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TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE

*“What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters
compared to what lies within us.”*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson



THE FABRIC OF YOUR BELIEF SYSTEM

The nucleus of that which is you is found in your beliefs and values. Belief, as defined by Webster, is a feeling of conviction. Values, on the other hand, are things that are important to you. All of us have well-developed beliefs and values. These deeply rooted philosophies are the sum of the experiences and learning that we have had in life thus far. Our personal beliefs and values serve as the guide for who we currently are and who we will become. To be honest, I didn't realize how strong an influence my own beliefs and values were until I began preparing for an intense coaching session for myself.

A brilliant woman by the name of Juannel Teague conducted the coaching session. My preparation for the session included an assessment of my life's experiences that had served to formulate my beliefs and values. The process was

extremely intensive but immensely illuminating. It gave me an opportunity to gain a very deep understanding of the experiences in my life that drove me both personally and professionally. During the course of this process, I discovered many things about myself that I didn't previously have awareness or appreciation for. If you willingly engage in this process, I promise that you, too, will discover things about yourself that you never knew.

It was during the course of this coaching session that I found the courage to take a far more powerful stance on sharing my feelings about climbing the corporate ladder. You might think, "Oh, I already know what my beliefs and values are. I can skip this part." Resist the temptation to do so. Getting your foundation right is critical; understanding the root of your belief and value system is the core of a solid foundation to build a successful career.

The exercises in this book will help you to get in touch with your true beliefs and values. I did these same exercises myself. I promise they work! Like a lot of other people, I was unaware how much the experiences from my childhood were impacting the way I conducted myself as an adult. I think we all know that we are products of our environment, but I don't think we have consciously gathered the wisdom that comes as a result of these experiences.

[... I believe in the power of making a difference in someone's life.]

I remember being eight or nine years old, playing in the field next to our house one day. It was a beautiful spring day and Easter was coming. Jackie, a friend who was my age and

lived around the corner, came over to play. I thought we were really poor, but he was even poorer than we were.

I probably should mention that there were ten kids in my family. That day, many of my sisters and brothers were outside playing. We were all talking about how excited we were about the upcoming Easter egg hunt. I noticed that Jackie didn't seem to share in our excitement. I remember asking him what was wrong. He told me that his parents couldn't afford an Easter basket and that they were not going to have an Easter egg hunt. I was crushed. It was an emotional experience that I can still feel today. I ran into the house, got my basket, and gave it to Jackie. It was my way of taking away his pain.

[...each of us can and should make
a positive difference for others.]

Do you know what I learned from that experience? I learned that I want to help people. I learned that I believe in the power of making a difference in someone's life. That experience formed the nucleus for the kind of leader that I would become. As I progressed in my corporate climb, I realized that the most satisfying part of my job was helping others develop themselves. Today, Jackie is doing great in life. I saw him a few years ago in my hometown and we had a big laugh about how I cried and gave him my Easter basket. He still remembers it as well as I do. If you don't think that there is power in connecting with and touching another person's life, you aren't alive. This experience formulated one of my core beliefs, that each of us can and should make a positive difference for others. It also set the stage for one

of my strongest values—helping others realize their dreams. That Easter basket incident was the spark for what I do today professionally. That’s how strong and impactful the early experiences are in your life.



KEEPING YOUR VALUES ALIVE

Getting in touch with what you believe and value will be critical to building a career that fits into your life and is rewarding. I now know how much I value my family. I wish I could tell you that I always knew the true value of my family, but the truth is that I haven’t always made choices with my family’s value at the core. In fact, the value that I place on my family life is what ultimately caused me to make the decision to leave corporate America.

I also value my health. Believe me when I say that without your health you are nothing! If you don’t manage the pressure and stress while making your journey, you will pay a price. I paid a price. Have you ever had chest pain and dismissed it as stress? Don’t ignore pain! It is a warning sign. I didn’t have a heart attack, but I was riddled with anxiety attacks that would sometimes paralyze me. I didn’t appreciate the need to manage my energy. Looking back, I wish I had done some things differently, which is part of the reason that I decided to write this book. I hope that by sharing some of the good and bad things that happened to me, your dreams will come quicker and without as high a price. That’s why it is so important to understand your beliefs and values. Once they are defined, you can set the boundaries for all aspects of your life so that you know where your thresholds are.

