

Successful Women Think *Differently*

Valorie Burton



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from The Holy Bible, *New International Version® NIV®*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Verses marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Verses marked KJV are taken from the King James Version of The Bible.

Cover by Koechel Peterson & Associates, Inc, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Cover photo © Jacki Hicks

This book contains stories in which the author has changed people's names and some details of their situations in order to protect their privacy.

Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications, Inc., 7680 Goddard Street, Ste #200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920.

SUCCESSFUL WOMEN THINK DIFFERENTLY

Copyright © 2012 by Valorie Burton

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Burton, Valorie, 1973-

Successful women think differently / Valorie Burton.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-7369-3856-3 (pbk)

ISBN 978-0-7369-4268-3 (eBook)

1. Christian women—Religious life. 2. Success—Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Thought and thinking—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title.

BV4527.B88 2012

248.8'43—dc23

2011022640

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 / VP-SK / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Table of Contents

Introduction	7
--------------	---

Seven Key Decisions	17
----------------------------	----

Habit One: Believe You Can Do It <i>How you explain your success and failure predicts more about your potential than you think</i>	21
--	----

Habit Two: Get off the Hedonic Treadmill <i>Why we are poor predictors of our own happiness and how you can get it right</i>	47
--	----

Habit Three: Stop Trying to Fix Your Weaknesses <i>Why you should stop obsessing about what's wrong with you and start building on what's right</i>	73
---	----

Habit Four: Build Your Muscle of Self-Control <i>Why your talent isn't enough and how to develop the trait that will take you to the top</i>	103
--	-----

Habit Five: Cultivate Positive Emotion <i>How a surprising but easy formula will save your relationships and transform your life</i>	119
--	-----

Habit Six: Be Prepared for Battle <i>Why you must expect obstacles and have a proven plan to overcome them</i>	131
--	-----

Habit Seven: Don't Be a "Maximizer" <i>How overabundance can rob you of satisfaction and make you ineffective</i>	147
---	-----

Habit Eight: Don't Go It Alone <i>Why authentic connections are more important than ever and how you can cultivate them</i>	171
---	-----

Habit Nine: Write It Down <i>The revealing reasons you need to tap into the power of the pen starting today</i>	181
---	-----

Conclusion	193
------------	-----

Coaching Guide	195
----------------	-----

Believe You Can Do It



*How you explain your success and failure predicts
more about your potential than you think*

Key Lessons

- Optimism is a key to reaching high levels of success
- Adopt a “growth mindset” rather than a fixed one
- Take notice of your thoughts—and adjust them as needed

Cecily struggled with her weight for several years before her doctor gave her a serious wake-up call: she was prediabetic. She needed to lose 40 pounds and maintain a regimen of exercise and a healthier diet. The mid-afternoon vending machine runs for Little Debbie's and potato chips would need to stop. So would the couch potato habits and all the excuses for why she didn't have time to exercise. But every time Cecily talked about doing better, her thoughts and subsequent words looked something like this:

I've tried before and failed. What's the point of trying again if the same thing is going to happen? It's a waste of time. I just need to accept that I'm a big woman. My mother is big. My sister gained weight after 30. Why should I think I can be any different? Healthy food is bland. I don't want it. And I'm embarrassed to work out in public. I don't want people staring at my flabby, overweight body. I can't do this.

With these thoughts, Cecily set out to do what the doctor suggested.

As you can imagine, her efforts were short-lived. Her counterproductive thoughts overpowered her intentions. Actions follow thoughts, and counterproductive thoughts will always send you in the opposite direction of your goal.

Think back for a moment to a recent failure. Maybe it was a relationship that went south or a promotion you were denied or a decision that got you into hot water. Or maybe it is something simpler—a test you failed or that 21-day diet that you'd already given up on by day two. Got a failure in mind? We all have them. Now, answer this question honestly and without too much thought: Why did you fail? Jot down the first things that come to mind. Just a short bullet-pointed list:

Did you write down your reasons? If not, don't skip that part. Write it down.

It's a simple exercise, but noticing how you think about failure can tell you a great deal about how high you will ascend on the success ladder. Numerous books will tell you that to be successful, you should simply emulate successful people. It can be tempting, then, to observe a woman who has achieved success, whether in her relationships or finances or health or work, and take notes about the steps she took to get to her destination. Why is it, then, that you can take two women with very similar backgrounds, education, and experience, and one excels while the other languishes? Why does one clear the hurdle when she faces it and the other trips and falls flat on her face, never to get up again? Why does one set big, compelling goals while the other settles for far less than she seems capable of?

Many of the answers to these questions cannot be found by simply

observing the steps each woman chose to take. The more important insight is to understand what caused one of them to take those steps—to even *think* to take those steps—while the other did not. The edge the successful woman has over the average is in her thought processes. It is not external, but internal. Sometimes it is learned through experiences and parental examples. However, some aspects of the thought process come very naturally to you. You are either more optimistic or pessimistic in your thinking. Although you may naturally lean in one direction or the other in the face of a challenge or opportunity, an optimistic thinking style can be learned.

