

SAVE YOUR CAREER

WITHOUT LEAVING YOUR JOB

RED CAPE

RESCUE



**Part 1
Preview!**

DARCY EIKENBERG

From the desk of Coach Darcy

Hey there! Thank you so much for ordering your copy of *Red Cape Rescue: Save Your Career Without Leaving Your Job*. As promised, here's **Part 1: Reinvent What You Think**.

Honestly, if you never read the rest of the book and only applied what you'll learn here, you'll be able to handle so many things that come your way in your life at work.

Oh, but don't get me wrong. I **absolutely** want you to read (or listen to) all of the book. I wrote it to be a fast, fun experience, as I hope you'll find from this preview!

You're also going to get early access to the toolkit I created as a companion to the book. **Watch your email for the special advance link**. No one else will be able to get the toolkit until the book is live on October 12, 2021 (that's when it'll be accessible directly from RedCapeRescue.com, as mentioned here in the book).

Enough preamble. I hope you enjoy the book. I'd be honored if you'd review it during its first few days of release. And most of all, I want you to know how much you matter—not only to me but to the world. We need you.

Always,
Darcy

For questions about speaking engagements or buying bulk copies for your team, email mine at Book@RedCapeRevolution.com



Praise for Red Cape Rescue

“If you’ve hit a speed bump in your career, this guide will smooth out your ride and get you moving again. Darcy Eikenberg’s strategies, at once eminently practical and deeply insightful, will help you see your work—and even yourself—in new ways.”

DANIEL H. PINK, *New York Times*-bestselling author
of *When, Drive, and To Sell Is Human*

“If you know that something has to change at work, but you aren’t sure where to start, this is the book for you. It’s a practical and fun guide that will help you take control of your professional life without compromising what matters most.”

DORIE CLARK, author of *Reinventing You*
and executive education professor,
Duke University Fuqua School of Business

“Darcy Eikenberg showcases a no-nonsense approach to escaping the noise in our heads and reclaiming our power. Her universal insights guide readers through difficult subjects like self-worth, doubt, and career planning with ease. *Red Cape Rescue* is a must-read for professionals of any age facing a fork in their career path. Let Coach Darcy hand you your red cape.”

APRIL STERCULA, CEO, Baxter Marine Group

“I’ve spent countless hours helping friends and clients think through their career, but never felt like I was efficient in my approach. Until now. Darcy Eikenberg gives us hope paired with process, a foolproof way to super-size your work, your life, and your impact on the world.”

MO BUNNELL, author of *The Snowball System*
and CEO and founder, Bunnell Idea Group

“For anyone who’s tired of being stuck, this book is like Goo Gone for your career—no matter where you work. Smart, actionable, BS-free, and totally on the money.”

LESLIE EHM, *Wall Street Journal*- and
USA Today-bestselling author of *Swagger*

“Coach Darcy’s book can turn even the most miserable, anxiety-provoking work situations—including the infamous ‘I’m stuck and don’t have the energy to figure it out’—into an action plan that will excite you, a team, or a whole company. With a fun and pragmatic approach, she will nurture your inner cheerleader and knows just the right words to say for forward progress, even when it’s all still imperfect.”

ANDREA LOEWENDORF, global head of access
and pricing, rheumatology, UCB

“A smart and engaging book by a professional development master. Darcy reminds us that productivity and happiness need never be trade-offs for career success.”

CHRISTOPHER WESTLEY, PhD, dean and professor,
Lutgert College of Business, Florida Gulf Coast University

“Darcy provides practical strategies and techniques to help you take back control of your career on your own terms. *Red Cape Rescue* will reset how you think, revise what you say, and reinvent what you do.”

MATTHEW TEMPLE, senior director of alumni
career and professional development, Kellogg School
of Management, Northwestern University

“If you’re at a crossroads, looking for actionable advice, or just want great perspective, Darcy’s words are game-changing. For over five years, Darcy has coached me through some incredibly tough and important career decisions and has always helped me see my strengths in new ways. She will do the same for you. Grounded in real-life examples, this book is a reminder of our own power and will give you the confidence you need to move forward.”

AMANDA FERBER, managing director, 22squared

“Inspiring, thought-provoking, and stirring right from the start! This captivating book on mindset reminds us how we are able to cast our own vision for our life. When we listen to the nudges, express gratitude, and learn from our mistakes, we are able to move from surviving this thing called life to thriving.”

CHRISTIN COLLINS, author of *Her Phoenix Rising*
and global wellness thought leader

“If your work life feels like Groundhog Day, *Red Cape Rescue* can help. This book will give you guidance, through inspiring success stories and small action items, to change the parts of your job that no longer work for you.”

COLLEEN SARINGER, PhD, first vice president,
lead wellness consultant, Alliant Insurance Services

“Rethinking your career? This book is for you. It asks the right questions to help you explore and find what’s best for you.”

PETE FRIEDES, former CEO, Hewitt Associates,
and co-founder, Managing People Better

“*Red Cape Rescue* is a must-read and so relevant in today’s challenging work environment. I highly recommend this book as it will give you practical tips to apply today so you can soar in your career and life.”

LISA O’NEIL, system director,
marketing and brand management, Lee Health

“This terrific book takes the mystery out of career transitions and reads like a super helpful conversation with a knowledgeable and experienced career expert. We can be happy at work. Author Darcy Eikenberg shows us how to make that happen with humor, inspiration, and practical steps.”

JENNIFER B. KAHNWEILER, PhD,
author of *The Introverted Leader* and
Creating Introvert-Friendly Workplaces

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DARCY EIKENBERG

● ● PAGE TWO

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RedCapeRescue.com

*To Mom,
who soars through it all.*

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WHY YOU AND YOUR CAREER DESERVE **A RED CAPE RESCUE**

MY CAREER rescue began in a cold McDonald's parking lot.

Earlier that day, I'd left my Atlanta office in a typical rush, hustling to catch a plane for the February leadership meeting at my consulting firm's headquarters in suburban Chicago. On my way out the door, my assistant shouted that I'd just missed a call from my boss, Suzanne, who wanted to talk before the next day's gathering.

Since I'd see Suzanne in person in about eighteen hours, I was concerned. Never one to create unnecessary drama, she'd told my assistant that nothing was wrong and to "call when you can."

Now, in those pre-iPhone, pre-Bluetooth days, "call when you can" meant using two hands to dial your shoe-sized flip phone—practically impossible when navigating I-75 traffic or hauling carry-ons through airport lines.

Not surprisingly, with me on the move and Suzanne booked in meetings, we kept missing each other.

Finally, as I white-knuckled my rental car down the icy highway toward my hotel, the phone rang. It was now past eight at night and I didn't want to miss her again. I steered off the road, parked under the safety of the Golden Arches, and answered the phone.

I could never have guessed what would happen next.

Greetings from the future you

But before I tell you more about my past, let's talk about your present.

My guess is you've picked up this book today because you've hit a speedbump, setback, hiccup, or hitch in your once reasonably fine career.

That shift might have originated from the outside, sparked by huge changes touching the whole world: an economic crash, contagious illness, environmental tragedy, or government uncertainty. Or your career chaos might have been ignited by changes only visible to your company or profession, such as:

- a technology breakthrough replacing what you know or sell
- an explosion of offshore, outsourced talent
- the consolidation of a big customer or competitor
- a merger, acquisition, or spin-off
- or a leadership shake-up involving your C-suite leader, your boss's boss, or maybe your direct boss

Alternatively, the “shift” might be hitting the fan quietly in the confines of your own marvelous mind, heart, and soul. Maybe you’ve been motivated by a health scare affecting your body or that of someone you love. Or you’ve missed one too many of your children’s concerts or competitions. Or perhaps you’re counting the birthday candles on this year’s cake and asking one enormous question: “What do I do *now*?”