One of my clients recently had an experience that tested

her resolve for her values. She was pregnant with her third child. She had been working toward a promotion for the last several years. She had done a really good job establishing her brand (I'll explain more about the branding concept later). She thought that she was close to being promoted. However, she had been experiencing complications with her pregnancy. Doctors had instructed her to take it easy. She had had problems in the past with her job, and these problems caused her concern about the perception her colleagues might have of her. The problems that she had weren't bad—it was just that the learning curve was so steep that it was taking her longer than she wanted to progress. She really wanted to be viewed as the star employee. She was absolutely torn. She wanted to be visible for the promotion; however, the culture of the company, although progressing, was still not openly understanding of women and pregnancy. At least that's what she thought. The truth is, the company would have responded to the parameters that she asked for. The company would have gladly accommodated each request that enabled her to take care of her health. No company wants an employee to have her baby on the cafeteria floor. Trust me!

Sometimes we are afraid to suggest or admit that we need help or special accommodations, for fear that it makes us look weak. Don't give in to this self-imposed guilt. If my client takes care of herself, then she's more likely to have a healthy baby—and still be considered for the promotion. If she doesn't take care of herself, she puts herself and her child at risk. Although she may still be considered for the promotion, if she makes this choice, she will likely regret it.

Fortunately, my client's situation was resolved through coaching. She was able to come to terms with taking several

days off, as her doctor had instructed. She actually found that she was able to get more done lying in the bed than running up and down the halls of the office tower. And, more importantly, she was true to her own values and she demonstrated her beliefs through her actions.

Many people start out their careers with really clear value systems, and then, to “fit in,” they compromise their values. Don’t do it! Stick with what you know to be right. Use the area below to compose a personal list of values you want to instill in your business environment. Some examples might be excellence, education, or open communication.

If you are not able to live your values in the work environment, what is holding you back?

What behavioral changes and/or environmental changes do you need to make in order to be able to function with value integrity?

If you don't take the time to
find out where you stand, you
will be compromised.

Your beliefs and values represent who you are. Don't let any individual or company serve as a source of compromise in this area. If you don't take the time to find out where you stand, you will be compromised. I promise you that. You are responsible for you! So, what do you believe? What do you value? Stop right now and challenge yourself to see if you can describe your values and beliefs. Then take it to the next level and ask yourself how these values and beliefs have shaped who you are today.

Following are lists of my beliefs and values, which I have refined over the past several years.

I believe . . .

- ⊗ What you sow, you will reap.
- ⊗ You should treat others the way you want to be treated.
- ⊗ You should dedicate yourself to excellence.
- ⊗ We all have a purpose in life.
- ⊗ When you help others, you help yourself.
- ⊗ God does not sleep.
- ⊗ We should strive to make a positive difference for ourselves and others.

I value . . .

- ⊗ Spirituality
- ⊗ Family
- ⊗ Friends

- ⊗ Fun
- ⊗ Honesty
- ⊗ Trust
- ⊗ Life
- ⊗ Productivity
- ⊗ Learning
- ⊗ Helping/Caring

I want to encourage you to develop lists for yourself. I also recommend that you keep these lists close at hand as you develop your career plan. Let your personal values and belief system guide your every action.

Let me drive this point home even further. In 1992, I was promoted by my company to the position of area vice president of sales for the southeast region. This region included nine states and approximately eight hundred people. Our team was responsible for a little more than a third of what was then a \$6-billion company. It was a great job. In fact, at the time, it was my dream job. I loved interfacing with the customers. I relished the opportunity to create a culture that mirrored my beliefs and values. I created all kinds of new business applications and received lots of press throughout the organization. The whole experience was absolutely invigorating.

There was only one problem. Of course, that one problem was a huge problem. My husband, Mike, was forced to work in another city because the market in which we lived was too small for his television production profession. The kids were spending more time with sitters than with either Mike or me. While managing a travel schedule that kept me on the road for a minimum of three days a week, and after being faced with a cancer scare, I knew that something had to change. But what that truly meant, I didn't know.

[You have to value yourself before others will value you.]

