

SAMPLE

I Wish I'd Known This

**6 Career-Accelerating
Secrets for Women
Leaders**

BRENDA WENSIL

AND KATHRYN HEATH

New York Times bestselling author of *Break Your Own Rules*

Endorsements

“This book provides a blueprint for women regardless of where they are in their leadership journey. It highlights career-advancing skills that keep us moving forward with impact and intention. It grants license to women to show up more boldly, bravely, and authentically in their careers.”

—**Tamika Tremaglio**, Executive Director,
National Basketball Players Association

“The authors offer practical, actionable strategies with real examples and research-based approaches. A refreshing reminder that when women achieve, everyone is better for it.”

—**Karen Case**, President, U.S. Commercial Real
Estate, CIBC U.S.

“In this timely guide, using real workplace stories and research-based approaches, the authors help us better understand potential career derailers for women. It’s a necessary reminder that the “how” of leadership matters as much, if not more, than the “what.”

—**Wendy Davidson**, President of Americas,
Glanbia Performance Nutrition

“This is the book you need to read now to shortcut career delays and derailers! Brenda and Kathryn's expert knowledge offers a timeless perspective on challenges women face and how illuminating the blind spots can accelerate the path forward. They encourage us all to think bigger and aim higher!”

—**Marshall Goldsmith**, Thinkers50 #1 Executive
Coach and *New York Times* bestselling author of
Triggers, *Mojo*, and *What Got You Here Won't Get
You There*

“A wise perspective on the universal blind spots for women leaders and a fantastic guide for those who want greater impact, insightful leadership and practical ways of seeing what's ahead. Reading this book feels like having an executive coach on your shoulder, sharing great stories, asking key questions, and pushing for positive change.”

—**Dr. Bev Kaye**, best-selling co-author of *Love 'Em
or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay and
Watch Them Grow or Let Them Go*

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Trying to Go It Alone

Assemble a Posse

If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

— UNKNOWN

Natalie was silent. Kathryn could almost hear her scouring her brain, searching for an answer to the simple question: “Who might you talk to?” Natalie kept coming up blank.

Although she reported to the C-suite at a large financial services company, Natalie, who was in her early 40s, was aiming higher. She aspired to land in the C-suite. She had been offered a promotion that might move her closer to that objective, but it was in a different department than the one she currently worked for. It would mean operating outside her area of expertise, not to mention outside her comfort zone. Natalie also worried that the steep learning curve and extra workload might affect how she managed her life outside work. Given those factors, she was struggling to decide whether it was the right move.

“I don’t know what to do,” Natalie told Kathryn. “I’m unclear about what the risks and the rewards are.” Kathryn asked Natalie who she might turn to for advice in making this pivotal decision. “Well, I can talk to you,” Natalie said. “I guess I could talk to my boss. Or maybe a girlfriend—but she doesn’t know my skills or experience at work.”

Kathryn kept pressing. Who else? Might there be a helpful colleague whom she could trust? A former college professor or mentor who could advise her? A family member? A peer in a similar or different industry? Anyone she had met at professional conferences? A former colleague who had helped her in a previous job or role?

Natalie could only think of one or two people—and that was a problem.

BLIND SPOT: NO WOMAN IS AN ISLAND

Many women are so focused on their daily responsibilities and “getting the job done” that they haven’t developed and fostered what we affectionately call “a posse.” This is a serious blind spot, because such a group gives women vast, valuable resources for being more effective at work and help in steering their careers.

We use the term posse to describe a helpful web of work connections and other relationships with people who can provide reliable information, support, and advice. Your posse can be enormously helpful to your ability to “get the job done.” This means finding people you can turn to for help about deciding whether to take on a project at work, for advice about how to get your voice heard in meetings, for suggestions on better ways to juggle career and home. Members of your posse are the thought partners who can weigh in when you’re trying to figure out whether to join a task force or create a committee, how to sell an idea, or decide

whether the promotion would be a good career move. When you're struggling and feeling like you might sink, your posse is there to throw you a lifeline. When life feels overwhelming, your posse stands ready to lend a helping hand. Having that kind of support can save your sanity.

