


INSIGHTS TO ACCELERATE  
YOUR LEADERSHIP



**SHOOTS and  
LADDERS**  
W O R K B O O K

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CEO, PROPEL FORWARD LLC

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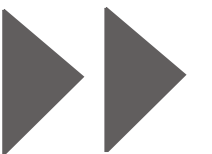
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□ *Don't worry about being perfect.* ▶▶  
*Focus on awareness and learning.* □  
— Carlann Fergusson

## *Chapter One*

# You Define the Winner's Circle



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## You define the winner's circle

This workbook is written for the ambitious person and the continuous learner—two distinctions that are not always mutually exclusive. It serves as a behind-the-scenes guide to the hidden criteria of leadership advancement. It empowers you with the ability to assess yourself to current and future levels. It speaks as the voice of a coach guiding you to find “ah ha” insight moments that allow you to be a more effective leader. Its passion and purpose is to create more great leaders by allowing anyone who is interested in further developing themselves access to the tools necessary to advance their own effectiveness.

Several potential journeys are offered to you from the pages of this workbook, but the path you take depends on where you want to go.

Are you:

- Wanting to improve your current impact as a leader?
- Ready to identify the strengths propelling you to the next level as well as the critical gaps that are prematurely stalling your career?
- Wanting to chart your own path to the next level or all the way to the executive suite?
- Wanting to gain an insider's view of how executives assess leadership potential to each level of leadership?
- Wanting to understand why you have been overlooked for promotion in the past or why your previously fast track has slowed?
- Wanting to gain insight into the success criteria of promotion into a Technical Fellows or Senior Fellows position?



Each chapter serves as a roadmap to all of these paths. As you complete the chapters you will identify where you are climbing, firmly standing, slipping or falling on the ladder of success.

Founded on 25 years of researching, designing and leading succession planning processes in a variety of establishments—from global Fortune 500s to small, privately held companies—the information reflects well over 3,000 developmental, promotional and succession planning group sessions. Because these generally discuss anywhere from 5 to 30 managers, a conservative estimation would put the work here as a reflection of promotion decisions of over 45,000 managers. The workbook's coaching sections are modeled from my own journey climbing the corporate ladder from an individual contributor to the executive ranks and from 30 years coaching and developing others on similar journeys.

When a team of leaders comes together to determine future leadership capability, they first consider the objective standpoints of the candidate's track record of success, their work experience and their proficiency level to various competencies required at the current and next level. Then, on the more subjective side, they look for patterns of conduct to predict future behavior and success. As you work through the chapters, you will assess to both the objective measures and subjective opinions that leadership teams use to select the next great leader.

I encourage you not to overwhelm yourself by trying to assess to more than one level of leadership beyond your current position. It is near impossible to truly understand what is required at higher leadership levels until you have fully experienced its predecessors. If you want to improve your leadership at your current level, complete the assessment and development activities specific to your current level. If you want to progress several levels in leadership, work only on those assigned to your next leadership level. Once met, come back and prepare for each subsequent level. Work at your own pace taking time to digest and apply the insights and keeping four things in mind.

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## You define the winner's circle

### 1. APPROACH YOURSELF WITH CURIOSITY

Have you ever used any of the following excuses for not being promoted?

*"My boss doesn't like me."*

*"People are threatened by my intelligence."*

*"I'm too different (a man/woman/minority/etc.)"*

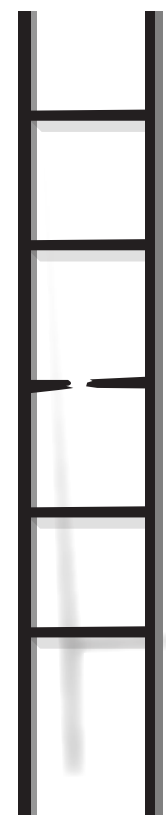
*"I'm just not good enough."*

*"I'm not good at politics."*

You can probably even extrapolate a few more. Though sometimes these reasons legitimately hold us back, most of the time, there are actual, valid reasons why one person is promoted and another is overlooked. If you're telling yourself a statement like the examples listed, challenge yourself to set those thoughts aside until you've had an opportunity to explore the key differences between those individuals who get promoted to higher-level management positions and those that remain unnoticed.

