

Melissa (Missy) Bradley's Story

'Woman of Focus'

Women just starting their climb on the pink ladder may consider Joseph Campbell's words, "Follow Your Bliss," says Melinda (Missy) Bradley this month's Pink Ladders Woman of Focus. If you find what you want to do that fills you and makes a difference in the lives of others, then you never have to work a day in your life.

An essential element for career climbing is to make sure your ladder is against the wall you wish to climb. Missy says her office is filled with people who have climbed the ladder of a career they dislike, but are good at. So every day a little piece of them dies. Just because you are good at something, doesn't mean you have to make a career out of it. She attributes her success to doing what she absolutely loves to do.

Goal setting in the traditional sense has not been a key component to Missy's success, but creating vision boards and lists (such as treasure maps, dream boards, life journey lists) has been essential. Some people believe it has to be specific. Her preference is having a broad set of balanced goals to include physical health, professional, spiritual, relational, community and material aspects.

Balance, vision and movement are essential in climbing one's pink ladder. Missy's daily practice in forming and assisting her career goals includes meditation, centering, prayer, and journaling. "When we do not do anything to get us grounded first thing in the morning and last thing at night, we have a tendency to get out of our body and stress gets worse and worse. After years of doing affirmations, I am more aware of speaking in affirmative terms, although I don't do it in the formal sense anymore. Our words are powerful. Thoughts become things as Mike Dooley says. When we make statements like 'It kills me that...' it probably will. Be clean with the words you use. They determine our future."

Missy uses positive statements like "I have work that I love, which provides financial security and makes a positive difference in the lives of others." The vagueness of this one, leaves room for opportunities to present themselves that have not been conceived of yet, says Missy.

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She also does specific ones such as “I am an international trainer and author” - this is an affirmation she conceived 25 years ago and it is true now.

“I think the greatest accomplishment, or maybe I should say the greatest gift, has been the absolute honor to walk people on their journeys out of the darkness. Whether it has been from profound trauma and loss, natural disaster, combat, business challenges and more, I can say at the end of my life, I have made at least a small difference in the life of another. Nothing is more important.”

Missy has experienced several career challenges. The first major one was moving from Knoxville to Nashville. She had already acquired a graduate degree in psychology, but had never worked in this field. Upon moving, Missy realized Nashville didn't need another unemployed musician. So she decided to break into a new field, in a new town, equipped with no practical experience. This was a daunting endeavor.

“I was away from my family, a very successful career as a music teacher and Organist/Choirmaster of a church in Knoxville as well. So, I hit a ‘belly of the whale’ or ‘Dark night of the Soul’ time professionally and personally. The day I finally got a new job in the field, my father died suddenly. It was a tough transition and is so important in what I am now teaching all over North and Central America.”

The second big challenge in Missy's career was being outsourced along with her entire staff after 12 years with the same corporation (as a psychotherapist and organizational development person). “The day we picked up our severance packages, an old friend happened to be at the same restaurant we had gone to for our last lunch. He asked what I was doing there and I told him our entire division had just been outsourced. He handed me his business card and said, ‘I have a new job. Wait two weeks and call me.’ Ten years later, his company is still my biggest contract and I have made more money in my own business, every year, since I left.”

Missy is not working in the profession she intended. She uses many of the tools she learned as a music teacher in expressive therapies and in working as an international trainer. “Music and

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movement is a powerful way to learn. I think once a person is infected with the teaching bug, you have it for life. My undergraduate degree (at University of TN) is in Music Education. I started college right out of high school because there was no option for me not to attend college. I was the first in my family to graduate from college. It was always assumed, by all, that I would be a music teacher...which I was for 7 years in the Knox County, TN schools.

“I decided to go to graduate school for an advanced music degree and during a required psychology class, I became interested in the resilience (not the word used then) of people after trauma. I changed my major to psychology, which is funny, because in undergrad I took Psych 101 and flunked it the first time. Took it over again and made a D and the third time was a charm, I made an A! Most of the songs and chants I taught my students in the 1970’s, like ‘Itsy Bitsy Spider’ and ‘Goin on A Bear Hunt’ are examples of Heroic Journeys...about resilience. So, in some ways I was on the path to psychology and resilience, I just didn’t know it yet.”

