

CHAPTER 5

CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

In this chapter, President Leary gives great tips for handling the challenges of your many roles when going back to school.

But, first, let me share a true story from the book. We will call this woman Maria. A mother at 17, Maria dropped out of school and stayed home to raise her children. She earned her GED but longed to go to university. Yet, something always got in the way. Then she learned she had breast cancer. Suddenly, Maria realized she must start fulfilling her dreams...now! At first she struggled, balancing school work and her children's needs. That's when she started bringing her homework to her sons' football *practices*. Waiting for them, she studied hard, freeing herself to attend their actual games. She discovered she felt more connected to her boys because, like them, she was a student, too.

That's your new role...student. And, it's scary.

Do you worry about writing college papers or doing college math? Well, every adult student does. Best advice?

Share those fears!

Get help now! Even *before* class starts! Many universities offer free tutors online or in person. If you have a special learning needs, let your advisor know **now**. They don't judge. They **do** get you the support you need.

Plan your study time.

Choose a time that works for you to do those *longer* assignments. Maybe before work or after everyone else goes to bed. Or, Sunday afternoons or right after you get home. Keep those study materials with you throughout your day so you can use free moments to read or study for an exam. Even twenty minutes at lunch or while waiting at the doctor's office can make a real difference!

Find a Study Buddy.

Find someone in your classes and reach out. Set up a regular time to check in with each other. And, never miss it. What a difference that will make!

But, what about your roles as Mother, Daughter, Spouse, Partner, and Community Leader?

We women try hard to meet the needs of our children, our parents, our partners, our spiritual communities, and neighborhoods. But, sometimes we believe we have to do it *all* by ourselves or we've failed in those roles. *Not true*.

When you go back to college, ask for help.

Sit down with those you love.

Share your dreams and what it could mean **for them, and you**, when you earn this degree.

Involve them in your studies, the triumphs and frustrations.

Schedule special time with them.

Say “Not now” to all those additional requests on your time and energy.

Tell everyone about this **emotional roller coaster**, from the excitement of learning...to those crushing moments when a bad grade threatens...but never defeats you!

Of course.....sometimes....we can't share. Not every relationship is perfect. Some are very difficult. But your advisor has seen it all. She knows the organizations and services to support you. Reach out to her.

Now let's talk about your role as an employee!

Many women work long hours, even multiple jobs, outside the home. It's hard to get it all done. Here are four powerful strategies that could help you!

1. Talk to your boss...if you can...about how this learning you're doing will help her and the company.
2. Check for any tuition reimbursement. Even the smallest organization may offer something.
3. Find a mentor and join a professional association in your current or future career field. A mentor will help you figure out when and how to tell others in the company about your dream of an education. Professional associations provide connections and expertise and offer opportunities to find the perfect job...and the mentor to get you to it...just ask!

Your role at home

1. Cleaning.

Okay, sit down and decide the level of clean you actually need and what you can put off until later. Then, meet with those you live with and decide who does what and when, even young children can help.

2. Meals.

Great food keeps us healthy and supports our family traditions, but it does take time. You may already cook extra and freeze it, or cook one meal that transforms into many, or try to shop only once a week. All of those strategies save time and energy.

One woman started Potluck Thursdays with her family and friends. Everyone brought what they had and celebrated...Thursday together!

Others asked their children, friends, and partners to take turns cooking. Even their young children prepared simple meals and helped clean up.

Finally, let's talk about your most important role, taking care of YOU!

Especially while you are in school!

First: Build in moments to relax with your family and friends.

Second: Exercise, yes, exercise, even just a walk with a friend each day makes a difference in focus and stamina.

Third: Get counseling if you ever feel unusually sad or anxious

We all experience loss and sadness. It helps to talk to someone. Most colleges and universities have confidential telephone counseling services to help you.

And last, when a big bump happens, adapt.

Remember, stops and restarts happen, but if you minimize them you reach your ultimate goal – your college degree – much sooner! ALWAYS talk to your advisor about what's going on. Then work with her to create a plan to finish!

You can do this! Don't let anything stop you!!