

An Interview with Funny Lady, Kathleen Passanisi

Q. What would you get if you combined Erma Bombeck, Lucille Ball, Lily Tomlin, Bill Cosby, Dilbert, King Solomon, and Mother Teresa?

KP. "Kathleen Passanisi Live!" or so I'm told . . . although I think the Mother Teresa part might be stretching it.

Q. Those are some pretty big shoes to fill. What's your professional background?

KP. I'm a licensed physical therapist with postgraduate training in Marriage and Family therapy. My experience in health care includes hands-on care, management, and clinical education. I've worked with people of all ages with all kinds of problems.

Q. Why did you leave health care?

KP. "You missed your calling. You should be on the stage." That's what people always told me when I worked in the hospital. I was the class clown in school and it carried over to my clinical practice. It was serious work but I always found a way to add a little laughter and fun. My intuition told me I'd eventually do something else with my life and a few life-changing events finally put it into motion.

Q. Did you always want to be a speaker?

KP. No, I wanted to be Carol Burnett but she beat me to it.

Q. How did you wind up speaking?

KP. I stayed home for several years after the birth of my daughter. I loved it, but I discovered that if you have time you have no money, and if you have money you have no time. I wanted a job that would give me both. I decided to create the perfect job for myself, although when I started I didn't have a clue what that would be.

Q. What were you looking for?

KP. I wanted a healthy, balanced life for my family and me. I wanted my work to be consistent with my values. I wanted to be surrounded by interesting people, enhance my creativity, and be excited about what I do. I've always been a big believer in combining business and pleasure, so I had a feeling humor would be involved.

Q. Were you able to pull that off?

KP. Yes. I'm very fortunate because my work as a speaker integrates all the pieces of my life: health care professional + educator + class clown. Every meeting provides a new great bunch of people and a new (sometimes great) place. My office staff, family, and I love making the most of my travels!

Q. What is NEW PERSPECTIVES?

KP. New Perspectives is the company I founded in 1987 to foster my dream. We seek to address issues in wellness, life balance, stress management, and the link that exists between humor and health.

Q. Why did you name your company NEW PERSPECTIVES?

KP. It's been estimated that 75-90% of doctor visits are stress related. It stands to reason that learning to manage stress effectively would have a major impact on our well-being. *But how?*

Most stress is self-inflicted and it's usually based on choice. How we *choose* to see things is the first step in determining how we think, feel, and behave. If we choose to see traffic as a major pain in neck we will think about how inconvenienced we are. We will feel frustrated, out of control, and will often behave negatively, ranging from fuming to road rage. My job is to teach people how to see things with a "new perspective" - a healthier one.

Q. What can your audiences expect to learn?

KP. They will begin to evaluate the quality of their lives and learn to make conscious choices that improve physical health, reduce emotional turmoil, enhance relationships, foster creativity, and make life's journey a lot more fun.

Q. What's the best compliment you receive after a program?

KP. "I feel like you've been looking over my shoulder for a month!" When I hear that I know I've done my homework, successfully tailored my material to fit their needs, and have given them something with lasting value.

Q. Who is your target audience?

KP. Anyone who still draws breath, although I prefer working with adults.

*Q. Your motto is "Optimism Guides * Humor Sustains." Can you explain that?*

KP. It means hope for and plan on the best that life has to offer, but use a little humor to keep you going when the road is a little bumpy.

Q. You talk about the "Sandwich Generation" a lot. What is that?

KP. It's a large group of people who are "sandwiched" between and caring for other generations. For example, taking care of kids and aging parents at the same time. Others wind up taking care of kids and grandkids or parents and grandparents. Those situations are referred to as "club sandwiches." It's especially tough when you think you're at a point in your life when you're looking forward to a little freedom.

Q. How can you help people in this situation?

KP. By changing perspectives, of course! Finding the humor in the situation is crucial. I am a strong advocate of finding others in the same boat with whom you can share a good laugh. I authored a chapter called "Rowing the Same Lifeboat - The Role of Humor in Friendship" that is a part of a book called *Humor Me*. I hope you'll read it if you're "sandwiched."