

HEALTH CARE



Get to the meat of surviving the Sandwich Generation

Text by Gail M. Samaha

It has all the appearance of a scene straight out of a movie starring Meryl Streep – by day a professional businesswoman, ministering to the needs and demands of clients and colleagues, and by night, a specialist of another sort, attending to the wants and desires not only of her own children, but also those of her aging parents.

She is the very definition of the Sandwich Generation – for better or worse, “stuck” between that pressing balance of work, home and caring for an elderly mother and/or father.

And she is far from alone. According to a recent AARP report, 44 percent of all 45 to 55 year olds have at least one living parent and one child under the age of 21, and 20 million Americans are currently caring for elderly parents while raising their own families.

If that's not eye opening enough, the U.S. Census Bureau projects that by the year 2030, the number of Americans 65 or older will double to 71 million, translating to 20 percent of the population.

It has been projected that Boomers will spend more time taking care of their parents than they did raising their children.

While there is some small comfort in knowing that the pressures you feel

are shared by many others, the bottom line to this very personal matter is simple – finding the time and services that can help make your life and the lives of your aging parents a little easier.

First things first: Hold a family meeting to honestly discuss the many tasks involved in maintaining your household, regardless of whether your parent(s) make their home with you or live independently.

While the bulk of caregiving may primarily fall on your shoulders, a genuine heart-to-heart talk with all family members could ease the burden.

Now is not the time to fall into the martyr trap, especially if you have siblings, a spouse or young adult children who are willing and capable of accepting a portion of the caregiving responsibility.

It may seem like yet another item on your already long to-do list, but take the time to research the many resources available.

From the Internet to the Council on Aging to outreach services by local hospitals/clinics to area places of worship to firms that provide solutions for elders and caregivers, you'd be amazed at the amount of existing caregiving assistance available.

This likely doesn't come as any surprise, but the person who most often gets the shortest end of the proverbial stick is the primary caregiver, so it's not only important, it's imperative that you take the time to care for yourself.

It may seem impossible to carve out a few minutes each day solely for your soul, but without some quiet alone time, this treadmill that has become your life will seem unrelentingly fast.

And pay attention to your body. When it tells you to slow down, listen! The stress of a far too active life can result in low resistance, especially if you've succumbed to poor eating and sleeping habits.

Without the proper nutrition, exercise and rest, you will not only sabotage the ability to provide care for your family, but will also compromise your own health.

Embracing good health is not a luxury; it is a necessity for someone who is stretched and stressed to the limit as a member of the Sandwich Generation.

Gail M. Samaha, founder of GMS Associates, is a management consultant who, from her own personal experience, created an elder care planning division for elders and caregivers.