

Successful Women Think *Differently*

Valorie Burton



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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.

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Introduction



IT'S ALL IN YOUR MIND

If you have ever watched other women—no more talented than you—excel beyond your level of success or happiness, then you've likely wondered what made the difference. What makes one woman succeed at high levels while another—with seemingly more resources and experience—falls short of similar goals? Consider Michelle and Angela. The two women had known each other since grade school. They were like two peas in a pod, right down to their love of all things creative—fashion, music, art, and dance. They decorated each other's bedrooms with the creativity and passion of young Martha Stewarts. They grew up in the same neighborhood, had many of the same teachers, and shared similar home environments.

Yet glimpses of which one would be more successful could be seen even in their childhood. Michelle was the better student, but she was afraid to fail. She made safe choices to ensure she'd always succeed. She was a people pleaser, so she chose a career path that would please her parents and impress her peers: law. But Michelle wasn't passionate about law. She longed to do something outside the box, but fear paralyzed her from ever taking a step forward.

Underneath the studious façade was a creative mind who loved interior design. That was her passion, but could it pay the bills? With so much time, energy, and money invested in law school and her career, she felt trapped and unwilling to pursue the dreams and desires of her

heart. And anyway, the money was great. Even though she wanted to spend more time with her husband and five-year-old twin girls, she knew it was unreasonable to expect too much—great money *and* a flexible schedule. Truth be told, things looked picture-perfect from the outside, but inwardly Michelle was unfulfilled by her work, frustrated in her marriage, and disgusted by her growing waistline. She had little time for exercise and even less for the people who mattered most. Her work wasn't meaningful in a way that she longed for.

It had been almost ten years since she'd talked to Angela when she saw her at their high school reunion. As they caught up on each other's lives, Michelle sensed that Angela was genuinely happy. Unlike Michelle, Angela had pursued her dreams directly. Her philosophy was, "If it doesn't work out, I'll try something else. But why not go for what I really want first?"

Her philosophy paid off. Angela was in charge of model home interior design for a national homebuilder with real estate projects around the country. It was her dream job and she worked mostly from home, which was terrific since her daughter was not yet old enough for school. The road to success had been rocky. At each step along her path, there had been moments where fear crept in and threatened to steal her resolve. But each time, she had mustered the courage to push through. She was passionate about the work, which made it easier to persevere. She expected bumps in the road, and was not deterred by them. Instead, she was intentional about learning from them. And when she had no idea how to move forward in her marriage or career, she was intentional about seeking out information, learning to be a better communicator, and becoming more patient. Angela's life was by no means perfect, but it was successful. It had meaning, it was fulfilling, and she felt like she was living on purpose.

Angela was not more talented or smarter than Michelle. The key to Angela's success, as this book will show, is that successful women *think* differently. They make decisions differently. They set goals differently. They bounce back from failure and adversity differently. They tap into their innate strengths differently. Fortunately, their habits are teachable. Consider this book a short course—a coaching program designed to help you learn them.

My guess is that you already have some measure of success. After all, the kind of woman who picks up a book on success is typically already successful to some degree. But you know, deep down, that you've only scratched the surface of what's possible for you. You may often be praised for your accomplishments thus far, and yet you sense there is something more for you to do and be. Maybe you already know what the big goal is, but for some reason it feels elusive. I believe our paths have crossed because your full potential does not have to remain elusive. The purpose of this book is to give you that edge—a boost that gets you moving to the next level in your personal and professional life. It is a level that brings you not just accomplishment, but greater happiness.

Sometimes you may find yourself feeling stuck as you desire to move forward. Perhaps you've had some setbacks and wonder if your dreams will ever come together. Maybe you haven't even articulated what you *really* want: to do so would be to admit there is something you want that you might not get. It's easier to pretend you never wanted it than to go after it and fail. The disappointment would be too great. The embarrassment too, well, embarrassing. Or maybe, just maybe, you feel guilty about your desire for higher levels of success. After all, you're a woman. Society sometimes sends messages that leave you feeling guilty about looking for success beyond family—the implication being that such success means you are somehow neglecting your family or personal life. It is a pressure men generally do not experience to the same degree. In fact, a recent study showed that women feel significantly more guilt and distress about work intrusions at home—a finding that researchers speculate could be partially attributed to gender roles.* The cell phone calls and e-mails outside of work hours take a greater emotional toll on us.

