

Philanthropist and women's health advocate, Michelle King Robson, shares her personal story of how her health crisis brought her to her life's mission, and how she's helping women everywhere take charge of their health and wellness.

On our Side



Healthcare is certainly a subject that's been on everyone's mind as we make our way through an election year, but perhaps no one takes women's healthcare more to heart than Michelle King Robson. Founder and chairperson of EmpowHER, which operates a comprehensive women's health and wellness website that reaches over two million people each month, Robson is on a mission to change the way women approach their health.

Robson had always been active in the community as a philanthropist, but it was her own health crisis that put her on the path that she feels is her true purpose in life. At age 42, she underwent a complete hysterectomy in an effort to resolve ongoing medical issues she'd been experiencing. Rather than providing relief, however, the changes she experienced as a result of the procedure were disastrous. She faced a slew of physical symptoms, from weight gain to hair loss to severe joint pain, as well as short-term memory loss and depression as a result of the hormonal imbalance. "Here I was, this highly active woman, doing all of these non-profit things, running commissions for the state, and all of the sudden I had no brain function," she recalls. The depression became unbearable as Robson went from doctor to doctor, looking for the answer. She says her quality of life was so poor that she went through a period where, daily, she thought of how she could take her own life.

Finally, her doctor admitted to her that he knew something was wrong with her, but he just didn't know how to fix it. She recalls him saying, "You are smart enough and you're going to figure this out, and when you do you're going to help me help the women that I treat."

Robson took his words to heart and immediately bought every book she could find on the subject of hormones and hysterectomy, hoping to find some answers.

Today Robson knows that a big part of what she really needed was validation—someone to tell her she wasn't actually losing her mind. "No one could ever validate for me that I was normal—it happens to women all the time," she says. When she finally hit upon the book that spoke to her and her condition, her life was changed. "It finally started to make sense—it all made sense and I realized I wasn't crazy. All of the symptoms that I was having were really real and they were true. It was as if I got the validation that I needed to carry on and not take my life," she shares.

She got the treatment she needed, and decided at that point that no woman should ever have to go through what she had been through. That is when Michelle King Robson became the

powerhouse that advocates for each and every one of us.

"I think everybody has a destiny and a purpose, and I'd been searching for a long time to find out... what is it that I'm supposed to do in this lifetime, and this is what I'm supposed to be doing. I'm clearly on the path that I'm supposed to be on and that is to make sure that women have a voice and that they have a place to go," she says with passion. And that place is EmpowHER.com.

Today Robson can laugh about the fact that she had "zero" experience when she started the website, with a goal of reaching five million women. She built the site, but had to get the people to it. "That's the naiveté I had when I started the company," she

“I think everybody has a destiny and a purpose, and I'd been searching for a long time to find out... what is it that I'm supposed to do in this lifetime, and this is what I'm supposed to be doing. I'm clearly on the path that I'm supposed to be on and that is to make sure that women have a voice and that they have a place to go.”

admits. "But I had so much passion behind it, and thank goodness I had money that I could put into it; and I wasn't going to let it fail, come hell or high water. I was going to figure it out and get the right people on the bus to help me make this company successful."

It only took a year and a half to meet that goal, and Robson says that the goal of the company for the last five years has been to reach all women and provide them with the information and resources to take charge of their health.

Today the site is an impressive combination of women's gathering place and health resource library—with almost 400 groups formed by EmpowHER members, it is one of the largest online health communities on the web. It features over 130,000 resources such as articles, videos and moderated discussions; and a "24-hour promise" that any question posed by a visitor will be reviewed by moderators and health experts and answered within 24-hours.

Robson's personal experience with doctors left her with a bitter taste, and she initially didn't want doctors on the site. She's since sought out those she calls "the rock stars" of the medical profession who share the company's vision and passion to participate in EmpowHER, giving women access to their medical knowledge online.

"They are so happy to have this opportunity to get their message out and help women around their health and wellness," Robson

says of the thousands of participating healthcare professionals active with EmpowHER. "That has been such a gift to see from the side of someone who didn't want to have a doctor on the site."

Although Robson has had moving one-on-one experiences with women through EmpowHER and its ability to literally transform women's lives, her mission doesn't stop with the successful reach of the website. Robson has been recognized with numerous national and local awards for her work in women's health care advocacy, and has chaired several women's and children's health initiatives in Arizona as a gubernatorial appointee. She's also raised over \$30 million for healthcare organizations in the Southwest.

She wants women to be educated consumers when it comes to healthcare, follow our intuition and advocate for ourselves. "You can't stop. You can't give up. You can never, ever give up," she emphasizes.

She is currently advocating for women's health on a much larger scale, because in her opinion, women's healthcare is light years behind where it should be. She is working on strategies to tackle women's health at the federal level and drive a shift from our side, rather than leaving the decisions to the health and insurance industries. "We have a lot of folks making decisions about our health and wellness that shouldn't have a seat at the table," she declares. She wants women to be educated consumers when it comes to healthcare, follow our intuition and advocate for ourselves. "You can't stop. You can't give up. You can never, ever give up," she emphasizes.

At 53, Robson feels the best she has ever felt and lives by the philosophy that at every age, in every stage, women should feel great. "If you're feeling good or you're feeling fine, that's not good enough," she cautions. "At 50 I could say, 'Okay, well, I'm now old enough to not really care what anybody thinks' and it's really such a great place to be. I've earned every single wrinkle I have on my face and that power is within me to do things differently and to do things the way that I want to do them," she says. Looking back on her own health journey, she plans to one day write a book about what women can expect as they pass from their 20s to 30s, 30s to 40s, and 40s to 50s.

Robson would be the first to tell any woman to put herself first, and that it's okay to take care of ourselves. She says that for women, taking the focus off of everybody else and tapping into our own selves is the greatest gift we can give ourselves. "When you let go of all of that—it's liberating and it takes a lot of the weight off of our shoulders and allows us to really begin to be who we are, what we are, and live life to our fullest every day."

Wendy Rubicam can be reached at www.rubicamwriting.com.

