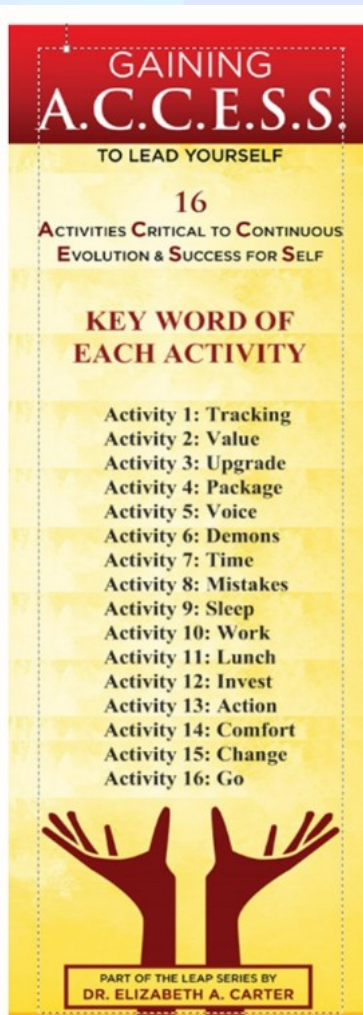


# Gaining A.C.C.E.S.S. To Lead Yourself

## 16 Activities Critical to Continuous Evolution & Success for Self

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## Excerpt from Section 2: PREPARING YOURSELF

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### YOUR FEARS: EXAMINING EXIT EXCUSES

*There are plenty of difficult obstacles in your path. Don't allow yourself to become one of them.*

—Ralph Marston

Do you have friends or family members who haven't stretched beyond a 5-mile radius from where they were born and raised? Are you one of those persons? Many of these folks married the girl/guy next door, are employed in town, and have parents and in-laws available as babysitters. As I have maneuvered my career through five states, multiple jobs, and many obstacles in between, I have learned that opportunities are options; some people take advantage of them and some people do not. As much as we know that the constant thing in life is change, so many of us find excuses not to change.

#### **Many Find Excuses to Block Change**

While living in my various states, I find it fascinating to talk to lifelong residents. I don't know how I became so adventurous to be open to move, but there have been opportunities to move that I have declined. I found that the excuses in my life that blocked me from changing fell into three categories:

#### **Guessing**

First is guessing. To *guess* means to estimate without sufficient information to be sure of being correct. Everyone makes guesses based on what they think is correct. We let the Internet, family, political figures, news reporters, and strangers scare us so badly that we are afraid to leave our houses, drive our cars, travel abroad, or live our lives.

In 2010, I was exploring an opportunity in Wisconsin. A company wanted to fly me in for an interview. It is not cheap to bring in a candidate and I don't like wasting a company's money. My guess about the state was based on superficial information—what I saw on the news. All I knew about Wisconsin was cheese, cold, a lot of snow, corn fields, and not much diversity. My being single and having this superficial information, I decided Wisconsin was definitely not a place I desired as my next relocation destination. I halted the recruiting process. I'm not sure if that was a good or bad decision, but there was probably more I could have done.

## **Ego**

The second excuse is ego. Those that have an ego have a sense of self-importance. We all have an ego—some bigger than others. If we leave a job, the company will fall apart; it will never be the same. If we move away from our families, they won't survive. If we break up with a significant other, all our work put in to mold and shape their lives was time wasted. Quite often, that is not true and you are hurting not just yourself but also others with your ego. While you are stifling your own growth, you are also stifling theirs because you allow them to be dependent on you.

I know I have an ego. There are some jobs I stayed in because I was loyal to the team. I wanted to ensure all the tools and reports I built were used and added value, and I feared if I left, no one would continue what I started. As a non-degreed psychologist, I seemed to always date guys I thought I could "fix." My determination, drive, and passion for self-development would rub off on them and they could rise beyond where they were at the time. I was the best thing that happened to them. Laughing to myself now, I see it never worked. As I moved higher on the corporate ladder, I saw egos get beat down with a stick. You can be here today and gone tomorrow, and be angry about it. That makes you cautious the next time, which can be good or bad.

## **Timing**

What time is the right time to make a change? The answer is never. When an opportunity is presented to us, we think about why the timing is wrong, not about why the opportunity is right. The stars will never be aligned perfectly that you can make a move without sacrifices or regrets. That is a part of life. There will always be excuses: family, money, school, activities, social circles, other commitments, the real estate market, and the economy among many others.

As I stated earlier, I was recently out of work for over a year. My search ended with a position that relocated me five hours from where I lived. I had committed to a 3-year leadership venture and I was just starting Year 2 of my tenure. There was a lot to consider: giving up my leadership position and breaking the established continuity, declining the job offer, living in a hotel for another year and a half and commuting home on the weekends, moving, and commuting back for events. The timing could not have been worse. It was not just me whom I had to consider. I had my mother living with me and she had finally settled into a regular schedule and social life. There was a fear of staying; I didn't know how long it would take me to get another offer. There was a fear of leaving; my ego told me that I needed to stay and continue my commitment. Other factors impacted me, such as trying to sell my home in December, when people are financially focused on the holidays and not on real estate. This meant the possibility of carrying two mortgages and two sets of utility bills for a period of time. Did I want to carry that extra stress on my mind and bank account? Would this be the excuse that prohibited me?

## **Get Out of Your Zip Code**

The word *zip code* in this book is used as a metaphor. A zip code can be a town, job, relationship, or anything else that has a hold on you that you won't let go. Guessing, ego, and timing are just a few of many excuses that hold us back. Let's move beyond the excuses that are blocking our success. Three suggestions that have helped me are to gain comfort, embrace change, and let go.

