



Don't Let a Personal Crisis Knock Your Company Off-Course

Steve Sanduski:

Hi everybody, and welcome to another episode of "On Your Mark, Get Set, Grow". This is the podcast of CEO Coaching International, where we talk to the world's leading entrepreneurs, CEOs, and coaches who are looking to make big happen. I'm your host, Steve Sanduski. And our guest today is Dr. Carol Clinton. Dr. Clinton is the founder, CEO, and medical director of Timeless Skin Solutions, which is a leading dermatology and skin care practice in Ohio. In addition, she is a member of EO and a client of CEO Coaching International.

In today's conversation we're gonna talk about a topic that you don't hear a lot about, yet it is something that will be faced by many entrepreneurs at one time or another in their career. And the situation is, what do you do about your business, how do you continue to move forward, when a crisis hits? In this example, we're gonna be talking to Carol about a personal crisis. Now in your case it might be a medical situation. It might be a divorce. It could be a lawsuit, but it's some kind of crisis that is gonna potentially disrupt your business. So we're gonna hear Carol's story. What it is that happened to her. How she actually moved forward, and ultimately ended up building a very successful business through this personal crisis. So it's a very important topic, and we are going to learn how do we actually continue to move forward. I know you're gonna enjoy and appreciate this conversation with Dr. Carol Clinton.

Carol, welcome to the show.

Carol Clinton:

It's great to be on the show with you, Steve.

Steve Sanduski:

Well we are happy to have you here. We're gonna talk about a topic that really doesn't get addressed very often, yet it's one that is really critical, and it's one that many entrepreneurs and CEOs will face at one time or another in their career. And that is what happens when you are running a business, you're an entrepreneur, you're a CEO, and then a personal crisis happens? So it's not like the business can just stop while you take care of your situation. You've had that

happen to you. We wanna talk about what do you do. If you would, why don't you start by just setting the stage for us, and tell us about your particular situation.

Carol Clinton: As you introduced me as a doctor, I'm a physician. At some point fairly shortly after I went to medical school and residency, I realized I didn't really like the way the medical model was going. So I started a business that was really me running my own office. I kinda bought myself a job as some people do when they start a business. My husband and I, we sunk our life savings into starting the business. We had our grand opening on a Friday. The following Friday I was diagnosed and in surgery with advanced ovarian cancer with a 18% chance of making it to five years. It was really ... If you wanted to have a personal crisis then why don't you just get it out of the way when you start.

Steve Sanduski: Take me back to that point and time. How long ago are we talking about here?

Carol Clinton: We're talking about 14 years ago.

Steve Sanduski: So, 14 years ago, you just open up your new medical practice, you get diagnosed with advanced stage cancer. What is going through your mind? What is your thought process at that time?

Carol Clinton: I think my thought process was ... number one, I think having knowledge is really power. So even though I knew what my outcome might be, I also knew how to get to the best person to get the best outcome that was possible. Being able to do that allowed my brain to flip the switch like, "I'm gonna get the best treatment that I can. And then I'm gonna keep doing in my life that I'm able to do." Business and family were the two things that I knew I wanted to keep going at the best level I would be able to. So that's how that worked.

Steve Sanduski: How did you allocate your time? Business and family, did you have some type of really disciplined structure, because obviously you're going through this medical situation. You probably ended up going through chemotherapy and the sickness that results from that. So how did you organize your day? Did you end up becoming really structured in that I have working hours from this time to that time and then family time? How did you think about allocating your time when it was just so scarce for you at that point?

Carol Clinton: That is such a great question, because the ups and downs of chemotherapy the ability to allocate time changes, too. It wasn't just like everyday I'm gonna be able to do this and this. Once you have chemotherapy, you have about a 48 hour window, at least the type I had, and then you kinda fall off a cliff. In fact, my family would say, "It's happening to you now. You need to go lay down in bed." With an hour, I wouldn't feel well for about five days. It was very hard to keep functioning out of anything other than just being able to just get myself a glass of water. And everybody else kinda had to just pick up around me in terms of the family.

