

Our Speakers Share Stories of Advice & Inspiration

By Diane Middlebrooks

Thank you for your emails and cards! I miss seeing and talking with you at our Women's Initiative programs. We had a lot of special programs planned since this is the 20th Anniversary of the Women's Initiative. As you know we had to cancel them all, including our big program of the year, which was planned for June 10. When things get back to normal, we will reschedule as many as possible.

I also miss our speakers, learning from them and enjoying what they have to share. So, I decided to ask some of our speakers you have enjoyed over the years to share how they stay inspired and positive. We will start with Leslie Goddard, whose program *Becoming Queen Elizabeth II* was scheduled for March 31, with more than 200 of you registered.

Leslie Goddard, Ph.D., is an award-winning actress and scholar who has been portraying famous women and presenting history lectures for more than ten years. In her words, "It's my life's work to bring memorable women from the past alive and to tell historical stories so that lessons from the past are more meaningful and powerful."

Advice from Eleanor Roosevelt on Readjustment

By Leslie Goddard

On a Zoom call last week, my friend Mindy started to complain. She works as a public speaker, and all her spring bookings were cancelled. Her presentations, she insisted, could not be given virtually. No museums were hiring. She could not think of any other way to make money.

We offered her sympathy and some suggestions. Could she create an online workshop? Write an article? Create a program that could be presented online?

No, she said. To every suggestion, she had the same answer: No. It would never work.

I understood her frustration, but it also frustrated me. What she wanted was to have her old life back. She wanted life to return to what it was before the quarantine. And that wasn't happening.

As a historian, in stressful situations like this, I often look for advice from women in the past. After our call, I pulled out one of my favorite books by Eleanor Roosevelt, *You Learn By Living*.

By coincidence, the book opened on a chapter titled "Readjustment is Endless." In it, Eleanor tells the story of what her husband Franklin said when his mother died in 1941. Much he would miss her, he said, he found consolation in knowing she could never have adjusted to life in wartime. She could never have adjusted to seeing her grandsons go to war. She could never have reconciled herself to living life on a smaller scale.

And yet, Eleanor notes, there are other people who adjust to life easily. Some people just seem able to pivot, readjust and change when necessary.

She tells the story of an immigrant doctor who moved to the United States with his wife, arriving

almost penniless and without knowing English. He was unable to practice medicine until he learned the language and retook the medical examinations. Rather than throwing up his hands in discouragement, he buckled down. He and his wife found work as domestic servants, he learned the language and went back to college, and they eventually settled in a rural area where he became a successful doctor again.

The thought of making such an adjustment would paralyze many middle-aged people. But as Eleanor notes, his ability to adjust was key to his ultimate success.

What a timely lesson that is right now. So many of us are facing unprecedented upheavals in our lives. It might be as minor as giving up your regular haircut or as major as being furloughed. Whether small or large, adjustments are difficult, but they are also unavoidable.

Those who thrive, Eleanor reminds us, are those who accept that readjustment is a natural part of life.

The more we accept this, less painful big adjustments will be. Those who meet changing circumstances as a part of life, will always have an advantage over those who resist change or simply refuse to adapt.

Sharon Garvey Cohen has been a soprano with the Lyric Opera of Chicago since 1987, for a total of 33 seasons. Sharon also teaches beginning piano and violin privately, as well as advanced vocal coaching and audition preparation. For five years she was a costumer for Fenton High School's Spring Musicals. Her most recent presentation for the Women's Initiative was the Ice Cream Social in July 2019. Sharon shared behind-the-scenes stories and photos of what happens backstage at the Lyric Opera.

“As a chorister in the Lyric Opera of Chicago, I was devastated when the season was cancelled. We were about to launch Wagner's four opera *Ring Cycle*. Tucked in at home, I discovered the Metropolitan Opera in NYC was live-streaming operas. I was able to watch *The Ring Cycle* and other operas—from the comfort of my home! Some operas I have performed but have never seen! The Lyric and the Met share productions and it tickles me to see my former costumes dancing across my screen.

I stay inspired and positive by engaging with my family. My daughters are home together, and we are finding a new balance. Jesslyn and I go on daily walks and Marissa works in her “Victory Garden”. I enjoy being a fly on the wall during Jesslyn's online music lessons. It's heartwarming to listen to. The girls' creativity in the kitchen is inspiring. My 90-year-old mother in Texas has learned how to FaceTime, and we have visited the girls' local grandmother by looking in her Lutheran Home window.

I find positivity through service. One day while Facebooking, a friend was asking for people who could sew masks for Chicago Mask Makers. I virtually raised my hand, watched a tutorial, and began sewing with my personal stash of fabrics. After delivering 55 masks to them, I have 20 more on the table. I sent 8 mask-making kits to my mother who lives on her own. She is busy sewing and happily serving her community!”

Sue Kirschner, Brand Strong Marketing, has been a perennial favorite of Women's Initiative business owners. She has 25 years of experience in helping companies of all sizes and industries tell their story and attract customers. Sue's most recent program, *Be Irresistible to Customers by Knowing What They Want*, was packed with great ideas and presented with Sue's usual enthusiasm and sense of humor.

“To stay positive, I need to schedule things that lift my spirits every day. Businesswise, I am busier than ever and incredibly grateful for that. But I know that some of my clients and peers are not so lucky. To help them and share some positivity, I do research every week to find stories of small businesses who are not just surviving but thriving with creativity and ingenuity. These business owners inspire me because they don't stop trying. I share these stories in my newsletter, with additional marketing tips, to inspire and give hope to others.

Personally, I am inspired by the people who not only have ideas on how to help, but who actually make them happen. Like Jose Andres of World Central Kitchen putting restaurants to work feeding those in need. Or actor John Krasinski, whose YouTube show - Some Good News - where he shares inspiring, good news stories weekly makes me smile. But the person who inspires me the most is my daughter. A Senior in High School, she has lost so much: no prom, no Senior picnic and breakfast, no friend hang-outs, and no graduation or party. No summer job as well, to save for college. Now, people are even talking about no University in the fall. While she definitely has several down days, I am inspired by her resilience to focus on the future. We talk about how after we get through this, she will always be able to say that she was part of the strong, 2020 Class of Corona.”

If you want to share how you are doing or what you would like to hear about, email me at womensinitiative@itascabank.com.