

Busy signals

Life coaches help Inland Northwest women struggling with hectic schedules

[Jamie Tobias Neely](#)

Staff writer

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One life coach calls it: The tyranny of the good. As Inland Northwest women can attest, their lives are as full of worthwhile, meaningful time-crunchers as any women in the country. Raise children? Pursue a career? Nurture a marriage? Serve at church?

They're doing it all. And when we here at IN Life launched a project recently to pair four volunteers with local life coaches, we were deluged by volunteers.

Fifty-four Inland Northwest women — stay-at-home moms, management consultants, clergy, you name it — were eager to sign up. We offered them a chance to find new ways to get control of their time and, with any luck, wind up happier and more satisfied with their lives.

We asked them to send us a letter explaining why they wanted to participate in the project.

Here's a selection of their responses:

"Is it a life coach I need or a miracle worker? The amazing thing is that I still have the Friday section of The Spokesman-Review to know where to even e-mail my request," wrote a Spokane mom and business manager.

"There are not enough hours in the day to meet everyone's needs. I lie awake at night going over lists in my head. What did I forget? Who did I forget to call? What do I have to do tomorrow?" wrote a North Side foster mom.

"I can have the best intentions at the beginning of the day but rarely does a schedule work. I wind up frustrated; nothing is done in whole. I feel like a lousy boss, lousy mate, and a lousy daughter/sister. Can a life coach help?" wrote a Spokane business woman.

It's no wonder the Inland Northwest seems so filled with women living hectic lives. While we were working on this project, Judith Warner's new book, "Perfect Madness" (Riverhead Books) came out, landing on the cover of Newsweek. Women all over the country talked about the magazine piece. Warner's premise — that 21st century American women drive themselves nuts with an impossible pursuit of perfection — also hit home in the Inland Northwest.

Warner cites research from Ladies Home Journal which found that 70 percent of American moms say they find motherhood today "incredibly stressful."

"I believe this post baby-boom generation came of age in a time of feminism which had an image of empowerment that had a lot to do with self control and self-perfection," Warner said in a telephone interview. "Those images became a backbone of our identity."

As the economy worsened, Warner says, American mothers' lives became even more frenetic, competitive and anxious as they worried over their children's futures. In her book, she calls for "politically palatable, economically feasible, home-grown American solutions" such as tax subsidies to encourage family-friendly corporate policies, tax relief to middle-class families and options for part-time jobs and child care.

Most American women are too inundated by the demands of their own lives to envision or advocate for these solutions, she says.

The readers who wrote us echoed Warner's observations.

As we pored over their letters, we found way too many perfect candidates for our project. Each woman who wrote us deserved help and support. In the end, we wound up selecting four women, all mothers, who we hoped might represent a cross-section of our community. They're single mom Angela Smith of Cheney, part-time working mom Tami Rossi of Spokane, full-time working mom Karin Carter of Spokane and stay-at home mom Eleanor Folsom of Spokane Valley.

We paired each of them with a coach. Our group of four Spokane life coaches all agreed to donate their time with our volunteers over a five-week period. Their names are Deanna Davis, Susie Leonard Weller, ReBecca Roedl and Cynthia Hallanger, all of Spokane.

The women and coaches met for an introductory session late in January. For the next five weeks, they touched base regularly by phone or e-mail or in person. The volunteers each kept a time log, started journals and worked on homework assignments.

When their work together wound to a close, they met for a final wrap-up session.

The hours in the day didn't grow longer for any of these women – nor did the political or cultural solutions Warner envisions take place – but each discovered new insights and watched the stress levels in their lives begin to wash away.

We're sure the results will fascinate you.

Life coaches can help sharpen a vision for change

[Paul Turner](#)
Staff writer
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What ever happened to solving your own problems?

Why would someone need a life coach?

"A lot of times we become so enmeshed in the day-to-day doing of things and experiencing of things that we don't even recognize the options that are out there for doing things differently," said Deanna Davis, a Spokane life coach.

A good coach can help a person clarify a vision of desired changes and then assist in crafting an action plan.

And such an adviser can be a sounding board or guide in a unique way.

"It's two people working toward a common goal, and that goal is the client's agenda," said coach ReBecca Roedl.