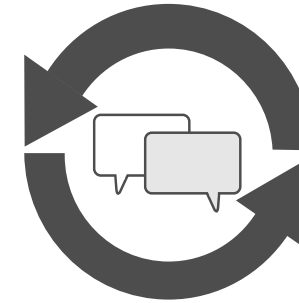
Certainly, in promotions, there will always be those individuals that feed their manager's ego, act as their boss's "yes" person or are a close friend or relative of someone important in the company, but this workbook is about what it takes to be a successful leader without relying on politics. It identifies all measures of success and provides insight on what is either propelling you forward or holding you back in your overall effectiveness and career.

Going through this process often results in "Shoot!" experiences as you begin to acknowledge that it is yourself, not others, causing career stagnation. Though this recognition often comes as a surprise, it is not uncommon. Managers are notorious for giving very cryptic feedback to direct reports. Being fed vague, unhelpful statements such as "You have some interpersonal problems," "You are too good at

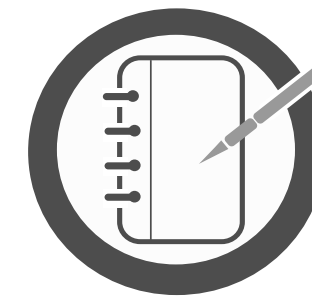


## STRUCTURE OF WORKBOOK

The majority of the assessments have one chapter dedicated to the assessment with a follow-up coaching chapter to allow you to gain deeper insights into the source of any gaps and potential improvement actions. As you progress through these chapters, you will come across these three symbols indicating how to employ the exercises given:



*Seek Feedback  
from Others*



*Journal your Response for  
Personal Insight*



*Assess  
Yourself*

## WRITE YOUR RESPONSES

Handwrite your responses in the workbook and journal, preferably in cursive. Do not type them on a computer or device. Handwriting engages the brain in different ways than typing. MRI images validate this statement. Virginia Berninger, a professor of educational psychology at the University of Washington, used brain imaging to demonstrate how handwriting differs significantly from typing. Because it activates massive regions of the brain involved in thinking, language and working memory, she found that individuals that handwrote their replies instead of typing them transcribed more words and expressed more ideas. These ideas also had deeper composition and expression.

Yet another brain imaging study showed that handwriting allows the brain to make meaningful connections by transferring information from long-term memory back into working memory. In response to this research, a group of avid journalists tried journaling by hand and by computer. They found that the handwritten entries explored more emotional issues, thoughts and attitudes and produced more insightful expressions and profound truths. I learned this concept first-hand many years ago at a conference session about handwriting analysis. The speaker encouraged the audience to test out her theory that handwriting engages the emotional side of the brain more than typing. The next evening, the need to create a sympathy note provided a somber test. The results were significant.

## **What to Expect** *You define the winner's circle*

My handwritten note proved much more heart felt, conveying ideas on a much deeper level than anything I had typed.

Keep these results in mind, especially when journaling your responses. You will be surprised by the connections you make and the deeper insights you discover by simply taking pen to paper.

### **PARTNERING WITH A MENTOR**

The workbook includes a Mentor Discussion Guide at the end of each Coaching chapter. This guide will help you identify areas where you want to gain additional insight and guidance. Completing these prior to meetings with your mentor will also ease any anxiety caused by not knowing what to talk about when the two of you meet.

A mentor from within or external to the company you work for who has succeeded at the level you are targeting is a great asset to your future success. Be careful, though, not to select someone more than two levels from your current level. As leaders are promoted, their requirements and expectations change, and you need a mentor who can tailor feedback and advice to the expectations of your target level. A Vice President is going to have difficulty trying to recall, in detail, what was required to be a successful Manager, but they will be great at remembering what it took to be an outstanding Senior Director and what it takes to be an effective Vice President.

Don't feel you have to limit yourself to one mentor either. It's often beneficial to partner with other role models who are exceptional at a specific skill or behavior you want to emulate. Your main mentor may be able to recommend someone to serve in this additional capacity.

