

consultant. speaker. writer.

Cathy McCullough

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A photograph of Cathy McCullough, a woman with blonde hair and glasses, wearing a white shirt, a dark blazer, and white pants. She is sitting on a light-colored carpeted floor, leaning against a stack of books. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a dark wood-paneled wall.

Cathy McCullough

“No one is successful alone. All of us need people that believe in us and ask us to join them in life's walk.”

Cathy McCullough loves people. It's that simple. She loves talking deeply, sharing abundantly and laughing hysterically with people. Encouraging the human spirit profoundly is her first love and she's managed to blaze a trail into her world of work, allowing her to inspire business leaders of all sizes and in all sectors.

Most days, Cathy is plugged into a laptop writing about what she calls 'the people dilemma,' or critically thinking on the leadership crisis that organizations and nations are facing. Thinking leads to action as she works alongside leaders of organizations to provide crystal clear realities about their strategic intent.


Leading leaders is life and breath for McCullough. CEO of McCullough Group, her passion for teaching exudes. “Providing exceptional leadership perspectives to better understand and internalize

strategy, communication and corporate culture is an innate expertise McCullough shares poignantly with her audiences.

“All of us have personal power. It's funny, though, because many leaders I've worked with didn't know how easy it could be to get the results they wanted. It's a journey that impacts both the individual leader as well as every single person that leader encounters,” says McCullough. Over coffee recently, Cathy shared the joys and challenges of building a career where passion and people are at the core; where inspiring real relationships and transformation is paramount.

Where does your passion for what you do come from?

I think it comes from many things, beginning with being hard-wired for having a sense of determination. After determination though, I've always simply pursued my passions.



“Then I guess I won’t be going to the party.” That was my quiet expression of a rebellious spirit.”

For example, I love the world of design. I admire the intricate decision of each thread or raw material by a designer resulting in the end product. There’s great design and lackluster design.

Whether I’m talking to people wanting to start their own businesses or leaders desiring growth in viable companies, my goal is to help them see what they’re designing. And then...is their view of design the right one? Why or why not?

Secondly, I’m also a flower child from the 70’s era which brought (from my perspective) a sense of right and wrong about how to treat people. I’ve always been passionate about what I believe “should be.”

How did you end up working with CEOs and executive officers? Was this what you dreamed about doing?

Actually, when I was in college I had no idea I would be doing what I am doing today much less earning a living from it! I’ve always had varied interests; I get bored easily. But one constant interest is human behavior. It fascinated me. So, I majored in psychology and spent my graduate school years studying leadership and organization development. At one point I opened a very small specialty bakery, which led to invitations to serve on the Governor’s Conference for Small & Home-Based Business and a plethora of speaking engagements. Life’s path simply opened the opportunity to work with people wanting to live the American Dream and start their own businesses. As time passed, I began to work with executives of mid-size growth companies, leading me where I am today. I’m privileged to be able to help individuals and organizational leaders increase their personal impact. Letters and emails of validation keep me doing what I do. For instance, I received a handwritten note from a CEO in recent attendance. He verbalized his high regard for the day and his ability to share what he learned with others. It made my day.

What is it about leadership that fascinates you so much?

The decisions we make each day create defining moments. Executive coaching helps CEOs or key

leaders understand the business relevance of their decisions and their ensuing behaviors. With facilitative consultation, I can guide executive teams to design and clarify their own strategic intent. Speaking to large groups opens a window of understanding for those who want to grow and learn how their behaviors impact the overall productivity of their organizations. Leadership is all about increasing productivity. Productivity that directly impacts the bottom-line. Most leaders I work with really do want to understand a different definition of leadership. I mean, they're all doing incredible things--from starting small businesses to developing and growing companies in emerging markets. Literally, I get to work with truly amazing people.

one of my classes, and I simply felt compelled to get to know her. I got a call later that night from a good friend to say, "Okay...you can't keep sitting by certain people at lunch or on the bus. Otherwise, you won't get invited to so and so's birthday party next month. I just thought you should know; I mean, it's just not cool, Cathy." All these years later, I still remember that conversation. And I remember my response: "Then I guess I won't be going to the party." That was my quiet expression of a rebellious spirit. All in all, I've just always thought people should be treated fairly, with dignity and respect.