Let me be specific about what I mean by these two terms. The hallmark of a pessimist is that she tends to believe negative events in life will last forever, will impact everything she does, and are all her fault. But when faced with similar circumstances, the optimist believes just the opposite. She sees the event as a temporary setback, believes it is limited to this specific instance, and doesn't blame it all on herself. Instead, the optimist sees all of the external circumstances that contributed—other people, poor timing, and even God's will.

So let's go back to that recent failure you identified a moment ago and take a look at the reasons you gave for it. Re-read what you wrote. Then, answer one more question: Are all of your reasons personal faults and character traits? In other words, are your reasons things that you can't do anything about or are some of your reasons changeable?

Women who are most successful explain their failures in terms of things they can take control over. In other words, they realize they have weaknesses and faults, but those are not the sole reasons why things go wrong. Instead, they focus on the external reasons—people who made things more difficult, the fact that they weren't as prepared as they could have been, the fact that the economy was bad, the weather was bad, the boss was having a bad day again.

None of these reasons have permanent implications. After all, next time she can prepare better, the weather may improve, the economy won't be bad forever, and even if the boss keeps his job, she can always find another boss to work for in another department or company.

Failing this time doesn't mean failing next time. With a few intentional tweaks and changes, the next go-round will be a clean slate.

The successful woman is hopeful. She is empowered by knowledge of lessons gleaned from the failure of the previous try. She doesn't take failure personally and she knows that failing doesn't make her a failure. She knows that internalizing failure is a death sentence for her dreams. After all, if you're a failure, what's the point of attempting to be a success?

This last question is critical. The two thinking styles—optimistic and pessimistic—produce specific results. Numerous studies illustrate that pessimists don't persevere. They give up more easily. They become depressed more often. And for women, this is even more pronounced. We are twice as likely as men to experience depression, and the average age of the first onset of depression is now just 14 years old—half the age it was just a few decades ago.* Because we experience higher highs and lower lows emotionally than men do, we can be more sensitive to the emotional impact of our goals and efforts to reach them. Having an optimistic thinking style results in feelings that encourage us to persevere in the face of challenges.

Consider the girl who sets out to sell Girl Scout cookies. Her goal is to sell 20 boxes in front of the grocery store on Saturday. When her four-hour shift is over, she has sold just four boxes. You ask her what happened and the conversation goes something like this:

You: I'm sure you were disappointed. Why do you think you only sold four boxes?

Girl: I'm no good at selling anything. My mom said she had a sales job once and she's no good at it either. Nobody likes these cookies that much. I hate bothering people. Everybody's on a budget these days and all the women say they're trying to lose weight and can't eat sweets. I don't know if I'm going to bother going back next Saturday.

* Mayo Clinic, National Institute of Mental Health.

Now, I know you're not a little girl, but sometimes when it comes to self-talk that little girl voice emerges and it can sabotage your success. The eternal pessimist explains her failures as personal (flaws or traits that have no hope of changing), permanent (the problem will exist forever), and pervasive (the personal flaw that caused the failure will sabotage your success in other ways too). Psychologists call it your "explanatory" or thinking style. I call it the determining factor in whether or not you will be as successful as you are capable of being. The sooner you start paying attention to what you say to yourself about your life, your circumstances, and yes, your failures, the sooner you will break through to the next level.

LEARNING TO FAIL FORWARD

At 28, Meredith Moore became the youngest director in the McDonald's Corporation. But her stellar career didn't start off so stellar. A series of bumps could have bruised her, but instead took her on an inner journey that landed her in a role reporting to the president of one of the most recognizable brands in the world.

When Meredith graduated from Howard University with a degree in communications, the Minnesota native took a job at an international financial services firm. Initially she was trained to be a stockbroker, but passing the licensing exam proved to be struggle. Still, on the job she was a star performer her first year—an accolade she thought would be rewarded. But in the stodgy "good ole boy" environment, her talent wasn't as great an asset as she'd imagined. "The HR rep at the company said something peculiar after my first year and I've always remembered it: 'Talented people push back.'" In other words, talented people see where there is room for improvement and expect that others want to improve. Talented people question the status quo. Talented people are driven to succeed and therefore they notice what's happening—or not happening—that might impede success. The culture was not a good fit and Meredith was soon reassigned from the East Coast to the Midwest.

"The company was stuck in 1955," she reflects. "They didn't want

new people.” If the culture had been the only problem, she may have been able to persist longer, but soon Meredith found that her competence was being called into question on a regular basis—something she’d never experienced before. For years, Meredith had confidence in her ability to write—it was something that brought her a sense of joy and accomplishment. It was a gift she’d honed over the years, especially in college. Now, she had a supervisor who told her plain and simple, “You can’t write.” To make matters worse, the supervisor refused to offer any feedback on what exactly she needed to improve. “I had always been pretty good at assessing my abilities. Since childhood, I had been a good writer. The organization beat me down so much that I started to say to myself, ‘I’m not a good writer.’ But my job in marketing and communications was 90 percent writing.”

