

Wander Woman

How High-Achieving Women
Find Contentment and Direction



MARCIA REYNOLDS

An Excerpt From

***Wander Woman:
How High-Achieving Women Find Contentment and Direction***

by Marcia Reynolds
Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers

CONTENTS

Preface ix

PART I

THE QUIET REVOLUTION

ONE The Road to Somewhere 3

TWO The Burden of Greatness 26

PART II

INTENTIONAL TRANSFORMATION

THREE Claiming Your Selves 47

FOUR Debunking Your Assumptions 71

FIVE Opening the Windows 91

SIX Choosing Your Course 116

PART III

WANDERING ON PURPOSE

SEVEN Maintaining the Momentum 135

EIGHT Navigating Through, Below,
or Away from the Glass 157

NINE Raising the Flag 183

TEN A Tribe, or a Growing Revolution? 196

Notes on the Research 203

Chapter Notes 207

Acknowledgments 219

Index 223

About the Author 233

PREFACE

This book is for you, Wander Woman. You represent the new face of high-achieving women who started moving into management positions about twenty-five years ago. You are different from the women who came before you. You are more confident, assertive, and active. Instead of hiding behind your desk, you put yourself on the front lines by constantly convincing, persuading, calculating, demonstrating, creating, and braving your way through corporate hallways. Your manager may label you rebellious and competitive. You see yourself as passionate. In your mind, you weren't hired to be efficient; you were hired to change the world. If your style becomes more of a problem than an asset, the difficulty doesn't last for long. As soon as you feel you can no longer make a significant impact in your domain, you move to another department or company. Or, you decide you can more easily change the world by being your own boss.

On the surface, this lifestyle sounds exciting. You start each new job with grand visions for what you can accomplish. Then reality hits and the job disappoints. Too often, you are pigeonholed, underutilized, micromanaged, and told to slow down. You spend more time planning exit strategies than you do envisioning your career. Somewhere along the way, the excitement turns into cynicism. The more you wander, the more likely you are to lose your sense of purpose and possibly your sense of self.

"I'm running out of options," Kali, age thirty-nine, told me. "I start a job with great anticipation, move up quickly,

and then somewhere along the line, I wake up with this gnawing sense that it's over. The work isn't meaningful anymore. My boss avoids me because he can't give me what I want. So I start making plans to leave." I asked Kali if she had ever tried to change the organization instead of rearranging her life. She answered, "That's a battle I don't want to fight."

I have observed this shift in the demeanor of high-achieving women firsthand through my years of coaching female top talent and in the women attending my leadership classes worldwide. Year after year, the women I work with are more hopeful and bold than ever before. They are also more stressed and perplexed about their futures. When I tried to find resources I could share with my clients to help them better understand themselves and their choices, I found none. Management training and, sadly, many women's development programs have yet to fully recognize the shift. Classes and business books for women still focus on helping them find their voice, balance their life, or strategize their way to the top of their organization. My clients don't need to find their voice; they know how to roar. They don't expect to balance their life; they long to find peace in the chaos. They aren't focused on organizational politics; they want significant projects they can run with or businesses they can run on their own. More than anything, they seek to know what they can accomplish in this lifetime without feeling exhausted and lonely in the end.

The shift is so profound you might call it a revolution, but no one has ventured to name what is happening. You might not have realized that thousands of women have the same burning issues and desires that you have and seek contentment and direction as you do. My clients are also surprised to hear how many other women face the same challenges as theirs. They are glad to know you exist, too. Together, you can bring the revolution to light.

To help increase this awareness and fill in the gaps of

understanding, I chose to do my doctoral research on what today's high-achieving women are doing in the workplace that keeps them from achieving executive positions. My research included multiple surveys with one hundred women between the ages of twenty-nine and fifty-two in the United States who fit my profile for "high achiever," plus ten intensive interviews with a random sample. The details of the study are described in the back of this book. More than half of the women were married and most of these women had children, so there was a balance between single women and those with families.

What I discovered through my surveys and interviews was that today's high-achieving women care less about the boardroom than they do about their strong desire to contribute. They have a longing for motion and meaning that often doesn't synchronize with the vertical ascent up the corporate ladder that so many people expected of them—and that they had expected of themselves when they started their careers. Therefore they often intentionally take themselves out of the running for leadership positions as they wander around looking for the elusive "something more" they need to do in this lifetime.

The paradox is that although the women feel confident about their choices, they are plagued by their restlessness. This "soulful agitation" leads them to accomplish great things but it leaves them aching for what's missing. They constantly question the value of their jobs, the definition of their purpose, the certainty of their identity, and their roles as wives, mothers, and sisters. Yet they still feel justified in keeping their lives in motion. It wasn't until I began writing this book that I found myself calling this group of women "Wander Women." The urge to move, mentally if not physically, is lodged in their souls. If they don't geographically move, they seek to change the landscape with new projects at work or at home, including a wide variety of volunteer commitments. Yet in spite of their constant drive for fulfill-

ment, they long for contentment and peace of mind. The first question I wanted to answer after I completed my research was, “What tools for both success and happiness can I provide these women beyond writing a new resume?”

I wrote this book to offer the guidance and support you and your fellow strong, smart, and passionate sisters have been missing using methods I’ve been able to test with high-achieving women worldwide. In addition to my extensive research, I have decades of experience coaching women one-on-one and as a part of leadership development classes I teach for multinational companies. I also speak at conferences for women and I interact with women through blogging and teleseminars. My research and experience helped me to refine the techniques I offer and to provide case studies to assist you in adapting the techniques in this book.

