

APR • MAY  
2026

WOW

CONNECT DSM

*Kathy Fehrman*  
OAK PARK RESTAURANT

*Recipe for*  
SUCCESS



THE MAGAZINE FOR WOMEN BUSINESS OWNERS BY WOMEN BUSINESS OWNERS

# Twist

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- EMPOWERING WOMEN TO FOLLOW THEIR PASSIONS AND TO FIND THEIR BLISS



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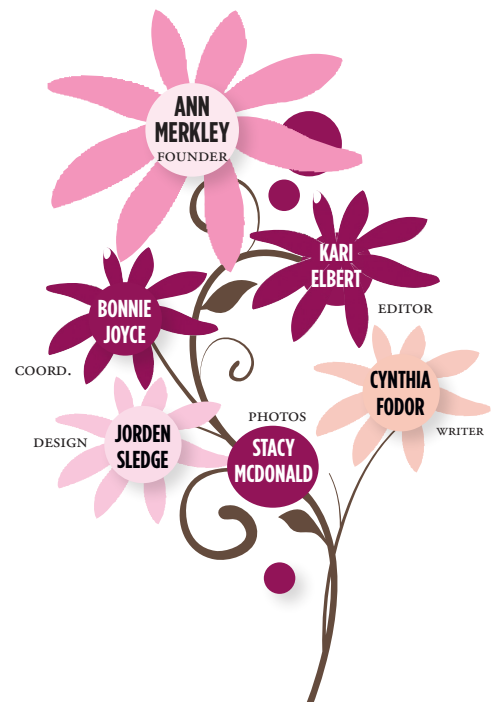
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Ann Merkley

## Retirement is a *Beginning*

### Preparing for retirement is not entirely financial

#### How do you know you are psychologically ready to retire?

As a start, ask yourself four questions.

#### One, is your work meaningful?

If it is emotionally and psychologically fulfilling, if it gives you a strong sense of purpose and identity, then there may be a voice inside your head telling you not to retire yet. You may want to listen to it.

It can be tempting to see retirement as a “finish line”: no more long workdays, long commutes, or stressful deadlines. But it is really a starting line: the start of a new phase of life. Ideally, you cross the “finish line” knowing what comes next, what will be important to you in the future.

#### Two, do you value work or leisure more at this point in your life?

If the answer is leisure, score one for retirement. If the answer is work, maybe you need a new job or a new way of working rather than an exit from your company or your profession.

An old saying says that retirement feels like “six Saturdays and a Sunday.” Fantastic, right? It is, as long as you don’t miss Monday through Friday. Some people really enjoy their careers; you may be one of them.

#### Three, where do your friends come from?

If very little of your social life involves the people you work with, then score another point for retirement. If your friends are mainly your coworkers, those friendships may be tested if you retire.

Creating a financial strategy for retirement is important. But there are also other important factors, including your physical health, your mental health, your relationships with family and friends, your travels and adventures, and your outlets to express your creativity. Building a life away from work can be a plus.

#### Four, what do you think your retirement will be like?

If you think it will be spectacularly different from your current life, ask yourself if your expectations are realistic. If after further consideration they seem unrealistic, you may want to keep working for a while until you are in a better financial position to try and realize them or until your expectations shift.



Ideally, you retire when you are financially, emotionally, and psychologically ready. Why you are retiring is as important as when you choose to retire. When you are motivated to retire, you see retirement as a beginning rather than an end. ✨

~ Ann

### WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

If you have a topic that you would like to learn more about or have a question for Ann, please email [Ann.Merkley@ceterafs.com](mailto:Ann.Merkley@ceterafs.com)

Merkley Wealth Associates is an all female comprehensive financial services firm located in West Des Moines. Ann Merkley can be reached at 515-259-3571 or [Ann.Merkley@ceterafs.com](mailto:Ann.Merkley@ceterafs.com)



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Rita Henry

## WHY SUCCESS STILL FEELS OUT OF REACH — *And the 90-Day Reset Designed to Change That!*

**D**oes it feel like no matter how much you've accomplished, you're still chasing something just out of reach? Like if you just got another certification or started another side hustle then maybe you'd get "there" (even though you've been telling yourself that for decades and somehow the bar keeps moving).

