

**Dotsie Bregel,
Founder and CEO of
The National Association of Baby Boomer Women
(NABBW)**



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Boomer Technical Skills

With

Helen Gallagher

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Boomer Technical Skills
With
Helen Gallagher

Dotsie: Hello and welcome to the call. For those of you who don't know me, I am Dotsie Bregel, founder of the **National Association of Baby Boomer Women**, which can be found at www.NABBW.com and **Boomer Women Speak** www.boomerwomenspeak.com, the number one site on major search engines for baby boomer women. I am passionate about educating and empowering my generation of women. So since launching www.boomerwomenspeak.com almost five years ago, I have been connecting, encouraging and supporting boomer women on a daily basis so I really have my finger on the pulse of this spirited generation. I dedicate a great portion of my time to creating opportunities that inspire women to explore their passions and live them to the fullest. My prayer is to embrace all women and provide them with the means to soar; especially at midlife.

One of the topics that we learned that our members were interested in was technology and so we were happy to have Helen Gallagher, who is actually a member of the association, be able to help us out this evening.

Helen became interested in computers because they had an escape key. Does that sound familiar? She launched Computer Clarity, which is a software consulting and training business in 1996 after she had a long career in executive positions at Jim Beam Brand, Environdyne Industries, and AT&T. At a time when people most needed a little help at getting started with computers and the Internet, she began personal, customized training and teaching workshops to bridge the gap between people and technology. Which I think is wonderful because I know a lot of women at midlife, unless they have been working right along, they really feel like they got left out. If they chose to stay home to be with their children, everything kind of took off during that time and then when it came time for them to enter the work field, they became very intimidated, so I think it is an excellent idea for a business. As a freelance writer with over 100 articles in consumer and trade magazines, Helen specializes in business and technology. She is a contributor to *Lonely Planet*, *Travelers Tales*, *The World is a Kitchen*, and she is also the author of **Computer Ease**, which was chosen by *Forbes.com Book Club* and an *Illinois Woman's Press Association* award in 2006. When most technology is obsolete before you can get the package open, **Computer Ease** has fundamental wisdom that continues to attract readers in its third year. Her book is perfect for women who are intimidated by computers or who have been out of the work force while raising children. Her latest book is actually on another topic called, "Release Your Writing – Book Publishing Your Way," and it guides writers through the daunting task of getting a book published and teaches smart marketing on how to keep the book alive. Jan Phillips, who is a national award-winning author of "*Marry Your Muse*," said, "Helen has an answer for every

question you've ever had about birthing a book into the world and covers every step."

And I know actually writing is another topic that a lot of our members are interested in and we are going to be covering that pretty in-depth in 2008 for one month. She's a national speaker and she leads workshops on technology and publishing. She got her bachelors degree late in life and now, pushing 60, she feels like she's finally caught up with the world. And I say what an inspiration for those of us who are interested in reinventing ourselves at midlife.

Welcome to the call, Helen.

Helen: Thank you very much Dotsie, I appreciate that long introduction seeing my life flash before my eyes.

Dotsie: Kind of amazing when you hear information about yourself, isn't it?

Helen: All of those years add up to a lot of work, yes.

Dotsie: We're going to start talking about opportunities that you are aware of for taking classes online that have to do with language, or writing, or starting a business, or just things in general if any of the women online are interested in taking classes.

Helen: I'm looking forward to talking to the people on the call tonight because technology is not going to go away. And even if we're dragged into it kicking and screaming, we have to realize that we've got to embrace technology. For one thing, it offers so much more to us than we've ever had in our lives, but more importantly, we do feel left out if we can't move ahead. Sometimes we need a little push. I think online classes are a great way to push yourself to do more with the computer, but also to loose that intimidation when it comes to trying to do banking transactions, or pull your medical history off of your hospital website, to book travel, to even conduct a transaction at the gasoline station, or buy airline tickets, and of course, to do shopping. So it turns out that online classes are a great way to sit in your jammies and be all by yourself, but to slowly make your way through something that's actually challenging. It's hard to learn something if it's boring to just look at web pages.

I've always been interested in education and furthering my education. I was pleased to note just recently an article in the newspaper indicated that Apple, which makes the very famous iPod, and iPhone, is now hooked up with universities to offer free classes that can be downloaded through iTunes. Apple has a site that is called iTunes U, the letter "U" as in Universities, where you can download the curriculum and courses from universities all over. And they do it in part so that the students can listen to lectures when they're not in class, but we find landscapers who are learning about economics and foreign exchange rates

listening on their headphones while they're working on the grounds-keeping. So I would like for people to consider that something as contemporary as Apple and iTunes is actually a good source for online education. Also in St. Paul Minnesota, Rasmussen College has free classes for high school teachers so that they can improve their skills and their tuition free. I have links to these sites which I would be glad to share these with Dotsie at the end of the call. A technology site called www.cnet.com has classes at all levels from digital cameras, learning how to take good pictures, and even how to choose a camera, to classes on combating spyware problems on home computers, or formatting documents in Microsoft Word or doing spreadsheets in Excel. Adobe is well known by most of us as the company that makes PDF, the documents we open frequently as email attachments, but they also have a product called **Adobe Photoshop** which you can use to make greeting cards, or alter photos, but you could become a graphic artist at home in your pajamas, with free classes that they have on the Adobe site that is at www.about.com not on an Adobe site itself. But many of you know that www.about.com is a website that has information and categories of information of all types. And they have many, many free classes from beginning Photoshop all the way through to the advance.

