

My Pie Is Full

By Katie Rose Guest Pryal

I used to be so proud of my ability to remember things. I could keep track, maintain and juggle. Although I never liked the term “multitask,” I was good at it, in retrospect. Now, I’m terrible at all of these things. At first, I thought it was because I was sleep-deprived. Then, I thought it was because I was aging, my brain losing its natural elasticity. I’m not a 20-something anymore, you know.

And then I realized that although those two things might also be true, the reason I keep dropping the ball, or two or five, is because there are just too many things to keep track of now.

Worse, my creativity has been suffering. I feel like the well of ideas I draw from for my work is drying up. Usually, I have an endless supply and never enough time. But now, over the past months—years even—no.

It’s a good thing I’ve figured out why these things are happening.

The Middle Lane, Superheroes and Slack

Something incredible has been happening on the pages of this magazine lately, a small revolution, if you’ve been paying attention. We have been fighting—for women’s right to their own time.

In October, I wrote about the “middle lane,” a mindset that pushes “back against the expectations of women in the academy—and in all workplaces really—that cause us to run ourselves into the ground.” At first, when my therapist suggested that I step out of the fast lane and into the middle lane, I resisted, calling the middle lane “the mediocre lane.”

You’re probably thinking the same—because “you were taught that if you weren’t in the fast lane, you weren’t working hard enough.” But that’s wrong. “The middle lane is not the mediocre lane.... It’s the lane where you call the shots instead of being jerked along by everybody else’s demands.”

But why do so many women in higher education end up in the fast lane? In November, I wrote, “because we’re always swooping in to rescue others.” We act like superheroes—often for men (some men), and “it’s time to stop saving the world.” The only people we must care for are ourselves and the people we love most. Everyone else is a grown-up who can take care of themselves.

Last month, the editor of this magazine, Kelly J. Baker, encouraged us to embrace the concept of “slack.” Why? She’s been running herself into the ground, just like the rest of us: “I somehow learned that imperfection was failure. Things would be perfect or things would be ruined. There was no gray area in which to live.” That doesn’t sound like fun at all, does it? She noted, “I have been remarkably unable to give myself any slack, and maybe you have felt the same way.”

Indeed, I have. And when I read her article, I realized that “slack” is so critical to why I keep falling apart.

There is no space in my brain to just be still and think. There is no buffer in my life. There is no slack.

My pie is completely full.

The Pie Metaphor

The pie chart is a long-standing favorite for a reason. It’s a circle. It’s easily divided into discernible pieces. And besides, who doesn’t like pie?

I’m not sure how it started, but one day, I was talking with my friend on the phone, worrying about how many things I was forgetting, and how stretched thin I felt—and she felt the same. We’re similarly situated: mothers around age 40, with two small kids who have exceptional needs and older parents who live near us who also have exceptional needs. And we’re both trying to also have careers.

Trying, and often failing.

We speak to each other on the phone to take stock, to reckon with our lives. It helps. That day, we settled on the pie as a metaphor for how much we could possibly handle in our lives. I might have said it first, or she did; regardless, the concept only came to fruition because we spoke of it together. That’s the way it is with fruitful friendships.

(I’ll get back to “fruitful friendships” in a later column, because those are *important*.)

The pie, in this case, represents how much mental energy you have to handle everything you need to do in the world. It is your life energy. And you only get so much of

it. You can sprint through a day, or a couple of them maybe (I have bipolar disorder, so I know what I’m talking about), but you will crash. That pie is only so big. It can only hold so much.

It can hold some kids. And a partner. A household, and money stress, and job worries, and a career that keeps getting sidetracked, and illness, and parents who need you. It can hold these things. And when it is full? It’s full. And that’s when things start to fall apart.

“My pie is full,” I said.

“So’s mine,” she said.

And they were. Today, around our forties, with two small children who need us so much, and partners who also do, and parents, there isn’t enough room in that pie chart for ourselves.

The Pie and the Empty Piece

When Baker wrote about “slack,” I realized something important. In my pie chart, there used to be one piece of that pie that was just for me.

It was my empty piece. But it wasn’t, not really. That was the piece with the time I used to stare at the sky, or take a walk, or sit on the porch and drink a cup of coffee. Those times, quiet, empty times, are important. For me, my brain creates, or rejuvenates, or rests—or does whatever it needs to do during those times. And my brain knows best what it needs. (Lately, it needs to rest. A lot.)

