

Agency for Change Podcast: Michele Magner, Aging Enthusiast and Caregiving Coach, Inspired Caring

Connect with Michele and Inspired Caring at:

- Website – <http://inspiredcaring.com/>
- Listen to Michele's podcast: Inspired Caring – <https://creators.spotify.com/pod/show/michele-magner>

Michele Magner: 0:01

We are all operating at the speed of information.

Announcer: 0:08

Welcome to Agency for Change, a podcast from KidGlov that brings you the stories of changemakers who are actively working to improve our communities. In every episode, we'll meet with people who are making a lasting impact in the places we call home.

Lyn Wineman: 0:31

Hey everyone, this is Lyn Wineman, president of KidGlov. Welcome to another episode of the Agency for Change podcast. So today we're going to talk about caring for caregivers, because caring for aging family members can be a really challenging journey. It's filled with emotional ups and downs, but it's also an opportunity for rare and beautiful connection and growth. So today's guest, Michele Magner, she's an aging enthusiast. I love that title. And a caregiving coach brings a wealth of experience to the table. She is the founder of Inspired Caring and she's passionately dedicated to helping caregivers prioritize their own mental and emotional well-being. So whether you're just beginning a caregiving journey, or whether you've been in it for a long time, or if you're not in it but you might be in the future, give this one a listen, because her insights are invaluable. Michele, welcome to the podcast.

Michele Magner: 1:41

Lyn, thank you so much for having me, I'm delighted to be here today.

Lyn Wineman: 1:43

Absolutely. Okay, I want to have you start by telling us more about Inspired Caring, because I've never talked to anyone who said they were an aging enthusiast and a caregiving coach. Tell me more about what you do at Inspired Caring.

Michele Magner: 2:11

Well, thank you for asking that question. I think aging is one of the most confusing and complicated things that we do as human beings.

Lyn Wineman: 2:15

That is so true. And it happens. It happens to all of us, it's going to happen to all of us, but yet are we all in denial?

Michele Magner: 2:22

Yes, the bottom line is yes, we are all in denial. So when I speak, one of the things that I share is my theory is the moment we're told we're no longer allowed to trick or treat because we are too old, that's when we start complaining about getting older. And if you have people, if you just start to have a heightened awareness around this, you will find that people in their twenties and thirties are complaining about getting older. Our life expectancy is 77 years currently. If you, if you, make it into your sixties, there's a solid chance you're making it to your 80s. So, Lyn, that means we're spending up to eight decades complaining about something that is inevitable.

Lyn Wineman: 3:11

Wow, that's it's kind of sad when you say it that way, right, like why are we complaining about it? And do you think 57 is too old to trick or treat? I just got to go back to that.

Michele Magner: 3:22

I mean you and me, sis, we should just suit up and get out there. I think that people would actually find it delightful at age 52 and you at 57, to let's give it a try.

Lyn Wineman: 3:34

Let's give it a try. Next year goals, next year goals.

Michele Magner: 3:37

So yes, all right Well and when, and because we are living longer than we have lived in the past and the end of our life tends to have a lot more chronic illness, we are in this new territory of caregiving that we've just never been in before. So inspired caring is really about helping people find the inspiration and the education and the resources that they need to care for the person that they love, but also really care for themselves along the way, because we're aging too, and so it's influencing our aging outcomes.

Lyn Wineman: 4:19

So talk to me about this, because I see a lot of statistics about loneliness in the senior population and mental and emotional health in the senior population, which is a concern of yours, but you're really taking that to the next level and thinking about the mental and emotional well-being of the caregiver. It's probably a group that's often overlooked.

Michele Magner: 4:47

Well, it's something that we stumble into. It's not like there's a sign-up sheet.

Lyn Wineman: 4:55

I mean, even with parenting, you know you have what to expect when you're expecting and you see the pediatrician and there's lots of advice available, much less on the aging end of the spectrum, I imagine.

Michele Magner: 5:11

Well, I agree with that. And then if you think about who the caregivers are, over 50% of the time it is a woman in the family, sometimes it is a partner or spouse, so they too may have their own chronic illness that they are managing as well. And then, if you think to how things used to be back in the day, we weren't as spread out as we are now geographically, so those family caregivers, if it is an adult child, may not even live in the same city as the aging adult.