Work was becoming a struggle as Meredith attempted to please a boss who couldn’t be pleased. “It was a toxic environment. I tried every chain of contacting the human resources department, mentors, or anyone I thought could help me improve the situation. Everyone said, ‘Just hold on.’ Eventually, though, they said, ‘We can’t help you.’” Meredith felt isolated in more ways than one—in a company with few prospects for advancement, in a town she had no connection to, many miles from family or the friends she’d had in college, and with no church or community connections. She knew she needed to come up with a game plan. Although her parents advised her to stick it out, that advice felt unbearable to Meredith.

“I had never quit before,” Meredith says. “But the pivotal moment for me was when I began to doubt myself. That had never been my mode of operation.” It was Meredith’s self-sabotaging thoughts that concerned her more than anything else. She understood something at a young age, a critical key to success for women: successful women *believe* in themselves. They have an authentic confidence that buoys them in the face of challenges and opportunities. Without that confidence, Meredith would lack the fuel to reach her goals. So she quit, and she did so quite unconventionally. One night, fed up, she decided never to go back to work at the company she’d called her employer for a year and eight months. “I packed up in the middle of the night,

cleaned up my apartment, took my cat, and drove to Chicago. I left with no job.”

Meredith immediately landed a job that was essentially an internship with an ad agency. At \$10 an hour, it was a far cry from her very comfortable paycheck plus benefits at the financial services firm. She was adamant though, that she had made the right decision. “I learned my worth and value. I was only making \$10 an hour, but I wasn’t being disrespected. I was willing to let go of all of my earthly belongings to avoid having people treat me badly,” she says. No one understood her decision to leave, especially her parents. But Meredith learned a key lesson through the experience. Previously, she said, she always felt she needed other people to validate her pain and her experiences. But something clicked for her the night she decided to pack up and leave. “I figured out that if I experienced it, it was valid. Other people don’t need to validate my pain in order for it to be real.”

Her leap of faith wasn’t without a net for long. For one, she had her sister and a new church home where she felt inspired and grounded. Then opportunity knocked. “I had forgotten that I applied for a job at McDonald’s Corporation while I was still at the previous company,” she remembers. The company, headquartered in a suburb of Chicago, called a week and a half into her internship with the ad agency and offered her a job as a communications supervisor. She would be supporting the Chief Operating Officer of McDonald’s USA with research for the financial writing needs of the company.

“There are times when you just know that God has a hand in your life,” she says. “There is no way I could have ordained that.” Still, she admits, “It felt like a setback because I wasn’t getting the chance to write.” But she was in the right place at the right time, and the doubts about her writing abilities had dissipated since leaving.

She struck up a conversation with the COO one day. He asked her, “What do you see as your next step here?” It was just the question Meredith wanted to hear. “I think I can be one of the writers,” she answered. He took notice of her answer—clear and concise, and simple enough for him to act on. “He let me start helping out on some of his stuff. For example, he had an upcoming trip to Pittsburgh and let me look

at his speech. I gave him some feedback.” And he did the one thing she’d hoped for at her last job: he offered *her* feedback. “I loved that he would tell me why something did or didn’t work! I needed that. I could learn!” Within six months, the COO promoted her to communications manager. And when he was promoted to president of the company, the communications demands of his office increased, along with Meredith’s responsibilities. She became external relations manager, and then director of external relations and brand outreach, making her the youngest director at the multi-billion-dollar McDonald’s USA.

LESSONS FOR FAILING FORWARD

Meredith didn’t specifically set out to become the youngest director in the company. She aimed to find a place where her talents could be appreciated, where she could learn and grow, and where a mentor would be an advocate for her. When asked what’s next, she mirrors the same approach that has worked for her so far. “I don’t know what my goal is. I’ve had such accidental blessings, but I’ve been ready for them when they showed up,” she says.

I see it a bit differently. Meredith is the type of woman who aims for passion and excellence. It is a strength so innate to her approach to life that she doesn’t even call it a goal, but it leads her to succeed at high levels. She is prepared when opportunity knocks. “I don’t know what my experiences are preparing me for, but I’m excited about it,” Meredith says. “I’m optimistic about my future. My thirties are looking pretty good!”

We can see many of the seven decisions in Meredith’s story. She refused to downsize her dream, chose courage over fear, actively sought feedback, and focused on solutions instead of problems. Here are a few more lessons:

- She refused to internalize the negativity she experienced at her first job. Instead, she attributed her failure there to the culture of the company and the stubbornness of her boss rather than exclusively attributing the problems to her own character flaws or lack of ability.

- She failed forward. She was willing to take a step back in order to find a better path.
- She took a risk.
- She took decisive action by cutting her losses and starting over.
- She believed in herself.
- She knew herself, and was able to decipher between “her stuff” and “other people’s stuff.” When others’ negative issues tried to redefine who she was, she recognized it as “their stuff” and didn’t make those issues her own.
- She volunteered to help with assignments outside of her job description so that she could demonstrate her abilities and also learn and grow.
- Sometimes sticking it out is not the best option. Sometimes you need to push the reset button and start again.

