

## Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

**Dear Kathleen,**

**My mother is an eighty-eight year-old widow. She's in generally good health and lives on her own, but her eyesight is not what it used to be, and she no longer drives. In spite of the fact that I have two brothers who live in our same town, I run all the errands for mom, including at least one doctor's appointment each week, and numerous trips to the grocery store and bank. I balance mom's checkbook and spend time visiting with her. Since I work out of my home and my brothers have regular jobs, they seem to think that I have all the time in the world. But I don't. I'm a freelance software designer with lots of deadlines. I love my mother and want to do my share – and even more – but I feel like I'm bearing the whole responsibility for helping her, and giving emotional support. My brothers call or visit her only every few weeks. We've had family discussions about the situation and they agree to do more, but nothing ever changes. I'm getting worn out.**

**-- Barbara**

Dear Barbara,

It's time for another family discussion, since the ones you've already had didn't do the trick. It is not reasonable or fair for you to shoulder all of the responsibility for helping your mother. But you already know that, and, based on your past family meetings, your brothers seem to know it too, if only in principle. The job now is to put that awareness into action.

Sit down with your brothers and make it very clear that things have to change. Personally, I would comment on the fact that you've had these discussions in the past but that things quickly revert to the same old same old. I'm not defending these guys, but you seem very competent at doing everything, and it becomes easy to just let you do it. Let them know that it is time for a change.

Together, make a list of all the tasks that are required to help your mom live a quality life. Write these things down, and make agreements about who will be responsible for what. I wouldn't hesitate to have everyone sign this list as a tangible commitment to individual responsibility.

Because you work from home, your schedule may be more flexible than those of your brothers. It might make sense that you would do more of the shuttling around during work hours for things like doctor's appointments or trips to the bank. When you do this, do it lovingly and appreciate these opportunities to spend time with your mother. But there's no reason that your brothers can't take charge of the checkbook, stop by the grocery store on the way home from work, or make time to visit with her. These chores can easily fit into a more traditional nine-to-five work schedule.

It's sad that your brothers haven't opened their eyes to the fact that your mother is aging, and will not be here forever. No matter how busy their lives may be, it will be enriching for them – and for your mother – to make her a priority in their lives. They don't seem to realize how lucky they are to still have their mother around at her age. It

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will be too late to decide to be actively involved in her life and help her out when she's gone. But regardless of whether they "get" this or not, you will have to insist that they do their share. Be firm and assertive and don't back down if they give you excuses or reasons about why they can't contribute more. It doesn't take a great deal of effort to stop by for a cup of coffee with your mother, make a phone call, or ask her if there's anything she needs. Those are clear ways of showing love and respect. I hope they figure this out before it's too late.

Send your personal coaching questions to [kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com](mailto:kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com) or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2003 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at [www.fullpotentialliving.com](http://www.fullpotentialliving.com).