



### **We are all guilty and no one is to blame**

*EPIC! Rule #10: If you aren't part of the problem, you can't be part of the solution.*

I had the honor of leading a Mastery Week on EPIC! for women at the Modern Elder Academy in Baja last week. I am always amazed at the welcome surprise that women experience when they realize they are not alone in their struggles and challenges. When women come together in circle for deep, candid conversations, it becomes clear. We are themes and variations of the same story - - “Good Girls” traversing a patriarchal world without losing our souls.

We have tempered our ambition and our truth to navigate the Goldilocks syndrome of being “too this”, “too that” and “never quite right”. The result? We have become skilled in playing “not to lose” in someone else’s game. We have become adept as power leakers, not power brokers. We are not “playing to win” in the game of our own design.

After almost 5 decades, I have gotten my fair share of Goldilocks feedback. Too independent, too competitive, too assertive, too articulate, too educated, not vulnerable enough. Not sure I was a team player. Ironically, the very attributes necessary to be the innovator and builder of new businesses were often held against me. It was hard for my male colleagues to fully appreciate that for women to be successful in the last half of the 20th century, they had to be “know-it-alls.” Never asking for help. Showing they could do it against all odds.

As someone who started her career as a diplomat stationed in the Soviet Union in the mid-70s, I learned to approach work as a cultural anthropologist, studying

how each organization's (and family's) culture informs who the "in-laws and the outlaws" are. Cultures, after all, are just the collection of stories that explain "the way it is". In male-dominated professions like diplomacy, investment banking, and management consulting, I was always the outlaw. I had learned to anticipate what I call the "ABCs" of my life—Anyone But Carolyn.

Here is a good rule-of-thumb I have used to navigate the ABCs (both personally and professionally). When it comes to culture, **everybody is guilty, but no one's to blame**. We don't live in our lives, we live in the stories we tell, and are told, about our lives. It's too easy and lazy to blame others for believing in fairy tales, rife with one dimensional women characters. The damsel in distress, the seducer, the saint, the martyr, the crone, the evil stepmother, the witch, and the bitch. And it's time for us to cut ourselves some slack and forgive ourselves for believing in the fiction as well.

So - time for another EPIC! rule.

**EPIC! Rule #10: If you aren't part of the problem, you can't be part of the solution.** This rule turns the traditional axiom on its head - if you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem. We did not make up the rules of the rigged game that we were all born into. Yet we have played that game as best we could, and have borne the burden of its costs.

We can see our tears in each other's eyes and recognize the similarities of the landmarks and landmines in our respective journeys. There is a gentle, non-judgmental, forgiving quality to the shared remembrances of our scenic routes to here. This is the starting point for a new chapter. By all being part of the problem, we can honor all that has gotten us here - knowing that it won't get us there. Both the traumas and the triumphs of the past become the treasures that equip us for the best next decades of our lives.

Living an EPIC! life is about liberation. Free of the box. Free of the ceiling. Free of the sticky floor. Free of all the elements, glass and otherwise, that diminish our ability as women to be the leaders we know we can be—at home, at work, and in our communities. It is important to understand that there is no loser in this game. As the designer, you have the power to construct a game where everyone wins—you, your loved ones, your organization, your community, and the future.

Thanks again to the Modern Elder Academy for creating the set and setting for the mid-life wisdom journey of the soul.

Sending love and light - Carolyn