In Meredith’s case, a pivotal shift occurred when she realized she was beginning to be pessimistic about her abilities and doubt herself in a way she never had before. She was self-aware, and she knew her new thoughts were a threat to her future success. She innately understood that she had to turn those thoughts around. She knew it would be an uphill climb to change her thoughts in such a toxic environment, so she changed environments.

We’ll talk a bit more about self-awareness later, but for now, just keep in mind that succeeding at the next level will mean becoming much more aware of your thoughts. What are you telling yourself about your failures? Is it “I always mess up” or “I was exhausted today”? Is it “Nobody will spend money on my products in a bad economy” or “I’ve got to find the people who are still spending money despite a bad economy”? If your mind were an electronic billboard for the world to see, what are the thoughts they’d get to read? It takes intention to accurately capture your thoughts. With practice, you can notice them and approve the ones that help you, inviting them in and repeating them

as often as needed to move you to the right actions. It's all about your thinking style in the face of failures or disappointments.

WHAT'S YOUR MINDSET?

Dr. Carol Dweck, a professor of psychology at Stanford University, has spent much of her career studying the mental attitudes of the most successful people—young and old—in the face of challenges and opportunities. What she has discovered is a fundamental difference in the *mindset* of the most successful people.*

Her quest began early in her career as she engaged in research to better understand how people cope with failure. She observed young students grappling with problems, using puzzles as the method of problem solving. Beginning with fairly simple puzzles, she then had students move on to harder ones. Her goal was not to see who finished the puzzles fastest or had the easiest time solving the puzzles. Instead, she studied each student's thought process by observing the strategies they used to solve the problem and probing their thoughts and feelings during problem solving.

She noticed that a handful of students in her studies did something peculiar compared to the others: they welcomed challenge. They were excited by the puzzles they had trouble solving. The harder the puzzle, the more determined they seemed. While other students were motivated by the possibility of looking smart and were deflated by feelings of discouragement in the face of the difficult puzzles, these students were not intimidated. When these “peculiar” students appeared to be failing because they couldn't solve the puzzle, they didn't even seem to view the experience as failing. Instead, they clearly thought they were *learning*.

What Dr. Dweck pinpointed through her research can profoundly impact how you approach your entire life—from career and relationships to health and financial habits. She called this simple but fundamental difference “fixed mindset” and “growth mindset.”

A fixed mindset is focused on talent. Someone with a fixed mindset

* Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2006).

believes statements like “You are smart and therefore you will do well in life” and “You are naturally gifted and that will take you far.” Those who have a fixed mindset believe that one’s natural gifts and abilities determine how far one can go in life. These are the people who believe that one’s intelligence is defined by one’s IQ, GPA, and SAT scores. These numbers become not just a measure of potential, but a limitation of potential. Those blessed with very high scores in a particular area of life gain a sense of confidence—but also insecurity. Since potential is measured by a set criteria, falling below that criteria can put one’s very intelligence or value at stake.

I recall believing I was smart and questioning that belief after getting low scores on the verbal section of the SAT. If I had allowed those scores to define my potential, I certainly would not be an author today! When we allow our potential to be limited by grades or performance reviews, it affects our belief in our own possibilities.

Many women are trained to operate in this mindset from childhood on. You were praised for your giftedness. This praise may even, at times, have made you feel more special or worthy than others. You probably don’t like to admit this, but for many it is true. Parents sometimes even encourage this belief in the name of building confidence in their children. But it is dangerous. What happens when you believe the reason you succeed is solely based on your giftedness? When you don’t succeed, it can be devastating. You are constantly in a position of proving how smart you are and how gifted you are. And the pressure can be intense. So much so that people with a fixed mindset shy away from challenges they are unsure they can conquer. “Better to stay in my comfort zone than to risk failure,” they say to themselves subconsciously. Every opportunity or challenge is an evaluation of their worth. “Will I be a success or a failure? Will I gain more approval or end up rejected?”

Another trait of those with a fixed mindset is that they look down on effort. “If you have to try hard, you must not really be that good,” the fixed mindset says. Before I became aware of the mindsets, I discovered this attitude in myself. It was holding me back tremendously and I didn’t even know it. The same could be true for you.

Using the technique of coaching through journaling, I began

peeling back the layers as I sought to understand why I was so stuck as I tried to move toward some exciting goals that I'd set for myself. Here's how that internal conversation went:

Question: What am I so afraid of when it comes to being more assertive about marketing my company and services?

Self: I don't know that I am afraid. It just seems like if my marketing is effective, I wouldn't have to directly ask for opportunities.

Question: What is so bad about directly asking for opportunities?

Self: I know it is a normal part of business to ask. And a lot of people ask for opportunities. But if you are really successful and talented, you don't have to ask. You are asked. You are invited.

