



Making Time for Making Art

by Katherine James, ACT of Communication©

I have been a woman since I was an embryo, a theatre artist since I was five, and a trial consultant since I was twenty-five. I created the third “role” out of the second – and heaven knows that the first one – that one in my DNA – is what keeps me always striving for the balance of all three in my life.

I am really over women telling women who are younger than I am (and since I am over 60 that covers a lot of women) that “You can’t have it all” or the new variation on that quip, “You can have it all, but you can only have it one thing at a time.” These damning messages disguised as the ultimate “time management” advice encourages women to knock themselves off their “to do” list. Once we put ourselves last in our own lives today, it is easy to lead us to put ourselves last tomorrow, this month, this year, this decade, this “season” of our lives.

I know that this is true of men as well. But after being in a relationship with one of them for forty years, and having given birth to two of them who are now in marriages to wonderful women (whose struggle with putting themselves first I observe as I empathize with their plight), I just don’t think it is as hard for the guys as it is for us. I’m not saying that they are selfish and we are angels. Quite the opposite. I am saying that they are more willing than we are to ask for what they want and need – and that is A GOOD THING. And most of us in this glorious profession of trial consulting are women. So you do the math.

“All my possessions for a moment of time,” said Queen Elizabeth I. She might have been the most powerful woman of her time – but in that moment she was just another one of us realizing on her deathbed that she might have put herself last in her life just one too many times.

I remind myself (daily – you think I’m not vulnerable to those negative messages?) and other women “You can have everything you need and want. There’s only one tricky part – you have to be willing to put yourself first in your life.”

Before you say, “Oh, that’s all very well and good for you, but you don’t have my life.” Yep. I don’t. I have my life – which is pretty full. As I write this, I have a very

successful trial consulting business with never less than 20 cases in trial or going to trial all over the country, have lots of national seminars and speaking engagements on my calendar, am writing a book, developing a series of new educational classes for lawyers, am appearing in one show as an actress, have another I have written being produced readied for a workshop (Headcase, the show I particularly reference in my session at ASTC 2013), am in the midst of rewriting two shows, am writing a new show, am blessed with a local family consisting of a husband, both our sons and daughters-in-law, a granddaughter, elderly parents, and since the hot water heater exploded all over our home office, I am still recovering from the remodel of what I sometimes think of as the most important room of the house since that's where the money comes in and goes out.

How do I do it, how do I do it?

It is simple, but not easy.

I am an early riser, no matter what time zone I am in. I am always best first thing in the morning. I know this. It is always tempting to give my "best" to others. Simply, I put myself first immediately. My day starts with the sun rising or almost rising and my waking up and saying, "No, not work or them first, Katherine first." Wow. It is especially a crazy concept since often times as a trial consultant I am waking up in a bed in a hotel room far from home.

What is most important for me? Keeping my billion-dollar piece of equipment (this ever-changing 61-year-old body) in shape. That means one hour a day of exercise. Walking is my exercise of choice with some stretching. When I am home, I mostly walk in my neighborhood. In the hotel, I mostly walk on the treadmill or the elliptical. I'm the one either listening to show tunes on my I-Phone or watching a black and white movie or HGTV on the built in monitor. Why am I not watching CNN first thing in the morning? Because Broadway Show Tunes, Bette Davis, and "House Hunters International" make me happy and this is my time.

I then have some replenishing inspirational time. If I am home, I read and meditate in our "Meditation" room – a spot filled with our spiritual books, an easy chair and a yoga mat. If I am on the road, I do my spiritual work with materials I carry with me on the road.

Breakfast? You bet. I'm a vegan, I take lots of supplements which I get from my acupuncturist and I don't cut corners either in good food nor supplements when I am on the road. By the way, I do see my acupuncturist once a month. I wouldn't dream of not seeing my manicurist every other week nor my hairdresser once a month.