The exercises and strategies in this book are enhanced by my own experiences as a leader, an employee, a high-achieving woman, a family member, and, finally, as a wayward teenager who rebelled against the standards and expectations others were setting for me. The lessons I learned during this very dark period gave me special insights on what it takes to re-create a life. I share my own stories in this book because all the research I have done and the intellectual wisdom I have gathered mean very little without facing my self-deception. Because I am asking you to make the same hard examination for yourself, I feel it is important to share my own journey. Be prepared to go on a more intense journey of transformation than you would when reading a typical “how to” book touting easy steps for success. I guarantee the results to be more lasting and fulfilling.

After the “dark days” of my twenties, I accumulated degrees, experience, and certifications that helped me formulate the content of this book, with coaching being most significant. My corporate positions were in training and organizational development departments. I experienced the typical frustration of watching people participate with

gusto in a training class but then, when back on the job, apply very little of what they had learned. In my search for new techniques, I enrolled in a coaching school in 1995. I quickly saw the power of coaching to make the mental shifts required before behavioral change can occur. My passion for coaching led me to help establish the International Coach Federation (ICF), hold the position of president of the ICF in 2000, and become one of the first hundred people in the world to hold the certification of Master Certified Coach. I have woven in powerful coaching questions and techniques throughout this book to both motivate and maintain the commitment to change.

In the late 1990s, Daniel Goleman's book *Emotional Intelligence* led me to dig deeper into the brain research being done that was redefining how we mentally process new information.¹ I felt I had discovered one more important step in helping people make behavioral changes. To satisfy my hunger for knowing more, I chose to get my doctorate in organizational psychology. Every paper I wrote gave me deeper insights into my life choices as well as into the struggles many of my female coaching clients were experiencing. My doctoral work helped me to define "the burden of greatness" that high achievers now experience and the steps for Appreciative Dialogue (see chapter 5) to help them carry forward what is good in their lives to resolve their urgent issues. These are crucial concepts to the flow of this book. My dissertation research helped me to further define the needs of high-achieving women. Throughout the book, I share the most illuminating stories, quotes, and themes that were revealed in my research.

Finally, I decided to go beyond just sharing my research with my clients and write this book after rereading the epilogue to Margaret Wheatley's book *Leadership and the New Science*. Wheatley describes the need for community when she says, "We can turn to one another as our best hope for inventing and discovering the worlds we are seeking."

Most of my coaching clients are lone rangers who rarely reach out to other women in their organizations unless they are required to in a formal program. Wheatley advocated connecting, not just networking, to test out and share new ideas, listen to one another's stories, and encourage one another when disappointments loom. "We need each other differently now. We cannot hide behind our boundaries or hold onto the belief that we can survive alone."² Wheatley's words inspired me to provide a forum for high-achieving women to learn and grow together. My hope is that many women will work through this book in groups, whether online or in live gatherings. My wish is to rally the strength and wisdom of my high-achieving sisters so that none of us ever loses our way again.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS BOOK

This book is intended to help you answer the questions you ask while you wander. I am not trying to convince you to act differently. Instead, I hope to shift your awareness and awaken you to a world of possibilities beyond your daily perspective. This means you can't just read through the book, talk about the concepts, and determine if you agree or not. You have to spend time reflecting on the pages, completing the exercises, dialoguing with a friend or coach about what you've learned, and having the courage to try out behaviors in opposition to your habits. Then you can determine if you agree with what I present or not. If you are ready, your questions will be answered. "Will I ever find peace of mind in the moment? Will I ever feel that the work I've done is good enough? How can I know if I am doing what I am meant to do as my purpose on this planet?" Once you have this awareness, it is irreversible. The objective of *Wander Woman* is not to teach you; the goal is to transform you.

In part I of the book, chapter 1 starts by exploring what differentiates you from the women who came before you to clarify your own needs and desires. The second half of

chapter 1 presents real-life quotes and stories to enhance the descriptions of both the light and dark sides of your typical behaviors. There are checklists you can use to determine how much of the Wander Woman archetype is actually in your blood. Chapter 2 defines the “burden of greatness.” On the dark side of this restless pursuit of new challenges is the feeling that there is always something more to do. You meet a goal beyond expectations and then immediately say, “What’s next?” I explore my personal experience with this phenomenon and how it played into the darkest period of my life. Then I share questions you can ask yourself to keep from carrying this burden in the future. You can live in harmony with your urge to wander and even use it to define your future if you better understand the source of your impulses.

Part II moves into the present with exercises and coaching questions to help you make an intentional transformation. Chapter 3 will help you discover your “circle of selves” that form who you are today and how you can expand who you can be tomorrow. Chapter 4 looks deeper inside your mind, where three assumptions form the mindset that keeps your perfectionist pattern locked in place. You have to acknowledge both the value and the harm of these three assumptions if you want any changes you attempt to last. You will also learn visioning techniques to help you reset your mental programming on a daily basis. Chapter 5 teaches you how to take advantage of the “window of opportunity” after any emotionally charged experience where you can step out of your frame and use Appreciative Dialogue and journaling to facilitate the renewal process. What you learn from these moments enriches your daily visioning routine. Finally, chapter 6 will help you discover what gives you a sense of purpose distinct from your need for recognition. When you passionately live with a strong sense of purpose, you can remember what is most important to you no matter how people judge you or what difficulties you face. When

you practice the exercises, answer the questions, and implement the routines laid out for you in Part II, you will find the contentment and direction you seek.