Maybe you're still bitter about that business partner who screwed you over, even though it's been 20 years and you know you "should" be over it by now.

Or you're ashamed to admit that your life looks great on paper, but every 6 months you get so burned out you're not sure if you'll ever have energy again.

Or maybe things in business are going great, but your personal life is a mess: your partner just asked for a divorce, your kids drive you bonkers, and if you miss even one workout you're pretty sure you'll finally tell your mom off for that time she read your diary aloud to the whole family like it was totally ok.

And it's even more frustrating because despite everything, you already know everything you "should" be doing.

You've probably listened to 43 podcasts just this morning with the latest neuroscience on behavior, habit tracking, and setting boundaries. You know you need to drink enough water, get enough sleep, eat healthy food, and move your body.

But you also know by now that knowing better doesn't mean doing better. (Otherwise things would finally feel different, right???)

That's where Intuitive Guide and Energy Healer Rita Henry comes in. She finds the blocks you're still facing (the ones you don't even know are there), and helps you unpack, face, and process them so they no longer kick your booty today.

And she's boiled all her genius down into a 90 day course called *Pain Isn't the End of Your Story* that's filled with lessons, videos, and homework you can do in 30 minutes or less every day for the next 3 months.

If what you've been doing hasn't been working, why not try something completely different? Something that's got other people saying, "Half the time I don't even know what Rita's helping me process, I just know on the other side, I feel better, my relationships improve, and I no longer get upset about things I used to really care about. I had NO IDEA life could be this good."

As an added bonus, we're offering you 25% off (for a total of \$57.75)! Use code **WOMENOFWORTH** at checkout to start improving your life today.\*

ONLINE COURSE

**PAIN ISN'T  
THE END**

**Rita Henry**  
*Intuitive Guide and Healer*

*Rita Henry is an Intuitive Guide and Healer who helps people release pain from their past because she's faced her own. From sexual assault to the death of her 9-day-old daughter, Rita's gotten her ass kicked by life and now helps others heal theirs. With compassion, Love, and Truth, Rita holds space for you to make energetic shifts that quiet the chaos within, heal your troubled past, and create a life you fricken' love.*

**Link:** <https://resources.ritahenry.com/pain-isnt-the-end>

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Amy Davis

## YOU DESIGN YOUR LIFE

**I**n Grad school I took an assessment for a class called Adverse Childhood Experience Questionnaire (ACE's). The ACE's test measures childhood experiences and is used to determine the likelihood of varying physical, emotional, and life outcomes due to trauma (Felitti et al., 1998). Higher scores increase the likelihood of multiple health conditions and are also associated with challenges such as developmental and learning, behavioral problems, high school non-completion, unemployment, low life satisfaction, poverty and felony charges. Many times this is passed from generation

to generation. I scored 9 out of 10 of the questions asked. Upon consideration of this, I pose the question, "HOW did I surpass the statistical outcome?" "How did I not only survive my childhood, but learn to thrive in my adulthood?" As I had shut down much of who I was as a child to adapt to the chaos and turmoil, thankfully my wonder of life remained open as my Grandma had given me the space to be a child during the times spent with her. When we are curious, we move away from judgement and into a place of authenticity, realness, and compassion. Our questions lead us to insights, guide us to solutions, and allow us space to grow. Our heart is our compass, and emits a magnetic field that resonates with a frequency of love. It has its own "brain", with over 40,000 neurons, it allows us to be emotionally attuned. It keeps us alive, and keeps us LIVING, fully and deeply. Each beat is a reminder, a knock on our soul to keep going, to continue on with childlike curiosity. My invitation is that you take the time to not only listen, but take aligned action towards what your heart is telling you. You are here for a reason, and you design your blueprint. If you need help, (as we all do at times), ASK. The answer will come in flashes of insight, synchronicities, and healers along your path. Don't just hear, but LISTEN to what your intuition is telling you. If you're scared, you're on the right track. You have the choice to make the changes your soul is urging you to, for you are the architect of your life. Don't be the person you were told you were, be the person you KNOW you are. I believe in you, now YOU believe in you.\*