Dotsie: Hey Helen, can I interrupt you for just a second and ask that for someone who is just learning to email and search the web, can you give an example of how they could use a search engine to find a class they could take online that they might be interested in. Can you kind of walk them through those steps?

Helen: Sure. Most of our listeners probably know a search engine is a Web site like Google, or Yahoo, or MSN, or AOL, where you type in what you're searching for and you receive a listing of probably dozens or a million different web sites for you to look at and one way to find good information is to start by using a good search engine that gives you the best results. And believe it or not, I don't think that Google is the best search engine for many purposes. It is definitely the most popular, so people like going to Google, but because it returns so many results, it is very hard to find what you are looking for. Google and all of the other search engines have an advance feature that lets you narrow down your choices. So if you were to search for free, online classes, you would find a wealth of information not so specific to what you are interested in, but if you added free photography online class or free online writing class, you would automatically narrow your search.

Dotsie: Okay, now let me ask; because this was a question in the forums, from someone in the forums, when we were saying what would you like Helen to answer, and one of the questions actually was about a search engine. What do you think is the best search engine? That's interesting you just said that you didn't think it was Google, so what do you use?

Helen: You're right. I'm happy to share with you what I use. The reason that I don't think that Google is the best is because it has so much and it ranks the results according to popularity, meaning how many other people have looked for that term. So that doesn't necessarily mean that if you have esoteric taste, that you're going to find what you are looking for. A better search engine is one that clusters the results based on buckets or categories so it pre-filters it instead of throwing the whole phone book at you, it just throws the directory that pertains to what you are looking for. There is a very unusual one called Clusty, as in clustering, and it gives you the top 200 results that are the most relevant in addition to the fact that there is a million more hiding there, it gives you the first 200 and down the left side of your screen, it even categories those 200 by subgroups into whether they're foreign language, or film, children's writing, and so on.

Dotsie: So that www.clusty.com

Helen: Right.

Dotsie: I've never even heard of it so I'm really kind of anxious to go and check it out.

Helen: I'm sure you'll enjoy it especially if you put in a phrase like "boomer women speak." I think you'll probably be pretty pleased. There are several others like that, which are targeted at giving you better results. I have an article, it's called, "Searching Beyond Google," and I could share a link for that with you after we end the call, and you could include it for the listeners, if you'd like.

Dotsie: Sure. Well actually Helen as you go along if you want, like something like that, if its on your site, let's tell people your site address and they can actually just go and get it, instead of doing it after the call and that way they will have the information right on the call. So why don't you tell us your Web site, and then you can mention the article again.

Helen: Like many people, I have more than one Web site but the primary site for **Computer Clarity**, my business, is www.cclarity.com

Dotsie: Okay, and do you have a lot of information on there for beginners?

Helen: Yes I do. I have lots of information, I'm blogging, and people want shortcuts, forums, people are invited to ask questions, no charge for me to answer them individually, they can subscribe to a newsletter and read articles. Enough to keep them busy.

Dotsie: That's wonderful. Because I do think that, you know, some of us know basic, but we can maybe learn a little more through your web site and that's free. It's not a class and you won't be graded, right?

Helen: Correct.

Dotsie: Okay, do you have anything else to mention? I love the idea of taking classes online as a way to kind of get started, but what if someone is taking a class online and they're not familiar with using a Word document or something? I think the majority of the people on this call are, but if they aren't, do you have information about that on your site?

Helen: Well for true beginners, it's best to start at the Microsoft Web site to learn the basics for free online at Microsoft. If you go to www.microsoft.com/office for the WORD processing program and the Excel spreadsheet, and Outlook and Outlook Express, you'll see tutorials on every single one of those products. And it also includes a "How Do I?" button which is like a search button but you can type in how do I format a page margin, or how do I rescue a deleted file, and it leads you through a simple clicking with the mouse or using the keyboard to drill down through your answer. The good and bad thing about the Internet is that there are millions and millions and millions of Web pages available to us, so we need to kind of reset our expectations about gaining information and realize we might have to work a little bit more at it than we would if we were reading a book.

Dotsie: Right, but it's always there and I have definitely used that Microsoft site and it's so worth while. The answers are right there. You can try one search and if it doesn't work you can think of wording it a different way but there's always a way to find an answer. That's good for people to know. You mentioned choosing your best time to learn. Can you tell us a little bit of what you mean by that?

Helen: Sure. I think it's really critical that we set expectations when we sit down to learn something at the computer. It might be frustrating but it doesn't help if you are fatigue, or cranky, or you're running out of time, or the cat is in the way when you're trying to get to the computer. If you remember when we were little children a long time ago, we headed off to school after 12 hours of sleep and a good breakfast, and we were just ready to learn all day long. Now that we live in a fragmented, multi-tasking world, it becomes very distracting to try to work at the computer and people become frustrated if they don't find what they are looking for right away. So when you notice that you're feeling restless, you are not going to settle in for a good experience. Your tension rate is going to increase. You are going to feel it in your shoulders for one thing, because people do get very tense working at a computer, especially in the desktop environment rather than a laptop. You'll feel it in your neck and your shoulders. And that irritability just extends to everything else around you. I have bills to pay, why is this screen taking so long to load? Well, you might be downloading your whole medical history from your hospital records which is easy to do on the Internet now. And that's something that you would have had to drive in the car and go through a bureaucracy to do in the past. We have a wealth of that available to us and it does take a little bit of patience. The same for gaining information from library

