

# UNLOCK YOUR **LEADERSHIP**

SECRETS & STRAIGHT ANSWERS ON  
STANDING **OUT**, MOVING **UP**, AND GETTING **AHEAD**  
AS THE LEADER YOU REALLY ARE



**DAMARIS PATTERSON PRICE**

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## Author's Note

I am an executive coach and leadership development facilitator, which is to say that I get to help professionals and managers grow their leader-craft so that they can drive great business results with and through their people. In my relationships with my clients, their confidentiality is paramount. However, with permission, and because I knew they could bring this work to life, I used some of their stories, which are deeply relatable and rich with teachable moments. To protect my clients' privacy, the names, genders, roles, and circumstances reflected in the anecdotes have been altered and disguised. Many of the narratives are several stories aggregated into composite case studies to illustrate particular challenges with laser focus. But all are authentic and based on actual experiences to give you, the reader, the benefit of their learning and the knowledge that, on this journey, you are not alone.

## Introduction

This work began with the questions:

Why am I not getting ahead?

What in the world is my boss talking about when she says I'm *not ready* to move up?

Why am I getting passed over when I see people who aren't any smarter than I am getting promoted?

When am I going to get a straight answer on what my manager means when he tells me to *step up and lead*?

I have experience; but why isn't it proof that I'm ready for the next level?

What's *really* going on?

Who do they think they are—these people who are deciding whether I'm *good enough*?

What's wrong with them?

What's wrong with me?

Why not me?

Anxious, pained, frustrated, and confused: a variety of people have presented the same problem to me in a variety of ways. But in my mind, it all boils down to the same truth: the moment you realize the people at your organization don't see it in you—it, the x factor, the leadership material; the thing that defines you as a long-term and bankable investment for your organization; the thing that holds you up as a high-potential employee and promotable; the thing that tells them you're ready for what's next at work. So, why don't they see these things in you, and what can you do about it? Those are questions that deserve answers. And answers are what we are here to explore. I call them answers; however, for those of you without the benefit of a mentor, sponsor, or coach, they are secrets, the insider knowledge you may otherwise never have the opportunity to learn. And as the saying goes: what you don't know can hurt you.

## **What This Book Is About**

This book is about demonstrating your readiness for what's next at work. *What's next* could be a promotion or an invitation to sit on high visibility committees. *What's next* could mean being your department's much respected go-to person or getting the plum assignments. Whatever *what's next* means to you, how to get there is the tricky part. How to get there can be the mysterious part. Without the right support, how to get there can be the frustrating part. And how to get there is what this book is all about.

This book is about discovering your unique brand of leadership—and leveraging it to grow your career. Advancement. Moving up. Promotion. Taking on more responsibility.

Getting ahead. People call the means of their career climb by many different names—and at the core of all of them, is leadership. Any book about stepping up at work—formally or informally—is a book about leadership, or it should be. Management or not, no matter what the next-level role is or what your organization calls it, it is a step into a higher degree of leadership. That’s the first lesson. To be promotable, you must be seen as a leader. Period. Full stop.

This book is not about management. Management—or the oversight of people, processes, and production—is just *one* function of *some* leaders. Organizations hope their managers will lead, but to be a leader, you need not have a management title because leadership is something else entirely. Leadership is not married to hierarchy, an organizational chart, or formal authority over a team. It’s a different animal, with more depth, breadth, and impact. I’ve known people who were little more than the boss of the applesauce, and yet they proved to be outstanding leaders. And I’ve known some vice presidents, executives, and Grand Poobahs—all with high-powered management titles, and not one of them could lead themselves, or anyone else, around a corner.

This book is about what leadership is—and more importantly, what it does. But as you will discover, what leadership is can be frustratingly resistant to fitting into a nice, neat box. From antiquity forward, I can find, without any effort at all, stabs at what it is. Some leadership experts define it with adjectives or outcomes. Others use flowery and esoteric prose. But none of them seem to satisfy a simple question I know a lot of people are asking: What does someone need to do to be seen as a leader at work? Thus, the

*leadership* we will discuss here will focus on the particular characteristics and pragmatic attributes organizations look for when they're looking for leaders. This book is about what your organization needs to see in you to recognize the leader you really are, as well as your readiness to handle what's next for you at work. We will discuss the walk, talk, and insights of someone who is next-level ready, high potential, someone who is leadership material, someone who is promotable, someone who is ready to lead.

This book will also deal honestly with why your leadership ability hasn't been as evident as it could be. We will delve into why the decision makers in your organization aren't thinking of you when they think of leadership. And who are "they"? This book will discuss that too—who the "theys" are—those mysterious individuals in your organization who decide whether you have earned enough influence, can inspire followership, and can trigger and accelerate positive results. But in the truest sense, this book is about you, what is masking your leadership capabilities, and what is holding you back from being your best self at work.

Whether you are an individual contributor, an internal consultant, a manager of projects or processes, a manager of people, or an established manager of multiple teams, this book will discuss how to lead in a way that is evident and obvious for others to feel, recognize, trust, appreciate, and reward. It will highlight strategies and tools that will transform and upgrade your daily walk and talk, as well as your thinking. The focus is on you as leadership material, powered with insights and strategies, coming out of hiding to reveal the leader you really are. Our conversation will demystify what

has been in the way of the leadership career you want. The process will open your access to insider knowledge on what evident leadership actually looks like. And the final outcome? You being equipped to pursue the roles and opportunities you want at work with more confidence. If any of these statements reflect what you've been looking for, keep reading.

