



FREE YOURSELF FROM THE
HIDDEN BEHAVIORS SABOTAGING
YOUR CAREER SUCCESS

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GLASS CEILING
IT'S A
STICKY
FLOOR

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Sabotaging Your Career Success**

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New York Chicago San Francisco Lisbon London Madrid Mexico City
Milan New Delhi San Juan Seoul Singapore Sydney Toronto

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ISBN: 978-0-07-163316-1

MHID: 0-07-163316-2

The material in this eBook also appears in the print version of this title: ISBN: 978-0-07-149394-9, MHID: 0-07-149394-8.

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Chapter 1

Know Yourself—Be Yourself

“You must create your own roadmap to your chosen destination based on your values, beliefs, and strengths.”



The Beginning...

Things started out nicely enough. Shortly after graduating from Purdue University in the late 70s, I was offered a job as one of the first female managers on a General Motors production floor. But once I started, it didn't take long (by which I mean mere hours) to realize that I should have considered more carefully the role of gender in the workplace, and should have asked a few more questions during my job interview.

I arrived for my first day of work at 6:30 a.m. full of energy and excitement. I knew nothing about cars, except how to pull into a gas station and fill up my tank. That was not one of the job requirements, however. Instead I was expected to learn the 120 auto parts they used on this assembly line—and I had to succeed in an environment that had sent three previous managers packing in just 10 months.

I knew when I walked into the plant, and everything and everybody stopped, that I was in for a challenge. It was like one of those

hushed movie moments. Everyone looked up and stared at me. At first, I wondered what was wrong with my appearance—did I have toilet paper dragging from my shoe or, worse yet, hanging from beneath my skirt? A glance down confirmed nothing was wrong; a glance up confirmed that I was the only woman in a sea of Teamster men.

The production manager waved me off with, “Good luck. See you at six!” By 9 a.m., the shop steward had come by with the first grievance against me. One of my quality control guys said he missed his coffee break because of a defect in one of the parts he caught running off the line. He had not missed a coffee break in 10 years and made it clear he wouldn’t miss another one again. Later, after going through the third grievance procedure that morning, someone lit a fire in a garbage can in my department. By the end of the day, I had accumulated a record 25 grievances. Not much else could go wrong, right?

That afternoon, I walked into my first management meeting. Seventeen men in suits looked up. Seventeen mouths dropped open, and seventeen pens fell from their hands. I placed my meticulously prepared reports on the table in front of me, only to hear this: “Becky, you take notes.”

That Which Doesn't Kill You...

This experience was one of the greatest leadership development programs I could ever put myself in. At the tender age of 24, I had to learn how to build a diverse spectrum of relationships, to effectively manage the blue-collar men who were so different from me, and to play the middleman in negotiations between the union and management staff. You can bet my social and emotional intelligence were stretched daily—and I loved it. However, after three years and my fifth promotion, I realized that I had reached a peak at GM.

I could have stayed on and advanced to be a head of plant production or even head of headquarters for human resources in Detroit, but in the long term, I didn't want to stay in manufacturing and production.

Fortunately I had a new opportunity presented to me. I was offered a job more aligned with my long-term goals at Amax Inc., a billion-dollar energy company, where I worked for its coal mining division located in Indianapolis. It provided me with broader human resources responsibilities, more opportunities to work with senior executives, and the chance to rotate through jobs that taught me about business activities company-wide. I had a supportive and experienced group of colleagues, mostly men, who served as helpful mentors along the way. I was fortunate to have a boss who was receptive to my ideas and willing to put me in a variety of diverse projects—all leading me to a promotion in my first year.

Then—4 years later, to my great surprise—I got a pink slip. I was shocked and in denial. Despite watching layoffs happen to others, I never thought I would be one of the victims.

How could this happen? Everything had gone so well. Like so many others in this situation, I was struck with self-doubt. I wondered about my abilities and my skills. And the problem was worse than it seemed. It was a bad economy, with a local unemployment rate of 15 percent—and Indianapolis wasn't exactly a booming metropolis in good times. What would I do?

