



MISE EN PLACE

The First Hundred Years Are the Hardest!

By Ann Michael Henry

That was one of my mother's favorite expressions. A working mom who managed the house, coordinated family gatherings, and was the quintessential matriarch of her extended family; she seemed to be always working. "The first hundred years are the hardest" was usually sighed at the end of a very long day, generally moments after something went wrong, delaying her ability to sit down, put her feet up, and read the evening paper – her favorite way to end the day. Sadly, she lived to only age 83.

As a child, I remember thinking, why does it have to be so hard? I never understood that. Yes, my parents grew up in the Depression. Yes, they were both first-generation Americans born to immigrant parents. Was it the expectation that they had to work hard? Or, was it that they knew what it was like not to have enough wood for the wood stove to keep the house warm or not have meat on the table for days on end? My dad had to drop out of high school mere weeks before graduation to join the Civilian Conservation Corps so that he could send money home to the family.

So when I was growing up, was life that hard? We were a classic middle-class American family. My parents had jobs, we had a family car, we were first in the neighborhood to get a television with remote control (my dad was a gadget person). As new things came along – dishwashers, blenders, electric can openers – they were gradually acquired as the budget allowed. So why did my mother think that life was so hard?

The answer is, I really do not know. What I do know is that her actions greatly influenced me and what would ultimately become my life's work. The reality is, I do not want to wait 100 years for life to be easier! As I look around at today's business environment it reminds me very much of my mother – work, work, work – the 24/7 mentality. Always busy and forever fussing that we just can't seem to get everything done. That is when I start thinking, "Does it all *have* to be done? Can it be done more easily?"

In his book *The 80/20 Principle – The Secret to Success by Achieving More with Less*, Richard Koch asserts that we are absolutely "awash with time." The book illustrates how we can achieve much more with much less effort, less time, and fewer resources, simply by identifying and focusing our efforts on the 20 percent that really counts. By doing so, we can unlock the enormous potential of that magic 20% and transform our effectiveness in our jobs, our careers, our businesses, and our lives.

Several years ago, after I had become a mom myself, my parents would regularly visit. One day while we were sitting at the kitchen table, my mother looked up at me and said, "You know, I've learned some things from you." We had been having a conversation about doing something easier. I don't remember exactly what it was we were talking about, but I remember her acknowledging that there are easier ways to do things and that that is ok.

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