BECKY BLALOCK: My name is Becky Blalock. I'm the managing partner at Advisory Capital which is a strategic consulting firm focused on information technology, medicine, and energy. I had the good fortune to spend 33 years in corporate America. I began my career at Georgia Power Company as an accounting associate, and climbed up the corporate ladder through many different roles, and ultimately spent the last 9 years of my career in corporate America as the senior vice president and chief information officer of Southern Company, where I directed all of the information technology activities across the 9 subsidiaries of the company.

I grew up in many different places as a child. I went to 4 high schools, 3 junior highs and 8 elementary schools. My dad was in the Air Force and my mother was a stay at home mom. Growing up, that was a lot of fun until you got into middle school. Then it becomes a little difficult to walk in and be the new person in the school. It wasn't until I entered the corporate world that I realized what a gift that had been. Coming out of college, I was recruited to go to work for Georgia Power Company. The first thing they did is they moved me to a small town. They moved me to Americus, Georgia.

Many of my friends who were from Atlanta at the time said, "Oh my goodness, you're going to move to a small town where you don't know anybody." I realized then that I wasn't afraid to do that because I'd been doing it my entire life. Also, I think in my career, a lot of times I jumped into new organizations where I wasn't a subject matter expert. I was not afraid to do that because of these experiences I had had as a child growing up, going into a situation where I didn't know anybody and having to find my way and knowing that ultimately I would. In the long term, I think that that actually ended up being a very key part of my success.

When I went to college, it was to be a social worker. I had never dreamed of having a career in business, never thought about a career in business, because I think it's very hard to be something you've never seen. This was the 70s when I was in high school. At that point and time, I can't recall ever seeing a female role model in business. In fact, the only 2 women I can even remotely think about being in business was Mary Tyler Moore on the *Mary Tyler Moore Show.* She worked in the newsroom, but she was not the supervisor or the manager. The other person was Miss Kitty, who worked on a show called *Gunsmoke*. She was the owner of the saloon. Those were the 2 role models I had, but I had the good fortune of taking an internship with a marketing professor.

I had been working for $1.65 an hour in retail because I was working and putting myself through undergraduate school, when 1 of the marketing professors posted a job for $5 an hour doing marketing research. I jumped at the opportunity to do that. I felt like I'd be rich. Five dollars an hour. His name was Walter Woods. Walter's pretty famous because he patented the frozen orange juice concentrate, was his idea. He’s now deceased but I had a lot of fun working with him, conducting the research. Then, we analyzed the data together.

He was under contract with a company called Yankelovich, Skelly, & White out of New York. He said to me, “You’re really good with math. You’re really good at taking large volumes of data and seeing trends.” He says, “Why aren’t you doing something in business?” I said, “Well, I don’t know anybody in business. Don’t have anybody to coach me in that arena.” He said, “Why don’t you sign up for a couple of my classes?” which I did. Of course, I have to admit, I was the teacher’s pet but I loved it, I really did and found that I really had an affinity for math and statistics and quantitative analysis. Got an undergraduate degree in marketing.

When I graduated in 1978, the college had a very good recruitment program. I knew that I wanted to stay in the South. I had lived all over the country. When job opportunities came along, I would go and interview but tried to stay limited to something in the South. Georgia Power recruited me to go into their accounting management training program.

Fresh out of college, I started right back into school and was in a 3 month training program. At the end of that, they sent me to Americus, Georgia where I was the supervisor of the meter readers and the customer service reps. I did that for about 18 months. The next move up for me would have been to district accounting supervisor.

It was very difficult to get these jobs, particularly as a woman because in those days, there were no women who held those jobs in the company. Nobody had ever done it. Frankly people just didn't think it could be done.

Ultimately, I decided I would come back to Atlanta and get my masters degree. I got my MBA in finance and was very fortunate in that I had a position working in the finance department. It was an exciting time to be in the company because we had a very aggressive construction program. We were building Plant Vogtle in Waynesboro, Georgia, building plant Scherer down in Macon and had to do billions of dollars worth of financing.

In order to do that, you have to be very active with Wall Street and with the rating agencies. We worked very closely with the senior executives in the company. It’s incredible in terms of my opportunity to learn about that side of our business plus the exposure that that gave me to executives.

I realized that while I loved finance, that wasn’t what I wanted to do long term in my career. My undergraduate degree was in marketing. I really wanted an opportunity to be in marketing. Economic development had always fascinated me, too. I went over and I had a conversation with the guy who ran that department. His feedback to me was, “Women can’t do this kind of work.” He said, “You know, you have to wine and dine men at night.” He said, “I just don’t think it would work. The people you have to interact with are other men. There are no women, even external to our company, that do this kind of work.”

I was a little frustrated but 2 years later, he retired and somebody else replaced him. Some people put in a good word for me. They posted a job. It actually was a job that was 2 levels lower than where I was at the time. I took a voluntary 2 level demotion to go into that position. All the people I worked with in finance thought I was crazy. They said, “Why in the world would you do this?” but I just knew intuitively that I was a marketing person at heart and that I had to do something to break out of being viewed as a technical finance person.

As it turns out, that really was the best possible move for me, career wise. I didn't see it. Two weeks into that, I went home and told my husband. I said, “I think I've made a big mistake.” I said, “You know, these people don’t talk in terms of ROI or internal rate of return. They're talking about square footage and tax incentives and I don’t know anything about all that,” but I'm very fortunate in that my husband coached me and said, “You just need to give yourself some time to settle in and learn it.”

Sure enough, about a month in, I began to learn all the new acronyms. I began to fit in. I did meet some other people outside the company who became good friends with, who said, “We’ll help you find some deals.”

Two years later, I actually was the top producing person in the department. One of the things I learned in economic development is I had a very strong background in finance and nobody else in the department did. They either came from engineering or they came from a sales background. To put together these deals and make it real attractive for companies to chose Georgia as a location, it was all about the economics. Nobody knew better how to do that in the department than I did to put down the internal rate of return of what we could put on the table as a state versus another state they might be looking at and go back and negotiate for the incentives.

That became really the key reason why I was so successful in the department. People would call me up and say, “I want to bring you into a project because I know you can sit down and you can help us put together an incentive package and talk to the company about why it makes economic sense to be in Georgia versus being in another state.” That was really very key to my success was that background I had in finance and the fact that I brought a little bit of diversity to the table.

Also, as they began to create some chamber president roles and hired some project managers at the state that were women, I bonded together with them and they were very determined along with some very forward thinking men to help me be successful in that role.