Standing in the unemployment line with 50 folks who had many more years of experience than me, who were looking for the same type of jobs I was seeking, an important realization struck me. Job opportunities in that town were slim, and no one was going to single me out from that long line of talented and credentialed executives to hand me a golden opportunity. I needed to create change for myself and take responsibility for my future. I could use this as an opportunity to pursue my dream job. This was a chance to push out

of my comfort zone, take a risk, and take control of my destiny. If I didn't, I would most likely be visiting the unemployment line for some time.

I knew this was what I needed to do to solve my immediate problem of getting a job. But I also had a glimmer of understanding that I was taking an important step toward building a career.

This was the beginning of my appreciation that it's important to have a vision of who you want to be and to continually take small, mindful steps toward that vision.

I began thinking of my job search as a process for self-evaluation and set out to learn about all the different aspects of who I was. What were my strengths, beliefs, fears, and motivations? I decided to pull over for about six months and take a hard look at what I wanted to do, as well as at my key drivers and decide how they would help to determine my next job. I found a book about managing your career and there was an exercise on identifying and living your values that I began to fill out. What was fascinating was that the top five values I had listed—relationships, creating and building new business opportunities, taking risks, continually learning, and helping others—were the very things that had motivated me in my first two jobs.

I then began to reflect back on the conversations I'd had with my father, Max Shambaugh, at the kitchen table when I was a little girl. I was always fascinated by the fact that he had built a third-generation family business into one of the largest construction companies in the country. My father instilled in me an approach to work that I still value today. Specifically, he encouraged me to take risks but to be prudent about it, to build on my strengths and relationships, and to follow through on things I'm passionate about.

I used these things I had discovered about myself to focus and expand my job search. And within six months I had three job offers—two in the Midwest and one on the East Coast. I ended up

taking the job in Washington, D.C., as head of human resources for the corporate headquarters of Fairchild Industries.

It was a darn good decision that would set me on the long-term career path I really wanted for myself. I took the position knowing it was a leap of faith to move to a new city in order to accept a job for which I was not totally qualified. But the job at Fairchild had everything I was looking for and I knew that whether or not it worked out, at least I was taking it for the right reasons. When making the decision on whether or not to move, I asked myself what would be the worst thing that could happen and I realized that I had nothing to lose and much to gain. The job that would provide the right stretch and allow me to form a greater level of inner competence and confidence down the road.

By going through that decision-making process to determine my next move, I learned that knowing yourself first and then having the focus, courage, and commitment to take action toward your goals is the key to success, as well as to satisfaction and fulfillment. However, let me emphasize that there is not always a linear path to success, even when you know your goals and have your roadmap charted out. This is why it's so critical to be aware of the person you are—your core values, beliefs, strengths, and weaknesses. You need that self-knowledge to navigate the twists, bumps, and detours you'll no doubt encounter along the way.

Does This Situation Sound Familiar?

Have you had points in your career where you felt perpetually exhausted and burnt out, or where you knew your performance was not at its peak because the fit wasn't quite right, or where you were handed that awful pink slip and felt at a loss about what to do next? Maybe you're there right now. Take comfort in knowing you are not alone. Everyone hits a career cul-de-sac now and then.

The trick to finding your way out is to avoid getting caught up in a sense of crisis (a very sticky floor). Instead, appreciate that you are poised at an opportunity for change. Think about the kinds of changes you would like and consider how you would go about making at least one of them happen.

If you've never done it before, take some time out to go through the kind of self-evaluation and life planning I did. You don't need the six months I could afford to take as a young woman with plump savings and few responsibilities. Even one evening session of intense career planning can get you started. There are resources right in this book to help you, and myriad resources online, in other books, and with people like career coaches if you'd like to go further.

Know Yourself, Be Yourself

So, why all this fuss about knowing and being yourself?