Web sites. Most libraries have enormous databases available to us of newspapers and magazines from all over the world and people say, “this computer is too slow, this isn’t downloading fast enough!” So you do have to kind of set your expectations, work in a comfortable environment. If you’re tired, take a break and do something else and come back to it later. Determine whether you think your space is set up in a convenient way, not just ergonomically, but is it easy for you to learn in that environment? Is it distracting, is it cluttered, is it too dark? Do you not have a proper light? By all means if you ever have to call tech support for something, you definitely want to make sure that it’s after the dishes are done and the kids are put to bed, or the first thing in the morning when you’ve had a nice pot of coffee and you’re near the bathroom, because it is not easy to do those things. Most people end up berating themselves from not being able to do something at the computer. But it’s not the computer and it’s not the person. It’s all the distractions and the frustrations from having false expectations that put us in that bad frame of mind. It does help to know if you feel smart in the morning, or if you’re really happy an hour before a deadline because you can finally focus. It’s important to know what your style is, and be kind to yourself when you are trying to learn something new on the computer.

Dotsie: Okay, now I’m going to ask you another question that came through the forum community and then we are going to open up the lines to see if anybody has a question before we go on to our next topic. You mentioned, oh gosh, and the hours I use to spend on the phone with tech support and it was very frustrating. I would try to squeeze it in and then I would only have a half an hour and I’m looking at my watch and the guy stills talking, and we’re still going through things and its 45 minutes and I have to hang up but I really hate to hang up because I’m finally getting somewhere. Anyway, the whole idea of troubleshooting online with people by phone. Someone in the forums asked what company has the best service or the most qualified troubleshooting capabilities? Like if you are in the market to buy a computer and you’re going to buy a Dell, does Dell have good support? Or who do you recommend?

Helen: Dell is a very good company for value in a computer, but for tech support like most companies, they outsource that to people in foreign countries where they work for pennies a week. We loose patience with them because of the fact that they sound like they are calling from under the ocean and that they’re reading off a screen and English is not their first language. I know that, I use to manage tech people, and I know that their job is very hard to. So it helps to have the right framework and say, oh I’m so glad you can help me. That just puts them at ease right away and makes them more willing to live up to that expectation, believe it or not, instead of saying this computer won’t do anything and I’ve had it with your company. That person isn’t the company; they’re not Michael Dow, and they’re not going to have a good attitude if they feel that they are being threatened or intimidated in such a way. So it’s important to have that expectation. But the best thing you can do other than feed the cat and eat lunch before you start the call, is to make sure that you respect the individual, you try to

explain the problem as well as you can, and the very first time that you feel that you are getting the runaround, or they are putting you on hold for twenty minutes, say I need you to escalate this. That's just a term that they use to say that they want to push you up to the next level of the support team. So you would say I need you to escalate this call. I can't spend an hour doing what you're asking me to do. When I'm helping my clients, when I have to call tech support, I often tell them you cannot ask an 83 year old woman to do that. It's a brand new computer, it is not her fault it is not working, you need to send someone to her house. And then they escalate you to a higher level and they get it taken care of for you.

Dotsie: Okay, now is there any computer company that has excellent support online or are they all pretty much equal; we just need to be more patience? What is the story? I'd love to know.

Helen: I guess patient is part of it, but we want to be treated fairly as a consumer as well. There isn't one company that has better support. It's just like thinking that there is one company in retail that has a perfect cashier; that you always want to get in that line. It's just not going to happen even at the local grocery store. It isn't that there's a company that has the right people, but it is a combination of knowing exactly what you are asking, and knowing when to push back and say, I'm not willing to do that, or I'm not going to risk that and lose all my data. If you haven't backed up your computer or you can't even turn your computer on, you don't have to agree to what they tell you. If your machine is under warranty, they are obligated to help you fix it any way they can, even if you have to send the computer back if they can't help you on the phone. And if they can't help you because of your limited ability, or time, or patience, then you want to ship it in to them to get it serviced, or at your own expense you can take it somewhere locally and just carry that baby in. A long time ago on a *Sex and the City* episode, Sara Jessica-Parker carried her Apple notebook into a repair shop in a shawl and said, "Here's my baby, you have to fix it for me." So it's very possible. Almost every large city has descent repair places where you're talking to someone that you feel that you can trust.

Dotsie: Absolutely. I have someone. The first sign of a problem I just call him up. I said, "Uh oh." And I do carry it over there if I have to, or he will come to the house now. Okay, let's see if anybody has a question about anything we've talked about or even anything off the topic because we want to make sure that we get your questions answered.

Saundra: Hi, this is Saundra. Helen, you were talking about taking these online classes and I noticed that I'm not taking advantage of a lot of things because I'm afraid of security and identity theft over the computer. I won't do bills on the Internet; I won't even talk to my car insurance company because I'm afraid of that. How do you know what is safe and what is not safe, and how do you get over that?

Dotsie: Okay, excuse me one second Helen, we do have this as a question. So we have *25 words on the nuts and bolts of the Internet safety*. Do you want to answer her question and then address that at this time?