## *Chapter Four*

# Competency Assessment: Critical Shifts



## Competency Assessment: Critical Shifts

The majority of companies use some form of competency assessment to narrow down their list of promotional candidates. This evaluation measures each individual against the knowledge, skills or abilities required at the target leadership level. The Lominger Competency Framework is a common example of a commercially available process. Other companies opt to create a developmental leadership model that tailors the knowledge, skills and abilities required for each level of leadership to their specific industry and expectations. Most processes include further defining each competency into sub-skills and behaviors. The manager rating the candidate determines if the candidate has demonstrated the overall competency by assigning a proficiency rating, such as "Novice," "Demonstrates" or "Expert," to each component. Below is a typical competency and its sub-skills.

<b>Decision Quality</b>	Makes good decisions based upon a mixture of analysis, experience and judgment
	Most of his/her solutions and suggestions turn out to be correct and accurate when judged over time
	Takes accountability for failures as well as successes
	Sought out by others for advice and solutions

Decision Quality will usually be used for Manager candidates, and is assumed to be a required baseline for advancement into higher levels, such as Director or Vice President. What traditional competency listings fail to take into consideration, however, is that the higher the leader's leadership level, the more advanced their sub-skills need to be. For example, at the Vice President level, it is expected that leaders not only possess these sub-skills but also have both the courage to make tough decisions, even when it creates hardship for others, and the experience to know when to overturn a decision for the strategic good of the business. Presuming someone at the higher level possesses these added skills when they actually don't is an assumption that results in major problems for the organization. One way to address this problem without creating a cumbersome list of competencies is to instead focus on critical shifts in the skills, thoughts and behaviors required for each leadership level that may or may not be in the same competency family.





## Critical Shifts

Critical Shifts are based on three important changes the leader must make to successfully move into the next, higher level.

- 1) Adding necessary skills to assume the broader responsibilities required by higher levels. For example, a Vice Presidents must expand his or her decision-making capabilities to include overturning a decision for the strategic good of the business.
- 2) Adjusting how the leader spends his or her time to better serve the needs of the company based on the expectations of their level. While a Manager's time is focused on the internal operations, a Vice President must adjust their time to understand external shifts in the market.
- 3) Gaining value for higher-level perspectives by broadening beliefs and values. For example, a First Line Supervisor must gain value for accepting and appreciating peoples' differences. A Vice President should not only share this value but also the value of being the custodian of the company culture.

Each of these three areas increases in complexity as the individual ascends the leadership ladder to positions of greater impact.

In the book *The Leadership Pipeline*, Charan, Drotter and Noel explain in detail the leadership career passages leaders must successfully navigate as they progress through the various levels of management. Movement from an individual contributor position to a supervisory position requires different shifts than moving from Director to Vice President. Each promotion is represented by a major change in the three pivotal areas of gaining skills, adjusting time and adding beliefs and values.

Take, for instance, a traditional competency of Directing Others. This normally includes the sub-skills of:

- Establishing clear directions, goals and measures
- Monitoring progress of goals
- Providing performance feedback
- Distributing work based on employees' abilities

However, the competency falls short by neglecting to include the shifts in what a leader values and how they spend their time. A supervisor must not only demonstrate the sub-skills listed but must, in addition, gain value for getting work done through others rather than doing it themselves. They must correspondingly adjust their time to help others perform successfully while accomplishing their own work.

This concept of going beyond skill competencies to the internal values of the person and how they spend their time adds a very important holistic view of the future leader. Problems in management occur when a leader is promoted but is still working at the skill level, time level or work values level of the previous position without making the shift to those required at their new level. The Supervisor who fails to spend their time mentoring someone on how to do the work, choosing instead to complete the work themselves because they believe it will be quicker, will ultimately fail in their role.

Problems in management also occur when a leader fails to adopt a specific shift required at a previous level yet still gets promoted to the next level. The executive who fails to analyze a problem based on the impact to employees, customers or stakeholders as well as the business outcomes will ultimately fail. When this senior leader communicates his chosen direction to the organization, he is shocked by the resistance and is unprepared to handle the emotional fall-out that has occurred. The skill of considering the impact to other stakeholders should have been acquired when the person was a functional manager and the gap went unnoticed. Unfortunately, it is often not a skill included in traditional competency assessments. Using a critical shift approach provides a more holistic view of capability.