If my guess is right, you’re wishing for a hero to save the day.

Perfect. You’re in the right place.

Meet your new hero

Without further ado, let me introduce you to the super-human talent who’ll make the most difference in your successful long-term life at work.

That person is *you*.

Yes, you. Right where you are, just as you are.

Oh, wait—were you thinking it was *me* who’d liberate your life at work?

Nope. I’m not your hero.

I’m here as your humble guide—Coach Darcy at your service. I am not your rescuer. But as a credentialed coach, mentor, and teacher to accomplished corporate professionals all over the world, I do have one powerful lifeline to throw you: the strategies within this book.


Applied together, they’ll help you create what I call a Red Cape Rescue. That’s where you can save your career

and succeed on your own terms at work. What's more, I'll show you how to do this without the default, drastic interventions of finding a new job, starting a business, bowing to an early and unwanted retirement, or, worse, compromising your health and happiness, along with that of those who love you.

It's a big promise, I know. But here's what else I know. Through our work at RedCapeRevolution.com, people all over the world are using these techniques to take back control of their professional lives with clarity, confidence, and courage. My clients, audiences, and readers have discovered how to reclaim their own lives at work and create positive, surprising changes in their career experiences, often right where they are, just as they are, without settling or sacrifice.

You'll meet many of these folks along the way in this book (with names changed to protect their privacy):

- They're part of a new movement that shouts *no!* to wasted weeks, months, or years spent frustrated or feeling stuck. They abandon the conventional wisdom that says, "Be happy you have a job."
- They've learned that at the first flashes of frustration or discontent, they don't need to reflexively hunt for a new employer, launch a new business, or just give up and stop striving.
- They're practicing ways to rethink what's possible, even in the most structured corporate environments, knowing they have more power to take back control



**What if you could
change your life at
work without having
to change everything
in your life?**

than they ever thought possible, and more ability to make an impact than they ever imagined.

These brave souls changed their lives at work without changing everything in their lives. I want that for you, too. I want you to be the hero of your work life and charge forward toward your own career rescue.

But first, you'll need an important accessory.

Every hero needs a red cape

Remember when you were a kid and you'd grab a towel or a sheet and fling it around your neck? You tossed your shoulders back and stuck your chin out. You felt confident; courageous, even. And, most importantly, you felt your life was in control as you stood there in your imagined red cape—even if you only controlled the backyard.

Now, fast-forward to your world of work, where life right now may feel anything but in control. What if you could step into a hypothetical phone booth and emerge with your red cape on, layering you with new strengths and confidence? What if you could have that superpowered feeling in your professional life, anytime you wish, no matter what is happening around you?

I believe you can. In fact, I believe you must.

I'm handing you the hero's guide

Every rescue organization, from your nation's emergency services to your local firefighting unit, has a guide, a playbook, a day-to-day reference. At its simplest, this guide is a list of strategies and techniques that all new recruits must master and every veteran must remember each time they're called into action. With its contents honed by deep experience and painful mistakes, the guide offers proven tools and decision-making frameworks these heroes can learn today and use as they respond to specific crises tomorrow.

In this book, I'm handing you the guide I've developed over the years as a successful coach of leaders and high-performing professionals battling all kinds of career and personal change. I'll teach you the simple, practical adjustments you can adapt to your own career situations, right where you are now, just as you are:

- In Part I: *Reset How You Think*, you'll learn how to shift your mindset and build your confidence, getting clear on what you control and what you don't.
- In Part II: *Revise What You Say*, you'll gain fresh strategies for more powerful conversations with your colleagues, and even with yourself.
- Finally, in Part III: *Reinvent What You Do*, you'll discover how to battle the blocks, protect your time, and move your career forward.

In addition to offering you these superpowered concepts, this book also contains actions to put in motion right now—ideas that work in the real world, tested by real people just like you. You'll find these steps in the Action Plan sections at the end of each chapter. To make it even easier, every Action Plan is in our free toolkit at RedCapeRescue.com. There, you'll also find checklists, scripts, videos, and other resources to put these ideas into action and get relief even faster.

The techniques here will help you rescue yourself inside your own career. Some of these strategies might resonate with you more than others. That's okay. My suggestion, though, is that you learn all of them now, since once you learn them, they're yours for life. After all, the Boston ladderman may never fight a raging brush fire in the forest, but if one day he finds himself in Bozeman, he'll have the skills to adapt.

Now back to the parking lot

As I sat inside that chilled rental car, flip phone pressed to my ear, I listened as my boss, Suzanne, told me she'd decided to retire and had already chosen her successor.

It wasn't me.

When I hung up, I expected to feel like a day-old McNugget: cold, rubbery, and stale. After all, Suzanne's role was the next step up the traditional corporate ladder for me. It was the job I was expected to want, the one others assumed would be my logical goal.

Instead, a realization hit me: I was . . . relieved.

I'd never wanted that job. I searched my soul for a tinge of sour grapes, but suddenly I knew it'd always been true. That job would have meant moving north permanently and experiencing more freezing nights like this one, spending more time on politics than people, and working even more hours than I already did.

But if I didn't want that job—and let's face it, I wasn't getting that job—what *did* I want?

I wanted a Red Cape Rescue for my career. Of course, I didn't call it that at the time, but in hindsight, that sub-zero night was a catalyst for all that happened next. I didn't want to settle. I wanted to soar.

Today, I'm grateful to Suzanne, and to the question "what do I do *now*?" because everything since has brought me here to you.

The world needs you

Although I'm here to serve as your faithful champion and I want to see you standing confident once again, I'm also mindful of the bigger stakes at hand. I mean, our world is filled with problems. Okay, your company might refer to them in code, calling them "challenges" or "opportunities." But no matter what pretty name you give it, you know much is broken.

But then, there's *you*.

You with your unique superpowers: that mix of strengths, skills, resources, and talents you bring to work

each day. You with your special abilities to influence and choose and help.

Knowing you're out there, I feel hope.

By picking up this book, you've already launched your Red Cape Rescue. Together, let's regain the clarity, confidence, and courage you want and need to thrive in your career, on your terms.

Let's help you take back control, to become the hero you're proud of in your work and your life. We need *you* in our world of work, now more than ever.

It's time to soar.

PART I

RESET HOW YOU THINK

*We do not need magic to transform our world.
We carry all the power we need inside ourselves already;
we have the power to imagine better.*

J.K. ROWLING

Right now, you might feel overwhelmed, confused, or even angry about what's happening at work. I get it. But breathe—in this first step of our adventure, you'll unlock the secret to taking charge once more.

1

KNOW
YOUR
CORE
POWERS

HERE'S WHAT I already know about you. You're smart. You're a professional. You're good at what you do. You don't like being stuck, unsure of your options. If you weren't all these things, you'd never see the need to think differently about your career in the first place. You're here because it's time to control the outcomes of your work and your life.

Truth is, everyone wants more control, more power over their own destiny. We *crave* it, even if we find that hard to admit sometimes.

When we don't have it, we generate what psychologist David McClelland calls "power stress."¹ That's the tendency to get angry and frustrated when others don't behave the way you want them to or situations don't play out as you wish. It happens to all of us, not only those of us who've labeled ourselves "control freaks" (you know who you are, my friends).

As part of the human race, you naturally hunger for more power and control over your destiny. It's in your DNA. In fact, I'm guessing the reason you chose this book is that you're ready to accelerate control over whatever's happening in your world of work.

Good for you. Let's get to it.