The women we have coached have called having a posse a game changer because the members of their group provide a supportive foundation that allows them to thrive—and equally important, sustain—long careers. A healthy roster of sponsors, mentors, colleagues, friends, and family members who can expand your thinking, offer assistance, and cheer you on will enable you to achieve your career goals more easily and efficiently.

PERILS OF THE BLIND SPOT

In our coaching practice, we often see women struggling to cultivate a career without enough help and support. You cannot go it alone and have a highly impactful career. If you want to maximize your potential, it's important to recognize this and develop the ability to ask for what you need. You can have a career without a posse, but you are likely to get farther, be more successful, and feel less stressed with a team on your side.

Not having a posse puts you in a less advantageous position at work. Here are some of the dangers of going it alone that we've identified:

Missed Opportunities

Systems analysts Yang Yang, Nitesh V. Chawla, and Brian Uzzi have found that a key indicator of success in women's career trajectory is a close inner circle of women. While networking is important to both genders, women and men typically use their networks in different ways. When discussing job interviews and workplace concerns, women often want to know how an organization's culture

affects women, and “that type of information is most helpful if it comes from other women,” says Brian Uzzi. Yang, Chawla, and Uzzi surmise that these small “inner networks” open up opportunities and allow for the exchange of advice focused on the specific challenges women face.¹ Although all genders benefit from broad networks, the most successful women have also cultivated a separate, smaller inner circle of trusted women they are close to.²

Not Having a Broad Base of Supporters

In *The Career Architect Development Planner*, Robert Eichinger and Michael Lombardo point out that overdependence on a single advocate can be a career derailier.³ If you're too closely aligned with one sponsor or advocate, you might be seen as lacking independence, self-reliance, or power. And if something should happen to your sponsor, no one else might be aware of your capabilities and value, know your skills and potential, or be available to speak up on your behalf. Maria, one of our clients, found herself in that situation. She had moved up through the ranks at a large national manufacturing company, eventually landing a high-profile executive job as treasurer and head of investments. The CEO had been Maria's longtime sponsor and had complete faith in her. But after he was diagnosed with cancer and had to suddenly leave his job, the company's leadership regime changed. Maria found herself with no posse, no colleagues, and no leaders who could step up to attest to the value she added and offer reasons why it was important that she retain her role. When the new leadership team took over, Maria was swept out. If you have only one sponsor, your fortunes can quickly spiral downward if something happens to him or her.

Lack of Information

While working in the banking industry, Brenda relied on someone who was one of “the most connected people I ever knew” as she navigated her career. This woman made it her business to

know what was going on—who was getting promoted, which new products were being vetted, and what new client relationships were emerging. She was a connector who listened closely to what other people knew and, more important, shared knowledge with others. Being in a meeting with her was like reading a newsletter. Even though Brenda knew she was never going to be exactly like this well-connected woman, she recruited her as a key member of her posse. The relationship continues today. “She’s given me great advice over the years and she’s still super good to talk to,” Brenda says. Look to recruit people to your posse who are sailing on the flow of information and idea generation. They are invaluable. Your posse should include people who look out for you and who scan the horizon for potential projects, promotions, and possibilities. Once they know what you want and need, they can spot and alert you to opportunities that might fit and/or advocate for you.

Lack of Career Navigation

Most of the women we work with are knowledge workers who are employed in organizations where the career ladder isn’t a straight line. A lot of white space exists in today’s complex, matrixed, leveraged organizations, and you need more brains than the one in your cranium to root out the best ways to move upward and achieve career goals. Today’s career path is unlikely to be linear or logical. If you have strong relationships, you’re more likely to hear about the deals that are being made, business trends, mergers, reorganizations, job openings, and disruptive technologies. This information can help you figure out how and where to steer your career.