**Amy Davis, MSW, LISW**

*Amy is a mom, wife, Clinical Social Worker, mental health advocate, public speaker, and soon-to-be published author. After losing her mother to suicide in 2011, she committed to healing generational wounds, pursuing seven years of advanced education as a single mom while inspiring her daughters to believe in their potential. Today, Amy is married and part of a blended family with four children, each on their own journey of self-discovery.*

**Web:** [diamondhearttherapy.com](http://diamondhearttherapy.com) • **Email:** [amy.davis@diamondhearttherapy.com](mailto:amy.davis@diamondhearttherapy.com) • **Phone:** 515-850-2894



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# Recipe for SUCCESS

By Cynthia Fodor

**I**t's never too late to start a second career. Kathy Fehrman had managed investments, volunteered and served on boards. At age 55, she was appointed to the Iowa Transportation Commission when she had an awakening. "I realized my life was not even close to being over," she says. "What else can I do? So I went and got my MBA and this restaurant just evolved very organically."

"You can do everything, you just can't do it at the same time," Kathy has learned. "I went to college, started a career, raised two sons. There are different stages. If you want to do something well, you might not be able to do everything at once."

Kathy had worked in restaurants but Oak Park is the first

restaurant she's owned. She started out as a fish fryer at Long John Silvers and served as business manager at a country club. She originally saw a house for sale on Ingersoll and envisioned a coffee shop. That idea grew into a grand vision.

"My husband is a 'Go big or go home' kind of guy. We met the right Chefs and the project just evolved." Kathy says Oak Park is a dream come true.

"It's a passion project. We have put our heart and soul into this. We're kind of restaurant nerds who love to go out and critique the food, the service, the layout of the building. So we have been preparing for this our whole lives."

Kathy, alongside her husband Bill, always wanted a place

for neighbors to gather with high-end dining focused on community. “We travelled to big cities and had similar experiences to Oak Park and thought, why not in DM, Iowa?”

They took the best ideas from everywhere they’ve ever been and put them under one roof.

## USE LOCAL INGREDIENTS

One of the secrets to their success is serving as many Iowa products as they can like apples from Timeless Prairie Orchard, and produce from Granite Gardens and Farm Baby.

Yet, they bring it even closer to home, planting their own culinary garden.

“It’s very important to have the products you’re using in your recipes as close to your restaurant as possible, she explains. “So having our garden right in our own backyard is pretty impactful, We’re getting produce from other farmers within a 15 mile radius and our proteins are closely sourced as well.”

## HIRE THE BEST TEAM

Kathy shares the main ingredient to success.

“You have to have a very cohesive team to make this work. We have the most amazing team I can imagine. They refer to themselves as family,” she says.

She inspires her staff to set high standards for themselves, taking inspiration from two books, *Unreasonable Hospitality* and *Yes Is The Answer. What Is The Question?*”

## TAKE CARE OF YOUR STAFF

“When we started down this path, we wanted to provide a great experience for our guests but we also wanted it to be a great experience for the team that works here. We provide great benefits to them. I think they respect the fact that we’re so hands-on.” Kathy explains. “We take care of our staff first and then have faith they are going to take care of our guests and our building.”

## SET A HIGH BAR

The staff undergoes an incredible amount of training. The wait staff wears vests they earn by meeting high standards.

“In a nutshell, Bill and I knew what we didn’t know. So you hire for that,” she says. “You hire people you trust and then get out of their way. I still have opinions about everything but you have to let them do their thing.”