After more than a decade of coaching women in almost every state in America and multiple foreign countries, and studying the massive research that exists on the subject of happiness and success, I have seen firsthand that women who succeed at manifesting the

* Paul Glavin, Scott Schieman, and Sarah Reid. "Boundary-Spanning Work Demands and Their Consequences for Guilt and Psychological Distress." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, March 2011, 43-57.

desires of their heart have a few things in common. Likewise, I have also observed some commonalities between women who struggle to achieve and sustain authentic success and happiness. Can you relate to any of these?

Successful Women	Unsuccessful Women
Courage in the face of fear	Feel sorry for themselves when things don't go as planned
A belief in their ability to navigate obstacles when they come	Give up once they fail
Relationships that strengthen them rather than weaken them	Relationships that drain their time and energy
Goals that are authentic to their deepest needs and desires	Define success by society's standards rather than their own
A sense of purpose and vision	Put successful women on a pedestal, as though there is some secret success formula they don't have access to
A perspective on life that accepts failure and mistakes as a normal part of the journey	Strive as though success is a destination, a place where she "arrives"
A habit of saying "no" to good opportunities in favor of purposeful ones	Focus on what they don't have rather than what they do have
A willingness to take risks	Are eternal procrastinators who won't get started because they fear failure and imperfection

Through the pages of this book, you will develop nine specific habits that have been proven to make you happier, healthier, and more resilient. These habits are skills that can be learned—and as you learn them, I encourage you to spread them. These are life skills every girl (and boy, for that matter) should learn in school while growing up. So as you begin to see a change in yourself, don't keep it to yourself! Share it. Pass it on. Pay it forward. Successful women are generous. They are

givers who believe not only in themselves, but in the potential of others. And as they succeed, they bring others along with them.

DEFINING SUCCESS

Whatever you assume I meant by the word “successful” in the book’s title is what I am guessing you want more of in your life. That word motivated you. And that’s good. Most people want success, whether they define it as having a happy family or climbing the corporate ladder or building a healthy bank account or fitting into a size six dress. But before I begin sharing concepts and strategies for success, let’s make sure we agree on what success is.

As I define it, success is a harmony of purpose, resilience, and joy. When these three elements flow together you will experience true success. Think of it this way: *Success is living your life’s purpose and embracing resilience and joy as you do.*

Let’s break this definition down further.

Purpose: Service fulfills the successful woman

Purpose is about making a difference in the lives of others. In other words, you cannot live your life’s purpose unless you are in some way serving others. Although our purpose often brings us joy, it is not about us. It is always about using your strengths in the service of others. Your purpose in life answers a simple question: How is someone’s life better because she has crossed your path?

Coach You:

Who do you impact?

Your Maker endowed you with gifts, talents, passions, and experiences that are unique to you. If I could travel back in time and observe you at four years old or fourteen years old, I would see traces of your uniqueness. Your strengths have been with you all along, and now it’s time for you to use them. There is a greater impact for you to make, and now is the time to make it.

In 1999, I had an epiphany about my life’s purpose while standing

in a bookstore: to inspire women to live fulfilling lives, and to do so through my writing and speaking. At the time I was running my own public relations firm, using my gifts and talents as a communicator, but I wasn't passionate about the work. My passion was lacking because those gifts were not being used for the purpose for which I was created: to serve women.

Maybe you can relate. You've got half the purpose formula right. You're using your gifts and talents, just not in a way that ignites your passion in service to others. Or maybe you're in the right place, serving those you are most passionate about, but you lack the opportunity to maximize the use of your gifts and talents in the way you've always dreamed. It can be quite frustrating. And as we will learn in a few chapters, negative emotion generated by feelings like frustration can sabotage your ability to be successful. Living your purpose is not only what you're here for, but it also empowers you to succeed.

Resilience: Hope sustains the successful woman

As you set out in pursuit of your dreams, you will inevitably face challenges, trials, and stumbling blocks along the way. A key to your success will be developing a critical skill that every truly successful woman possesses in abundance: resilience. Nothing is perhaps more important to actually achieving success than the ability to be resilient in the face of challenges. Whatever your vision for the future, the likelihood of obstacles on the path to that vision is almost certain.

Coach You:

What is your most meaningful goal?

This is where successful women excel. They think differently in the face of fear, failure, setbacks, and challenges. They say different things to themselves in the face of such obstacles. As you read, you will learn to become more self-aware about the thoughts that knock on the doorstep of your mind. You will learn to choose which ones to let in and entertain.