Family members, close friends or co-workers in whom one might confide can bring their own issues and baggage to the conversation. "No matter how much they love you," said Roedl.

Coaching is not for those battling depression or other psychological issues.

Often, people have tried self-help books before they call a coach.

"There are hundreds of really wonderful books out there," said coach Cynthia Hallanger. "But unless you have some kind of reason to move forward – some structure, some accountability, some specific tasks set up each week – it's very, very hard to find the self-discipline to do that."

Frustration with the status quo can prompt a cry for help.

"I think the biggest thing would be that people have been trying to do things the way they used to, and it no longer works," said Susie Weller, a coach.

Though no longer an altogether new concept, coaching remains a buyer-beware service. With regulatory clarity still emerging, prospective clients are pretty much on their own to hack through the thicket of alphabet-soup degrees and myriad levels of certification and credentials.

But just about everyone recommends getting to know a coach before committing to anything.

"Coaching works because it's a relationship, a very powerful, powerful relationship between two people," Davis said. "And a relationship can't be established if you don't have a connection."

Some coaches concentrate on specific lifestyle niches, such as career transition or spiritual growth.

Some conduct most meetings in person; some consult by phone.

In Spokane, coaches typically charge anywhere from \$100 for a block of four sessions to \$400 for three sessions.

"You have to have a climate of trust," Hallanger said. "But you also have to believe that they are going to challenge you where you need to be challenged."

Life coaching is certainly not an all-female world. But most observers of societal trends would acknowledge that sometimes women face especially daunting demands.

Davis summarized a sentiment expressed to her over and over: "I don't want to be superwoman. What I want is to have a fulfilling life."

There's no miracle formula, of course. But life coaches tend to see theirs as a growth industry.

Said Roedl: "Women are OK with the idea of asking for help."

At a glance

Life coach tips

Some free advice from Spokane life coaches.

"Give up the idea that the to-do list will ever just vanish."

"Stress should be like an alarm clock. Don't keep hitting the snooze button."

"Write things down."

"Identify what's working and build on that."

"Celebrate successes."

"Ask yourself, 'If I had only 30 days left on Earth, how would I want to spend that time?'"

"It's not enough to just sit down and have some reflection time. You need to attach action to it."

"You can make progress without having to be perfect."

"Multitasking reduces efficiency."

"Give yourself permission to say that you've done enough rather than always looking for outside approval."

"Coaching isn't for everybody."

Paul Turner

Life coaches list their top picks:

"Finding Your Own North Star: Claiming the Life You Were Meant to Live" by Martha Beck (Three Rivers Press).

"Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment" by Martin Seligman (Free Press).

"The Power of Full Engagement: Managing Energy, Not Time, Is the Key to High Performance and Personal Renewal," by Jim Loehr, Tony Schwartz (Free Press).

"I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was: How to Discover What You Really Want and How to Get It," by Barbara Sher (Dell).

"The Success Principles: How to Get From Where You Are to Where You Want to Be," by Jack Canfield and Janet Switzer (HarperResource).

"Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement With Everyday Life" by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (Basic Books).

"Taming Your Gremlin: A Surprisingly Simple Method for Getting Out of Your Own Way," by Rick Carson, (Perennial Currents).

"Organizing from the Inside Out," by Julie Morgenstern(Owl Books).

"Stand Up for Your Life: A Practical Step-by-Step Plan to Build Inner Confidence and Personal Power" by Cheryl Richardson (Free Press).

"Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work & in Life, One Conversation at a Time" by Susan Scott (Viking Books).

"The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness," by Stephen R. Covey (Free Press).

Online site

www.authentichappiness.org has a variety of free online assessment tools to examine your strengths, level of optimism and life satisfaction. It will track your results over time, too.

Coaches

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Deanna Davis, Applied Insight: Strategies for Exceptional Living, (509) 532-1600, deanna@appliedinsight.net.

Web site: www.appliedinsight.net

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Cynthia Hallanger, Challenger Coaching, (509) 838-7570, cynthia@challangercoaching.com.

Web site: www.challengercoaching.com

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ReBecca Roedl, Intuition Coaching, (509) 475-9094, info@intuition-coaching.com

Web site: www.intuition-coaching.com --

Susie Leonard Weller, Tools for Transformation, (509) 255-6676, sweller@att.net.

