



Please direct all communication to jacqueline@thefearlessfactoratwork.com

The Fearless Factor @ Work

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jacqueline@thefearlessfactoratwork.com

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Opportunities to find deeper powers within ourselves come when life seems most challenging...

–Joseph Campbell, Reflections on the Art of Living

A special shout-out to Mary Van De Weil (Van) who inspired me many years ago with the title The Fearless Factor and started a revolution in my life!

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

Why This Book? 3

An Unconventional Life 5

1 THE JOURNEY BEGINS 9

VITAL Elements

Be Curious 12 Take the Next Step 14

2 BE FEARLESS 17

Fear in the Workplace 18

Fear Is Optional 20

Fear Is Imagination Based 23

Courage to Change 26

Being Vulnerable 29

Courage Is A Verb 32

Fail Your Way to Success 35

Success Follows Failure 38

Fear of Not Being Enough 40

Are You Good Enough? 42

Deep Dive 45

3 BUILD TRUST 47

Do You Trust Yourself? 48

Trust and the Brain 50

Trust Is Uncertain 52

Trust Is Personal 54

Trust Is Risky 57

Get Comfortable Being Uncomfortable 58

Trust Builds Strong Teams 59

Building Trust as a Leader 61

Trust is a Choice 65

Empathy Builds Trust 68

Empathy Matters 72

Trust Rules 74 Deep Dive 76

4 QUESTION EVERYTHING 79

Change Begins with Questions 79

Questions Confront Fear 81

Are You Faking It? 82

Question Everything 83

Deep Dive 85

5 BECOME SELF-AWARE 87

Who Are You? 88

Holding Up the Mirror 89

How Aware Are You? 91

Beware Negative Self-Talk 92

Burnout Is Killing Your Career 94

It's a Cultural Thing 98

Understanding Our Differences 99

Deep Dive 104

6 ARE YOU MOTIVATED? 105

It Don't Come Easy 106

Learn, Grow, Achieve 107

Becoming Self-Actualized 109

Deep Dive 112

7 BUILD YOUR LEADERSHIP MUSCLES 113

Develop Your Muscles 114

Communicate Your Strengths 114

Essential Strength Builders 115

What's Your Plan? 117

Deep Dive 119

8 FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE IS COSTLY 121

Communication Is Everything 122

Communication Is Simply a Conversation 122
Feedback Moves You Forward 123
Feedback Is an Art 126
Develop a Habit of Inquiry 127
Listening to Be Understood 129
Four Levels of Listening 131
Words Matter 133
Be Careful of the Words You Use 134 Deep Dive 138
9 DREAM BIG: VISION AND VALUES 141
What's Your Vision? 142
Share Your Vision 145
What Do You Want to Do When You Grow Up? 147
An Intuitive Hunch 148
Looking in the Rearview Mirror 149
What Do You Value? 152
Values Impact Your Relationships 153
Are You Living a Purposeful Life? 156
Deep Dive 161
10 ACCELERATE YOUR OPPORTUNITIES 163
G.O.A.L.S. 163
Be Audacious 165
Define Your Goals 168 Create a Map 169
Deep Dive 172
11 FEELING APPRECIATED 173
Do You Care? 174
Appreciation Supports Growth
Why is Appreciation Hard to Do? 178
Appreciation Creates Momentum 180
Deep Dive 183
12 BEING INFLUENTIAL IS A GAME CHANGER 185
Influence Moves Mountains 186
My Life Evaluator 210
My Guiding Affirmation 217
Where are the GAPS? 222
Fear 223
Trust 225
Question Everything 227
Self-Awareness
Motivation 230
Leadership Muscles 231
Communication 232
Dream Big: Vision and Values 234
Dream Big: Purpose 235
Accelerate: Goals 236

Appreciation 237
Influence 238
Legacy 239
Influence Is Emotional 187
Elements of Influence 189
Influence and Power 191
Influence and Trust 191
Influence Is Goodwill 193
Build Your Network 194
Deep Dive 196
13 WHAT IS YOUR LEGACY? 197
What Will They Say About You When You're Gone? 198
Your Legacy: Being vs. Doing 200
Deep Dive 202
14 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS 203
15 WORKSHEET GUIDE 209
RECOMMENDED READING 240
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 243
ABOUT THE AUTHOR 245

“Psychological safety in the workplace starts with two things: self-awareness and the courage to change. In The Fearless Factor @ Work, Jacqueline Wales gives readers a priceless roadmap that takes them on a journey to better relationships and greater success.”

