



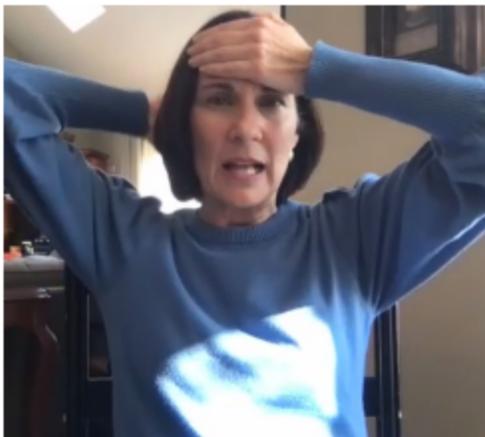
UMB News

Setting Boundaries, Exceeding Limits

March 23, 2021 | By Mary Therese Phelan

Self-care. Me time. Work-life balance.

Buzzwords women throw around to take a break from the spouse and kids?



Or, vitally important aspects of maintaining one's sanity in the midst of a pandemic year filled with long days of teleworking, home schooling, and social isolation?

According to a powerhouse lineup of speakers participating in the March 9 Women's History Month virtual symposium "The Myth of Balance or The Art of Being Unbalanced," it's the latter, and we are all a little weary.

"What a year it has been to celebrate and understand the role and

Allison Morgan, MA, OTR, E-RY, demonstrates a mindfulness exercise during the UMBrella Group's Women's History Month Symposium on March 9. Morgan, founder and chief executive officer of Zensational Kids, an educational company bringing evidence-based yoga and mindfulness practices to school communities, spoke on

"Filling Your Cup So You Can Lift Others Up."

importance of women in our society," said University of

Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) President **Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS**, as he welcomed more than 300 registrants to the forum sponsored by [the UMBrella Group: UMB Roundtable on Empowerment in Leadership and Leveraging Aspirations](#). "And certainly, along with that, to recognize the profoundly harmful effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for working women."

Since February 2020, nearly 2.5 million women had exited the workforce, half a million more than men, Jarrell said, quoting a recent article he had read. "That impact has been even greater for Black, Latino, and Indigenous women who already have been faced with intersecting oppressions as well."

Significantly more women than men also have reduced work hours or left work to care for children and spent more time on education and household tasks.

"But whether COVID is here today or after we are past the COVID crisis and back to some routine, UMB will need to evolve as well," Jarrell said. "And I want to underscore to all of you that UMB needs to evolve to become a place that is even more family-friendly ... where your concerns get heard, where your suggestions for improvement also get heard, and where our policies, practices and priorities incorporate your suggestions to the greatest extent possible."

Founded in 2014 by **Jennifer B. Litchman, MA**, senior vice president of external affairs and special assistant to the president, UMBrella works to support the success of women and those who identify as women at UMB by helping them achieve their personal and professional goals, enhancing their leadership skills, and championing women at all levels of the organization.

"We're here today because we're seeking balance in our lives," Litchman said as she welcomed attendees. "We're trying to balance our personal lives with our professional lives, trying to balance taking care of our children, our pets, and perhaps even our parents while at the same time taking care of ourselves."

She noted how flight attendants always instruct people to put their own oxygen masks on first before helping others.

"Do we ever really do that? Do we ever think of ourselves before we think of others?" she asked. "Is balance just a myth, or is there an art to being unbalanced? We'll explore all of this today."

Women typically fail when it comes to taking care of themselves, said morning keynote speaker **Pamela Peeke, MD, MPH, FACP, FACSM**, an adjunct assistant professor of family medicine at the University of Maryland School of Medicine (UMSOM), Pew Foundation Scholar in Nutrition and Metabolism, and fellow of the American College of Physicians and the American College of Sports Medicine. *(See keynote video below.)*

"Since this is Women's History Month, I'm going to give a shout out in a major way to women who get an F-minus in taking care of themselves most of the time and instead take care of anyone who comes within 100 feet of them, even if they don't know them," Peeke said. "It's about time to do the self-care thing and then celebrate whatever happens after that."

Research shows that people who are most successful in life are those who prioritize a healthy lifestyle, a key component to self-care, said Peeke. A morning routine of gratitude, affirmations, and exercise sets her on the path to a successful day.

A Different World

From working in an operating room where only male doctors were equipped with scrubs while female doctors were required to wear dresses, to having a young male flower shop employee ask her "Where is Dr. Peeke?" as he stood right in front of her, women are still not on a level playing field, she said. Despite lacking any female mentors during her medical training, she refused to be discouraged.

“I lived in a world that was a bit different, but that was OK, you know why? I’m resilient. I’m resilient, and I would say to myself, ‘Well, OK, you know, if things aren’t exactly ideal for me right now, can I find the little openings in the gaps and make it work for myself? Can I do that?’ Of course, I could, and I usually did it on a routine basis.”

She cited “The Obstacle Is the Way: The Timeless Art of Turning Trials into Triumph,” by Ryan Holiday, as a must-read book for women who want to learn the lessons of what it means to overcome roadblocks on their career paths.

