Corley Caregiver Consulting, LLC

5 Things

Newsletter

Corley Caregiver Consulting, LLC

Hello friends and a warm welcome if you're new here!

We just passed Memorial Day so I think we can officially say summer is here! I'm so happy to be able to emerge from a winter cocoon and into the warmth and sunshine!

As with every newsletter, I'm back again to share 5 things that have helped me on my caregiving journey over the past month. I do this in the hopes one of them will be a golden nugget of help, support or entertainment for you in your own journey.

I invite you to email me if you have found resources, routines or ideas that work for you. I'd love to include them. My goal is to make this newsletter more than just a one way communication. I believe we all have something to learn from each other.

Now on to our 5 Things for this month!

---

1. Instant Pot and Pinterest to the rescue!

As caregivers, by the end of the day we’re tired. It’s quite possible you start the day exhausted. By the time dinner rolls around the last thing you have energy for is cooking. I say this from personal experience.

I’ve been in a position where I worked 40 hours a week and provided care for 2 people in my family. It’s a lot. Often too much. I found the first thing to go were my eating habits. Quick and easy was all I had energy for and that quickly effected my overall quality of health and energy. Not only did it affect my own health, but it directly affected my caree's health as well. It's a ripple effect.

I realized, for me, cooking wasn't the issue really. It was coming up with the idea. Once I had a plan, I could move forward much easier. It look a bit of planning in some cases (remembering to thaw meat ahead of time), but I had direction and could just follow through.

The other thing I experienced was "recipe boredom" as I call it. I felt like I always fell into a rut of cooking the same things because they were quick and easy.

One day when I had a bit more bandwidth for brain power, I explored Pinterest. It changed everything for me! My goal with it has always been to find healthy, easy recipes that use common ingredients. I don't have interest in rare ingredients or spices. I need simple!

Fast forward to earlier this year, and we find my discovery of the Instant Pot. To say it's been life changing for us would be an understatement. Intimidating at first, yes, but recipe boredom no more! Frozen chicken to fully cooked meal in an hour! I'm still in awe of it.

I'm likely a bit late to the party on this one, but I'm sure I'm not alone. All in one pot cooking, press a button, set the timer, and let it do it's magic. How have I lived this long without it!

Again, as a caregiver, simple is better, but healthy eating is the utmost importance to keep everything and everyone is top working order.

I've been collecting my favorite Pinterest recipes and wanted to share them with you. Below are links to my Recipe Keepers for the Instant Pot, main courses that use traditional cooking methods and meatless options. We choose to eat meatless one day per week and Pinterest has been an integral part in us moving beyond macaroni and cheese or tuna.

Recipe Keepers - Instant Pot

Recipe Keepers - Main Course

Recipe Keepers - Meatless

Feel free to check them out! Reply to this email and let me know if you find any you enjoy!

2. Book Recommendation

I have a friend who loves Legos. I mean to her core LOVES them. They help her stay tapped into her inner child. She’s been obsessed with them since childhood. As an adult, she’s taken that love of Legos and channeled it into a therapeutic method of play for helping caregivers communicate with loved ones experiencing the effects of Alzheimer’s and dementia. She’s been a caregiver herself in many different forms and has used this method of play and seen the results!

The book is titled Brick by Brick Bonding.

Foreword by LORETTA VENEY
Author of *Being My Mom's Mom*

BRICK BY
BRICK
BONDING
TOOLS FOR FAMILY CARE

BONDING ACTIVITIES FOR SENIORS
LIVING WITH ALZHEIMER'S AND DEMENTIA
AND THEIR CARE PARTNERS

PATTY SHERIN AND LAURA HERMAN

It’s a simple and easy read with nuggets of great ideas on every page. If you, or someone you know, is caring for someone diagnosed with Alzheimer’s or dementia, I encourage you to check out her book for simple ideas on connecting and staying connected through play.

I truly believe the power and benefits of play cannot be underestimated. From the benefits on the brain to memories, laughs and connections you make through it, it’s a powerful tool we could all use more of in our life.

3. Mighty Networks - Caring Our Way

I’ve been connected to a great caregiver site for a few years. It’s a group called Caring Our Way on the Mighty Networks platform.

If you’re unfamiliar with Mighty Networks, it’s a site where communities are built and members can have conversations, watch live or recorded events, etc. It’s somewhat like Facebook and yet much less noise.