After much counsel with my husband, and prayer, I made the decision to approach my boss. I wanted to test the waters on the company's position about a possible relocation to another job. I would have been satisfied with just a kind ear. Unfortunately, I didn't receive that from my boss. But I didn't stop there. There are some battles that are just worth fighting, particularly when they are attached to a strong belief or value. I decided to wage a campaign. The message of the campaign was this: *I want to work here and do great things for this company, but I can't under these circumstances. I've got to find another way. Will someone help me find another way?*

If you are reading this, thinking "I could never do that," think again. You can! Someone has to be the first. You have to value yourself before others will value you. And if you are not willing to help your organization meet your needs, shame on you. *Don't sit on the sidelines; get in the game!*

My colleagues and my boss really thought I was out of my mind to ask the company to relocate me and to create a job for me. Fortunately for me, the chairman and CEO of the company was familiar with my work and the contributions I had made. After I submitted several business plans to the senior vice president and the president, my company and I came to the decision that there was, indeed, a business need I could help to fill. The need was rooted in addressing the company's underdeveloped relationships, performance, and market share within the national accounts. It was a big challenge, but I was glad to take it on in order to move my

family to one city where we could all live together. I knew I would still have to travel, but it was a better situation overall. We picked Dallas. It worked for the company since the world's largest convenience store chain was headquartered in Dallas, and the world's largest distributor was less than a two-hour drive from there.

Initially, the situation had seemed hopeless. Had I not asked or made the request, it would have been hopeless, at least with that company. What's the message in all of this? Don't be afraid to tell the world what your needs are. As long as they are rooted in your beliefs and values—as long as there is no intent on your part to do damage to the company or anyone else—make your case. If you don't, who will?

I recently coached a client through a very similar situation. She had strong family values, but her work schedule was demanding more and more of her time. She was beginning to feel overwhelmed by all of her responsibilities. She wanted to reduce her hours from forty to thirty-two per week. What this really meant was that she wanted to reduce her seventy-hour workweek to something along the lines of forty-five hours. After conducting research on other companies where employees had reduced the number of hours, yet increased their productivity, we put together her case.

She went forward under the auspices that this was a “test.” She knew that she was valued at the company, but she didn't know what the acceptance level for this kind of arrangement would be. I reminded her that she would never know if she didn't step up to the plate and ask. When she asked, she received. She successfully reinvented the rules.



WORK, BOUNDARIES, AND CHOICES

Do you want more control over your life? Most of us would probably answer yes. The truth is, much like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, we've all got the power. We have always had the power. What power am I talking about? The power of choice. The power to say yes or no. It is so easy to get lost chasing the carrot. We lose sight of who's really in control. Finding your voice is very much about recognizing that you have the power of choice. Yes, you must be prepared to live with the choices that you make. But here's the good news—each and every morning is the first day of the rest of your life. If you don't like the way things are, CHANGE them!

[Finding your voice is very much
about recognizing that you have
the power of choice.]

The way our lives are today has its roots in our childhood. Women are particularly skewed toward the People-Pleasing Syndrome. The following story illustrates this influence in my own life.

“It started as a child,” I stated.

“What started as a child?” questioned the interviewer.

“My need to please everyone,” I responded.

“Why do you think you need to please everyone?” the interviewer asked.

“Because I want to be accepted, admired, respected, and loved.”

“And you think that because you say yes to everyone else’s requests, you will be accepted and admired?”

“Why, yes,” I replied.

“Then why do you feel so out of control?” asked the interviewer.

“I’m out of control because I am pulled a million different ways and I so want to take care of everyone else that I am no longer taking care of myself,” I said. “Quite honestly, I feel like I’m dying inside.”

“Is that what you want?” asked the interviewer. “Do you really want to give so much of yourself that you have nothing left? Do you really think that people admire that kind of behavior?”

“I don’t know,” I responded. “I guess I hadn’t really thought about it that way.”

“Well, let me ask you one final question. Do you know anything about the Superwoman story?”

“Yeah, I guess I do,” I said. “I mean, I know that people talk about women who try to do it all, be it all, live it all, but on the inside they want a life totally different, if that’s what you’re talking about.”

“That’s not exactly it,” the interviewer said. “Let me explain. Superwoman was a really good person whose desire to please others was admirable, but she stretched herself too thin. After many years of pleasing others and taking on more than she could truly handle, she had a nervous breakdown, was committed to the insanity ward, and died. It was as if Superwoman had never existed. Do you know what people said about her death? The same people who called her and made a thousand requests that she honored said this: ‘I thought she was smarter than that, to have taken on more than she could handle. It’s no wonder she died; she tried to

do everything for everybody. She should have had more respect for herself.”