Part III expands the process by helping you apply what you have learned to a broader life strategy. In essence, wandering can become your strategy instead of a series of unplanned upheavals. First, you need to actively sustain the transformation you began in Part II. Chapter 7 will give you four tools to help you overcome your tendency to find other things to do than the work of transformation. Chapter 8 then provides three scenarios where women used the techniques in this book to successfully climb the corporate ladder, navigate below the glass ceiling while still getting great assignments and recognition, and do a total life makeover. I share their stories in the hope that whatever strategy you choose, you move forward with clear intentions for what you want for your future. Chapter 9 gives you ideas and resources you can use if you choose to influence leaders in your workplace to support and engage top-talent women. Organizations will be more competitive if they understand how to cultivate and retain this amazing creative force.

I was working on my manuscript on a plane to Dallas, Texas, while sitting next to a thirty-something woman who was traveling with her four young children dispersed in the three rows around me. In a rare moment when she wasn't watching her children, she looked over my shoulder and asked me what I was writing. I reluctantly told her, assuming she was not my target audience. Shame on me for making this assumption. She launched into a diatribe about the struggles she is having with the business she owns with her current husband and how no adult seems to understand her even though she knows the risks she takes are right. Her children understand her best; they know that they need to stand back and drop in line when she decides to forge a new path. She said, "Oh, I'm a Wander Woman all right. And so is my sister. Do you really think this is a sort of tribe, or

is it a sign of the future for women where we finally get to express who we are?" Bless this woman for giving me the questions I will address at the end of this book.

Based on this interaction, in chapter 10 you will reflect on the questions the woman on the plane asked me. After you experience the book, including the research, the questions, the exercises, and your reflections, I will ask you if you think Wander Woman represents a personality style or, instead, if you think she symbolizes something that is in all women, bubbling up to the surface as we progress. The answer is important not only to how you see yourself, but also to how you explain yourself, your desires, your vision, and your passion in the world. If you are a part of something bigger than yourself, you may be called to serve a higher mission of helping your wandering sisters succeed as well. Power is in the collective. We can make a substantial difference that benefits us all if we choose to rise up together.

This book is for you, Wander Woman. You can finally come home to rest your feet before the wind blows and takes you off on your next adventure. I hope you savor the ideas, the exercises, and the questions I offer. Take your time, keep your mind open, find other women to go through the process with you, and celebrate your successes. I wish you joy as well as clarity in the process.

Marcia Reynolds

Phoenix, December 2009

PART I

The Quiet Revolution

ONE

The Road to Somewhere

A few years ago, I was listening to a luncheon speaker talk about the difference between what is most important to men and women in the workplace. He said men tend to focus on career and how they can drive their way up the ladder. Then, for numerous reasons, they shift to focusing on intimacy as they age. On the other hand, women focus first on intimacy. As they age and their children grow up, they focus on career. I said, “Not the women I know.”

After three decades of training and coaching high-achieving women, I have noticed an evolution of their needs and desires. In the past, my female clients longed for life balance; now they get bored if their plate isn't full of new and exciting challenges where they can showcase their skills. Once they were desperate to overcome their fears; now they want help laying out a clear career path so they can quit making brash decisions. They used to ask for assertiveness skills; now they are looking for ways to better formulate their words so people will quit questioning them and get on board with their ideas. Women still face inequities in the workplace and difficulties juggling their many responsibilities. Yet something has changed in the women themselves, the way they approach life, the way they work, and the way they relentlessly show up even when they aren't sure what they are fighting for. In essence, the answer to the questions “who am I?” and “what does this all mean to me?” have changed. Instead of an evolution of behaviors

from one generation of high-achieving women to the next, a revolution is going on as you read this page.

Few resources are available for this new force of women. Many self-help books advise women on what they should and shouldn't do to succeed. These books are based on old assumptions. Women today are very different from their pioneer predecessors and scoff at the idea that they resemble their mothers. With no guidelines for offering the support today's high-achieving women need to succeed, their managers are ill-equipped to develop and retain them. What's worse, the women don't know where to turn for help. Therefore, I'll share the old characterization of working women to see clearly what is causing frustration for women today. Then we'll explore the five pitfalls high-achieving women are faced with today and the possible negative behavior that could result. If you find you are saying, "Yes, that's me" as you read, know that you will be given specific steps for finding the satisfaction you desperately seek in the chapters that follow.

THE AGE OF THE IMPOSTOR

An important study was done in 1978 that found that, despite their gains, most accomplished women in the 1970s felt they weren't very smart and had fooled anyone who thought otherwise. They attributed promotions to "luck, timing, an overestimation of abilities and faulty judgment by decision makers."¹ Even if at some level these women knew they were intelligent, they were cautious about expressing their ideas. They calculated their moves and hedged their bets. It took years of experience before they claimed their own brilliance and creativity, if they ever did at all. The researchers referred to this behavioral pattern as the Impostor Phenomenon.

No matter how hard they worked, the women in the study felt they were impostors and never stopped worrying that they would be "found out" and ousted from their

positions. They keenly protected their gains and cautiously called anyone “friend.” On one end of the spectrum of behaviors, the women struggled with speaking up. They didn’t ask for what they wanted; they hoped they would be recognized and given raises based on the quality of their work. If they didn’t get what they hoped for, they quietly suffered, rarely making their desires known. On the other end of the spectrum, instead of acting passively, some women acted overaggressively. Behind their back, people called them names like Bully Broads and Ice Queens.² Meryl Streep brilliantly portrayed this archetype in the movie *The Devil Wears Prada*. Underneath their callousness, these women feared they would never be able to meet expectations and that other people were constantly trying to cheat them and steal their jobs. Instead of losing their voice, they acted as if they were superior to everyone else to cover their fears. Of course, what we see in the movies are women who play the stereotypes to an extreme, acting utterly submissive or brilliantly conniving. No matter where women fell on the spectrum in reality, the prevailing factor among most of the women in the workplace before the mid 1980s was a damaging lack of confidence. I find this trend still evident today when I teach in emerging countries and in Western industries still dominated by men. It’s as if the Impostor Phenomenon is the first stage women go through when they start breaking down corporate doors.