Lyn Wineman: 5:54

Yeah that adds another layer of complexity to how do we handle this and discussion of resources and guilt and responsibility and gosh, all those things that are not fun to talk about. But I know, in addition, Michele, to the professional work that you do, you have a personal connection to caregiving. I'd love to hear the story of how caring for your own family really shaped your approach to what you're doing right now.

Michele Magner: 6:34

For me, family caregiving was a true blessing, and I can say that very fully and wholly in reflection. It had its hard times and hardships for sure, but it actually began when I was 27. At age 27, I had I was engaged. I wasn't even married yet, no kids yet, and I became the primary caregiver to my grandmother, my paternal grandmother.

I was the only family member in town. We all lived in Kansas City at the time, so was with her through really making that decision that it was no longer safe for her to be driving. It was also no longer appropriate with the level of care she needed to be living at home, so helped her make that transition into assisted living and then, through end of life, and then shortly thereafter, my maternal grandmother, she was also in Kansas city and so I had the privilege of being on that same journey with her.

So for about seven to eight years I was in this role as primary family caregiver. So just all of those doctor's appointments, hospital stays, everything around the home. I don't like to say it fell on my shoulders, because I happily picked it up, but that's where things started on my personal journey. And then fast forward not too many years later, a couple of years later, we ended up moving to Omaha because we could tell something was up with my mother-in-law, and she was diagnosed with frontotemporal dementia, was diagnosed with frontotemporal dementia, and so I was part of the care, family care team, helping her and looking out for her.

And then my father-in-law, who was her primary caregiver, had a terminal cancer diagnosis. It just kind of layered on. So he ended up passing away first, and so then the responsibility for her care really did as he was, you know, declining in health. It did shift to to us, so my husband, his brother and myself. So it's been a long journey, but it has completely informed the work that I do, my passion for serving

seniors and their family members, my curiosity about how we age as individuals and how culturally are we aging was really piqued, so I've just continued to pursue education in these areas.

Lyn Wineman: 9:36

You know some of the things that you've mentioned. You've hit on some of my greatest fears as a daughter and a granddaughter. You know the conversations about driving, the conversations about not being able to stay in your home, the conversations about illness and then end of life, right Like those are four big ones right there and I'm already just scared of the conversations, not actually even doing the work. I mean from your perspective, Michele, what are some of the big challenges that these caregivers face, as their family members or their loved ones need increased care, and how do you navigate those challenges?

Michele Magner: 10:25

So I think one of the biggest challenges that we face is our aging loved one. I mean, we all have this general denial about getting older, right, and I feel like the older we get, we lose some of that ability to self-assess and determine how we're doing, like, how much help do we need. I recall my father-in-law sitting on the couch struggling to put on his socks and you know, the curtains were pulled shut and the room is darkish and I just asked him how do you think things are going? And he looked at me and then said great.

So I think for families who are starting to notice that something is not quite right or not as easy for someone as it used to be, I think that we have to get into a headspace, that it's okay to be a little uncomfortable, because what I witness is that families, to avoid having a hard conversation, they are willing to flip, flop this guilt resentment coin over and over again. I feel very strongly that when we delay having important conversations or hard conversations just because we don't want to be uncomfortable, we're also delaying the care or interventions that someone needs that could potentially keep them home for longer. And you know, in that moment, with my father-in-law, my response and because, not because I am, you know my background with my industry, but because my position within the family I wasn't one of his sons, I felt like I was able to say this feels unsustainable, and then just pause and let the air get really uncomfortable.

Lyn Wineman: 12:28

Yeah, okay, there's the next biggest fear, right? Other than having the conversations, is that uncomfortable moment. But it's so important, right, like it's so important to just let it happen.

Michele Magner: 12:42

Because here's the thing is we're going to be uncomfortable at some point, and delaying the discomfort, it just stretches everything out.

You know, we can kind of ignore something to a certain degree for a period of time and just back burner it for a little while until the next incident or episode happens, but more than likely there's always this nagging that we have in our soul and heart. So I would say you know, the first thing is I believe there are five phases of caregiving.

So phase one is when you're just kind of annoyed and frustrated. Your parent can't quite keep up. Phase two is usually there's been like an incident or something specific that has occurred and so we're trying to triage that situation and fix that current problem. Phase three is when we start to notice like things actually do have to shift, like we are now in this really big transitional phase. Big decisions are having to be made, hard conversations are being had and someone is no longer able to manage the business side of their life. Yeah, this is maybe when driving starts to come into question. That phase four, Lyn, is when someone is really bearing the full burden and responsibility in that caregiving role, so they are now really in charge of someone's health care initiatives and advocacy.