Helen: Yes, I can cover both. I can answer Sandra's question. We were pretty much prepared to discuss this Sandra because it's an important element of feeling comfortable online knowing that there are people out there and also so in regard to doing shopping and other transactions. It starts with having the confidence that you know how your computer is running and what you're connected to, and what software you have running and its protection and that it is up to date. Most people know about anti-virus software but an Internet protection suite is a combination of anti-virus software, anti-spyware, which is people getting into your computer without your knowledge, a firewall, which blocks intruders and protects the data that you are sending out, and a secure site where you are conducting a transaction. If you just browse a Web site for Barnes and Noble, it's not a secure site, but the minute you click to purchase something, if you'll look at the lower right corner of your Web browser, your scene, you'll see a lock or a key that changes from open to closed. And that shows you that they have put you into what they call a secured area of their Web site. So your transaction on that particular screen is protected. It helps to know that you have a valid Internet protection suite. Most of you are probably familiar with the Norton Anti-Virus Suite, but the full protection suite is anti-virus, spyware, and firewall. There's Norton, McAfee, AVG, which is a free one, TrendMicro and Computer Associates, is a fortune-500 company that has home-user level security. The one other security issue that you would pay attention to is if you are conducting your computer business on a WiFi connection using wireless Internet in your home or in a public environment such as a café or a library. WiFi transactions are less secure because anyone in that geographic area with that same talent as a hacker can go into your computer if you are on an unprotected WiFi. So you are correct to be careful about online transactions even with your car mechanic, if you're on WiFi. But now a computer that has a hard-wired connection, either dial up or DSL cable modem so that there's a line in your house, you're pretty safe if you're using any one of those protection suites and if they are updated. Does that answer your question, Sandra?

Sandra: Yes, thank you very much.

Dotsie: Okay, do you have anything else to say about that Internet safety?

Helen: I think I've expanded on my 25 words on the nuts and bolts but that is pretty much true for all computer users whatever kind of transactions they are trying to do.

Dotsie: Right; and I guess the big thing is looking for that lock or key that shows you've entered a secure part of that site. And I must say that I do everything

online and recently, we got a call from our credit card company saying they saw activity on our credit card that didn't look like it was ours and so they ended up canceling our one credit card and we had to get another number. I was most impressed with that bank because I really felt like they do have people watching this. And if something is charged to your credit card that you did not charge, then you can always call the credit card company. What I tell my kids is to look at your credit card bills, really look at every single transaction because we are the final protection in that regard.

Helen: Yes, and you are correct Dotsie, that we don't usually read the fine print in our credit card agreements, but most of them protect you from any loss over fifty dollars. Even if you did do an online transactions and someone grabbed your credit card and ordered a new car, you would actually be protected from your bank, your city bank or your credit card provider's fraud unit, in that regard. Some people recommend using one separate credit card for your online purchases that has a low limit. Like a \$500 credit card instead of one that has a \$14,000 available, because you can lower your risk that way. But not everybody wants a separate credit card and if you were buying airlines tickets, you might not be able to do that.

Dotsie: Yes, you would need more.

Helen: You would need more. But you are correct that you can dispute and the fraud protection division of the credit card companies is very sophisticated. I just bought new carpet and I was glad to use that in order to get miles, but they called me and said that this transaction was not typical for you and they are right, I don't usually spend that much money. So they are in business; they would not be confident that people would want to do business with them if they weren't careful in that regard. Most identity theft, which actually is was what Sandra's question was, was identity theft which is a greater thing, that someone would slowly get into your computer and steal your social security number and bank records. The majority of identity theft does not occur online. It occurs from someone taking a check and whitening it out and doing something else with it or stealing your bank account. Very little of that occurs online because all of our critical information is not accessible in any one transaction.

Dotsie: Yeah, and that's important, I think that is a really important piece of the puzzle because that is something that people worry about. You might learn one thing but you can't learn it all in one transaction. I think we've covered that, why don't we move on? You had mentioned that you can't move ahead if you don't stay current. You want to address that a little bit?

Helen: Yes, just real briefly because I'm sure people want to get to other more specific things.

Dotsie: Sure.

Helen: Just along with your idea of empowering and supporting women and helping, especially women who are in transition, just like choosing your best time to learn, we have to have or it would be ideal to have a certain sense of curiosity about the world to enjoy our participation anyway, but especially when it comes to technology. If you just turn your head and said, "I don't understand any of that stuff that the kids are talking about" then it is going to make it harder for you to embrace the next thing that comes along because technology moves so fast. So it might be that you're sitting at your computer and you're irritated that your screensaver comes on so fast. You're working and then all of a sudden you get a goofy picture that's very distracting. Instead of being frustrated by that, it would help you learn to move ahead if you said, "I'm going to figure that out and I'm going to change my screensaver so it goes on after 20 minutes instead of 2 minutes." You would be amazed at how much better you would feel about your ability to embrace technology.

If you could have a feel of the little victories every once in a while, and teach yourself a new skill and kind of force yourself to say, use—Microsoft Word or whatever your word processing software is, to create some really attractive stationery, or to do with, or something you think would be fun to do and to keep your life more organized by forcing you to stay current. The same thing is true when you read something in the newspaper; you hear something on TV, try not to just let it pass your by. If they're talking about Facebook, you want to go to the Web and look that up and see what the heck is Facebook, unless you have somebody that you could ask. There was a recent cover of Newsweek that has a picture of a e-book reader, a little piece of technology, that sits in a fanny pack, that lets you read books anyway, and it has wireless ability to download books from Amazon; something like 20,000 books would be available to you in a fanny pack, that you could read wherever you want. When you look at the Newsweek cover and you see this little gray machine, and its called Kindle, which is maybe not the best marketing ever done for a product, you want to look into it. When you are at dinner with people or you're talking to people at a Starbucks, and everyone else knows what Kindle is and you don't, that's what enforces that feeling that we're not keeping up or we're inferior. So I really like for people to push themselves to just learn it. You know, there was a time when none of us knew what Beavis and Buttthead was, but we figured it out. I'd like to think that we would do the same with technology.