Then – it is time for a core part of who I am – **THE ARTIST.**

Some of this time I write. No – not the book for my business nor this article for my nearest and dearest ASTC colleagues. One of my shows. If I am at home I write in our “Inspiration” room, a sunny spot filled with all our show business and travel memorabilia. By the way, our “Meditation” room was our younger son’s bedroom growing up and our “Inspiration” room was our older son’s. No more kids so those spaces are now used for what we consider the best and highest use for my husband and me rather than as trophy rooms of the past for two former kids.

On a fabulous AT HOME day, I work on one of my shows for no less than an hour and a half. Willa Cather wrote for an hour and a half every day and found that after that time period that her writing went downhill. I find that true of my creative writing time as well. Joyce Carol Oates, on the other hand, writes from 8 am to 1 pm and for several hours in the evening. Wait a minute – that’s right – I am much more likely to have an hour and a half than eight hours a day to write. I may not be writing a full hour that day – I may need to spend some time memorizing or working on the role I am playing (yes, it now takes me about a billion years to memorize my lines as opposed to when I was a kid and it took me about 30 seconds). Or immersing myself in a show I am directing. Whatever is needed.

On a fabulous AT HOME day, I never go into the office before nine a.m. Where online lives. As does the email. And the cases.

And the family wants and needs and joys of the day. In case you haven’t guessed, “a fabulous AT HOME day” is one in which I put myself first as a person and an artist.

On a fabulous ON THE ROAD day, I follow the exercise, quiet reading and good food part of the day by putting out the fires via email and PLANNING WHEN I AM GOING TO WRITE OR WORK ON A SHOW I AM PERFORMING IN OR DIRECTING. Only then do I go to the war room or the client’s office at whatever time they want me there.

Some days on the road and at home just can’t be fabulous. Maybe there is a family crisis. Or I schedule a Skype session 6 in the morning my time and then never leave the office because I get sucked into the black hole of administrative necessity. Perhaps I am in the war room at 7 am and back at the hotel at 11 pm. On such a day I remind myself that, in the words of Anne Lamotte, “Perfection is the oppressor.” I will try to give myself a pat on the back. Before I drift off to sleep I will remind myself that Sylvia Plath managed to write every day no matter what happened despite the fact that she had two small children and a husband and she ended up with her head in an oven. I am alive and relatively mentally healthy and I will try again tomorrow.

When looking at the long “to do” list for the week or the month that I haven’t delegated to others I only put on today’s list what I can comfortably achieve today. This allows me to pat myself on the back every day and say, “You did it all, kiddo.

Well done!” By the end of the week, if there is an item that is still on this week’s list I look at it and decide whether it can either be delegated, or completely eliminated from my own personal “to do” list. If it absolutely needs to stay, then I look at it, smile, and make a commitment to it for “some time next week.”

Do I do this perfectly every day? No. But I strive for it and am able to make this “routine” the norm rather than the exception most of the time. So different from before...

When I was putting everyone else in my life first I never managed to fit in time to exercise, meditate or get my teeth cleaned. I never made an appointment with my manicurist nor my hairdresser further ahead than this afternoon. I was not as bad at putting myself first as the woman I witnessed running into a salon screaming, “Emergency Bikini Wax!!!” but I was pretty bad. The clients and cases (always with me) would be on my mind as soon as I woke up – all my thinking time went to them. My theatre writing got postponed and postponed and postponed. Family needs pushed any lingering thoughts of what I might need as an artist away. Never had TIME for me. Sound familiar?

What finally got me to put myself first? A great advisor (chellie.com), a great therapist, and a great 12-Step Program (Al Anon – yep, some of us put others first pathologically). I then was able to join a playwrighting workshop. Yep, I have a deadline every Saturday of 10 new pages. I’ve been in the workshop now for five years and have written four full length plays which have been read and/or workshopped. I’ve written 7 short plays, most of which have been produced. I dared to become part of a team that reads and directs new plays at a theatre company of which I was already a member, but had “no time” for “extras”. Finally, I dared to take whole chunks of time to perform as an actor in a show for long runs.