They're now in charge of that financial piece, making sure things are being taken care of. And then phase five is end of life, which you know we don't love talking about end of life, but we know it's going to happen for all of us. And so there's this movement towards what does a good death look like, and so there's different emotions and things that we can do to be prepared within each of these phases, but I think, for people that are finding themselves on this caregiving journey like you're starting to realize oh wait, a minute, I'm not just the spouse anymore. I'm not just the daughter or son anymore. I think having an awareness about this is really important.

Lyn Wineman: 15:03

Amazing. I want to go back through that because I think those five steps and I was frantically taking notes on this side of the microphone, but I think those five steps are really important, so I wrote it down. Phase one you're just starting to get annoyed and notice something different. And that is interesting, because it's interesting to me, because as your loved one ages, there is something about like they've always been your hero right and you want them to have that. And when they start into that decline, I think sometimes there is that sense of grief or loss that does make you annoyed. Why is this happening? And then you said phase two usually is represented by some type of incident. Something has happened.

Phase three okay, you've recognized things need to shift. We can't keep going the way we are. Phase four you've got a caregiver that has the full burden. Now that is, you know, making decisions, stepping in, advocating. And then phase five end of life, which there are a lot of resources out there to help us make that journey into transition, or transition into end of life, more beautiful for everyone involved. So in that journey, what is the best time for someone to engage with someone like you that can help them? Is it way up in phase one? Is it phase two? Is it the point where you just feel out of control? You know what is the engagement strategy there.

Michele Magner: 16:46

I think ideally someone in phase one or two are listening to the podcast. They're tuning into the Inspired Caring podcast. Yeah, if, if they, if someone is realizing things seem to be clicking along, you know, faster, or things are just moving along and we're starting to have to make some decisions. Ideally people in phase three, that's when we're having a conversation or they are engaging in my online coursework that has been created.

So once people hit phase four, you know, at the beginning of phase four we kind of go through these little honeymoon phases because there's always these chaotic episodes and moments and then things plateau and settle down. So even within each of these phases, if you are in chaos, you're probably

talking to a hospital social worker or a doctor. Wwhen things feel like they've settled down a little bit or, you know, really recognize that you need to catch your breath, those are good times for us to be talking as well.

Once we are fully immersed in phase four, especially towards the end, when someone is just feeling like they're drowning, they are drowning it's just so much harder at that point to weave through interventions. It's possible, it's doable, but people get very fixed on how things are and start to lose some hope. And then in phase five you know that end of life. There's potential that things are settling down a little bit again because reality is setting in, and so that would be another good time.

Lyn Wineman: 18:38

Absolutely so, Michele. You've got the online course. You've got the podcast. Can you talk a little bit more about the resources you have available for folks? And we'll make sure to get links to both in the show notes on the KidGlov website so they can access those.

Michele Magner: 18:58

Fabulous. Yes. So the podcast is a growing body of work of my own thoughts and sentiments from my own caregiving journey and there are some episodes that were recorded during those chapters of caring for my in-laws. And then I have had a lot of guests on experts, speakers with national platforms that have generously come on to share their thoughts and the work that they do. So there's a lot of guest episodes and we tackle things like how do we empty the house, like there's a lot of episodes about how do we manage the stuff and empty the house with multiple so much stuff.

Lyn Wineman: 19:40

Yes, and so much emotion, often with many families, my family. So much emotion tied up in this stuff, yeah.

Michele Magner: 19:51

Yes, I mean we're very connected to our belongings and what they mean and represent to us. There's also speaking of emotion, a lot of episodes around you know the five phases of caregiving, communication and compassion, both for the person that we're caring for and for ourselves, and I think we lose sight of our own, curious about like, how am I responding to this? Is this what I want? Is this how I want to be showing up?

Lyn Wineman: 20:28

Yeah, that is such a good question. Is this how I want to show up? I think we could ask ourselves that every day, but I think, particularly in a situation that might be, that will be stressful and emotional, that is such a great question.