When they hired me in economic development, I was actually brought on board to create a commercial development program. Historically, we had only focused on recruiting heavy manufacturing. If you looked at even all our marketing materials, it was about what a forklift operator or a plant operator would charge per hour. All of the sites were in industrial parks. What they had brought me on board to do was to go after corporate headquarter locations and data centers and more of what was considered white collar working.

We’d not done a lot of that in the past but timing was perfect because these were very clean jobs. They required really heavily educated workforce and we had a number of locations in Georgia that they could go into but we had to develop all the marketing materials, had to go around and talk to people all across the state. People in Atlanta were pretty open but in some of the second tier cities, they’ve never really done a lot of recruitment in this space. It took a success for people to catch on to the fact that this was really where we needed a lot of focus on jobs.

My first success was that I got a lead on a data center opportunity. They wanted to come to Atlanta. When I first started working with the decision makers, it was between Atlanta and Boston and Nevada. They had absolutely no intention of looking anywhere else in Atlanta but what I told them was that, “You know, if you go down and take a look at Macon and Columbus, Georgia, I'll get the company’s helicopter and we’ll fly down there in a helicopter.” They’d never been in a helicopter before. Who knew? They were willing to go down and take a look.

I called the 2 communities. In these communities, we had been working with them on marketing and what kind of information they needed to have. The leaders in those communities did a fabulous job. I never will forget, we went to Atlanta, then we went to Macon and spent the night. They were really not talking to me, these 4 gentlemen working on the project but they came down and knocked on my room after we had had dinner with folks in Macon because Macon said, “If you come here, we will give you the land. We will give you tax incentives.” Atlanta wasn’t going to offer them any of that.

They knocked on my room, said, “Would you come down and would you have a drink with us?” They said, “We want to talk to you. Is this for real? Would they really give us the land? Would they really give us these tax breaks to come here?” I said, “Absolutely, they will.” I said, “They know that they need to do that if they’re going to compete with Atlanta.”

From that point on, I was just in like Flint with them and they really talked with me and communicated with me and they kicked out the other locations after that. It became all about Macon and Columbus who were willing to give them the incentives and who had a community that rolled out the red carpet for them. Unfortunately, it’s very competitive. I felt like a ping pong ball between those 2 cities but Macon won out. It really shown a light on the fact that here’s this whole market of new opportunity for us, of these corporate headquarters or regional headquarters and data centers and call centers that we can be recruiting that we hadn't been focused on. These are jobs that don’t pollute and they are relatively high-paying positions.

From there, the rest is history. That's how it was successful as a project manager was blazing that trail. Really loved that work but I got a tap on the shoulder from some of the executives I worked with and said, “We’d really like for you to go be a lobbyist for our company. We want you to be a lobbyist at the Public Service Commission, not of the Capital,” which is just to be a more political hot seat and tends to be a little bit more glamorous. This was at the Public Service Commission where I was handling a lot of the really technical data but again, great opportunity to learn yet another piece of our business because as a regulated entity, everything that goes on in that arena is life or death for us as a company.

I was a part of our rate case team. I handled the fuel cases. We were just beginning to see the early stages of environmental regulation at the commission as well.

Two years into that job, I got another tap on the shoulder. They said, “We’d like for you to go back over and run the entire economic development group.” This was the group who earlier had said, “Women can’t do this kind of work.” It was a great opportunity to go back. It was a challenge though because here were these really smart, talented men who had all trained me. I'm coming back over to be their boss, not that they were unhappy but I think there were some people who felt that they should have gotten that job instead of me.

I think 1 of the most important things I did when I got into that job was I took each person to lunch individually and talked to them about the fact that I appreciated how much they had done for me to help me be successful. I knew that I would never have had that success had it not been for them and that I wasn’t going to be successful if we couldn't continue to work together as a team, that my whole view was that I was not the boss. I was just the person leading the team and that we wouldn’t be successful if we weren’t all pulling together.

Believe it or not, just those intimate 1 on 1 conversations totally turned around my relationship with all of them where they committed in those meetings to support me. We had a tremendous amount of success. One of the things we did was helped a company create a program to really leverage our sponsorship in the 1996 Olympics. Project was called Operation Legacy. It was so successful that it actually became a model for how host cities use the Olympic Games in the future. I had many conversations afterwards with London when they were recruiting the Olympics, with people from China and people from Salt Lake City about how we ran this program. Our group won some awards, some national real estate groups picked us as 1 of the top economic development groups in the country. We exceeded our goals by 300%.

It really was a fun, successful time. I think I would have been happy staying in that job for the rest of my career but I had been chosen to go through the program for management development at Harvard. Every year, our company picked 1 person and I had that honor. While I was at graduation at Harvard, our CEO called me and offered me the job as his assistant to. He was a great man. That’s considered a prized job inside of the company but I really wasn't that excited about it but I thought, “How do I tell the CEO no?” I said, “Well, I guess I have to walk away from this dream job and take this position,” which again, was a very smart move. One of my philosophies has always been don’t say no unless you’re 100% certain that’s it’s something you just don’t want to do. If you can learn and if you can grow, you should always accept that opportunity.

I also think that what’s important is who you’re going to be working for. I always tell people, “Choose your boss as carefully as you chose your next job. Is this somebody who’s going to support you and that you’re going to learn from and grow from and that will help you reach that next level in your career?”

He was certainly that kind of person. I became his assistant to, typically you're in those jobs for about 2 years. Five months into that job, he walked in 1 day and said, “We’re creating new positions called chief information officers and we’re going to have 1 at Southern Company and then, each 1 of the operating companies will have one. We want you to be the 1 from Georgia Power.” I said, “Well, what does the chief information officer do?” I thought it was maybe something to do with communications. He said, “Oh, no. This is running all the information technology across the organization.” I was like, “You’ve got to be kidding me. I don’t hardly even know how to turn on my computer,” but he said and this ended up being very true. He said, “I am very frustrated.” He said, “We cannot get any of the information we need out of the systems we have to run this company.” He said, “You’ve seen that as you’ve been here working with me as my assistant to.” He said, “I don’t know the people that work in that department.” He said, “I don’t trust them. I want you to take this job and go down there and figure out what we need to do to get the information I need to run this company.” I said, “Well, you know, nothing like going into the frying pan.”

I stepped into this job where I didn't know the people, I didn't know the culture. It was a job that was actually housed at Southern Company. I reported up to the enterprise CIO. Every day was really like putting out a fire. We had systems that went down on a pretty regular basis, people who had been calling me and wanting to have lunch to me when I was the assistant to the CEO were calling me up and yelling at me about something that wasn’t happening right with their department. I'm like, “Are you the same person that I talked to 2 weeks ago?”