This was a bit of a lightbulb moment! I was actually surprised to hear myself say this. "Successful people don't have to ask." Where did I get this idea from? I knew I believed it, but I also knew it might be a faulty belief. So I continued probing. This is what you have to do sometimes to get to the bottom of an issue. Without having a name for it at the time, what I discovered was a fixed mindset. Here's what I was really saying: *If you have talent, you don't have to try so hard. You don't have to ask! Trying hard somehow diminishes your talent. You aren't really that talented if the way you arrived at success was by putting forth so much effort. Gifted people are naturally successful.* So I continued the self-coaching conversation:

Question: So is it true that successful people—truly successful ones—don't have to ask? Think of highly successful people you know. Is this the principle they subscribe to?

Self: Well, as I think about my mentors and even well-known entrepreneurs, I know they ask

for opportunities. They don't just wait to see what shows up. They get clear about what they want and they are not afraid to ask for it.

Question: So is your belief that “successful and talented people don't ask” helping you or hurting you?

Self: It's definitely hurting me. First, it's simply untrue. And second, it's leading me to use an approach that is much too passive.

Question: What new belief do you want to replace that old one with?

Self: Truly successful people ask for opportunities. They don't just market, they also sell. And they put forth a lot of effort, which in no way diminishes their talent. Instead, it shows their commitment. Not asking because you believe it will diminish your talent is simply prideful.

In this short five-minute self-coaching exercise, I unearthed a limiting belief that had been lying just beneath the surface of my actions (or lack thereof) for years. And it was rooted in a fixed mindset that says effort is somehow a negative. After all, if you fail and you can say you didn't really put forth much effort, you have an excuse. But if you fail and you truly gave it your all, your very worth is at stake. Women with a fixed mindset are terrified of failure. In the mind of a woman with a fixed mindset, failure is not what you do, but it defines who you are. The exciting part is that you have a choice.

Think back to a time when you failed and then called into question your own intelligence or abilities. Perhaps you began to doubt whether you could ever accomplish what you set out to do. You failed in a relationship and decided you were doomed to remain single forever. “I just don't get the love thing. I'm no good at it,” you say. Or, “I keep getting rejected by men. I must be unlovable.” These are decisive evaluations of your relationship abilities that give you no room for improvement. “This is who you are and how you are and it's not going to change,” the

fixed mindset says. That mindset works just fine when you are succeeding at everything, but when you start struggling or failing, it simply leaves no hope for the future.

The fixed mindset says life dealt you a hand and that's it. This often causes people, dissatisfied with the hand they've been dealt, to bluff about the hand they've been given. These are people who often feel afraid they will be found out. They are constantly trying to prove themselves and sometimes feel like an imposter putting on a façade of smarts and personality to win people's approval and praise. The growth mindset offers an approach that melts anxiety and opens the door to amazing possibilities. It says your natural traits are more than just something you have to live with, but simply a starting point. You can cultivate the qualities needed to succeed through your own efforts. A growth mindset believes you can grow through experience and change substantially through your actions. Unlike a fixed mindset, a growth mindset doesn't disdain effort. It thrives on it!

Because those with a growth mindset believe that through effort they can learn things they previously did not understand, improve personality traits, and even grow in intelligence, they are not as easily discouraged by failure. When you have a growth mindset, challenges that stretch you far beyond your comfort zone actually excite you. You realize you're going to *learn* something. You will be expanded by the experience, not judged by it.

Women with a growth mindset believe that with years of discipline and passion, their true potential is unknown. Why waste time hiding your shortcomings rather than simply overcoming them? Why not make friends or search for a spouse who will challenge you to grow rather than simply quell your insecurities? Why stay in your comfort zone and play it safe when you could stretch toward your true dreams?

Another important distinction is this: Studies show that just as people are very poor predictors of what will make them truly happy, we are also poor judges of our own abilities. Those who are most inaccurate at estimating what they are capable of are those with a fixed mindset.

Consider this: If you believe you can improve, you are not as intimidated by the idea that your abilities are not currently as great as you

would like. In your mind, those abilities are not set in stone. They will change as you actively learn and grow. However, if you believe that your abilities are permanently set you will be more likely to inflate them. If there's no room for growth or change, you'll want to impress people as much as possible right now!

DOES A GROWTH MINDSET NEGATE STRENGTHS?

When you build on your strengths rather than assuming they are fixed, you multiply your efforts. Sure, you may be a natural-born leader and you've been leading for years, but does that mean you couldn't still be more effective? A woman with a fixed mindset is content to rest on her laurels. A growth mindset sees strengths as only a starting point. Wisely, she taps into her strengths and then nourishes that talent.

Choosing a growth mindset doesn't mean your individual strengths don't matter. In fact, a woman with a growth mindset notices strengths and weaknesses more than those with a fixed mindset. It simply recognizes that skills can be developed—whether in one's career, relationships, finances, spiritual life, or health habits.

