing small . . . if I had not asked myself the question, What more is there for me if I simply step up? . . . if I didn't pursue the dream that I could have it all, what kind of life would I have had? It's safe to say that my life, then and now, would be drastically different. I wouldn't have worked with thousands of women around the world. I wouldn't have made amazing, lifelong friendships with so many people

I've met through the work I do. And I wouldn't have the war stories and experiences behind me to remind me that I've done scary things before,

*and I can do them again. What drives me today is helping to bring about a world where every women digs deep within her soul and asks herself the big question: what do I want for ME? Not to please someone else, but to allow her to live her dream and be the person she was meant to be. To understand that this lifetime is not a competition, but a collaboration—a chance to create community and support. To recognize that each of us needs to go the extra mile and believe that we can.

If I can overcome my limiting beliefs and grant myself permission, anyone can. Together we are better—and together we can and will make a difference.



20 EMPOWERING STORIES OF PERMISSION GRANTED AWAIT YOU

available at
amazon