Anyway, it was very interesting but here is something that happened that was really very telling to me. I think that job was so important in preparing me to move on up the corporate ladder out of middle management and into senior leadership. It was a young woman I had worked with in accounting. She’d been on my team. She followed me to marketing. She was on my team in marketing. Then, she accepted a job in information technology when I went to work there. Six months into that job, she walked up to me and she said, “You know, you’re a much better leader here than you were when we worked together in accounting.” I said, “How can you say that? I feel like on any given day, I don’t know what I'm doing here.” She said, “That's the beauty of it,” she said, “Because we were in accounting, you were the subject matter expert.” She said, “You micromanaged everything we did." She said, “A lot of times, you wouldn’t even let us do the work. You'd do our work for us.” She said, “Here, you can’t do that,” she said, “Because it changes too much. It’s too broad. It’s too technical,” she said. “So you’ve had to surround yourself with a bunch of people." She said, “You listen to people." She said, “And you take their input in consideration in making decisions.” She said, “That's what leadership is about.” She said, “You’re much better leader.”

That was a real wakeup call to me that the higher up the corporate ladder you go, the less the job really about you. The more it is about who you surround yourself with, who you listen to, who you trust and how you manage and lead and support them. That was 1 of the real aha moments in my career.

As I had mentioned earlier, I thought that what was important is growing a Southern Company brand as an innovative company. We created an intellectual property program at Southern Company. Prior to that, we had no patents in the IT department. There were a few patents at Southern Company, not many. I think maybe about 7 but none coming out of IT. I'm very proud to say that with very few resources and it takes a long time to get a program like that up and off the ground. By the time I retired from the department, we had 63 items that had cleared the patent program and were moving forward to be patented. We had 7 patents in hand and we had commercialized the program. We’re bringing in $15,000,000 in annual revenue with us being on track for that to just be a normal part of doing business in the future. We were able to take that and publicize it because really none of the other utilities across the country had a program like ours. It set us apart from what anybody else in our industry was doing.

We had also been picked by *CIO* magazine as 1 of the most innovative companies for some of the tools that we had rolled out in IT. Many of the members on my team had won lots of recognition. I was picked as a premier IT leader by *Computer World* magazine and then 3 other people on my team were recognized by them. We were in lots of publications. There were no mentions of Southern Company to speak of prior to my role in IT but it was a regular basis. Somebody was calling and wanting to talk to us and highlight some new technology that we had rolled out.

Every year now, Southern Company’s recognized as 1 of the best places to work in IT and 1 of the most innovative in the country. We are no longer rated very low on that innovation scale when it comes to *Fortune* magazine. I'd like to say that I helped play some small role in making that happen at Southern Company.

Then, after being in IT for about, a little over a year, I got a call offering me the opportunity to go interview for the director of corporate communications at Georgia Power. The reason that I jumped at the chance to do that job is because the company was an Olympic sponsor. The Olympics was here. It was a chance to manage all of our PR and advertising opportunities for the Olympics to manage the whole media relations and advertising function and to bring to bear some of the technical expertise I had because the internet was just beginning to become a mode of communication and web pages were just becoming prevalent. I could drive all that change inside the company and also got a lot of really deep training on how to respond in a crisis and be a much better communicator.

We did have some tragedies that happened while I was there. We had a power plant that blew up and had some employees that were killed. That was very tragic. Then, we had a terrible ice storm that occurred right when Atlanta was hosting the Super Bowl so had to put together a press conference to ensure everybody that we were going to try to keep the electricity on when this very important event was happening in Atlanta. Those are just skills that you take with you regardless of where you go in any company. Communication skills will stay with you.

I always tell people that if you’re not a good communicator or if you’re not a good public speaker, you can learn to do that. Leadership and communication are learned and so is confidence. You just have to be willing to put yourself out there and practice and grow it through experience.

I had the opportunity to go back to economic development. This time, I went back as the vice president. I was not the first woman to be named the vice president in our company. I was the second person to be named vice president but I always tell people I was the first 1 who was also a mother. My daughter was 4 at the time. I spent a lot of time reflecting. She’s now 24 years old and talking to other women about the fact that you can do this, you can have a family and you can be a successful executive as well.

The great thing about balance is my daughter is now grown and is 24. When she was in school, I felt so guilty because I would be pulling out of the driveway to take her to school. I was the only working mother in our neighborhood. Some of those mothers were staying out there with their children and they would give me dirty looks as I was going off to work or maybe I just perceived that. I was very self-conscious about it.

One mother actually said to me 1 day, She said, “The beauty of having your own child is you make all the decisions about how they’re raised and then you suffer the consequences of when they end up in the juvenile delinquency system because you haven’t done all the things you needed to to help them be successful.” You fast forward 24 years now. My daughter is going to be a drug dealer. She’s in pharmacy school at the University of Georgia. I did a few things right.

We have conversations now. I ask her, I say, “You know, do you remember me not being there as you were growing up?” because I used to feel awfully guilty about not being at stuff. She said, “No.” She said, “I really don’t remember you not ever being at anything.” She said, “I remember you used to ask me,” we used to sit down and I used to ask her to help me understand what was really important, what were the things I really needed to be at. She remembers those conversations.

The things that were important to her changed. When she was little, she could have cared less if I was driving her to school. She even had a really cool babysitter that sometimes would drive her to school. That’s who she wanted to be seen with and not me but what was really important, when she was little was for me to be the mother that came and read the story in the classroom. If that happened, you can bet at work, I told them I didn't care what else was going on. I made arrangements so I could be there and I had cupcakes and balloons and we made a really big deal.

Those are the things that she remembers. She doesn't remember a lot of the other stuff. I think that those personal times that you have with them is quality time, not quantity of time that you spend with your child that’s important. I think our daughters are all going to be working in the future. If you look at the women who come in the workforce since 1970, we’ve added 25% of the gross domestic product of the U.S. We can’t afford to not have women in the workforce anymore. Women who are working and balancing these careers are great role models for their daughters and how they can make it all work for themselves when they grow up because today, 60% of working women are the primary bread winners for their families. That’s only going to change as we continue to move forward in the future.

As the vice president of that organization again, we have a lot of successes, exceeded all of our goals. Then, 2 years into that job, I had the opportunity to go back and run all of IT for Southern Company which was a huge job. I was in that role for 9 years. It was not a great situation to inherit. When I went into the department, morale was really terrible. We scored the lowest among the organization’s on the employed progress survey. We did not get good ratings internally from the people that we supported. We didn't hold any patents and we didn’t have any external recognition but over the 9 year period that I was there, the team that I put in place. I'd like to say we made a lot of progress with the company.