Networking is an important aspect on the career path, but many networking methods were not Missy’s cup of tea. “Connecting with people one on one and nurturing those connections are networking also. I am a bit more introverted and when I put my professional hat on, I can look very extraverted and I have great colleagues that nudge me a bit too. Networking is essential when we are in our own business and is good for anyone in any career. I have been blessed with some wonderful mentors and the very nature of my career is mentor-like, so I have to practice what I teach first. I think we all have mentors...and sometimes mentors come in the form of an adversary. It is all in how we look at it in The Heroic Journey.”

What gives Missy strength and desire to continue when tough challenges present themselves, she reveals in her seminars. “Two of my greatest strengths are tenacity and curiosity. I understand the heroic journey of life and during the initiation phase, part of it is simply to keep putting one foot in front of the next. During tough times, I realize I have also been through some of the hardest things people can go through (personally) and I made it through that! My curiosity gives me the gift of looking at every tough situation with a question mark: What am I learning about life from this challenge? What am I learning about myself? Is there a pattern here? Have I dealt with this feeling before? If so, did I get through it previously? Do I need to try something different this time?”

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Missy's father inspired her because he felt gender equality was a non-issue, it was just a given, in both his actions and his words. "Every night at dinner, I would sit down with my parents (my brother, Barry, who is 14 years older was already out of the house) and Dad would tell stories about growing up during the Great Depression, his mother dying when he was nine and adventures of leaving home at 12. All of the stories were filled with initiations in life, the normal 'I doubted myself at times,' or 'I was scared' and then he would tell me how he got through it. We laughed a lot with the adventure stories...of which my brother said may have been embellished! The greatest gift my parents gave me was the gift of teaching me to think. If I had a hair-brained idea, they wouldn't tell me it was stupid, I would be asked questions about 'how would you...' in order to help me learn to look at the errors in my thinking or successes."

Along with her father, Missy's says Terri Schanks is her inspiration. She is co-author of many articles they have written together. "When I temporarily misplace my authentic power which is not based on ego, but of service, she helps get me grounded again." And her lifelong best friend Jenny is her inspiration. "Jenny is the most loyal, fearless and loving friend. She lives by example. She is kind and stands up for 'what's right.' There are many unnamed people who, every day, do things of service in the face of great cost to self. They inspire me when I am finding myself wanting to whine; I am grateful that I actually have it so easy."

Volunteering is an important aspect in keeping balance through the career journey. Missy has been an avid volunteer since high school. "I started for the American Red Cross with nursing as a home volunteer. I was a volunteer for the (then) Rape and Sexual Abuse Center in Nashville which launched me into a new phase of my career. I now dedicate my volunteer time to all things veteran. I am on the Clinical Board of Advisors for Not Alone (www.notalone.com) and Operation Stand Down, Inc. - both based out of Nashville. A very important person in my life is a combat, and I was married to a combat veteran for 20 years."

In five to ten years, Missy sees herself doing much of what she's doing now: training professionals, individuals and systems (families, businesses and communities) in finding their life purpose and their authentic self. She will have a series of books on The Heroic Journey derived from her seminars for different groups, much like Chicken Soup for the Soul. She envisions having a strong media presence in television and radio.

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I love what I do and who I am when I am doing what I love. So I will know what I need to say yes to when it presents itself, says Missy.

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Missy's Favorite Recipe

Missy says this rice dish is one of her Mom's favorite recipes. Her mother is always on her mind whenever she gathers the ingredients and creates the mix.

"She was not a particularly good cook (and neither am I) and this one is so simple."

Mom's Rice

1 can of French Onion Broth - Campbell's
1 Can of Beef Broth (double) - Campbell's
1 1/3 cup of Uncle Ben's converted rice
2 jars of sliced mushrooms
Mix together
Let stand for 2 hours
Put in oven at 375 degrees for one hour

*Excellent with beef dishes.

Melissa Bradley is the owner of the [Omnibus Center](#) in Nashville, Tennessee. She can be reached by visiting her website.