

## Introduction

I did not start out bold, but I was always strong. I have experienced great heights and understand the pain of searching to find a way out of the valley to escape being lost.

No single defining event motivated me to search for bold. An accumulation of feelings and prior experiences drove me to the realization that I was not living the life I really wanted. I was not where I wanted to be in my career.

Most of the companies where I've worked were good, some were great, and a few were exceptional. I learned fast and was never afraid of a challenge or hard work. Finding opportunities came easily to me. Yet, I did not use this to my full advantage. I was still allowing companies to select me versus playing a more active role in the selection process. At times, I accepted positions that were below my full ability. Looking back, I was passive, too compliant, overly nice, and willing to sacrifice my time, energy, and sleep. I knew all of this but did not do anything to change the outcome.

That all changed after I had a chance to review my notes from a reference check for a new position. I personally knew the references who provided input from over the last seven to fifteen years of my work history. Each reference was asked to provide short answers to specific questions about their prior experience working with me, my general character, and professional impact. I cannot recall exactly how the specific question was worded, but essentially it asked about my experience and expertise. I remember everything slowing down as my eyes met the line that one of my references provided anonymously, which read:

*"Audrey is so talented, amazing, and passionate. I only wish she could find the opportunity that is right for her and deserving of her skills."*

Those words washed over me like Niagara Falls. The assessment provoked me.

While I have now achieved success beyond what I believed was possible, it took longer for me to get there. Looking back, I made all the right moves but often made them without fully understanding my own strengths. I had the right cards in my hands, I just didn't always play them to my benefit.

I was the common denominator in this dilemma. I do not attribute any of my painful lessons or missteps to any person or company other than me. I take accountability for not prioritizing myself and seeking the right culture and environment for me. I am ultimately accountable for my success.

I read those words again, and that was when it hit me. When we hold ourselves accountable, we take back control.

## To Be True

*Some people are not aware of the importance of searching for and discovering their proper and true role in life.*

—Chin-Ning Chu (Chu, 1994)

Choosing to leave the ranks of a full-time employee (FTE) to independently pursue organizational change management (OCM) consulting and executive coaching required careful consideration and considerable courage. I remember thinking, Before I make the final decision to leave a full-time job with benefits, I'd better speak with someone who can help me weigh my options. The representative from EAP (Employee Assistant Program) was laid back, casual, and unassuming.

"So, what's going on?" she asked. Then she listened without making a sound as I spoke. I was listening as well. Then she calmly and empathetically said, "Maybe you just don't want to do it." She was so neutral in her response that I could not tell if her reply was a question or a comment. Either way, she was right. I did not want to do "it." I did not want to play it safe anymore.

The lessons of the past taught me many valuable lessons about myself, the importance of company culture, making brave choices, and finding the proverbial "right room." The decision to take my power back and become more aware of what I want and what is right for me was a significant turning point in my life. Like a baptism, I decided to give up the old to embrace the new. I changed the way I value myself, the way I have selectively designed my career, and the choices that define my world.

The good that came out of the experience is a clear understanding of who I am, what I value, and how critical engagement is for living and for work. What came out of this experience was the motivation for unlocking my "bold." Self-appreciation and understanding underscores the belief that when you show up as your true and authentic self, you will almost guarantee your success.

Further on in the book, we will discuss the Bold Value Equation (BVE), a "needs analysis" that compares what you are willing to give and what you expect from an employer in exchange for your expertise, time, and value. These needs reflected the "season of my life," which represented more mature goals and aspirations than my younger, less-confident self. I was no longer willing to sacrifice my time, health, and autonomy. Reaping financial rewards without making a meaningful contribution to the company was no longer enough, nor was it worth it if my skills, experience, and knowledge were not fully needed, leveraged, and appreciated. After all, we all have financial, emotional, social, and environmental needs that must be recognized and satisfied in the workplace—and we have the authority to make choices that are required in order for us to move ahead in life.

## **Moving Ahead**

Life continues even after making big decisions. Taking accountability and making peace with our decisions frees us from the burden of thinking there must be a right or wrong. On the path to becoming bold, moments like these test our resolve, define our character, and show us who we really are in the moment of choice. We emerge stronger by recognizing and honoring our truth.

Insights like these—along with the teaching of my parents, hands-on experience in OCM, and executive coaching—led me to write this book. I have dedicated my career to helping individuals and organizations change and transform.

This book is written with you in mind. All throughout, I will make the case for why intentionally identifying and leveraging your bold creates a powerful competitive advantage, not by telling you what you need to be or do but by telling you how to do less of what you are currently doing.

As a certified International Coaching Federation (ICF) coach and global consultant with over twenty-five years working with some of the world's best companies, I understand the issues and the significance of company culture as well as what is required for individuals to transform their lives. I have designed transformation strategies for some of the world's largest companies and trained leaders globally on communication effectiveness and issues management, in addition to having the honor of spending hundreds of hours deeply listening to and coaching individuals around the world.