Running Out of Gas

We’ve coached many women who are burned out. For too long, they’ve been fighting career headwinds as solo sailors, trying to get where they want to go without a knowledgeable crew. A supportive circle of people can prop you up when frustration

and fatigue begin to boil over, when challenges pile up in a way that feels insurmountable. In one memorable coaching call, our exhausted, demoralized client talked about losing sleep over a tough job situation in which she was trying her utmost to protect the team she managed. She did not feel supported and felt very much alone. The resources she needed to take care of herself seemed absent. Her life was consumed by the job, and she became so overwhelmed in the coaching conversation that she cried. Her tank was empty—she'd run out of gas.

Burnout can make you feel like there is nowhere to turn. Research bolsters this assertion.⁴ This became even more clear during the COVID-19 pandemic, when we all learned that consistent self-care and support from other people can make the difference between doing well, hanging in, or spiraling down. Studies show that one way to foster resilience and avoid burnout is to develop strong social support systems.⁵

Interacting Only with People Who Are Like You

It's natural to drift toward people you have a lot in common with, but that can present an obstacle to learning and new experiences. It's important that you don't surround yourself with people who look at the world exactly the way you do or share your personality traits. Members of your posse should have different styles, backgrounds, points of view, and knowledge and should have other traits than you do. Fresh outlooks from people who can expand your thinking are very important. One woman we worked with allied herself with a colleague who had the ability to stay calm and methodical under pressure. She wasn't easily rattled, and our client recruited her to her posse because she was eager to develop that capacity. Many of us grew up with people who are a lot like we are. If you develop relationships with people who have different knowledge, skills, competencies, cultural backgrounds,

perspectives, and personalities and learn about the ways they approach things, you can augment your learning opportunities. In addition, scholarly research supports the idea that diverse groups make better decisions.⁶

Remembering Who You Are

The rewards of a posse can go far beyond career development. You need people who can help you remember who you are when things get rough, who can re-center you when you start wondering why you made the choices you did. For example, after a long, successful career in banking during which Brenda helped financial organizations improve their customers' experiences, she got a call from a former colleague who had joined the U.S. Department of Education under Arne Duncan, secretary of education during the Obama administration. They wanted her to become the first chief customer experience officer and asked her to change the culture of student lending. While the invitation was flattering and customer service was her sweet spot, Brenda had never considered a job in the public sector. But in further conversations, she connected with the vision. She wanted to make a difference in the lives of younger people and this position provided a platform to do that. Although Brenda took the job, she worried about losing sight of why she was going to Washington D.C. She turned to her posse to prop her up when she felt discouraged and questioned what she was doing and why she had taken the job. They stepped up on many occasions to help her reconnect with her purpose. Without them, Brenda says, she couldn't have been as productive and as satisfied in her new role. And although she eventually left that post, she continues to tap into the wisdom and support of her posse today.

Remembering who you are is also necessary when you need to let go and reinvent yourself. During reinvention, the doubting days when you wonder whether you're doing the right thing are bound to

come along. Your courage to do something different will get tested. In the midst of making a wanted or needed shift, your posse can give you the affirmation you need to stay grounded and on course.

COACH ON YOUR SHOULDER

Questions to Help You Reflect on Where You Are Now

- Who do you trust to help you navigate your career and how can you enroll them in your posse?
- What is holding you back from getting people to help you?
- What new step will you take to focus on creating your support network?
- How can you demonstrate reciprocity with the people in your posse?
- What will you do to create time and space to develop and maintain relationships?

STRATEGIES

Building relationships with purpose and focus is a great career advantage. Start with a list. Write down anyone you can think of who has the potential to be a contributing member of your team. Think about the people you trust, people who are in the know, people who have helped you get things done, or people who have influenced your thinking or behavior. Peruse your social media accounts for people you've connected with who are potential members of the posse you need.