Joy: Happiness empowers the successful woman

Joy empowers you to succeed. As Nehemiah 8:10 reminds us, "The joy

of the LORD is your strength.” Wherever you are on your life’s journey, if you find a way to embrace it and enjoy it, you will already have found some measure of success.

Joy is not just about what happens in life—the little boosts of positive emotion that come when something makes you happy for a moment. Yes, that bite of chocolate will make you happy for a moment, so hey, savor it. But deeper joy comes from peace and love and knowing you are living the life you were meant to live. You can have all the little joy moments your heart can stand, but if you have to drag yourself out of bed in the morning to go to a job you dislike and come home to a contentious household every evening, you are not going to feel successful. Every truly successful woman seeks peace in her decisions, love in her relationships, and purpose in her life.

Coach You:

What brings you joy?

One constant among all of the women you’ll read about in the pages to come: They are happy with where they are in life. Though they have aspirations for the future and new frontiers they’ve yet to conquer, they are genuinely satisfied with how they have spent their lives so far—mistakes, triumphs, and all. As your coach through these pages, that’s what I want for you too: a sense of satisfaction and contentment with your life.

Women have a unique set of concerns and challenges to navigate on our path to success. We have unique societal expectations, ones that often tell us who we *should* be. But who we *want* to be may not fit into that box. I don’t know what life is calling you to, but I know that if it’s your purpose, you are uniquely equipped to fulfill that calling.

Success will quite likely look different for you than it does for the woman next door or even your mother or your sister. While we are all wired a bit differently, there are some basic foundations for happiness and success that must be present. When it comes to educating yourself on what it will take for you to achieve your next level of success—living your purpose while embracing resilience and joy—you will benefit from a perspective that honors your uniqueness as a woman.

THE APPROACH

As we get ready to delve further into this guidebook, let me take a moment to tell you a little more about my approach to this topic. First of all, I don't claim to know how successful women think differently because I'm the world's most successful woman. That would be too narrow and a bit presumptuous on my part! What I have found, through my interviews and coaching experiences over the years, as well as through graduate study in the field of psychology and study of the Bible, is that there are several basic, foundational truths about women's success and happiness. So here's the practical approach you'll find in this book:

- Real-life stories of real women, just like you, who have found that harmony of purpose, resilience, and joy that defines success. You'll learn from their failures and triumphs, and most importantly, their thought processes along the journey.
- Practical, relevant research, some of it surprising, about how successful women think and approach life differently from the average woman. This research will equip and educate you with the tools and knowledge that can get you to your goals.
- Coaching questions to help you determine your next step. Successful women know that when you ask the right questions, you get the right answers. Through the book, you will find questions to help you gain clarity about who you are, where you're going, and how to get there.
- Spiritual insights to strengthen you for the journey. God made no mistakes when He created you. You were uniquely designed for success in your purpose. When you align your life with your strengths—those innate qualities you were gifted with—you will tap into a level of grace that empowers you to achieve things you could never accomplish in your strength alone. Throughout the book, you will be reminded of the power at work in you when you open yourself to His divine love and guidance.

Throughout the book, I will reference practical research from the pioneering academic field of positive psychology. Positive psychology doesn't focus on people's problems. Instead, it's the study of happiness, success, resilience, courage, strengths—all the things that empower you to thrive in life and work.

A NOTE ABOUT COACHING

As you read, you'll see that I use the term “coaching” and provide you with coaching questions. Coaching is the process of asking thought-provoking questions and providing a safe space to explore the answers, empowering you to take action, learn, grow, and ultimately get moving toward your destination.

This is where transformation takes place. While the stories and research insights will inspire you and give you practical knowledge that you can apply to your everyday life, the coaching questions will give you clarity about which steps to take next. Do not skip over the questions. Refuse to hurry through this process. Instead, savor it. If you do, I guarantee that you will experience real change before you finish this book.

As your coach through these pages, my goal is to be a catalyst. I'm just a vessel here to get a message to you. What you do with that message is up to you. I believe the power lies within you to make changes and adjustments in your life that will lead you straight to your dreams. One step at a time, one day at a time, expand and explore your options. Take action. Notice what works and what doesn't, then make adjustments. Take another step. That's coaching.

