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**CHERI
 BRITTON**

AND THE ANTI-POLLYANNA WAY
 TO BREAK OUT OF OLD MINDSETS

BY JONNA RAE BARTGES

PHOTO BY MAX POPPERS

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*"You cannot solve a problem with
 the same mind that created it."*
 ~ Albert Einstein

You know the feeling
 – work is going all
 right, you're reasonably
 comfortable in your
 relationship with your significant
 other, family communication is
 happening on a relatively regular
 basis, and while not perfect, your
 health is OK, too. All the important
 areas of your routine seem right
 about average.

But then, "life" happens.

This reality that was fitting you like
 a comfortable old shoe begins to
 pinch a bit. You're passed over for
 that anticipated promotion. You
 and your spouse start to bicker

over minor stuff. The kids seem
 to have sprouted horns and fangs
 overnight. And those favorite
 pants shrank in the dryer. Again.
 (Damn dryer!!!)

Suddenly your life is not OK, and
 you realize, in hindsight, you have
 "settled" for an average existence
 while your unpursued dreams are
 burning a hole in your heart.

The wonderful thing about
 reaching this state of mental,
 physical and/or spiritual pain is
 now you're motivated to shift
 things around, to flush out the
 gunk that's holding you back and
 to reclaim your passion for life.

That's the science behind BOOM
 Thinking, the brainchild of
 Asheville speaker/writer/coach/
 catalyst Cheri Britton, M.Ed.
 (**boomthinking.com**)

One would think that the
 powerhouse of a businesswoman
 who has connected and nourished
 hundreds upon thousands of
 western North Carolina colleagues
 would be a bit intimidating. Cheri
 is the first person to indulge in
 good-natured self-deprecation.

"I used to think that to be a
 motivational speaker you had to
 wear a uniform of pumps and
 pearls," Cheri confides, curled up
 on her pillow-strewn sofa in her
 chic west Asheville bungalow.
 "Look at me!" she laughs,
 gesturing to herself, comfortably
 clad in jeans and toe rings. "The
 last time hose touched these legs
 was when I bumped against the
 garden sprinkler! Thank goodness
 I got over that old mindset."

Thank goodness, indeed!

Cheri's BOOM Thinking is a flavor
 of business and life inspirational
 coaching with attitude. BOOM,
 an acronym for "Break Out of Old
 Mindsets," challenges people to
 point a discriminating finger at
 what's not working in their lives,
 figure out how this behavior or
 idea benefitted them in the first
 place, blow it up, then rethink their
 options, creating a positive, self-
 empowering shift in the process.

She hosts BOOM Thinking
 luncheons, which bring together
 area business women to get
 connected, inspired and excited
 about the idea of tackling the
 things in their lives that just
 aren't rocking their world. She
 challenges corporate groups to
 sacrifice mediocrity for passion
 and excellence. She coaches
 individuals and groups in the step-
 by-step introspective process that
 blasts them into a new reality, and
 writes a regular business column
 for the Asheville Citizen-Times.

Yes, there's positive psychology in the BOOM Thinking mix. But there's also a healthy serving of reality.

"Change isn't for sissies," Cheri cautions. "Shifting how you view and live your life is a painful, scary process. But if things aren't working for you, until you do shift, you're stuck. It's not a happy or fulfilling life, but at least you're familiar with it. You're ready to BOOM Think when you're in such intense discomfort that you can't get through another day with your sanity intact."

It's that unblinkingly honest self-assessment of where a person is, where they want to go, and why the heck they haven't already taken that journey between Points A and B that differentiates BOOM Thinking from the current slew of other motivational processes.

"I have great respect for The Secret," Cheri says. She's also a huge fan of the Abraham material, spiritual and inspirational wisdom delivered by Esther Hicks.

"In my own world, though," Cheri explains, "I say right up front – lasting change isn't instant or easy. You're going to experience some pain before you make it to your goal." BOOM Thinking is kind of an anti-Pollyanna approach because it makes you acknowledge all the nasty stuff before you can blast it out of your life. Cheri's also realistic about the fact that this shifting around of old beliefs and behaviors isn't a once-and-done thing.

"Come ON," she sighs, "let's be authentic here. It's taken you years to develop self-limiting behaviors. You're not going to just snap your fingers and have a whole new life. You've got to be willing to keep

working at it until the new positive behavior becomes the habit."

Cheri loves a good metaphor, and plugs one in. "Imagine that you have a wheelbarrow of stuff, and you're moving it from one place to another, the same two points, day after day. You've worn a groove in the path, and you don't even have to consciously think about where you're going – you just walk in that rut."

