

"My Most Valuable Lessons": Leeza Gibbons

Midlife Lessons From Leeza Gibbons

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Just hearing what Leeza Gibbons does for a living can be a bit daunting. The TV journalist, who turned 55 last month, manages to host two television shows ("America Now" and "My Generation") while supervising her own cosmetics line and running a nonprofit foundation designed to help caregivers of Alzheimer's patients. When asked how she does it, Gibbons just laughs and says, "I'm a woman." It's only honest to say that she's got exceptional drive, too, but her answer indicates how deeply she believes in women and the unique qualities that can help them succeed. Gibbons first got a glimpse of this female power when she was asked to report on a convention held by cosmetics queen Mary Kay Ash. When she got the assignment, Gibbons says, she wasn't that interested in hearing what Ash had to say to her legions of saleswomen. But within minutes of walking into the meeting, she felt differently. "Women were transformed by this," Gibbons says. "They were a community. They were engaged in a transactional enterprise." And Ash, Gibbons says, taught her saleswomen to succeed in that enterprise by using "our natural abilities as women – the ability to communicate, to nurture, to applaud others."

In fact, Gibbons says, she was so impressed that she had occasional thoughts of being a Mary Kay salesperson herself. She's used the skills she learned about that day to communicate with the audience for her two shows, "America Now" and "My Generation," both of which emphasize stories aimed at Boomers. (And her love of cosmetics led to her creation of her Home Shopping Network-based beauty line.)

Leeza's most important contribution, though, may be personal rather than professional: her foundation, Leeza's Place (www.leezasplace.org), which provides crucial, free support services for caregivers who are looking after a loved one with any chronic or progressive illness. Gibbons began the effort in 2002 after her [mother](#), Gloria Jean, died of Alzheimer's. Based on the toll caregiving took on her and her family, Gibbons saw how much help caregivers need. Her own father, Carlos, "learned very quickly how much he needed support or he would go under," she says. Today, the foundation operates centers across the country, and drew 25,000 visitors last year.

As she's moved through the first half of her fifties, Gibbons says, she's come to learn a few valuable life lessons:

"It's better to drop the dread factor. This is the best time of our lives." "I've learned to look in the mirror and forgive myself and forgive others. I wish I got that memo years ago." "I'm imperfect." "We all have scripts about how we could live happily ever after. Don't fixate on not getting exactly the life you ordered." Gibbons, the mother of three grown children, has another point to make: about marrying a younger man. In 2011, she married California educator Steven Fenton, who's thirteen years her junior. "I'm so glad to be married to my best friend!" she said on her Facebook page. When she got married, Gibbons told an interviewer that she was getting in touch with her "inner cougar." But today, she says, "I don't know if I'd use that term. It's so five minutes ago, don't you think?" Yes, it is—and maybe that's another life lesson.