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Introduction

Welcome to a world you never expected to be in...the world of caring for a loved one or friend who is coping with an illness, injury, disability or a limited time to live. Nothing could have prepared you for the role you are already in or are about to accept.

We were not prepared before our own lives took unexpected turns. We, too, found ourselves in the midst of caring for someone we love. We invite you into these pages, to travel with us as we explore the world of the caregiver. In this book we will take you on a journey into self in which we ask you to look at who you are, what you expect, what others expect from you, concerns of caregivers, and how to care for yourself.

In caring for your loved one, you may have become their hands, legs, voice or eyes. You may have found yourself giving pills, administering injections, transporting, dressing, feeding, toileting and bathing them. As much as you love this person, you may be doing things you never dreamed of having to do.

You may have wondered, "How long will this last?" You've asked and probably gotten vague answers such as "We don't know." At any rate you are in the position of caring because:

- You want to
- You were encouraged/required/forced to
- No one else is stepping forward

In the beginning your brain is on a wild ride that is taking you to places you've never been. Because of the way our brain is wired, you think about this over and over. You put your head on the pillow at night and the thoughts come flooding in, "I can't wrap my brain around this." "I can't take this in." "This feels unreal." Maybe you feel lost. Or overwhelmed. Consider a twenty-four hour day. How much of it do you spend thinking about this? Other tasks in your life may seem trivial, or alternatively, overwhelming.

If it has been a while and you have settled into your caregiving situation, you may find that the ride isn't so wild anymore. You are

Chapter 4

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Here are some questions we want you to answer right now. We wouldn't ask you if we didn't think these questions were important. So, please slooowwww down and answer each one:

- Who else can help you with this?
- What little tasks can this person do in order to take some of the burden off you?
- What else should you be doing now to take care of yourself?

I'd Rather Do it Myself

In dealing with the "who else can help you" question, one of the problems with caregivers is a belief about delegating. For example, complete this sentence: "The best way to get something done is to _____."

If you said *do it myself*, you are not a genius. Why? Because virtually everybody believes this. This belief is part of the phenomenon in psychology known as Type A Behavior Pattern. See if this is true for you: Some time in the past you gave someone a task to do. How did it turn out? Answer: they did it wrong. Not only that, you had to come in and make it right and it took up more time and energy to (a) explain it to them; (b) worry if they were going to do it right; (c) be upset because they screwed it up; (d) explain/apologize to others what happened; (e) fix it yourself. After all that your brain learned a valuable lesson: "Don't delegate. Too many things can go wrong." So, here you are today being a good, responsible person by helping this someone and you are absolutely convinced that you need to stick with the one reliable person to get things done. Who is this reliable person who is going to do this right? Of course, it's *you*.

Do you realize what a tough job we, as authors of this book, have at this moment? We are trying to convince you to delegate tasks to others.

You may truly believe that you are the only person who can get the job done. We'll not argue that point. What we'd like to do at this point is to remind you of a very harsh fact: **Someday you will be dead.** (We told you it would be harsh.) Whether you want to admit it or not, your death will bring much grief to your loved ones. It is also true that you have no idea when will be your last day on earth. Given these two facts it follows that, if you fail to delegate tasks to the people around you and continue to take more than your fair share of the burden, then, in addition to the grief of your passing, your loved ones will have to scramble and figure how do to the things you did. And some of them won't be happy. In the midst of their grief, some of them will be grumbling, "Why didn't she tell us about this." or "Does anyone else know how to do this?"

A reason for nondelegation is the positive feedback you get from others who depend on you. Our egos love to be fed. It feels good to hear, "We don't know what we'd do without you." "You are a lifesaver." "You're wonderful." "Thank you for being here." Wow, with all that ego stroking it's no wonder some of us don't want to give up things. So, our question is, "Who's saying this to you?" And what will happen to these words of appreciation if you delegate? If you delegate, can your ego handle the dip in praise? Or is all the energy, time, and worrying worth it?

Does this make sense to you? Are you mad at us for bringing it up? As you read this, were you trying minimize this in your mind or deny that this scenario could happen? This is a normal response that people have when they are reminded of their impending death. One of the reasons it's tough to imagine that today might be our last day is because, whenever we think, "Yes, I could die today/tomorrow" guess what happens? You wake up the next day still alive. Now your brain isn't easily fooled. Here you are saying to your brain (and anyone else who will listen), "I'm gonna die." And day after day for thousands and thousands of days you wake up again and again and again. Pretty soon your brain doesn't believe it anymore. It comes to the conclusion that the belief "I could die tomorrow" is hogwash. So, as a result, you continue to take on more and more