Based on your list, start populating categories with the people you have identified (see figure 9). Remember, posse relationships can overlap—it's not only fine to have people who occupy more than one category on your list, it can be an advantage. What's most essential is finding and cultivating people who are in a position to help, advise, and support you and who you can give to

reciprocally. Look for people who can fill a variety of roles as you navigate your career. In this section, we discuss each of the categories that you see in figure 9.

A “Board of Directors”

Don’t worry. We’re not talking about the highly paid people who run companies, worry about shareholders, and hire and fire CEOs. This is a metaphor, not a formal group that meets to make decisions. However, it can be invaluable to assemble a group of diverse people with varying expertise that you can turn to when you need guidance or direction. These should be people who know you well, who understand your challenges, and who maybe even feel like stakeholders in your success. They don’t even necessarily have to know each other. They are only like a corporate board in the sense that you can ask them hard questions and they can help you with strategy because they know you, they know your situation, and they know the organization.

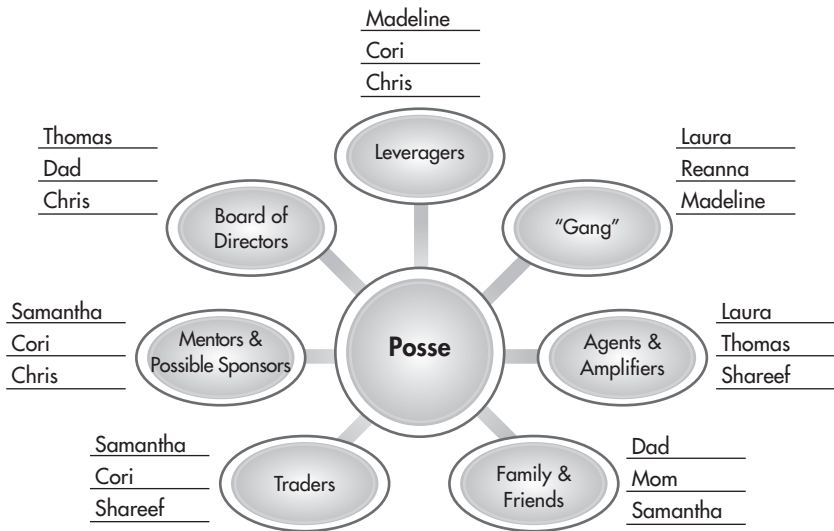


Figure 9. Find your people

Sponsors

Sponsors are people who will go to bat for you. They are willing to expend political capital to put you on a critical project team, identify leadership opportunities, or insist that you get that promotion. Organizational behaviorist Herminia Ibarra points to research showing that men have sponsors in much higher numbers than women.⁷ If the notion of a sponsor makes you feel like you're powerless or overly dependent, think of them as connectors and advocates. They want to help because they know the value you bring. We worked with one woman who had a strong sponsor high up in her organization. When he was asked for names to consider for a senior leadership promotion, he immediately identified this woman. "Can you give me other names?" he was asked. "No," he replied firmly. "Trust me. She is the only name you need."

Agents or Promoters

These are people who can actively market you. They will mention your name and talk you up to appropriate people. They'll be ready with solid reasons why you should be given projects and be considered for new roles. These people play a different role from a sponsor. They're more like your personal advertising agency, a cheerleader squad for your qualities and accomplishments. This also works in reverse: look for opportunities to promote the capable women you know. Create a virtuous cycle.

Mentors

These people are valued thought partners who are politically savvy and can give you solid advice. They're ready and willing to talk an issue through with you to help you consider as many angles as possible. Mentors can help you understand an organization's culture in a way that helps you avoid making unintentional gaffes or mistakes. Kathryn coached one woman, for example, who was seen by her peers as a hard driver. Many would see that as a good trait, but

her style was out of sync with the organization's more collaborative culture. Once she got feedback from a mentor, the woman adjusted her work style to be more open and inclusive and she became more effective as a team player. An important point to keep in mind, though, is that women tend to be overmentored and undersponsored.⁸ As you build trust with your mentors, keep in mind that it might be possible to turn them into sponsors.