The Result? I am a better trial consultant, theatre artist, and family member because I am first. But the best part is...I feel great. The wonderful writer, Bonnie Friedman brilliantly voices how I feel: “An unhurried sense of time is in itself a form of wealth.”

Biggest surprise of all? There is this whole cross-pollination that I never saw coming.

Funny. When I first thought of applying what I knew as a theatre artist to the law and fell upon trial consulting, I thought it was going to be a one-way street. The artist in me would advise and develop the consultant. I never expected that the reverse would happen.

In fact, people would say to me, “Katherine – you must be getting all kinds of ideas and characters for shows!” I would say, “No, no – I have a real ‘church and state’ rule about that. Art and commerce are separate.” Then one day, almost twenty years ago,

I worked on the case on which Headcase is based. I knew it was a show. But I didn't know how to make it into a show. I knocked it around in my head for years until I figured out that it wanted to be a musical. And so I wrote the first draft. And now I am working on collaborating with a wonderful composer on it for this rewrite, and we will be workshopping it sooner than later. How about that?

Over the years I noticed that certain characters started springing into my work who were based on witnesses and lawyers that I knew. And then cases transformed into plot points.

You have to understand that I don't just take the case and put it on the stage. Or take the witness and plop him into a scene. The situation is transformed, the witness has only some qualities of the character I create. But I know what is at the heart and base is the truth of the situations and people with which and with whom I work on a daily basis.

It isn't only my writing that is affected. Because I meet people at an extraordinarily vulnerable time in their lives – as witnesses in a case – I get extraordinary insight into just what makes them tick. When I am directing a play, I am able to help an actor who doesn't understand where a character is “coming from” by offering an insight or two or a dozen from the “real” world.

That's what I call the world of trial consulting, by the way, when I am looking at it from my point of view as a theatre artist. I call it “The real world” or “my other life”.

I recently worked as a director with an actor who was complaining that his character wasn't “emotional”. I said, “He's not emotional the way you are. That's because he is like an engineer. He thinks that if you can figure out how the world works then all will be right. That satisfaction of ‘all is right with the logic in the world’ is a kind of emotion. Get it?” Without being a trial consultant, would I have ever gotten the opportunity to meet hundreds of engineers of every stripe and gotten to see what makes them tick – collectively and individually? No way.

Right now I am working as an actor on a character who is heavily medicated because she has been through a traumatic event. When I first read the play I knew that there was a big trap here as an actor – how can you be highly medicated and have a performance that is “stage worthy” (as opposed to “sleep worthy”) at the same time? I immediately went to all the witnesses I've worked with who are on some kind of medication because of trauma. As I rifled through the dozens upon dozens in my memory banks I lit on one. I remember that she looked at me with that strange glassy stare that highly medicated folks can have. She had a perpetual smile on her lips. We were talking about her story – about the details of the case that so traumatized her that she couldn't live her life without the drugs. Suddenly, tears burst from her glassy

eyes. Her smile never left her face as she lifted her hands to her face and felt the tears – like foreign objects – streaming down her face. “What are these? Tears?” she asked me. “Why would I be crying?” You know I’m going to be channeling her at one point or another when I play that character!

I’d like to end this article with a short play that I wrote that was suggested to me by a case I worked on. It is called “Dirty Laundry”. The show was written for a ten-minute play festival for a wonderful company in Arizona called “Little Black Dress” which produced it a couple of seasons ago.

You might want to know exactly how is it like and not like the lawsuit on which it is based? And how have I transformed the case and made it into a piece of art?

There is actually a lawsuit in the play (unusual for my work). There are legal terms that the characters know – but their knowledge of them acts as clues to who they are and what actions they are taking with their lives. The characters have been vastly changed. In the “real world” there was no “Abe”. The plaintiff, who has been transposed in part into “Sara” actually suffered similar damages to her body. But the “real world” woman was a middle aged guest at a wedding shower being thrown by someone who she thought was her best friend. But the basic theme – taking responsibility for one’s life and actions – is a theme near and dear to the heart of all trial consultants. I hope you enjoy it!