## Start at the Beginning

One of the key rules to keep in mind as you take the assessment for the first time is to start at the Individual Contributor level regardless of your current or future desired level. Skipping an important shift, even at the earliest career level, will certainly show up later and become the career staller of an otherwise successful leader. These incomplete shifts are often used to describe someone believed to fit the "Peter Principle," a term coined by Lawrence J. Peter and Raymond Hull to describe the phenomenon in organizations where leaders promoted solely based on past achievement, success and merit eventually get promoted beyond their level of ability or competence.

As you complete the assessment, consider the size of your organization before selecting the position title. The leadership levels used in the assessment correspond to larger corporations. If you are in a small business, you may need to review the competencies of the different levels to determine which ones accurately apply to your company. For example, the Director skill level in small companies is often more in line with a Fortune 500 Senior Manager, and the expected skills of a Vice President in a small company are often equivalent to a Director in a large global firm where the scope is more complex. Adjust the tool to fit to the expectations for the levels in your company.

Even if you believe you are a high potential, assess yourself only to the next level of leadership beyond your current level. If you want to look through the assessment to even higher levels, do so, but don't assess to these. It is difficult for anyone to focus their development beyond two or three skills or behaviors regardless of their brilliance or capability. Doing so will only overwhelm you with unnecessary development areas and distract you from the focus you need today to prepare for tomorrow.

If there are gaps at any of the levels you held in the past, recognize that you will need to find a way to complete the missed shifts before focusing on anything at higher levels. If you avoid correcting a foundational gap, you will see it become a reoccurring problem area for you, eventually leading to your career stagnation or, in some cases, failure.

A commonly missed early shift, "gaining value for different approaches to work," occurs at the First Line Manager level. Too often leaders are promoted for their individual success and brilliance and not for enabling others to challenge that approach and find better ways to do the work. The leader may be able to continue to direct all aspects of the business in this First Line Manager level, allowing the problem to go undetected as his or her reports are reluctant to say anything to their manager's boss. This leader then gets promoted to Senior Manager and continues to expect their direct reports to think and approach work the same way they would. Now that the leader is managing other managers, however, these stronger, more self-assured managers reporting to the Senior Manager speak out and push back at the leader's attempts to force them into doing things the same way. These leaders then complain to the next level of leadership about their controlling Senior Manager. This next level intervenes by coaching the leader to change his behavior, telling the leader that this behavior is seen as holding back the progress of the Senior Manager's direct reports. If the leader does not change the behavior, they

are stalled in their own progression until they can prove they have mastered this important shift in behavior. If the behavior continues, the leader becomes categorized as "unpromotable," and the company either finds an individual contributor role for the leader or exits them out of the company.

## Approach for Technical Fellow

If you are assessing to a Technical Fellow level position, start by assessing to the full Individual Contributor level. Then, assess up to the Manager of Other Managers level. On the First Line Supervisor and Manager of Other Managers assessments, skip the "Learned to" category. Focus only on the "Gained value for" and "Adjusted your time to" categories on these pages. These columns provide the same influencing and informal leader behaviors that are expected of the Technical Fellow.

To determine the higher-level "Learned to" areas you need as a technical fellow, you must objectively assess your technical skills to the skills you observe in current fellows and senior fellows. Also, assess yourself against the competency needs of the business and industry you are working in.



**Your Self-Assessment on Critical Shifts**

Start with the Individual Contributor level and continue assessing yourself to the target level. If you want to improve your effectiveness at your current level, assess up to that respective level. If you are using the workbook to determine promotional potential, assess from the Individual Contributor to one level beyond your current level. For each section, think of specific examples where you demonstrated the skill or ability, the value or behavior. Having specific examples in mind will keep you focused on actual data rather than general opinion. As you work through the assessment, pay special attention to any gaps you have in earlier position levels as these tend to be large contributors to career stagnation.