WOMEN WHO HAD TO BE MEN

Although the Impostor Phenomenon was significant inside research circles, the issues discussed by nonacademic women in the workplace in the 1970s and 1980s centered on whether a woman should stay at home to raise children or choose to live and act more like a man. The middle ground was vague. Women who chose to work were told to “dress for success,” so they donned traditional dark-skirted suits with shoulder pads. They were instructed to verbally fight

like men and to talk about sports to gain acceptance. One company I worked for rated their “promotable” women based on an assessment that compared them to the top male leaders. The women then had to set goals to act more appropriately before they could be promoted.

As we moved into the 1990s, the self-help and seminar themes for businesswomen focused on work-life balance and rediscovering the feminine side they lost trying to be more like men. Even today, many women pay lots of money to go on retreats to de-stress or to “find their inner goddess.”

The high levels of stress and the push to be acknowledged haven’t changed. However, the answers and even the questions women are asking themselves in order to discover how to create happy, fulfilling lives are changing. Many high-achieving women no longer feel like Impostors. They no longer feel they have to dress, act, and talk like men. Yet who they are becoming is still unfolding. What today’s high-achieving women need to feel happy is different from their predecessors. Until now, few guidelines were available to help them find their way.

Julie, age thirty-four, said, “I knew early on that I was going to make my own choices based on who I am and who I want to be. Yet these are hard criteria to identify.”

ENTER WANDER WOMAN

In 1991, senior executives at Deloitte & Touche found that only four out of fifty candidates for partner were women, even though they had been heavily recruiting women from colleges and business schools since 1980.³ They didn’t see the problem as a glass ceiling. If a woman applied to be partner, she stood a good chance of being chosen. Neither was the problem due to a lack of performance. Records showed the women performed as well as and in some cases better than the men. Women performed very well, until they left.

The problem was that significant numbers of women were leaving the firm before they could even be considered for partner.

The CEO at the time, Mike Cook, decided the high turnover of women was an urgent problem that needed to be fixed. His predominantly male executive team didn't agree. They assumed the women were leaving to stay home with their children and there was nothing they could do about it. Cook didn't settle for this answer. Against massive complaints about wasting time and money, Cook created a task force that started their research by interviewing women who had left the company.

The task force found that most of the women left because they felt management stifled their drive for achievement, not because they wanted to be home with their families. They felt devalued by not getting the best assignments, by not receiving mentoring, and by not feeling as if their managers knew who they really were. They said many male managers were overly protective, as if the women couldn't handle their lives on their own. The results revealed a more subtle discrimination than in previous decades. The women said the managers formed opinions about who they were and what they wanted without ever asking them. Within a few years, they tired of not being seen or heard and moved on to find greater and more fulfilling challenges.

Armed with this information, Cook created a plan for Deloitte that first focused on upgrading the perceptions of the current generation of women in their workforce. They didn't need to fix the women. They needed to fix their culture. In 2005, Deloitte selected 116 women as partners, principals, and directors, up from 3 in 1992.⁴ The transformation is happening.

Deloitte was one of the first big corporations to discover that the current generation of high-achieving women is often misunderstood and generally mismanaged. Although the leaders claimed to provide a woman-friendly environment,

they were actually stifling the spirit of the women they had aggressively recruited. The men thought they were helping the women. Instead, they were actually holding them back. Their views were not shifting fast enough to keep up with the changing needs and desires of the women. What most surprised the managers was that the top-performing women did not stay and fight. These days, strong women take their expertise and knowledge to greener pastures.

Today's high-achieving women are not giving up; if the workplace doesn't support their needs, they are choosing to move on.⁵ Women typically have a high capacity to adapt if they want to, but the women who leave companies are choosing not to adapt. When companies quit showing gratitude for their high-quality work, these women begin looking elsewhere. If they stay during a down economy, they spend time planning their next move. As soon as the economy picks back up, they are gone. Their confidence in their abilities, their courage to take risks, and their disdain for "giving in" is greater than their fear of not finding another job.⁶

Whereas high-potential men tend to choose to stay with one company because of a sense of responsibility to their family, their female counterparts are more likely to ask their family to support their job-hopping decisions and find ways to work with the shifts in income, location, and schedules.⁷ Half of the women in my study had children at home, yet they all spoke about various degrees of ease in leaving their jobs, from describing the process as "extricating myself" to simply saying, "next!" One of the women I interviewed went, in less than twenty years, from being a CPA in a big-four New York accounting firm, to an internal position handling international tax policy for a major telecommunications company, to being a lobbyist in Washington, to taking an executive position for a company so she could live on the California coast, all the while doing her

favorite thing, teaching Pilates. She said, “I just feel that I have to move on.”

Sue, age forty-eight, said, “I never serve time. I have quit jobs because they were intrinsically not satisfying, they became too boring, or they asked me to focus on doing things I no longer found useful for my position and growth.”