One of the great insights I got is the CEO of Southern Company at the time, a guy by the name of Allen Franklin and I had a conversation when I got the job. He said that to me something very wise and I share this with a lot of other people. He said, “You know, when you get to a job at this level, people call you all the time and ask you to do all kinds of things that don’t add any value to the company." He said, “You’re going to have to be very disciplined about where you spend your time. Normally, when somebody goes into a job like this at this level,” he said, “I'd write 3 things down on a sheet of paper and I tell the executive, ‘This is where you need to spend your time. If you go outside of this, then you’ve wasted a lot of the company’s money.’” He said, “I don’t know what to tell you these 3 things are.” He said, “I really don’t know much about information technology so I want you to go off and think about what are those 3 things you think you need to be spending your time on. What are the 3 things? What are the 3 legacies you want to leave for this company?”

I left and I spent time talking to all my director ports, I did some focus group meetings with lot of employees on the front line. I talked to the venders. I talked to the companies that we did a lot of business with and asked them, I said, “How do we stack up against other companies? What do you think it is that we need to be focused on?” I talked to our internal customers. I asked our internal customers, I said, “Tell me 1 or 2 things we do well. Tell me 1 or 2 things we need to improve on.”

Then I talked to a couple of large industrial customers. I said, “Tell me your impression about how technology savvy you think we are and as a customer, there are things that you’d like to see our company do that could serve you better.” It’s amazing, when you step back and you take the time to do that, people will pretty much give you a good long list of exactly what it is you need to be focused on.

I summed all that up. I went back to the CEO. I said, “I think there’s 3 things that we need to do.” I said, “First and foremost, when you look at our company’s brand,” and every year, we were competing for America’s Most Admired Company. We had 7 criteria they rated companies on. We scored pretty high on everything except in innovation. I said, “I think there is a lot that we can do to change the company’s brand as 1 that’s really innovative and creative. We’re doing things that are far beyond what anybody else in the industry is doing and the way we apply technology but we never tell nobody about it. We never apply for any patents or any awards.” I said, “I think there’s a lot of opportunity for us to do that.”

The second thing is, I said, “These are some of the smartest, most talented people in the company but you know what? They never go anywhere unless they go out.” I said, “We have got to find a way of taking some of this talent and have these people go work in the core business. In some of my focus group meetings when I talked to people,” I said, “You know, have you ever been out to a district office or a power plant?” They said, “No.” I said, “How can you be developing technologies for this company if you’ve never had an opportunity to work in the core business and really understand how people would use this?” I said, “I really want us to be, I want to look back on my department and say, ‘We have grown a lot of talent that has gone on to do many great things in this company.’“

Then, the third thing that I think we need to be extremely focused on is rolling out technologies. I said, “I can’t tell you what those are. I don’t know enough about the department, I don’t know enough about what’s coming in the next 5 to 10 years but this company and this organization needs to play a key role in figuring out what we’re going to do that’s going to drive success, take cost out, help us open up new markets, help us better serve customers.” I said, “In 5 years, I'll be able to at least look back and say, ‘We did some significant things in that area.’”

Believe it or not, the entire 9 years I was in that job, I stayed focused on those 3 things, building the brand, focused on the internal employees and their development and then focused on what are those new technologies we need to be rolling out. Everything else was secondary to that. If I disciplined myself to stay focused on that, then I found that I was driving a lot of value to the company.

When I now speak to a lot of younger people who are coming up or younger executives, I always tell them, “You can’t be everything, so you’ve got to think about what’s most important and make sure you stay focused on that.” I think that’s very important to helping you be successful in any job that you go into.

Then, after a 33 year career, I said, “You know, there are still a lot of things I want to do in life. I'm young enough. I can retire. My pension has vested and I'm going to go do it.” I retired. I'd always had a dream of writing a book. That really came about because as a senior executive, you get asked a lot to go speak to other people and particularly women. I found that when I would go speak, I would be really struggling with, “Oh, my goodness. What am I going to share? What am I going to say to people?” Yet, after I would talk and it’s not that I'm not that great a speaker, people would be lined up, young women because they’re all looking for a role model. They're looking for somebody who’s been successful to tell them what they should or shouldn’t do.

I also liken leadership to once you reach that level, you forget about all the little lessons that you’ve learned. I sometimes tell people, “You know, when you go teach your child how to drive a car, you forget how much is involved in driving that car till you’re sitting on the other side and you're trying to put your foot on the pedal as they’re trying to drive.” I think careers are the same way. Once you’ve crossed the line or you’ve learned something, you forget how hard it is and that people aren’t born knowing these things.

I really wanted to leave behind some of my lessons learned for the next generation of people coming along. There were a lot of books out in the marketplace but most of the books out there were either written by men or they were written by academics or they were written by consultants, not by people who had actually lived this and done it and could talk about their own experiences. I was extremely fortunate because after writing a manuscript, somebody hooked me up with an agent who hooked me up with a publisher. Wiley Publishing is 1 of the big publishing houses in the country, decided to publish my book.

Wiley asked me, They said, “You know, we want you to go out and interview a lot of other women and have their stories in here, too.” That ended up making the book, I think, even more powerful. The book’s been out for a year and a half now and has been highly successful.

Now, concurrent with my book coming out, I started my own consulting business because I kept having people approach me about coming to work for them in IT. I really didn't want to work for anybody else. I wanted to have my own company and continue promoting my book because once you get a book out, people want you to come and speak a lot and want you to do workshops. I was approached by an Indian company, a company called Tech Mahindra, 1 of the largest companies in India. They're my client now for 2 and a half years. I consult with them on the side and I continue to be out across the country talking about my book.

The book really has 3 key messages. The first message in the book is you have to dare to begin within. The primary thesis of the book is all about building confidence because if you have the confidence to go do something and if you're willing to just be courageous and put yourself out there, there really isn’t much you can’t do but you just got to have the confidence to get out there and make it happen.

The first message is dare to begin within. Know what it is that you want. As a senior executive, I coached and mentored a lot of young people. The first question I asked them is, “What is it that you want?” The number 1 answer I would always get back is, “I don’t know.” I wanted to say, “Well, you know what? My crystal ball’s not working to good today.” There’s not very much I can do to help somebody who doesn't know what they want, but yet when I think back to the early stages of my career, I think I stumbled along, too, because I didn't really know what the career options were that were out there. Nobody told me you should be more focused, more thoughtful about what it is that you're going to do.