### **Activity 14: Gain Comfort in Your Decision**

The first suggestion to get out of your zip code is to gain comfort. That is done by doing your homework. Collect as much information as you can to help make an educated decision, not a guess. With relocating five times over a 17-year period, I have created a system of research that helps me decide where I will live. First is matching—looking for towns comparable to where I currently live. Along with that comes real estate pricing, types of homes, statistics on crime and demographics, commute to work, and proximity to services. Next is investigating where I can find fun: bowling alleys, golf courses, fitness centers, restaurants, and movie theaters. I am a member of some national associations; thus, I also look for the local chapter and its meeting schedule. This investigation gets more complicated when others are moving with you: school districts, job market and industry viability, needed programs and services, and toleration of the changes the prospective environment will bring. With my last move, I had to consider my mother. What were the needs and services she would require? We would need doctors, hospitals, elder care services, transportation, social activities, and a home I could afford and where we had some space. These may also become part of your decision to stay or go.

If I have enough information about my potential comfort level in the prospective environment, then I go back and review the opportunity. What information is available about the company and its history, employees, diversity profile, promotion opportunities, and profits? I am an expert in relocation packages and I know a good one from a bad one. I turned down a job because of its relocation package; the company clearly didn't really want me to come and work for them. Instinct also plays a part in comfort. If something does not feel right about a position, possible boss, city, or even the body language of the people you saw in the lobby when you arrived for a face-to-face interview, you must consider those feelings. Your body is sending you signals; acknowledge them, but also think about the result if you do not accept the opportunity.

### **Activity 15: Embrace Change at Your Own Pace**

We all combat change differently. Don't jump in and drown; start at the shallow end. A great point about moving to a new location is that you take all your belongings with you. I enjoy living in townhouses and they all have similar layouts. Sitting in my home office at my desk and in my 5-year-old chair, it doesn't matter what state I'm in and what the weather is outside. My surroundings are familiar; I'm with my bookcases, computer, printer, and wall hangings. If I decide to venture out and explore my new city, it is my choice. If I want to stay home in my sweatpants the entire weekend, that is my choice also. When you are interacting with new people, whether coworkers, neighbors, or even dates, get to know them. Just because they want to know you doesn't mean you have to embrace them right away. When you are the "new person," others will want to invite you places and meet their friends. You don't have to accept every invitation.

As an introvert, I do not need to have a lot of people around me, so I sometimes come off as distant. That is all right with me! When I lived in Upstate New York, I eased into making friends. I was interested in some recreation, so I joined a community ladies basketball group. I never formally played, but I wanted to get some exercise and we definitely weren't former WNBA players. My teammates were wonderful and we would sometimes go out afterwards. One invited me to her church and I went. I actually enjoyed the running required in basketball so much that I started running races. I have many racing bibs of many distances—5K, 10K, 15K, 20K, and more than a dozen half-marathons. I don't think I would have ever considered running had I not moved to Upstate New York!

### **Activity 16: Let Go**

Easier said than done, for sure. After you have done your homework and decided who and what you will allow into your new life, you have to let go of some of the past. There is a lot you can do to prepare yourself and others impacted by your actions. At work, prepare a clear transition plan for your successor. Be conscientious and give enough notice so that the team feels confident in taking on the work. This is the best way to ensure your legacy and that the tools, reports, and processes you improved continue. Every person has a style in which she or he works. After you have transitioned the assignment to your coworker, let him or her own it going forward. It will not be the same as when you owned it, but if taken and improved or developed further, there is still a piece of you at the foundation.

The same applies for any roles you hold within other organizations and at home. Give assignments to others; let them step in and lead. Letting go gives them the chance to grow and build up their own ego. While the timing may not have been right for you, the timing for someone else to step in may be just the push needed for their growth.

You never permanently leave people. Telephone, text, e-mail, Skype, buses, planes, trains, and automobiles are available to keep in contact. That is my response when I am asked why I am so open to moving. I also now have several places to visit and familiar surroundings when I do.

Fortunately, I haven't had any regrets yet with the changes I did make, and that was due to my recognizing fears and opportunities of change. I can't beat myself up on the options I declined. It is a process, and I knew that if I had done my due diligence, the outcome would be the right one.

### **Reflection Items**

- 1) What decisions are you contemplating today? Don't think about the past. The "coulda," "shoulda," and "why didn't I" thoughts need to leave your mind, unless those things you're thinking about are still possible. Some moments have passed, and you cannot recapture them.
- 2) Think about your ego. Is it a major factor in your decision process? Have you had conversations with others to determine what a job, relationship, or family would look like without you?

- 3) Think about your past decisions. What was happening at that time? Was the timing 100% right or 10% right? How did you navigate the gap between perfect and the present?

### Action Items

- 1) Write down all the decisions you are contemplating. For each decision, create a grid with the six categories Guessing, Ego, Timing, Gain Comfort, Embrace Change, and Let Go.
- 2) For each box in the grid, write down everything that comes to mind in those categories, good and bad.
- 3) Put the grid to the side for a few days, then review it with someone else—a person you trust and feel comfortable sharing your thoughts. As you talk through your list, note new insights and ideas. The resolution to these ideas may need to come from conversations with family or the company who offered you an opportunity.
- 4) If there is a deadline for a decision, ensure you accomplish these actions well ahead of that date so that you are clear that you have considered all pros and cons and have completed all supplemental research.
- 5) Make a decision and get out of your zip code.



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