## ENCOURAGE CREATIVITY

When their pastry chef came up with an idea for a \$100 banana split, Kathy was skeptical but said you have to allow creativity to flow. It was a huge success!

After two years, Oak Park has exceeded Kathy’s expectations. Customers call it a gift to the neighborhood. Last year Oak Park was named one of the top restaurants in the country by

USA Today. This year, Chef Ian Roberson is nominated for Best Chef Midwest.

“I knew it was going to be a lot of hard work and it truly is, but I also knew it was going to be fun and it’s way more fun than I ever imagined.”

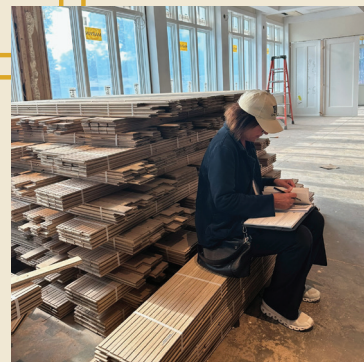
Kathy is having so much fun she’s planning to open a new breakfast/lunch restaurant with a market called Canopy. The market will feature their own Oak Park brand of products like their granola.

Running a restaurant is all consuming but Kathy and Bill have created a rewarding experience for themselves and the neighborhood.

“This is the restaurant Bill and I would like to dine in every night of our lives,” she says.

“I never imagined it was going to be as big as it is but it just landed that way and I’m so proud of it. Every day there’s something magical happening here and I am seriously just blessed.” \*

**Oak Park Restaurant is located at  
3901 Ingersoll Avenue, serving New American cuisine.  
Learn more at [OakParkDSM.com](http://OakParkDSM.com)**





Susan Sutton-Ludwig

## THE VALUE OF Homeownership

Let's talk about children for a moment. Many of us remember hearing stories from our parents or grandparents: "When I was your age, I had to walk to school in the cold—one or two miles—every day." No rides. No shortcuts. Just responsibility. And when you wanted something—like a new pair of jeans—the answer wasn't to ask again. The answer was simple: it was time to get a job. At 13 years old, you knew that in just one more year you could legally work and start earning money for the things you wanted. That mindset taught us something important. Responsibility was placed on us early. We learned that if we wanted something, we worked for it. We saved. We planned. And eventually, we built something of our own. That lesson carries directly into adulthood.

Homeownership has long been considered part of the American dream—almost a God-given right. Owning something in your own name. A piece of land. A home. Real estate that becomes both shelter and investment. It represents independence, stability, and pride. In many ways, buying a home is one of the most meaningful milestones in life. With rent continuing to rise across the country, we as parents have an opportunity—and perhaps even a responsibility—to encourage our children not to fear homeownership. Instead, we should help them understand it. Owning a home allows people to build equity instead of simply paying rent month after month. It provides the option to invest in something that can grow in value over time. And perhaps just as important, it creates a sense of grounding. Being a homeowner brings a level of responsibility and commitment that helps shape maturity. It truly is a wonderful passage to adulthood. When many of us were younger adults, buying a home was simply what you did. It was a natural step forward. You worked, saved, and eventually bought a place to call your own.

Today, areas like the Des Moines metro and its surrounding suburbs continue to offer strong opportunities for appreciation and growth. With the right guidance, the younger generation can learn how to benefit from purchasing real estate and even make money from it. Whether it's buying a personal home, investing in a property to remodel, or purchasing a rental, real estate remains one of the most reliable ways to build long-term wealth.