Is this what people will say about you? Will people talk about you after you have departed with a legacy that isn't worth replicating? If other people's reactions don't reach your heart, try and think of it another way. Would you want your son or daughter to repeat your behavior? My daughter has had such an influence on my life, particularly in the area of the choices that I made around my career. She used to tell me that she didn't want to be like me when she grew up. Every time I heard those words, the pain went deeper and deeper. Sometimes I even felt anger. Here I was trying to make life so good for her. I mean, I was working my fingers to the bone. I was sacrificing my life—all in the name of advancing her life. It wasn't until I got the nerve to ask her why she felt that way that I learned yet another lesson about beliefs and values. I really didn't want to hear what she told me. Can you imagine? Perhaps some of you have had this same experience. This is what she shared: “Mommy, you don't do anything but work. You don't have friends. You are always on edge.” WOW! I knew that, but I didn't know that she knew it. That very day I began to make adjustments in the amount of time and effort that I gave to each facet of my life, including spending more time with her.

Do you have respect for yourself? Are you trying to play Superwoman? I was. Fortunately, my story didn't end the same way Superwoman's did. But, like Superwoman, I hadn't taken the time to really understand my beliefs and values. I knew what they were, but I wasn't prepared to apply them. I was using the wrong model. It took me eighteen years to figure out that I had no boundaries. I knew it, but I wouldn't deal with it.

Many of the women who were climbing the corporate ladder during the '80s and early '90s were experiencing the same thing. It was our first window of opportunity, and we were hell-bent to do whatever it took. There was a certain amount of conformity. We tried to act like we were men with wives at home to take care of everything. Unfortunately, that wasn't the way it was. It wasn't until someone asked me how my actions were impacting my children that I began to really look closely at what percentage of my life was spent at work. If my analysis was right, probably 70 percent of my time was spent at work. It's hard to have a complete life when there is nothing in your life but work.

Susie wears a badge that is self-imposed. Her badge is connected to the eighty hours a week she works, the sleepless nights she's had over the past two weeks stressing over an upcoming presentation to the president of the company, and the twenty pounds she's gained in the last three months. Not a pretty sight, is it? But can you relate?

How many times have you found yourself in the same situation? Why does it make you feel good to talk about how tired you are, how stressed you are, and how desperate for time with your family you are? It's a cry for help—an internal cry, that is. Many times men and women who are in the process of building careers believe that if they work themselves near to death, somehow they will get extra credit. *Newsflash:* You don't get extra credit! You aren't even thought of as "something special." In fact, truth be told, the perception that is formulated about people who portray themselves in this extreme, out-of-balance position is that they can't handle all the responsibility.

It's ironic, isn't it? Susie was convinced that she was adding extra value because she was stretching herself. Yet the

exact opposite perception was being created. Challenge yourself to do a quick examination of how you would be graded in the balance department. If you are not happy with your discovery, make the commitment to do something about it.

[Successful careers require balance.]

Successful careers require balance. Is there an easy answer? NO! It's about making smart choices based on your life's vision. Balance is something I would love to say will come magically. It won't. In fact, it's hard work! It requires careful planning. It also requires that you identify some very healthy parameters. Some refer to these parameters as boundaries.

In a recent coaching session, I offered these suggestions to one of my clients who was struggling to find balance:

1. Remember what's important. Jobs can disappear in the blink of the next merger or acquisition, but families are with you until death. You want to have fulfillment in all areas of your life. Fulfillment and success require *prioritization*.
2. Step back and ask yourself why you have to work such long hours. Is it because there is a crunch project that has a looming deadline? Is it because you are learning and are going through a period of getting up to speed? Or is it because you enjoy the rush of being able to wear the badge that you *think* says to the world, "I'm slaving and you should promote me for it"?
3. Delegate when you can. The purpose of a team is to ensure that one person doesn't have to carry it all. Share the responsibilities and ask for help.

4. Establish healthy parameters or boundaries. As an example, if you have to work extra during the week, then weekends should be off-limits. Or maybe you could go in early two days a week instead of staying until nine or ten at night.

You'll know when you have found balance because you will experience a consistent burst of energy instead of a dragging tiredness and a feeling that you can never get caught up.



