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RN, MSN, JD *New York Times* Bestselling Author and *Inc.* Top 10 Entrepreneur

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The “Wicked Success” Revival Plan: Eight Ways Stressed Out Women Can Revive and Renew – Mind, Body, and Soul

In today’s chaotic world, it’s easy for women to feel burned out, beaten down, and depleted. Taking time to strategically renew yourself will go a long way toward helping you to reclaim the excitement and energy that will enable you to thrive instead of just survive.

BY **VICKIE MILAZZO**

You’re a modern woman ... which means you’re barely surviving. You work yourself to the bone for ever-diminishing returns, thanks to the rising cost of everything from gas to food to health insurance. Meanwhile, you serve as cook, maid, shrink, tutor, and handyman at home. When life’s little “emergencies” crop up – a broken water heater, a toothache, a parent-teacher conference to discuss your son’s recent homework boycott – well, those land one permission slip away from a complete breakdown!

And here’s the worst part: lately, the bar is so low you find yourself celebrating the mere fact that you survived another day. To be energized and fulfilled – well, that’s so far at the top of your hierarchy of needs that you can’t even see it for the cloud cover.

Women should *not* accept this state of stressed-out existence and call it living. You *can* lead a successful life *and* cultivate a wellspring of energy that will renew your mind, body, and soul every day – but first you’ve got to give yourself a break.

Today’s woman has taken on an extreme life crammed to overflowing with commitments and responsibility. It’s not possible to stretch yourself to the breaking point every day and *not* break.



You wouldn't expect a battery to keep going forever without recharging it, and you shouldn't expect it of yourself either. Women need to learn to revitalize their minds, bodies, emotions, and spirits frequently, so that they'll have abundant energy whenever they need it.

Women try to look objectively at their lives and routines, as though they were happening to a good friend. What advice would you give her?

You'd probably tell this 'friend' to slow down, take a few deep breaths, and spend a few minutes doing something enjoyable before the next day and its demands come crashing in. You know that this advice is sound, too ... so listen.

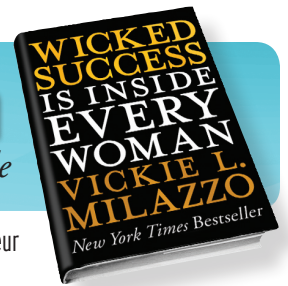
I speak from experience. After working (overtime) for six years as a registered nurse, in 1982 I faced the reality that I was unsatisfied with her career, financially strapped, and burned out across the board.

I realized that if I wanted to thrive instead of just survive, the first thing I needed to do was cultivate a fulfilling relationship with myself. Yes, I know that it might seem impossible to take even one moment out of your overscheduled life, but I promise you that it can be done. Too often, our own behaviors and habits sabotage us and prevent us from taking the renewal steps we need for restoration, causing us to slip further and further into the desperate state we're trying to escape.

The fact is, every woman needs to renew and refuel her body, feelings, mind, and spirit on a regular basis, so that she can reflect on what's important and maintain perspective and equilibrium. And with habitual rejuvenation, you'll be able to complete your daily tasks while having the energy to pursue your big goals and passions ... and still have some vigor left over for great sex!

Read on for eight of my tried-and-true suggestions to help you renew yourself in the midst of your manic life:

PLAN FOR RENEWAL. With days, weeks, and months that are packed full of responsibility, you can't exactly head to the spa, to the nearest mountain for a hike, or to wherever you go to relax and reflect on a moment's notice. (Heck, you can't even paint your own toenails in the bathroom without being



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interrupted!) So if you want to renew your energy, you're going to have to schedule time for relaxation just as systematically as you would plan to complete a long-term project at work. If you keep waiting for the right moment to kick back and smell the roses, it'll never happen because life will get in the way.

Remember, what gets scheduled gets done. If renewal time is *really* a priority for you, it will be on your calendar. Period. So you need to make sure that no one – including you – overbooks your time. Over the years, I have learned to schedule everything from vacations to massages to daily quiet time and exercise in my planner. I have also learned that what you're striving for shouldn't be a balanced *day*, but a balanced *life*. For example, if I know I'm about to take a totally unplugged vacation, I'm willing to work some 14-hour days beforehand. The key is to feel that you are in control of your life instead of the other way around.

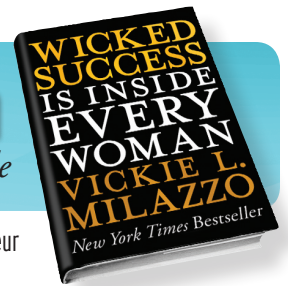
RENEW PHYSICALLY. While many of us would like to think that frequent trips through the drive-through don't have *that* much of an ill effect, the truth is that these empty calories have a negative impact on our short- and long-term health. The same goes for poor sleep and insufficient exercise. Look honestly at your eating, fitness, and resting habits. Are they helping or hurting? If it's the latter, you need to know that it's not only your body that's affected; your productivity, energy, creativity, and motivation will also take a hit.

Physical health is necessary for any kind of success, because increased energy opens up all kinds of doors. There's no need to make a ton of drastic changes all at once, but over time you do need to shoot for a balanced, nutritious diet, regular exercise, and – of course! – the chance to relax with a massage, a facial, or a soak in the tub. No matter how smart you are or how much potential you have, you'll never get anywhere if your body is sluggish and running on empty.