Finally, I would encourage you to make time for your art if you are so inclined. A time every day. Or every week. Or, if you are that kind of a person, a whole week. Join a group of fellow artists for inspiration and accountability. And take some time to dream. Those amazing cases and the people we meet through them are longing to be transformed into the stuff of creativity.

Dirty Laundry
A Play in 10 Minutes
by
Katherine James ©2011

Place: The Entry Way of Abe and Sara's Condo – their personal doorway between themselves and the rest of the world which begins with their fellow condo owners.

Time: Now

*Characters: Sara (early twenties to forty)
Abe (her age)*

At Rise:

Sara enters into the entry way from the main part of the condo. She is carrying a full, tied off 10 gallon white plastic garbage bag. As she moves to the door, it flies open and Abe enters. They stare at one another for a moment. She puts the bag down, throws her arms around him, and kisses him.

ABE
You're suing my parents?

SARA
God, I love you!

ABE
I love you more!

SARA
Can you believe it?

ABE
No!

SARA
"Free at last, free at last –

ABE AND SARA
-- thank God almighty we are free at last!"

SARA
Just like that other thing you're always saying, Abe.

ABE

Which one?

SARA

“It’s like we’re one person.”

ABE

Yeah...

SARA

Of course, it also fits with all the other things you are always saying, “Fuck them!” and “I can’t believe they did this to you!” and “How could they do this to us?”

ABE

So true!

SARA

But it’s what you said on Thursday that did it for me.

ABE

Thursday...

SARA

After you came home from bowling. When you said, “They are dead to me!” That’s when I knew. I knew that it was time to give Carol the thumbs up to file the lawsuit.

ABE

You’ve been talking to Carol?

SARA

Remember when I told you right after it happened that Carol said I should sue? And you said to wait? And Carol said we had a year to sue before the statute of whoever ran out?

ABE

The Statute of Limitations.

SARA

Right. That I had one year from the time of the injury to file a lawsuit. (beat)
How did you know what it is called?

ABE

Don't think I didn't look it up, Babe. Last year. When you told me. Just because I didn't say anything doesn't mean I don't listen to you. Then yesterday came and went and neither of us said anything. Even though we both knew it was the date. Both knew the year was up.

SARA

I knew you were just being your same kind amazing sweet self – not wanting me to –

ABE

--suffer any more than you've already suffered.

SARA

They impaled me, Abe.

ABE

The rebar impaled you.

SARA

That they left sticking up in the backyard.

ABE

But they didn't do it.

SARA

Carol says that they are responsible for whatever their landscaper did or didn't do.

ABE

They are?

SARA

Of course they are!

ABE

Oh.

SARA

I thought you would be happy for me. For us.

ABE

Are you sure?

SARA

Aren't you the one who is always saying that you can't believe that they never even apologized? That they never visited me in the hospital? That they kept telling you over and over again that they never wanted to see me again and that if you insisted on marrying me that you would never hear from them again?

ABE

I mean about the landscaper.

SARA

She said if they would give us the name of the landscaper that we could sue him, too.

ABE

I begged them and begged them for it..but...

SARA

Goddamn them!

ABE

Oh Babe, Babe – don't get yourself worked up – you know what it does to you...

Pause. She concentrates.

SARA

It's okay, Babe. No leaks. This is all the "dirty laundry" for today.

She holds up the garbage bag.

ABE

I can't believe you were going to take it out – didn't I tell you I would put the "dirty laundry" in the garbage forever?

SARA

Not every guy would.

ABE

I'm not every guy.

SARA

Not every guy would marry a girl who wears Depends.

ABE

Don't use that word. "Dirty Laundry". Say it.

SARA

"Dirty Laundry".