This is particularly exciting news if you have ever felt you were stuck with your circumstances—that your intelligence is a fixed entity, that your relationship skills are set, or that your penchant for flubbing finances is an unchangeable trait you inherited from a parent. You *can* change. You are capable of far more than you may have previously thought.

Dream of changing careers, but feel like it's too late to change course? Always wish that you had gone to college or graduate school, but fear you can't cut it? Had a string of broken relationships and feel like you'll never understand the opposite sex? There is abundant hope for you! You can learn new skills, patterns, and habits that will transform your ability to succeed at the endeavors most meaningful to you. Your most successful path to doing so will marry your strengths with a growth mindset—taking you to higher heights than you've ever experienced before.

It's time to stretch beyond your comfort zone.

I learned this firsthand after uncovering my fixed mindset belief that successful women somehow “ascend” to the top. They don’t have to ask for opportunities. Instead, if they are really talented, opportunities show up on their own. To be clear, opportunities often do show up on their own for women with talent. They are a like a magnet that attracts opportunities. But there can sometimes be a strategic danger to using “attraction” as your sole method of success. What happens when you don’t attract the right opportunities? What happens when you want to go to a completely new level and you are simply not in the right place or around the right types of people to bring that vision to fruition? What happens if God is calling you out of your comfort zone to stretch and break free of your fear of rejection or failure? It is during those times that it is essential to tap into a growth mindset.

In fact, it could be argued that God calls us to a growth mindset. Consider these Scriptures:

- “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”—Romans 12:2
- “With God, all things are possible.”—Matthew 19:26
- “To him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.”—Ephesians 3:20

From a spiritual perspective, you cannot possibly believe that your potential is fixed and has no potential to expand. If you believe all things are possible, then you can rest assured that if you open your mind, you could find yourself growing beyond your wildest dreams.

Have you told yourself that you’re stuck in any of these areas? Where do you believe you have little hope or no further potential?

- *Presentation skills.* You are scared to death to speak in front of people. You’ve accepted this, and, for the most part, avoid any situation in which you are asked to make a presentation.
- *Accounting and finance.* You don’t know the difference between a financial statement and a balance sheet, and see

no reason to fix that. You've decided you're not that good with numbers and you can live with that. When people talk finances in a meeting, your motto is from Proverbs 17:28: "Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent!"

- *Personal finances.* Maybe you never find yourself in a situation where you need to understand business accounting, but you cannot avoid the need to better manage your personal finances. You are financially illiterate and don't understand what it will take for you to ever find financial freedom and peace. And the idea of learning scares you.
- *Getting fit.* You see women in magazines or even jogging down the street who seem to have some magical ability to take care of themselves. You were never an athlete as a kid, and see no reason to start now. The idea of making fitness a part of your lifestyle—something that you do daily—seems daunting and out of character for you. Yet it is also intriguing. Could you actually do it?
- *New career.* You don't actually want to be in pharmaceutical sales or teaching or _____ (you fill in the blank!) any more. You have a dream of becoming an attorney or author or _____. But do you really have what it takes? You don't know anything about the field—you just know you feel drawn to it and you have the strengths for it. Is that enough to take a step in a new direction? There's so much you'd have to learn. What if you can't cut it?
- *Love life.* You and your husband seem to be stuck in a rut. He just doesn't get you. He probably never will. And frankly, you're so frustrated with him that you've given up trying to see his point of view or to keep bending and changing to please him. After twelve years of marriage, you have almost lost hope that this will ever be the kind of marriage you'd dreamed of before you tied the knot. Now you just feel stuck.

Is there really hope for undoing old habits? Could you actually learn to communicate better?

- *Shyness.* You've always been shy. It's the reason you don't have many friends, and you blame your lack of career advancement on it. After all, shy people aren't exactly good networkers. Shyness is a personality trait, right? That's not something you can change. Well, what if you could?

That's the question I want to plant as a seed in your mind. What if you could change? What if being shy or a procrastinator or a poor communicator or math-averse was something you could permanently overcome? If there was a road map to doing so, would you be willing to follow the map? I hope so. Open your mind to the possibility that what you know now as your potential is only a fraction of what is truly possible. The key to advancement is recognizing that your limitations are not unchangeable, fixed, or genetic. With education you can expand your understanding in these areas. With discipline, your possibilities are truly limitless.

HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN SUCCESS?

At the beginning of the chapter we examined your perceptions of a recent failure. Your success is determined just as much by your thinking style as your failures. Think back to a recent success you had. It can be something big or small. Jot it down here:

Why did you succeed? Jot down a few bullet-pointed reasons here:

Now, let's take a look at how you explain your success. Did you attribute it to external factors (luck, other people, the weather) or internal ones (you worked hard, you're smart, you're disciplined)? Did you see your success as temporary (I succeeded this time, but who knows if I can pull it off again?) or permanent (it could definitely happen again)? Did you see it as specific (I am good at this one thing, and that's it) or pervasive (my success at this task represents a bigger theme in my life)?

DO YOU EXPLAIN YOUR SUCCESS AWAY?