The Ludwigs would love to help show why investing in real estate is such a smart move. Anyone can see how much the metro is growing—new apartments and rentals are popping up everywhere, and rental prices continue to climb. Maybe not as fast as places like Nashville, but the trend is clear. Instead of making money for large investors and corporations, why not position yourself or your children to benefit from owning property? The good news is that there are still many programs available to help first-time homebuyers get started. There are 100% financing options, grants, USDA loans, and other resources designed to make homeownership more accessible. It's also helpful to remember a bit of perspective. Years ago, mortgage rates were 11–12%, and a typical first-time home cost between \$75,000 and \$100,000—which felt like a huge amount at the time. Today those numbers have flipped, with many starter homes in the \$350,000 to \$400,000 range and rates around 6%. Yes, prices are higher, but that's the reality of inflation. And historically speaking, today's interest rates are still relatively reasonable. We likely won't see the 2.3% rates of the COVID era again, but we also hope we never return to the extremely high rates of the 1960s and 70s. The key is to live forward and think long-term. Encourage the next generation to step confidently into adulthood, to invest in themselves, and to embrace the opportunity—and responsibility—of homeownership. Waiting will cost you more. \*

Susan Sutton-Ludwig  
Real Estate Agent – Des Moines Metro | Ankeny, Iowa  
Ludwig Real Estate/Remax Concepts

1535 SW Market Street, Suite #300, Ankeny Iowa 50023  
Phone - 515.250.3126 • Email - Suesutton@remax.net  
Website - suesutton.remax-central.com



Joleyne Young

## TAX SEASON IS HERE!

Don't Forget These Major 2026 Tax Changes!

At Profit Consultants, we handle the numbers, deadlines, and compliance—so you can focus on growing your business. We offer bookkeeping, payroll, sales tax filing, tax preparation, and tax advisory services.

Tips we thought you would find helpful:

- **1099 threshold** increased from \$600 to **\$2,000** starting in 2026.
- **Bonus depreciation** is back to **100%** for assets placed in service after 1/20/25; assets before that date remain at 40%. This is now permanent.
- **Business mileage rate** increased from **70¢ in 2025 to 72.5¢ in 2026**.
- **Clean vehicle tax credit** eliminated for vehicles purchased after 9/30/25.
- **Overtime pay is no longer taxable**—if you earned overtime in 2025, request a statement from your employer.
- **Tips are no longer taxed**...Starting in 2025!

If you or someone you know needs accounting or tax services, please contact us at **515-808-8016**. \*

### Joleyne Young, LPA

Joleyne is a Licensed Public Accountant in the state of Iowa. She has over 35 years of experience in both public and private accounting. She works with her clients by making complex financial matters approachable, so that they will succeed at what they are good at! She enjoys traveling, country living, and spending time with her animals.

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*Debra L. Sears*

# SPRING IS HERE!

## *Believe It or Not!*

Recently I was invited to present to graduating college seniors on the importance of health and life insurance products. This was fun and very positive to see young educated leaders want to take responsibility on a personal level, enriching their futures and in turn being able to excel in their field of interest with financial potential and security. We had five topics; health (and the ancillary benefits), short term and long term disability, life insurance, annuities and IRAs. Most will be aging off of their parents insurance and need to individually insure. They may go to an employer sponsored plan(s) or they become self-employed, which there were a few.

The difference between personally held insurances to protect your health and your finances and employee benefits provided by the employer were discussed. Both are very important. For a business owner, the ability to recruit, hire and retain the quality of employees that will make you successful has many facets. To offer a slightly higher wage than the competitor is not the full picture. If you want retention, you must offer a reason for the quality, long term, team player to want to join you and stay. The employer must offer benefits appropriate for the industry norm or better at a budget friendly cost. This is what I like to do. Make the puzzle pieces a win-win for the employer and the employee.

I am focusing on disability income protection. I am currently working with a business owner that within the last three years purchased disability income insurance for the employees. Within the first year of this contract being in force, a key employee had a catastrophic health crisis prompting a long term disability claim. Since that time, one employee passed away (life insurance was a part of this contract) and two more are on claim. All of these people (in their 50's) unexpectedly became permanently disabled. These were not work comp claims and not a "slip and fall", all due to catastrophic health. This contract has allowed the families to remain in their home and continue to educate their children. Folks...It is must that you hear this one out! Please call me for details.