Dotsie: Yeah, and Helen that is such a good point about empowerment because the more we learn, the more we feel empowered. And instead of us just saying, "Ugh, whatever, I don't know what they're talking about," you know? Look it up and figure it out. And that takes us in to the next comment, which is about avoiding the teenager crutch and I'll share my little story before you get into that, and then we'll take everyone's questions.

Helen: Do you think everyone knows what we mean by that?

Dotsie: I think so. Avoiding the teenager crutch is just trying not to depend on your teenager to fix your problems. I can totally relate to that because I had three teenagers living at the house and then they all went away to college. And especially my daughter, she can fix anything, figure anything out, she just has so much patience and endurance and that's really what it boils down to. But I would always, if I got into a jam, I would always call her into the office; sometimes her boyfriend was there and they would come in and they would fix it. When she went away, I was like, "Oh my gosh Jess, I don't know what I'm going to do without you!" But you know what? I am fixing these problems. I mean like my printer has jammed, and I've seen them in the past open it up and I thought, oh my I have no idea what they're doing, oh my gosh, I don't even want to look at it. And now I fix my own printer problems. I change my own ink. I use to say, "Honey, can you change my ink?" And so it is so true, and now I just feel better and now I really know how to use my printer.

Helen: Well first of all congratulations on having such a self-reliant daughter.

Dotsie: Oh she's wonderful.

Helen: That's a great achievement. You know, it's so easy for us to say, "Oh Timmy, I don't know what I did wrong here." Well, that certainly makes your child think you're never going to get it, and so its easier for them to just reach over and fix it, than it is to explain it to you. Whether it's a teenager or your grandmother or a parent, who says, "You know, your RAM is fried," that really doesn't mean anything to you. Basically that would be a person saying that your computer's memory went kablooey, but we don't use phrases like your RAM is fried. We're not sure if we should send a kid to his room if he says that. So it's important for us to be able to do this ourselves. Not to just enhance our skills, but to enhance your prestige in the eyes of your child that you are able to tackle that. When I go to sit with a client and consult with them, the first thing they want to do is move away from the computer. I say, that's not really going to be productive. I need you to sit at the computer because I already know how to do this.

Dotsie: I can totally relate to that.

Helen: So it's really important and even with terminology there's a wonderful site called www.acronymfinder.com that is the site that tells you, "what is HTML" and "what is FAQ?" You just type in any acronym like RAM, or HTTP, and it gives you all of the definitions for it.

Dotsie: Oh I love that.

Helen: If you have an internet connection problem, one of the first questions they often asked when you ever get through to tech support is "Are you using SSL?" And the first time someone said that to me, I knew what it was, but I don't think

they should assume that lay people know that. I said, “No, I use Sherman.” He got the joke. But SSL means Secure Socket Layering, as to Sandra’s item that she mentioned earlier, that means your Internet connection is more secure. And they want to know that because maybe they want to come into your computer from tech support and help you remotely, but they can’t start a conversation by saying, “Do you have SSL?” because you wouldn’t be calling if you knew what that meant. So I think www.acronymfinder.com is one of those places where we can say “Aha, that was in a magazine today and I looked it up and I know what it is now.”

Dotsie: Oh I love that little tidbit. I love learning things like that. Let’s see if anybody has any questions and if not, we’ll move on. Any questions at this stage? Okay, why don’t we do the email essentials, the skills for email, next?

Helen: I presume everybody on our call uses email to some extent, whether you use some kind of canned package such as AOL, or MSN, or Gmail, where you’re using a web-based interface or whether you use a regular email that lives on your computer with the “inbox” and the “sent,” and the “trash.” I have invented what I call the 7 Essential Email Skills because it is becoming such an important communication device now, that if you are making an inquiry with a company about a job perhaps, or you want to submit an article to boomer women speak, your inquiry in your email has to be very professional in order to be taken seriously. And there are a lot of people using email in very casual ways as they do in normal conversation. If you’re standing in the movie theater lobby, it’s fine to just jibber-jabber and make all kinds of strange transitions from one phrase to another, such as “I like what you’re wearing, did you see this and where are we going to eat?” But that’s not a good way to communicate in writing. So my 7 Essential Skills are:

1) Pay attention to your grammar and spelling because it’s a memo, it’s a letter, it’s as if you’ve put pen to paper and wrote a note and put it in the mail to someone. It’s a letter or a memo and it should look professional.

Dotsie: Okay, let me just interject something there. Can you tell us how to set—I have a spell check on my email, can you share how people can do that? Or does it depend on the email program?