This metaphor accurately illustrates what's literally happening in the brain with repetitive behaviors or thinking patterns. You literally wear a groove into your brain, and continue to keep repeating that emotion, thought or behavior. When that rut just isn't comfortable for you anymore, you have to consciously push the wheelbarrow – and your brain – out of the well-worn groove, and onto a new path.

Occasionally, this new path was not part of a person's original plan.

Mary Elizabeth Kingston, a talented Asheville architect, did a workshop with Cheri and laid out a detailed plan for her company. A year later, she sent Cheri a note to update her on her progress. "She'd accomplished all her key goals," Cheri said. "She and her husband bought a home within walking distance of work, so they were driving much less. She'd shifted to more environmentally friendly architectural projects, and enjoyed more quality time with her daughter. She thought she was trying to fix her business (kingston-architecture.com) but discovered she was actually trying to create a life that more accurately reflected her values. Now, she has both."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 36

"What part of you is hungry?"



Throughout her childhood and adolescence, Sunny Kruger was morbidly obese. Ironically, during college when she shed all the extra weight, even more serious problems surfaced. Remaining slim, she began a roller coaster ride of dysfunctional eating and related disorders—*anorexia/bulimia*, compulsive dieting, exercise addiction and an endless, distorted preoccupation with her appearance.

"Obesity is about starvation, not about food," says Sunny. "Typically, we who eat too much are folks who feed others—with food, with energy, with emotional support—while we starve. People with 20 pounds to lose often have the same issues as those with 120 pounds to lose. The clients I can help are those who have not yet been able to redeem their relationship with food."

Sunny developed Alliance for Weight Loss to help others find out what she learned the hard way: to find and maintain a healthy weight, all aspects of the self—mind/body/spirit—must be fully nourished and balanced. She combines her years in women's health and private counseling with her personal, intimate knowledge of what it takes to live a truly balanced and healthy life. She walks the path of healing with her clients. And she does so with love.

Alliance for Weight Loss is not psychotherapy. It is not a "One Size Fits All" diet. It is not a panacea. It is a down-to-earth, sensible, self-caring approach to obesity and food management issues that, to put it simply, can change and save lives.



Sunny Kruger
828-808-0850
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allianceforweightloss.com

"Effective teamwork is all about making a good, well-balanced salad not whipping individuals into a single batch of V8."

~ Sandra Richardson, OD Consultant

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~Julia Klein, owner, C.H. Briggs Hardware, Reading, PA

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

"Ginger Graziano, an Asheville designer and artist, took the Solopreneur class with me and (former business partner) Elizabeth Barbour," Cheri said. "Ginger wanted to see why her business had stalled, and discovered that she really desired to paint more, and nurture her artistic side. The ironic thing is that as soon as she got serious with her creative work, her business (gingergraziano.com) immediately blossomed, too."

Another woman heard Cheri speak at a retreat, did some deep BOOM Thinking about her life, and gradually lost 75 pounds.

While she's painfully honest about the fact that BOOM Thinking isn't an instant fix, Cheri's equally candid about the challenges she BOOMS in her own life on a daily basis.

"In our society, parents have their egos so tied up in what their kids are accomplishing – or not accomplishing," Cheri says. When she found out both her children (Sawyer, 13 and Noah, 7) had learning disabilities, she had to put her own ego aside and start seriously rethinking what good parenting was all about.

"I love my children to pieces – they're both magnificent, vibrant human beings who are perfect just the way they are," Cheri says. "Sometimes when my son's soccer team was running one way down the field, and Noah was running in the opposite direction, I needed to do a little more BOOM Thinking to remind myself that my kids don't need 'fixing,' because they're not broken. They're mavericks, and one day they just might be leading the herd."

Cheri also got to put her preaching into practice when her marriage of two decades recently dissolved.

"I had to break out of all my old mindsets about what it meant to be a single parent; to support myself; to create my own home. My entire life circumstances changed instantly, and every aspect of my world was impacted.

"Throughout the transition I was constantly asking myself, 'What are the things I hold to be true at this point in time? Do they really work for me?' When I suddenly became single, up pops this belief that I might not be able to pull it off. I might become destitute, shopping only at Goodwill and living in squalor. I knew I couldn't stay in that state of fear because what you dwell on literally becomes your reality.

"I immediately began to do what I teach others to do – I stopped and had a hard look at my life. Let me tell you, it was tough. I evaluated my strengths and vulnerabilities. I observed my emotions and behaviors. I consciously decided the shadowy, panicky feelings had to go, and I had to shift my temporary belief that my life was going to be all about scarcity and desperation."