*Use the following five-point grading scale to rate yourself.*

Possible Grades	
<b>A</b>	Role Model - recognized as a strength by others
<b>B</b>	Demonstrating
<b>C</b>	Learning
<b>D</b>	Absent or needs focused development
<b>N/A</b>	Not applicable

As an **INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTOR**, did you:

Possible Grades	
<b>A</b>	Role Model - recognized as a strength by others
<b>B</b>	Demonstrating
<b>C</b>	Learning
<b>D</b>	Absent or needs focused development
<b>N/A</b>	Not applicable

Learn to	Grade
Set goals and break work down into manageable steps	
Analyze solutions based on cost versus benefit	
Anticipate consequences of your decisions and create alternate or contingency plans	
Admit mistakes	
Meet or exceed your goals	
Build rapport with peers and management	
Establish integrity by being truthful and maintaining confidence	
Meet expectations and requirements of internal and external customers	
Communicate both orally and in writing to get messages across with the desired effect	
Establish ways to monitor own success	
Use logic and reasoning to analyze problems and recommend viable solutions	

Gain value for	Grade
Timely communication	
Sharing credit with others	
Different perspectives and experiences	
The customer's perspective and feedback	
Sharing knowledge and skills with others	
Providing timely information so that others can make accurate and timely decisions	

Adjust your time to	Grade
Manage changing work and life priorities	
Manage changing work and life priorities	
Assist others in finding solutions to problems	
Identify potential solutions to issues prior to asking others to solve the problem	
Keep your boss informed of critical issues, successes and results	
Focus on what is most important to both short term and long term success	

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Key Areas of Strength:

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Areas Needing Improvement (Limit to 3 or less):

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As a **FIRST LINE SUPERVISOR** or **MANAGER**, did you:

Possible Grades	
<b>A</b>	Role Model - recognized as a strength by others
<b>B</b>	Demonstrating
<b>C</b>	Learning
<b>D</b>	Absent or needs focused development
<b>N/A</b>	Not applicable

*Chapter Five*

**Coaching: Closing Gaps to Critical Shifts**

Learn to	Grade
Make goals clear and relate them to company goals	
Influence others who do not directly report to you	
Confront people's issues directly, fairly and in a caring and timely manner	
Plan and assign work	
Coach and develop others	
Assist in hiring and selection	
Instill passion and enthusiasm for other people's work	
Make solid decisions based on a combination of analysis, experience and judgment	
Take accountability for failures as well as successes for both your own and your team's work	
Delegate appropriately and give decision-making authority to those with experience and capability	
Build relationships with customers and respond to their needs while keeping the company's interests in mind	
Deal with people and process issues in an effective and timely manner	
Establish credibility and trust with others	



Now that your mind is clear, you will follow a series of steps and questions. You will use a separate journal to handwrite your answers. This will allow you to freely respond without being constrained by writing space within the workbook. Handwrite your answers rather than creating a typed journal to connect more deeply to your subconscious, creative and emotional brain.



**STEP 1**

Examine the “Gained value for” item you are trying to change, and identify what the contrary belief is. To do this, handwrite your responses to the questions in your journal.

1. *What contrary belief do I hold?*

Just write whatever comes to mind. For example, a contrary belief to sharing credit with others is, “If I do the majority of work, I should take the credit.” Once you’ve isolated this, proceed to the next question.

2. *Why do you believe this statement is true?*

It could be as simple as, “Sharing credit puts me at risk of being taken advantage of by others.” Then, ask yourself why this statement is true for you. “Because when I shared the credit with Tom and Joyce on my college projects, they told the professor they did the majority of the work, and it affected my grade.” In this example, we got to the real reason behind why the belief was held in only two whys. Often, it will take asking yourself up to five whys to uncover the real reason for your belief. Keep asking why until you have identified the initial circumstances in your past that led to this belief.

3. *What fears are associated with the beliefs connected to the value statement?*

The initial step might have uncovered some fears for you, like the fear of being taken advantage of in the example. If so, record those fears now. Ask yourself if there are any other fears associated with your beliefs tied to the value statement and capture those fears in your written response.