A list of everything you control

Ready? Here is the complete, conclusive list of everything in the world you control:

- 1 Everything you think.
- 2 Everything you say.
- 3 Everything you do.

Wait—that's it?

Yep, that's it.

So, that means everything else—from #4 to #4,000,000,000—falls outside your control.

That can't be true, Darcy. We humans now have incredible technology at our fingertips. We know how to manipulate the human genome. We can get virtually anything we want delivered to our homes within days or hours. We send humans into space for months at a time—and bring them back! Surely, we can control most everything, right? Right!?

Wrong. Here are a few things that fall on the “things you don't control” list:

- whether or not you get the promotion
- what your boss thinks of you
- whether the product sells
- whether you've helped or hurt
- whether the stain comes out
- how your colleague reacts
- if the client likes it
- whether the plane takes off on time

- if the recruiter thinks you're a good fit
- whether your email gets opened
- what the stock market will do
- how your mom feels
- and more...

Yes, you can influence a lot of these items. Throughout this book, I'll offer you specific tools to do just that. But to have complete and utter power over them? Not. Gonna. Happen.

Your Red Cape Rescue starts when you realize where your unique power lies: in what you think, say, and do. That's all. But don't fret, smart one. It's enough.

Myths and lies

Maybe you don't believe me. After all, growing up, you were likely taught you could do anything, have anything, be anything... if you only worked hard enough and did the "right" things. So you squeezed and stressed and tightened your grip around what you thought you could control until your fists hurt. As TV's Dr. Phil would say, how's that workin' out for ya?

Of course, your parents and teachers didn't mean to be wrong. They were trying to protect you the best they knew. There's a good reason why they believed what they did, and it's all about how our brains function.

We'll dig into this deeper in chapter 2, but here's an important fact (one we'll keep returning to): the human

**There's a big
advantage
to knowing
where your
power lies: life
gets easier.**

brain is biologically programmed to try to keep us safe. In his book *Linchpin*, author Seth Godin notes, “Everyone has a little voice inside their head that’s angry and afraid. That voice is the resistance—your lizard brain—and it wants you to be average (and safe).”²

Our internal desires for control are merely a well-trained response—an attempt to stay safe. But here’s the rub: “safe” isn’t a route to more meaning, impact, or happiness. It’s only a route to more of the same. Or, as author John A. Shedd writes, “A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for.”³

The good news here is that once you see what you control—and what you don’t—you’ll create a stronger sense of power, safety, self-worth, and freedom than you’ve ever had before.

How Blaine changed her mind about control

After years working at a major university, my client Blaine accepted what appeared to be an exciting new job at one of the world’s leading tech innovators. *Finally*, she thought, *the career I’ve been waiting for*.

She got off to a fast start, connecting with colleagues, diving into the business, and even making a few new friends along the way. About four months into her new job, though, the company announced a restructuring. Blaine’s department would now be led by someone new, and she’d be partnering with other folks in the company whom she didn’t yet know.

The problems started early.

Initially, Blaine kept her head down, working on her projects as she'd been doing all along. Over time, though, she started to hear criticism. Questions. Thinly veiled judgments she interpreted to mean that she wasn't performing up to expectations. Nothing was said overtly, but she noticed she was being left out of meetings and calls. Even a few of the folks she had considered friends seemed . . . distant.

And in true human form, she began to worry, waking up at night and tossing the situation around over and over. She was doing the exact same thing she'd been doing before the leadership changes, so what wasn't working now? She tried to figure it all out on her own, but no solutions popped up.

Blaine didn't want to leave this job, nor did she want to lose it. She also didn't want to fall into the old-school, this-or-that thinking that she'd seen trap so many of her peers. She didn't want to choose between (1) diving into an exhausting, soul-sucking job search, abandoning all the good that existed where she was, or the alternative, (2) sucking it up and settling for a not-so-great work experience.

Her career was ready for option three: a Red Cape Rescue. Together, we identified actions that were clearly within her power and under her control, including what she thought, said, and did.

What she thought	When she caught herself thinking, <i>Something must be wrong with me</i> , she changed that thought to <i>I'll do my best to find out what's happening and fix what I can.</i>
What she said	One by one, Blaine scheduled conversations with her new boss and colleagues, as well as friends she'd worked with before the changes. Without judgment or anger, she told them what she'd noticed about their interactions and comments, and that she was concerned. She swallowed her pride enough to ask what they were seeing in her behavior that she might be missing.
What she did	After hearing specific feedback that she was appearing "cold" or "blunt"—behaviors she had intended as efficient and focused—Blaine could make specific changes. She now entered each meeting more self-aware, taking more time to interact and ask questions, and making sure to not rush the conversation when others needed a little more time.

After taking control, Blaine not only opened the door to better conversations with her colleagues, she also slept better, worried less, and overall felt more positive about her life at work.

Knowing what you control—and what you don't—is liberating.

The greatest advantage of all

There's one more advantage to knowing—and practicing—where your true power lies, day in and day out. Life gets easier:

- You'll approach the inevitable challenges more calmly, without that white-knuckle death grip.
- You'll cut through the noise faster and quiet down those worrisome “what if?” thoughts.
- You'll give yourself permission to let what you can't control go.

When I was struggling to learn this myself, a Buddhist friend shared this story: Imagine you pick up handful of sand. When you squeeze it hard, the sand escapes through your fingers. But when you hold it lightly, the sand stays in place.

So, my friend, loosen your hold. All will be well.

You now have permission to stop beating yourself up for what's out of your control—and to focus *only* on the things you think, say, and do. When you do, you'll reclaim your power and start recreating your life at work in a way that works for you.

ACTION PLAN: RESET HOW YOU THINK

Ready to dig deeper? Dive into these questions. If you're not sure yet of the answers, that's okay. There's no right or wrong in these exercises. Just give them a try, and you can always come back to them as you learn more about yourself and your career.

1. What's the biggest thing you're trying to control right now? Write it down:
I'm trying to control...
2. Now, read what you wrote out loud. Is what you wrote *really* in your control—is it something you can think, say, or do?
3. If you can't control it, then break it down and answer these questions:
 - What can I choose to *think* differently about this issue?
 - What can I choose to *say* differently (or more frequently or more loudly) about this issue?
 - What can I choose to *do* about this issue?



A supervillain hovers nearby,
ready to derail your success
(and maybe it already has).
Let's meet this lowlife and
vanquish it, for good.



2

CONQUER
THE BATTLE
OF THE
BRAIN

LET'S TALK honestly about one of the biggest barriers you'll ever face.

No, it's not the economy. Nor is it your boss, your age, your weight, your credit score, or even your family. It is (drum roll, please) your brain. Yes, that tingly tangle of neurons dancing inside your skull and triggering everything you do in this lovely life. Your brain, pardon the expression, has a mind of its own.

When your world goes haywire and it's time to rescue your life at work, you can use your newfound power to control what you think. That means learning how to conquer the battle of the brain.

Wait ... where's the battle?

I'm sorry to tell you this terrible truth. Your brain isn't always on your side.

I mean, it does so many wonderful things, like remembering your favorite flavor of ice cream or the refrain of "Macarena" (good luck getting that out of your head now). But it's also constantly chattering at you, like

a third grader on Cupcake Day, and its messages aren't always tasty.

Early Buddhist writings refer to this nonstop dialoguing as the “monkey brain,” where thoughts swing from tree to mental tree. Those monkeys swing fast, too. In fact, University of Michigan professor Ethan Kross, author of *Chatter*, says we talk to ourselves internally at a rate equal to speaking four thousand words a minute out loud.

