Chasing Perfection

Shatter the Illusion

Minimize Self-Doubt & Maximize Success

Sue Hawkes

with

Alexandra Stieglbauer
CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: UNMASKING YOUR SUPERHERO - This chapter explores the self-doubt many leaders experience, also known as Imposter Syndrome. Vulnerability is explored in this chapter, with practices focusing on leading with vulnerability and asking for help.

CHAPTER TWO: BALANCE IS BULLSHIT - This chapter explores the myth of balance and the many roles leaders are pulled into: business owner, confidant, mentor, leader, manager, spouse, teammate, friend; the list goes on. It includes practices for managing these roles and assessing when you are misaligned with your own values. This chapter explores the cost of saying yes, how to say no effectively and how to delegate things that aren’t the highest and best use of your time without guilt.

CHAPTER THREE: PUT ON YOUR OXYGEN MASK FIRST - This chapter discusses self-care and provides healthy practices to change your thinking and overcome the habit of putting yourself last. Do you take care of everyone else around you at your own expense? As a leader, it’s time to stop; you can better serve others when you first take care of yourself. We highlight leaders who have overcome challenging issues such as addiction and anxiety on the path to a healthier self.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONQUERING CATASTROPHE - This chapter explores when the events of your business and life are occurring at such a pace and so life-altering in scale, nothing prior can have prepared you for them. As a leader, how do you dig deep to find the energy, commitment and drive to continue moving forward amidst overwhelming circumstances?

CHAPTER FIVE: INTUITION IS YOUR SUPERPOWER - This chapter explores using your intuition as a strategic influence in your business and life. As a leader, how do you lead with and follow your intuition – especially amidst “logical” counter arguments? Emphasis on quieting your limiting self-talk and learning to trust yourself.

CHAPTER SIX: GAME CHANGERS & TRAILBLAZERS This chapter highlights leaders who changed the business world by paving the way for others. How do we learn from these game changers and lead without apologizing? How do we forge new trails while eliminating the barriers that don’t serve us and bring others along for the ride?

CHAPTER SEVEN: BACKWARD AND IN HEELS - This chapter explores the excellence and mastery it takes to become an exceptional business leader. Women leaders must be willing to go the extra mile, deliver what’s possible, and work to always improve – regardless of limits, or what may seem reasonable to others.

CHAPTER EIGHT: POURING GAS ON THE FIRE - This chapter explores how to identify what triggers your optimal performance. For many leaders, their ultimate driver is to make a positive impact in the world. Emphasis on discovering your purpose and designing practices to align it with your business goals.
CHAPTER NINE: UNLEARNING TO LEARN - This chapter explores the connection between lifelong learning and success. Unlearning those habits that hinder you allows you to be coachable, humble and creative. We identify where success can be a learning disability, and the practices to unleash your maximum potential.

CHAPTER TEN: ENTITLED TO ENLIGHTENED - This chapter explores how to simplify working between generations effectively. Believing generational stereotypes limits your ability to harness the best from everyone at the table. Learn how to unlock potential from all generations by engaging everyone around shared values. Emphasis on gracefully communicating through the tough stuff.
STOP!!!!

READ THIS FIRST

Before you begin doing what you’ve always done with every book before this, let me help you get the most from your reading.

1. This book isn’t intended to be read cover to cover. You’re free to read any and all chapters that are most relevant to you right now and ignore the rest. You can pick it up at any time when it makes sense. That’s what you’ll do anyway.

2. This book is written for entrepreneurs, business owners, leaders and those aspiring to be one of those three things. Is there anyone else?

3. A few chapters are written specifically for women in one of the categories mentioned in #2. If you’re a realized man, with strong emotional intelligence, you’ll get it and make the connections.
If you’re not either of those, you can ignore these chapters, as you’ve likely ignored these perspectives.

4. This book has several stories from my life in it, some are personal and that makes this more uncomfortable for me to share. Some are professional, and they are meant to represent the thousands of people I’ve worked with. You see, I work in a world of confidentiality and only the people named agreed to share their stories. So I offered myself as an example to demonstrate the points I’m making. Please draw your own conclusions knowing I’m representing a lot of experience with each story. You can use them or lose them at will. I do.

5. I’m writing this with the intention of inspiring you, the reader to STOP chasing perfection and shatter that illusion. When you do the work I’ve outlined in this book, and you are consistently practicing what I’ve offered, you will be more confident and able to maximize success. For those who join this movement to shatter the illusion, mastery entails becoming unf<kwithable in the process. And that’s the point.

6. What’s unf<kwithablity you ask? You’ll find out when you complete each chapter as we’ve included links with bonus information, practices and resources for you to explore. The rest of you will skip to the end of the book and read the conclusion like you always do, and that’s the shortcut you’re looking for. I can’t believe you read all of these instructions, you usually don’t!
INTRODUCTION

I built my first business in fifth grade and dragged my friend Amy into it. We were opposites and that seems to be the great start for most business partnerships. Amy was the more conservative, thoughtful, risk averse partner; I was the risk taking, big thinking, and door opening partner. We knew how to make macramé plant hangers. The two of us could make two to four plant hangers every night and well more if we had the weekend to work. My dad mimeographed our business cards on the powder blue card stock I purchased at Woolworths (we didn’t have copiers yet – my God I feel old writing this). We cut those cards with the kitchen scissors. Our company name was a blend of our two last names and included our parent’s rotary dial home phone numbers on them. The cost of our materials was about 10 cents a pound plus our time. Our mark-up was about 900%. We went door-to-door and sold the plant hangers. A lot of them. Enough that I could lose about $200 from my bike seat pannier bag – (it seemed secure?) after which Amy took over as the banker. It was a good choice. We made about $500 after our loss which we used to buy Christmas presents for our families. That was it, game over. We accomplished what we wanted and the company was finished. Little did I know that experience would set the stage for my future as an entrepreneur.

At the age of 11, I learned you could make as much money as you could work for, and I was willing to work hard for it. Through college, I went to school full time, worked full time and still found time to freelance painting murals. I was always motivated to make money and do things I’d never done before. Most of my jobs growing up were leadership positions, from managing a restaurant to running a company by the time I was 26. God knows, as a liberal arts major I had
no idea what I was doing, and to no surprise that company went out of business a few years later.
I learned more at that little company, where I cut my teeth in the training business and failed forward, than anywhere else. I was presenting to audiences of 20-100 people, consisting of students, CEOs, and everyone in between. First I was leading guest events, then doing small pieces of our trainings and by the time I was 27, I was leading ninety day leadership programs which included a significant community service component. It was intense, unreasonable and extraordinary transformational work, and I loved it.

That was the springboard for my future. I found my life’s work in leading workshops, keynotes and seminars in my twenties. My work included general public trainings as well as working with CEOs of multi-million dollar businesses through the Women Presidents’ Organization (WPO), which you’ll see mentioned often throughout the book. That’s one way I continue to learn about business, from the incredible women who support and challenge one another in WPO. Balancing running my own company, being a chapter chair for WPO and leading seminars and workshops had been my fuel for years. As you’ll read, I had two companies throughout my 30s and 40s. I founded a global coaching certification program, and I continue to lead my company YESS!® I’ve worked with leaders and their teams for the bulk of my career. My keynotes and workshops focus on topics such as: effective communication, coaching, leadership development, emotional intelligence, and team performance. I have all kinds of certifications and acronyms as I enjoy learning so much; it seems I’m either leading a program or attending one most of the time.