Helen: Exactly, but we are ultimately responsible for our spelling and grammar anyway, so it means read it over before you press send. It is especially true for anyone who is making an inquiry to Dotsie and saying I’d like to be considered to tell my life story. If you spell story wrong, she’s not going to have much faith in your ability to deliver the final product. So it does mean reading it over. And you know the people who write the grammar checker for Microsoft Word; they’re teenagers. They don’t know grammar as well as we do as older women. So even if you have a spellchecker in your email program, you should still read it over because there are so many words like they, then, their, that might be

grammatically incorrect but spelled right. So number one is always check your grammar and spelling before you press send. Just move your hand off the mouse and take a minute and breathe, and make sure you are making sense in your communication. The second one is

2) Knowing how to hand email attachments and that's tough for people. Both knowing you want to attach a document, but you don't know where it lives on your computer, and the other side of it which is frustrating, is receiving an email attachment and not being able to open it. We could probably do a whole hour on that sometime because it is difficult, but when you receive an email attachment from somebody, you know by the look of the logo, or the extension of the file, if it ends in doc, for example, it's a word processing document, if it ends in "eml," it's another email that they forwarded to you, you need to know that little bit of information to know what program should open it. Your computer should know how to open it, but not everybody's is set correctly to do that. So it's a case where you might make a phone call to someone and say, "Can you help me learn, not just help me do it, or do it for me, but help me to learn how to open attachments."

The next thing is

3) That if you are sending an email to twenty something people, it is considered rude so that the "To" line is to all those twenty people. Because you are giving away each person's email address to the other people and that allows people to accidentally begin getting on mailing list and getting spammed. The correct way to do it is to send an email to the key person or to yourself and address everyone else as a "blind carbon copy," which is "BCC" in your email program. There's the "To" which is most common, and then "CC," for Carbon Copy, and BCC for Blind Carbon Copy. I did talk to a person once who said, "What is Carbon Copy?" because he was so young, he didn't know what carbon paper, when we grew up. So it's important to do a BCC if you don't want everyone on the list to know who else got it. That can be pretty critical. And the CC means its okay. If you are sending it to your Grandmother and you want everyone else in the family to see that they also got it, everyone else got a copy, and then the CC is just fine.

The fourth one is

4) The reply etiquette. When you are answering an email from someone: If someone says, "Would you like to come to a fun party on Saturday night and would you bring wine or a snack?" You don't just reply and say "Thanks, I'll be there." The person is also counting on you to finish the next sentence and tell them if you're going to be bringing something. So it's important to reply properly and not just say, "I'll see you then." Just make sure you're making sense.

Dotsie: Yes, and also, sometimes I get emails and then a couple of days later, I'll get emails from people I don't even know and then I figure out that they must have hit a "reply all" to another email I received. I just think that's crazy.

Helen: You're right. I should have an 8 essential then about when sending something to someone the "reply" and the "reply" all are very tricky. I don't see that too much so I'm glad you brought that up. Just two more quick ones and that is:

5) To keep up with the trash. Many people are okay with the inbox and sent. If you delete something from your "inbox," it just goes to your trash folder. And if you delete things from your "sent," because you sent 48 things to your sister this week, then they also go to your trash. So periodically, go through your trash and pick; from most email programs it is File, empty trash, to get rid of that because 100 messages takes an enormous amount of disk space and if you've got things in your "inbox," and your "sent" and your "trash," it makes your whole computer slow down and it makes your email program slow down and you think, what's wrong, I'm deleting my messages. But it is important to keep up with the trash.

And then the last and the most important one is

6) Try to resist forwarding junk. Everyone heard the joke already and nobody thinks its funny and nobody's day will be ruined if they don't get a little cap that chews up paper in a little cartoon. There's a compulsion we have to forward these funny things, but most people consider it pretty unprofessional to continue to do that.

One final thing,

7) For those who are kind of addicted to email, is to know if you're having a problem with that and try and stop the compulsion. For example, just open your email program three times a day and answer everything in a 15-minute sweep of time and then close it. And focus on whatever else you're trying to get done. The time you loose goofing around with email, is time you will never regain. And this is a wonderful communication tool but we did live without it for centuries. So it's important to know if you're having an addiction to checking your email every three minutes and just chatting all day long. It's kind of a tiring thing to do. So that's my last piece of advice on that.

Dotsie: Okay, another thing I would mention is in forwarding emails and responding to emails, always make sure you know who you are sending it to. Because I once responded to someone and I gave the response as though it was going to someone else. Do you know what I mean? Like when you get something that is forwarded, and then you have to click through and you read it and then you hit respond, or reply and it's not going to the right person. And then the other thing with email that drives me crazy is for the people who do send all these

jokes all over the Internet and everything else, inspirational messages, etc, they send everybody's email, I mean, sometimes you have to scroll down for two minutes before you get to it. They should at least delete all those email addresses.

Helen: You're right. I wish I would have included that. I'm glad you brought it up. If you really want someone to read it, then send it to them, but get rid of all of those little carrot symbols that show that you forwarded it from ten other people.

Dotsie: Right.

Helen: The same is true now. People are forwarding these UTube videos to each other and I tell people, I will call them up and say, "Give me three reasons why I should waste time looking at that" because I just won't otherwise. Someone just sends a UTube video with no clue as to why you should watch women mud wrestling or something, or God being caught in the sink drain, or something.

Dotsie: Right, right. Okay, let's see if anybody has any questions before we move on. We only have 10 more minutes. Are there any questions? Okay, you must be doing a good job Helen. How about selecting software?