To put this in perspective, consider that contemporary American presidents' State of the Union speeches normally run around six thousand words and last over an hour. Our brains pack nearly the same verbiage in a mere sixty seconds. This means if we're awake for sixteen hours on any given day, as most of us are, and our inner voice is active about half of that time, we can theoretically be treated to about 320 State of the Union addresses each day. The voice in your head is a very fast talker.⁴

Now, I've got no worldly idea how anyone could accurately measure the speed of our internal dialogue, but what Kross says rings true. In fact, here's a sample of my own thoughts from the last fifteen seconds:

Okay, let's get serious and finish this chapter... Maybe I should print out what I've written so far... Naw, just keep typing—butt in seat, doncha know... I'll set a timer and I won't leave my laptop until it rings... Oh, before I do that, I might need chocolate... Man, my kitchen needs cleaning... Let me just load the dishwasher and then I'll feel better... Damn! Out of dishwasher pods. Where's my grocery list? Do I have enough chocolate to get me through this chapter? My back hurts—why does my back hurt... Maybe I need to stretch. Or lie down... When can I stop writing and take a break?!

No wonder we're all exhausted.

What's worse: not all of our thoughts are harmless. Let's take another look at mine. (Gulp.) Unless I've taken control, my own monkey brain will easily drop some banana peels to slip me up, like these slimy suckers:

Okay, let's get serious and finish this chapter...
 LOSER! Maybe I should print out what I've written so far... BUT IT'S NOT ENOUGH SO DON'T BOTHER...
 Naw, just keep typing—butt in seat, doncha know...
 AND IT'S A BIG BUTT, TOO—WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO THE GYM? I'll set a timer and I won't leave my laptop until it rings... YES, 'CAUSE I'M A LOSER AND LAZY AND...

Ahem. You get the idea.

This painful and demeaning dialogue was brought to you courtesy of my brain. I hope it doesn't make you

think less of me. Perhaps you see a smidge of yourself in there, too. That dialogue is the battle: the battle between what the brain says and what the truth is.

What my brain was telling me is not true. I'm not a loser. I'm not lazy. This chapter is almost finished and by some stroke of disciplined miracle, you're reading this book. #winner.


It helps to realize that my brain, yours, your mom's, the president's, your boss's—all work like this. But me and you and your mom and the president and your boss, we're not losers. We're not lazy. We're not any of the hurtful things our brains often tell us we are. With extreme apologies to Journey's rock anthem from the eighties, please stop believin'.

The brain, she means well—but she lies

Why? Why doesn't the brain paint us a path of lavender and rosewater, all easy and sweet smelling? It goes back to biology. So, let's meet our biological ancestor, Gorp.

Gorp lived in the Stone Age and happily sustained his Paleolithic family through a daily quest of hunting for game large and small. The archeologists tell us that Gorp's primitive brain was pretty tiny, both size- and content-wise. However, Gorp's gray matter did one thing really well: it sought out safety.

Yes, when Mr. Gorp heard a roar from a saber-toothed tiger with a taste for Gorpy meat, his tiny brain signaled him to stay inside and hide, remaining concealed and



**Your inner
dialogue is a
battle: one
between what
your brain says
and what the
truth is.**

safe. Gorp's brain—exquisitely equipped for the times—protected his physical safety, and so guaranteed the survival of his species.

Now, let's meet You, circa today.

Sweet, modern You has come a long way from the Gorp household (or cavehold, as it were). For one, you likely wear pants. However, we now know (thanks, modern science!) that your pants-wearing body still houses a remnant of Gorp's primitive thinking.

It's called the amygdala.

The amygdala, which in the old days would trigger us when we'd hear a tiger roar, now triggers us when we hear our project manager roar (even if she's significantly less likely to chomp down on our tasty flesh). The well-meaning amygdala works like an alarm to the body, alerting the hypothalamus, which signals the adrenal glands. Their job is to shoot you a dose of adrenaline, forcing your heart to race and blood to pump.⁵

And you thought your corporate structure was complicated, right?

Now, what do we do when we get that jolt of adrenaline? We might freeze and hide. Alternatively, we sweat, feel the flush in our face, and get defensive, with fists up and ready to protect. Emotionally (and sometimes physically), we're in fight mode.

Here's the truly wild thing: this ancient, reptilian physiological response no longer serves us in our modern context, where tigers are more apt to be seen on Netflix or our local zoo cam than in our backyard. Knowing this, it's your job to suit up and do a little compassionate combat if you want to win the battle of the brain.

How to override the safety switch

If we're biologically programmed to stay safe and protected, how do we allow ourselves to be bold and confident? How do we risk more to gain the greater rewards that we want, whether those rewards are time, freedom, happiness, money, or something else entirely?

To start, we've got to separate the voice of our lizard brain from the cooler, calmer voice of our true heroic self. After all, that lizard is not you. It's not your hero. In the long run, it's not even keeping you safe—it's keeping you land-locked when you should be flying high.

Author and Stanford professor Shirzad Chamine calls that voice a "saboteur." In his book *Positive Intelligence*, Chamine describes the various types of saboteurs and says all humans share one in common—"the Judge":

The Judge is the master Saboteur, the one everyone suffers from. It compels you to constantly find faults with yourself, others, and your conditions and circumstances. It generates much of your anxiety, stress, anger, disappointment, shame, and guilt. Its self-justifying lie is that without it, you or others would turn into lazy and unambitious beings who would not achieve much. Its voice is therefore often mistaken as a tough-love voice of reason rather than the destructive Saboteur it actually is.⁶

In that snapshot of my monkey mind you read earlier, the Judge is the voice calling me *loser* and *lazy*.

Can you hear that voice inside your own skull? Good. It's time to learn to spot that freakin' faker and weaken

its hold over you. How? Well, if you want to conquer the battle, you've got to learn how to spot the enemy. So, let's name it to claim it.

Yes, I'm suggesting you give that little annoying voice a name. Personify it. It doesn't matter what the name is, as long as it reflects someone or some idea in your life that's a bit irksome. For example, my client Aruz called her voice "Sister Anna," after a teacher who embarrassed her by chiding her constant talking. (Interestingly, Aruz now gets paid to speak all day, *thankyouverymuch*.) James named his voice "Lex," for Lex Luthor, Superman's nemesis. Erin, incisively, dubbed her voice "Li'l Trouble." See how that works?

A name makes it easier to separate your real, red cape-wearing self from that villainous, lizardy, safety-clinging brain. Use whatever moniker will motivate you for battle, whether that's the Joker or Darth Vader or Hannibal Lecter.

What to say when you talk back to your brain

Now that you've named the voice inside your head, listen for it. Practice teasing apart its exhausting and negative commentary from what's really true. Do this out loud, or on a piece of paper, like this:

**When my lizard
brain says...**
**I counter with the better
thought that...**

My career is out
of control.

I can only control what I
think, say, and do, so I'll
focus on that.

There's so much to
worry about.

Worry never wins. Let me
focus my energy elsewhere.

Everything's broken
right now.

Everything moves in phases;
I know this situation will
eventually work out.

I don't want to fail.

I never fail; I just learn and
try again.

Everything I need
to do is so hard.

I've done hard things before.
I can handle this.

I'm stuck.

I can decide on the next
small action, and trust that
each action moves me forward.

I can't decide what to
do next.

There's no wrong decision,
so let me make one and learn
from that.

I've got so much to do.

Everything that's important
will eventually get done.

I'm smart; I should be
able to figure out all this,
but I'm struggling.

I'm smart; that's why I'm
open to trying out the ideas
in this book.

What's wrong with me?

Nothing's wrong with me.
That's just my bratty brain
talking back to me.