Cheri actively applied BOOM Thinking to her divorce, and shifted her way through the pain and into a whole positive, happy new lifestyle. She and her ex maintain healthy communication, particularly about the kids, and she's loving her beautifully decorated, comfy-cozy home in the heart of west Asheville.

As Cheri's gutsy, gritty approach to personal and professional transformation continues to gather steam, she's fielding more requests

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for speaking, coaching and writing. She's on the roster, along with Jane Fonda, at the "Time for Our Power" Southeastern Women's Conference in Asheville in June (timeforourpower.com/bios.php; and see ad page 20). Cheri's also speaking at the May Mountain Biz Works '08 Women's Conference (mountainbizworks.org/calendar_event.php?id=25), and working on the final draft of her first book about the power of BOOM Thinking.

"The thing that makes all this feel so organic and wonderful to me," Cheri confides, "is this isn't something that came from a weekend workshop. BOOM thinking came from me facing huge challenges in my own life. I've been doing this process for decades, and just put the name to it a few years ago. I love that it's helping so many other women make powerful, positive shifts too."

Get a Sneak Peek!

(The following is an excerpt from Cheri Britton's upcoming book, whose working title is "BOOM Thinking: The Un-Pollyanna Way To Break Out of Old Mindsets," to be published in 2008.)

While I was so relieved to be bringing my work into focus, my own limiting mind had a field day. My merciless inner critic, who's waiting to meet you in Chapter Four, whispered in my ear, "Who are you to tell people how to break out of old mindsets when you're still struggling?"

At first the accusation stung, but as I BOOMED it, I understood its purpose.

YES, I'm still struggling with some limiting beliefs. For instance, some days I berate myself that I haven't fit into a size 4 since I got my clothes in the Macys Toddler section. But while I'm struggling with some emotional roadblocks, I've been quite successful with blowing many negative mindsets up and achieving numerous goals that have helped me help others.

In our society, we value pluckiness – the refusal to immediately say "Uncle!" even when it seems a sumo wrestler has us in a headlock. "Struggling but successful" works – look at venerable funny man Robin Williams, who always bounces back from box office bombs. (Did ANYONE see "License to Wed?") Katie Couric was bumped from an on-air reporting gig at CNN because her bosses decided "she wasn't ready for a big audience," and promptly claimed the top spot on The Today Show for 15 years (and many millions of dollars).

My personal favorite example of both BOOM Thinking, and "struggling but successful," is megastar Oprah Winfrey. This remarkable woman didn't fit society's stereotypical ideas of "beauty" when she launched her TV career as a reporter at the tender age of 19. Even after claiming her place in history as broadcasting pioneer, billionaire and master influencer of public opinion, she continues to struggle with her weight, being abused as a child, and most recently, sexual transgressions by one of the employees at her groundbreaking school for girls in Africa. Even though she called that revelation one of the most painful things she's ever endured, we know this magnificent woman immediately

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put on the brakes, observed how this could have happened, obliterated the old system that put a pedophile on the payroll, and created a new mindset, and a new policy, for hiring practices at the school.

We probably wouldn't love Oprah the way we do if she never suffered – it makes her human, and it

makes us cheer her successes all the more. We feel like she's real – she's one of us – she's had her share of knocks, but she refuses to stay down. She owns the bad, like chiding herself for the day she pulled a wagon of fat out on stage to celebrate that temporary weight

CONTINUED ON PAGE 38

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loss years back. Her authenticity and perseverance inspire and motivate us. When she suggests we read or try something, we're there.

The same way that Oprah has used the pain in her life to move forward, I believe the whole purpose of BOOM Thinking is to be realistic about what's not working for you, learn from it, and rework your life to eliminate the habits and behaviors that have, in the past, limited your success and happiness.

Exercise:

1. Take a piece of paper, and fold it in half vertically.
2. In the first column, make a list of the things you naturally do well.
3. In column 2, list the things you just can't help but do.
4. In column 3, list the things you feel passionate about.
5. In column 4, list all the things that truly give your life meaning.
6. Now, go back over all four lists and mark the overlaps. You will find some!

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Jonna Rae Bartges *makes words dance and consults for businesses, groups and individuals in the US and Canada.*
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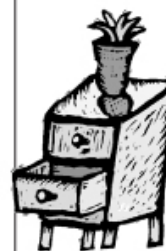


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*Center for Women's Business Research: cfwbr.org/facts/index.php