Michele Magner: 20:48

Thank you, I agree, and I think it's something that we're not asking ourselves enough, like we just get on autopilot and go, especially when we have tasks that need to be completed. The podcast has a lot of great episodes. The coursework I've created three different courses. One is called Illuminating Senior Living and it's really I would advise people are checking that out anywhere in that phase two to four, because by the end of phase four we're going to have some serious interventions in place for someone and we want people to stay home for as long as possible. So part of that course is really around when is it appropriate and time to move, what to look for, how to choose, explaining in detail each level of care and the fluidity within those, the common objections. And you were talking about being uncomfortable and having those hard conversations, and so the course teaches people about planting the seeds of again having that curiosity. This is unsustainable. Where do you see things going in the next 12 to 18 months.

So the course teaches people how to have those conversations. And then there's Inspired Gratitude is another course. 21 days of prompts to help you get into that headspace and feeling the emotion of gratitude Again. How do I want to be showing up? And then Inspired Caring that course is really focused on our emotional well-being and our mental health. So how am I managing my thoughts and expectations around other people? In myself? Do I know my core values? So I know what triggers me and sets me off the handle. And then how am I managing some boundaries If we're showing up every day feeling like we have to have these hardcore boundaries, like that is unsustainable too so so that is what that course, is all about Fantastic.

Lyn Wineman: 23:01

So, Michele, you have very thoughtfully put all of these educational tools together. One thing that strikes me is when you and I first spoke to each other a couple months ago, you had shared a story about how you had gone mountain climbing and you realized when you were on that trek that this had a lot of parallels to the work that you do. Can you say more and how that might have influenced you?

Michele Magner: 23:31

Yes, okay, so to be transparent, we were talking about hiking.

Lyn Wineman: 23:37

Yes, all right. All right, leave it to me to make turn a hike into a mountain climb. I had you summiting a 14er? Yeah Right.

Michele Magner: 23:47

I did summit the 14er, but it was. I wasn't scaling the front of it.

Lyn Wineman: 23:53

Okay, fair, that's fair. Got it, got it All right.

Michele Magner: 23:58

So one of the parallels that I really drew was the fact that we have so many false summits in our life. Life is just this series of false summits, and this particular hike, Mount Elbert, is the tallest peak in Colorado and it was a pretty brutal 14er. And we got to the first false summit and I really thought I'm done, I'm just done, like I cannot go any further, I cannot do this. So I think, false summits being the first parallel, just how many times do we hit these plateaus and feel exhausted and done? The second parallel was rest, the importance of rest. You know, once I caught my breath, had a sandwich, I closed my eyes for 30 minutes.

I had the opportunity to do that. It really refueled me to go to that second fall summit. This was hilarious, Lyn, because I'm looking at that second fall summit and someone had said well, this first one was the worst, so I'm looking at the second one and I thought that does not look that bad. I can do this.

So maybe a little false optimism, I'll be there, I like it. And when I got to that second one, it really was. You were just sauntering over the hill a little bit further to get to the summit. So, yeah, taking those moments to rest are just so critically important. And it was interesting because I realized that I was tapping into something. I don't know if primal is the right word, but the pushing that I was able to do of myself, it was this digging deep, but it was not from a place of exhaustion, it was from a place of motivation.

Lyn Wineman: 25:57

Yeah, I feel that. Just hearing your story, I feel that yeah.

Michele Magner: 26:09

Yeah. So I think that, whether we're caregiving or managing our household and careers or, you know, trying to get along with our neighbors and colleagues, you know, whatever your Mount Elbert is, for you to just draw your own parallels of what you feel like that would look like for you could be interesting.

Lyn Wineman: 26:26

I love that. That's a great story. You know, Michele, I feel like I should ask you've given so much great advice, but just to kind of tie it up in a bow for people out there that might be somewhere on that caregiving journey, what advice do you have for them?

Michele Magner: 26:46

It really is one step at a time. I think it's it is helpful to have that 30,000 foot view of you know what, what could happen, and we are only living in this present moment. So ruminating about should have, could have, would have, is going to, I think, crush your soul and it's going to make this so much harder and worrying about the future and what may or may not happen. Worrying is not planning. So getting a little more information, fueling yourself up on those plateaus with whatever you need to rest yourself and to be thoughtful about. I mean, if we have a disease process that is underway, we have some ideas about where things may lead. But what I always share is whatever you think the best case scenario is, or the worst case scenario is, we're probably going to land somewhere in the middle.

Lyn Wineman: 27:48

Absolutely Good point. Good point. So, Michele, for people who want to tap into some of the resources, listen to the podcast. You know dig into the coursework, where can they find the information?