**That annoying
voice in your
brain is not your
hero. It's keeping
you small.**

This work takes practice, and it's rarely perfect. In fact, I practice every single day (and don't always succeed). But here's what I've learned: when you separate the fearful, judging thoughts from the real you—the heroic you—you regain energy and confidence, and you take back control over one of your biggest assets: your brain.

You're going to need it. So win the battle and actively, intentionally choose the thoughts that push you forward. Tell those voices that drag you down to go back to their cave.

ACTION PLAN: RESET HOW YOU THINK

Ready to conquer the battle of the brain? Get started here.

1. Pick a name for your lizardy, judgy, fearful brain. Have fun with this—pick an identity or avatar you'd love to tell to shut up!
2. Watch for situations where that voice shows up—perhaps even now, or as you continue reading this book. You might hear it saying things like:
 - “This kind of stuff works for other people, but not me.”
 - “I've tried these things before, and they never work.”
 - “My job's just a job; it'll never get better.”
3. Using the voice of your inner hero, talk back. Depending on where you are and what works for you, feel free to speak out loud. This can be fun and powerful. Start with the ideas listed earlier in this chapter.



When you're boldly pursuing
what's next, don't underestimate
the power of assets you already
have naturally. Let's discover
what you might have overlooked.



3

UNVEIL
YOUR
VALUES

ONCE UPON a time, I worked for a gold-plated consulting firm. The firm was filled with talented people and provided a never-ending parade of interesting clients who had juicy problems to solve. I practically grew up in the place, moving from the “shut-up-and-tag-along” levels to, fifteen years and three cities later, earning partner and leader status and becoming someone to tag along with.

Yup, I looked like a lifer. Like I’d retire there, happily. But (not exactly spoiler alert), I wasn’t happy.

Of course, I *looked* happy. I never complained in public, nor did I disengage from day-to-day client work or my leadership commitments. I built teams, sold projects, developed relationships, solved problems, and helped others get what they needed to feel successful.

Sure, priorities and pressures were shifting inside my company as we moved from a private boutique firm to a publicly traded entity. But as a partner, I’d benefited from those moves . . . hadn’t I? Hadn’t it meant more opportunity, a bigger playing field, more money, more growth?

Yes, and . . . those elements didn’t seem to matter.

After that cold night in a McDonald’s parking lot (the one I shared at the beginning of this book), I started

getting honest with myself about what was working in my career, and what wasn't. I finally confessed to myself that something wasn't right, even if everything was looking good on paper.

But then I did what most people still mistakenly do. I followed the old-school, broken-thinking path that said all my problems would be solved if only I found the perfect new job. I fussed over my resumé. I worried, wondered, waited.

After many sleepless nights, cranky days, and intense interviews, I began getting offers to join other companies. Many required disrupting my life, whether that was moving to a new city or adding hours a week to my commute. Others had uncertain leadership, and although they said they valued what I could *do*, the jury was out on whether they would value *me*. Most importantly, I began to notice that those companies looked a lot like the one I was already in, and the roles I was being offered looked a lot like the one I already had.

Thankfully, each time I came close to saying yes to one of these offers, something stopped me stone-cold. I didn't have the language to describe it back then, but today I know that I was hearing the whispers from my future, more heroic self. (You'll learn how to hear yours in chapter 5.)

Yes, I came close to accepting the option of sucking it up and living with the discontent, as so many before me had done and too many still do. But when I calculated the years of career runway I still had ahead of me, I chose instead to start saving myself.

Every value
is worthy on
its own. (It's
value-able,
if you will.)

That's when I invested in my first professional career coach. My initial question to him: "What's wrong with me?"

I learned that nothing was wrong with me, and, surprisingly, nothing was wrong with my company, either.

We just held different values, and I never knew it.

Uncovering hidden values

You're a smart, sparkling person, and at least once in your life you've probably attended a cocktail party with other smart, sparkling people: ones who are both interesting and interested. Let's imagine that, at such a party, one of your new, caring friends asked this question: "What do you value in your life?"

(Okay, maybe that's not normal party behavior. If, to get into the spirit of the thing, you have to imagine that you and your friend had gone for a couple of extra rounds at the bar, that's okay. The question still stands.)

If you're like most of us, you'd probably smile and dust off a few old standby answers about what you value:

- family
- health
- and maybe even happiness

Although these are noble values, I propose that they're not specific enough. A value on its own isn't a divining rod. You need to look at all your values combined to make the decisions that are right for you.

Case in point: actress Felicity Huffman long valued being a mother. In fact, she shot to fame as a beleaguered mom of four on TV's *Desperate Housewives*, eventually winning an Emmy award. After the show ended, Huffman translated her popularity into a blog on parenting, sharing her experiences of raising her two daughters, with all the challenges and imperfections that come with the territory of being a modern mom.

In 2019, Huffman was convicted in a broad-reaching college bribery scandal after paying \$15,000 to have her daughter's SAT exam scores falsely improved so she could get accepted into her chosen schools. In a letter to the judge prior to sentencing, Huffman said, "In my desperation to be a good mother, I talked myself into believing that all I was doing was giving my daughter a fair shot."⁷

I'm not judging Huffman, nor doubting the idea that she valued being a good mom, and to her, that meant helping her children succeed. But what other values might have been at play here that led to her illegal actions? Security? Belonging? Not wanting her daughters to be left out? Each of us makes our decisions not just based on one single value, but on a whole set of values. These values become our internal operating system, a collective set of guidelines that drive our actions.

Hitting the piano keys

You've seen this conflict yourself, I bet, in situations like these:

- The friend who hits the gym because he values his health, but who won't schedule a colonoscopy. He might value safety more.
- The colleague who values freedom, but never takes a vacation. She may value accomplishment more.
- The online gurus who talk about kindness, but who also criticize public figures. They may internally value recognition, self-expression, or even dominance more.

This disconnect is a lot like hitting two neighboring keys on the piano. If you've ever put a keyboard in front of a two-year-old, you know how this sounds. Played one by one, each note is beautiful and perfect. But strike two side-by-side notes simultaneously? It's not harmony. It's just noise.

Author Mark Manson says it this way: "Most of us are incredibly adept at telling ourselves what we wish to be true, rather than what is true. But our values are demonstrated through our actions . . . The problem is that most people aren't aware this decision-making process is going on in our head."⁸

Our collective set of values drive us, whether consciously or subconsciously. As *Black Sheep* author Brant Menswar puts it, "A lot of values are important to you, but which ones are you unwilling to compromise on?"⁹

Your values are the soundtrack playing behind each scene in the movie of your life—but they’re more than that, too. Whether you know it or not, they’re running the show. So let’s make sure you know exactly what those values are.

Decode your values

If it’s time for something to change, then it’s time to make your values crystal clear, right now. Let’s unlock the vault and get those drivers down on paper, looking them over to see if they’re a middle C or a B flat. Chances are, your values are a huge clue to what’s out of sync for you.

To begin, let’s clean your mental slate.

Naturally, you grew up with certain values. You’re likely surrounded with other people’s values (OPVs). Maybe they come from your work, church, community, or family. Delete their software from your brain, for now. Pretend—if only for the moment—their values aren’t yours. If you do this work and discover those OPVs are still a match for you, you’re welcome to reload them back into your brain (and no one will be the wiser). But if you don’t give yourself permission to expunge them for a minute, you’ll keep circling back to where you are now.

Next, scan the list of values on page 48. (Or download it from the toolkit at RedCapeRescue.com if that’s easier for you.)