You're fairly independent minded. Has that been persistent throughout your life as well?

In reality...yes. But I had to grow into the confidence needed to recognize my independence. In actuality, I've always been a bit of an oddball, if you will. I think I learned about independence first from my mother. From the time I was about three years old, she was a single parent. It was just her and me. I watched her work...and work hard...so I could have art classes, piano lessons, and ballet lessons. My interests have always been varied, and she encouraged me to get involved.

"I'm leaving this presentation determined to do what I should have done fifteen years and three children ago: I'm going to start my own business." To this day, I hold that in my heart.



So you were a bit rebellious in your teen years?

Yes...but I was rebellious in spirit. I wasn't rebellious in the sense that I was pessimistic or always yelling my opinions in people's faces. Instead, I just did things some considered a bit 'awkward.' In high school, my friends freaked out at times because during lunch I would go sit by the person who nobody wanted to talk to. I did the same thing on the school bus. I sat by a girl that didn't seem to have many friends. She was in

Her personality is totally different from mine, but we always understood each other...and most importantly, I always knew I was loved. She kept me on a straight (and narrow) path. I tease her today because she was so strict! She always just smiles in agreement.

So observing her was like learning via osmosis relative to being independent. Then there was my grandfather...who encouraged me to follow my dreams.

How have you been able to handle a family life while also building a career?

I think this is where I'm supposed to say that I employed the use of 'life balance.' I'm laughing a bit as I say this because I don't think there really is any such thing. Literally, the scale is always tipped a bit to one side or the other. So...we (all of us) can have it all but not all at the same time. I think that's why 'patience' is considered a virtue.

So you're patient?

My husband would burst out laughing if you asked him that question. So no...I'm not the most patient person in the world. I am, however, a reflective thinker by nature, so I like to think that I've learned to honor that reflective aspect of who I am.

And I can't be reflective if I don't learn patience. So...I'm getting there.

You mentioned your husband. What does he think about your career path?

What helps is that I'm married to a saint, literally. He's the most wonderful man on the planet. We have a beautiful blended family and we've partnered to raise three decent human beings. My husband is also my greatest champion. He's not easily threatened and he's one of those men that I didn't have to raise. Some adults just need someone to continue raising them. Well...his parents did a fantastic job of doing that without my help. He's secure with who he is, which means he's secure with who I am as well. And he cooks, thank goodness!

So you have three kids?

Yes. My husband brought Casey and Bailey into my world, and they are both amazing people. David, our oldest, came with me into our marriage. What I love about kids is what I learn from them. Casey is so patient and he has the kindest heart of anyone. Watching him today as a grown man is so satisfying because he continues to work hard and he's a wonderful husband and father. Bailey is in college. She's a pistol--always has been. She's tenacious and very committed to her goals. I love her sense of determination and her willingness to listen and learn. (And she gives the very best fashion advice imaginable.) Finally, David is my rock. He's always been like a best friend and we've always been able to talk things through. During his teen years he'd

be rolling his eyes while we talked, but in the end my verbal white papers paid off. He graduated from college with honors and now works in the area of finance for a large corporation. I depend on his advice and he doesn't hesitate to share his perspective.

You consult, but you also speak. What is it about these two worlds that gets you excited?

The consulting gives me the opportunity to personally touch an organization of people. By working directly with organization executives, I have an opportunity to help grow and develop better leaders, creating a domino effect. People within that organization reap the rewards of a good leader. That's how I make a difference. As for speaking, it's the energy. I get all wrapped up in the people; in their engagement and their desire to gain insight into doing what they do better. Speaking also gives me the opportunity to share all the 'stuff' in my head that I study. I firmly believe in lifelong learning. I constantly see analogies to leadership and the entrepreneurial spirit in what I'm reading. Speaking provides the avenue to share insights. It makes everything meaningful.