Interestingly, a disproportionate number of women who succeed at high levels experience what researchers call the “imposter syndrome.” It is a phenomenon that occurs when you are unable to really connect the dots and internalize your accomplishments. Despite your hard work, competence, and experience, you see success as a fluke, pure luck, or your ability to get others to believe you are smarter or more talented than you really are. As a result, you have a nagging feeling that people are going to find you out—that eventually, the jig will be up and you'll be found out. Strangely, successful men simply do not report feeling this way nearly as often as women. I recall a coaching client whose successful talent had been showcased nationally, even landing her on the Oprah Winfrey Show. She confided to me, “I feel like a fraud. I mean, I do the work, but I don't think I'm more talented than anyone else. I always feel like people are going to find out that I'm really not that great.” A recent *Psychology Today* article pointed out rich and famous women who were impacted by the imposter syndrome. After being nominated for three Academy awards and six Golden Globes, actress

Michelle Pfeiffer shared her self-doubts in an interview in 2002. “I still think people will find out that I’m really not very talented. I’m really not very good. It’s all been a big sham.” The article went on to quote Academy Award winner Kate Winslet: “Sometimes I wake up in the morning before going off to a shoot, and I think, I can’t do this. I’m a fraud.”

If it happens at such public and high levels of success, what happens to us in the everyday efforts of life—in our marriages and relationships, as mothers and managers, employees and business owners? Whether you face doubts as severe as feeling like a fraud or occasionally doubt yourself in the face of a particularly difficult challenge, the key is to notice what you say to yourself about your success. True success is not anxious or doubtful, but confident and at peace. If you find that a pessimistic thinking style is invading your thoughts, you have the power to renew those thoughts by choosing a new outlook.

BUILD SELF-AWARENESS

So what does this all mean for you? When you succeed, even in the small things, you want your thinking style to be the opposite of when you fail.

When you succeed, attribute it to:	When you fail, attribute it to:
Internal factors	External factors
See it as permanent rather than temporary	See it as temporary rather than permanent
See it as pervasive rather than specific	See it as specific rather than pervasive

In his book *Learned Optimism*, Dr. Martin Seligman notes, “Some people, the ones who give up easily, habitually say of their misfortunes: ‘It’s me, it’s going to last forever, it’s going to undermine everything I do.’ Others, those who resist giving in to misfortune, say: ‘It was just circumstances, it’s going away quickly anyway, and besides, there’s much more in life.’”*

* Martin E.P. Seligman, *Learned Optimism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006).

What does this all mean for you? As you navigate the path to your life's vision, pay attention to your thoughts. Refuse to allow pessimistic thinking to rule. Sure, pessimistic thoughts may invade your mind. But intentionally question those thoughts, and ensure that the thoughts you embrace are accurate and productive. In other words, any thoughts that produce self-sabotaging fear and paralyze you from moving forward need to be rejected. It is a choice. With practice, it is a choice you will make more quickly over time. You will develop an optimistic thinking style that empowers you to dream bigger, bolder dreams and walk into your vision with confidence. And you will be empowered to cut through the fears and excuses that threaten to hold you back. By intentionally noticing your thoughts and questioning the counterproductive ones, you will cultivate an optimistic thinking style that will propel you to the next level.

FOUR QUESTIONS TO CONQUER EXCUSES

What's the reason you have for not pursuing your most authentic dream? Whatever that dream is in your life or career, you probably have a reason it hasn't happened yet. But if you look behind the reasons, you might just discover that they could be reclassified as excuses—thoughts you are embracing that sabotage your dreams. Excuses are born of a pessimistic thinking style and fixed mindset. Now, I'm not trying to beat you up about your excuses. I want to help you break free of them so you can go to the next level. Whatever you want to call them—excuses or reasons—they're in the way. And *you* are the only one who can demand they go.

So what's your excuse? Is it a lack of time? Money? Is it that person who is always tearing you down? Is the dream just too hard? Too complex? Too much of a commitment? Maybe your excuse is a lack of education or experience. Or perhaps if you just had more contacts or more friends or fewer obligations or weighed less or...

You get my point. Excuses allow us to justify our lack of progress. They can even bring you sympathy. They let you off the hook. But the

truth is, when there is something you were meant to do, you'll never truly be off the hook. You *must* do it, which means you must let go of your excuses. That means facing your fear—whether it is fear of success and all the expectations that come with it or fear of failure and all the disappointment or embarrassment that come with it.

Whatever your fear, the good news is that you can muster the courage to conquer it. Choose to let go of all excuses for why you cannot have what you want in life. Coach yourself with these four excuse-shattering questions:

1. What's my excuse?
2. What does this excuse give me permission to do (or not do)?
3. If I could no longer use this excuse, what would I have to do instead?
4. Why don't I just do that now?

When you drop your excuses, you discover that the bottom line is you can choose to pursue your dreams—or not. You can live life fully or you can live it small. Living fully takes courage. Courage is a choice. The choice is yours.

WHAT ARE YOU HOPING FOR?