Amplifiers

Find mutually supportive women and talk about the ways you can work together to amplify your voices in meetings and other organizational arenas. When a trial balloon goes up during a meeting, help keep it up in the air by reiterating the idea, talking about its merits, and giving credit to the person who said it first. Find others who will do the same for you. This worked well for a group of women who had high-profile jobs at the White House during Obama's presidency. Their presence in the administration's inner circle was groundbreaking and important. Even so, they had to fight the unconscious gender bias that happens when many of the people in the room are men. The women allied with each other and adopted a strategy of repeating each other's ideas and comments, underscoring the name of the woman who made the original contribution. This not only helped the men recognize the women's contributions, it also prevented men from claiming the ideas as their own.⁹ If you're the only woman at the table, see if you can enlist a male colleague in your effort.

People with Business Intelligence

People who have good business intelligence are valuable for helping you understand trends, navigate business currents, and make better decisions. We have one colleague who developed sources throughout her company and her industry. This breadth helped her gather a holistic picture of the business she worked in.

Traders

When Kathryn got a big promotion, she suddenly went from being a leadership development expert to overseeing training and development for the entire organization. This included divisions like operations, technology, and finance that she knew very little about. Knowing she needed to get knowledgeable fast, she called Janet, a woman she knew in operations. When Kathryn asked for help, Janet replied, “You know, I’ve been trying to get you to do some team development in the department for a long time.” Kathryn agreed to make that a priority, and in exchange, Janet agreed to be her go-to person when Kathryn needed operations information or expertise. The exchange of service doesn’t have to be exclusively with women. You’re aiming for the ability to cultivate give-and-take that serves you and the other person and therefore the organization.

A “Gang”

Sometimes you just need a sympathetic ear and time to unload over a cup of coffee or a glass of wine. The members of your gang can be supportive women who are there for you when you need to let off a little steam, find fresh ideas, or create new coping strategies. They’re the team that helps you deal with microaggressions at work, especially if you are one of only a few women in a senior leadership position. This network doesn’t have to be strictly career-oriented, either. You’re looking for friends who get it, who might jump in to help with childcare emergencies, insist you take a break when you’re overwhelmed, and help you remember that you’re not crazy. They’ll take your “career 911” calls and then show up to help you sort it out.

Friends and Family

Don’t forget about the people who love you and care about you, the ones you’re closest with. Family and friends are already rooting for you, so why not tap into their love, support, and energy when yours

is flagging? Sometimes the people who know you best can give you the most authentic feedback. When Kathryn was venting—again—about a difficult boss to her best friend one day, a simple question (“And were you *surprised* he acted that way?”) provided an insight. The question helped Kathryn see that continually complaining about a boss who wasn’t likely to change was not the best use of her time and energy. Enrolling your family and friends in your hopes and objectives helps them know how to support you. Share your successes and good days as well as your trials and frustrations.

Leveragers

Being overleveraged means you’re taking on too much. That risks your ability to do great work and sustain it for the long haul. If you have the financial resources, don’t let social expectations or guilt stop you from hiring the people who can make your life easier. Childcare providers, housekeepers, financial planners, tax preparers, restaurants with good takeout, and personal shoppers can help you leverage time and energy. Remember, your time is worth a lot. To whom can you delegate the things you don’t have time for? It might make more financial sense to pay someone else if it helps free up time that allows you to focus on your career. We talk with too many women who are overworked, and not just because of their employment. Do what you do best and get others to help you with the rest.

STORIES THAT HOLD US BACK

In our coaching sessions, we hear the same statements over and over again:

“I don’t have time to build relationships, and even if I did, I don’t have time to sustain them.”

“If I ask for help, I’m going to be seen as weak.”

“The people who could really help me are too busy.”

“I feel like it’s contrived—like I’m just out for myself.”

“Taking time to build a posse will distract me from the work I’m paid to do.”