In the United States, women today are also more inclined than men to switch industries as well as jobs, including starting their own businesses.⁸ Women are also more likely to take the initiative to define new roles and jobs for themselves within a company. Sometimes they do a complete job “makeover” along the way, making the path look like a zigzag both horizontally and vertically. Their workplace wish lists rarely state “being promoted” as a prime motivator. Instead, my survey respondents told me they look for (1) frequent new challenges that stretch and grow their ability to achieve; (2) the opportunity to be flexible with their schedule; (3) the chance to collaborate with other high achievers; (4) recognition from their company; and (5) the freedom to be themselves.

Debbie, age forty-five, said, “Moving up the corporate ladder doesn’t appeal to me if I have to morph myself into being someone I’m not to get ahead. . . . I’m not sure what I want for my future but I am sure I want to proudly be me.”

The lack of frequent new challenges and learning opportunities has led many women around the world to use corporate experiences as a training ground to hone their skills in preparation for owning their own companies. Growth in the number of women-owned businesses has significantly outpaced that of overall businesses. By 2004,

half of all privately held U.S. businesses in the top fifty metropolitan areas were women-owned.⁹ The fastest-growing sectors include traditionally male-owned companies such as construction, transportation, and agricultural services. Women-owned businesses are also rising sharply around the world, even in countries that traditionally suppressed women, such as China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia. The emergence of confident, educated, and restless women is truly a global phenomenon.

THE ROAD NOW TAKEN HAS YET TO BE PAVED

Many of today's high-achieving women move around so much because their definition of success is not predetermined. Although they might like their titles and money, they feel these standard corporate rewards are a means to an end they haven't yet defined. They embody a drive toward mastery, yet they are constantly questioning what they want for their future. Sunny Hostin, a managing director in the New York office of the investigative firm Kroll Inc., a regular commentator on CNN, and the mother of two young children said, "Any woman who is successful will admit that you have to prepare for your next move; you always have to be thinking about it."¹⁰ Ultimately, the range of choices offered by a company affects the decision to stay or opt out, a decision these women repeat over and over again because they won't suffer long in jobs that don't offer frequent new challenges and movement.

Therefore, when it comes to helping strong women make crucial choices for their careers and their lives, it is important to study their inner as well as their outer journey. Self-satisfaction seems to be more important to today's high achievers than the outer trappings of success. Yet how they create self-satisfaction isn't clear to them. This uncertainty leads them to continually question the road they are on. I'm reminded of what the Cheshire cat told Alice in Won-

derland, “If you don’t know where you are going, any road will do.” What was the road less taken is now filled with passionate, driven women who question their direction and feel tired, anxious, and empty at the end of the day. It’s time we put up some guideposts and refueling stations to help these women along the way.

I AM NOT MY MOTHER

I didn’t know until after my mother died that the only inheritance she had received was a letter along with her mother’s will saying, “Everything goes to your brother because you can find a man to marry and take care of you.” Most of her life, my mother grudgingly sacrificed her needs for her brother. She couldn’t go to college because there was only enough money for her brother’s schooling. Her father died when she was five, so she spent most of her childhood working in the family clothing store when she wasn’t in school. Her brother got to study and play sports. She moved with her mother and brother to Phoenix when she was twenty because of her brother’s asthma. Two years later, her mother died. In the 1940s in Phoenix, Arizona, jobs were scarce for my mother’s level of education and experience. They were even more limited for Jews. My mother eked out a living on her own until she married my father when she was twenty-three. She got pregnant a month later.

My mother never had a life of her own beyond raising her family. Although she did volunteer work, she never accomplished anything that received public acknowledgment as my father had. After we grew up and left, she spent most of her time caring for my sick father. I never felt close to her; she was either angry or emotionally distant. I didn’t realize until I was much older that she wasn’t angry with me. She died in her late sixties from complications due to dementia. Frankly, I think she just checked out.

Many of the women I interviewed felt their mothers were angry about not having a choice for how they wanted to live

their lives. Some of the women had mothers with lifelong careers. Even then they felt their mothers took jobs more for the money they would make than for their own pleasure. Dinner conversations were not about the joy of work but about the pain of not being able to do their best at work. A person or rule always stood in their way. Their sense of helplessness kept them from being role models of power and actualization. If they were fighters, they sensed their battle was a lost cause. Sadly, a few of the women thought their mothers were jealous of their successes and criticized them more than they praised them.

Julie, a thirty-four-year-old engineer, said, “There was always competition between my mother and myself. My mother was held back in what she thought were her options. I think she needed to work. But it wasn’t her chosen work and she always seemed drained. . . . I have lived my life 90 percent not wanting to be like my mother. There are great things about my mom, but her life in general and the way she approaches it is very different from the way I do.”

High-achieving women today are not willing to give up their personal satisfaction and sense of accomplishment as their mothers did. Although discrimination still exists in the workplace and women must still make trade-offs between their careers and family, there has been a drastic shift in norms around women’s roles both at home and at work as well as a shift in women’s own self-concept. It’s true that juggling the responsibilities of family and home with their work life is still an issue. Many women choose flexible jobs that will allow them to “see their babies grow up.” However, these women want to be good mothers *and* they want to be recognized for the value they give to the workplace. They can be a mother and a CEO if they choose to. They can

be feminine and compete with the guys at the same time. Women can do what they want and get the recognition they deserve if they know what they want and deserve.