### UNDER AGE 65

It is tax time and for clients that had coverage through the Marketplace at any point during 2025, you must use Form 1095-A to complete your IRS taxes. This is used to reconcile the 2025 premium tax credit that may have been used to lower the monthly premiums. You can access this form through the

Marketplace or call us, we'd be happy to assist. If you have any special enrollment events throughout the year you would have what's called an SEP (Special Election Period). This allows you to change your policies to best suit your needs, let me know as soon as you are aware and we can explore your options.

### OVER AGE 65

If you are age 65 or over and want assistance with your initial enrollment and the insurance choices that you have to choose from, please give us a call. Otherwise, if you are already enrolled and insured, the opportunities for change can be done through the AEP (Annual Election Period) each October 15 through December 7, effective January 2027.

### EMPLOYERS

It is essential that you "shop" your entire package of employee benefits. The offerings need to be commensurate with industry standards, appropriate for the needs of the employees and budget friendly, serving the greatest and the least compensated employees. The products should "fit" together like a puzzle to avoid over insuring and having voids in the coverage. We strive to make this process streamlined, easy and affordable. We work with your HR and payroll personnel as a team. I ask that you allow me to quote your package. If you are well where you are, the service is complimentary and I thank you for the opportunity. If there is a discovery, I will ask what you think.

Again, I thank all of my clients for your loyalty and your referrals. It is the ultimate compliment. \*

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Lily Hou

## YOGA TO INCREASE *Bone Density*

Women are at higher risk for bone fractures or other traumatic injuries due to weakened bones from osteopenia (low bone mass) and osteoporosis (serious progression of bone loss). Yoga can be effective in preventing osteoporosis-related issues. It is weight-bearing, generally safe if done correctly, low-impact, and can be practiced in a way to produce calculated and targeted results. Read about one of my client's personal experiences.

**TESTIMONIAL:** *In 2012, I had osteoporosis with a hip dual femur neck mean T-score of -2.5. I started getting Prolia shots twice a year and taking calcium and Vitamin D daily to slow the bone mass loss of osteoporosis.*

*In 2014, when I started yoga classes with Lily, my hips were tight and my muscles were weak. When I sat cross-legged, my knees were 12 inches off the floor. Slowly, I learned how to rotate my hips to loosen them up and stretch my muscles. Lily taught me how to stretch, stop and breathe, then stretch another inch or two to gain flexibility. Weight-bearing exercises (squats, planks, wall pushups) were done slowly by holding position for 5-10 seconds and repeating 10 times to feel my muscles shake and grow stronger. Balancing exercises got easier over the years. Now eight years later, my flexibility has improved so much. I can straighten my leg, stretch, and put fingers of both hands on the bottom of my foot. I sit cross-legged with my knees 3-4 inches off the floor. Because of yoga I am stronger and have good balance.*

*Yoga is a significant part of keeping me healthy. Most people worry about their osteoporosis getting worse as they age. Now, in 2022, my bone mass density has improved to the classification of osteopenia with my hip dual femur neck mean T-score of -1.9. \**

- Laura K.

**For postmenopausal women and men age 50 years and older, the T-score is the number that is used for diagnostic classification, as follows:**

- **Normal bone density:** T-score of -1.0 or above (Examples are 0.9, 0 and -0.9)
- **Osteopenia:** T-score between -1.0 and -2.5 (Examples are 1.1, -1.6, -2.4)
- **Osteoporosis:** T-score of -2.5 or below (Examples -2.6, -3.3 and -3.9)

**PLEASE TEXT LILY AT 515-991-6266 FOR A FREE BEGINNER GROUP CLASS!**

*Lily Hou has owned Green Yoga House (greenyogahouse.com) since 2003. She began her practice in the mid-1990s and quickly discovered the transforming benefits of yoga for her rheumatoid arthritis. She has received training by some renowned yoga masters on various styles. As a certified yoga instructor, Lily is known to teach with an eclectic blend of many styles and uses her extensive knowledge of body alignments and exercise safety in designing her classes to meet individual needs. She approaches her mostly private classes with enthusiasm, compassion and respect for each client. Lily has a Bachelor's Degree in English and a Master's Degree in American Literature. She frequently speaks on yoga and wellness. She is also passionate about her fun jewelry business, "Lily Hand Made."*

greenyogahouse.com • 515-991-6266



BEFORE TREATMENT

Kari Ellbert

was told an emphatic, No. I immediately checked out mentally.