So the nice part was, was that we had someone here at the house to help us. My husband had a job that was flexible, so that he was definitely ... Marriage sometimes is a zero and a hundred. Sometimes you're a zero, and sometimes you're a hundred. It certainly wasn't fifty-fifty at that point. My husband just picked up the 100%, and then we got help at the house that we needed. We had tons of friends bring us food, bought a freezer, so it kind of ... The part of your daily living that really kind of sucks a lot of energy was taken care of. The kids knew where I would be if I was at home, usually in bed or we have a pool, down by the pool just relaxing. And they would come and interact with me, or I could hear them play piano. It was just really awesome.

Work was as much as I could do. Some days it was three hours, and some days it was five hours. I just started that day at 9a.m. and went as long as I could. There would be some days I would be finished working ... I know three hours or five hours doesn't sound much to entrepreneurs and CEOs out there, but ... Sometimes I would have to sit in a chair for an hour before I could even get in my car and drive three miles home. Just exhaustion was incredible from going through the treatment process. I really am passionate about what I do. I love what I do, and I didn't wanna see it fail because I was at a limited point. So I just went ahead and put the energy that I could behind it.

I wore a wig for about, I would say, six hours once my hair fell out. I just couldn't stand having to think about something else on my head. Was it on my head? Is it in the right place? So I didn't even wear a wig. I think opening myself up to that vulnerability in the early part of my business really allowed my patients and my staff to engage with me. They were no longer afraid to mention if I was sick, because you could see it.

Steve Sanduski: What kind of staff did you have at that point in time? Since you weren't available to the business a whole lot, were there other folks that were able to pick up what you weren't able to do at that point in time?

Carol Clinton: I did. I had a physician assistant. And then I also had a subcontractor who helped me with what I do. I do cosmetic dermatology, so I had someone who could do some of the more mild aesthetic treatments. Names of those things would be a micro dermabrasion or a chemical peel that doesn't require a medical license to be on sight. I had subcontracted with them very luckily before this whole thing started. They were able to answer the phones, and kinda around their portion of the business that didn't require me to be there.

Steve Sanduski: Let's fast forward a little bit. We're obviously today, so you survived. We're all thrilled to know that, but maybe walk me through what happened then over the next few years? What was the process like trying to get back to health, and yet also trying to run the business, too?

Carol Clinton: I think that was my ... When I finished chemotherapy, I had a major surgery and chemotherapy is the standard treatment for the first time around for ovarian

cancer. When I finished they told me at the end of the treatment that I would feel like myself in three months. I had a family, three kids, very active, starting up a business, and also I was running half marathons at that time. I thought, "In three months, I can't believe I'm gonna have myself back That is gonna be the most fantastic thing." I couldn't believe it was only gonna be three months, because I'm usually a 16 hour total go person, just a little bit of relaxation. So I thought if I could go from three to five hours of activity back up to 16, I would be ecstatic. I don't think I've ever gotten back to 16. Twelve to fourteen is where it hits. So I didn't make it at three months. I think I was kinda mad at that point that I didn't get back what I thought I was gonna get. I just had to really focus on staying healthy.

Also, I was concerned 'cause my family, while I was very positive that I would live, and that was really my focus, they didn't always feel that way. And I had to be sensitive that maybe they would be wanting to ask some questions. Are you really sure you're okay? It was the end of the second year, one of my kids said, "Are you sure you're better, Mom?" And I said, "Well why do you think that I'm not better? What is making you worried?" And they said, "Well your hair color is not the same." I'm like, "Well that I can fix." So I went and fixed that; but in the meantime it was just growing the business with intention of continuing to do a great job, but it wasn't really in a hyper growth phase.

Then in early 2008, I felt like I had my energy back. My health didn't show any signs of reoccurring, and I was ready to grow. I had a plan on where I was gonna be in five years. Then the wheels fell off the economy. I just really didn't know, even though I'm in what people would refer to as the lipstick profession where you are kind of immune to some of these cycles, and we did grow. I just didn't feel like I had enough risk within me to go for it with abandon as 2008 unfolded. We just grew our business in a really nice kind of continuing to provide excellence and adding staff and adding space as we needed it. Then about four years ago, I really knew that I was ready to not be the ... the business no longer be dependent upon me. And be able to pull in other people who could do some of the roles that I was doing, so that I could focus on being the CEO and grow.