Web site: www.susieweller.com

Coming up

Pause & Play Getaway: A Weekend of Fun and Friendship, organized by a group of local life coaches, will be April 22-24 at the Coeur d'Alene Resort. Attendees can choose between a full weekend getaway option (starts at \$325 double occupancy) or a Saturday-only option (\$99). For more information, check the Web site at www.pauseandplaygetaway.com or call (509) 532-1600.

Karin Carter: Making priorities is the first step

[Paul Turner](#)
Staff writer
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Karin Carter describes her situation.

"I love my job and I love to work," says the 40-year-old Spokane Valley school administrator. "I could easily work 16-hour days, seven days a week and love it."

The problem?

"I love my family and could easily fill my days with kids' art classes, play practices, homework, dentist and doctor appointments, dinner parties, dates with my husband...."

That's not full. That's overflowing.

"I've become a hamster running endlessly in a wheel that goes nowhere," she says.

And she wants to take better control of how she spends her time.

That's how she winds up in the office of personal coach Deanna Davis.

In a stream of unflinching self-analysis, Carter presents a picture of a stressed life-juggler who fears dropping something/everything.

Bright, funny, and full of praise for loved ones and co-workers, she blames no one but herself for her discontent.

"I'm looking at the way I'm living and thinking I don't want to do this anymore," she tells Davis.

After that first meeting, Davis praises Carter's self-awareness.

"What's great is that she sees the situation globally – that her time pressures come from and affect all areas of her life," says Davis. "So she's not seeking a 'magic bullet' solution for her current challenges."

Carter, though, worries about how she came across.

"Describing my life felt awful, as though I was letting her in on my dirty little secret," she says, partly tongue-in-cheek. "The secret is that I am a bad mother, a shell of a wife, and I am letting down the children and families who depend on me to do my job well.... Hearing myself describe my frazzled days and hectic weeks, I realized how out of control I have allowed my life to become."

Maybe you've heard that tune: Wanting to do everything well but worrying that it's all getting short shrift.

But what Davis sees is a likable workaholic who desperately needs to start getting home from the office at a reasonable hour.

So the two women talk at length about new approaches to planning and prioritizing Carter's work day.

With these scheduling strategies soon in place, she finds herself having dinner with her family on a semiregular basis – previously a rarity.

"It has made my home life more enjoyable," says Carter, a South Hill resident.

But that one seemingly simple change requires more of an adjustment than just modifying her time-sucking open-door policy at work.

"I have not felt fondly toward people who left at 5 o'clock every day regardless of what was going on," says Carter. "That seemed like lack of commitment to me. I resented it."

In any event, leaving work on time isn't to be viewed as a quick-fix that would solve everything.

"This is an ongoing process," says Davis.

In their weekly sessions at Davis' office, the two women talk about ways to address what the coach has perceived to be Carter's perpetual state of imbalance.

By the time they get up and hug at the last meeting, it seems clear the hamster has learned some new tricks.

"By creating better habits and sticking with them, you've made your life easier." Cynthia Hallanger, who served as life coach for Angela Smith

Angela Smith: Building new routines, being organized proves key

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Angela Smith wakes at 3 a.m. these days, worrying over how she'll pay the heat bill now that she's divorced, and fretting over the weekend hours she spends away from her three children.

Forty-two-year-old Smith, who lives in Cheney, recently took a promotion at Northern Quest Casino. As a floor supervisor, each night she oversees four tables of card dealers or the dice pit. But she worries that she doesn't see her children as often as she'd like, and even with a raise, her money never seems to stretch far enough.

Today she's huddled in a red upholstered chair in the South Hill living room of life coach Cynthia Hallanger, her hazel eyes pinched with worry.

"I live paycheck to paycheck," she confesses.

Hallanger asks her to rate the various areas of her life on a 0 to 10 basis, with 10 representing the most satisfaction. Her career's a 7 — "I love my job" — but money's a 2. Her family ranks a 7 or an 8, but she misses them. Most of her family lives on the Yakama Indian Reservation near Yakima. "I don't have anybody out here," she says. "My family is so far away."

She talks about what she loves: dancing, reggae music, powwows.