–Dr. Tasha Eurich, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Insight* and *Bankable Leadership*

INTRODUCTION

“It is not the strongest of species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change.”

–Charles Darwin

YOU ARE AMBITIOUS. You work hard to get the promotions and the recognition you deserve. You’re constantly thinking about ways you can do your work better. There is a desire for a better work/life balance, but you’re not sure how you can achieve it. You spend more time at work than you do at home, and you wonder if you will ever find satisfaction.

Do you want to build more trust with your team and communicate more effectively, but it’s difficult? You think you could be more productive but stuff keeps getting in the way? You feel like you’re spinning your wheels and no one seems to give a damn?

What if you had the insights, tools and skills you need to do your job well? How would it feel if you got the recognition you deserve and were promoted? Does the idea of living a life of accomplishment and fulfillment excite you? This book is written as a guide to help you create the life you want, offering insights you need to accelerate your career and elevate your life to the next level.

I will challenge your thinking and behavior. You will take risks, step out of your comfort zone, and get comfortable with being uncomfortable. You will be challenged to think deeply, explore intently, and identify ideas and insights to nudge the needle in the direction you truly want to go.

I will ask you to test your assumptions about what you can and cannot do, and offer a vision for growth. I will applaud your accomplishments and celebrate your wins.

Consider this book a virtual mentor as you develop greater self-awareness, trust, and ability to communicate more effectively. You will acquire skills to make better decisions, evolve strategies for success, and build relationships that will last long after you have moved on to another job or career.

No matter how knowledgeable you think you are about being a good leader, there is always more to be learned. Curiosity is a key ingredient of learning and development. When you are curious, you are constantly adding knowledge and understanding to your repertoire in order to expand and grow. This book asks many

questions to stimulate your curiosity and find answers that only you can provide, because it's your life, your journey.

I've been perpetually curious all my life. *Why?* is my defining question. *What's that about?* follows, and ultimately, *What about that matters?* is the clarifying question that underlies everything to give it true meaning.

I encourage you to enter this journey of exploration with curiosity and a commitment to growth, knowing you can create the satisfaction you want at work and in life. You will discover the heart of what matters to you.

Why This Book?

Ten years ago, I wrote and published *The Fearless Factor*, a deeply personal story that spoke to the fears and uncertainties we all face in growing up, becoming more confident, and creating our best lives. My intent was to help people who struggled with the same fears and doubts I had experienced. I offered insights into how to move beyond limitations and create the life they wanted.

I shared my personal story of overcoming a perilous childhood and an adolescence filled with fear and instability. I had lived a life inhabited by alcoholism, drug abuse, unwanted pregnancy, and constant uncertainty. I wanted to inspire possibilities in others who struggled with their own uncertainties.

In conversations with hundreds of people across the globe, I found a common theme of fear: fear of taking the next step, fear of not being good enough, fear of never being loved. People fear finding out that all the negative things they think about themselves are actually true.

Fear is an emotion, evolved as part of our DNA to keep us safe. Running across the savannah, fear was useful to know whether you should stay and fight or run for your life. It is as primitive an emotion as the joy you feel when a baby is born, but instead of bringing happiness, it frequently leads to confusion and despair.

I have made it my life journey to understand fear, because fear had kept me in a tight grip since childhood. I became curious and alert to underlying beliefs that kept me thinking and playing small.

My journey took me across three continents and countless experiences that challenged me to become the woman I am today. Over the years, I became a writer, poet, singer, martial artist, pretty decent wife, mother of four, and a professional coach and facilitator of change.

While writing *The Fearless Factor*, I invited women to share their stories of becoming fearless in order to inspire and motivate others to go beyond their insecurities and seize the courage to live the life they wanted. Their best lives, now!

Throughout the book, I asked more than a hundred questions to give readers an opportunity to find answers which would spark an “aha” moment. These questions became the foundation for my programs.