People do tell me I should write things down. I used to think, “Well, why should I write it down? I've got it all up here,” but truth of the matter is, if you're not willing to invest the time in writing it down, then you're not going to invest the time it takes to make it happen because senior jobs in corporate America, it’s tough. It's very grueling and it’s very competitive but if you are very focused on what it is that you want and you can communicate it very succinctly to other people, they will help you make it happen but they can’t help you if they don’t know what you want.

I spend a lot of time in the first part of my book telling people, “Know what it is that you want. Know what your values are.” Sometimes you don’t know the exact job you want but you know what’s important to you in terms of your values. They become a guidepost for helping you make decisions about the direction that you go in.

The second thing is be bold and aggressive in going after what you want. That's 1 place where I feel like I was always pretty good at doing that. That came from all that moving around as a child and going into situations where you didn't know people. I learned early on not to be afraid to ask. All people can do is say, “No,” but so many people don’t ask and particularly not women. In fact, all the research says that last year, coming out of college, 57% of men negotiated their salaries and only 7% of women did. What’s significant about that is that those who negotiated, they got 8% more.

When I talk, I tell young people, “You should always ask.” Now, be logical about how you ask and have a reason for asking for more money but you should negotiate. Don’t take the first offer that somebody puts on the table. Even people who’ve been in their jobs for a while don’t always ask for a raise, even when they go in for their annual performance review. About 64% of men do and about 46% of women do but what’s significant about that is 4 out of 5 times, when people ask for a raise, they get it.

I tell people, do your homework before you go in. Help the company understand why you should end up being paid more money. Think about the fact, too, that, hey, it’s not all about cash. There are a lot of ways to be compensated beyond cash. You can ask for a vacation. You can ask for them to pay for your MBA. You can ask to telecommute. You can ask for flexible working hours but you have to be creative and think about it and you got to ask. You’re certainly never going to get it if you don’t ask.

The other thing is, there are some major corporations have done a lot of research on why women aren’t moving up in their companies. What they found is that when they have a job posting system, as most major corporations do, they went and looked at who was posting for jobs. Typically, a man will post for a job, there are 10 criteria posted. They’ll apply for the job if they meet 4 of the criteria. For women, women have to check at least 9, sometimes 10 of the boxes before they’ll apply. I'm telling women that you’ve got to be willing to do what they guys are doing. Put yourself out there when you're not 100% qualified. Be willing to take those risks because that’s where it happens. So much of your upward mobility is about going into these jobs where you're not 100% qualified and learning the job and doing it. Then, you're qualified to go to the next job up.

College education only teaches you so much of what you need to know to be successful in these jobs. Most of it is about how well you can adapt, how well you learn and how well you prepare yourself to move up to the next level. It’s not about being the technical expert. You do need to be able to grasp things but you’ll always have to depend on other people when you reach the senior levels to educate you on some of the more technical aspects of the job. Things change too fast for you to know everything. Nobody can know-it-all.

I tell people, too, that you need to be very self-aware, know what you're good at, know what you're not good at. If you're not a person who’s particularly sensitive to other people, then have someone on your team or somebody who being an accountability partner that will tell you when you need to be more sensitive to other people.

If you’re not good in finance, you do need to know some basics of finance. I used to tell the people I worked with in IT, “The language of business is not bits and bytes. It is dollars and finance and you’ve got to know how to manage the money and know what kind of value of the products you deliver will draw into the bottom line and how to sell them to somebody inside the business.” You need some finance.

If you don’t have marketing skills, then you need to go get some marketing skills or have somebody on your team that has them but also, it’s about building these trusting relationships and how you leverage yourself through other people. That's a real key to it. I think so many times, people think that their upward mobility, there’s a real myth that the most technically competent person ends up being promoted and that’s just not true. Harvard actually did a study that said something like 15% of your upward mobility is tied to technical competence and 85% of your upward mobility is tied to emotional intelligence and how sensitive you are to other people and to the culture around you. I absolutely believe that, having spent 33 years in corporate America and working as a very successful entrepreneur in corporate America as well.

The third message that I have in my book is that you're not going to be successful alone. You need a lot of relationships to help you be successful as you climb up the corporate ladder. In fact, the more people you know, the more access you have to information and to opportunities. I used to spend a lot of time developing relationships with people who had the very same job I did but in a different company. Talking to them on a regular basis, “What’s working at your company? What’s not working?” because the senior levels, there is no textbook that tells you how to do some of these things. The best learnings comes from your peers.

If you want to be successful at a senior level, you better be going somewhere and meeting a lot of your peers and having conversations with them about what does and doesn't work. Who are the venders that you can partner with that deliver on their promises? Who are the people who you should stay away from? What are some best practices you have?

Then, being very sharing about that with other people and figuring out what you can do to help other people. If you want to build relationships, the best way to do that is figure out what you can do to help somebody else. I tell people that, yeah, there’s givers and there’s takers in this world but the people who take and never give are not very successful for very long. If your philosophy is always when you have a conversation with anybody for the first time meeting them and when you're talking to them thinking, “What can I do to help this person,” you’ll find something you can do to help them. You know what? From there, you built a relationship. Then, those people will be there for you when you need them.

The single most important ingredient in any relationship is trust. I always tell people, “Most people, when you go into a relationship with them, they don’t distrust you so don’t violate that.” I think most people will tell you, “I'm a trustworthy person. I tell the truth,” but then they won’t do little things like, they’ll tell you they’re coming to something, RSVP they're coming and they don’t show up or they’ll tell you they’re going to give a report and they don’t get it done on time. There’s always a reason why you can’t do something. Get with people and let them know because if you don’t deliver on the little things, it makes people think you're not going to be trustworthy on the big things. Your integrity is the single greatest asset you have on your brand. Don’t ever compromise that because if you ever violate that, it is virtually impossible to get it back.

I've been on teams with people that were brilliant, that didn’t trust each other and didn't like each other. They could not accomplish anything, even the simplest of tasks. Then, I've been on teams with people who liked each other, who’ve had fun and they trusted each other. It is amazing the kind of work and value and accomplishment that a team like that can make happen.

Your integrity is the 1 thing you have that you can’t … You can’t buy it back. There's no amount of money. Once it’s gone, it’s gone. Don’t care how rich you are, if you have a tarnished reputation, you will never, ever get it back to where it needed to be. I tell people, too, that any time you're talking about somebody else who has a bad reputation, your reputation gets a little bit tarnished, too. Think about that when you're not maybe being supportive of somebody else and try to always take the higher road with everyone because you don’t want your brand getting tarnished by maybe not being as supportive as you need to be as somebody else.