Steve Sanduski:

When you had this personal crisis, and this was a life-threatening cancer that you had, so you could have died from this. Did it change how you thought about the business and the priority that the business took in your life? So prior to this you're a hard charging entrepreneur opening up this new medical practice, this new medical clinic. Did it change when you had this life threatening illness? And now that you're past it, and it looks like you're in good health, what do you think today? How does the business fit in your life today? How do you think about the business today?

Carol Clinton:

My dad was such a big influencer in my life, and he really as I was growing up, and I'm one of eight, said in your life your priorities should be God, your family, and you work. I always tried to keep that in the front of my mind. Am I intentionally living with these as my priorities? Sometimes those things get off

balance. Certainly if you're starting a business or you're running a business, your family sometimes can get pushed to the side and become second. It was just a matter of making sure that my family knew that I valued them. I think the life partner choice is huge, because my kids and my husband are very close. And because I have a life partner that does value family so highly and the relationships among them, among all of us, when I ever get off balance he really helps me bring that balance back in. I'm not sure I answered the question that you just asked, but I'll let you ask it again if you feel like missed something.

Steve Sanduski: No, No. No I think that's good. Now I read something you wrote here recently. Prior to having this illness you were an active distance runner. I think you were running half marathons. And over the course of the past ten, twelve years or so, you've tried to go back and do the running. If you could, just tell me where you are today. Are you able to actually run at all today?

Carol Clinton: The good news is I am. I had developed from the chemotherapy a pretty severe neuropathy of my feet where it hurt so bad to even run 10 yards. And that was one of the visualizations I did when I was sick and laying in bed, I would see myself running again to keep myself encouraged for the next day, and the way I felt. To not be able to run has been very discouraging. So the last two years, as our children have grown up and left the house, I feel like I've had more time to invest in really great workouts. So I've been at a gym, and I'm up to running anywhere between three and four miles a day. And it feels fantastic, but it has taken a lot longer than three months.

Steve Sanduski: Right. When you wrote this article, and maybe this was a year and a half or so ago, you had said that at that point in time you still had not run a 3K, and it had been 12 years since the diagnosis. Here's a quote that I really want to explore. In this article, you wrote, "I am not sure that I ever returned to myself, maybe I should have focused more on becoming the new me rather than returning to the old me." What I'd like to explore there is so often as entrepreneurs and CEOs we get so wrapped up in this identity of who we are and the success that we have, and look at me, look at who I am. When I read that from you, I thought it was just really insightful. So I'd love for you to elaborate on that in terms of as we think about our identity as successful people, how much weight do we put into that? How much do we rest on our laurels versus we want to continue to become new to renew. You've had this personal crisis, which I'm sure has had a big impact on how you think about this; but I would just love to hear you elaborate a little bit on what you wrote in that article.

Carol Clinton: I think you heard me say a couple times, when they told me at three months that I was gonna be back to myself, that's really what I focused on, instead of ... making sure that I was focusing on the things that I really wanted to focus on. I was just clawing to get back to who I was. I don't know that I'll ever run half marathons again, but I do enjoy running and I have tried to do that. Now I lift weights. I ride bikes. My husband and I are getting ready to do some hiking and

skiing. It just ... Maybe opening my horizons to the other ways that I could enjoy a physically active would have been a good thing.

Also, at work I've had so many employees have personal crisis, either their own personal health crisis or we've had I'd say four serious family health crisis at my office this year. And you know what, there is nothing more important than the health and the stability of someone's family. I don't think anything about it is time for you to get up and leave and go take care of that. Whatever their job is, someone else can pick up the pieces. If the situation is such that they would like to come back when things are settled down, the job is there for them. I certainly believe in the ability of people to appreciate their family and that which is their foundation in their life. I think that this personal health crisis that was really a big take home message that didn't take me long to embrace as a human being.