When it's time to clean house, she pops in a Carlos Santana CD, and moves to the music. "When it's done, I say, 'OK, that's enough. My house should be clean enough.' "

Hallanger explains the coaching process, then urges Smith to commit to some homework for the coming week. Hallanger wants her to list the pros and cons of her current work schedule, to develop some positive affirmations she can repeat to herself, and to set aside 30 minutes for herself four times a week.

Smith mentions she knows she needs to organize her bills, so Hallanger asks her to spend an hour on that task.

"Oh, I hate doing that," Smith sighs.

"You know what? You can do it while listening to Santana," Hallanger negotiates.

Smith checks in with Hallanger as the weeks roll past. Soon they meet again. Smith slept deeply the night before. She has added a new affirmation to her routine, "I deserve to be happy." She repeats it several times a day, upon waking, brushing her teeth and driving to work.

When life turns stressful, Smith tells herself, "Oh, no, I deserve to be happy here."

She organizes the bills. She digs out the garage-sale leftovers in her spare bedroom, loading up bags to take to Goodwill. She notices that when she doesn't take the kids to the store, she spends less money.

She resolves to spend one-on-one time with each child and adds a treat for herself: a trip to a matinee on her day off.

The days zip past. Quickly, five weeks have gone by, and Smith meets with Hallanger for a wrap-up session, back in Hallanger's living room.

This time, Smith relaxes into the big red upholstered chair. Her brown hair tumbles to her shoulders. A shaft of sunlight beams through the front window, and a smile breaks across Smith's face.

Now she regularly sleeps through the night. She's budgeted her expenses and talked with her kids about the limits. This week she even filed her taxes.

Though she's still working weekends, she asks for time off when her kids have a birthday or track meet. She's also figured out ways to spend special time with each of them during the week. She's popped in for lunch at 8-year-old Calvin's school and rejoiced over 14-year-old Sophie's admission to the National Junior Honor Society.

"You're a great mom," Hallanger reminds her.

Just recently, Smith spent a day alone with 12-year-old Carolyn, her middle daughter. They rented movies, and when they shopped, Carolyn said, "No, I don't really need this, Mom."

Smith tells her coach she feels proud herself for asking for help.

"I learned I am strong, and I am doing my best for my kids," she says. "I don't beat myself up as much as I used to. I'm aware of when I'm doing it now."

She's also started new routines: organizing bills and laundry, picking up rooms, repeating affirmations.

"By creating better habits and sticking with them, you've made your life easier," Hallanger says. "You've done it yourself. Congratulations."

As their time together draws to an end, Hallanger walks Smith to the front door and envelopes her in a hug. Then Smith heads back to her busy life, smiling and affirmed: She deserves to be happy.

Tami Rossi: Has new perspective

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Tami Rossi speaks quickly this afternoon as she perches at an elegant table at the Davenport Hotel and lists her values to life coach ReBecca Roedl.

She wears a black and pink blocked sweater, deep red polished fingernails, a diamond ring. Her chin-length bob shines with golden highlights. She's friendly and energetic.

Today she's rushed into the hotel mezzanine for a carefully scheduled hour with Roedl. The minutes tick away. Soon she must hop back in the car to pick up 15-year-old Rachel from Ferris High School.

Rossi's a food scientist for Cyrus O'Leary Pies, working 20 to 30 hours each week developing new recipes, then zipping off to fill the rest of her days with appointments, volunteer work and precious after-school time with her two teenagers. She winds up her days exhausted, with a longer to-do list than when she started.

As the coaching begins, 46-year-old Rossi spells out her top priorities. They're simple but rich: To raise her children to happy adulthoods. To have a stable, lasting marriage with her husband, Al.

"At the end of the day, what really matters to me is the kids and my husband," she says. "Nothing else is really that important."

What stands in her way? Her own perfectionism. If she's not filling every possible minute with productive activity, all completed perfectly and punctually, she feels guilty.

Roedl presses Rossi to set a few goals for the week. She'll buy a journal, talk to her husband about scheduling regular evenings alone, and keep a log of her time. She'll track down her pedometer, and finally write those Christmas thank-yous.

Then she's zipping out to race the clock to Ferris.