What is it that you are hoping for? What's that thing that caused you to pick up this book in the first place? There is something you haven't yet experienced, but want to. There is something that represents that gap between where you are right now and where you want to be. And the first step to you closing that gap is believing two simple words: It's possible. Just say that out loud right now: "It's possible." Your dream is possible. With the right thoughts, the right actions, and the right relationships, whatever divine dreams rest in your heart are possible.

So as you begin this journey, this first step is about hope. You must have it. Hope is the foundation of faith and the essence of optimism. When you stop hoping, you start settling. As I coach women

in particular, and as I reflect on my own personal experience, I have noticed how often people downsize their dreams. Women so often attempt to juggle multiple roles and responsibilities. Many downsize their dreams for so long that settling for less becomes a habit. Can you relate? *When you stop hoping, you start settling.*

You begin to settle for a smaller version of your real vision. What have you stopped hoping for out of fear that you won't get it? In what ways has "settling" crept in and buried a hope for something better?

Give yourself permission to hope again. To dream a bigger dream. Successful women are confident enough to dream authentic dreams. It means you have to be honest enough with yourself to acknowledge the real desires of your heart. No time for surface goals. No time for putting everyone else's agenda ahead of God's plan for you. Be bold and courageous about what you are hoping for. I'm asking you to stretch and see beyond your current circumstances and resources. Reach toward the heavens and trust that although your divine destiny lies beyond your reach, God can close that gap by meeting you more than halfway. It's that kind of believing that requires faith.

As life brings disappointment or failures, it can be tempting to stop hoping for some of the things you truly want. If you're not hoping for anything, you don't need faith. So what is it that you need to start hoping for? What is it that you've hesitated to admit is the real vision for your life? I believe you are reading these words because *now is the time* to start dreaming bigger. Now is the time for a new season of confidence and passion and purpose.

I dare you to dream a bigger dream, and refuse to give up hope.

I'm not talking about cherishing false expectations that set you up for heartache and disappointment. I'm talking about renewing the goals, desires, and visions that speak to you deep within your spirit. Hope energizes you. It inspires. It motivates. Sometimes you don't get what you hope for right when you want it, but if you stop hoping altogether, you cease to take the actions that will bring your dreams to life.

Coach You:

What do you need to give yourself permission to hope for?

Perhaps author Joyce Meyer summed it up best: “I feel that if I believe for a lot and get even half of it, I am better off than I would be to believe for nothing and get all of nothing.”

Be true to your desires by giving yourself permission to hope for something more. And most importantly, *believe* you can do it. Believing that you have what it takes is the first habit of success.

YOUR BEST POSSIBLE FUTURE SELF

Research indicates that imagining your best possible future self is a powerful exercise. Much of the thrill of changing your mindset to move to a new level of success is becoming the kind of woman who can break through fears, navigate obstacles, and believe that with God all things are possible. *All* things are possible. You don't have to know how. But you do have to believe. That's hope. That's optimism. Starting today, make it your goal to cultivate optimism as a success strategy.

Every Woman Should Know

- Optimists live longer, on average, than pessimists—by as much as nine years.
- Depression has been described as the “ultimate pessimism.” Women with an optimistic thinking style tend to fend off depression when bad events occur. The opposite is true for those with a pessimistic thinking style.
- In career fields such as teaching, sales, litigation, and public relations, optimism is a predictor of success.

PERSONAL COACHING TOOLKIT: POWER QUESTIONS TO ENHANCE YOUR THINKING STYLE

Answer each of these questions in a journal or with a coach or friend who can listen objectively and give you the space to explore your answers without attempting to *give* you the answers.

1. Spend some time in meditation. The perfect dream for you is the one God uniquely equipped you for. Paint a picture of what the next level of success looks like for you. What is your *real* dream (not the downsized one)?
2. What would it mean to you to be able to accomplish that dream? Picture yourself living that vision. What does it feel like?
3. What gifts, talents, passions, or experiences will you draw on to reach your goal?
4. Think back to a time when you were at your best and reached a particularly meaningful goal. How did you do it? What did you learn about yourself?
5. Consider that meaningful goal you described in the last question. What enabled you to be at your best? Who were the people, circumstances, and other key factors surrounding your success?
6. How could you go about recreating similar circumstances to empower you to reach that “next level of success” you described in the first question?
7. Think back to a time when you failed to reach a goal. What personal factor(s) led you to fail? What external factor(s) led you to fail? What lesson(s) can you glean from these contributing factors to help you succeed when reaching future goals?
8. Realistically, when you look at the picture you painted in the first question, what are the most significant obstacles you might face? If you don’t know, take a look at role models who have already been where you aim to go and pinpoint the obstacles they faced.
9. How can you reduce the risk of those obstacles occurring as you move forward? How will you navigate around those obstacles if they occur?
10. Describe your best possible future self. Who is she and how does she approach life?

Think Differently

Be intentional about what you say to yourself when you fail as well as when you succeed. Choose hope. Dream big. Learn new skills. Believe all things are possible.