YOUR WORK AND YOUR LIFE

Is the business world getting better about work/life balance? Absolutely. The fact that *Fortune*, *Fast Company*, and *Working Mother* magazines all survey the top companies to work for is fantastic. There is no need to work for a company that isn't family-friendly unless you are going to dedicate yourself to changing the environment and culture of the organization or your circumstances restrict you from relocating. This is all assuming you have the credibility and experience to get the kind of job you desire. Remember, the definition of a successful career is not limited to a title, a compensation, or a corner office. Successful careers are defined for each individual on a personal basis. It is the reason why a career strategy or vision must be a part of a life vision.

Plan your life and let work
take its proper place.

As you plan your career, decide how work fits into the rest of your life. Plan your life and let work take its proper

place. Don't plan your work and expect your life to fit into it. I promise you, it won't!

To climb the ladder requires good choices and, sometimes, sacrifices. Before you leap onto the ladder, make sure you take the time to engage in the exercises included in this book. Don't shortchange this step—it's more important than you think. Carolyn's example drives this point home. Carolyn is a mid-level manager in a major consumer goods organization. She is married with no children, but she wants to have children sometime in the near future. She began her career in the field as a sales representative. While in that role, she caught the eye of a regional director who was in her territory and was really impressed with the work that she was doing.

Shortly after the regional director's visit, she received several other visits from key personnel from the home office. Not too long thereafter, Carolyn was promoted to a position in the city where the home office was located. Carolyn's husband was in the process of obtaining his MBA at the time she was promoted. He did not want to interrupt his education to move with her.

Carolyn and her husband made a decision together. They decided their marriage was strong enough to sustain living apart for a year. They understood that in order for Carolyn to experience the kind of career advancement she desired, it would be necessary for her to move to her company's home office. They both agreed that the sacrifice was worth the reward.

Fortunately for Carolyn, everything worked out as they had planned. She stayed in the home office, where she developed her skills, and was then promoted to the regional director position within two years. Her husband obtained his degree and then he moved to be with her. Carolyn's career advance-

ment may not have come so quickly had she and her husband not been prepared to make some choices and sacrifices.

But not every story of sacrifice has a happy ending. Sometimes, even after you have made what you think are good choices, you find that the price is higher than you thought. Terri's story is like that. She, like Carolyn, was a smart, energetic professional. She and her husband, Dave, had been married for several years and had moved three times for career advancement, twice for Dave and once for Terri.

Terri had received regular promotions and was viewed by the organization as having the potential to attain a position as vice president. The one thing she would need to do was spend time in several different functions in the company's home office. The problem was that her husband absolutely loved where they lived and really didn't want to move.

After a lot of debate and serious conversations, this couple made the decision that it was in the best interest of the family to make the move. And so they did. But Dave got to the new city and fell into a deep depression. He became a different person. His negativity started to affect the children. And, needless to say, it affected Terri. He resented the move and the fact that Terri's career was now on an extreme fast track, while his career had hit a brick wall.

Terri made every attempt to help her husband assimilate into the new environment. She tried to help him find a job. She suppressed telling him about many of her achievements, and she never reminded him that it was her paycheck that was providing for the family. Unfortunately, no matter what she tried, Dave remained stuck in his depression. His unhappiness caused marital and family stress. After dealing with the situation for more than two years, Terri was faced with the reality that Dave was never going to be happy in this city.

She had to either find a new job or convince her company to relocate her to another city.

Terri's situation is just as real as Carolyn's. Both couples made choices, and both couples made sacrifices. One story turned out great, the other not so great. Why? Change is difficult for people, even when it is positive. But when one partner makes a decision to pursue career advancement, he or she must understand how it will affect the entire family unit. And a partner can't agree to a move simply because he or she wants to support the spouse; the move must fit into the family's life plan. In other words, a career vision has to be a part of a much bigger life vision.

This is an issue that many couples will face, given that married couples with children comprise the bulk of the nation's employee base. The exercises included in this book will help you design a career vision that is part of your life vision, and the exercises should be shared with your spouse or significant other. If you are single, you probably are not going to develop your career plan and life vision for the day when Mr. or Miss Right comes along, but it should be conducted with other particular elements in mind. These elements may include proximity to family, friends, city life, etc.