Helen: Okay, what I would like to say about that is that most people accept what is on their computer when they first get it. You look at a computer and you think, "Oh, this is lovely!" And then they never look around at what is on the computer to see how useful it might be. We set up the Internet, we do email, many people do word processing or they use Excel spreadsheets for everything from home inventory and financial stuff to organizing grocery list and things. But it's important to know there is a wealth of software for any particular need or use. There's software that is available for people with different types of learning disabilities, that the screen can read Web pages aloud to them, if they have a vision issue with being able to see the screen. There's also the software that you can talk into the computer instead of having to type into it if you have a physical disability with your hands. You are able to just speak into the computer and the software can turn it into typing for you. But there are also many other programs that are free or very inexpensive such as—there's a mailing list program and mailing list are very hard to do on a computer in Word, this whole mail-merge concept is much more complicated than it should be. There's a little program that anyone can search for on the Internet called Personal Mailing List; it's three words, but PML is the acronym for it on the desktop, and it's a wonderful little program for just managing an address book and a mailing list which is very relevant at this Christmas time of the year. And there are little programs in the thirty dollar program price range such as "EverNote," that let you keep track of absolutely anything and a tiny little program that you can use on any computer. You can have a whole file in it for recipes, or book collecting, or gift ideas, or charting your charitable contributions for the year, recording your mileage and business expenses. It's sort of a free-phone program that you can use to track

absolutely anything. Another wonderful one is Jot Plus, and that comes from the United Kingdom. And on my Web site, www.cclarity.com there's a link to my blog, and I have a little icon on there for a company called, www.giveawayoftheday.com Its all one long word, www.giveawayoftheday.com and it is a Web site that arranges with companies that everyday for a 24-hour period it gives away that piece of software, instead of it being fifty or a hundred dollars.

Dotsie: Wow! And you download it and you can have it forever?

Helen: Yes.

Dotsie: That is amazing.

Helen: If you go to www.cclarity.com and you click on my tech blog, it's a permanent icon at the top of my screen and it changes all by itself every single day. It's what is called a widget, a little embedded program. Dotsie you probably have twenty of them on every page of your very beautiful site. But the www.giveawayoftheday.com is just a great example of how you can learn something by downloading it for free. Now today, it happens to be of all things, a package on statistics, which nobody is likely to want, but another day it was EverNote and other days its great games that are beyond Solitaire and Free Cell to things that are more intellectually challenging and it's usually productivity-type software to keep people, like a telephone usage log for people and homework helpers for kids. It's really neat.

So I'd like to encourage people to beyond the few icons that they are always hitting on their computer; look and see what else is in the program under programs, but also be a little bit brave about buying and downloading software. At places like Office Max and other stores around the country, you can buy software to learn Bridge, or Chess, or foreign languages or play Scrabble or to do Sudoku, for less than twenty dollars and they work flawlessly on just about every PC or MAC. I'd like to encourage people to expand their computer beyond the first few things they learned use it fully and engage a little bit more of it each year.

Dotsie: Yeah, that a great idea because I know I do get in a rut of doing the same things on my computer and it's mostly work.

Helen: We all do. Most people use about 10% of the potential of the computer. And maybe that's okay for our car, too. Maybe we just drive around our own community for the bank and errands, but because the computer is an intellectual aid, it's wonderful to use it for all sorts of other things. I'm kind of an evangelist for asking people to expect more from technology but to invest more in it. You know any time we spend learning something is never wasted and when you learn one or two things in the computer, your learning curve is much, much shorter

going forward after that. So many programs are very similar in the way that we talk to software.

Dotsie: Yes, that is so true. Well, let's see if anyone has any questions and then we just have one or two more things and then we're going to close things off, so does anybody have any questions they'd like to ask of Helen before we move to the next topic? No? Okay, because this is the holiday season, and a lot of us are grandparents, and some of us have children that we are still buying things for, we just wanted to talk a little bit about tech toys for kids and maybe not necessarily listing all of the latest and the greatest but just what to look for and make certain of before we just go out there buying things.

Helen: Sure. You know its unfortunate today that even two-year olds are attracted to technology and they will gravitate to that rather than a cute, fluffy snowman or a teddy bear. Unfortunately. So it is important to know that this is what children seem to want and they see it all day long in school and pre-school, but I actually don't recommend that families invest in those high end games like PlayStation and Xbox. There are always places where your children and grandchildren can play with that, but I think it is better to appease them with smaller technology tools and toys, primarily because it all becomes obsolete so fast. So you can amuse a child perfectly well with a forty-dollar digital camera which is technology, and it would wow even a 10-year old, but it's something that can teach that child to take good photos and to learn to manipulate them on the computer and do a photo album for grandmother's birthday, or something. It is something that involves the child more with the family instead of isolating a child in their room with solitary technology that they just thumb and look at all day long like some of the strange games.

And there are also companies that do a phenomenal job in learning games, games for learning. Such as Leapfrog, which is one word, www.leapfrog.com, they have learning games for everyone from age two to ten, easily. And they're colorful, and they're attractive and they're electronic but they are not hundreds of dollars. There is a company called V-Tech that has a product called WizKid and it has a fifty dollar learning tool that's called a VTech Nitro Junior Notebook and it looks like a laptop in pink, or purple or black or red and it reinforces children's school skills in either English or Spanish with these cartridges you can insert in them. It makes them think they have a high end electronics but its actually giving them a learning tool. And yet lastly on that subject I'd honestly say if you remember our childhood, nothing beats family games, whether they are cardboard or plastic. Just getting the kids to engage together and play games and learn games; especially those like Scrabble, and Upwords, and Jargon. Those that are games that involve expanding your ability to spell and think and do grammar and learn to score. I think those things have much more value for us and will for a long time when these games are long gone onto Ebay or to the recycling centers.

Dotsie: Now can you tell me again, it was at www.Vtech.com and it's the WizKid Vtech Nitro Notebook?