Caregivers from all backgrounds can connect over different topics and share their stories or experiences. Frankly, if you're not comfortable sharing your personal experiences, it's a great place to read others' stories and find the connections we all have to each other as caregivers regardless of the specifics in your story.

The group is run by Denise Brown, who's been working with family caregivers since 1990. It's free to join and you can visit the site as often or infrequently as you want. I highly encourage you to check it out. Denise posts thought provoking questions for reflection and discussion - many have been things I've never considered of thought about. Conversations happen within the group via commenting like you would on Facebook so it offers a level of privacy for those who need it. She also offers live events each month on a range of topics.

If you'd like to check it out, click the link below.

Mighty Networks - Caring Our Way

It's free to join and you don't actively have to participate. You can just watch conversations, if you prefer.

There's a simple comfort in being amongst kindred spirits. For those who haven't found those spirits in their life already, this is a great opportunity for connection.

4. "Pulling the Thread"

We've all done it….pulled that small piece of thread sticking out on a piece of clothing and watched it unravel everything above it. It's a bit like watching dominoes fall. It all starts with that piece of string, that when pulled, starts a chain of events.

I coined this phrase in my own caregiving experiences when it comes to information and resource finding. I have a problem. I need a solution and yet I have no idea where to start.

I use this idea ALL…THE…TIME. I'll give you an example.

My Mom was diagnosed with breast cancer many years ago. Thankfully caught very early and she's officially cancer free. That makes mammograms especially important for my sister and I. My sister, being developmentally disabled, makes a typical mammogram a challenge. Until recently, we had relied on breast ultrasounds as a diagnostic tool. Not as accurate as a mammogram, but certainly better than nothing. Given the type of cancer my Mom had, the ultrasound would not have detected it until it was much farther advanced, so we knew we had to figure out a solution to getting my sister a mammogram.

For the developmentally disabled population finding medical providers with experience or the ability to work with their disabilities is a huge challenge. In many cases, it’s virtually impossible so we knew this would be an uphill challenge.

So what was my thought process with this? What was the small thread I pulled?

I knew she needed a mammogram.
Who might have an idea? My OBGYN was a good place to start. This was my thread!

I asked him for suggestions or advice and he asked his staff to start checking with their connections. After a week or so, they connected us to a hospital system about 40 minutes from us. That mammography office gave us a large appointment slot at the end of their day, 2 technicians to help and the patience to take as many images as we needed to get something that would be deemed diagnostic and clear enough. In the end, she officially had her first mammogram!

That’s just a simple example of “pulling the thread”. Some circumstances for me have involved asking one person, who then either refers me elsewhere or offers a phrase or idea that I can then work from. It’s like detective work really. My usual rule for times like these are:

- ask people you think might know. If they don’t, ask them if they know someone who might

- If you’re given a phrase, idea or medical term (depending on your question), Google it. I’ve learned new medical phrases or ideas, Googled them for a better understanding and have been gained new insight on questions to ask.

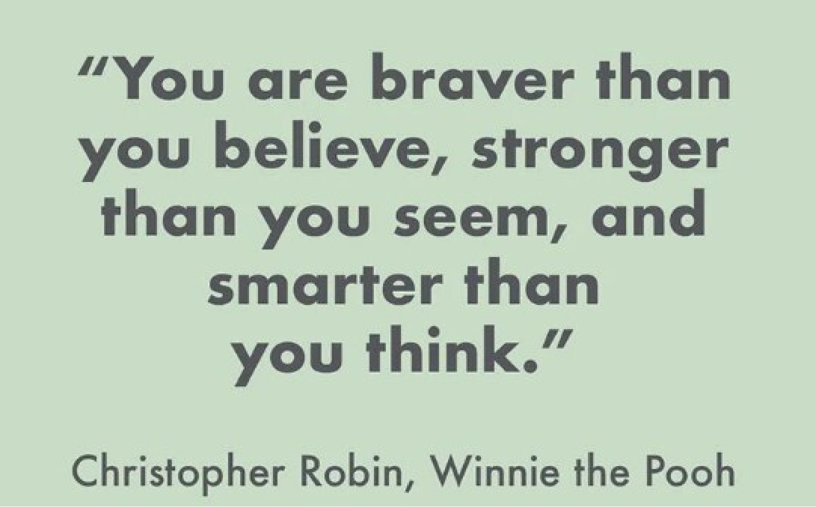
The trick with this is to keep asking questions, keep seeking ideas and don’t give up too soon. In reality, you might reach a dead end with your search. I know I have. The trick is to not stop asking until you get an honest sense you’ve run out of options. Even then, I keep my eyes and ears open. Just because I don’t have an idea or connection now, doesn’t mean I won’t cross paths with one.