**STEP 2**

Compare the existing situation to the past situation. Ask yourself the following:

1. *In what ways is the current situation not like the original situation that triggered the belief?*
2. *In what ways is the current situation like the original situation that triggered the belief?*
3. *What is the probability that the fears associated with my belief will manifest in the current situation?*

In most cases, you will find there are numerous differences between past and present circumstances. In examining the reluctance to share credit, today’s differences may include being in a more professional environment, greater transparency of roles played by team members and an increased risk of the boss discovering that someone didn’t so what they said they did.

The purpose of the second step of finding commonalities between the two situations is to challenge your assumptions tied to the original fear. Often, we believe the circumstances are repeating themselves, but when we stop to examine our assumptions with logic, we find that the probability of the exact same event repeating itself is often far less than we emotionally feared. The third question allows you to complete this thought by realistically determining the probability of the worst case scenario.



**STEP 3**

Identify the actions you should take to comfortably change your belief by answering the following:

1. *What initial change would I need to make to demonstrate to myself that I no longer hold the old belief?*
2. *What support would I need to feel less at risk at acting on this new belief?*

If you are having trouble challenging your own thought patterns and beliefs, find someone who can help you. This may be a good friend, coach or mentor.

*Mentoring Guide*  
**Critical Skills Assessment**

Numbered items should be completed prior to the discussion with your mentor. Lettered items provide questions to ask your mentor and space to record your mentor's response.

1. The level I assessed to was: \_\_\_\_\_

2. The key strengths that will help me reach the goal we have set are:

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3. One to three critical gaps I need to work on to reach the goal we have set include:

Critical Gaps	Source: Competency, Value or Time	Position Level:
1.		
2.		
3.		

a. In what ways do these strengths and gap areas match or disagree with your thoughts of what I needed to work on?

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4. Some insights I gained from the journal work I did were (share as much as is comfortable):

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a. Have you experienced similar challenges and insights? Capture what you learn from your mentor's experiences.

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5. What I'd like your help with is (be as specific as possible):

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*Shoots and Ladders* was created for the leader in all of us as a way to improve our impact at the current level while preparing for the next. It enables the aspiring and the experienced to assess strengths and identify areas that often propel, stall or derail otherwise promising careers. Guided coaching sections promote deep insight and result in personally tailored action planning. Mentoring worksheets ensure continued learning through discussions with company advisors. *Shoots and Ladders* provides the tools to help you become the leader you know you can be.

*"Wow, I loved this workbook! Shoots and Ladders is a conceptually rich collection of step-by-step examples of how to move up in your career. This is a workbook that will not sit on the shelf. It is an excellent resource for all leaders to dissect and respond to chapter by chapter."*

**Patti Wilmot**

former Executive Vice President, *Peoplefirst; Domino's Pizza; current Founder, Wilmot and Associates*

*"Shoots and Ladders provides you with insight into what drives corporate promotion decisions and what factors determine long range career success. Individuals are guided through self-reflection to identify gaps and potential 'career staller,' making this self-help guide incredibly effective. I have had the privilege of being mentored/coached by Carlann personally, but if you aren't given that opportunity, this guide can be a game changer for you—not only in your career but also in your personal life. This is a must read!"*

**Joy Avery**

Executive Corporate Recruiter, *GE Healthcare*

*"Carlann Fergusson's workbook is a true insider's guide to leadership. She was present in the boardroom to learn executives' hiring preferences and shares these with you in this book. She includes a great series of self-assessments and not only pushes you to be honest but provides techniques and examples that draw out your honest answers! The book is a highly readable and doable approach to becoming a leader by examining yourself inside and out."*

**Adam Kashuba**

Director of Professional Development and Post-baccalaureate Programs, *Northwestern University School of Professional Studies*



#### About the Author

Carlann Fergusson is CEO of Propel Forward LLC. She is also an adjunct instructor for Northwestern University's Leadership Certificate Program and a Master Certified Coach. Prior to founding the company, she was an executive and manager for Fortune 500s, private companies and the Government. She has over twenty-five years of experience in selecting, developing and coaching leaders.



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