It takes courage and fearlessness to get honest with yourself. I was tempted to call this book *Stop Looking for Answers and Start Asking the Right Questions*, as you can't find answers without asking the right questions. Many thought-provoking questions also are offered throughout this book. Using them wisely can provide the insights you need to create the life and career you want.

I've worked with hundreds of clients who struggle with self-confidence, communication skills, decision making, relationships, financial insecurity, and career- building strategies, to name a few categories. When working with new clients, I start with three simple questions: “Where are you now?” “Where do you want to go?” and “What is getting in your way?”

What's getting in your way is rarely clear, but if you are willing to explore and stay open to possibilities, the answers will be found. When this happens, new thinking and behavior come into focus.

An Unconventional Life

“Be bold, be brave enough to be your true self.”

–Queen Latifah, singer, actress

I've been coaching and guiding in one way or another my entire life. My career began on the steps of my tenement building in Leith, Scotland around the age of nine, when the neighborhood kids would ask me, “What do you think?” This became a frequent theme throughout my life, both personally and with complete strangers.

I can safely say my life has been unconventional. I left my home in Scotland at age sixteen with a one-way ticket to London. I spent time in various countries and continents, going down paths that challenged me to explore my best and worst characteristics. I gave birth to children I would not live with, married twice, and showed up in countries where I knew no one. With no money, I found jobs that supported a roof over my head but not much else. I drank excessively for a few years, joined Alcoholics Anonymous, and five years later understood it was not about the drinking, it was my *thinking* that was the problem.

I worked as a temporary secretary but found the corporate world too rigid. Not feeling that I belonged in that environment, I rejected any opportunity to build a career path.

I wanted the freedom to choose when I worked, and I left when I was bored! Work was more about survival than forging a career. I needed money to pay the rent and keep the lights on. After finishing a degree in Medieval History (my interest was in heresy), I had a vague idea that maybe I could teach. But there was a significant problem.

My head was full of negative chat. I heard an inner voice that echoed my father's words: *You will never amount to much*. It was a recipe for failure and I was doing my best to prove him right. At the same time, a small voice said, *You can do better*.

There were many people who believed in me and encouraged me to try harder. My belief in myself was extremely low. I took some convincing. Therapists, coaches and mentors showed me how things could be different. Slowly, I began to push beyond my dysfunction and realize how capable I truly was...and how I could help others do the same.

I like to say I earned a PhD in Life Skills from the School of Hard Knocks. If I had half the sense I have now, I might have taken an easier route. But then again...

Change has been the biggest driver of my life, invited or not! Taking risks has been a great teacher and a hard taskmaster. Change brought considerable fear. I found I needed curiosity and courage to face my truths and explore the possibilities that life could be different. I've reinvented my life so many times that I sometimes wonder who and where I will be five years from now.

I bring my passion for helping people change to everything I do. It's what gets me out of bed in the middle of the night to write this book. It motivates me to show up each day with one burning concern: to help people create a life of purpose, meaning and commitment, and to discover inner resources to build the life they desire.

I firmly believe that by helping one person become a better version of themselves, they will help others do the same. It's a domino effect.

1

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

“Resilient leaders make things fall into place, unlike other leaders. They don’t blame their circumstances. Instead they take responsibility for their actions and invest their efforts to influence situations and outcomes.”

–Professor M.S. Rao, international leadership guru, author of forty-eight books including the award- winning *See the Light in You*

THIS BOOK IS BASED on my experience in working with clients who have made a commitment to change their professional and personal lives. It is the result of more than thirty years of education in behavioral and organizational challenges, hundreds of books read, countless seminars, conferences, certifications, and facilitating my own leadership training programs. These experiences have led me to a profound understanding of what it takes to be a great leader.

We are all leaders of our own lives. If you aspire to be a leader of others, you must first do your own work. Self- awareness is the first step in any change process. Great leaders are not born, they are forged in the steel of experience, both positive and negative. Ultimately, great leaders become conscious of their impact on the world around them and choose to make change a positive experience for everyone.

Change is hard. Facing our limitations, feelings of inadequacy, and beliefs that we are not good enough impacts many of us.

In order to change, you must let go of limited thinking and confront the behaviors that do not serve your best interests. Letting go of what doesn’t serve you is a journey of discovery. Whether you know it or not, limited thinking has influenced the quality of your life. As a simple test, ask yourself, “Is my life working the way I want it to?”

