

EASIER DAYS AHEAD

A successful entrepreneur tackles her biggest challenge yet: slowing down and taking care of herself

Elaine Tan Comeau has some advice for every busy woman out there: take care of yourself first. But Comeau admits she struggles to heed her own words of wisdom.

Last year, the busy entrepreneur, wife and mother of three waited 14 hours before seeking medical attention after suffering a stroke. The left side of her body stopped functioning, but somehow she cooked meals, worked, took her youngest to field hockey practice and put the kids to bed before going to the hospital. "I had my family to take care of, and business to take care of," she says.

Comeau has always focused on making other people's lives easier. When she worked as a schoolteacher, parents constantly asked her to create a visual daily routine for them, similar to the one she made for her classroom. After becoming a stay-at-home mom, it occurred to her that people might be willing to pay for the product she'd been giving away for years. Never one to go the easy route herself, she launched her company, Easy Daysies, a mere two days after her third child was born. The company's goal: to help kids and families have easier days. Easy Daysies magnetic schedules feature kid-friendly tasks such as Brush Teeth, Pack Backpack and Make Bed. Moving an item from the To Do side of the schedule to the Done side gives children a sense of accomplishment more powerful than "a sticker or a lollipop or a dollar."



+ WORDS BY SHERI RADFORD
+ PHOTOS BY ALFONSO ARNOLD

*Seen here, left to right, are: Ron, Elaine, Naomi
with Cookie Ninja Comeau, Abigail and Justin.*



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Having no idea how to mass-produce these schedules, Comeau searched the Internet. “Google was my best friend,” she says. “Google still is my best friend.” With her husband’s help, she got Easy Daysies up and running and worked on it from her kitchen table in Maple Ridge. “We had over 100,000 magnets in our home at one point,” she says with a laugh. “We had 11 four-by-four pallets. It looked like Costco.”

There was obviously a market for the magnetic schedules, because they began to sell briskly and win awards. She decided to pitch her product on *Dragons’ Den*. Again, she didn’t go the easy route, taking all three of her children onto the TV show with her. Right before walking onto the set, her four-year-old son squeezed her hand and said, “Mommy, I’m not scared of Dragons.” Comeau recalls, “I wanted to throw up on the spot,” adding, “It was the most nervous experience I’ve ever had — a mom going on with three children under the age of eight.”

But the risk was worth it: a bidding war broke out among the five *Dragons*, and Easy Daysies was later named one of the most heart-warming pitches in the show’s history. “It’s when you take a risk that you can grow,” Comeau says. “It’s pretty hard to be something if you just stand still.”

In addition to founding and running Easy Daysies, Comeau somehow made the time to start a podcast, become head of the BC chapter of *Momprenuers Canada*, and write a book called *Sell Your Passion*. She also launched a version of Easy Daysies for adults with memory loss, which came in handy after her stroke. “I ended up having to use my own product, which makes me want to laugh and cry at the same time.”

The medical emergency forced her to pause and focus on herself, especially since tests after the stroke showed it wasn’t her first one. “I have learned that there’s a very powerful word that I wasn’t good at using until this past year. That word is “no.” And it’s okay to say it.”

The stroke made her realize she needed to prioritize her health and her family. It made her accept that it’s okay to swallow her pride and ask for assistance sometimes: “It takes a very strong person to ask for help.” And it made her understand the importance of focusing on one task at a time. “We’re always so proud to show how much we can juggle. I have experienced that, where I feel like I’m juggling with one hand tied behind my back, because there’s so much going on. But it’s okay to drop balls.”

Comeau considers the stroke a blessing, because of all the valuable lessons that came with it, lessons she now feels compelled to share with other women. It's a word she uses often: blessing. She expresses gratitude for all the people and experiences in her life.

Comeau may be spending more time on her health and her family, but she still has big ambitions. In the fall, she's starting up *Elaine's Kitchen Table Podcast: The Business of Real Life again*, after taking a hiatus for recovery. She dreams about one day giving a TED Talk. Plus she's now a passionate spokesperson for the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, because she wants other people to learn from her story and her mistakes.

Can Comeau actually follow her own advice? She's certainly trying to, and part of taking care of herself is reminding herself not to multi-task. "Our children, our families, our friends, our loved ones will not remember our multi-tasking moments, but they do remember when we're single-tasking with them, whether it's having a face-to-face conversation, eating a meal together, or going bowling with our kids." 💡




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