

Memo: You're Not As Indispensable As You Think

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When I was in college and fancied myself as a young woman way ahead of my time, I kept a book by my bedside.

The book "***Running on Empty: Meditations for Indispensable Women***" by Ellen Sue Stern is a day-by-day (one page for each of the year) guide that shines a light on what we do to ourselves and those we love all in the name of being indispensable.

I loved having this cute little book on my nightstand, and did my best to remember to read each day's blurb every day, on the morning of the corresponding date.

Reality was, though, I was like 20 at the time. I wasn't married (or divorced) yet. I wasn't yet a Mom. I was still a daughter barely out of the house and by no means really on my own. (Physically, yes, but financially or emotionally? Not so much.)

But something about the quick little stories, the realizations, the lessons, the affirmations appealed to me, and I stuck with the book (or maybe it stuck with me) for years.

Fast forward a few (OK, more like closer to 20) years and guess what? That very same book is still on my nightstand. The nightstands have changed over the years, as has the bed. The last name I wrote on the inside cover is no longer the one I use. Even the way I read has changed (my attention span was so much better in my pre-Blackberry, pre-Internet days. Sigh.)

And of course, the girl has changed too.

All for the better, I choose to believe.

And wouldn't you know it....I totally "get" the book now. Not only do I get it....it is all about me.

And maybe you, too.

I was indispensable.(Or, I thought I was. And I wanted everyone else to think the same.)

(By the way, according to dictionary.com, indispensable is an adjective that means: *absolutely necessary, essential, incapable of being disregarded or neglected.*)

As women and as moms, we tend to think that we are indispensable. That no one can do whatever it is they need to do without us. (Heck, they may not even *know* what they need to do without us.) That, at an absolute minimum, we must be fully present (physically and emotionally) and available (physically and emotionally) to everyone at all times.

We plan and schedule. We anticipate. We shift and accommodate, we do whatever must be done. We wonder why our children or our spouses don't proclaim with every breath their utter gratefulness for such deft indispensability, but we forge ahead nonetheless. We are ready for whatever comes our way, no matter how unexpected.

We are on edge, but with good reason: We are needed.

Regrouping and recharging are for people who aren't indispensable and, well you know, apparently those "luxuries" aren't in the cards for us.

Being indispensable means being responsible. And being smart. Of course, we indispensable moms are responsible and smart above all else, right?!

And, let's face it, there is a better-than-good chance that the world will fall apart if we take a break, or a day off, or check out for an evening, or turn off all communications means/devices for a few hours or (gasp!) go on vacation.

Indispensable.

With great power comes great responsibility, right?

That's a whole lot on our shoulders, no matter how able they may be.

That's an awful lot of pressure we are putting on ourselves, no?

It's just a lot. Period.

And there is more I've learned about being indispensable:

One day in a big way (and on many days in little ways), it will hit you that you are not indispensable.

That your kids can function and -- get this! -- thrive without you in their grill.

That your spouse (or significant other or best friend or whomever) makes great choices and even makes it intact from out of the bed in the morning to back in bed at night -- regardless of whether you talk to or advise or guide them that day.

That your employer or client stays in business even if you take a day or a week off.

That your dog doesn't die if someone else feeds or walks him/her.

That the world spins on its axis in the cosmically-correct way regardless of what you do (or don't do) on any given day.

And that, ultimately, indispensability is a utter and total myth (I felt saying "lie" was too harsh for you right now....that's me being indispensable and assuming your feelings can't take the truth).

That being indispensable is all about a story we tell ourselves, an excuse really, that keeps us from really playing big and taking life head-on.

The truth about indispensability is this: No. One. Is. Indispensable. (And by "no one," I don't mean "Everyone but you." I mean No. One.)

Yes, you are loved, and needed and adored. Yes, you can (and do) move mountains. Yes, you are amazing and great. I know all of that. (Hope you do, too.)

But like the sun and the tide and time itself, everything and everyone will go on with or without you. This includes the sublime as well as the mundane like homework and dinner and permission slips and sleepovers and birthday presents and laundry.

You can keep trying to control it all. And one day your mind or your body or your health or your marriage or something else will give.

Because control, like indispensability, is an illusion. Eventually, your life will collapse if all it has to build on is an illusion. And by that point, chances are you will have missed out on a lot for YOU. Not for someone else or "them," but for YOU.

So for today, and maybe tomorrow too, take a look at where the need for indispensability is driving you. (And if you say it isn't, I submit that it is in spades...somewhere way closer to the surface than you think.)

To put it more bluntly: Where are you not needed anywhere near as much as you think you are needed?

Where can you step back and just let people and things and situations BE?

And, finally, where can you *stop* saying, as this sweet little book that's literally been by my side for 20 years recommends (on April 26, by the way): *I'm the only one who can do it.*

You are not the only one. You are not alone. You can be smart and responsible and important and needed **and** still live. Really live. Like out loud and deliberately. The kind of living that isn't just for everyone else. The kind that is for you, too.

But don't just take my word for it....try it yourself.

Right now would be good.