Five years ago, I became certified in the Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS®). It was one of the best things I’ve done, because it married my passion for working with entrepreneurial
leadership teams, communication, team health, and making a difference. I love my mix of work and the people I serve.

So why write this book now? Good question. As I sit editing it for the gazillionth time, I’m wondering the same thing. In all seriousness, I have several reasons and you’ll hear a theme. First, like most leaders, I want to accomplish something on a grander scale. My team and I will continue to work with leadership teams directly, yet I can also increase the number of people I impact by writing this book. Second, my intent is for the book to be so useful that it creates more opportunities to reach wider audiences with keynotes or workshops. Third, my kids; I want them to understand they can forego the mistakes I’ve made if they get a head start on these practices and apply themselves to their passions. They may not be able to hear it from me, yet perhaps if it’s in writing they will be three of the people most favorably impacted. Frankly, that’s what I’m hoping for every reader. Fourth, I’ve been asked by many people over the years to write a book, so they can share me in a sense. If that will impact more people, I’m willing. So in short, it’s about the numbers of humans positively impacted by me.

Why this format? Because I’ve heard the same challenges echoed from too many hard working, generous, sincerely great leaders and I’m hoping this will mitigate some of the pain and help you thrive. Most of you are rule breakers by nature, so reading cover to cover is unlikely anyway. Many of you never finish a book. You’re great starters, however, so suggesting you find the most compelling chapter(s) and beginning there makes sense for most of you. It’s what you’d do anyway. Besides, it allowed me to think this through in the thematic struggles I most commonly hear behind closed doors. I hope you won’t just read this book, it’s really important you DO
something about whatever you read if it pertains to you. This is not a passive read, it’s an active read. There are practices and suggestions of what to do throughout the book to help you shatter any illusion you have.

I’ve wasted too much time, energy and money chasing perfection and I’m done with it. I want to shatter the illusion and bring everyone I can with me. Our tribe of learners will move forward together supporting others to lead with grace, shatter the illusions we’re full of and end our needless suffering in pursuit of perfection. It will require two things: vulnerability and the support of the people around you. It can be done, and it takes practice. Once you master what’s between these pages, you’ll be unf❤<kwithable. So get reading, find out what that means and get on your way!
CHAPTER ONE:

Unmasking Your Superhero

"It's not who you are that holds you back, it's who you think you're not."

- Denis Waitley, motivational speaker and success expert

"The best advice I've ever received is, “No one else knows what they're doing either”

- Ricky Gervais, award-winning comedian and television writer

Most of the leaders I know, myself included, project a competent, confident exterior to the world. Yet beneath that calm public exterior lurks the fear of being found out as a fraud: *What if they discover I'm not who I'm pretending to be? Or, I don't really know what I'm doing. I'm just making it up as I go along.* Interestingly, the more successful the leader, the louder and more persistent those voices can become. How many of us go through our lives and careers feeling like we’re faking it (and might get caught)? The better questions are: when does it begin and what can you do about it?

In 1978, the term Imposter Syndrome was coined by clinical psychologists Pauline R. Clance and Suzanne A. Imes describing high-achieving individuals who are marked by an inability to internalize their accomplishments with a persistent fear of being exposed as a “fraud”. Despite external evidence of their competence, those exhibiting the syndrome remain convinced they are frauds and do not deserve the success they’ve achieved. Research shows 70-80% of leaders experience Imposter Syndrome, those who don’t are actually the ones likely to be an imposter.
When we think there’s no one who can possibly relate to all we’re challenged with, what can we do? We can find other leaders we trust facing similar challenges who we feel comfortable enough to talk vulnerably with about it.

**Ages and Stages**

It starts early. In our twenties, life is about proving ourselves and figuring out who we’re going to be. In my mid-twenties, I wanted everybody to think I knew more than I did. I was out to conquer the world before breakfast; my parents told me I could do anything, and I believed them. When I got out into the world, the crashing reality hit, "Wow, there are a lot of really competent people out there. I'm not so special. I've got to work harder." That realization drove me to be overly competitive and threw life out of balance. Fortunately, I discovered volunteering; when I started to put my energy into serving others and began to focus outward, I realized it wasn't all about me, and things started to become a lot easier. I was able to measure myself more honestly; to look at other people in my sphere and recognize just how much I had to learn. It was a lot (and seems to become more every day)—and that’s okay.

**MAXIMIZE SUCCESS: BETH BRONFMAN:** Now Managing Partner of View, The Agency, Beth began her career at Lane Bryant, eventually moving on to Macy’s where she became VP of Advertising, then left to start her own firm. Despite a career path that might appear to an onlooker like a line going straight up, she admits, “When I was younger, I did have more doubts. Most people do. I think the older you get, the more you realize that things really do work out. It may not be the way you expect it to be, but I think it's the way it's supposed to be. That's a lesson you learn with age. You have to be resilient and flexible. You have to bounce back. In the
beginning when I started my business, I would get nervous about everything. “Am I going to get this deal? Is it going to work out right?” It doesn't bother me anymore, because I know that it will work out. That's part of the journey of life, right? And if you have a good marriage and love for your family, it makes everything so much better.”

Her advice to young people? “Be resilient. People like to critique things because it makes them feel important. But you've got to just listen, take a little grain from it, and move on. You can't get yourself in knots and say, "Oh my God, they hated it. I can't go on." Forget it; you've got to move on. People who can't let things go get moody and wallow in the fact that someone hated their work, but you can't live your life like that. I wouldn't have a business in advertising if we didn't keep moving on and learning and evolving.”

When asked to what she attributes her success, she answers with a question: “What's success? You always have to strive. It keeps you on your toes. I cannot rest on my laurels, because I know I'm only as good as my next campaign. You can't talk about all these great things you did in the past. You've got to do it now.” For Beth, success is a journey, not a destination—and she treats every assignment with the same level of commitment she brought to her first job: “It doesn't matter if it's the smallest job or the biggest job. You have to give it the same billion percent effort. Every day is a new day, and a new opportunity.”

**Taking on Commitments**

In our thirties, life gets more complex as we take on new roles and responsibilities. Maybe we get married, have children or buy a home; suddenly we’ve got greater accountability and more bills to pay. We can start to feel trapped in our career, or by our other choices. Chucking it all and taking off for Europe is no longer an easy option; we’re buying a couch or
replacing the water heater, not going on spring break. We're learning to juggle our responsibilities; what we put on Facebook is "Look at all the cool things I'm doing," but the reality is, "I have to decide whether I’ll travel 40 percent of the time for my career or if I want to have a family, because those two don’t always go together—and my spouse is wrestling with the same choices.” So you bolster up your game face, donning the mask of success, while juggling it all.

When my mom was growing up, the career choices for women were nurse, schoolteacher, or secretary. The door cracked open for my generation, offering us many more options (in a business world designed by men for men) yet somehow we never discarded the idea that we also had to be stellar homemakers and parents in the same way our stay-at-home moms were. We were caught up in Martha Stewart perfectionism; our homes, our kids, and our careers all had to be perfect—and nobody could see us sweat while we were figuring it out.