I believe that great leadership is *so much* about knowing who you are. Successful leaders know their strengths, weaknesses, beliefs, motivations, and intentions.

In short, self-knowledge is the starting point for absolutely everything else; the successes you want and, equally important, the setbacks you're bound to encounter.

I spend a lot of time talking with women who are in a transition, who feel like they have no control of their destiny, or who feel frustrated or ready to give up because they did not win some plum job for which they recently interviewed. I know how frustrating this can be, but at the end of the day, I tell women that the key to coming out ahead in these types of situations is to have a steady, reliable self-image to fall back on. Once you have that grounded and mindful self-awareness, you can channel it into whatever you want to be.

The fundamental questions for all of us are: Who do you want to be and how do you manifest that in your life and work?

There are hundreds of books on this topic in bookstores and probably on your shelf at home or in the office. But, there is more to it than just knowing yourself—there’s also *being* yourself.

Identifying and being yourself is critical for great leaders and a chief reason why they succeed or derail. I believe that the ability to know and be yourself has a direct correlation to your ability to have an impact on things around you and create results that matter to you and your team, customers, organization, family, and community.

Having a critical awareness of your motivations and intentions channels your behaviors in the right direction and ensures that you are always taking the right small steps toward those big-picture goals. Maybe you want that next promotion, or to influence key customers on a proposal, or have a difficult conversation with your boss about why you can’t take on that next project. Knowing why you do or don’t want to do these things, and where you ultimately want them to get you, will help you to motivate yourself and persevere.

The exercises and liberating solutions I will provide, along with my story and those of other women, will help you to develop this self-knowledge that is fundamental to successful leadership. This book should help you to know yourself, understand your strengths and weaknesses, get clear on your goals, face your greatest fears, and use this new inventory of knowledge to develop a personal action plan.

Along the way you will discern, assess, and perhaps reframe your personal belief system, break free of old patterns that are undermining your success, and learn how to take control of your future.

How Do You Get to Know Yourself?

Leaders who don’t have internal self-awareness peak soon after they’ve gotten the top jobs; or worse, derail their careers before they even get close. Why? When you know who you are and are true to that, your actions and reactions are consistent. As a result, others feel

more comfortable approaching you and more willing to place their trust in you, share their views with you, and support your ideas. When you know who you are, you feel and project inner confidence, which enables you to build credibility and identify with others. You are the leader who projects a sense of stability during crisis, change, debate, or conflict. You project a centeredness that others pick up and, in most cases, create this magical focus and alignment for others.

On a personal level, the impact of not knowing yourself is that you might take the wrong job, or make other decisions you'll regret down the road. You might make ill-considered choices that leave you having to repair an important relationship, or that undermine other people's trust in you. Knowing how you want to appear to others and then being that person, versus being someone else, is critical to every leader's credibility, influence, satisfaction, and overall fulfillment.

In the early part of my career, I listened, watched, and got to know people who rose to high levels of leadership and success. I observed that, aside from being competent in their field, they had something else in common. They actually took time out to examine themselves. This allowed them to access their strengths and intentions when important opportunities and challenges presented themselves. They also applied these insights to the daily onslaught of difficult decisions every executive faces. Finally, they knew their weaknesses, and that helped them to understand and manage the assumptions and behavior patterns that could get them into trouble when they were under stress or pressure.

Lydia Thomas, Ph.D., president and CEO of Mitretek, a not-for-profit research center in Falls Church, Virginia, observes, "As a leader, you need to be your own person—you can't pretend." She points out, quite correctly, that no one can act all the time. "People should know what they are getting when they get you and you should be happy about what you are providing to others."

The next chapter will take you through the roadmap for personal discovery that I have incorporated into my own life. Even if you are already familiar with some of these areas of introspection, it is still important to reflect on them from time to time because the one thing constant in life is change, and it's important to revisit our values and goals as the context of our lives change. If they're new to you, they should help you to look at yourself, your day-to-day work, and your career in a more clear-eyed way.