RENEW EMOTIONALLY. These days there's certainly more than enough to worry about: healthcare, cutbacks at work, your dwindling bank account, the price of gas ... the list goes on. It's easy to spend all of your energy fretting and contingency planning. Sooner or later, though, you'll hit emotional rock bottom (if you haven't already), and you'll go through life bitter, put-upon, and exhausted. Plus, if you don't renew emotionally, you're likely to overreact or underreact to various situations, which will only multiply the number of things you have to fret about! To avoid this fate, you need to allow your emotions to recover and be uplifted on a regular basis.

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If you barrel through life with an unhealthy sense of urgency, you will never enjoy anything. You must learn to enjoy the moment and cultivate calm, not always be pushing. Whether you plan a vacation, have a cup of tea, or go on a walk, think of being kind to yourself as a necessity, not a luxury. Allow yourself to get away from it all from time to time so that when you re-enter the fray, you'll have freshly buoyed emotions to sustain you.

RENEW SPIRITUALLY. All other types of renewal will be temporary fixes unless you have a deep-seated sense of serenity within you to draw upon. Spiritual discipline is definitely a journey, not a destination, but its benefits are peace, calm, and enlightenment. Figure out what works for you, whether it's meditation, prayer, study, service, or something else, and incorporate it into your routine. Just a few "time-out" moments at the beginning and end of each day can make a significant impact.

Spiritual renewal is important for me, because I don't want to accumulate worldly success and still wonder if 'this' is it. "Spiritual renewal looks different for everyone, but I think an important component of it is to quiet down and reflect on who you want to be and what is really important. Doing this will give you lasting perspective and will help you to realize and remember just how precious a gift life is.

RENEW MENTALLY. Most of us never stop to consider how often we feed our minds less-than-healthy fuel. Whether it's reality TV, bad romance novels, talk radio, or Farmville, the activities we pursue in our downtime often don't renew our energy (and may even deplete it). No, you don't have to read scholarly articles and watch educational documentaries every day, but it is important to throw some thought-provoking activities into the mix. Consider visiting a museum, gallery, or arboretum that you normally pass by, or try your hand at something creative like painting or writing.

What you feed your mind influences your thoughts, attitude, and energy. You need mental energy to be creative and to make good decisions. You don't have to give up 'junk' entirely – in fact, I find that reading a frivolous book every now and then is kind of like indulging in a buttery bag of popcorn – but make sure that you're also watching, reading, and experiencing new, challenging, and inspirational things. And the best part is, you don't have to carve any more free time out of your day. Just imagine what you could learn and accomplish in the time it takes to watch a sitcom or two!

CELEBRATE TO INTENSIFY RENEWAL. Think about it: life without celebration would be one long



stream of to-do lists, thankless tasks, and mindless drudgery. When you accomplish a goal or pass a milestone – big or small – it’s smart to take a little time to celebrate your success. Even thirty seconds of allowing joy to bubble up inside you can act as a great pick-me-up and keep burnout at bay.

You need to experience satisfaction when you reach your objectives, so make a habit of celebrating each success. When you acknowledge the little things, the big goals also seem more attainable. For example, just being considered for a promotion is worthy of self-congratulations. Even if things don’t work out as you hoped they would, you can still celebrate your willingness to step out into the unknown.

RENEW WITH THE PEOPLE YOU LOVE. Have you ever noticed that we often work ourselves to the bone to benefit the people we love ... and end up rarely spending time with them as a result? No, you can’t blow off all work and responsibilities, but make sure that close relationships stay at the top of your priority list. The fact is, since life and love don’t happen in a vacuum, surrounding yourself with people you love guarantees you more positive experiences.

When you cultivate strong relationships of all kinds, you will create memories, and you will not have to face anything alone. Plus, women in particular are wired to connect, so when you schedule date nights and girls’ nights, take part in traditions, and create memories, you’ll be more fulfilled. Also, responsibilities, tough times, and problems that need to be overcome don’t seem nearly as overwhelming when you have a team of friends and loved ones on your side!

RENEW BY GIVING BACK. The phrase “giving back” often conjures up the mental image of a wealthy philanthropist writing sizeable checks to various charities and organizations. No wonder many of us don’t consider ourselves to be givers – we’re more focused on making sure that our own accounts aren’t overdrawn! However, giving doesn’t have to mean cracking open your wallet – time, mentoring others, or giving spiritual or emotional support are all just as valuable.

Giving is a gratifying and renewing act because it disconnects you from yourself and your own problems, creating fresh perspective. I’ve found, for example, that when I extend encouragement – even if it’s just a quick ‘Thinking about you!’ text message, I receive that same gift back abundantly in my own life. When you live selflessly, you will attract genuine relationships, unconditional support, and lasting respect ... and you’ll also leave behind a positive legacy that you can be proud of.

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Ultimately, taking the time to renew yourself will give you the energy and capacity to *enjoy* the life you were blessed with – even in the midst of tough times. Remember that it's okay, and even encouraged, to take care of yourself. While periodic and strategic renewal won't get rid of all your problems, it *will* lighten your load and help you to remain solid in the midst of the chaos.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vickie Milazzo, RN, MSN, JD, is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Wicked Success Is Inside Every Woman* (Wiley, 2011, ISBN: 978-1-1181-0052-3, \$21.95, WickedSuccess.com). From a shotgun house in New Orleans to owner of a \$16-million business, *New York Times* best-selling author Milazzo shares the innovative success strategies that earned her a place on the *Inc.* list of Top 10 Entrepreneurs and *Inc.* Top 5000 Fastest-Growing Companies in America.