

Being a Joyful Storyteller Entrepreneur

by Carol McCormick

"You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So, you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future." Steve Jobs

Working as a professional entrepreneurial storyteller for over forty years is a quirky way to make a living. It's taught me to embrace uncertainty, take risks, pivot from my planned path, embrace unforeseen opportunities, and try financially to keep my head above the water.

I chose this work because I love telling stories. I think storytelling at its most powerful is discovery learning. The storyteller doesn't tell someone what to do. Instead, you plant seeds in their imagination. Later they remember the story and it guides their behavior.

Running a solo storytelling business requires you to wear many hats: Artist, Researcher, Imagineer, Author, Marketer, Teacher, Social Media Specialist, Public Relations Advisor, Accountant, Travel Agent, and Business/Tax Advisor. There's the stress of it not being a monetary slam dunk career or providing a service that people think they need or should pay for. It's a 24/7 job with no health insurance or paid personal time off. You're always thinking about marketing and creating new stories and programs even while you're delivering booked gigs. On vacation you're expected to respond to clients and potential customers.

The quandary of this career is how do you remain joyful, excited, and healthy? How do you avoid Burnout -- exhaustion, cynicism, or inability to be productive?

Here are some signs you are experiencing or approaching creative burnout:

- Struggling to get started on even small tasks
- Frequent lack of energy and motivation
- Lack of daily joy
- Decision fatigue
- Feeling constantly overwhelmed by your workload
- Physical symptoms such as weight gain or loss, hair loss, elevated blood pressure, insomnia, back pain, headaches

There are things you can do that may help you overcome burnout.

When you feel there is too much to do:

- Let it go. Think about what you can delegate or take off your To Do List. Recognize that you cannot do everything all the time. There will be periods when your house is a disaster, and you have PB&Js for dinner. Maybe you can adjust deadlines? Be honest about your needs and limitations. Take time for self-care.

When you feel you lack autonomy and have no power over your life and decisions:

- Allow yourself more creative freedom over your time. Maybe make more space for passion projects? Take a break from your routine work and try something new. Give yourself freedom of location, work hours, and process. Take control of as much as you can.

When you feel lack of support:

- Explain to your loved ones why storytelling is important to you, and why it would mean a lot to have their support. If they seem amenable, ask them to babysit, help with housework and meals, or help with yardwork and shopping.
- Look for other storytellers who can become friends, confidantes, and champions of your work. Find or create a storytelling group to meet regularly to listen and give appreciations and suggestions about your work.

When you feel stressed-out by deadlines, rejections, internal self-criticism, or impostor syndrome:

- Take. A. Break. Stop and smell the roses. Count your blessings. Read past favorable reviews of your work. Go for an outdoor walk, preferably through a space with water or greenery, and practice mindfulness, focusing on your surroundings and all five senses. Take a leisurely bath. Curl up with a good book. Take a nap. Exercise. Dance. Meet up with or telephone a friend. Watch a movie. Go on a political social media diet. Disconnect from work at the end of your day. Take off to do something fun for a few hours or a whole day. Take some vacation time.
- Do deep breathing for two or three minutes. Inhale slowly and hold for four seconds. Exhale slowly and hold for four seconds.
- Relax your muscles. Clench then release muscle groups. Begin at your feet. Tighten all the muscles of your toes at once, hold for three seconds, then release. Proceed to your feet, your calves and so on all the way to your jaw and brow.

If I'd stayed in teaching or corporate training I could have made more money. I've no regrets. Those careers would never have brought me the joy and wisdom of storytelling.



While teaching in an impoverished school district, Carol McCormick discovered that storytelling helped students of all abilities learn. As a corporate trainer and interfaith minister, she uses storytelling to introduce change, instill values, build connections between people, inspire action, and keep listeners engaged. She shares a wide variety of storytelling programs and workshops. Carol is the author of *A BRIDGE FOR GRANDMA*, a picture book to help lessen the fear of death. www.carolmccormick.net

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