

KAREN SANDS >

MY STORY

ABOUT KAREN

My whole life I've been a visionary game changer.

There's a reason for that: In 1973, my mom phoned to tell me that she had driven into a tollbooth . . . head on. When I asked her why, she told me that the voices on the radio had told her to do it. That moment defined a stark, new reality for us. I could no longer deny that my mom's Alzheimer's was full-blown. There was no retrieving her. She was only 59!

After 36 years as a mother and housewife, she had just started to work. She never got to find her voice. She never got to blow her horn. Her life was never fully lived.

There was no way I was going to end up that way.
I wasn't going to feel invisible, useless, or go quietly into the night.

I was just 28. But in that moment, I made up my mind that—if I, too only had a limited time—I wanted to know what it would take for me to become a woman with a voice, a woman whose life had *meaning*; a woman full of passion, purpose, and possibility. Regardless of my age.

The loss of my mother redefined me. And it completely altered the trajectory of my life from then on. Nothing was going to

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prevent me from using my voice and blowing my horn every day for the rest of my life. Nothing.

This is how new stories are born.

Before my mother succumbed to the ravages of Alzheimer's, I saw a need for us, as women, to raise our consciousness, tap into our unrealized potential, and change the story of who we are at every age and every stage.

I'd just started my own non-profit organization: a women's center. And this was at a time when women were expected to become teachers, nurses, or stay-at-home mothers. The center was women-led, women-run, women-staffed, and women-centered. *This was where I first became a career counselor and life planner.*

My driving mission? To bring women back into the workforce on their own terms. I was determined to help them take their rightful seat at the table—be that in the kitchen or the boardroom.

There was no chance of me sitting at home wearing a Chenille robe with curlers in my hair, sipping a cocktail at 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

I wanted to be everything I could possibly be in this lifetime.

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Ultimately, I turned consultant for other (similar) centers, launched another business, in jewelry this time (because . . . why not?), and later found my place in Corporate America at a major financial services company amidst a grueling custody case spanning two continents.

That meant I rose to the top very, very fast. Anointed the first “intrapreneur” and “leader of the new breed” by the company president, I broke every status quo rule in the company and made new records in the marketing of retirement services and pensions in the company—and the industry.

I trained with some of the best of business and leadership gurus and forward thinkers in the country (maybe even the world) during that time—Peter Senge, Werner Erhardt, Nelson Broms, Marshal Thurber, and others—and have continued to do so since with the likes of Dr. W. Edwards Deming, godfather of the continuous quality improvement movement.

Over the years, I was nicknamed the “Velvet Whip” and “Age Maven” as I developed my visionary leadership skills as a futurist and startup and turnaround expert.

I led the call for private retirement planning for high net-worth clients and firms; trained, educated, and led thousands of professionals, NASD advisors, and experienced agents to enter the small and mid-sized business market to market and sell complex retirement services and employee benefit programs.

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After one success after another, I realized my dream of turning around and leading a stand-alone business serving the affinity market of professional associations which few in the industry had mastered. To do so, I pioneered the marketing and sales of advanced retirement products using an elite team of NASD professionals. I trained this team using accelerated learning methods, so that they rapidly became highly skilled knowledge workers who could sell direct via telemarketing and direct-response marketing.

But that's not all. Because I also had the incredible opportunity to hire, train and lead executives and team members in new conscious intrapreneurial models. These models integrated leading-edge, employee- and customer-centric ways of conducting business while contributing to the bottom-line. They also enabled us to accurately forecast high-impact trend after high-impact trend.

My corporate career is where I first immersed myself in studying and honing my foresight about the future. I truly became a futurist, in every sense of the word—studying the future of aging, retirement, women as they age, organizational change and transformation, visionary leadership, you name it.

Until one day, about 10 years in, when I found myself sitting at my fuchsia-enameled desk with brass trim (I had all the accouterments in that corner office), thinking, “*What am I doing here?*”

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I was carrying home a big, overstuffed briefcase every night and every weekend, wasn't spending enough time with my kids, and was your typical honcho female—addicted to working too hard. But that wasn't what I'd signed up for.

So, I voluntarily resigned. And the timing couldn't have been better. An ugly takeover was in play, in ways that just didn't sit well with me.

Over time, I began coaching again, long before it became a “thing”. In fact, I was one of the coaching industry's pioneers. I coached executive women, women in transition, entrepreneurs. **Women who were struggling to fulfill their potential—despite being exceptionally talented, and exceptionally brave.**

That helped me get the message loud and clear that it was time to bring the idea of Agelessness to the surface. Because far from being over-the-hill, irrelevant, invisible, or no longer important, I wanted to let women (and the evolving men in our lives) know that their contribution was needed, that they had value, and that they could no longer allow their worth to be defined by how many candles they'd blown out on their last birthday.

In my early 40s myself, I returned to graduate school—the prestigious Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging & Longevity—to become an Educational Gerontologist specializing in Positive Aging and adult development (including creative living, positive aging and conscious aging). While I was there, I taught professionals about “Conscious Aging” (as I called it then) and

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armed myself with a postgraduate certificate in adult development and aging under the tutelage of Harry R. Moody, Ph.D., an Educational Gerontologist himself and an early pioneer when it came to the topic of Positive Aging.

But my curiosity was still not sated.

I had questions no amount of studying could address: the kinds of questions only older women visionaries could answer. Growing up, I'd had few role models of older women who'd made a difference. All I could conjure up was based on what I *didn't* want.

I began interviewing women in their 60s, 70s, 80s, and beyond, seeking answers and guidance to share with other women who were asking the same questions I was asking. My research became the basis for one of my most popular books, [Visionaries Have Wrinkles](#).

I also returned to **my lifelong role as a social entrepreneur and visionary pathfinder**, offering my services as a deeply transformational and results-oriented master coach and mentor for visionary leaders-in-the-making—not to mention change makers, world shakers, audacious entrepreneurs, and conscious intrapreneurs.

And today, I'm realizing my destiny more than ever before: to **empower people to rock their AGE**; to help women especially, and the men that love them, to experience the power of Agelessness. And to shape a new story for our times.

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Deep in my bones, **I believe that visionaries do *indeed* have wrinkles**, and that older women will lead the way into the future, and to the leading edge of business, as innovative social entrepreneurs, change makers, leaders, and discerning, high-value consumers.

I've written more books, in the past few years . . .

I speak. I coach. I consult. I facilitate and educate.

But most of all, I *care*. I care about how we, as human beings, show up in the world—regardless of our age or gender or life so far. I *care* about those people who believe that it's too late for them or that their time has passed.

I care because I want to tell them the truth: that it is possible to rock your AGE at any stage in life, and that the future is 100% theirs for the taking.