In order to change, you must believe there is something better. To do that, you need a vision of where you want to go.

VITAL Elements

Having a vision of where you're going is the first step of the **VITAL** acronym I use for The Fearless Foundations of Great Leadership program. It stands for **Vision, Insights, Trust, Appreciation** and **Legacy**. Cultivating each of these elements creates strong leaders who make a difference in organizations.

When you have a **Vision** of where you're going and what you want, and can imagine your future, your vision will pave the way to your success.

Insights offer a path to clarify your strengths and weaknesses, the understanding you need to achieve your vision. Over time, your vision and insights will not only provide greater knowledge of who you are, but also what is possible, and how you can achieve it.

When you have gained this awareness, you will learn to **Trust** yourself, move beyond the fears that get in the way of your success, and build trust with others.

You will learn to **Appreciate** how important it is to have this self-awareness, and to value the contributions of others by showing them that you care.

When you put these VITAL elements together, you will influence people positively and leave a lasting impression that becomes your **Legacy**.

Paraphrasing Maya Angelou, "It doesn't matter what you do, or what you say, it's the way you make people *feel* that matters." When you leave a lasting impression of good feeling, you have made a difference in someone's life.

In the course of this book, I will cover the fundamentals of the VITAL acronym, not necessarily in the exact order of the acronym. You will learn how each of these elements correlate to form the big picture.

At the end of each chapter you will find a section called Deep Dive, containing powerful questions designed to produce greater understanding. These questions are also in the Worksheet guide at the end of the book.

Be Curious

"Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything."

–George Bernard Shaw

Change is not for the faint of heart. Less than 2% of the world's population actually makes a conscious effort to change. Most of the time, change happens through circumstance.

To change, you must be curious. It takes courage to look yourself in the mirror and ask:

- Who do I want to become?
- What actions must I take to create the life I want?
- What is the best way forward?
- Where do I stand in my own way? ○ What does a good life look like?

We spend our lives looking for *answers*—the opposite of what we should be doing. Imagine if you spent your life looking for the *right questions*. What do you think might happen?

Discovering “aha” moments—when something clicks and you just know the right answer, decision or choice—is expansive and illuminating. What sparks these insights?

I guarantee that is a great question.

Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” He believed a conversation that stimulates ideas based on asking and answering questions is the most dynamic of all human behaviors. This became known as the Socratic method. The intention is to help a person or group discover deeper meaning and explore alternative actions and ideas. This is the very definition of coaching.

When you ask powerful questions, you must stop and consider the reasons *why* you are asking these questions. It's not enough to find the answers; you also need to know why these answers are important to *you*.

Throughout this book I will present deep, reflective questions that can lead to powerful answers. It takes courage and fearlessness to truly embrace the power of questions, because questions lead to insights that accelerate some kind of change.

Socrates spoke of courage as “endurance of the soul.” To transform yourself, you must be resilient and willing to endure any discomfort that occurs as part of your change process. As I cheerfully tell my clients, “Get comfortable being uncomfortable.” It's how we change for the better!

The power of questions cannot be underestimated. Questions help uncover the layers of what is most important to you, and ultimately unlock areas where you

need to grow. If you take this journey seriously and dig deeply to answer your own questions, a treasure trove of insights awaits you. In the hard work of asking powerful questions lie insights that will change your thinking, and ultimately change your life.

Take the Next Step

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.”

–Lao Tzu, *The Art of War*

The Journey Begins

Finding direction in life takes time. We all need guides to help us find the way. Whether using self-development tools like this one or sharing what’s most important to you with another, finding direction is about figuring out what you want, and what it will take to get you there.

The truth is: We all know what’s good for us. We know what we should be doing, could be doing, and are not doing. The tricky part is staying on task and sticking with it when it gets hard, because once you are committed to change, you’re in. There is no turning back. You can’t just suddenly turn off the spigot and hope you can go back to being who you were. It’s a law of physics: Once the wheels are in motion, they stay in motion.

This is an action book. It asks hard questions and demands answers that only you can provide. If you are committed to being the best version of yourself, you will do the necessary work. If you are looking for magic bullets, this isn’t it. Don’t skip over the deep dive section at the end of each chapter. Take time to reflect on how they resonate in your life.

