

# GAINING A.C.C.E.S.S.

TO LEAD YOURSELF

16

**A**CTIVITIES **C**RITICAL TO **C**ONTINUOUS  
**E**VOOLUTION & **S**UCCESS FOR **S**ELF



PART OF THE LEAP SERIES BY  
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

## **Section 1: PRESENTING YOURSELF**

YOUR RESUME: MONITORING METRICS AND MIND-SET

YOUR ATTIRE: PACKAGING PURPOSEFUL PRESENCE

## **Section 2: PREPARING YOURSELF**

YOUR GOALS: STRETCHING SELF SUCCESSFULLY

YOUR FUTURE: SETTING SUBSEQUENT STRATEGIES

YOUR FEARS: EXAMINING EXIT EXCUSES

## **Section 3: PUSHING YOURSELF**

YOUR NEXT MOVE: ACCESS AND ACTION

## **About the Author**

About the LEAP Series

# PREFACE

**A**s I was growing up, my parents embedded in me that education was important. I assumed that if I did well in school, learned a lot, and expanded my knowledge, regardless of what could happen—lose my job, car, house, spouse, or health, my education would help me get through it. Well, that is not true. I know many intelligent people with credentials who struggled, including me. My goal was to make it to the “C-suite” in the corporate world. I worked hard to earn excellent grades, proceeded to college, and got my bachelor’s degree, but I knew it wouldn’t be enough. Every decade since then, I completed a certification or advanced degree: several insurance industry certifications, two master’s degrees, and—most recently—a PhD. While that may look good on paper, it was not without challenges. My life has included

- Depending on others for transportation
- Sleeping on my mother’s couch
- Moving because I couldn’t afford rent
- Living paycheck to paycheck
- Changing careers
- Moving my aging mother in with me
- Being unemployed for 15 months

There were times when I wasn’t sure my situation would improve, a goal required more time and patience than I expected, and I wanted to give up on my dreams. I accumulated a lot of insight from my education, but I feel that what I have achieved came from what I learned in school coupled with trial and error. Sometimes, the knowledge you have is useless or comes too late. Other times, the knowledge you need never comes. Just because you have letters after your name does not mean you know everything, and just because you do not have letters after your name does not mean you know less. It is when we use what we know and find out what we don’t know that knowledge is powerful.

As we maneuver our careers, there is quite a bit of knowledge that is not easily accessible. Some of us are “book-smart” and some of us are “street-smart,” but what we all wish to be is “access-smart.” The word *access* has two meanings in this book. First is the dictionary meaning: “to gain entry to or obtain.” We need access to the tools and information that will help us get ahead, lead the pack, be on the top of the list, and excel in life.

The second meaning of *access* is one I created. Those who have heard me deliver a speech or training session know I love acronyms, and I try not to miss opportunities to use them. *A.C.C.E.S.S.* stands for **A**ctivities **C**ritical to **C**ontinuous **E**volution & **S**uccess for **S**elf.

I want to add to your current knowledge level. You would think with all the information available on the Internet, we would all be maximizing our lives. Are you struggling to find answers?

The struggle is because not all of us have family members, mentors, coaches, leaders, or friends in our lives to share their stories with us. I have received help from many resources who shared information that became critical to my success. Sometimes, we get information before we need it but we don't recognize it. When the lightbulb finally goes off, it is usually because we have reached a crisis and are in panic mode. The knowledge was right in front of us had we opened our minds, hearts, ears, eyes, and mouths earlier. I want to share my knowledge with you with the hope that you can use it now to set you up for future success. I offer you access and A.C.C.E.S.S. to provide the missing key to help you get your next job, promotion, or opportunity and reach that lifelong dream or goal.

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## **YOUR RESUME: MONITORING METRICS AND MIND-SET**

*Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it.*  
—Michelangelo

**A**s a person having had several roles that have included hiring employees, I have reviewed hundreds of resumes over the years. There are at least 100 million sources between books, articles, blogs, webinars, YouTube videos, and TED Talks on resume writing. With these available sources, I still see a lot of suboptimal resumes. A resume is your calling card; it needs to display the best reflection of you and your work.