Values

Accomplishment	Friends	Peacefulness
Achievement	Fun	Persistence
Activity	Goodness	Play
Advancement	Helping	Possessions
Adventure	Home	Power
Advocacy	Honesty	Professionalism
Art	Honor	Prosperity
Athletics	Hope	Rebellion
Authenticity	Humility	Recognition
Beauty	Humor	Religion
Belonging	Imagination	Reputation
Career	Improvement	Respect
Caring	Income	Rigor
Challenge	Independence	Risks
Charity	Influence	Satisfaction
Comfort	Inner Harmony	Security
Commitments	Integrity	Self-Expression
Competition	Intimacy	Service
Connection	Joy	Sincerity
Consistency	Knowledge	Social Life
Creativity	Laughter	Spirituality
Culture	Leadership	Sports
Decisiveness	Love	Stability
Discipline	Loyalty	Stamina
Dominance	Maturity	Standards
Duty	Meditation	Status
Education	Modesty	Stimulation
Employment	Money	Success
Enjoyment	Morality	Survival
Entertainment	Neatness	Teamwork
Entrepreneurship	Nonconformity	Tenacity
Equality	Obedience	Tranquility
Excitement	Order	Truthfulness
Exercise	Outdoors	Wealth
Fame	Ownership	Well-Being
Family	Patience	Winning

With clearer values, decisions get easier.

As you scan, circle the ten attributes that feel most like the true and genuine *you*, the heroic version of yourself, the one that's you in your most honest, happiest state. Choose the values you don't want to compromise on. Don't overthink it. I often tell clients to set a timer for no more than seven minutes to help resist censoring or judging their answers during the scan.

If one value on the list isn't quite right but inspires a different word, that's okay, too. If one makes you uncomfortable... also okay. Discomfort is where the growth is.

Once you have your list of ten values, take another two minutes and narrow your list to four—the four that feel most like the hero you aspire to be. Find the four that you wouldn't compromise on, no matter what transpires. If it's hard to narrow them down, then that's another clue about what might be in conflict. Choose your four anyway.

Now... whaddaya gonna do with them?

Good software doesn't work well sitting on your laptop in a zip file. You can't just download it. You have to install it and use it regularly. The list you've just created is your new download. Now, let's run the install in your mental hard drive. That means accepting your values, watching for them, and (the hard part) not judging them. Over time, you'll be able to use them to make better decisions. (We'll talk more about that in the third section of this book, *Reinvent What You Do*.)

Every value is worthy on its own (value-able, if you will). Sure, I've had clients whose values include learning, teaching, helping. But I've also worked with clients who value beauty, danger, or financial success. There's no right or wrong here. Talk back to your internal judge (use the name you chose in chapter 2 if it helps) and let you be you.

Clarifying your values might take some work. It might make you uncomfortable. But the only way to operate in sync with your values is to first know what the heck they are—all of them. Not what you think they should be. Not what your parents valued. Not what your spouse, boss, or fave Insta celebrity values, either. But what they are, right now, with you just as you are.

You'll not only feel clearer, you'll also feel more confident. You'll make decisions faster and grow more secure about saying yes or no. Then you'll generate the kind of confidence that helps you soar. Give it a try now—you're too valuable to wait.

ACTION PLAN: RESET HOW YOU THINK

Got your top values? Now, answer the questions below. If you have trouble completing this exercise, answer this question, too: what's getting in the way? There's no right or wrong answer, and the few minutes you spend will give you an operating system for life.

1. How are my collective values showing up in my choices right now?
2. Where am I out of sync? Which values am I choosing over others?
3. What's working fine?
4. What's the one place I need to take back control and match my actions to my values?



Charging to your own rescue,
your defenses are on high
alert. But that's exhausting.
Try this preemptive strategy
to change your mind, fast.



4

IMAGINE
POSITIVE
INTENT

YOU KNOW that moment. A colleague says or does something that pushes your button. Yep, *that* button. The one that makes your face flush hot, your fists clench, your jaw tighten. Maybe they say *that thing* in an email. You read it, mutter a few choice words to yourself, and start to hammer out a heated response. Your keyboard quietly cries out in pain as you power through the !!!!!s and ????. You hit send.

Later, after you've sent that blazing email, you discover that the sender meant something entirely different from what you read into it. Your flushed face is now covered in egg.

Prevent this embarrassment. Imagine positive intent.

You might wonder why you have to imagine this. Indeed, why don't we give people the benefit of the doubt, no questions asked? The answer goes back to your big, beautiful brain and all the weird, wonderful things it tries to do to keep you safe.

You'll remember from chapter 2 that your brain is always on the lookout for danger. That's its survival mechanism, honed over years of trying to keep the species alive. For that purpose, it's done a pretty good job.

But for your purposes at work, jumping to conclusions can be a killer.

You see, our brains overemphasize negative experiences and underestimate positive ones. That's why we hear five compliments about our work in our annual review and yet lose sleep over a single item for improvement. Scientists call this the "negativity bias" or "negativity effect." It tricks us into paying more attention to the bad that's happened, rather than instantly seeing the good.

Psychologist David D. Burns describes it this way. Imagine a clear glass of water. Then imagine squeezing a drop of black ink into the glass. Soon, the entire glass turns dark.¹⁰ That's how negative thinking colors our perspective about ourselves and others. But here's the truth: there's still a lot more water in that glass than ink.

Choose the water

What if your interpretation is wrong? What if the other party intended good instead of evil? The decision to choose which thought to believe is fully in your control. That means the next time you get triggered and start to attach a negative meaning to something or someone, you can choose to imagine positive intent instead.

I won't kid you—this mental magic isn't easy, especially in times of change, chaos, and confusion. Naturally, you get worried. People around you are worried. They remind you to fret, even in fleeting moments when you forget that you were troubled. And when you worry, you get wary. Your defenses go up, with metaphorical

What if what you think isn't what they meant?

fists at the ready. Noticing this, you can put your fists down. Lower your walls. See the water, not the ink.

Okay, breathe. That kinda feels good, right?

Positive intent in real life

Alan's ears steamed as he read me the email from his colleague, Carlos. "He's implying I've dropped the ball," Alan vented, "like I haven't delivered my part of the project. I have! And of course, he's copied our boss, the VP, and everyone from my assistant to my grandma."

(For the record, Alan's grandma was not on the cc list.)

His temper was triggered. His fingers itched to fight back, to defend, to prove. As we talked, I challenged him to check his annoyance and, instead, imagine positive intent with the help of a magic question: what else could this mean?

Boom.

**The brain is
always looking
out for danger.
But jumping
to conclusions
can be a killer.**

“What else could this mean?” is the pinprick in the balloon of your frustration. It’s also the fastest way I know to put a damper on those internal flames so that you can think more clearly.

When Alan asked himself “What else could this mean?” he came up with these potential answers:

- Carlos didn’t realize that Alan’s part of the project was complete.
- Carlos misunderstood what Alan was delivering and expected something else.
- Carlos was in another conversation with someone cc’d and this note was attempting to answer that person’s question.
- Carlos’s email was intended to promote himself and had nothing to do with Alan.
- Carlos is just a poor email writer.
- Carlos is an evil warthog and wants to sink Alan’s career forever.

When he imagined more positive intent, Alan realized that the most ink-filled scenario, the last item on the list, was likely not true. He also realized he had no way of knowing the truth. That he, Alan, had many stellar talents, but mind reading was not among them.

So he picked up the phone (which, BTW, is often a better way to clarify someone’s message than the back-and-forth drama of email or instant messaging). He told

Carlos he'd received his email and said, "I'm wondering if there's something I missed. In your note, it sounded like you were concerned that you hadn't seen my part of the project, but I delivered it to the team on the twenty-fifth. Help me understand—is there something else you needed here?"