Steve Sanduski: For people that don't go through a health crisis like this, do you have any thoughts or advice for them in terms of, and again, so often successful entrepreneurs, busy CEOs, they'll oftentimes let their health fall to the wayside at the expense of just really trying to grow the business. You've been through it. What advice, any advice that you have for these folks in terms of hey, don't forget your health, and really even though it is gonna take some time to work on your health, you'll get more energy, and you'll probably be building an even more successful business. So any thoughts on that?

Carol Clinton: I would say, I take two day every year by myself just planning out the year and planning out my days first. What is my day gonna look like in this upcoming year? What is my free time gonna look like in this upcoming year? Then go from there on then what is the business getting from me? Because if I don't put myself first, no way am I gonna be the best CEO and leader that I can be.

Steve Sanduski: Some people would say, "Well that's being pretty selfish." I agree with you. I think we do have to really focus on ourself and take time for ourself for the health but ... Any thoughts on that in terms of if someone says, "Well gosh, that's pretty selfish."

Carol Clinton: No. You know what? It's very selfish if you don't do that, because you need to be the best leader for the people who are spending their time and energy during their working day with you. And you need to have that same sort of energy for your family. If you're not taking care of yourself, believe me, you could be laying in a bed and only have three hours of energy to give to anybody. So your health and your mental focus, you're being able to have that is the most powerful thing that you have to give to this world. So please take care of yourself.

Steve Sanduski: Well I think that's a nice segue to talking about some of the business lessons that you've learned over the years. We've talked about health. We've talked about the personal crisis and how that's affected the way you work and the way you think and the way you approach things. What are some other things that

you've learned about building a successful business over the last decade or so as you've had your organization, that you think would be helpful for our listeners?

Carol Clinton: The thing is, if you know your purpose and why you're doing this, and bring that purpose to you to work every day, you're gonna be inspirational for the people who are around you. Then you're gonna wanna surround yourself with people who can make your purpose come to life. So you'll be looking for the best and the brightest out there and people you like to spend your day with to be your employees to help you grow. And they'll be engaged in your purpose, because you're gonna inspire them.

Steve Sanduski: Hoe do you find those people? I know purpose very important. How do you discern that when you are talking to a potential new candidate? How do you try and understand what their purpose is, and whether it's in alignment with your purpose?

Carol Clinton: We have core values for our company that we live and breath. We really do some initial pre work before a potential employee even gets the first phone interview to see if these core values even resonate with the person ahead of time. We really focus on those and then in relationship to what the job functions are, and trying to discern whether those core values ever went off and were not applied in a previous occupation. And then looking for the person with the skill set. The skill set goes out, but the core values is what we measure against first before we go back and look and dive into their skill set.

Steve Sanduski: What are some of the core values of your organization?

Carol Clinton: We're a medical model so we have a consider others, respond to a need, bring a solution, and assume good intent. The medical world sometimes can be so adversarial for a patient, and we really don't want patients to feel that. We will assume good intent between each other as employees and with our patients when they bring to us a concern. Not just see it as a problem, but as ... We view it as a gift if somebody brings us an issue. It's a gift for us to be able to solve it for them.

Steve Sanduski: When you developed these core values for the organization, did you just come up with these on your own because you're the business owner, or was this in collaboration with some or your key employees?

Carol Clinton: This was in collaboration with some of our key employees. We sat down and did an exercise and really went through our best employees. What were the values and what were the things that they brought to work every day that everyone valued and aspired to be? From there, we were able to bring these down. I think the one that I forgot was lifelong learning. We just all love to read and learn and grow.

Steve Sanduski: As you reflect back on having built the business now for over a decade, is there one or two things where you look back and you think gosh I wish I would have done this a little differently, or maybe a lesson or two that you've learned that you think would be really helpful for the listeners.

Carol Clinton: I kept hold of way too many roles that I was not an expert in for way too long. As soon as I was able to get somebody else who was more expert in finance take that over, it freed up my time to be a better practitioner and CEO. As soon as I taught other people how to be excellent practitioners, now I can be a better CEO. I'm not trying to focus in too many places at one time.