### **The Inability to Articulate Contribution Is a Common Problem**

A friend asked me for help with his resume because he got laid off from his job. He had spent several years in customer service, and he only listed the tasks he performed. This was our conversation as I tried to uncover his measurable contributions:

Me: “Did you ever keep track of your customer service satisfaction scores?”

Him: “No.”

Me: “Did you keep track of your call response or talk time rate?”

Him: “No.”

Me: “Do you recall your yearly customer retention rates?”

Him: “No.”

Me: “Did your manager ever give you an evaluation that showed how you contributed to the overall results of the company?”

Him: “No.”

Me: “Did you keep copies of letters from customers you could use as testimonials?”

Him: “No.”

The questioning continued, and the answers continued to be “No.” Unfortunately, many companies function similarly, so it is your role as an employee to keep track of your contributions, metrics, and results. With no information displaying why you may be the best fit for another job, it will be very difficult to get another job. You can be the best [insert job title here], but if there are no data to confirm your words, there is slim chance of getting a call from the hiring manager.

I have seen resumes from people in various industries and organizational levels with varying college degrees, and those trying to transition careers. Some candidates had a role that should have had measurable metrics, but they listed none. The main problem is that people write resumes referring to the past when there is a lot they did that they neither remember nor documented. When reviewing the past and the tasks and duties performed, hiring managers want to see your accomplishments. They want to understand how you improved the people, processes, or profits of a company. They want to know if you grew sales or saved expenses, improved quality or processing time, or led a small team or a big project. These accomplishments are not mentioned because we were not recording them as they were happening, or we did not know the final result of the work or the value it provided. This is where the Michelangelo quote applies. We must discover our accomplishments and contribution to the team because they are not always visible. We must carry our own chisel and carve out our success.

## **Change Your Mind-Set Today: Enhance Your Resume Tomorrow**

### **Activity 1: Create Your Own Tracking to Monitor Your Success**

A solution to the articulation problem requires a change in mind-set. You must ask what, why, and how a task you are doing contributes to the organization, and track your activities of said task. I have worked in finance leadership for over 20 years, and my roles included tracking metrics and results. This gave me the exposure to the information and data to track my projects and their impacts. The greater part of any organization consists of individual contributors, and frontline supervisors and managers who may not see or connect their inputs to the impacts. You may have to create your own goal, milestone, or improvement metric that is not part of your performance objectives. Keep track of the metric and observe any changes that are occurring due to your work. In one of my roles, I discovered a huge gap in the forecast process. I determined where the problem existed (communication, where 80+% of most problems originate) and set new guidelines and processes. I had an initial benchmark, created a tracking mechanism, and monitored the progress. This is how I incorporated the accomplishment into my resume:

- *Implemented expense forecasting accuracy performance process that improved forecast accuracy from 66% to 85% over 2-year period, allowing for better estimates of future profitability and proactive change management measures.*

That 2-year period was 5 years ago but remains an accomplishment I keep on my resume. It provides companies insight into what I can do to help them if they have a similar problem.

## **Activity 2: Use Critical Thinking and Listening Skills to Add Value**

A change in mind-set also includes using listening and critical thinking skills during meetings. While you may not play an active role in every meeting, here is advice to stay engaged. Are you hearing questions and concerns that are not being responded to with an answer or follow-up assignment? Are you envisioning future challenges or benefits that may arise based on what is being worked on today? Can you offer to help? If you can find one small project you can manage within your workload, that would be helpful and a huge accomplishment.

Keep track of what you did for your own records, be proud, and copy the process for the next project. These actions build credibility for you. How you incorporate them into your resume is up to you. There are enough resume resources available to provide the correct descriptive words. Always try to include some numerical value: percentage, percentage point, dollar, or item count. Sometimes, the dollar or item count value looks small, but the percentage to the total may be large. Use what you feel is best, and that becomes the sculpture of your work.

### **Reflection Items**

- 1) Are there metrics, analytics, or processes pertaining to people or the organization incorporated into your performance objectives?
- 2) If the answer to 1) is, “Yes,” are you keeping track of them? If the answer is “No”, do you have access to data that would allow you to track some of your current activities?
- 3) Are there current projects in which you may take an active role that would allow you to take part with a win-win outcome? (win for you: resume addition; win for the company: value added)
- 4) Do you keep a folder of successes, thank-you messages, and kudos cards for what you did and whom you helped?







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