The lack of internal confidence is real — and persistent. Somehow, no achievement is ever quite significant enough to reassure us we’ve arrived. The bar is always rising. The first landmark for growing a business is to reach a million dollars in revenue; it’s the first big benchmark of "I did it!" for most business owners. Time and again I see leaders raising their goals without pausing to savor their success; suddenly the benchmark becomes $10 million because $1 million “just isn't that much”. I’ve heard people with multimillion-dollar businesses say “I’ve got a baby business” in comparison to other business owners. Somehow, they still see themselves as just barely qualified to be in the room with other leaders of larger businesses! And that nagging voice in their heads just gets louder — the one saying “I’m a fake” or “I don’t belong” or “How long can I go on fooling people?” or “What if they find out?”
The more successful we become, the less we allow ourselves to talk about the challenges we face, because it cracks the façade of how we appear to the world. So we quiet ourselves to protect the façade and become very lonely behind our mask.

**PRACTICE: LEARN TO ASK FOR HELP AND BE WILLING TO RECEIVE IT**

I see leaders building trust and being honest about their issues within the business roundtable groups I facilitate and speak at, when one person is willing to say, "It’s a mess right now. Please don't pin me with this permanently, I need your support." Most leaders are phenomenally competent at so many things—I can't think of many leaders who aren't—yet admitting they’re struggling is tough, because they don’t want to be judged or pop the perceived bubble of perfection. Among trusted peers, it feels safer and less exposed—and it’s a tremendous relief to hear the person next to you say, “I’ve been there too.” Once someone opens the door by admitting they’re overwhelmed and needing help, it creates permission for everyone to be vulnerable and tell the truth as well. It’s hard to be the one to go first. Learning to express vulnerability, ask for help and receive it gracefully are key skills for any leader’s success.

**How Does Our Lack of Self-Confidence Hinder Us?**

One of the most revealing differences between men and women is how they present themselves as job candidates and the chasm of confidence that exposes. When men are interviewing for a job, they’re comfortable talking about how they can do whatever is required, even if they've never done it. If women are interviewing for the same job, they’ll typically project much less self-assurance; "I haven't done it yet, but here's what I have done and I believe that indicates I can handle this as well." Women rely on what they’ve done, where men focus on
how their experience is the reason they will be able to do something in the future. All things being equal, who do you think an employer is more likely to feel confident hiring in this scenario? Men will read a job description and if they meet at least half of the requirements, they'll typically apply. Women will only apply if they meet a majority of the requirements. In cases like these, women would benefit from a bit of overconfidence and trusting a “fake it ‘till you make it” mentality will pay off. Communicating from an honest place while focusing on what your experience makes possible will open more doors every time.

And now I’m going to sound like a hypocrite. Faking it — putting a game face on when you’re not feeling it — is another way we wear a mask. And there comes a point at which it’s no longer an option — and I hit that point.

I am a Chapter Chair for the Women Presidents’ Organization (WPO), and 12 of us decided to form a virtual roundtable for ourselves. I was talking to one of the members pre-meeting one evening, and I remember saying to her, "Things are really hard right now." That was an understatement: My mother had been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, so I was cooking for my parents and taking care of Mom on weekends. I was providing for my family because my husband wasn’t earning any income and had withdrawn into himself. He’d been in charge of paying the household accounts; it wasn’t until I came across a certified letter with my name on it bearing a foreclosure notice dated several months previous buried in a stack of mail that I learned he hadn’t been making the house payments. That was the moment I finally decided to divorce him. Add that to the overfull life I was already living; I had to sell my house against a deadline, and work with the bank to repair our relationship and our finances. Thankfully, I was able to sell in time, but it left me with only three weeks (which included some travel for work) to pack and move out, all while caring for my son and parents and running two businesses.
As I confessed this to my friend, the floodgates opened. I cried and admitted, “I've never felt like more of a failure.” I didn’t want to unload on everyone about my personal problems and I didn’t know if I’d clearly communicate all that was happening.

“This is why we have this group”, my friend said. “This is where you're going to be vulnerable. You're one of those people nobody assumes is challenged with anything.”

That hit me like a two-by-four; “What!? That can’t be true.” One insightful conversation made it possible for me to be on the conference call and put it all out there. I removed my mask and cape, sharing it all with them and letting them see my humanity.

I would never have had the courage to be that vulnerable without her pushing me. Like so many leaders, I was blind to my pride in maintaining the mask of my over-competent façade. I also thought it was selfish to open up — I didn’t want to take up time that someone else in the group might need more than I did. Too often we stop ourselves from being vulnerable when we need to be. The more successful we are, the more we conceal, because now we have a public image to preserve — and if the world knows we’re not perfect, we’re concerned it could become a permanent black mark.

By the end of that call, I felt a lot better — and I also worried that I’d blown my credibility. I remember thinking, "I feel like a fraud. I coach people about how to run effective businesses and how to live successful, fulfilling lives — yet my life is the antithesis of that.” In the coming days, I was relieved when the other group members reached out to me to offer support and share their own vulnerabilities with me. My self-disclosure proved to be a doorway to intimacy and depth in our relationships which in turn made us stronger and more connected.

The greatest outcome? I'm more authentic and accessible as a result of that difficult period in my life. I make no bones about how removing my mask, sharing it all and being
vulnerable was the only way to move forward. I’ve made a lot of mistakes, and the sum of those now gives people permission to be vulnerable with me in return.

MAXIMIZE SUCCESS: NANCY LYONS: Nancy Lyons mixes well with people, has a wicked sense of humor and is an easy person to like. From pursuing theater in college, doing standup comedy, and being on the national speaker’s circuit, the charismatic CEO of Clockwork is the last person you’d imagine would suffer from a lack of self-confidence — but she admits, “Most people think I’m supremely confident but I don’t always feel that way. I think confidence is something we talk a lot about in professional spaces and we either assume everyone has it or say they should get it. We don't talk about what it feels like, or how normal it is to question confidence or to lack confidence. We also don't talk about how it feels in a service business to come to a table maybe second-guessing ourselves and how that could come across to the client. When that happens how do we recover quickly and gain trust? We put ourselves through a lot. We humans are really hard on ourselves. But I’ve found that confidence comes more naturally when you really work hard to know your stuff and you commit to always telling the truth.”

I was forty years old when I had to sell my home to avoid foreclosure. As I stood in my driveway with my home emptied and all my belongings packed, I realized that everything I owned fit into a storage pod. That was one of the most sobering moments of my life; my mind was running a continual loop that sounded like, "I have been working my entire life and everything I own fits into a pod; one single pod.” I was so busy packing and worrying about my son and my mom and my work and trying to get out on time so the house could sell and not be
foreclosed upon. What I hadn’t given one shred of thought to was where in the world were we going to live next?

And that’s when I took vulnerability to the next level. I began a group exercise at a coaching certification program I was leading by admitting "I have no idea where I'm going to live. All my belongings are packed and in a pod. I would really appreciate if anybody has any great ideas for housing for my son, dogs, and me on short notice."