Fear can be a powerful obstacle when it comes to asking for help. Often women leaders tell us that they worry that asking for help will be seen as weakness or a sign that they’re not confident about their decision-making skills. Many women we coach are what we call “onlys”; they are the only woman in a group of male colleagues. They want to fit in, and they use much of their energy trying to match the style of the dominant group and be accepted. They often don’t realize the importance of tapping into the help of colleagues, allies, and other supporters.

Women are typically taught or have bought into a mythology that self-sufficiency is the ultimate virtue. They take to heart the saying “If you want something done right, do it yourself.” They tend to ask for help or advice much less often than their male counterparts do. Such attitudes mean that women often don’t view career building as the team sport that it is. Your career track will suffer if you’re constantly swimming laps in the singles lane.

A lot of women in business back away from the word “network” because they hear a negative connotation. Many women we work with say that networking is “contrived” or “insincere” or “sounds too Machiavellian.” Sometimes they’ll just say, “I’m not good at networking.” We find that reframing the term can be useful: networks are nothing more than a web of relationships. They range from casual to intimate and should be collegial, instructive, and mutually beneficial. We’ve discovered that when we talk to women about the importance of building relationships, they will say, “I’m good at that.”

THE POWER OF REFRAMING: NEW STORY

In a professional assessment we did for Mary, a woman in her 30s who worked for a large insurance company, person after person talked about how well connected she was in the company and the industry. Colleagues said things like, “She doesn’t stay in her own silo. She has lots of colleagues in the organization and lots of contacts outside the company. She has contacts throughout the industry. She knows how things get done and how to get things done.” People saw her ability to develop and foster relationships and the way she leveraged them as a great strength.

When Brenda asked Mary how she had become so successful in this area, she said it started when she went to university. As a student on scholarship, Mary quickly realized that she needed to leverage every resource she could think of if she was going to be successful. She recognized early on she would need many diverse people on her team to help her achieve her academic goals. Mary carried that attitude over to her career. After graduation, the relationships she had developed in her academic life helped her land her first job and she continued to use her posse as her career advanced.

You can replace limiting beliefs by reframing your attitudes about asking for help. Recruiting people to your posse won’t just help you, it can provide great benefits to others. Consider these points:

It Is Okay to Ask for Help

It can feel vulnerable to make a request, especially if you fear—consciously or unconsciously—that asking for help makes you appear weak. But doing so can also be a sign of strength and courage. You can ask for an introduction, for someone’s point of view on a situation, for an assignment, or for help with getting your ideas out into the workplace. How will you know what help

is available unless you ask? If someone says no, try not to take it personally and ask if he or she knows anyone else who might be in a position to help. Then try again—you might get a yes from someone else. Try more than once if it doesn't go well. We are big believers in trying more than once. Courage is a muscle that gets stronger the more you use it; the more you ask for help, the easier it gets.

Humility Is Overrated

Promoting yourself, talking about your goals and competencies, is a great way to help others know who you are and what you're reaching for. Talking with authenticity about what you're good at gives people information they could find useful. Point to some of your accomplishments and highlight your skills and competencies.

Get clear about your goals and look for opportunities to talk about them as a way of giving people the opportunity to advise and assist. People can't help if they don't know where you want to end up. Be clear about your requests. Clarity helps those who want to help you know exactly what kinds of information and opportunities you will find useful.

Asking Gives People an Opportunity to Be Generous

Turning to others for support and advice signals that you're human, open, and willing to grow. It also allows others to be generous. Asking for help and giving it shows that you know who you are and who you are not. And allowing other people to help you, inviting them to be a part of your inner circle, can prove to be a source of satisfaction for others. Think about it this way: why would you rob people of an opportunity to be of service?

If you haven't yet realized the power of the posse, take heart. It's never too late to start. Let's explore ways to find your people.