ABE

I will be responsible for you and our "Dirty Laundry" until death us do part.

SARA

I don't understand how someone who takes responsibility the way you do could have such irresponsible people as parents.

ABE

As I've said over and over again since that night...they aren't my parents anymore.

SARA

If I live to be a hundred I'll never understand it. They ask their son's girlfriend over to meet her...make a big backyard barbeque...

ABE

Redo the backyard walkway that very afternoon in honor of the occasion.

SARA

Treat me like a princess! "Come – look at the lights we put in by the walkway!" I turn to look at the lights – and over her foot I go – and onto the rebar sticking out next to the light – sticking out next to every light along the walkway – it was like they set up a whole line of swords on each side.

ABE

A piece of rebar next to every light.

SARA

Carol says that's okay – there should be a piece of rebar by every light – but bent over. Like a candy cane. Not sticking straight up.

ABE

Bent over. Like an upside down "U".

SARA

I still think she tripped me on purpose. And then the searing pain deep in my pelvis --

ABE

Shh...Babe...don't...

SARA

The hospital...the surgery...and here I am left forever with a hole next to my asshole. A slow steady leak...

ABE

Stop...

SARA

Fecal incontinence.

ABE

“Dirty Laundry”!

SARA

Forever.

ABE

Forever.

SARA

If only they weren't who they were, if only they didn't put us into a position where I had no choice but to sue them!

ABE

Don't sue my parents.

SARA

What?

ABE

I said, “Don't sue my parents.” Call Carol. Tell her to stop.

SARA

I love it when you make me laugh!

ABE

I'm not joking. Call her. Now.

SARA

Why?

ABE

Don't ask questions. Just do it. Like when I told you to cut your hair and to hold out for The Prius and to buy the Condo and voting for Obama instead of Hillary and—

SARA

If only they would have shown the least bit of remorse.

ABE

If only they had offered to pay for it – but that doesn't matter. You know I'll pay your medical bills forever.

SARA

If only they had apologized.

ABE

If only they hadn't said, "Dump her! She's damaged goods!" But I'll never leave you. Never.

SARA

If only they hadn't disowned you when you told them you were marrying me!

ABE

If only they hadn't cursed us! But we have love enough to make up for all their hate!

SARA

If only! We have to live a lifetime with their "if only's"!

ABE

If only they had paid attention to what the guy at Home Depot said! "Pound the rebar over right away!"

SARA

If only...what did you say...?

ABE

Nothing.

SARA

What guy at Home Depot?

ABE

Babe, don't get upset – you know it makes it worse –

SARA

Abe! Look at me!

ABE

I'd better get this load of "Dirty Laundry" out to the garbage before...before...

SARA

Oh my God.

ABE

It wasn't my fault.

SARA

You did it.

ABE

You had to be picked up at 5:30. So that the chicken would be ready on time for my mother. So the ice wouldn't melt in the Margueritas for my father. So that the flowers you had got them – your "thank you" offering -- wouldn't be wilted. 5:30. 5:30. Don't you see? There was no time to pick you up at 5:30 and hammer the fucking rebar over.

SARA

Who are you?

ABE

I'm yours. Yours forever. Forever yours. I keep telling them over and over –

SARA

Them...?

ABE

It's not like I want to...

SARA

You speak to them...?

ABE

Thursday nights.

SARA

You aren't bowling...?

ABE

I don't know how to bowl...

SARA

But you sure do know how to lie. Oh, my God!

ABE

What?

SARA

Are you lying to them, too...about me?

ABE

I tell them the truth! The Truth! You say that you don't want to speak to them or see them and that they aren't invited to the wedding and even if we could have children that they couldn't see them and –

SARA

You've been telling them what I say...and me what they said...for an entire year?

She goes to the door.

ABE

Where are you going?

SARA

To see Carol.

ABE

Why?

SARA

To let her know I've found the landscaper.

She takes the garbage bag from him and exits out the front door.

End.