THE FUEL FOR WANDERING

Today's high-achieving women won't stand in anyone's shadow and would never aspire to be someone's assistant unless the job gave them autonomy, new challenges, and a chance to shine on their own in a reasonable amount of time. They don't apply for jobs; they seek opportunities. Once they earn a position, they aim to quickly accomplish their goals and just as quickly look around the corner for the next opportunity, which could be in the same company if there is space to grow. Their overall sense of confidence, pride in their work, and passion for life keep them moving forward.

Elizabeth, age forty-one, said, "I remember my father was talking about how he wanted his kids to take over his company. He says, 'And Elizabeth, you can be vice president.' What did he mean, vice president? Why wouldn't I be president? He says, 'Well the boys, they're men, and the industry is mostly men . . .' I remember being so mad at him for making that comment. It's not the way I was raised. He had always said, 'You can be anything you want to be!' So then he's said I couldn't be president? Well, he has since apologized 150 times for that day."

Elizabeth explained that her father raised her to be a successful businesswoman. He had helped her create her first business card when she was twelve years old and taught her how to give a firm handshake and look people in the eye when she asked to be their babysitter. When she was sixteen, her father suggested she get a full-time job to earn experience. Instead of taking his suggestion, she chose a

simple weekend job so she could take college classes. Since graduating from college, she has redefined her career three times, each time reaching the top of her job rank before deciding to move on. Currently, she makes more money than her father.

More than ever, women are making their own career choices and setting the terms for what they call success. If someone tries to keep them from getting what they want, they feel motivated to try even harder to prove they can succeed. Julie, age thirty-four, said, “My rebelliousness fuels me.” She sees rebelliousness as her strength; her success is dependent on her strength of will.

Some people claim these women have a sense of entitlement. It’s true they feel they are special. But they hit the ground running, working hard for what they earn. They feel they deserve to be valued, respected, recognized, and then given great projects to work on for their extra effort and superior performance even if they lack years of experience. They feel they deserve attention and perks as a result of their effort, which has nothing to do with their age. They strive to work harder than everyone else, they are willing to learn from their mistakes, and their accomplishments are excellent. They are outstanding performers—why shouldn’t they feel entitled?

Sue, age forty-eight, said, “I always felt I knew as much if not more than my bosses and I should be recognized and rewarded for that. In return, they would get outstanding work from me, beyond expectations. I could help take the organization to the next level if they let me. When this was slow to come, I was irritated and restless. They weren’t using my strengths and they weren’t acknowledging my brilliance. How stupid could they be?”

In fact, these women love to show that they can do something that someone else said they couldn’t. Generally, they

aren't trying to prove that they can do something difficult in spite of their gender; being a woman factors very little into their reasons for proving their worth. Mostly they are intent on achieving what others think is impossible or foolish for them to attempt regardless of the basis of the judgment against them.

Julie, age thirty-four, said, "Why did I choose to be an engineer? Honestly, to prove I am smart enough to be an engineer."

Beth, age thirty, said, "I don't like someone else telling me what I can't do. Just when you think you know what's best for me . . . I'll do more."

These women are not invisible like many of their mothers and older female bosses, yet they think they are invincible, which causes them problems personally and professionally. There is a "dark side of abundance" to their confidence, impulsiveness, and even their passion. They must honestly confront the barriers that are still in the workplace. And they must face their inner demons before they can find the peace they desperately seek. If they do this, their burdens can become joys and their restless spirit can become the passionate energy that helps them find, explore, and achieve their purposeful path.

THE FIVE DRIVERS OF WANDER WOMAN

As a second-generation high-achieving woman, five factors drive your success in the workplace. An old adage declares, "Our greatest strengths are our greatest weaknesses." Therefore, these five drivers are also the source of the pitfalls you should avoid. On the surface, these drivers define why you are so remarkable and shine above your colleagues. If you aren't careful, these drivers can also lead you to make decisions based on emotional needs instead of on a long-

term plan or purpose, leaving you feeling aimless and discontent after a few frenzied decades.

In the following sections, I'll explain both the light and dark side of each driver to help you understand yourself, not to define yourself. You may not agree with all of the quotes and descriptions; see if your tendencies match up instead of rejecting the driver entirely if a specific behavior doesn't fit for you. I will also share anonymous quotes from women I surveyed so you can see the thought patterns that underlie the actions. Read the quotes out loud. *My intention is that you find in their words not only the strengths that have been instrumental to your success, but also the seeds of discontent that drain your happiness.* At the end of each section, I'll share how the negative behaviors related to each driver can sabotage your goals and dreams if you fall into these traps. You can use this information to create new beliefs and behavioral patterns using Part II of this book.

Driver 1. Extreme confidence

Give me a stick and I'll build you a bridge.

You feel you can do anything you put your mind to. The only time you are concerned about meeting a goal is after you accept a project and face the reality of your commitment, but even then doubt is fleeting. You are persistent, figuring out ways to bypass any "no" you are given. Ali, age thirty, said, "I'm either bold or defiant. I can't say for sure which drives me more." You get what you want but not out of gratuitous entitlement; you work hard for your wages, praises, and promotions. The adjectives you choose to describe yourself include: passionate, high-energy, persistent, assertive, direct, bold, and confident.

Some of your confidence comes from your focus early in life. Your parents did everything to make sure you would have a good future, which included excelling at school. Your self-worth centered on getting good grades and shining at extracurricular activities. If you had to work to help pay for

your schooling, you found jobs easily. You had no doubt that you could support yourself. By the time you entered the workforce full-time, you felt highly confident about your abilities and you expected to move up fast in the organization.

Survey responses:

“My first two companies promoted me quickly to positions beyond my capabilities, both in experience and knowledge. But I rose to the challenge and figured it out.”