One of the people in that program was Giannina Hall, a woman I had previously coached. Giannina approached me during the break and said, "I have a furnished townhome where you can live. I would feel like I helped you in return for all you’ve done for me." A member of my staff also offered his basement to me. In a matter of minutes (and a huge swallow of pride), there were two offers, with no questions asked.

I broke down in tears. It was the most phenomenal example of how everything you need is available to you; you just have to ask for it. I didn’t know how to say yes to her offer; I didn’t know how I could pay her; I didn’t even know if I had clean clothes for the next day. Everything was in boxes and bags. My options were slim and I had no time.

So in this case, I couldn’t say no. We ended up living in her home for about five and a half months. She never charged me rent, she even paid the utilities. It was one of the most generous, unconditional gifts I’ve ever received, and it was incredibly humbling because I felt dependent upon someone beyond my family. At the same time, it completely changed my life.

**PRACTICE: THE DOUBLER EXERCISE**

The Doubler Exercise, created by Shawn Achor, is a daily practice meant to increase joy and gratitude, which in turn leads to better productivity and satisfaction in one’s overall life.
Every evening, write down the most meaningful experience you had that day. Then, write down three details. Including the three details will cause you to reflect back on the moment and therefore achieve double the positive energy and benefits from the experience. You will also create a record of what is most meaningful to you and begin to notice a trend you can then intentionally act upon. Taking time to notice and reflect on a meaningful experience each day will train your mind to look for the positive in all things.

You need to know, I’m the speaker on stage saying, "Keep your word; be accountable.” I had done that, yet it wasn’t enough to avoid disaster in my personal life. I reached that point and realized, "there are choices to make and different ways to look at this." Realizing my previous choices had contributed to where I was felt like the ultimate acceptance of accountability. I didn't have clear perspective until I journaled, meditated, moved on and asked for and received a ton of help — because I never could have accomplished all I did in that three-week period or over the summer without all the people around me who said, "Hey, I can help you out — I’m happy to help." I realized how much support was there for me, once I stopped being too proud to ask for it. Pride is a limiter when it stops us from connecting with others. Are we afraid to look weak? Afraid to be indebted?

My life turned around, and I have a lot of people to thank for it. Amazingly, not one of them expected a thing back—and that was another tremendous lesson for me. I have prided myself on being a giver, only to realize it’s terribly selfish to refuse to accept someone else’s help. When you won’t accept help graciously, you’re actually denying others the good feelings they would enjoy by contributing to you.. My life was built around being the one doing the
giving — and I didn't understand how selfish that was until I learned to receive the help offered. Giving makes us all feel good. When we don’t receive, we’re actually taking from others.

I learned many things from that difficult, humbling period in my life. The biggest lesson was, you’ll never know how much others care about you until you take off your mask and let yourself be seen as you are, vulnerabilities, failings, and all… and perhaps having the courage to take off your mask is what makes you a superhero after all.

For bonus information, practices & resources: https://www.sayyess.com/unmasking-superhero/
"If you truly want to improve your self-worth, stop giving other people the calculator."

- Tim Fargo, author and entrepreneur

“The question isn’t who’s going to let me – it’s who’s going to stop me?”

- Ayn Rand, philosopher and author

Trailblazing is tough work; ask any woman in the workforce, whether she’s a CEO or an executive assistant. You can’t be all things to all people, though everything you’ve been taught will tell you that you’re supposed to try. Inevitably there are trade-offs, and people will tell you, "You shouldn't. You can't. You're going against the grain." The trick is to find an equal amount of support and positive people who will say, "Please, keep doing what you're doing, because it matters."

For every woman who has succeeded, there's a host of women preceding her who did something courageous, something nonconformist that was probably not received well at the time. — but they dared to stand up to the status quo. Emma Watson's speech about feminism hits the nail on the head; "It isn't against anyone. It's for everyone. It's about equalizing things. How can we effect change when only half of the world is invited to the table?" It’s such a thoughtful, compelling and profound question. In order to create understanding, you've got to have the healthy conflict that goes along with forging new turf, and that's what feminism is about. We still have a long way to go to reach equity, but I only have to look back at my mother’s life to realize how far we’ve come in a generation.
My mom was a devout Catholic, educated in parochial school when it was still the old school, hard-core, rulers-to-the-back-of-the-hand kind of system. When she was a teenager, she fell in love with my dad who was a Protestant. At that time in history, that was called "a mixed marriage" and it was a very big deal. When they first fell in love, she was only 16, and he was 22 and about to go into the service. Within two years he was honorably discharged, and they wanted to get married, but her parents said, "Absolutely not," so they eloped. They became pregnant right away; her family was not happy, and they shunned my parents because they hadn’t been “properly” married in the Catholic Church. Mind you, my parents met at my uncle and aunt’s wedding (my dad’s sister married my mom’s brother) so my uncle had married a non-Catholic girl, but that was all right because the expectation was as the wife she would give up her faith and take up her husband’s, which she did. They were not shunned, only my parents; talk about hypocrisy!

Somehow, through all this, my mother held onto her faith and her religion; she’d never stopped going to church, even though my father didn’t go with her. Her first pregnancy was a difficult one, and she nearly died giving birth to my oldest brother. Afterward, her doctor told her, “If you have another child, it could kill you. You need to use birth control.” Well, that flew in the face of everything the Church taught at that time, birth control was not allowed; if you were meant to have children, you’d have them, period. Now she was facing a moral dilemma; "Do I go on The Pill and fall away from my religion? I certainly can't go back to the Church if I'm violating this edict. Do I save my own life, take birth control and fall away from the Church, or do I continue going to church and roll the dice, and if it's God's will, let myself die?"

Ultimately she decided to use birth control, and although she raised her children to be Catholic,
she went to church less frequently. She had two more sons, thankfully without problems; then, twelve years later she had me.

It sounds like a conventional life in today’s terms, but she was a rule breaker. She was someone who had eloped, and defied her family and religion, choosing her own path. She did what her heart, intuition and conscience told her was right. She witnessed the ’60s, and the upheavals of bra burning and social change when people started doing what they believed was right, even if it went against the norm. My parents consistently told me ”You can do anything you want to do, we support you, and we love you.” My gender had nothing to do with my possibilities. My dad saw things the same way, and up to a point, I was raised with a kind of gender parity that was unusual even then. Dad expected me to mow the lawn and do yard work, and I learned how to fix my car and bait a hook, I also learned how to iron and cook and clean from a pro. I wanted to get a job as early as possible when I was a young, working hard was something we knew well in our family. Their message was “Keep working hard and being smart. Be the first one in our family to go to college. We'll help you if we can.” The self-reliance they encouraged in me really set the stage for who I am and what I believe is possible, because even as they had their gender-specific roles, neither one put limitations on me.

**PRACTICE: STOP APOLOGIZING**

Too many of the women I work with are battling guilt, and they spend much too much time apologizing for what they’re doing and things they haven’t done perfectly. I help them to understand the difference between saying, “I’m sorry”, which implies that they’ve done something wrong, versus "I apologize," which suggests that you regret your actions are impacting them in a less than favorable way, but doesn’t imply you’re wrong. Much of the time
we're apologizing for being bold and direct, which some people find disruptive—but it's not anything to apologize for. Women are guilty of apologizing when it’s unnecessary. Stop it. Disruptive women get things done and make history. We need you.