Steve Sanduski: I think that is such a critical piece of being able to grow a business is understanding what are you good at and what you need to delegate and empower other people to do. So as you think about that, what did you specifically do as you continued to build the business? How did you identify hey these are the things that I'm really good at. What makes you think that you're the best person to be the CEO, 'cause I know that's another thing that we run into is an entrepreneur starts the business, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they're gonna be the right person to be the CEO. Maybe they're the best person for business development or product development, but they may not be the best manager for the business. How did you decide what you're best role was versus hiring other people to fill some of those roles?

Carol Clinton: I think I sat down and did a grid on what I was not just good at, but what I enjoyed. What I was good at, and maybe I didn't enjoy. What I wasn't good at, but I enjoyed. And what I wasn't good at, and I didn't enjoy. As a started to graph those things out, it became clear to me that that was the role I wanted to gravitate towards was the CEO role. In doing that I knew that I didn't have ... I'm a physician and my background education is a physician, and I didn't have training to be a CEO. I didn't have a business background. At that point then it was time for me to seek out who was gonna help me become the best CEO that I could be.

Steve Sanduski: Where did you find that?

Carol Clinton: The good news is CEO Coaching International has been just a wonderful platform for not just me to grow as a leader, but for my leadership team to grow to help me grow the business.

Steve Sanduski: Excellent.

Carol Clinton: I couldn't be more grateful for what they provide.

Steve Sanduski: Excellent. Thanks for sharing that. Before we jump into some rapid fire questions here. Is there anything else that you wanna to share that we haven't talked about yet?

Carol Clinton: I do not have anything that I wanna to share that we haven't talked about yet.

Steve Sanduski: Okay. Let's jump into a few rapid fire questions. These are designed for some short answer. You were just talking about leadership and being the CEO, so let's just start with who is a person that's had the greatest impact on you as a leader?

Carol Clinton: I would say my dad. My dad was such a quiet leader. He helped me with the focus of what it is that should be the importance of things in my life. Things didn't always go perfect for him, and yet I never saw him being angry or unkind. He just kept plugging away at what he thought was the right way to live his life.

Steve Sanduski: Another question here, you talked about the importance of being a lifelong learner, so what is a book that you have read here recently or perhaps that you're reading now that you'd like to share?

Carol Clinton: I'm reading a book by Matthew Kelly, and it's called "The Dream Manager". It's interesting because when I made the change from a physician as an employee, I had read one of his books called "The Rhythm of Life". And when I realized, after reading that book, I could not develop a rhythm in my life with the way things were currently going, that's when I decided to make the switch. "The Dream Manager" is more about really looking forward and projecting what are the dreams I have? I've created a successful business and we're financially independent, so what is the next thing that I wanna make sure that I do? Our kids are grown. We've kind of gone through a lot of the things that are your dreams when you're young, and we've achieved those things. So what is the next stage? What do my husband and I wanna do? He just retired. I think sitting down and taking some time here in the next month, both each of us independent and then come together to really figure out what is this next stage, and what does it look like? How are we gonna do it together.

Steve Sanduski: Okay great. Another question here is what is a daily or regular behavior that you think has helped lead to your success?

Carol Clinton: Oh my gosh. I think starting the day with positive intentions that I'm going to use my heart, my hands, and my mind to help those around me and to help myself is ... That's the way I start my day.

Steve Sanduski: I think having that morning routine is really important. We hear that a lot from folks that starting the day with something similar, a ritual, something that's habitual is a great way to start the day.

Let me finish here with two more questions. I'm gonna start a sentence, and then I'd like you to finish the sentence. The first sentence is, what I know to be true is ...

Carol Clinton: What I know to be true is acting from love is the easiest way to live.

Steve Sanduski: Excellent. The second question is, the second statement is the best way to accelerate personal growth is ...

Carol Clinton: Surround yourself with people who know more than you who are positive, and be humble and learn.

Steve Sanduski: Excellent. Carol, thank you very much. I appreciate you taking some time her to share your story. It's a great story. It's an important story. All of us need to understand and realize that life and health is just such a precious gift, and we always have to be appreciative and grateful for what we have. Those times when we don't have our health like you just described her in your example that we have to deal with the hand that we have at that point, and continue to move forward and do the best that we can. You've given us some great insights on how to go ahead and do that.

Carol Clinton: Thank you.

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