## **Getting the Most from This Experience**

As I write this, it is important to me, as it is in my practice, to favor the pragmatic and real world over the academic and theoretical. So, here is an actionable tip from the start. As you move through the content and concepts, I invite you to engage in the Strategic Reflection exercises, through which you will talk to yourself—*about yourself* and what you are discovering along this journey. These coaching questions that are peppered throughout the content are designed to provide opportunities for you to pause and reflect in a way that stretches or challenges your current thinking. In my experience, when you have finished, what you will have learned about you *from you* will prove to be among the most valuable lessons of all. Look, here's one now...

### **Strategic Reflection No. 1**

You have started down the path of a development journey that will result in you being able to pursue next-level roles and opportunities with more savvy and confidence. Think about that end state and the person you want to be after this experience. Once you emerge on the other side of this

process, what do you want to have changed? What do you want to be different from today? In the space provided, list three shifts you want to see along the way. Identify changes that are within your control to influence, even though you may not yet know how. List what you will see more or less of as you approach a successful outcome. Lastly, to help these shifts take shape, note how you will help yourself stay the course. How will you keep yourself accountable and on the path? Here's an example.

**Desired Shift:** I don't want to be afraid to go after the roles I want at work. I want to pursue opportunities at work with more confidence.

**Success Looks Like:** I'll know the change is happening when I feel more surefooted going after next-level positions. I'll be using more strategy (and less wishful thinking). I'll be less afraid. And I'll know what to do in between promotions to get and keep myself ready.

**To Help Myself Deliver:** The Strategic Reflections—I'll use them to track what I'm learning as I go through the book. I'm going to write down what I'm really thinking to see if anything unexpected comes up. My friend and I have also agreed to go through this together. I'm more likely to follow-through with him as an accountability partner.

**Desired Shift:**

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**Success Looks Like:**

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**To Help Myself Deliver:**

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## You, Me, and We

As I wrote this book, I pictured you sitting here as one of my coaching clients, people who engage me to help them, through incremental and unfolding self-discovery, resolve a career challenge or advance their professional aspirations. It's with that image in my head that I wrote, working hard to show up, speak, and coach just as I would if you and I were sharing the same space. In these pages, I hope you get a true sense of who I am, my voice, my culture, my experience, my mistakes—and even, far too often, my mom. I couldn't help it; sometimes her famous proverbs just fit. Promise to never tell her I quoted her, though; as she'd like that way too much.

With only the ability to imagine who you might be, I will make a few assumptions. I will assume you are a strong performer whose work meets or exceeds your organization's expectations. You may want to be promoted into a management role, ascend into a higher level of management, or perhaps you just want to be elevated and respected as a thought leader, the go-to person, or a senior-level and specialized expert. Whether your career success story comes with a formal title or not, you're pretty clear on what you want. You only need a little help on the *how*.

I hope you experience this book as practical and easy to digest, just as if we were sitting together in conversation, but our coaching relationship does have its limitations. I have no general or specific knowledge of the organization for which you work, or its hiring or promotion practices. The concepts and strategies in this book are based on my nearly thirty years of corporate human resources and executive coaching experience in a variety of industries and domains. Although

this book provides many of the same insights and tools that I share in my private coaching practice, there are several factors, both within and outside of your control, which can influence your ability to move up and around in an organization, so I cannot make any guarantees. No one ever can. However, this book will share many of the critical elements of recognizable leadership, as well as the methodologies that enable you to demonstrate them at work. In the end, it's you who has to step up and do the doing, but the conversation you and I are about to have will certainly point the way.

### **On a Personal Note**

I've spent the majority of my career in the business of developing people, and I have loved every minute of it. However, during that time, I've noticed something that deeply disturbs me. Compared to all who want, need, and deserve it, surprisingly few people ever get a chance at effective and focused career coaching and leadership development. In the earlier days of my chosen field when I only aspired to do what I am so fortunate to be doing now, I needed leadership development. I needed it badly. And I was lucky. Mentoring and good managers for me were abundant. Unfortunately for them, my mentors and coaches didn't realize what a mess they were getting themselves into by taking my sophomoric and hardheaded self under their wings. By the time they figured it out, it was too late. I stuck to them like cold on ice, whereas they tolerated me. Although it was painful for everyone, they endured, and I learned. I'm still learning. And I'm forever in their debt.

For many people in need of leadership development, however, the message is, “Oh, you want to get ahead at work? Terrific! Hope you work that out!” And most do; they work it out—but not before riding the gauntlet of trial and error. Absent a supportive manager, mentor, or coach, learning the craft of leading means learning it the hard way, and often on your own. How many more great leaders would there be in the world if people only knew how, if they only had a partner on that journey?

This is my opportunity to pay back what others so generously gave to me. On this leg of your journey, I want to be your partner. So let me be the first to congratulate you on your decision to advance your career success story! It’s one of the most critical decisions you can make and one that can positively reverberate through all parts of your life. In the marketplace, there are many career development products to choose from, available in a variety of shapes, sizes, and philosophies. Know that I appreciate that you chose this one to help you take these all-important steps, and I thank you for choosing to take them with me.

—*Damaris Patterson Price*

## PART I

# YOUR LEADERSHIP LOCKED

*“It would be too easy to say that I feel invisible. Instead, I feel painfully visible, but entirely ignored.”*

*—David Levithan,  
author and editor*

They can't see you: the leader you really are.  
All you've experienced, all you want to learn, all you  
want to give, is hidden in plain sight.