

UpClose

KAREN ELIZAGA



Karen, who grew up in Honolulu, did not always have her dream job. She considered her parents' expectations when plotting a path to law school at American University but didn't analyze how a career in law would suit her. "I was an unhappy lawyer," says Karen, "and because I was unhappy, I was not living in a productive, fulfilled place." She fed her misery with chocolate until shifting to a new job for a start-up in London. Inspired by the epiphany that work can be fun and by workshops she began hosting to mentor high school girls, Karen launched her coaching business, Forward Options (forwardoptions.com). She studied executive coaching at NYU and has been helping people "find their sweet spot" for a decade.

"It doesn't feel like work at all," comments Karen, whose clients include top executives, entrepreneurs, stay-at-home moms and teens, many of whom have undergone major transformations. "One client was condescending and very unproductive on the team at work. My contract is usually six months but the CEO brought me in and said, 'You have six weeks'... He's now the guy at the office people go to for advice. He's the sage, calm presence."

"I've had clients go from a fast-food diet to veganism," continues Karen. "One woman was miserable at her job but so afraid to make a change. Visualizing where she saw herself in ten years motivated her, and within three months she made a big change. One mom and executive couldn't figure out how to be happy and present in her life. She wasn't aware of it, but she would say really limiting things in her mind: 'Why would she want to be friends with me? Why would I get that promotion?' She adjusted her mind-set and learned how to be in the moment."

Susan Zook, vice president of Clinical Services at Cancer Treatment Centers of America (where all senior executives are

Take Action

Karen Elizaga, with a roster of high-powered clients, offers a fully modern guide to finding your excellence **BY JILL JOHNSON**

Imagine you are sitting in Karen Elizaga's living room in her Westport beach house. With cucumber juice in hand, you admire the glorious view of Long Island Sound and take a deep rejuvenating breath. Then you begin to ponder how Karen looks so energized on a Sunday morning—glowing skin, shiny hair, fit body—and how she keeps her home so tidy with two elementary-school-age children in the mix and a career as a top executive and personal life coach. Next? Envy! How does she do it? The toxic thoughts fall like a black curtain over Compo Beach: "Why is my

house so cluttered, my life out of balance, my income insufficient, my stomach flabby?..."

Reach for Karen's book, *Find Your Sweet Spot: A Guide to Personal & Professional Excellence*, and you'll learn how to compare yourself with others and be inspired rather than discouraged. You'll also learn how to love yourself (a biggie), detox your vocab (that incessant negative chatter in your head), make gratitude part of your daily life, breathe, replace bad habits with good ones, embrace a healthy lifestyle and cultivate a fulfilling career.

SWEET SPOT TIPS

1

PRACTICE GRATITUDE.

Find a time each day to list what you are grateful for. (Karen does this while washing her hands; it takes no extra time and she often catches herself smiling in the mirror within minutes.)

2

DROP YOUR GAVEL.

Stop judging yourself—and others—so harshly.

3

RESPECT NUTRITION.

A healthy diet nourishes your body and brain. Keep a food log for a week for an honest and accurate picture of your eating habits.

4

MOVE YOUR BODY.

Make exercise a priority. Karen walks down Compo Beach and around the Marina parking lot for an easy energy and attitude boost.

5

LOVE WHAT YOU DO.

Take stock of where you are now versus where you want to be. Are you in a position that you love and that you're good at? Or do you struggle just to make it through the day? Even small changes or a shift in perspective can make your day more enjoyable and meaningful.

assigned a coach), worked with Karen for two years. "I made a lot of significant professional and personal decisions during that time," comments Susan. "Karen helped me find a lot of balance in my life, while also enabling me to be a more effective leader at work."

Juggling clients, writing, speaking engagements and motherhood is no small task. "I live by my calendar," says Karen. "I put things in there like exercise. I aggregate administrative tasks. I make sure to schedule fun things. You have to figure out what you want to balance and resist taking on things

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The Elizagas are based in New York but schedule fun in Westport whenever they can. They bought their house here in 2008 after visiting friends on Compo Mill Cove. "My jaw literally dropped," recounts Karen. "This felt like Hawaii to me."

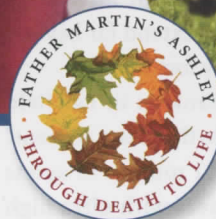
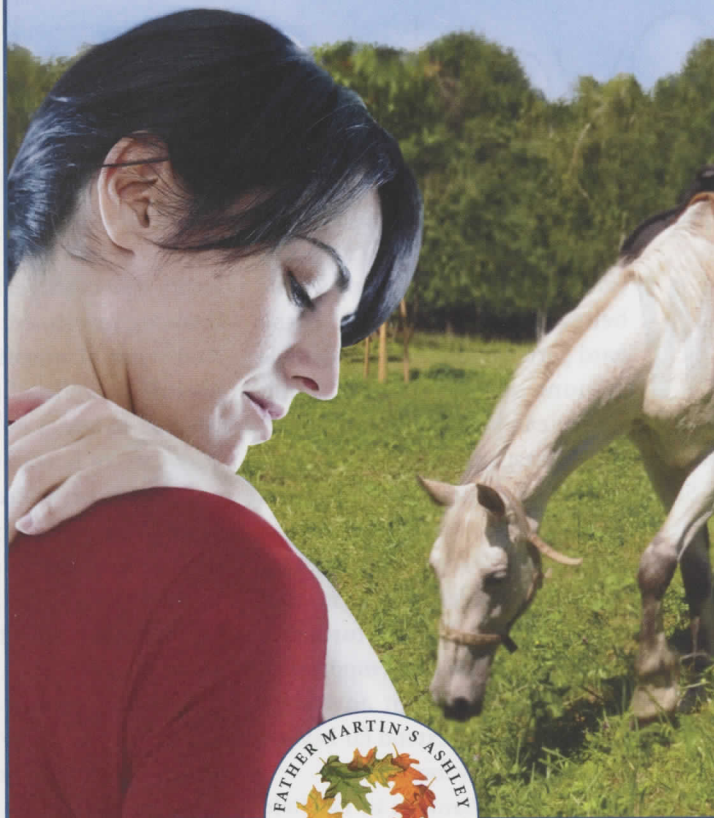
As perfect as her life seems, Karen's book is not about achieving perfection. "When I found my new career, I ditched this idea of perfection," she stresses. "It was so liberating. This book is my way of letting everyone else know this is possible."

Kathy Dean, a Westport stay-at-home mom who is contemplating her next career, says, "I especially like the idea of actively practicing self-love. Looking inward for acceptance, love and confidence is so important when you feel like you are jumping off a cliff into the unknown."

Karen says her debut book is for "everyone. The lessons are about strengthening ourselves at our core, so the strategies apply across the board."

Find Your Sweet Spot is available on Amazon and at Barnes & Noble. **W**

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