Have you ever lost a group? How did you pull them back in?

In all honesty, I don't think I've ever "lost" a group I'm speaking to. But then, I have philosophy. Every person will walk away with exactly what they entered the room thinking they'd walk away with. It's all about expectation. Those excited to hear new insights never seem to leave empty handed. Those who enter believing it's a waste of time, may leave with nothing more than time wasted. Everyone has their own agenda...and that agenda will become their reality.

Surely you've had a tough group or two along the way. Surely!

The toughest group I've had was at a national conference workshop. I began speaking and almost immediately, a guy in the back raised his hand and boldly shared he thought this was a waste of time because the concepts didn't apply to their field of expertise. It was abrupt and an air of discomfort in the room hung heavy. I needed to bring back comfort. I addressed his concerns by sharing a few thoughts on how the content could be used in his industry and how the concepts were indeed pliable versus rigid. He grumbled, but remained quiet. I gave the group time to work through a concept with others at their table.

During this time, I walked over to him and asked how he was doing. He told me if someone isn't happy with how he's performing, he would just lose the contract (according to the way things worked in his industry) and a peer would gain the contract. I was amazed that he was okay with that. I mean, I was literally amazed how little he cared that someone wouldn't want to work with him. He came into the room with a battle plan. It didn't work though. The voluntary insights shared by the group were incredible. So as a speaker, I focus on people who want to gain something from spending time listening to the content. That's where the reward is for them as well as for me.

How are you good at what you do?

I'm not so sure I'm good; I let the people I work with make that call. What I can say, though, is I'm grateful for the people who have helped me do what I do. No one is successful alone; all of us need people that believe in us and ask us to join them in life's walk. I'm deeply appreciative to these people because without them, I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing.

What's been your most successful moment? Successful in the sense that you saw the light bulb go on?

I don't know that there's any one successful moment. But as I reflect on your question, what comes to mind are moments where people have told me I've jolted their thinking or opened their minds to a new perspective. Still to this day I remember reading an evaluation after a international women's business conference. Her comment said, "I'm leaving this presentation determined to do what I should have done fifteen years and three children ago: I'm going to start my own business." To this day, I hold that in my heart.

What are you feeling today? You have grown kids and a career you're happy with. What's next?

I'm a dreamer and an optimistic dreamer at that. I've enjoyed every chapter of life...so whatever's around the next corner will be a continuation of a great journey.



"Speaking provides the avenue to share insights. It makes everything meaningful."



Cathy's audiences are in no short supply of positive affirmation. Her heart for inspiring growth and change is tangible and magnetic. Audiences of all shapes and sizes glean insight, encouragement and tools for success whether in the world of business or personal growth.

- *"Cathy has the uncanny ability to help people see through their issues & their chaos...and bring a sense of calmness, clarity and rationality to whatever the circumstance is."*
- *"When a conversation with Cathy is over, people are very clear on what their next steps need to be."*
- *"We [executive team] have discovered that there are skills to be developed if we want to grow our company at a faster pace...and we've learned today that effective leadership is a lot harder to do than we ever thought. But we're leaving the room with a renewed understanding of why these skills are relevant both to building a great company as well as to us as individual leaders."*
- *"I have been very fortunate to have attended a lot of training over the ...well lets just say years... and I have enjoyed your approach and have gotten more out of your instruction than most any I have attended. I truly appreciate you."*
- *"Cathy's presentation has been the best yet!"*
"Very articulate & an excellent presentation. Tremendously enthusiastic & inspiring!"
- *"Cathy's greatest strength is her experience, warmth, and love of people. Good impression-- Great!"*
- *"I wish Cathy's session could have been a mega-session!"*
- *"Cathy's greatest strength is her confidence and her energy. She provided a great presentation that gave me knowledge to take with me."*
- *"Information and personality--those are her greatest attributes. Informative and wonderful to hear."*