A few months ago, we hit a wall with ideas on tackling my husband post concussive headaches. It was a hopeless moment for me because I’d kept looking and trying to find a solution for so long. Recently, a new direction came to light and we're cautiously optimistic we'll find an answer this time.

At this point, you might be thinking this all sounds great, but it sounds like a lot of work and I just don't have the energy. To that I say, I hear you. Caring, hoping, witnessing decline/struggle/pain are all exhausting and draining as caregivers. If a small glimmer of hope or fight remains in you then take this idea in small steps. You don't have to find an answer to your question in a day. It might take longer. I've found that simply making any progress on something that is weighing on me helps boost my energy and lightens my spirit because I feel less powerless with the situation.

It's truly all about regaining our sense of power. By regaining even a teaspoon of power, we regain hope and that's a power force for a caregiver.

5. Inspiring Quote



"You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think."

Christopher Robin, Winnie the Pooh

I think we can all agree we don't always feel capable or brave or strong.We can also be our own worst enemies when it comes to these insecurities. Our inner voice speaks harsher to us than any other person likely has.

This tends to happen because we are looking forward. Projecting our insecurities into our future. We are preparing the ground for our inabilities before we even arrive.

Regardless of the stage of caregiving you're in, these insecurities are there. New caregivers are insecure about their ability to provide care. Existing caregivers worry they'll have the strength to keep moving forward through the trenches.

I believe our best way to combat these feelings are not necessarily through positive self talk and optimism. While those are great coping strategies, sometimes those deeply held beliefs need something stronger to counteract them.

I believe the only way to truly strengthen our belief in our abilities is to look backwards. Reflect on what you've come through. Look for evidence that counters your negative beliefs in yourself.

Speaking from personal experience, I can tell you I put my head down, dig deep and just barrel through. I don't often linger in the details of the now. When I take time to reflect on an especially difficult period, that's when I can appreciate how I managed all the moving parts of that specific time; how we moved through that difficult period; how we coped; and how we survived.

What you discover will likely not be grand, fancy or earthshaking. It will be simple actions that made the difference.

In that reflection, you'll see:

- Moments when you were brave, possibly braver than you ever thought you could be.

- Moments when you were stronger at pushing through, moving forward, accepting what is, staying positive in a less than positive moment.

- Moments when you were smarter about navigating a situation with your caree, navigating the complex medical system, managing complex behaviors or emotions.

This can be challenging to do when looking back over a long period of time, but it's still possible and valuable to do.

As caregivers, we might not always get feedback, encouragement or the support we need from others. In those moments, I encourage you to consider looking inward and setting a daily, weekly or monthly practice to reflect on how far you've come in that time. What have you made it through, managed, accomplished, survived. Don't judge how you could have handled a situation better or done things differently. This is a chance to see things at face value and appreciate how you made it from point A to point B.

Our critical inner voices steal the joy we can find in a caregiving experience. It's likely one of the hardest things we'll ever do. It's in those difficult times when our beliefs, abilities, and strength are tested. It's also in those difficult times when we are stretched to new levels and grow in ways we might never have grown otherwise.

So I invite you to sit with this quote, because whether you believe it or not, you are a braver, stronger and smarter person because of your caregiving experience.

Ideas and Takeaways for the Month Ahead

- Break out of your normal cooking routine and try 1 new recipe. If you're like me, it will break you out of your cooking rut and add some much needed variety into meal planning.
- Introduce play into your week. Whatever

play looks like for you is OK.

- Carve out a few moments for reflection on how far you've come in your caregiving journey. Look for the ways you're braver, smarter and stronger than you normally tell yourself.

That's a wrap for this month, friends.

If one piece of information here supports, empowers, or makes you feel less alone in your caregiving journey, I am beyond thrilled.

As you implement any of the ideas, please share that with me. I'd love to hear from you! I certainly don't have all the answers, but together we get stronger and smarter.

If you know someone who would enjoy this newsletter, please share it! The more the merrier!

Also, if I can support you in your own caregiving journey, please message me. I'd love to hear your story.

I'm always here to remind you that you are not alone and you can do difficult things.

Wishing you peace in all that is and strength to keep you moving forward.

Barbara Corley, CCC
Certified Caregiver Consultant
hello@corleycaregiverconsulting.com