MAXIMIZE SUCCESS: MARSHA FIRESTONE: Most women I work with have stories to tell about their challenges with inequity. Dr. Marsha Firestone is the Founder and President of the Women Presidents’ Organization (WPO), begun in 1997 as a peer advisory organization for women who own multi-million dollar businesses. Marsha earned a doctorate in Communication from Columbia University, specializing in the dynamics of small groups. This was at a time when there was more opposition toward women in the workplace. The day she defended her dissertation, there was palpable hostility in the room. The all-male review committee facing her made it crystal clear that as far as they were concerned she had no business being there, and their questions were pointedly confrontational. As Marsha defended her thesis, the revered social anthropologist Margaret Mead, then a professor at Columbia, entered the room. When asked for input, Mead turned to the committee and said, "I think this is the best-written dissertation I've heard in many years. I think it's one of the most profound and necessary skills our world needs around communication and body language." Marsha remembered, "It was absolutely a breeze from there forward. Had Margaret Mead not walked in, I might not have gotten my PhD."

Women helping women in the business world is more common now than it used to be, and Marsha was ahead of her time in saying, "We've got to get women business owners going" when she formed WPO over twenty years ago. "I remember trying to set the amount of money that the women had to qualify for this group for, and I remember thinking, 'Oh my God. A
million dollars is so much," and twenty years ago, it was. Her husband gave her the money to pay her first employee, Linda Strapazon, because she had no revenue at the start of this non-profit. She gathered together a group of women, she started the chapter, and facilitated one group before deciding she wasn’t a great facilitator. At that point she brought aboard Mindy Goodfriend and Ellie Gordon as facilitators, and Marsha set off to start her next chapter in LA. All three women are still involved in the organization, and now twenty years later, it has gone international and has over 2000 members.

I’ve been a WPO Chapter Chair for over fifteen years and have founded six chapters, five in Minnesota. None of us facilitate the chapters for the money; I’ve learned so much from these amazing women. It was because Marsha said, "There needs to be a peer advisory group where we can gather women of these businesses that are very much under the radar," because they weren't publicly touting themselves – overall, women don't toot their horn very well. At the first conference, about 40 women attended. This year we saw 850+.

Marsha told me about an early mentor, who consoled her after a setback by telling her, "You're not failing. You need to quit for the moment and then move ahead." That’s very much the mindset we need to keep out in front of us; as long as we’re breathing, the work isn’t done. Though you're collecting many people supporting you along the way, you're also changing a social norm, which is not the same as changing a tire. It's not a simple strategic initiative or a one-time event. You're working to change the way people think, and how social behavior is organized, and support is key. You must gather an army of people who believe as you do, and be able to deafen yourself to those who say "This will never work. What are you thinking?"
PRACTICE: LOSE THE NAYSAYERS

Do you define what’s possible for you and your life, or are your possibilities constrained by what others tell you can or can’t be done? Tell the truth. We’ve all got those people in our lives; the ones who starts shaking their heads before we’ve finished describing a new idea or an opportunity in full. Those are the naysayers, and until you get them out of your life (or at least out of your head) their disempowering messages will undermine your potential.

The Gift of Mentorship

One thing we can do for each other that makes a tremendous difference is to mentor and advocate for other women. I wrote about Rhoda Olsen in chapter 4; we met in 2008 when I was at an incredibly low point in my life. As it happened, I was recruiting members for WPO, and several friends had mentioned her name within a three-week period as someone I should meet. Her business hadn’t hit the billion-dollar mark yet, but she was well on her way. A friend connected us and we had breakfast together.

We bonded quickly and I discovered she was already in a peer learning group, one consisting of men and women. I initially assumed she was a “no” for WPO, and when she asked me if she could be in both groups, I was thrilled to say yes! By the end of our breakfast we’d had an incredible meeting, I had four pages of notes and was thinking, “Wow”— and she said, "I’d like to have breakfast again. Would you?"

I remember thinking, “Wow, she wants to have breakfast again with me?” and I said, “Absolutely.” We met a few more times, and by the third meeting I gathered up my courage and asked, “I know you’re crazy busy — but would you consider mentoring me?”
She said, "You know what, Sue?" — and I could hear the "no" coming — "I can’t do that. The only way it will work is if we mentor one another. You see, I learn as much from you as you learn from me."

I remember feeling dumbstruck; I said, "You've got to be kidding." It was the classiest, most gracious response I’d heard. She was clearly someone who did not need me in her life, yet I said "I would be honored as long as you have time," I said.

She told me, "Let's have breakfast every month. I learn a lot from our meetings and I really enjoy spending time with you. We have a lot in common, and you ask great questions.” I left the meeting on a cloud; I remember thinking how much better this world would be if people were always this generous with each other. We need to lift each other up, not only blazing the trail but also helping the next generation of leaders to navigate it.

As I write this book, I've just returned from South Africa traveling in a group with Rhoda to visit Phakamani, one of her franchisee’s nonprofit organizations, which provides microloans to women in business. Our lives are intertwined, and through our time together we've become good friends. I work to pay all I’ve learned from her forward and when we’re at events, she’ll introduce me as “this is Sue, we co-mentor each other. It still tickles my “I’m not worthy” button, and I love it.

The Next Generation is Taking Up the Fight; Will We Help Them?

My daughter Alexandra is in her twenties; she tells me it feels next to impossible for her to ask someone she admires out for lunch or coffee to ask for insights or advice. As she puts it, “I just feel lucky to be in the room. Who am I to take up someone’s time? I'm the lowest person on the totem pole. I'm just happy to shake somebody's hand. So in terms of asking, ‘Hey, can I
meet with you?; or ‘Would you share insight with me about your industry?’—that's beyond anything I feel comfortable doing because I think, ‘Here are these people who have 50 million things to do that are way more important than me, and I'm not giving anything back. It's not fair to ask them for something when I'm providing zero.” Her experience is similar to mine with Rhoda. I remind her she may not be giving them business insights, but she is letting them talk about who they are, what matters to them, what they love doing or how they started in business and this is a gift to them.

Though Alexandra may not deal with the challenges my mom or I did, she tells me she’s unsure about having her own kids, because she’s not sure she could be the mom she’d want to be, while having a great career. That hasn’t changed—and it needs to because men aren’t torn about choosing between family and a career. We’ve still got work to do.

**PRACTICE: MENTORING AND PEER GROUPS**

As I’ve experienced, mentorship is a gift to both people involved. Are you willing to invest your time and energy sharing what you’ve learned with the next generation of leaders? If you’re starting out, be brave and ask someone whom you admire and with whom you have a rapport to lunch or coffee, and explore the idea of mentorship. Peer groups are another powerful way to connect, educate, and to be educated. Seek out groups of professionals in your field, or others running businesses. Meet regularly to discuss common issues and exchange business or personal advice and insights. When we help others, we help ourselves. Check the website link at the end of the chapter for a list of peer groups.
Being Heard

As women, we often have to push to be heard or be acknowledged for our input, particularly in groups where we’re outnumbered by men. On multiple occasions I’ve offered a useful idea or suggestion within a group of men and they don't hear me; and I’m no wallflower. Within a few minutes, one of several things often happens with my suggestion: it is attributed to another male, suggested as his own idea, or the idea is hijacked and brainstormed upon as if it originated with the hijacker.