I think, for me, what’s been very important in helping me be successful is my faith. Oddly enough, when I interviewed these 28 other women for my book, I asked them a question. I said, “When things get really tough, where you just don’t know if you're going to make it or not, where do you draw your strength from?” A few people said their spouse. I think 1 person said their mother. Overwhelmingly, everybody said their faith. I thought, “Well, isn’t that interesting?”

Then, I had a conversation with a woman named Laura Liswood. Laura is a professor at Harvard and runs the Council of Living Women World Leaders. She had done a documentary on the 19 women who were the head of their country. These are people not like Queen Elizabeth who ascended the throne but Margaret Thatcher who was the prime minister. She said that in interviewing those women, universally, they had 4 things in common. One was that they were all excellent communicators. Not only could deliver a message very succinctly and very well and powerfully but were great listeners. She said they had a diverse view of the world. They all understood how well their country fit in with world politics. She said they were very courageous, not willing to challenge the status quo, willing to take a stand on things that matter to them. Then, the fourth thing was that they were all very spiritually grounded and that when things got tough, that’s where they drew a lot of their strength from.

I think that that’s been a very important part of my success is having that and drawing on that, I generally start each day before I even get out of bed with some sort of prayer and thinking about the things for which I'm most grateful. I think that if you start each day doing that, that it puts you in the right frame of mind for the rest of the day because we have so much to be grateful for. There are 2,000,000,000 people who live in this world and don’t even have enough to eat . Every day, everyone in this country should wake up energized about the opportunities and the resources that we have at our disposal. Thinking about the fact that my glass is half full. How am I going to get it full? I think that has been extremely key. I think it also helps you realize you're not alone.

Having these 5 people, knowing at least that there’s 5 people that when things get rough, you can pick up the phone and call them because we all just need to vent. Sometimes by talking to somebody who’s not as emotionally involved in something as you are, you yourself can begin to become a little more reasonable and see things that you might not have seen. As a senior leader, thinking about controlling your actions. I'm a very passionate person. I get very excited about things. I've been told that it’s a double edged sword that you're really passionate when you get excited about things, that’s great. You energize everybody around you but boy, when you’re upset about it, it shows too. You can’t do that as a senior leader because people watch how you react, particularly in a crisis. If you are upset, they get doubly upset.

It’s very important if you're a senior leader regardless of what’s going on to be calm and stay focused on the facts, too because a lot of what happens is other people will come to you when they’re upset. Really, sometimes all they need to do is, they just need to vent, too. If you keep yourself grounded in facts and seeking first to understand, facts tend to take the emotion out of things and allow you to be a lot more reasonable and see things from a good perspective. You got to make decisions. It’s not black and white. There’s a lot of gray there.

All you can do is the best you can do with the facts that you have but what you don’t want to do is go make a decision without having at least made the attempt to get the facts on the table, particularly when you're dealing with personnel issues because people used to ask me, “What keeps you up at night?” I'd say, “Really, nothing technically about this job. What would keep me up at night is a personnel issue.” Anytime we got to deal with another human being’s life or particular if you're going through a downsizing of any kind in the company, there is nothing more difficult to deal with than that. Nothing tougher. Those are the kinds of things that’ll keep you up at night.

I think HR’s 1 of the most difficult places to work in any company. They don’t always get the credit that they deserve but I always value what HR brought to the table because bottom line, if you’re a senior executive in the company, human resources is your number 1 job, selecting the talent, grooming and growing them to the next level. I used to say, “Look at a person. If the people in your team getting promoted, moving to the next level and moving up or is their organization a graveyard?” They're not a very good leader if people on their team aren’t getting promoted.

To me, that’s the greatest thing you do as a leader is help identify that talent. If you are so important to your organization that when you walk away and you leave, it falls apart, you’re a terrible leader. You should always have 3 or 4 people in mind that can come in right behind you and you should not skip a beat. You’ve not done your company a very good service if you haven't focused on that.

I love a quote by Deepak Chopra. He always says that the universe has a perfect accounting system. You get out of life exactly what you put into it. I've seen so many times where you make 1 little investment in somebody. It delivers back dividends of huge multitudes. I never hesitate if I can help somebody regardless of how small or insignificant it might seem, I try to do what I can to help. Time and time again, I have been rewarded for that.

The other thing is that I think mentors come from all around you, not just people above you in an organization. I used to spend a lot of time doing something I called reverse mentoring where I would find somebody in my organization who was really good at doing something and maybe somebody who was really good at doing something technically. I would have them come and reverse coach me every couple of months. That did a couple of things. Number 1, it built a relationship with somebody at a grass roots level in the organization. They would talk to other people about how hard I was trying to learn and what was going on in the organization. At the same time, then I learned these new skills that I just frankly didn't have the time to go sign up and go take a course somewhere. I don’t think people always understand that mentors don’t necessarily have to be somebody higher up than you.

Because there were no other women really who were higher than me in the organization, I learned a lot from women that were younger. I'd see a young women on my team who gave a really great presentation. I'd go to her and say, “Help me understand how you did that.” Mentors are absolutely critical to our success.

The other thing that’s absolutely critical are sponsors. There’s a big difference between the 2. I don’t think a lot of people realize that. I don’t think till I got to the senior level of the company. I'd certainly didn't have any female sponsors. I did have some sponsors outside the company. Betty Siegel from Kennesaw College was actually what I would call my first female sponsor. I went through a program called Leadership Georgia in 1994. Betty was the leadership speaker. It was the first time I’d really seen a very strong, just incredible women speak about leadership. She was so successful at the time.

I wrote her a 3 page letter after I heard her talk. She reached out to me and we got together for lunch. She’s become a lifelong friend and mentor to me. In fact, there are things that I wrote about in my book that I learned about from Betty. One of the most important was balance because she was also a working mother with 2 children. I was struggling at the time because my daughter was very, very young. She helped me understand that the most important thing you can do is take care of your family, that work will be there. If you surround yourself with the right kind of teammates, they’ll be there to pull for you but you don’t get to go back and do some of those things a second time. As I look back now, I'm so glad that I had those wise words of wisdom from her.

Inside of my company and this is the way it happened in all large corporations, when you’re making a decision about a senior level, a VP job in a company, it’s not made by 1 person. It’s typically made by a selection committee. You’ve got to have somebody advocating for you before your name even gets on those lists. Even if your name is on the list and you have 1 person advocating for you, it becomes a very political process because if there’s somebody else sitting around that table that’s not a fan of yours, you’re not going to get the job or if there are 3 people advocating for somebody and you just have 1 person advocating for you, you’re not going to get it unless that sponsor is really, really strong.