But then I thought of two friends, one who had healed her tumor holistically and another who was treating her colon cancer that way in Phoenix at Euromed Foundation. I called to talk to the doctor there, and he said to get there as soon as possible. I stopped to think about my choices. I usually see cardinals in my yard, but while I was debating, one came right to my front porch. I took it as a sign from my dear friends, Pam Dixon and Lori Bosley – whom I lost after brutal battles with cancer – to pursue this alternative treatment. Since, like most alternative treatments, insurance does not cover it, my husband Dave and I committed to investing in my health. The goal was to treat my cancer but help me still feel good. Another friend who treated her cancer holistically told me that God does not want us to be miserable while our body is healing. That was in the back of my mind the whole time.

At Euromed, they used insulin potentiation therapy (IPT). It is a low dose of chemotherapy that pairs with insulin. The goal is to directly impact cancer cells without damaging your immune system. I stayed in Phoenix for five weeks, doing two IPT treatments a week and two detoxifying treatments a week. I did have side effects – a couple of blood clots in my arms, and my ankles swelled – but that was less than

## My Alternative Cancer Treatment Journey

Four years ago, I had a hysterectomy. Afterward, they found that I had Stage 3 endometrial cancer. You could have knocked me over with a feather. The oncologist wanted to start six cycles of chemotherapy, with radiation five days a week, for five weeks. Our son's wedding was just two months away, so I asked if we could wait until afterward. I

I might have experienced with traditional treatments. It helped lessen the stress that my cousin allowed Dave and me to stay with her while there, which meant I could have my sweet dog with me. I can never thank her enough. Gratefully, all my family and friends supported me as well – I could feel the love and the prayers.

Two months later, I enjoyed our son's wedding in Wisconsin and felt fabulous the whole time. No one could believe I had had ten treatments.

Afterward, I sought help at another clinic in Downers Grove, Illinois, closer to home. Nourish Healthcare offers the same IPT treatment. My tumor was no longer showing up on scans, so the doctor wanted me to do blood and tissue analysis to identify my cancer mutation. When the results came back, I did not understand them, so my husband and I scheduled a Zoom call with my new holistic oncologist. While waiting, I needed a distraction and turned on the Kelly Clarkson Show. She was belting out The Warrior by Scandal. I took that as a positive sign, and I still cannot get it out of my head! Sure enough, the doctor told us that the test proved that the treatments had worked – there were no longer cancer cells in my body! After that fantastic news, my husband and I are committed to sharing my story with as many people as possible. I am so thankful WOW Magazine can be my vessel. \*



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Tara Hofbauer

## YOU AND YOUR SPOUSE CANNOT USE THE SAME ATTORNEY FOR YOUR DIVORCE

“We decided to just use one attorney to represent both of us.” “We used the same attorney for our divorce.” I hear variations of

these utterances more often than makes sense. As an attorney I can only represent one party in a divorce or other family law matter. Attorneys cannot represent two parties with adverse interests to each other. It is common, however, for one or both parties to proceed without an attorney. In fact, I learned from a Polk County judge that most divorces proceed without any attorneys involved at all. When I have a divorce case where the other party is unrepresented, I make it clear that I represent my client’s best interests and not theirs. I remind them that it is in their best interests to seek advice from an attorney. I likely annoy the opposing party with my incessant proclamation to seek independent legal advice—that I cannot give them legal advice.