This happened with a blog post I was asked to write based on a "nugget" of wisdom I shared in a group of 170+ people — mostly male. The leaders of the event approached me to write a blog post about it, which I did. Two weeks after my blog was published to 35,000+ subscribers, another attendee posted his own blog article with the exact same title, quoting me directly with no attribution whatsoever. I reached out to him and suggested he read the original blog including the link and save face by referencing it.

His response via text was that I had simply beat him to posting the article saying it was another man from the group's wisdom I had stolen. I explained it was my "nugget" and ended up arguing with him while he blamed me for not announcing my name prior to sharing it or he would've attributed it correctly in his notes. We ended up in a heated phone conversation and he eventually apologized. We’d wasted an hour of time with blame about what I didn’t do which resulted in his mistake, rather than realizing what he’d missed, apologizing and correcting it. I’m not unique, most women face situations like this every day, and we need to stand firm, not back down, and communicate well through it while not creating adversarial relationships. Our allies are the men and women we run with to blaze trails and change the game. We can’t make it a one-time event, and we must persist to affect change.
PRACTICE: EMBRACE YOUR INNER B.I.T.C.H.

Leadership requires making some noise, and ruffling feathers, which includes being straightforward and direct. Women are referred to as "bossy", a “ball buster” or called a “bitch” when we’re told we’re coming on too strong or as a way to make you back off. This is a double standard: a man coming on strongly isn’t called an asshole, he’s praised.

When I was young, probably in my early twenties, I learned two different acronyms from trainers I admired and respected; they warned me I’d be called a “bitch” by people who felt intimidated by me, and that it was a word intended to slow me, diminish me, or shut me up. They suggested I reframe it with these acronyms any time I heard it. The first was "Boys, I'm Taking Charge Here," and the other is "Beauty in Total Control of Herself." Either way, if someone refers to me or anyone else that way, I’m actually tickled. Reworking some of the less forwarding messages we receive into affirming messages is part of changing the game!

As women leaders continue to blaze trails, it’s important we all lift other people up as we succeed. Mentoring, joining a peer group and championing others makes us all better. The power is in the ‘we’.

For bonus information, practices & resources: https://www.sayyess.com/game-changers-trailblazers/
CHAPTER TEN:

Entitled To Enlightened

Written with Alexandra Stieglbauer

“People need to be reminded more than instructed.”

- Samuel Johnson, English author and lexicographer

“One generation plants the tree, another gets the shade.”

- Chinese proverb

We know you can’t go anywhere without hearing about the challenges of working with and mentoring younger generations. For our incoming Millennial leaders and younger generations, this chapter is also for you and those you work with. From my lens on the world, I believe it all comes down to communication. If we, no matter the generation, can communicate more effectively, we can better understand those around us. Please note, I’m a communication expert, not a generational guru. I believe the research on generations in the workplace is real and informative. I’m challenged with believing any generation (spanning 20 years) can be categorized and generalized in behavior.

Millennials are the most written about generation in history. Their communication and worldview is different from preceding generations thanks in part to technology. I feel a responsibility to extend a hand to the incoming generations of leaders, because I’m acutely aware we all stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. With the advent of smart phones, millennials were the first generation to have 24/7 access to answers and each other. Their phones are an extension of themselves. The incoming Gen “Edge” (aka Gen Z) hasn’t known a world
without technology at all. So, of course, these generations will not relate to those of us who use technology as a tool, not as a means of connection. We need to build bridges in how we all give and receive information, and that’s where our work begins.

**PRACTICE: BUILDING BRIDGES**

Part of the communication work I do is about navigating how we give and receive information between people, regardless of generation, position, age, gender, or anything else. It’s imperative we recognize that we can work through anyone’s priorities and needs if we’re willing to understand them. This means investing the time to learn about them and their motivations. Do they need more information? Do they find meaning in their relationships at work and in the work they do? Do they need others to cut the chatter and get to the point? Are they excited by the work they’re doing and the people they work with? We have to start there, or the statistics and labeling will limit what’s possible between us.

Millennials get a bad rap, yet are they really that different from any other generation of people? When we researched the common millennial traits we hear most often, we realized they share at least five attributes with entrepreneurs:

1. They desire to change the world.
2. They want to design life on their own terms.
3. They value relationships.
4. They don’t accept the status quo.
5. They have an insatiable hunger to learn.

The research and our conversations about generations tend to focus on the differences; therefore, the differences are all we see. If instead we begin from the common ground we share,
while still appreciating the differences, we can build some bridges and begin to gracefully work through the tough stuff.

**MAXIMIZE SUCCESS: BETH KIEFFER LEONARD & KIMPA MOSS:** Managing Partner Beth Kieffer Leonard and COO Kimpa Moss have led accounting firm Lurie LLP through both internal and external change, resulting in numerous “Best Place to Work Awards” and significant growth in the firm. Together this dynamic duo leads with their values and invites employees to participate in the future of Lurie LLP.

One of their biggest initiatives is an Emerging Leaders Program. Beth explains, “I had a dream of running a firm that reflected the values I thought were important. I wanted to treat our partners equally; I wanted to have a line out the door for clients, and a line out the door for talent. If we wanted to be a destination for talent during the tightest talent race for accountants ever, how would we become a place where people want to work this hard and feel like it’s worth it? You only win if you win the talent war.

“I knew we needed to keep these high potential candidates or we’d lose them to another business. So, I brought a futurist in, the brilliant Watts Wacker. We told him about our program and he said, ‘If you want to live this and you want to make a difference, you need to invite them in to your annual meeting.’ We were all skeptical but I thought the worst that could happen was we’d just never do it again, so we did it — and it totally changed everything. There were twelve people in that group, two from each department, both men and women, and they participated in dreaming about what the firm of the future looked like. Then they became a cohort and led part of the all-firm annual meeting, to be seen as leaders, and take on projects. They were engaged and knew we were investing in them. And they received partner time, says Beth.
Kimpa has found employees are eager to share the ideas they have, and Beth says this is part of building consensus. “People feel like they’re part of the change instead of having change thrown at them. People feel like they’re heard.

Learning Together

For my daughter Alexandra and me, mentorship isn’t a sit-down-and-I’ll-teach-you situation; it’s a series of daily interactions. This daily communication is important to keep Alexandra on track, show her I’m consistently invested in her learning and provide the opportunity for the open conversations we need to understand each other. What often surprises me is how the insights I think might be impactful or important are not typically the ones Alexandra takes to heart from our interactions; the observations I’d consider commonplace oftentimes seem to Alexandra to be the most interesting.

Alexandra says: “One example was how I learned to do speak intelligently about what we do in our business. When I first began working with Sue, I didn’t know how to do that. There was no script to memorize, and I never really sat down with Sue and practiced it, or wrote down talking points. Because Sue invites me to events with her, I’m able to sit in the back of the room and experience her doing keynotes, talking about our business. I've learned to pitch through observation and practice. Listening to Sue working with leaders and presenting at events taught me how to speak intelligently about our services.