Politics and having a sponsor is absolutely essential to getting the next job. If you don’t have a sponsor, you're going to have a problem getting there. You don’t typically go and chose a sponsor. They find you but if you do good work, then you typically will be somebody who surfaces as someone who’s worthy of having a sponsor. I always tell people, too, that when you have your annual performance review, that’s a good time to sit down and talk to your boss. Hopefully, your boss is somebody who 1 day will be a sponsor. Maybe they’re not now. That's another reason to be very selective about who you chose to go to work for. Is this a rising star that maybe you can hook your wagon to or is this somebody who’s just going to stay where they are.

Always do your best work so that people will want to take you with them but also ask your boss if there’s a job that you want. Ask your boss to call the person that runs that department and tell them that he or she would like for them to do a 15 minute get to know with you. Most people will do a 15 minute get to know, particularly if your boss calls and says, “This is a really sharp person. Would appreciate if you spend some time with them.”

Now, if you get that 15 minute meeting, be very focused when you go into that meeting. Make sure that you are being productive with that person’s time, about what it takes to go to work in their department, what advice they would have for you. Then, follow up with them. Let them know what you did to follow up on that advice. People often have these kinds of meetings with me but when they didn’t follow up or if they call back and wanted a second meeting, said they’d not have time to follow up on the advice I'd gave them, they never forgot a second meeting with me.

Make sure that if you get that 15 minute meeting, you follow up and let that person know that they’ve made a good investment in you. Once they’ve made 1 investment in you, they’ll make another. You don’t have to meet with them face-to-face. Just send them an email and say, “You know, you advised me to go and shadow somebody for a day,” for example. Was the best feedback I've ever gotten. Let them know. Then, that way, they’ll be a lot more generous with you and maybe even give you a 30 minute meeting instead of a 15 minute meeting.

Again, you have to ask, you have to make that happen. I think too many times, I'll think people sit back and they wait for their bosses to tell them what to do. They think their boss is going to look out for them and help them get that next job. You can’t wait for your boss to do that. It’s your job to do that for you. Do it in a way that you're sensitive so that your existing boss doesn't think you're trying to get out their department but is excited and interested in helping you grow to that next career level. Make sure that you're not so focused on the next job that you're not getting any work done where you are because you have to do that, too.

Companies are starving for leadership. I’ll never forget, too, as I was going up the corporate ladder. One day, somebody said to me, They said, “Why do you do all this stuff outside of the job? You're involved in all these organizations and the company and you're doing all this stuff in the community on a per-hour basis. I'm making twice as much money as you are.” I said, “Well, you know what?” I said, “I do that because I'm continuing to grow and learn and I meet a lot of people that help me be successful on this job by doing that.” That person has never moved beyond the department that we worked in together. I had the opportunity to move on up the ladder. I think it’s because I made all these investments beyond the job description.

Job description’s what you get paid to do. You really want to be a leader and want to move on up, you got to figure out how you add value beyond that and how you build that network with those people who will help you be successful once you get to those senior levels.

I feel very fortunate in that I grew up in corporate America in the time that I did. I think, had I come into the corporate world any earlier, I might not have had the same opportunities. I don’t think that it was very easy for women prior to 1970. In fact, when I came into the company in 1978, I thought maybe 1 of these days, I'll get to supervise some people. I never dreamed I would end up being a senior executive in the company. It’s been hard because I do feel like, in a lot of jobs I went into, people said, “You can’t do that job.” For some people, I think that shuts them down. I'm the kind of person who really likes a challenge. For me, I was determined that I was going to show people that I could do that.

I think our younger women today won’t have some of those same challenges although I do know from my work this past year, traveling across corporate America and talking to women inside corporations that things are still not where they need to be. That's why we’re continuing to see women drop out and not pursue jobs at the senior level. Of course, I see men do that, too.

Being in the C-suite is not for everybody. It’s very hard work. I tell people, “If you want to be in the C-suite, you're probably not going to be at every ball game your child has. It’s all about tradeoffs.” I feel, too, that my husband has been a key part of helping me be successful. I married my college sweetheart. We met when we were sophomores in college. He’s been my biggest cheerleader and supporter. I never could have done everything I've done in corporate America had he not been supportive of me. He has turned down some significant opportunities so that we could stay in the same city and I could be successful in my job.

I spend a lot of time talking to women who are working and raising their children because I suffered a lot with guilty working mother syndrome. I see a lot of young women who do that today. I tell women, “It’s very doable.” There are more working women today than there ever have been. There certainly will be in the future because 60% of the people in college today are women. Companies are figuring out they've got to create a more inclusive culture for women or they’re not going to be able to retain the best talent. Today, we are competing in a very global marketplace against China and India who have more smart people than we do people in this country. We’ve got to take these highly educated and talented women and help them understand that they can be successful in corporate America. That means creating an environment where they can also balance their family’s better.

By the way, this is a male issue, too. I managed and lead more men who were trying to balance issues at home as well because they mostly have working wives now as well but I think there’s 3 keys to having more balance in your life. The first goes back to the first part of my book. That is dare to begin within, know what it is you want because we all the time success very differently. If you know what it is that you want, then you begin to prioritize around that. It allows you to say no to things that don’t take you down the path that you want to go down.

The second thing is outsource. When my child was little, there were very few options for child care. We always had to have somebody that we paid to come to our house and paid a fortune for. Now, look around there. These fabulous child care facilities that teach 2 and 3 languages. We didn't have those options but you can outsource child care. You can also outsource cooking. My husband’s idea of a home cooked meal walks in the house in a paper bag. Cleaning your house. We either have a dirty house or somebody else was cleaning it. Don’t think that you have to do everything. You can outsource.

As a part of outsourcing too is really leveraging the technology. I never will forget 1 day, I walked into a hair salon. There was 1 of our other female vice presidents. It was 4:00 in the afternoon. It was a Thursday. We had both snuck out early to get our hair done. In the old days, you would have had to go on a Saturday to do something like that. We’re sitting there with all this stuff in our hair, this foil in our hair. She’s talking on her cell phone. I'm talking on my cell phone and working on my iPad. I thought, “Those people back in the office, they had no clue where we are,” but we’re being just as productive as we would if we were sitting behind our desk but you just have to be very smart about leveraging the technology and really embracing it.