“Why run from obstacles? I run into them,” Peeke said. “It’s the ability to say, ‘Bring it on.’ That level of courage is going to get you where you need to go.”

Still, it’s OK to have bad days when one may feel a need to turn to a pint of ice cream and Netflix for solace, she added.

“We all have days where we face-plant. But get up. Get up and regroup again. That regrouping is what characterizes you as successful in life,” Peeke said. “You cannot be resilient at all if you don’t take care of yourself. Self-care is absolutely central or core to your ability to be able to achieve any objective and goal in life.”

Stepping Back, Moving Forward

DeRionne Pollard, PhD, MA, the president of Montgomery College, painted a similar picture in her afternoon keynote as she shared her story about striving for balance in the demanding world of higher education leadership and her journey back to the office after a life-changing six-month sabbatical.

“Any of you who struggled in the world of professional life and parenting or family care know that these latter roles are oftentimes more taxing than any of us even really acknowledge,” said Pollard. “The other ones don’t end at 5 p.m., and they don’t shut down on weekends.”

The number of women who have exited the workforce during the pandemic because of the demands of working while homeschooling raises important questions about income inequality and gender that will be debated for a long time, Pollard said. “But there are some issues facing us right now that are very unique to this COVID moment and I think create some true challenges to the idea — or maybe I say the ideal — of balance.”

Answering a need to find her own sense of balance, Pollard took a six-month sabbatical in 2019 that ended in January 2020.

“After eight years as the college president, I needed to regroup and reassess,” she said. “When I took this timeout, I did it with a plan for some inward looking and discovered that I really wanted to come back refreshed but I also wanted to be able to show up differently. I wanted to be more authentic.”

A few months into her role as college president, a predecessor offered a bit of advice: “If you want to be able to do this job for some time, you’re going to have to teach the college and the community how to treat you. But more importantly, you’re going to have to learn how to treat yourself.”

It took decades for Pollard to learn a critical lesson: Serious self-care was the only thing that was going to allow her to continue her work of serving others.

During her sabbatical, she began a daily meditation practice that she continues. She hired a personal trainer and a dietitian and addressed medical issues with her physician.

“My health was not at the level that I knew that it should be. It was compromising my ability to do my work as well as I wanted to,” she said.

Confronting challenges in herself and working through them during this period of being away from academia led her to develop a series of recommendations:

Live simply.

Give more.

Expect less.

Free your mind from worry.

Free yourself from hatred.

“Now, I can’t say I do these every day. On a good day, I might hit three out of the five,” Pollard said.

Other speakers and breakout sessions included:

Kelli Bethel PT, DPT, a physical therapist, certified yoga therapist, and registered yoga instructor who works at UMSOM’s Center for Integrative Medicine, speaking on “You! The Captain of Your Health and Wellness.”

Isabel Rambob, DDS, clinical assistant professor in the Department of Neural and Pain Sciences at the University of Maryland School of Dentistry (UMSOD) and a member of UMBrella’s advisory board, speaking on “Self-Awareness, Well-Being, and Professional Success: Finding the Balance.”

Liz O’Donnell, award-winning author and the founder of Working Daughter, an online community for women balancing elder care, children, and career, speaking on “Life in the Sandwich: How to Care for Children, Aging Parents, and You!”

Beth Rosenwald, managing director and branch director, senior consulting group, Rosenwald Team in Baltimore, an RBC Wealth Management firm, speaking on “Financial Wellness: Plan Today for the Tomorrow You Envision.”

Mai Trinh, MS, founder of Mai Health Now, which helps busy individuals learn how to boost their energy so they can be healthier, happier, and more productive, speaking on “Recognizing and Coping with Stressful Triggers.”

Allison Morgan, MA, OTR, E-RYT, founder and chief executive officer of Zensational Kids, an educational company bringing evidence-based yoga and mindfulness practices to school communities worldwide, speaking on “Filling Your Cup So You Can Lift Others Up.”

In an ongoing effort to shine light on talented and dedicated UMB employees, UMBrella announced its inaugural awards to recognize the contributions made by individuals who espouse the mission and goals of the group. The inaugural winners, announced by Juliet Dickerson, MS, interim associate vice president, Human Resource Services:

UMBrella Person of the Year — On the Rise: Michele Ondra, MBA, MS, director, administration and operations, University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law

UMBrella Person of the Year — Leading the Way: Isabel Rambob, DDS, clinical assistant professor, Department of Neural and Pain Sciences, UMSOD

UMBrella Champion of the Year: Cherita Adams, MBA, MS, assistant dean for administration and strategic initiatives, University of Maryland School of Social Work

Despite the virtual format, attendees did not miss out on the networking opportunities afforded at live Women’s History Month forums in the past, thanks to informal virtual breakout sessions at the end of the day to mingle and share lessons learned.

“I’m going to set some time for myself,” said **Davene Hinton**, a UMSOM administrative assistant. “And put boundaries around it to protect it.”

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