A couple of weeks later, Rossi bakes 250 apple and cherry tarts in her South Hill kitchen, more volunteer time. She's a parish council member at Our Lady of Fatima Roman Catholic Church, and she's offered to bring tarts to the new church's dedication. The smell of brown sugar and cinnamon wafts into the room.

Already she's made a few observations.

"My expectations for myself are totally unrealistic," she says. "You create the image of the ideal woman who can keep house like Martha Stewart, who can carry on a conversation like Oprah Winfrey, who looks like Gwyneth Paltrow.

"You're trying to measure up to this person who doesn't even exist."

The progress report: She's gone for coffee in the evenings with her husband. She's lost the pedometer, but she's written the thank-yous.

Five weeks after their initial meeting, Rossi and Roedl have returned to the Davenport Hotel.

This time, Rossi relaxes into her chair. Her silver earrings shine. The conversation flows, a gentle downhill stream, this time.

She's figured out a new perspective now. Everyone she cares about — her husband, her kids, her friends, her employer — all deserve to have a wife, mom, friend and employee who's at her best.

"I don't have a right to run myself ragged," she says.

She's rediscovered a love of antiquing and even tracked down a vintage chandelier she's recast as a candelabra for her bathroom.

One homework assignment she's flunked: to make some mistakes on purpose.

"I couldn't do it," she says. "I felt like I was letting other people down."

But life has subtly become easier for Rossi. She's scheduling regular dates with her husband. She's taking time to just to shove the cat out of a patch of sunshine in the living room and sit there a few moments herself. She's just not feeling resentful or burdened as often as she did before.

She makes plans to continue the coaching sessions on her own with Roedl.

And she lingers over her chai tea today. She's enlisted her son to pick up Rachel after school. She'd rather stay a few moments longer to talk about how coaching has worked for her.

"I think it's making me braver," Rossi says. "Less afraid of what other people will think."

Eleanor Folsom: Stay-at-home mom now has more energy

[Paul Turner](#)
Staff writer
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It's not like Eleanor Folsom is one of those women who can't say "No."

She has a track record. When demands on her time seem to be spiraling out of control, she makes choices. (That's how swimming and soccer got bumped from the family schedule last winter.)

But not long ago, she realized something wasn't working. So the 30-year-old stay-at-home mother of three made a list.

"I would just like to organize my life in a way that I can:

"1. Be there for my children and be a fun mom.

"2. Start our new construction business.

"3. Organize myself better with paperwork for our investment properties.

"4. Find time to be myself and enjoy personal time."

Enter life coach Susie Weller.

When the two meet in person for the first time at Folsom's Spokane Valley home, Weller does a lot of listening.

She hears about a woman accustomed to doing things for her kids, her hard-working husband and her church but seldom for herself.

Weller suggests that it wouldn't be selfish for Eleanor to tweak that. "The more you're not running on empty, the more you have to give," she says.

This proves to be the nudge Folsom needs to sign up for weekly ballroom dance classes. All soon agree that decision proved to be a good one. Recreation can be re-creation, as they say.

But initially Folsom is skeptical about the apparent direction of the coaching. She craves concrete time-management tips. And Weller is talking about spiritual wellness and listening to her body. "It seems Susie wants to focus more on me as an individual and making me 'happy and fulfilled,' " she confides.

In the ensuing weeks, the two women talk by phone about Eleanor's feelings of guilt over not getting more done each day and about just what constitutes reasonable self-expectations.

Folsom becomes a convert. She acknowledges that the coaching has helped her understand what's really required to change habits.

"I usually have to schedule my 'me' time, but so far it has been working," she says.

She has more energy. She feels more focused.

When the two women meet again, five weeks after the initial get-together, Eleanor beams and reports that working with Susie has reminded her of something: "Hey, you know, I'm a person, too."

Weller's questioning and gentle prodding have helped Folsom scrutinize how she makes choices.

At the beginning, Weller had gotten Folsom to fill out a life satisfaction assessment. In the category of "Ability to make progress on goals and create the life you want," Eleanor had given herself a "5."

Weeks later, she takes the survey again and raises her score to a "9."

As the women are about to say their goodbyes, the conversation turns to how to talk to others who are feeling stretched and rudderless. The coached now sounds like the coach.

Says Folsom, "The first thing I would ask is, 'What are you doing for yourself?' "