Recently I was speaking to a group of executives on career success and leadership. I made the point about boundaries and choices and how important it was to establish boundaries while building your career. I shared my personal story of how my son, who was born with Down syndrome, had to have surgery at the tender age of fourteen months. I had just started my career and was too afraid to ask for time off. I had been in the position for less than six months. I knew that I had been doing a good job, but I didn't think my boss would understand. I gave away my power because I

didn't make the choice for myself. I let what I thought was the "pressure of my job" keep me from being with my son during his surgery. My husband went with my son, and I came to the hospital after my workday was over. Why do I share this story? Certainly not to be a role model or to boast about my wonderful accomplishments. I tell this story to men and women because I want them to understand that in order to have life success (personal and professional), you have to get up to the top and then reinvent the rules.

After the speech, a woman came up to me and said that she has heard many women executives talk with regret about stories similar to mine. She had children herself and she wanted to experience a successful career. But she felt as though she was in a catch-22. My first response to her was one of understanding. It was clear to me that she was in turmoil and pain. I asked her if she had taken the time to get in touch with her beliefs and values, and if she had set any boundaries. Even though she had tried to set boundaries, she feared not getting the next promotion because of her choices. Here are the points I shared with her about facing the personal responsibility of living your life the way you want to:

1. Identify your beliefs and values.
2. Establish your boundaries.
3. Decide where your career fits into your overall life vision.
4. Find other women and men in your organization who are faced with similar work/life balance issues.
5. Bring your concerns to senior management.
6. Look for small victories (such as being able to work from home a certain number of days a week).
7. Make sure your work is impeccable!

8. Make sure you clearly understand the measurements for getting promoted.
9. Find case studies of other companies that have done a good job managing work/life balance. Use these case studies to support your point.
10. When you get promoted, create an environment where the fear of not advancing because of family commitments is eliminated.



YOUR PERSONAL BOUNDARY PROTECTION

The next time you are pressed to do something that does not align with your boundaries, use this five-step process to help regain focus. I'm sure you've heard about "talking to the hand." Most people associate this with a negative, but I would submit that it can be a positive if you use it as a caution reminder. Think of the hand as your compass and make sure that the choices you make align with the keys for each finger. The thumb represents your Purpose. The index finger represents your Passion. The middle finger guides your level of Fulfillment. The ring finger can represent the Happiness that the choice brings you. And, finally, the pinky asks whether it aligns with your conviction to Service.



TALK TO THE HAND

#1 The Thumb—Purpose

How does this current activity align with my life's purpose?

#2 The Index Finger—Passion(s)

How does this current activity or request align with my passion(s)?

#3 The Middle Finger—Fulfillment

Does this activity add energy for the fulfillment of my current goals? Does it align with my values, principles, and beliefs?

#4 The Ring Finger—Contentment

Does this activity give me a sense of peace and joy? (I know that I'm doing the right thing even if it means readjusting other priorities.)

#5 The Pinky—Service

Does this activity help me to make a positive difference for myself and for others?

Think about how many times you have checked the Caller ID, only to pick up the phone knowing that you don't want to talk to the Spirit Mom who's planning the next fundraiser. But guilt draws you in and you answer the phone anticipating that you will be asked to do something that will add yet another responsibility to your already overflowing plate. Stop the guilt trip! Just say NO! Or, if it aligns with all five elements, just say YES. But *say what you mean and mean what you say!* Don't just do it "because"! These five elements become a part of your boundary road map. Applying them consistently will give you strength to make the decisions that are necessary (including saying no) to get the most out of your life.

[. . . say what you mean and
mean what you say!]

Now I don't want you to get the impression that you can go around all day throwing your hand in everybody's faces. I would strongly suggest that this be a *mental* process. One of my sisters (God love her soul) has been searching for how

to establish boundaries for about twenty years. She is so deep into feeling as if she has to care for everyone else that she looks horrible, sounds horrible, and must feel horrible. Her favorite line is “I’m tired of being tired.” And my favorite line back to her is “Then why don’t you do something about it?” That is the question for all of us. At some point, we all have to do something that results in a positive change. If you don’t get anything else out of this book, get this: *You are in charge of your life*. You are responsible. Yes, YOU! As scary as that is, it is also exciting. You are the architect—get busy designing your life to be the way you want it to be. None of us wants to get old and say “I wish I would have . . .”



KEEPING STRESS IN CHECK

Stress is a big component of today’s fast-paced world. Success cannot be achieved without an adequate amount of respect for stress. You have to have a plan to keep stress in its place or it will take you over.