COACH ON YOUR SHOULDER

Advice for Steering Clear of the Blind Spot

STAY IN TOUCH Too many women we coach are embarrassed to realize that they haven't devoted time to keeping in touch with people in their web of relationships. This comes to light in a stark way when they need help to find another job or connect with a prospect or some other kind of help. Touch base occasionally to keep relationships alive with a note, an email, a text, a quick phone call, or a voicemail. Don't wait until you need something to reach out.

CONSTANTLY UPDATE YOUR LIST If you're just starting, a small, curated list is useful for building the posse. Make a phone call, suggest a meeting for coffee or lunch, send a friendly email. Make a point of having a focused conversation with a colleague. Let people know you're looking for help and assure them that you're eager to reciprocate. As your career develops, your list should expand. Constantly scan your environment to find people you can connect with in a beneficial, mutually supportive way. As you make or review your list, ask questions. Is there diversity among the members of your posse? Does it include younger and older people, people of different genders and ethnicities? Do they all know each other? (It's better if they don't.) Will members of your posse give you the information and support you need to be successful? Keep adding people—fresh faces mean fresh insights.

TRAVEL THE TWO-WAY STREET Relationships need attending to, just like houseplants or gardens. It's important to keep up with people. Check in regularly with your people to see what they're doing and how you can help. Women sometimes say, "I can't call someone out of the blue after so many years!" Why not? If it feels awkward, look for reasons to reach out. What is important to these people?

Have you seen an article that might be relevant to their work or life? Do you have a business referral for them? Have you seen (or can you find) news about them on social media or in an alumni newsletter? Do they have a blog or podcast you can comment on? Most people are happy to hear from people from their past, especially if the intention is to congratulate the person or to help them in some way.

ENROLL PEOPLE IN YOUR CAREER When you enrolled in school, you talked to your advisors, chose courses, checked out the professors, and asked for feedback on your assignments. Do this with your posse. Talk to people about your goals and challenges and ask for ideas and feedback. When you hit a milestone or make improvements based on the feedback you have received, circle back with an update to show that you value the help you received and that you're earnest about managing your career.

CREATE CALENDAR SPACE You'll greatly increase the chances of building and maintaining relationships if you set aside specific time on your calendar for making phone calls, writing a note, crafting an email, or sending texts. Keep "relationships" on your ongoing task list for those unexpected free times, such as when a meeting is canceled or an appointment is rescheduled. If your calendar or to-do list seems overcrowded, take a few minutes to jot down everything you think you need to do, whether it's work-related or buying new school supplies for the kids. Shed your Superwoman persona as you review the list. Ask, "What can I delegate? What can I delay? What can I delete?" This can help you free up time, replenish energy, and add perspective to your workload.

Again, a successful career is a team sport. Actively recruit your team, let them know what you want to do, and then let the team

pitch in to help. Look for ways to help your team in return. Your career path will be smoother and your life will be full of an eclectic group of people who enrich your life.

SUMMARY:

What We Want You to Know

- Flying solo in your career is inefficient, exhausting, and unnecessary. You need more than a village if you want a thriving career that is sustainable. Find a “city” of people and build mutually beneficial relationships with them.
- Asking for help and giving it can be a great source of career power.
- Expand the way you think about building relationships. You want diversity among the people on your team of mentors, advisors, cheerleaders, and shoulders to lean on.
- Get clear about your capabilities and career goals and communicate them to people in your posse.
- Consciously cultivate your posse by scheduling time to stay in touch, help others, maintain long-term relationships, and build new ones.

About the Authors

Brenda Wensil is a recognized expert on women's leadership and dedicated to advancing women in the workforce. She is a managing director and heads the Leadership Acceleration practice at Bravanti, a preeminent firm in the field of leadership development.

Wensil served in numerous executive leadership roles in the financial services industry, including head of Customer Strategy for Wachovia, creating successful customer growth and retention strategies, developing brand, and expanding retail banking into new markets. She also developed and led global supply chain management programs for Barclays Bank in London. Wensil was the first-named chief customer experience officer at the U.S. Department of Education,



Office of Federal Student Aid in Washington D.C. She received the 2012 Executive Leadership Award from the U.S. secretary of education and was awarded the Service to the Citizen Award for customer experience in the federal arena.