My ultimate goal is to help you develop the habit of coaching yourself. You won't always have another person there to coach you—or even a book to spark guidance and direction—but you will always have you. If you develop the skills to coach yourself, you will have a consistent advantage in life. Because your choices, the ones you make from here on out, will make the difference.



Seven Key Decisions



Choices that will change your life

Before we dive into the first chapter, let's stop here to establish the guiding principles for this book. They are seven personal decisions that I encourage you to embrace as a way of life. Without adopting these principles as your own, you may find the lessons in this book difficult to apply to your life.

These seven choices are a set of personal decisions for women who are serious about maximizing their personal and professional lives—women, like you, who don't want to look back ten years or twenty years from now with regret. Every woman who experiences authentic success—a harmony of purpose, resilience, and joy in her life—has incorporated these decisions into her life. As you turn these pages, you will see them at play. I am asking you right now to commit to them. They are simple but profound choices about your thought processes. No matter what you encounter on your journey towards your vision, these seven decisions will steer you in the right direction, restore peace and confidence, and boost your happiness even in the midst of challenges.

Decision #1: I do not downsize my dreams.

Perhaps Mark Twain said it best: “It isn't the things we did that we most regret; it's the things we didn't do.” To succeed at a high level, you must start expecting more. Even when you don't get everything you expect,

you'll get a whole lot more than if you were expecting nothing at all. The moment you choose to settle, you guarantee you'll never achieve your real dream. Choose faith over fear.

Decision #2: I focus on solutions, not problems.

The bigger you dream, the more opportunity for obstacles, challenges, and problems. Choose a mindset that sees these problems as opportunities for growth, and you will eventually walk into your vision. Just as importantly, when you focus on solutions you attract opportunities. People are so used to complainers, excuse-makers, and problem-generators that your refreshing bent toward solutions will be a success magnet.

Decision #3: I choose to be authentic.

Be yourself. Who else can you be? It takes less effort and energy to be yourself, but it also takes courage. Fear that you will not be accepted or approved just as you are can lead you to send your "representative" out into the world. She looks like the real you, but she's not. She's a counterfeit and whatever success she has is built on false pretenses that you must keep up in order to maintain success. Aim to be the best *you* possible—nothing more, nothing less.

Decision #4: I choose courage over fear.

Like problems, fear is inevitable. But it's not a stop sign. Fear is the most common obstacle to achieving true success and happiness. Fear tempts you to shrink from your authentic desires. It causes you to rationalize yourself out of a great idea. It leads you to pretend you don't really want what you *really* want. Like problems, fear is inevitable. But it's not a stop sign. Refuse to succumb to it.

*Decision #5: I choose relationships
wisely and nurture them intentionally.*

Success doesn't occur in a vacuum. You need people, and people need

you. Those with a strong support system have the resources that open doors of opportunity and empower them to manage any challenge. By the same token, there is a deep sense of well-being that occurs when we give to others, offering support, kindness, and love. Don't go it alone. Happiness and energy come in relationship with others.

Decision #6: I will actively seek feedback and use it to grow.

You need people around you who tell you the truth. Resilient women know this. And even when they don't like what they hear, they listen, process it, and ask themselves, "Is there a grain of truth to this feedback, even if it's negative?" Your limited perspective is not enough. Be humble, and use failures and mistakes as learning tools. Put yourself around people who know more than you, and learn all you can from them.

Decision #7: I know my purpose and take daily action in the direction of my vision.

Consistency is key. If you continually take steps in the right direction, you will eventually arrive at your destination. Consistent action yields consistent results. "For a dream comes through much activity, and a fool's voice is known by his many words," King Solomon promised in the book of Ecclesiastes (5:3 NKJV).

Take a look at these Seven Key Decisions again. Are you willing to adopt them as your own? Which one stands out as your favorite? Which one will require a shift in attitude for you? Make a commitment to these seven decisions by making an agreement with yourself. Sign it as a symbol of your pledge. Post these commitments where you will see them often.

Seven Key Decisions	
Decision #1:	I do not downsize my dream.
Decision #2:	I focus on solutions, not problems.
Decision #3:	I choose to be authentic.
Decision #4:	I choose courage over fear.
Decision #5:	I choose relationships wisely and nurture them intentionally.
Decision #6:	I actively seek feedback and use it to grow.
Decision #7:	I know my purpose and take daily action in the direction of my vision.
Name:	
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