Then, the last thing. This is the thing I see women struggle with the most and some men struggle, too but primarily, I see women struggle with this. That’s delegate. If you're going to be in a senior level job, you better learn how to figure out what things you can delegate to somebody else and really leverage yourself through other people. So much of that is about surrounding yourself with the right team and getting people off the team if they’re not people you can depend on and delegate to because nothing can be more miserable than having people that aren’t the right people in your team.

I interviewed 28 very senior women for my book. I asked them a couple questions. One of the questions I asked them was, I said, “If you had a young person you cared deeply about coming into the workforce today and you could give them 1 piece of advice for success, what would it be?” The overwhelming answer was be willing to take more risk, get out of your comfort zone, a comfort zone is a dangerous place to be and do it on a regular basis because it’s those experiences that really grow you and grow your leadership so that you're ready for the next move.

Then, I asked them, I said, “If you could go back in time and change 1 really big mistake that you made, what would it be?” The number 1 answer was that they should have fired somebody quicker than they did. I think as women in particular, we want to give somebody every single chance in the world to be successful and won’t do the tough things to fire somebody. Many of them told me stories where their career almost got derailed because they did not deal with those issues. I tell women, “If you have somebody who’s not supporting you, who’s not a team player, that you can’t trust, get them off your team,” because that’s disruptive, not just for you but for everybody else that’s on the team as well.

This whole thing about taking risk is so critical, I like to share the story of Babe Ruth. Babe Ruth hit 713 career home runs, more than anybody else in the league in his time in history. His record has, of course, since been broken but if you go back and you check the records, he led the league in strikeouts most of those years, too. Nobody talks about the strikeouts but what’s important about that is he was willing to get up to the plate and he was willing to try. He would swing. If he missed, you know what he did? He learned what didn't work so he could be successful in the next try. Careers are like that, too. You’ve got to be willing to get up to that plate and swing and try.

The reason, I think that sometimes this is harder for women than it is for men is we don’t have the same social safety networks that men do. I'm seeing that change in corporate America. Men typically are part of a network of other men who support them and take care of them. Women haven't always had that but now there are enough women breaking through the glass ceiling, getting to those senior levels that we can begin to provide those safety nets for each other. I tell women at the senior levels, “I know it’s tough because there’s still not enough of you there but you got to be there for that next generation coming along. You got to be that safety net for them." I tell younger women, too, “It’s hard to be in these jobs because still, there’s a lot of scrutiny of the senior women that are there and you need to be supportive." If you see a senior women who’s doing something you don’t like, try to find a way to get that feedback to her so she can correct it and make sure that you got all of your facts. If you hear somebody being more selectively critical of her, then challenge them or push them back, say, “Help me understand why you feel that way,” because they need your support. If they’re doing something good, write them a handwritten note.

My greatest praise didn't come from letters from my CEO. I would get a little handwritten note from somebody on the front line. I would be having the worst day in the world and I get this note from somebody saying I did something right. That would keep those notes in my drawer. On those days where it got really rough, I'd pull those notes out and I would read them and say, “I'm not doing so bad,” because we all need affirmation.

I tell people, too, that you are the average of the 5 people you hang out with the most. What kind of attitudes do they have? Are you hanging around with people that are a bunch of whiners because you know what? If you do that, you’re going to end up being a whiner, too. But think about that network. If you want to be a good tennis player, what do you do? Go play tennis with somebody who’s better than you. Careers are the same way. Surround yourself with a bunch of winners. A bunch of people with positive, can do attitudes. You know what? You’ll become that same way but it’s up to you to manage that network and make sure that those 5 people you're hanging out with are people you can count on to tell you when you screw up.

I interviewed a lot of men for my book. I asked them, “If you could change 1 thing about women in business, what would it be?” Overwhelmingly, the response from them and this was shocking to me was quit taking it to personal. I wanted to say to them, “You know, you not want to think about the feedback you give and wrapping it somehow a little nicer when you give it to a women,” but at the same time, I think that nobody wants to be the emperor with no clothes on and that only people that care most about you will take the time to coach you and council you and tell you the things you're really need to fix and that you need to be very aggressive in going out and asking for feedback and being open, regardless of how much it hurts and not be defensive because that’s how you get better is through that self awareness and getting that feedback but if you don’t go ask for it and if you're not open to it when you do get it, then there’s a lot of things that you need to fix that you're just never going to hear about it.

I tell people, too, think about what you're 2 greatest developmental needs are. When I asked people where your 2 biggest strengths, they can tell you like that. When I ask them, “What are your developmental needs,” I'm amazed how few times people can tell me that and how unself-aware they are.

I always tell people, too, that you have a brand just like Coca-Cola has a brand, Home Depot has a brand, you have 1. It’s what people say about you when you are not in the room. Think about it. What are the 2 to 3 adjectives that people would use to describe you? If you don’t know what that is, you probably need to find out. Is that the adjectives that you want them to use to describe you? If not, then you need to start thinking about what you can do to brand yourself and communicate those messages that will help you create that brand.

I ask an awful lot of people from my book about the 1 piece of advice that they would give to a young person they cared about that they want to be successful. I'd have the same advice. It goes back to what’s in my book. Think about what it is that you want and think far bigger than you think you can because as human beings, you have about 65,000 thoughts in an average day. About 85% of those thoughts are negative where you're talking yourself out of doing something. That's how our species has survived but so many of these warnings that we’re constantly giving ourselves, talking our self out of doing things are not things that you need to worry about. Some of them are. You remember if you put your hand over a candle flame not to do that. You’ll get burned but putting yourself out there and being concerned about how other people are going to judge you. That's not something that’s going to kill you. You just don’t know if you don’t do it.

We learn so much by experience. I talk about public speaking and leadership being learned in confidences, too. Confidence is all experiential, putting yourself out there, learning what doesn't work so that you can make adjustments and be successful on the next try but you just got to be willing to push beyond those 65,000 thoughts every day that are telling you that you can’t. Be very focused on what it is that you want.

There’s a remarkable book out there other than my book there but it is a pretty remarkable book and that was written in the 1920s. It was written by Napoleon Hill. The book is *Think and Grow Rich*. Napoleon Hill was hired by Andrew Carnegie to interview 500 of the most successful people of that time in the 1920s. It took him 25 years to conduct all the research and interview these people. He came back and he had 1 single piece of advice. He said these people all had a clear vision of what it is that they wanted and they expected it to happen. You’ve really got to begin within. You’ve got to think bigger than you think you can. You’ve got to go for it boldly. Don’t let anybody tell you that you can’t. I always tell people, “I dare you.” That's why the title of my book is *Dare*.