Wensil has authored numerous articles on women's leadership and inclusive leadership behaviors for *Harvard Business Review*. She is a frequent keynote speaker and panelist on the topic of women's leadership and customer experience strategy.

Wensil holds a master's degree in organization development and executive coaching from the McColl School of Business at Queens University of Charlotte and a BA in journalism from the University of South Carolina. She is a Professional Certified Coach by the International Coaching Federation and a Board Certified Coach by the Center for Credentialing and Education. She is a senior fellow of the American Leadership Forum and a graduate of the Executive Leadership Program at the Kenan-Flagler Business School, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Kathryn Heath, PhD, is a distinguished thought leader, author, and sought-after speaker on the topic of women's leadership. For more than twenty years, she has coached high-potential women leaders to help them move forward faster. She is a coauthor of *The Influence Effect: A New Path to Power for Women Leaders* (Berrett-Koehler, 2017) and *Break Your Own Rules: How to Change the Patterns of Thinking That Block Women's Path to Power* (Jossey-Bass, 2011). She also authored five chapters in the *HBR Guide for Women at Work* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2019).

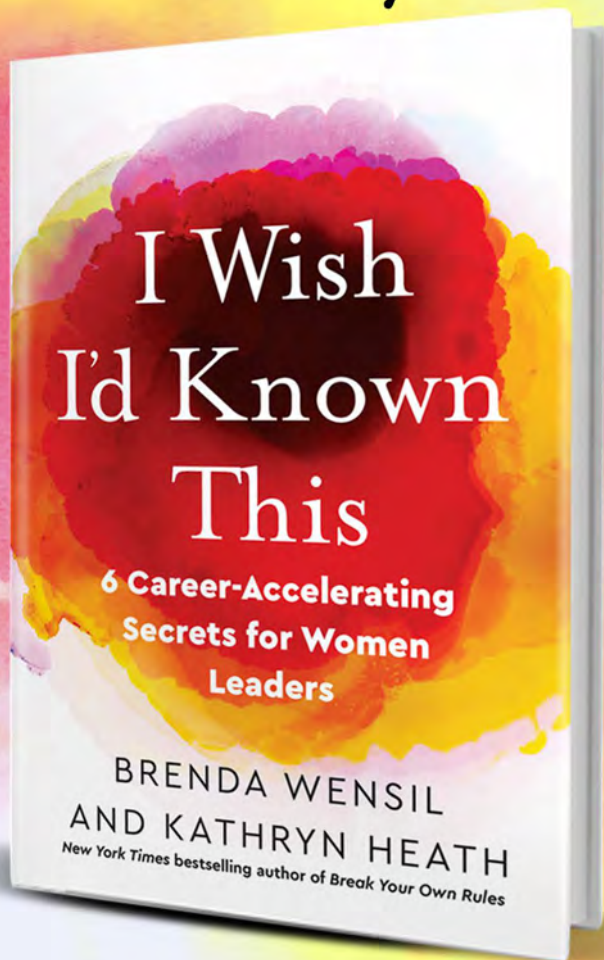


Heath currently serves as a managing director of the Leadership Acceleration Practice at Bravanti. She was a founding partner of Flynn Heath Leadership, where she designed and executed custom programs to recruit, retain, and promote women and to help women overcome barriers to advancement. Previously, Heath was senior vice-president and director of First University at First Union, where her inventive and results-focused approach won her numerous awards in the field of learning and development.

Heath has also coauthored numerous articles on women's leadership for *Harvard Business Review*. She is a high-demand speaker for conference keynotes and other events, and she has presented at the 24th Annual ICAN Women's Leadership Conference and the Network of Executive Women Leadership Summit.

Heath holds a PhD from the University of North Carolina Greensboro; a master's degree in education from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte; and a BA from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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