Another thing I learned was how to dress professionally, because there’s no class in college to teach you how to look as a professional person. But it’s a really important thing, because it helps our clients feel comfortable and respected. Once, I came to work in something
that was a bit over the line; a short dress that had an open back. Sue said it was cute for a date, but not for work, and she sent me home to change. Honestly, I was upset; I felt like my personal “brand” was being challenged. Sue helped me understand that our clients come before that, and dressing professionally shows them respect. That made complete sense to me and I’ve been open to feedback on my attire since then. A useful piece of advice Sue shared was, ‘If you’re questioning whether you should wear something, the answer is ‘no.’” I still use this advice and share it frequently.”

**PRACTICE: DAILY CHECK-INS**

Don’t assume the person you’re mentoring hasn’t asked a question because they already know the answer. Be proactive with your mentee, and make daily check-ins or huddles a habit for you both. It gives them a chance to air their thoughts and ask questions. You’ll be able to more quickly identify where the gaps are and prioritize all that’s happening with your mentee, and they’ll learn how to solve future problems or concerns based on your responses to current questions. If your mentee is not a part of your organization, communicate more frequently with them than you think you need to. A quick email or text will go a long way. Younger people new in their career need interaction – make time for them frequently, it shows you care.

As I explained it to Alexandra, you need to dress for the position you want, not the one you have. In other words, suit up for the sport you’re playing. If you are playing football, you wear a certain uniform. If you're playing basketball, you wear a different uniform, and if you try to play football wearing a basketball uniform, you're going to get killed. The game we’re playing happens to be business, and it’s got its own uniform. You have to dress as well as or better than
your clients or it’s game over; this made sense to her once I shared a larger “why,” and she appreciated I took the time to have the conversation.

**Teaching Follow-Through**

As a company, we set ninety-day priorities we call “rocks”, which are part of the Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS®; see chapter 9). When you set them, you're saying, “These are the priorities I commit to accomplishing by the end of the quarter.” Rocks aren’t part of your everyday job; they're above and beyond it. We each ideally set from three to seven, and Alexandra ambitiously set five rocks this particular quarter, which is a lot, but she was confident she would accomplish them.

When it comes to goal setting, I’m either your worst nightmare or your best teammate, because I'm the person who ensures that if you say you're going to do something, you will get it done. I will help you, and I will push you. We were about eight weeks into a thirteen-week quarter, and Ali put her rocks on our issues list, and we began to discuss them. She asked the question, “Can you help me prioritize my rocks?”

I said, “No. You're asking which one you can skip or delay or put off or not do — but they're all prioritized — they’re all number one.” You'll need to get them all done. How you’ll get them done, I don't know. You have five weeks remaining, so, how can we help you, what do you need from us?”

That message wasn’t received well initially — but by the end of the meeting, Alexandra said things like, “I guess I'm going to have to grow up and work some nights and probably some weekends. I’ll ask for help as I need it and I'm going to get these done.”
That meeting and the weeks following were a turning point for Alexandra. She went from “I'm going to have this nice little life where I will work forty hours a week and hang out with my friends and go to brunch,” to, “If I want to be in this business, it's going to require more of me.” It was one of those moments where I witnessed her becoming a different, more extraordinary human being. And she was victorious when she finished those rocks. We celebrated. It is an incredible responsibility as well as an amazing gift to see someone grow profoundly. Her success inspires me every day and I’m grateful she was willing to hear my communication. I was able to hold the line and have a tough conversation while coming from a place of care. I communicated my intentions, and Alexandra was able to receive my feedback and coaching.

Alexandra says, “It really was a big personal shift, something that will serve me my entire life, whether professionally or personally. When I think about mentoring, and how Sue has and continues to mentor me, it’s really gotten deeper for me. I'm still learning, and it's hard work. But to have someone on your team who really cares about you, and is patient with you, and wants to support you, is just invaluable.”

When Alexandra joined the team, part of her learning was about how you “show up” for work. How do you behave in a meeting, or facilitate one? Regardless of her college degree and good grades, there was a lot Alexandra had to learn in order to thrive in the fast-paced world of small business.

Alexandra says: “When I was in high school and thinking about getting a job, my dad told me not to because my “job” was to get good grades and into a prestigious college. What’s
interesting looking back is how little of my learning in college is applicable to my job. I enjoyed what I studied and use my writing skills daily, but almost everything I do at YESS!® I’ve had to learn on the job. It feels as if I’ve gone to college twice, and I think that emphasizes how little what you study in college matters. I had the false assumption when I received my college degree, I would have learned everything I needed in order to be successful in a career. Now I’ve learned that isn’t the case, and even Sue is constantly learning new things. When we go to meetings and conferences, we debrief afterwards and discuss what we learned from them.

I’ve also had to learn how to implement knowledge once I’ve studied it. My college career was strictly liberal arts oriented; read a book, write a paper, take a test. There was never any practice around applying the knowledge in a real way to prove you’ve learned it, you just took the test. In the working world, you always must apply what you’ve learned; this step is a skill I’m still working on.”

PRACTICE: SHARE A BIG ENOUGH WHY

Alexandra and I were attending a millennial workshop, and the Millennials were separated from the other attendees and asked a series of questions, such as, “Why do you have to dress in a certain way for meetings?” To the Millennials these seemed like a lot of dumb, arbitrary rules. The non-millennials in the other room believed you dress to show respect for your audience and yourself. Once that was explained to the Millennials — once they understood the ‘why’— they were fine with it. As my mentor rubye Erickson said to me, “When you give someone a big enough ‘why’, they’ll handle the ‘what’ and the ‘how.’”

I remember at age 24 when I was getting ready to do my first big presentation in front of a group, as Alexandra is preparing to do now. rubye looked me over, and said, “Do you want
absolutely everything going in your favor?” Yes, I did. She told me, “Your age is an issue, because people will question your credibility. And while you’re smart and articulate and pulled together, you want to remove everything they could possibly criticize you about. Don’t give them reasons to question your authority. Don’t underprepare, over-prepare. The shorter your presentation, the longer your preparation; it takes more to do less.”

It made so much sense to me; why would I give them ammunition against me? Why would I speak like I’m twenty- something if I could present more professionally and sound more articulate? It made sense to me, because she gave me a big enough ‘why’.

Speaking of a big enough why, Alexandra and I stumbled into one when she joined me at the Women Presidents’ Organization’s (WPO) annual conference. Until I came into her life, Alexandra had never met a woman who worked in business; suddenly at the conference we were surrounded by over 800 women business owners. Alexandra was inspired, and I was moved to tears when she shared how seeing all those women leaders made her believe for the first time she too could be a CEO. We wondered if there weren’t other young women like Alexandra who were unaware of the opportunities small business offered. Out of that insight, we created the Women’s Entrepreneurial Experience (WEE). The program paired women ages 18-30 with female business owners from the WPO, and we had over 80 women at some of our events. The young women learned from the seasoned business owners and, in turn, the business owners enjoyed sharing their wisdom and thinking differently based on the questions the younger generations asked. It was a valuable experience for all who participated, and they were united around the bigger “why” we celebrate the 2% of multi-million dollar women owned businesses in the US.