There is no space in my brain to just be still and think.

continued on page 15

to ascend to the top positions within intercollegiate athletics—whether that be in the coaching ranks or in the administrative ranks,” Albert says.

“I see myself as being key to helping [college and university] presidents and directors of athletics think differently about the ways they do hiring, so that our student-athletes can see themselves reflected in those that lead and coach them,” she continues. “I also see myself as being key to helping our student-athletes stay close to the game. If they don’t go on and play professionally, we want them to consider careers in intercollegiate athletics, so they are training the next generation.”

Women on the Move, *continued from page 10*

- **Dr. Ines Maturana Sendoya** moves from director of the Thea Bowman AHANA (African, Hispanic, Asian and Native American) and Intercultural Center as Boston College MA to associate dean for inclusion and engagement at Wellesley College MA.

- **Dr. Carla M. Sinopoli** becomes director of the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology and professor of anthropology at the University of New Mexico.

- **Dr. Tina Smith** becomes associate vice chancellor for strategic initiatives for development and alumni relations at Vanderbilt University TN.

- **Maureen O. Stokes** moves from associate VP of external relations, marketing and communications at Lincoln University PA to assistant VP for communications and marketing at Worcester State University MA.

- **Dr. Lina Traslaviña Stover** moves from associate director in the Office of Undergraduate Admissions to director of undergraduate admission at the University of Nebraska-Omaha.

- **Dr. Geeta Swamy** becomes vice dean and associate vice provost for scientific integrity for Duke University NC and the Duke School of Medicine.

- **Dr. Lora Taub-Pervizpour** moves from associate dean for digital learning to dean for digital learning at Muhlenberg College PA.

- **Julie Weaver** moves from financial aid counselor to financial wellness coordinator at McDaniel College MD.

- **Dr. Lisa Wilkes** moves from interim VP for human resources to VP for business affairs at Virginia Tech.

- **Dr. Rebecca N. Wright** becomes director of the Diana T. Vagelos and P. Roy Vagelos Computational Science Center at Barnard College NY.

A Roaring Revolution, *continued from page 8*

engaged with women; it’s incredibly enriching for me,” she says.

Very adamant about practicing self-care, she acknowledges that “this version of me is very committed to balance and enjoying my life.” Her team now works

remotely, and productivity, rather than seat time, drives the business.

“I’ve been really clear in creating a schedule that works for me,” says Wakeman. “I’m also being clear about what pleasure looks like for me.”

Her “necessary pleasures” include spending time with her two nieces. She also takes boxing classes for relaxation.

She is very picky when selecting her clients; they must be willing to accept the agency’s relaxed format. “I want to give my best, and there are certain conditions that are required for me to give my best,” says Wakeman.

By the way, there’s a simple solution to that ventriloquist/dummy act. Long ago, Wakeman learned to take ownership of her ideas with a simple query: “Oh, so now you agree with me about that thing I said two minutes ago?” It works every time.

To learn more about *She Roars*, check out their website: <https://www.thoughtleadershipforwomen.com/>.

My Pie Is Full, *continued from page 11*

The problem is, it is easy to fill up that empty pie piece with things that *need doing right now*. It’s easy to think your empty piece isn’t important. That you don’t need to “slack,” as Baker put it. Or worse, that slack is wrong.

But slack is mission critical. It’s not optional. It’s your piece of the pie. It’s the only way you’re going to remember all of the things you need to do. That you’re going to make the creative connections for the project you’re working on. That you’re going to be joyful.

I’d forgotten what joyful felt like. Joy is found in the empty piece of the pie. The one that’s mine.

So, here’s what we’re going to do. We’re going to take a look at all of our responsibilities, the things we’re committed to, and we’re going to let one of them go. And we’re not going to fill that empty space with anything else. It’s ours now.

PROFILE: Miles Elevates Community Colleges, *continued from page 13*

Miles and her team have created a role at WCC called completion coaches to reach out to students close to finishing their degrees to make sure there are no barriers to completion.

Miles is also a mentor to aspiring and new college presidents and teaches in leadership development institutes, such as those held by the Higher Education Resource Services organization, which is committed to developing women leaders in higher education, and the Future Presidents Institute of the AACCC.

“It is my desire to serve and help improve the lives of individuals and institutions in our society,” she says. “I have eight former direct reports who have gone on to presidency positions.”