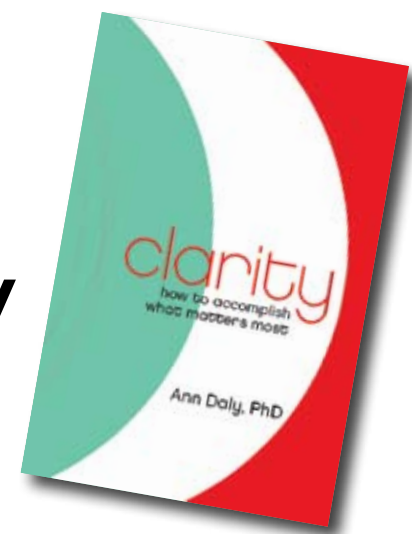


A Lifetime of Clarity

Author Ann Daly Teaches Women
How to Live Life in the Clear



Story by Chantal Outon | Photos Courtesy of Ann Daly

ON A BRIGHT AND STEAMY AUSTIN SUMMER morning, Ann Daly sinks into a cream-colored, leather sofa in the living room at the rear of her Hyde Park home. Sun floods through several large windows, bathing the room in soft, enchanting light. Daly, author of the newly published self-help book, *Clarity: How to Accomplish What Matters Most*, arranges herself on the couch, tucking one leg beneath her. Then she begins her confession. “Let me be clear. I love clarity because I’m lazy,” Daly says, letting loose her hallmark guffaw. “I’ve set up a system for myself and...it’s something that works well for me.”

Clearly, that’s the case. Despite embracing the more lackadaisical qualities of life, Daly has been diligent in her work; she spent only a few months writing her new book. It’s true, however, that it was a lifetime in the making.

Raised in New Jersey and Long Island, NY, Daly graduated from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, PA before seeking her Ph.D. from New York University. She began her professional life as a journalist – a job in which clarity is essential – and quickly worked her way up from intern at the *Pittsburg Press*, to a features writer and art critic specializing

in dance. After writing several books – one, about dance icon Isadora Duncan, the other, an anthology of her academic writings and articles for *The Village Voice* and the *The New York Times* – Daly ventured to Austin in 1989 to accept a teaching position at The University of Texas.

For 17 years, Daly, a tenured associate professor, taught dance history and cultural studies with an emphasis on women in the arts. But, in an oddly foreshadowing way, it was a moment of clarity that led Daly to resign her professorship in order to begin a full-time coaching and speaking career.

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Five Simple Steps to Attaining Clarity

Press Pause. This is the foundation for the other four steps. Set aside 15 minutes each day to “do nothing,” and reflect on what ideas surface.

Pay Attention. Observe your own thinking patterns, emotional themes and behavioral habits. Listen to yourself and check the judgment at the door.

Ask Questions. Clarity is an inquiry, and questions drive this self-inquiry. Questions reveal what's being ignored, lost or forgotten. By asking questions, your priorities will become transparent and powerful.

Ask More Questions. The price of clarity is being brutally honest with yourself, so ask the difficult questions. Also, be aware of and embrace the resistance that follows, because actively managing resistance will help prevent you from undermining your ambitions.

Write it Down. Writing is another way of making inquiries to yourself. Practice “freewriting” and keeping a “morning pages” journal. Writing can help you access your intuition and commit you to your intentions.

NOTE: Though these steps are simple, they require regular effort in order to reach and maintain clarity. More specific information is outlined in Ann Daly's book, *Clarity: How to Accomplish What Matters Most*.

“Like many of the women I coach, by mid-career, I had gone so long working on one thing,” Daly says. “It was time to grow, refresh and try new things. I felt that for a number of years I was ready for a new challenge.”

These days, Daly works one-on-one with her clients, most of whom are women, with the goal of empowering and inspiring them to embrace life.

“Helping women is my passion. I want to unleash the power of women, one woman at a time, so they can have an impact on the world,” Daly says. “In coaching, I feel a sense of impact myself, and a direct and immediate sense of helping someone improve their life. I've gotten hooked on that.”

It was in her coaching practice that Daly began more precisely peeling back the layers of the clarity onion. She started seeing patterns emerge while discussing work, life and family issues with her clients. She was then able to construct a system through which her clients (and now her readers) can explore their innermost thoughts and goals, and reach a level of clarity about how to proceed.

“Clarity is a way to connect with what's most important to you,” Daly says. “And it's so liberating. As women,

we're socialized to be people-pleasers and sacrifice our lives for others. It's a dangerous myth for women to take care of everyone else first. You have to take care of yourself first or you'll just burn out. Now there's this idea of freedom that more women are embracing. They're rethinking their values and priorities. And the payoff is that they're bringing so much more to the people and the world around us.”

Daly, a self-help reader from her high school days, has drawn from her own education and experiences in creating an earnest, practical and beneficial interpretation of the self-help book. *Clarity: How to Accomplish What Matters Most* provides five easy steps to attaining clarity, which Daly notes, is not a magical moment or outcome. Clarity, she says, is a process, a habit of mind that anyone can learn, given enough time and focus.

Furthermore, the process of attaining clarity can be applied to nearly any situation or issue, whether work, family life, illness, a particular project or a life-long goal. And the benefits are endless, Daly says.

“Living clearly lets us maintain a

See *LIFETIME OF CLARITY* on page 28

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sense of being grounded and calm instead of being reactive. Meeting the world with calmness and focus gives us more confidence in everything we do," she says. "And the outcome is that you accomplish what matters most. Clarity helps us keep our eyes on the prize."

But, she warns, individuals undertaking a journey to clarity should be prepared to face some challenges and make some difficult choices. Setting priorities, after all, can be painful. It's not easy to pull yourself away from your family to start a new business, for example, but it's something that must be done in order to fulfill a personal goal of becoming a small-business owner.

For newcomers joining the path to attaining clarity, Daly suggests doing nothing. Of course, it's a little more complicated than it sounds. When she says to "do nothing," Daly doesn't mean loaf around on the coach all day. She's encouraging her readers to take a direct and deliberate time-out for 15 minutes each and every day. Whether that takes the form of a peaceful walk, sitting quietly and reflecting, or working in

the garden, Daly says the key is to mentally check-in with yourself every day.

"If you're moving too quickly, the passing voice is blurry," Daly writes. "You'll never find, let alone maintain, clarity."

"Living clearly lets us maintain a sense of being grounded and calm instead of being reactive. Meeting the world with calmness and focus gives us more confidence in everything we do," she says. "And the outcome is that you accomplish what matters most. Clarity helps us keep our eyes on the prize."

Daly has an insatiable desire to continue learning herself. And she practices what she preaches, relying on her 15 minutes a day of doing nothing to maintain her sanity. Additionally, learning to pay attention to herself (step two), ask questions (step three) and write down her thoughts (step five) have become second nature in her own life.

"There's just no time to waste in life," Daly says. "If you do not care about what you want to accomplish, no one's going to do it for you. You've got to take action for yourself."

On Daly's own list of tasks to accomplish? Only one small chore.

"My mission is to change the world," she says matter-of-factly with her guffaw in tow. "But I believe that can happen by unleashing the power of women. Simply put: I'm on a mission to bring back ambition!" ★



Ann Daly, Ph.D.
Clarity: How to Accomplish What Matters Most

A Q+A with Ann Daly at BookWoman (12th + Lamar, 512.472.2785) Thursday, September 6th at 7 p.m. Free and open to the public Available at BookWoman and at www.AnnDaly.com 512.454.0531



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