That’s the essence of it — seizing an opportunity and learning together - and it doesn't have to be your daughter! Although I nearly burst with pride with the accolades I hear about how
Alexandra conducts herself. When we were at the annual WPO conference together, one of my friends told me, "I’m so inspired by you and Alexandra. In 10 years when she’s old enough, I want my daughter to join me at the conference. If I can have one night like this with my daughter, it would be worth it. To see what you two are doing and how you're participating like this gives me hope for us all.”

**Be Willing to Over-Communicate**

Young people new to their careers need more communication, not less. They’ve grown up with a wealth of global information available at any moment through their devices. They need to be met with, talked with, and the relationship needs to be nurtured on a regular basis. I work far more independently than any of the young people I know. Most of them are used to working in teams and collaborating. When I’m not touching bases and either listening or checking in, it can go south pretty fast.

_Alexandra says:_ “Because my generation received rewards and recognition for everything, I assume I’ve done a bad job if I don’t receive positive feedback. In reality, it’s the opposite; if I did a bad job or anyone on our team was unhappy with my work, they’d address it with me directly. Realizing I had this need took some work and reframing. Now I’ll coach myself, “Okay, no news is good news, don’t jump off the deep end because you didn’t hear anything.”

Alexandra’s orientation is very different from the way I was brought up, which was, “I’m not going to tell you it was a great job unless it was exceedingly great. Otherwise assume it was
“fine.” I don’t believe it’s entitlement, but a product of how this generation was raised. They need more frequent affirmation to assess how their doing. Minus that affirmation, they’ll assume the worst. When both parties are willing to reframe, it’s easy to build a bridge. As a mentor, you have to demonstrate you care, be consistent and be firm. You hold the line. You wake people up when they’re asleep to the impact of their behavior. You say things that are meant to pierce some of their non-working assumptions. Interestingly, during the process, your mentee winds up teaching you a lot, because it’s never a one-way relationship. If you’re not learning as much as your mentee, something’s not working.

The key is, we’re both vested. Speaking as a mentor and mentee, it’s a tremendously rewarding relationship. I believe, "You're not a leader until you produce a leader who produces a leader." Until it can happen two generations beyond you, it's not leadership, because most people can influence those in their immediate proximity. The true test is whether you can have an impact that goes beyond that generation to inspire and inform the next generation. As a leader, I need to be as receptive and open as I expect the people I'm leading to be. If I’m operating from an, “I've got something to teach you” perspective, there's a power disparity, and that won’t work in our world.

**PRACTICE: SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS**

No matter what generation you’re from, make sure your mentee, employee or teammate understands exactly what you want, how you want it, and the specific timeline they need to adhere to. If you weren’t explicitly clear, you can’t blame people for not meeting them. After all, they come from a different generation than you and may not have the same ideas about what is business appropriate. This is why communication is so important.
*Alexandra says:* “Sue has taught me that over-communicating is important between teammates as well, not just mentors to mentees. Someone may be the same generation as you or same position in the company, but that does not mean their communication style matches yours. I recently encountered this when we hired a new employee, who’s just a bit younger than I am. We clicked immediately and I couldn’t wait to become friends as well as teammates. Things started off well, but after a few months there was tension between us. She often relied on me for training and help, and while I was happy to give it, I was also struggling with my own workload. I’d often ask if her requests for help could wait until the end of the day or the following day, and when she did not push back I assumed that timeline worked for us both.

This tension was there and I noticed it, but little did I know it had to do with me. I simply assumed she didn’t like the position; after all, if she had a problem with me, wouldn’t she speak with me directly? This was a poor assumption on my end. Eventually she aired her frustrations to another teammate about me. They came to me and suggested I speak to her directly. I was a bit surprised and defensive at first, then Sue coached me about how to have what I imagined would be a difficult conversation.

Monday morning I told her I needed to speak with her and set the stage by assuring her that regardless of work, I valued our friendship and liked her as a person. This was important. I shared what I’d heard and asked her to give me the feedback directly. I listened as she openly shared her frustrations. This was good learning for me and I asked for examples so I could better understand. When she was complete, I shared my side, explaining why I reacted as I did, realizing I only had partial information from her. I emphasized to her my reactions were never personal, they were involuntary.
Ultimately, we were able to meet in the middle. She committed to communicating directly and more frequently. I committed to work more effectively with her. Sue sat in on the conversation which neutralized both our emotions. When it was complete, Sue suggested we have lunch together that day and spend time together as friends. This was immensely helpful and we spent a half hour laughing, catching up and moving beyond our conversation. It went so well we’ve committed to doing it every week. Our work relationship is better than it’s ever been, and we are both happier and more effective due to that conversation.”

**Myths About Millennials**

Millennials sometimes get a bad rap in the working world, and there are a few particularly damaging myths that have attached themselves to this generation that I’d like to take a moment to dispel.

First is the biggie — that they suffer from an inflated sense of entitlement. In some regards, with some people it is probably true, although it seems unfair to label an entire generation with this. In my experience working with them, I honestly don’t see much of it. I believe they are really quite open — and the onus is on us to reach out and make time to connect with them. As leaders, we need to take the time to communicate, create meaning and to listen. Yes, they need direction — business parenting, even — to help them present themselves professionally in the working world. But what generation hasn’t come into the workplace with a lot to learn?

Some people are put off by their need to know the “why” for the things they’re asked to do. When I observe them, it seems to spring from how sincerely they want to make a difference; they want their work to have meaning. I find I don’t get pushback in the same way I hear other
people talk about it in their workplaces. When I sit down with Alexandra, I do so with care, and with the clear intent of helping her to be better. I make it clear how her role and actions contribute to our business and affect others - including our clients, during both positive and negative outcomes.

Yes, Millennials use their devices a lot — but if they’re using them to further the business or themselves, that’s great. Good people have a moral compass, so I don't monitor time. I monitor outcomes. Of course, if they're not getting their work done, or they’re negatively impacting your team, it's a different discussion. If things are being accomplished, I think connecting and communicating is the right way to impact this generation.

*Alexandra says:* “Being engaged with your work, with your clients and your teammates is important to us. And that’s something Sue fosters in our company; we're very relational with our clients, which I appreciate, so if I have to stay late, I don’t mind. I don’t resent it because I know I’m helping a person I care about. As long as I have a meaningful reason, I’m good.”

Entrepreneurs and Millennials have many shared values; while the way they express those values might look a bit different, the root is the same. When we use communication to clearly identify those shared values, everyone is motivated and on the same page. Frequent, clear communication is the key to working effectively with different people. Work to uncover the common ground, and lead with that. If people know you sincerely care and are on their team, they will do what it takes to work well with you.
Believing generational (or any other) stereotypes limits your ability to harness the best from everyone at the table. Engaging everyone around shared values and remembering to be graceful as you communicate through the tough stuff will go a long way to bridging the generational divide. We have more to gain working together than we do focusing on our differences.

How can we move from seeing the barriers between us, to a place of common ground and opportunity? It begins with conversations; courageous, open-minded, open-ended conversations expanding what each person brings and maximizing that in concert with the others present. This is how we begin to gracefully work through the tough stuff and drop our preconceived notions about what’s possible with others. We will become unstoppable when we take the time to truly connect with each other, finding the common ground to begin the conversations.

For bonus information, practices & resources: https://www.sayyess.com/entitled-to-enlightened/