Helen: Wizkid is a whole series of learning tools at Vtech. But the particular one, that's a toyish laptop, I'll call it, because it's fifty dollars. It's Vtech, and the next word is Nitro Junior Notebook. They look like very cool little laptops. They get a CD cartridge that goes in where the CD door would be and that cartridge is specific to learning 5th grade Spanish, or something on the computer that helps children learn the right clothing to wear for different weather. Those would be like for a pre-school level child.

Dotsie: So you actually buy the notebook and the WizKid software is separate?

Helen: No, the cartridges are separate when you buy the notebook. The WizKid is a separate product from the same company; from Vtech. And that is more like a question and answering gaming tool.

Dotsie: And do you put that on your computer?

Helen: No, it's a little hand-held thing.

Dotsie: The WizKid is actually a hand-held thing also. Okay, great!

Helen: You've learned something today!

Dotsie: I've learned a lot! Your last comment was to have confidence in yourself and to realize that we know than we think we know. And I have to say that I appreciate you making that a separate topic because it is so important and I do think we know more than we realize. I can comment on that because since launching my own business, I've learned so much but I do it all the time. So I really don't think much of it and then I'll talk to someone and I'll say I use Audio Acrobat and just kind of use different terminology and they're like wait a minute, and then I realize, oh my gosh, I really know something about all this.

Helen: That's wonderful. And you know, this is the very thing in modern technology in a 100 years where there's no gender difference. And I think women aren't expecting that. The expect, if a man goes to work all day and grunts in front of a computer that he's smarter than you. But that isn't the case. This is one of the very few areas in society where gender differences completely disappear. We're on an equal basis with men. We don't need different strengths or brawn, to do any technology or computer-related task, we need common sense, we need intellectual curiosity, and in fact studies have shown that women are better at computer interaction than men because women are born multi-taskers. So it's easier for us to pay the bills, and register a kid for pre-school looking it up on the Web, make a doctor's appointment, buy airline tickets and write a book.

Dotsie: Right.

Helen: And go to www.boomerwomenspeak.com and chat in the forums. Women work like that all day long. And then at 5:30, they look up a recipe at www.recipe.com for the three things they've got in the refrigerator and they have dinner on the table an hour later. Men can't always do all of that. So I think when faced with a challenge, in our lives, if we look at the computer as an ally whether you are buying new carpet as I just did, or you need to price new health insurance, for the family, or you're caring for an aging parent, there are so many resources available to you on the Web. It's a wonderful intellectual and knowledge-base electronic tool in the home and no one is better suited to it than a middle-aged woman.

Dotsie: Wow, isn't that wonderful?

Helen: We love to sit, we love tea and coffee, and we have the time to make decisions and young people would be astounded by all the things that are available but we have that world of experience that helps us be sound consumers and so we are a perfect match for technology and I wish every middle-age woman approaching 60 would embrace it as much as I have. That's why I wrote ***Computer Ease***, I really wanted to get people past intimidation, to share the philosophy and humor of coping with computers and just knowing that you can take charge of it and improve both your intellectual pursuits and your efficiency, which is great. And you've been a perfect example of that the way you've used the computer to grow your business.

Dotsie: Yeah, well you know, there is a great quote from your book, ***Computer Ease***, which is a great handbook that Helen has written that answers a lot of your very basic questions and will help you feel more comfortable using technology. But the quote was, "When a person embraces the computer for all it can do, the possibilities will always grow." And that really stood out to me because I think so many times, we don't recognize all that the Web and computers have to offer. When we really think about it, learning is literally at our fingertips and I just encourage women, you know, to use those search engines to find whatever it is you want to learn because you can learn it from the comfort of your own home. And so maybe that is a good way to end the call.

Helen: Very well said, Dotsie.

Dotsie: Helen, why don't you tell us your Web site again, and what you blog about, and that's actually something we didn't get to talk about, but in 2008 we're going to have a teleconference on blogging so we can come back to you then.

Helen: As I mentioned earlier, my primary Web site is www.cclarity.com and there's a link on the top of that to my blog. And even though a Web site is kind of static and not something that changes everyday, a blog is free for the most part,

and is as easy to do as an email. So if you are addicted to email, you'd be a great blogger. I blog on any tech topic or humorous topic that I think is of interest to people when I feel like making a post a couple of times a week. And your post or your comments can be organized according to topics, by productivity, or fun, or Internet, or security and safety. And I also have a blog for my book, Release Your Writing, at www.releaseyourwriting.com and that blog is full of resources for writers to gain motivation and learn what I am learning everyday about the industry and how fast it's changing, and how the face of publishing is so different than it use to be. So both of those, both Web sites have blogs that are ongoing ways for people to continue to learn and I link to other blogs, of course, and to books of note, so it's a way to share a little bit of your own personal experience with a much wider community than we could have ever, ever hoped to reach in any another way.

Dotsie: That's right. Okay, look for Helen online, she's also a member of the association, so you can contact her through her site, and feel free to correspond in your forum community, right Helen?

Helen: Sure. Also, if people could just email me directly with any questions from what we covered so fast this evening, Helen@cclarity.com and I'd be happy to answer any questions by email.

Dotsie: Okay, thank you so much for being on the call and I just hope that everyone will continue to spread the word about the National Association of Baby Boomer Women, www.nabbw.com and Boomer Women Speak, www.Boomerwomenspeak.com. Thank you ladies so much for being on the call its been a pleasure.