“I think the things that have happened to me in my life have been a matter of opportunity meets capability. I make things happen.”

“For a moment after I accept an assignment, I might gasp. In the end, I always figure it out and do it well.”

What is the dark side of being so confident?

- Taking on projects beyond your expertise and having to spend all your free time catching up.
 - Never prioritizing because every project you do has to demonstrate how great you are. If you are taking on too many tasks, this can be overwhelming.
 - Not seeing other possibilities while busily persisting down one path. Because of this, others may accuse you of not being strategic or visionary, which hurts your leadership potential.
 - Steamrolling a project because you think you are right without broadly looking at the total impact on everyone involved.
 - Risking an addiction to work—more and more, work becomes your priority over family, friends, and health, even when you say this isn’t true.
-

Driver 2. Constant need for new challenges

*Give me a stick and I'll build you a bridge,
unless I've already done that, so give me a
bigger challenge or I'll move on to something else.*

You seem to have an internal flame that needs constant stoking. You seek successive accomplishments that are enjoyable to work on, whether you can do this in one company or you have to job-hop to get your needs met. If you feel you are not getting the recognition you deserve or that the work is becoming stale and boring, you begin your search for the next great thing. High salaries and stock options won't solely keep you in a position, though you might stay longer to make enough money to do what you really want to do, which is often to own your own business. Although you say you want peace of mind, your greater need is to accomplish things of value. You want to make a contribution, over and over again. You may experience fatigue from overworking and disillusionment with the corporate world, yet your passion and energy for creating amazing results doesn't wane with age. You want more peace and balance in your life . . . someday.

In a down economy, you might stay in a job a little longer than normal because fewer jobs are available. Yet you still keep your eyes and options open. You will even look in other industries for the right opportunity. You can always learn what you need to know on the job. What is before you has to be better than what you are leaving behind, even though you aren't clear about what you are getting into.

"I was never hired for a job I had done somewhere else. It was always a new challenge in a field I knew nothing about. It didn't scare me; it energized me."

"I can walk into a situation and see where the holes are and what changes need to be made . . . then I do it. If I have the freedom to do that, I thrive."

“I was always the top sales person. But then when I was done with sales, I knew I was done. When I started looking, I had no idea where I would end up. Yet I knew it would be great whatever it was.”

The average length of time you spend in one particular job is about four years plus or minus two, even if you decide to stay with one company. Although you jump jobs by choice, your decision is usually based on *leaving something behind* instead of *choosing based on a plan*. By your mid-thirties, you regret not being more deliberate about your choices. You could have made a bigger difference if you had created a plan earlier in your life.

“Many times it would just be a matter of, ‘been here, done that, I know how to do this, I have accomplished this, and it’s time to sort of move on.’ But then I never know what I’m going to do until the opportunity presents itself.”

“I get so busy with activities that I don’t get focused . . . do, do, do, always go somewhere, always do something, always travel, always have things in the works . . . but when I stop to take a breath, I feel shallow, like I’m not contributing to society. I’m not sure how to create what would make me feel more valued.”

“I want to be free to make my own choices and decisions and not live by what someone else thinks is right for me. Is that enough of a purpose to have?”

What is the dark side of having a constant need for new challenges?

- Feeling as though you’ve wasted time figuring out what you want to do.
- Making impulsive job choices based on what you don’t want instead of what you want for the future, so some choices are good and some are not.

- Not stopping long enough to enjoy the fruits of success.
 - Resenting jobs that started out well but failed to fulfill your needs over time.
 - Not staying long enough in a company to earn an executive position where you could make significant changes to improve the organization.
-

Driver 3. A strong drive for recognition based on performance, not on gender

Don't do me any favors; just applaud me when I'm done.

You aren't trying to prove what a woman can do; being a woman factors very little into your reasons for proving your worth. You might experience sexual harassment and employment inequities in the workplace. You might even experience discrimination from older women who seem to be more interested in making you "pay your dues" than in supporting your rise in the company. Some of these acts are blatantly hostile and possibly illegal. However, instead of spending energy trying to eradicate the discrimination, you rev up your desire to succeed in spite of these roadblocks. You are driven to prove what *you* can do. If someone tries to keep you from succeeding, you feel provoked to prove your value even more.

"I proved them all wrong; I'm living the success they said I would never achieve."

"They said I had to sleep with someone to get the job. I didn't, but I still had to endure dumb sexual comments and men looking up my skirt. When I moved to another unit, the discrimination wasn't so obvious but it was still there. Because I am good at what I do, they eventually backed off. It's a stupid game but as long as I know I can get my work done, I know I'll win in the end."

“I have found that racial as well as gender discrimination is still alive and well. But it won’t stop me from succeeding.”

Because you are driven to perform, you have a direct communication style that can intimidate others and cause you to have political difficulties and interpersonal conflicts. Regardless of the personal nature of your motivation, you feel you are committed to obtaining outstanding results so your intentions should not be questioned. You are not self-serving. You serve the bottom line though your methods may be untraditional. Additionally, because you put more time and effort into finding the best way to do things than most people do, your voice should be heeded and respected. As a result, your communication style is very direct and passionate. This may serve you in a leadership role that requires a sense of urgency. However, regardless of the situation, this can cause rifts in your relationships. This doesn’t mean you are self-absorbed and don’t care about others. It means that people might not get to see your compassion. You often lose your patience if you feel someone is trying to pick a fight with you. You don’t mind when people listen to your ideas and present good arguments in rebuttal if they have them, but you will compete if someone stands in your way.

