

INTRODUCTION

Do you want to increase your autonomy, competence and connections? Are you ready to address whatever might be interfering with your building and tapping into your own wisdom? This book offers guidance in identifying and understanding your strengths, weaknesses, emotions, motivations, and assumptions with greater clarity and friendliness. As self-efficacy expands, so does your agility in handling competition, conflicts, negotiations, organizational politics and transitions. You approach sensitive conversations and bridge differences with greater ease, leading to more authentic connections with others, our truest wealth. In these ways you enable and equip your own inner coach.

This career development resource for early and mid-career professionals is unique in three ways:

First, I work from the premise that softening toward ourselves is often what is hardest. This softening begins with facing our personal museum of embarrassments with curiosity and compassion. Treating self-doubts and insecurities as teachers rather than as failures speeds release from our finger-wagging inner critics.

Second, this book covers all the skills foundational to career-building and to growing as a leader in any field. Part 1 covers the inner work of building on your strengths, obtaining the feedback necessary to close gaps between your intentions and your actual impact, arriving at a definition of success based on your values, maintaining equanimity even when you feel devalued, and increasing your objectivity. Part 2 discusses the additional skills that working interdependently requires, including communicating across multiple kinds of differences, approaching

conflicts as learning opportunities, and navigating organizational politics. Part 3 focuses on the long haul, on building resilience, agility, and hopefully also a sense of humor about yourself as you mature.

While the chapters may be read in any order, I discuss the skills in the order in which they most logically build upon each other.

Third, threaded throughout this book are examples of how women can meet the challenges they still face in turning their intellectual capital into career capital. Career development can be compared to a poorly lit stairway with uneven steps and only sporadic handrails. Elevators are reserved for those with a powerful sponsor. With less access to handrails and elevators, women and people of color generally do not climb as high as white-skinned men. Women and people of color remain hampered by invisible weights of cultural and systemic restrictions which many have internalized. Paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould observed: “Few tragedies can be more extensive than the stunting of life, few injustices deeper than the denial of an opportunity to strive or even to hope, by a limit imposed from without, but falsely identified as lying within.”¹ When women look around and see mainly women on the lower stairs while men are steadily climbing, too many convince themselves that they lack the “right stuff.”

This book encourages and supports women in their steep climbs to develop their influence in line with their values and to realize their ambitions. I also aim to extend the influence of mentors, as they better discern what handrails and access to elevators would most benefit their junior women colleagues.

Implementing insights and expanding capacities begins with experimenting with new behaviors. Questions to stimulate reflection and action dot each chapter. I recommend starting a document

1. Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981).

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or using a notebook for tracking what deserves more thought or for stream-of-consciousness writing on what's intriguing or troubling.

If, like me, befriending yourself has not come naturally, you might imagine an older, more companionable version of yourself asking the questions. Or, since hearts and minds are often in conflict, you might set up an inner conversation—between for example your risk-taker and your security-seeker—and see what emerges. Ideally a wise thinking partner is available to dialogue on questions of mutual interest.

The origin of the word *develop* is *dis-envelop*—that is, to unfold and unfurl, to open up whatever scripts are interfering with living and working out of our strengths and values. As we unfold into our unique potentials, we increasingly access the wisdom of our own inner coach and friend. This book is a full-service resource on this empowerment.