In these pages, I will share true stories along with lessons and insights I learned working in corporate America. I want to recognize that at times I am vague and do not offer the tantalizing details of conversations that occurred at many of the companies where I worked. I do this to honor the value of confidentiality and to illustrate the bold move of taking the high road and moving away from the drama, as rehashing, reliving, and rumination do not offer a path forward. In fact, reliving such negative and often toxic events steals our joy and weakens our power.

Many of the structured processes and frameworks that I have included are inspired by my work in OCM and coaching. I am giving you the best of both worlds, as I have sat in many of the same places where you may find yourself today. I am now able to look at things objectively through the lens of both the employee and the expert, and this duality allows me to be empathetic and honest.

As an executive coach, I spent hundreds of hours listening to the stories, aspirations, hurts, and triumphs of my clients. I heard joy, pain, pressure, and disappointment in their voices. I saw dreams and spirits on the brink of breaking. I witnessed breakthroughs, setbacks, and personal victories. In coaching I follow, encourage, and challenge each one of them to achieve the goals they have established.

You know yourself best. Understanding this is essential to understanding the difference between leading and being led. While the information and thinking shared in this book have resulted in positive change and success for many of my clients, I will always take the position that you are the leader in your life, and this book is most valuable when you use it as inspiration in customizing a strategy that best suits you. If you find the models and processes helpful, you can use them as is or as a guide. Ultimately, remember that your talent, passion, mindset, and actions are the most important ingredients for catalyzing your success.

I wrote this book for the following reasons:

- I hope and trust that it will motivate you to explore and unlock your true potential.
- I truly believe "bold" is a powerful concept that anyone can access and use to improve their career and life.
- I wish this book existed earlier in my career.
- The timing of the book and the topics covered coincide with the current needs of many individuals who are at a crossroads in their lives and in their careers. This book is a resource and tool for reflection and planning.

Several factors are driving the need for a bold mindset:

- In the face of an increasingly complex, turbulent, and uncertain future, there is a need to cement your focus, power, and the resolve that is required to succeed.
- Given the accelerated and changing nature of work, you need to become more autonomous, independent, and confident in who you are and in the value you provide.

- Understanding yourself at your core will enable you to learn,, adapt, and evolve. This is the secret to sustaining “your bold.”

We will discuss:

- Why tapping into your true and authentic self is essential to your career and living your best life.
- The importance of understanding your vision (a mental image of what you desire), values (embodiment of your character), value (valuation and impact of your utility, experience, and talent), and how you want to be valued (being recognized, compensated, etc.).
- How you can use your bold to serve others.

I kept the following four profiles in mind when writing this book:

- Individuals who are tenured and who have mastered technical success but are in search of balance and greater fulfillment.
- High performers on the cusp of unlocking their brilliance and attaining the next level of success, but their goal is often elusive, as “something” is standing in the way.
- Middle managers who serve on the frontline of leadership but are often overlooked due to a lack of a personal strategy for promotion and success.
- Individuals who are successful in getting a job but struggle to find the right lasting opportunity.

I hope this book will help you:

- See and appreciate your value and the bold in others.
- Increase your confidence.
- Own your choices and your career.

### **Your Call to Adventure**

Nothing in life occurs by chance. I am guessing you may have found this book because you are searching for clarity, change, or direction. You sense from the cover that this is not your “typical” career book outlining exactly what you need to say or do. Perhaps you already own a few of those books, yet you are in search of more introspection. You are nuanced, after all, and the world is much too complex for rote advice.

You are at a place in your life that requires individual and purposeful consideration and planning. The time has come for you to do the deep introspection that only you can lead.

This book is simply a tool to inspire, illuminate, and affirm your personal strategy to live boldly. I hope you will accept my invitation to stay open and curious about learning about yourself. Come along with me to explore what is possible when you realize your bold. Everything in this book is simple to apply but not always easy to achieve.

The difference between living boldly and ordinarily is like night and day. With a heightened level of awareness and commitment, you will start to see yourself and the world around you differently. Others will sense and see it too, but most importantly, you will experience it for yourself.

### **Introduction to Bold Reflections**

Each chapter is carefully selected and arranged to help you grow and transform at your own pace. Use chapter takeaways and powerful questions to gather insight to develop your strategies and action plans.

As you take on the challenge to bring forward the best version of yourself, reserve the time and find a quiet space to reflect. I recommend you keep a pen and notebook or voice-record app close by to record your thoughts and reflections at the end of each chapter.

- What do you hope to learn about yourself by reading this book?

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- What intrigues you the most about your reaction to the introduction of bold? Why?

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- Are you ready?

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