“Even as a child I was very direct . . . I’m still the one who always says exactly what she’s thinking. It does keep you out of some realms. I’ve been coached how not to do that, but it still happens.”

“I was born spirited, full of will power. And when I’m stressed . . . I’m not the softest person around. . . . I was more abrasive and assertive than I might have needed to be. I thought I was being honest, but I guess I was being hurtful.”

What is the dark side of having a strong drive to be recognized for your performance?

- Appearing insensitive to other people's needs, desires, and solutions.
 - Reacting harshly to criticism.
 - Others see your persuasiveness as intimidating.
 - Holding people to high standards you create without tolerating differences.
 - Coming across as argumentative, obstinate, and blunt when disagreeing with others.
 - Not listening well unless you really want to.
 - Allowing discrimination to continue if it's not stopping your progress.
-

Driver 4. Work is your life's blood

Retire? Never. I love knowing the world needs me.

Your greatest pleasure comes from your achievements in the workplace and out in the world. You couldn't imagine not working, which could include writing a novel or growing organic vegetables, unless you are thoroughly exhausted and physically need a break. It's not likely you will ever retire; your personal needs are met by completing projects well. Applying yourself to your work is how you get to be courageous, creative, self-sufficient, amazing, productive, outstanding, and the bold savior of all. You will never sit still, not even on a rainy holiday. You want to move mountains. That is the game you are playing and you want everyone to get out of your way.

Although you don't like to call yourself "competitive," you do measure yourself against people with greater successes than your own. You are driven to work even harder by the friend who got promoted faster, the colleague whose book hit the best-seller list, the neighbor whose Internet

story went viral, and the competitor who found a new income stream. You may be happy for your friends but disappointed with yourself that they reached a pinnacle before you. If your peers have accomplished more than you have, you are driven to figure out how you can meet or beat their results. You don't do this for the pleasure of beating someone; you just want to know you have done your best.

“It’s not so much that I need to sit a project on a shelf and say, ‘I did this.’ Once I’ve accomplished it I feel like, ‘So, now what can I do?’ I need to be invested and active to feel good about myself.”

“I could have saved the world yesterday, but if I haven’t done anything today to make a difference, I feel like I am failing.”

“Whenever we have something new rolling out, I’m the first to get it done because I’m passionate. It’s coming from my heart. It’s not just about me.”

What is the dark side of making
work your life’s blood?

- Desiring peace of mind and balance but never creating the space for it.
 - Being seen as arrogant instead of confident and self-serving instead of bighearted.
 - Disconnecting with life outside of work.
 - Caring so much about immediate results that you lose sight of the big picture.
 - Able to deal with setbacks but not failures.
-

Driver 5. Experience is the best teacher*Kick me down, I'll bounce back up.**But that will never happen again.*

You are often disillusioned by how work gets done, but you have the strength to rise up after every setback even if you must resurrect yourself elsewhere. One lesson you quickly learn is what kind of managers you like best to work for. If you receive little support for your progressive ideas, if you are told to “tone down” your energy, or if you feel held back in any way, you will either leave the company or create a new position for yourself as soon as you can. A *high-achiever-friendly* working environment is critical to retaining you. You learn your lessons quickly but you may not give your boss or the company a second chance.

This driver often leads you to believe you are self-sufficient and you don't need the advice or support of others. You learn fast. You adapt easily. You often appear wiser than everyone around you. This does not mean you don't need emotional support when the road gets bumpy. There are now many studies that prove that an active social network provides both mental and physical benefits. You may rise up faster and achieve more goals based on your autonomy, but you will be happier and healthier with a community of support. You will learn how to amass a team that honors who you are as a high achiever in chapter 7.

“When the day came that my boss told me I couldn't be promoted, I knew what my next exciting challenge would be . . . walking out the door and starting my own company. I'm a fast learner.”

“I rarely ask for advice. I'm sure I could use it, but I learned early on that I had to do things on my own if they were to get done. I'm not even a great team player. My behavior is so habitual I rarely notice when I put people off.”

What is the dark side of learning
the hard lessons at work?

- You are shocked by office politics and then only see the negative aspects of people's behavior instead of trying to understand what drives them to act the way they do. Your disillusionment keeps you from trying to work out differences. You would rather just leave even if you don't have a plan for where you will go next.
 - You have difficulty recovering from being laid off, removed from a position, or placed in a position you don't want.
 - You need reflection time to best understand what is going on within an organization. Because you love to stay busy, you may not get the quiet time you need to thoroughly think through complex situations.
 - You may not seek or accept help and advice when offered. This could lead you to misread people's motives. You may learn from your mistakes, but you could avoid some of the problems if you accept guidance more often.
-

In short, you love proving to the world how amazing you are. You are worthy because of the extraordinarily impressive things you can accomplish. However, while you are in this whirlwind of achievement, taking charge, producing results and creating value, you may intimidate others, miss options, and regularly drive yourself to the point of exhaustion. Then you wonder if it is all worth it in the brief moments you take a breath. To help you feel positive and fulfilled, you will explore the darkest side of your high-achieving ways in the next chapter, "The Burden of Greatness." Then, in Parts II and III of this book, you will learn how to consciously choose the path you want to take for the rest of your amazing life.

this material has been excerpted from

***Wander Woman:
How High-Achieving Women Find Contentment and Direction***

by Marcia Reynolds

Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers

Copyright © 2010, All Rights Reserved.

For more information, or to purchase the book,
please visit our website

www.bkconnection.com