

Growing Ourselves While the World Stands Still

Written by Jennifer Taber VanDerwerken

Sometimes the right conversation comes along at the perfect moment, and in it we find comfort, understanding, and insight that inspires us to keep moving forward.

We're all looking for that kind of encouraging and poignant perspective, and we found it with author, speaker, entrepreneur, and general font of wisdom Anne Kreamer.

Anne's accomplishments and career highlights read like a dossier of the coolest jobs you've ever heard of, bound together by a common philanthropic thread.

"When I look back on my different careers, it's clear to me that the through-line is that I've always wanted to find a way to help serve the underserved. That kind of mission alignment was central to all the things that I did."

And what a great many things she has done. Anne has been at the helm of landmark children's programming like Sesame Street and Nickelodeon, which gave kids access to robust educational entertainment. She helped launch SPY magazine, shining an irreverent spotlight on politics and celebrity. Together with her daughter Lucy Andersen, she is the founder of "Wild & Rare", an accessories company dedicated to increasing awareness about our planet's biodiversity.

Anne is also the author of three non-fiction books, *Going Gray: What I Learned about Beauty, Sex, Work, Motherhood, Authenticity, and Everything Else That Matters*; *It's Always Personal: Emotion in the New Workplace*; and *Risk/Reward: Why Intelligent Leaps and Daring Choices Are The Best Career Moves You Can Make*. These topics might seem disparate but are all explorations of societal boundaries and how we might breach them to experience more fulfillment and success.

At the time of this writing, we are five weeks into a complete societal shut-down, forced into isolation from our friends, family, and workplaces. Many of us have lost income or job security. Many of us are navigating a volatile emotional landscape as it pertains to our work and career. And yes, many of us are watching our hair gray before our very eyes, without the ability to visit our hairdresser.

In short, Anne Kreamer is exactly the expert you want to hear from at a time like this. While her good counsel feels particularly appropriate now, the guidance she so generously offers is timeless.

In her books, *It's Always Personal* and *Risk/Reward*, Anne probes the rules of the modern workplace and the habits and behaviors of the most successful people. So what advice does she have for those of us floundering in this strange new normal, trying to cope with our anxiety— career or otherwise?

"Grounding is really critical right now. Free-floating anxiety is one of the hardest things in the world to manage. If you can create a kind of structure in your day, even if it's just meditating or spending some time outside with your feet firmly planted in the grass, it can really help."

Anne also recognizes that times of great upheaval can reveal new opportunities.

"When we emerge from this crisis and people start looking for new jobs because they were laid off, remember that there is no shame attached to looking for work. So many people will be in the same boat. This is also a good time to remember that the most successful people learn by doing, not thinking. If you're considering a different career path, see if there are ways you could test drive that on some kind of volunteer or exploratory basis right now."

Anne suggests using this newfound time to do some self-investigation about your own nature. As she reveals in her books, emotions can be a huge advantage in the workplace, and the most successful people easily toggle back and forth between their emotional and analytical brains and have a strong sense of themselves and what makes them happy.

“We can develop the capacity to have self-knowledge. Ask yourself insightful questions. For example, would I thrive in a startup where there might be an uncertain future, but I will have a lot of creative control? Or am I better off in a big corporation, because I like that feeling of being part of a large team with a firm plan in place? It will help you find the kind of workplace environment and role that will be best suited to you.”

As for the gray hair of it all, Anne is quick to point out that it's no shallow concern. Her book, *Going Gray*, could not be a timelier read.

“In 1950, 7% of women colored their hair. Today almost 100% of women color their hair. When this isolation is over, if every woman in the world walks out of her house with her natural hair color, it would be the most powerful statement.”

Looking at Anne's life and career, it's clear that she's always listened to her intuition and been unafraid to forge her own path on her own timeline.

“I love the freedom that comes with age. I think I have less tolerance for the wasting of time. I've cut out a lot of the chaff that used to clutter life. As we get older, we become more willing to contemplate that the time is finite, so we need to make the most of it.”

That's great advice from a very good neighbor.