My goal, however, is not to annoy. When the opposing party is *pro se*—or unrepresented, I am able to draft all of the settlement paperwork. I mostly keep my communications with the *pro se* opponent to email—although phone calls are sometimes warranted. This protects both of us so that our conversations are documented. No one ever questions whether I am representing both sides of the divorce. Lawyers have strict rules of professional conduct they are required to follow. Iowa Rule of Professional Conduct 32:4.3 guides attorneys in dealing with unrepresented persons. “In dealing on behalf of a client with a person who is not represented by counsel, a lawyer shall not state or imply that the lawyer is disinterested.” *Id.* The only advice I am allowed to offer the *pro se* party is to seek independent legal advice. So that is the proverbial drum I repeatedly beat.

It is because of this required diligence that I am surprised by the number of people who proclaim the phrases above in my first meeting with them. No party should leave a divorce believing that the other party’s attorney was giving them legal advice. No attorney should meet with, have phone conversations with or communicate in any capacity with a *pro se* party without an understanding of who the attorney actually represents. Because of this, if your spouse hires an attorney and the attorney says or implies that they will represent both of you—do not talk to them further. Seek your own independent legal advice. \*

**Tara L. Hofbauer - Shareholder**  
**Shindler, Anderson, Goplerud & Weese P.C.**  
 5015 Grand Ridge Dr., Unit 100, West Des Moines, IA 50265  
 Phone - (515) 850-1505 • Email - hofbauer@sagwlaw.com

*I earned my law degree from Drake University Law School (J.D. with honors, 2006) after studying English and Rhetorical Studies at Iowa State University (B.S. with distinction, 2004). One of the most rewarding experiences of my education was attending an intensive foreign language program at the Universidad Internacional in Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico. Before joining Shindler, Anderson, Goplerud & Weese, P.C. in 2012, I was a prosecutor and served on the Board of Directors at Child Abuse Prevention Services. With experience in Family Law, Juvenile Law, Custody, Child Support and more, I am not merely striving for results; I am striving for your peace of mind. When the final ruling is delivered, you will know that I have scoured every inch of the case because I believe in being the most prepared lawyer in the courtroom – every time. I am determined never to look back on a case and wonder if I’ve done enough. You deserve the best preparation and representation so that you can set yourself up for a brighter future.*



Connie Fiscus

## OH, YOUR TEAM IS TALKING. They Just Might Not Be Talking To You

Employees will share honest feedback when they feel safe. The real test of leadership is not whether people speak up. It is whether leaders can receive feedback without becoming defensive or argumentative.

Psychological safety disappears the moment feedback is met with justification or debate. When that happens, employees often stop sharing concerns directly with leadership. Instead, they talk to one another. What some leaders label as gossip is often an opportunity to listen that was missed.

In my 20+ years of leadership experience, I have learned something important: when leaders create the right platform and listen without backlash or punitive consequences, employees will share invaluable insights. Those insights help leaders grow, strengthen teams, and improve the work itself.

Strong leaders approach feedback with curiosity rather than control. They intentionally create environments where employees feel respected, heard, and valued for their perspective.

A few simple habits make a powerful difference. Pause before responding so you can truly hear the message. Thank employees for their honesty, even when the feedback is difficult. Ask follow-up questions to better understand the root cause of concerns. Then close the feedback loop by sharing what actions will be taken or explaining why change may not be possible.

When meeting one-to-one with employees, consider asking three powerful questions:

- Have you ever thought about quitting? If so, what brought you to that point?
- What am I doing that is making your job harder than it needs to be?
- If you were leading this department, what would you do differently?

Stop guessing. Start listening. Transform your culture.

If you want a thought partner to help strengthen communication within your team, let’s connect. \*

### Connie Fiscus, MHA, Certified Master Coach

Connie Fiscus is Founder and CEO of Sunflower People & Culture Solutions LLC, serving as a Certified Master Coach, leadership trainer, and culture consultant. With more than 20 years of leadership experience and advanced credentials, she helps leaders strengthen relationships, elevate culture, and turn everyday challenges into meaningful, sustainable growth.

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