As it turned out, Carlos wasn't attacking him at all. He just needed another data point—one that Alan offered up on the spot.

What would have happened if Alan had fired back a blistering email immediately? We don't know. In the experiment of life, there's no control group. But in hindsight, we can guess it wouldn't have solved a darned thing—and could have made things worse.

You're not a doormat, you're a welcome mat

When I teach the concept of imagining positive intent to my fast-track coaching clients, I'm used to getting pushback: "But I know he's trying to make me look bad in front of our boss. I can't just ignore that!" "It's pretty clear that she thinks she could do my job better. I need to stand up for myself."

Now, I'm not suggesting you become roadkill on the superhighway of your career. I'm suggesting you slow down a step, give people the benefit of the doubt, and maybe extend an iota more trust. Imagining positive intent isn't about letting bullies walk all over you. It's not about looking the other way when true offenses take place. It's about interrupting your brain's natural and

often destructive pattern, and gathering more information before you respond.

When you do this, you'll welcome new possibilities and see things that you didn't before, such as:

- the pressures the other person might be under, personal or professional
- the moment that came right before or right after the triggering event happened
- the real problem you're wrestling with that you haven't admitted yet (I'll show you how to figure that out in chapter 5)
- a bazillion other things that you might never know, until you step back and ask

Imagining positive intent is proof of your strength and self-control, not your weakness. Sure, it takes a bit of work. Practice. Faith. All things you need to rescue during the inevitable calamities that happen in a long and rich professional life.

Swap frustration for empathy

Have you ever bought an item of clothing online, and once it arrived you realized you'd chosen a size too small? What do you do then? Well, you can keep it and hope your body changes. (Hint: it rarely does.) But rather than squeeze into it or let it dissolve into moth

food in your closet, the smart thing to do is to exchange it for something that fits you better.

You can do the exact same thing with the frustration that comes when someone or something infuriates you at work. Send that frustration back to your lizard brain and exchange it for something that fits you better. And that's empathy.

Empathy, or the ability to imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling, helps us answer the magic question "what else could this mean?" As emotional intelligence expert Daniel Goleman says, "If you can't have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far."¹¹

Applying empathy isn't a woo-woo theory. It's a tangible working tool to use every single day. Here are a few examples of the kinds of things you can choose to think with empathy:

- *I heard Michelle's son has been sick. Perhaps she was abrupt with me because she's tired or worried, like I'd be if my son were sick.*
- *David's still new here. I was assuming he knows our processes by now, but maybe he doesn't. It took awhile for me to catch on when I joined the firm.*
- *I know my call caught Terrell as he was headed out the door. He may not have had time to really process what I was asking before he said no. I'll try again.*

When you train your brain to imagine positive intent, you'll see what's happening around you in a new light. Suddenly, you're shining with new possibilities you never would have imagined otherwise.

ACTION PLAN: RESET HOW YOU THINK

Think about the last time your buttons got pushed and you overreacted or assumed the other person meant harm. Hit rewind and put yourself in the moment right before you responded, and answer the following questions:

1. What else could this mean?
2. Why does this bother me? What value is it violating?
(Check back with the values you captured in chapter 3.)
3. What am I assuming here?
4. If I trusted this person more, what would I do now?
5. How might I be wrong here?
6. What does the other person need? What do I need?

You're moving away from what's broken and taking back control of your life at work. Now, you're ready to tune in to a deeper source of direction. So let's learn how to hear the signals and turn up the volume.

5

LISTEN
TO THE
WHISPERS

“WHAT THE heck was wrong with me?” I kept hearing myself ask, albeit privately, and often while the rest of the world slept.

After all, my life at work looked “good on paper”: great company, excellent people, fun projects, generous salary. All of those elements were right, which led me to the conclusion that it must be *me* who was wrong. But at the same time, I heard something else, too—a faint voice inside me, clearly present but as unintelligible as the lyrics of the song playing on the radio down the street.

Back then, I hadn’t learned to conquer the battle of the brain (as you did in chapter 2). My bully brain’s voice drowned this other voice out, bellowing statements like:

- *You should be happy with what you have.*
- *What right do you have to complain? Plenty of people would kill to work in a place like you do.*
- *You’ll never amount to anything more than this, so just stop your damn whining.*

Finally, I got the Cher-in-*Moonstruck* “snap out of it” face slap I needed. It was in that cold McDonald’s parking lot I told you about earlier when my beloved boss announced she was retiring and had already selected her replacement—who wasn’t me. That jolt amplified the volume of the little voice inside me, and this time, I heard it loud and clear. It said, “*Phew!*”


Yes, much to my surprise, when the next-level-up job was suddenly out of reach (the job that I should have wanted, said the lizard brain), all I felt was relief. That’s when I shook hands with the whispers, and we’ve been friends ever since.

All heroes get messages (but sometimes in code)

In May 2011, TV host-turned-entrepreneur Oprah Winfrey wrapped up her popular, twenty-five-year-old talk show with a lesson.

Your life is always speaking to you. First in whispers . . . It’s subtle, those whispers. And if you don’t pay attention to the whispers, it gets louder and louder. It’s like getting thumped upside the head, like my grandmother used to do . . . [If] you don’t pay attention to that, it’s like getting a brick upside your head. You don’t pay attention to that, the whole brick wall falls down.¹²

Depending on your perspective, you might think of your whispers as “gut feelings” or as “intuition.” Do you



**My one regret:
not acting on
those whispers
sooner.**

answer to a higher power? You may be hearing from your “better angels.” No matter what you call them, the whispers are a secret code from your heroic future self, sending you better ways to think about what you need to say and do next.

Your whispers grow up and out from the highest and best part of you: the part that’s ready to get out of your current rut and to start feeling happy and strong in your work life again.

Why whisper? Why not shout?

These messages are vital to your long-term well-being, so you’d think that you’d hear them immediately. You’d assume they’d be loud, prominent, and never compromised. But that’d be too easy, right?

Truth is, these secret-not-secret messages usually start small and quiet. They rarely flash across the digital billboard of your daily activities. Maybe that’s because our big, beautiful brains crowd them out, trying to keep us from really stretching ourselves, because (gulp) we might fail.

After a while, though, the whispers demand action.

Like Gaby Hinsliff. As political editor of Britain’s *Observer*, she enjoyed a powerful career that took her all over the world. But something felt off when she abandoned her seaside vacation, rushing her husband and wailing toddler back to London so she could cover the latest political crisis. Of course, cutting a vacation short

never feels quite right, but Hinsliff had felt misgivings before. After all, in the past year, she kept noticing—and dismissing—the small things, like not knowing her son’s shoe size or missing weddings, birthdays, and the minutia of her loved ones’ lives.

When her husband was offered a job away from hectic London, Hinsliff finally listened to the whispers. In a move that was both criticized and complimented, she left her once-dream job for the life she’d been missing for some time.¹³

Your whispers want attention, too. Like now. If you don’t feed them with action, they’ll work even harder to be heard . . . only next time, they’ll knock you over with a bigger brick (or collapse the wall you’ve been trying to hold up forever). Yup, you can’t ignore the whispers for long.

I’m guessing your whispers led you to think about what’s not working in your career, which led you to this book, for which I’m grateful. If so, good for you, because by getting this far, you’ve signaled to your whispers: message received.

Jan’s adventure with the whispers

My client Jan worked in a corporate sales role when she started to hear her whispers.

Like me earlier in my career, she didn’t trust those quiet noises. Her whispers were pulling her toward design—a field that, to her logical mind, seemed miles

away from what she was doing in sales. After we worked to conquer her battle of the brain (using the strategies from chapter 2), we developed a plan to tune in to those messages from her future self.