You will feel things you may not have felt for some time, or maybe ever. You will step into realities that have been with you for a long time, that have made you uncomfortable and probably scared you. Through this process, you will grow and become the person you want to be: a Fearless leader, a Fearless entrepreneur, a

Fearless individual who possesses the courage to change.

All adventures start with the unknown.

Are you willing to make the journey and commit to being the best version of you?

2

BE FEARLESS

“Hope and fear cannot occupy the same space. Invite one to stay.”

–Maya Angelou

FEAR IS THE BACKGROUND noise of many people’s lives. Fear is a constant din that keeps you hypervigilant, always on the lookout for trouble, dealing with limitations that define your life. By identifying the fears holding you back and learning how you can overcome them, you can create the life you desire.

Fear in the Workplace

We live in a world where governance is distrusted. Many organizations struggle with employee disengagement, lack of trust, and confusion over roles and regulations. As I write this book, a global pandemic threatens the stability of our world.

We live in a VUCA world: Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous. Many companies struggle with unpredictability and a sense of not knowing what’s going to happen next. With the rise of new technologies, the complexity of our world has only increased.

Every day employees are expected to do more with less. Employees are asked to change gears at a moment’s notice and to adjust to frequent managerial changes. They experience both physical and mental fatigue and may feel their efforts are futile, which gives rise to cynicism and a feeling of helplessness, leading to avoidance and absenteeism and general disconnection from work. This in turn often leads to confusion and burnout, the number-one cause of employee dissatisfaction in today’s workplace.

Is it any wonder that fear is prevalent in organizations?

ACCORDING TO STUDIES done by the EI Leadership Institute, the three fundamental needs of every human being are the **need to belong**, the **need for empowerment** and the **need for meaning**. These factors are critical to performing at our best, as they keep us connected to people and the work we do in a meaningful way.

Unfortunately, many employees do not feel connected or empowered and struggle with finding meaning in the work they do. Given that we spend 60% or more of our days at work, this lack of connection and meaning is a huge disconnect in the workplace. Many feel they are simply a cog in the wheel, and lack of engagement between team members becomes the norm.

The numbers speak for themselves. According to a Gallup survey in 2019, 34% of the workforce was actively engaged. 53% were not engaged, meaning they came to work, did the minimum, and were ready to jump ship if a better offer came their way. 13% were totally disengaged, an improvement from 2016 when this number was 16% (so there is hope)!

These figures present an often-untapped opportunity for companies to increase performance and profitability: helping to provide belonging, empowerment, and meaning for employees. Strategically engaging workers in growth and development programs must be a priority in order for a company to thrive. When companies truly believe that employees are their best assets, then employee care and support are given high priority.

Fear Is Optional

Fear is an extraordinary motivating force because it sets us a challenge to change something that's not working.

–Jacqueline Wales, *The Fearless Factor*

Fear is a physical and psychological response built into our DNA. The fight-or-flight syndrome is situated in the primitive part of our brain known as the amygdala and is an instinctive response to feelings of threat, real or imagined.

The amygdala does not distinguish between real and imagined threats. When triggered, it causes a reaction that leads to fight or flight. This is the point where we decide if we should stand our ground or run.

When your amygdala is activated, you make up stories to validate how you are feeling: anxious, stressed, confused, uncertain, etc. You can run, hide, defend, deny, blame, or control; or you can look fear square in the face and ask, *What's that about? Why am I having this reaction?* To do this takes courage. That's how "Feel the fear and do it anyway" works!

As our prefrontal cortex, the executive brain, develops, we begin to question, taking a more analytical approach to make sense of perceived threats. We discover that most of our fears are based in imagination.

I have facilitated dozens of 360° assessments for clients that are designed to evaluate behavior in individuals and organizations. These scientific tools analyze specific behaviors that help individuals and organizations make measurable improvements at work, and in their personal lives. During the course of this work, I have realized that fear is a core issue for many in the workplace. Fear shows up in behaviors that limit performance and undermine potential success.

Fear operates below the surface and keeps you from living and working at your highest level of engagement. When you consider the number of people who are not engaged (53%) in the workplace, you find that many of these fear-induced behaviors work against individual self-interest, undermine many aspects of the individual's existence, and negatively impact organizations.

TO BE CONTINUED...