The corporate world is full of stress. There are outside stress factors and inside stress factors. You control the inside stress factors. You cannot and will not ever be able to control external stress factors. You must learn how to respond and process external factors in a positive way. One of the pitfalls of success is that you feel as if once you get up to speed, you don’t want to get off the treadmill for fear that it will take too long to recapture that pace. (I can tell you from personal experience, this simply isn’t true.) Everyone needs quiet, rest, and reflective time. It is yet another critical step in your action plan. We can’t forget that we are humans. As such, we must take care of mind, body, and spirit.

Another reason to apply an appropriate amount of energy in this area is that we are examples for our sons and daughters. They repeat many of the habits and behaviors they learned through us. While we'd like to believe that's not true, just remember the last time you said, "I can't believe I'm acting this way. This is just the way my mother used to act." It's most natural to absorb through example. We learn by repetition. This is why it is so important to spend quality time thinking about what you want out of life and making sure that what you're doing is really what you want to be doing.



ATTITUDE IS THE KEY

Remember, you are in charge of your life and the way you want to live it. Know that what you want is worth standing up for. Following are six keys to keep your attitude right.

1. Listen to your body and mind. If you feel tired, pull back. Don't play the martyr. No one can help you with this except YOU.
2. Include exercise three times per week.
3. Set clear boundaries. Learn to say no.
4. Make time for family and friends.
5. Get fed spiritually.
6. Keep everything in perspective.

Another practice you might find to be of value is the use of affirmations. Affirmations are positive statements that help to subconsciously influence our thinking process. It is what some people call "self-talk." Here are some tips on developing and using affirmations:

- ⊗ Make your statement positive.
- ⊗ Make it present tense.

- ⊗ Use “I” as a part of the statement. For example, “I am happy, healthy, and successful.”
- ⊗ Repeat your affirmation as a part of your self-reflection time or any time during the day when you might need a little pick-me-up!
- ⊗ Put your affirmations on note cards and place them anywhere that will help you remember to repeat them.
- ⊗ Practice letting go of the past. Focus on the present.

[. . . success requires resiliency.
Mistakes are great teachers.]

I believe in the power of affirmations and positive thinking. Affirmations are still an integral part of my life. Why? Because there is always something happening that can cause anxiety. As Charles Stanley says, “You are either going through something, coming out of something, or getting ready to go through something.” Discovering your values, beliefs, and life desires serves to lay a solid foundation—but sustaining success requires *resiliency*. One way you can prepare yourself to deal with the inevitable bumps in the road is to commit to adopting an attitude that rejects defeat. That doesn’t mean that you won’t experience failure. The difference between those who can bounce back from setbacks versus those who cannot is attitude. Women tend to hold on to mistakes like a security blanket. Let mistakes go. Men are great about being able to quickly move on after a mistake has occurred. Don’t let mistakes cause you to think that you are not worthy of greater levels of responsibility. Mistakes are great teachers. There are secrets that can only be gleaned from the pain.

Shortly after I was promoted to a position as vice president, one of the major distributors in my area of sales responsibility

declared bankruptcy. There had been rumors that this might happen and we were watching and monitoring the situation. As VP, it was my responsibility to make the recommendation about the best way to handle this situation. I deferred my decision to the credit department because I wanted to separate myself from the fallout. I was doing this because I believed that even if the account closed, these same people that I was dealing with would show up in other accounts. I should have never deferred such an important decision to anyone else. The distributor closed sooner than expected and we lost nearly \$700,000. Fortunately, we got most of that back during the reconciliation activities in court. My initial guilt was overwhelming. I complained about the situation on almost a daily basis. It wasn't until my husband reminded me that I needed to get on with "the business of doing business" that I realized I was holding back my performance and my team's performance by hanging on to this feeling. What I learned from that lesson is this: Once something negative happens, there is nothing you can do to undo history. But you can learn from it. You can process the learning and put best practices into place that will prevent the same mistake from happening again.



SMART WOMEN, SMART CHOICES

The first part of this chapter focused on identifying your values and beliefs because you need to gain inner understanding to make smart choices. I truly want you to experience personal and professional success. It will require choice, commitment, and courage. I know it won't be easy, but it will be worth it!