First, we got clearer about what Jan's whispers really meant. That way, she could feed them with the right action. After all, the word "design" can mean different work in different situations, but what part of it specifically called to Jan? Sketching out concepts? Searching the world for fabrications? Consulting with clients?

It was time to help the whispers get more specific. When you assume what your whispers mean—or don't mean—without digging deeper into them, it's easy to waste time traveling down the wrong track.

Upon reflection, Jan uncovered that her whispers were pointing her toward working with clients long-term. That was a change from her current world, where she closed a sale and never knew what happened to the client next. With this clarity, we designed bite-sized actions to dig even deeper. Jan chose to:

- identify others in similar roles, scheduling conversations with them to learn more about what their real life was like
- research different roles in her company that consulted with clients
- reconnect with others in her industry through trade groups and LinkedIn

These secret-not-secret messages usually start small and quiet.

Jan's whispers grew louder when she acted. Her actions not only clarified *who* she wanted to be, but also *how* she wanted to be in her life at work. Soon, she could trust the whispers and that her future career would work out.

Don't rebel against the whispers too long

Seven years after leaving my traditional corporate consulting job and starting my coaching business, I was invited to create a decision-making course for career change called "Should You Stay or Go?" As I sketched out lessons, I dug through old files saved from professional development classes I'd taken over the years.

What I found shocked me.

My excavations uncovered a worksheet from a local university's night course, which I didn't remember attending (and still don't). The course was called "Planning for the Future." On that paper, filled out in my almost-illegible, no-I'm-not-a-doctor chicken-scratch, I'd written this:

I want to make a difference through people—coach professionals through changes, speak to groups all over, and write articles and maybe books on a regular basis.

Reading it, I was gobsmacked. That description is exactly what I do now when I'm doing my most important work. It's exactly what I set out to do when I started my business in 2008. But the shocker?

The worksheet was dated September 2000.

That's a whole eight years before I listened to the whispers that eventually led me to change. And yet my future red-caped self was already calling to me—enough so that I wrote it down.

Suddenly, I understood why people tattoo their bodies with messages of reminder. I, on the other hand, had promptly filed away that vital message from me to me in a battered manila folder, which quickly got buried in the dark recesses of my dusty filing cabinet.

I'll confess: I don't have a lot of regrets in this life, but one thing I do regret is not acting on those whispers sooner. Who knows how many more people I could have helped if I had started my work earlier? Who knows what kind of difference each of those people would be

making in their careers and in their lives and, in turn, in our communities and in our world? Thank goodness the whispers kept at it.

Trust the whispers, trust yourself

Once you learn to recognize the whispers, you'll never regret tuning in.

Oh sure, you might wish they'd shut up. It'd be so much easier if they did. But what hero ignores a message for help? What cape-worthy pro hides when it's time to save the day? Not you, I know.

Your whispers will tell you the truth: that somebody out there needs you. Problems in your world of work? They're not being solved on their own. Where are you being called to step in, step up, step out? Where's the pain you're meant to cure, the problems you're meant to solve?

Your hero's whispers never lie. They're trying to tell you the truth that I already know: that we need you to be who you are, doing what you uniquely are meant to do in your career. Trust what the whispers say, and give them a little love and attention. Soon, you'll start soaring again in the new world of your work.

ACTION PLAN: RESET HOW YOU THINK

Let's give your whispers permission to be heard.

1. Plan fifteen minutes of solitude for yourself. Turn off all distractions, including any dings and zings from your phone or computer. (If you need to change your location to have fifteen minutes of uninterrupted time, do that, too.)
2. Take out a sheet of paper (or use the workbook in the downloadable toolkit at RedCapeRescue.com).
3. Set a timer for fifteen minutes, then begin writing with this sentence: *My whispers are telling me...*
 - Write as fast as you're able, and keep writing, even if you repeat yourself. Above all, don't edit, censor, or judge what comes out—there's no right or wrong here. Just give your whispers a safe place to land.
4. When the timer ends, reread what you wrote, ideally out loud.
5. After listening to yourself read what you wrote, answer these questions:
 - How true is this for me?
 - Is the battle of the brain getting in the way?
 - What is one action the whispers are asking of me?
6. If you find you're still struggling with the battle of the brain, reread chapter 2.



Congrats, my dear friend. Reshaping, rethinking, and revising your thoughts is a monumental step in your Red Cape Rescue. It's like grabbing onto an overhead branch and pulling yourself out of the rapids before your dinghy careens over the falls.

It may not feel like much has changed. After all, you're still soaking wet. But you're here, and I'll hand you a towel while we keep sailing toward what's next. In the meantime, remember that you can always go back and review this guide again to:

- revisit what you control
- conquer the battle of the brain
- rethink and reengage with your values
- imagine positive intent
- and remind yourself to always listen to your whispers, the wisdom from the hero inside you

Your life is built on your thoughts. Keep practicing to make these ideas your own.

So, fear not. You've got it. Now, part II will magnify another superpower over which you have complete control: your ability to choose what you say. Go to RedCapeRescue.com to download all of the exercises, plus discover more tools, scripts, videos, and checklists to transform your work and your life. Can't wait to see you there.

That's the end of Part 1! Hope you enjoyed it!

If you did, please consider leaving a review wherever you purchased the book. Your positive comments help other people find the book and use it to help change their lives at work.

Plus, reviews tell the booksellers that the book is worthy of sharing further, so it moves higher in search and can help more people that way, too!

Just go to where you bought your book and follow the prompts to write a review. If you have any questions, my team is here to help at Book@RedCapeRevolution.com.

THANK YOU!!

Always, Darcy

ABOUT

DARCY EIKENBERG, PCC

LIKE MANY of us in the working world today, Darcy Eikenberg wears a lot of hats. She's been an executive coach to leaders at organizations such as The Coca-Cola Company, Microsoft, State Farm, Deloitte Consulting, and more. She consults and speaks about career growth, employee engagement, and leadership development all over the world. She blogs regularly on leadership and career issues at RedCapeRevolution.com. Her ideas have been shared in the *Harvard Business Review*, Thrive Global, CNN.com, The Ladders, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, and *Forbes*, among others. She's a former principal and communication consulting business leader at Hewitt Associates, now part of Alight Solutions, and she graduated from Northwestern University. Darcy brings a sense of humor to serious matters in our work and careers, and she offers simple, practical ways we can transform our lives at work, right where we are, right now.

“If you’ve hit a speed bump in your career, this guide will smooth out your ride and get you moving again. Darcy Eikenberg’s strategies, at once eminently practical and deeply insightful, will help you see your work—and even yourself—in new ways.”

DANIEL H. PINK, author of *When, Drive, and To Sell Is Human*

If it’s time to take control of your career and thrive at work, you’re ready for a Red Cape Rescue.

LEADERSHIP and career coach Darcy Eikenberg reveals the unconventional but practical secrets to creating professional and personal success right where you are, just as you are.

Discover how to transform your life at work *without* resorting to the drastic measures of changing careers, finding a new job, starting a business, or bowing to an early and unwanted retirement—and without settling or sacrificing your health, family life, and well-being.

Plus, you’ll get Coach Darcy’s action plans—proven concepts that work in the real world, no matter what’s happening in your company or the economy. Get the clarity, confidence, and courage you need to soar once more at work. Start your Red Cape Rescue today.

“If you know that something has to change at work, but you aren’t sure where to start, this is the book for you. It’s a practical and fun guide that will help you take control of your professional life without compromising what matters most.”

DORIE CLARK, author of *Reinventing You* and executive education professor, Duke University Fuqua School of Business

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