Michele Wagner: 28:08

I have a website. The website is inspiredcaring.com. The podcast is also called Inspired Caring and it is on all the major platforms Fantastic. We will have some links to those in the show notes as well, and I'm so happy for you that you were able to get in early enough that you got inspiredcaring.com and you didn't have to do any funky gyrations to stand out. So that's awesome. As a marketer, that's always something we look for.

Michele Wagner: 28:44

Well and to be honest with you I was speaking with this woman on the East Coast and I was thinking about the name Inspired Caregiver yeah, Inspired Caregiver or Inspired Caregiving yes, right. And we were having this conversation and she said said, oh my gosh, I think I have that URL, cause I had said lamented, oh, it's taken, and it was hers. And the next day she texted me and she said actually, what I have is inspired caring and I would love to gift it to you.

Lyn Wineman: 29:14

Oh, that's amazing.

Michele Wagner: 29:17

It is amazing. So we have a virtual handshake agreement that once I hit a certain point within the business and I am going to mail her a check I cannot wait to do that.

Lyn Wineman: 29:28

That's awesome. I love that. Having been on the other side of that, it's just frustrating to be looking for a URL and knowing somebody's got it but they're not using it, and not being able to find them. Honestly, people ask me sometimes why KidGlov is spelled without an E, and the first reason is because KidGlov.com with an E was already taken by a transportation company in Indiana. I've probably sent so many people to their website, but then we also said, hey, it's kind of cool and funky to spell it our own way as well. All right, Michele, I'm going to switch gears here and I'm going to ask you my favorite question, because everybody who listens knows I'm inspired by motivational quotes and I know you've said so many good things here today and I mean you have the word inspired in your website and your podcast name, so I'd like a Michele Wagner original quote to inspire our listeners.

Michele Wagner: 30:35

One of my favorite quotes that I say all the time is we are all operating at the speed of information. We are all operating at the speed of information, and I think what that does is it gives us some grace for doing the best we can with the information that we have right in front of us, and it also allows us to be open to the idea that maybe there's more information that could be obtained to shift gears or take us in a different direction if that's what needs to happen for the person that we care about or for ourselves.

So we're just all operating at the speed of information and you know, to piggyback on that, we're all just folks trying to get stuff done.

Lyn Wineman: 31:23

Yep, yep, and we're all trying to do our best, like that is a deep belief of mine. I believe that everybody is really trying to do their best with the information and the resources that they have. And, you know, we don't know what's under the surface or what's you know going on behind the curtains. But, yeah, I really appreciate that. That's awesome.

Michele Magner: 31:48

We don't know what's over that first fall summit.

Lyn Wineman: 31:53

Yes, I love it. Absolutely way to tie that all together. I love that, Michele. I have loved talking with you today and, to really wrap things up, I'd love to hear what is the most important thing you would like people to remember about the work that you're doing.

Michele Magner: 32:14

I think the most important thing to remember about the work that I am doing is that I am not the only one doing it. You know. I think that we do a good job of finding a resource and exploring that. And then I also want to really encourage people that there are so many other people in this space that also have a lot of wisdom and knowledge to share. I personally would love to support you and work with you and also look around. I would encourage people to go ahead, when you're doing a search, use that word caregiver, even if you don't identify as a caregiver. It's going to unlock this whole new world for you, and there's a lot of people on Instagram in this space. There's a lot of podcasts in this space. So you, I am not alone in this, and you are not alone in this.

Lyn Wineman: 33:11

That is such a good sentiment, because sometimes I think it can probably feel like a very lonely journey, and what I hear you saying is it really doesn't have to be. That's great, Michele. I have really enjoyed this conversation. I'm going to say that I fully believe the world needs more people like you, more aging enthusiasts and caregiving coaches, and more tools and resources like you've developed at Inspired Caring. Thank you so much for sharing today.

Michele Magner: 33:43

Thanks for having me, Lyn. This was truly a delight.

Announcer: 33:48

We hope you enjoyed today's Agency for Change podcast. To hear all our interviews with those who are making a positive change in our communities or to nominate a changemaker you'd love to hear from.

Visit kidglov.com at K-I-D-G-L-O-V.com to get in touch, as always. If you like what you've heard today, be sure to rate, review, subscribe and share. Thanks for listening and we'll see you next time.