When I started my career, there were no role models. There wasn't the wealth of online resources to help explain

how the politics of the corporate world play into career advancement. And there was real resistance from the “good ol’ boys” to accept, let alone embrace, diversity. It was the School of Hard Knocks. And you better believe that there were many days when I just wanted to throw my hands up and walk away from the whole thing, particularly when I was feeling like I wasn’t being valued or respected. But I learned to look for that comfort *within myself*. You will have to do the same. It all starts with making the choice to get into the game. You can’t sit on the sidelines and coast if you want to have a major impact.

In a conversation with one of my first coaching clients, Paul, the subject of choices came up. Paul holds a position as a director, working for a major manufacturer. He has worked for several of the top consumer goods organizations in the country. He is capable of obtaining a senior management position either for the company that he works for now, or for one in the future. The choice that Paul has to make is to consistently engage.

He admitted to me that he holds back and wants to fly right under the radar screen. When I asked him why, he responded by saying that he felt safe there.

“What are you afraid of?” I asked.

“I hate to tell you this,” he said, “but I know that if I get into the game, there is a price to pay, and I am not sure I want to pay that price.” He went on, “As a minority, it’s been hard enough to reach the level that I’ve achieved thus far. I feel like I’ve gotten this far because I haven’t challenged the system, even though there are things that I would really like to see change in my company.”

Paul’s honesty was refreshing. And his comments are more common than you might think. Leadership is not for

the faint of heart. It is tough business. It requires mental, emotional, and physical toughness, but first it requires a choice. I told Paul that it was not for me or for anyone else to try to make the choice for him. He would have to decide for himself—as will you. If you make the choice that you want to pursue the executive ranks, whether in an entrepreneurial adventure or for a corporation, there will be a price to pay. There is a price to pay for everything in life.

The following statements will help you come to terms with your career vision. Decide if you agree or disagree with each of these statements, but don't stop there. Pause after each one and give yourself permission to relive previous experiences and to dream about what you want from your professional career.

- ⊗ I enjoy being in charge.
- ⊗ I am not afraid to challenge the status quo.
- ⊗ I want to be known for leading or supporting a cause.
- ⊗ I have a sense of calling to make a difference for generations to come.
- ⊗ I am uncomfortable just watching the game. I believe my calling in life is to get into the game and lead.
- ⊗ I am constantly seeking a new challenge.
- ⊗ I am hungry to do something great.
- ⊗ I am not afraid to stand alone for something I believe in with my whole heart and soul.
- ⊗ I like helping others.
- ⊗ I like making big decisions.
- ⊗ I love being in the spotlight.

My career vision was to become a senior leader of an organization and then, one day, to own my own company. That vision is now a reality. Was I lucky? Maybe a little. But my outcome was more about planning, making choices and sacrifices, and a lot of hard work.

I felt extremely lonely in my personal climb. There was no one like me. I was the first crack in the comfort zone of the people that I would call my peers. The second break came as a result of my desire to change the culture from a good ol' boys' network to a far more diverse world that included women and minorities. In today's marketplace there are so many options to network with other women. Reach out and use every source. Join an industry association or a women's group. Sometimes support groups even exist through churches. You don't have to go it alone. You should network every opportunity you can. Set a goal for yourself to meet one new person a quarter to build your Rolodex—it will come in handy.

As well as I thought I knew who I was, what I wanted, and where my boundaries had been drawn, I found myself growing weary of fighting and often just going with the flow. As a result, I began to compromise my beliefs and even some of my values. I would curse like the guys. I would talk about others behind their backs. Don't get caught in this trap. *In other words, remain true to yourself.*

The one thing I refused to do was to adopt a sense of arrogance. I wanted everyone to feel important. I believe that every role in an organization has value. Every role, including the cook in the cafeteria and the clerk in the mail-room, is important to the execution of the strategy.

Make the decision now to build a career that enables you to make a difference for yourself and others. Embrace your leadership role in creating the future. Plan wisely and enjoy the journey day in and day out.



POINTS WORTH REMEMBERING

- ⊗ Building a successful career starts with taking personal responsibility for your destiny.
- ⊗ Your values and beliefs are the nucleus of who you are, and they should never be compromised.
- ⊗ You have to value yourself before others will value you.
- ⊗ Don't be afraid to tell the world what your needs are.
- ⊗ Boundaries help to keep your priorities in the "right" order and enable you to sustain success.
- ⊗ A career vision must be part of a bigger life vision.
- ⊗ You are the architect of your life and are empowered to design it however you want.