

Women: Get more from your careers

Author discusses how to succeed without surrendering who you are

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By DARLA ATLAS / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

Most of us have never sat down and figured out our life's purpose.

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Lynette Lewis

But it's a crucial step toward having a fulfilling career, says Lynette Lewis, author of *Climbing the Ladder in Stilettos: 10 Strategies for Stepping Up to Success and Satisfaction at Work* (W Publishing, \$21.99).

"I see our careers as an extension of who we are in our hearts and the impact we want to have on people," she says. "It's really about the relationships for women in particular. That's what stirs our hearts."

Ms. Lewis, in town recently for book signings and a coaching seminar, talked about developing that purpose, looking on the bright side and avoiding stumbling in those stilettos.

Question: You included a story in the book about an IBM executive who had finished a huge video project, which took her to three continents. But as she reviewed it, she realized, "I cannot relate to this piece of videotape." She wondered if that was success – sitting in her living room with that video. Do you think that's a common trap, equating a prestigious job for one's purpose?

Answer: We all have our notions of what success is going to look like and feel like. We work toward this picture we have. Oftentimes we get to the pinnacle of success and then there's a sense of "This wasn't

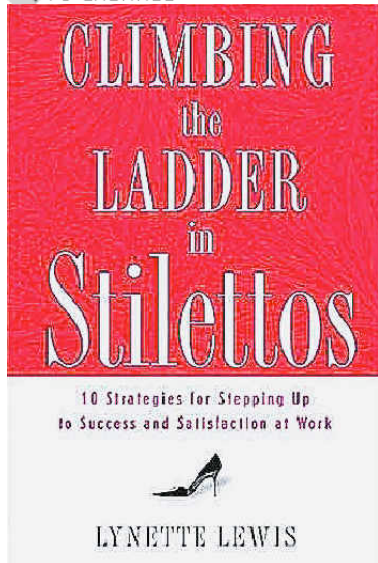
anything I hoped it would be." I think women especially evaluate that trade-off – and there's always a trade-off – and ask if the trade-offs are worth the sacrifice.

Question: Can you talk a little about our need for a pat on the back? Why don't companies realize that it can almost be more important than money?

Answer: If you look at studies, what people really want out of work is the personal satisfaction and a sense of power, that we're effecting change in people's lives. We're always going to feel underappreciated. That's how I've always felt in my career. So in my work, I just lavish it on people.

Question: I like the quote you included from Barbara Walters, that you should take every crumb the boss gives you and handle it magnificently.

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Answer: It feels so often like you're thrown a crumb. I did a major project and spent hundreds of hours on it, and they gave me a very small gift certificate. I'm thinking, "Please, folks! This was worth a \$10,000 bonus!"

Question: You say that a leader is someone who finds joy in celebrating others' achievements. But what if you don't have a leader like that?

Answer: What I've done is really look at the position and milk the opportunities for my own goals. But my number-one challenge is to do a great job for this person, because you never know when you'll come around the bend and there they are again. You never want to have to regret an interaction; you really can't afford to make that mistake.

Question: It seems like the nature of business is changing now; companies don't necessarily want employees to stick around for 40 years. So how can workers keep a sense of loyalty?

Answer: I think that in the larger firms and companies, there's an ability to move around, to do a lot of different roles. That brings up the whole networking aspect – building relationships that transcend what you're doing now. I think it's very important that you work on communication, either by e-mail or phone. Do some extra things to build that trust.

Question: In the book, you talk about giving a speech that didn't turn out well. What did you learn from the experience that we can all learn from?

Answer: Oh, they hated it. I'll never forget that, because my natural reaction was to say, "These women are crazy! They have no concept of how great I am." Instead, my mentor told me that not everyone is going to love you every single time. What I learned from it is just the need to really connect, to not be afraid in the middle of a talk to switch gears.

Question: You encourage people to expect the unexpected in their careers, that you never know what's about to be offered to you.

Answer: And sometimes the opportunities come from outside voices. At one point in my career, I really wanted a new role, and no one around me seemed to be advocating for that. I met an outside person while

doing community service, and it turns out he had a voice inside my company. He was the one who became my advocate. The title of the last chapter is "Different From What I Thought, Better Than What I Imagined." I think that's really what our lives end up being.

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Creating a
career purpose

Lynette Lewis, author of *Climbing the Ladder in Stilettos: 10 Strategies for Stepping Up to Success and Satisfaction at Work*, says her purpose is "to inspire and motivate people to live lives of hope, overcoming every challenge on the way to their dreams." To find yours, start by asking the following questions:

1. When people explain why they want me involved or why they referred someone to me, what do they say?
2. Which of my abilities and gifts are most often noted and affirmed by my colleagues?
3. What activities bring me the most joy and satisfaction?
4. What could I be passionate about doing for the next 10 years?
5. If I could have any role or position at my current organization or elsewhere, what would I do?
6. Given my life experiences, my education and my gifts, what unique attributes set me apart from others?

Look for common threads or a central theme in your answers. The next step is to create a purpose statement, which includes two elements: a word or phrase that indicates a change in status (to increase, to prevent, to nurture, to entertain, to heal, etc.), and an identification of the problem or condition to be changed. Think big. If you go

Lynette Lewis will host a book signing tonight at 6:30 at the SMU Bookstore, 3060 Mockingbird Lane. Free. Call 214-768-2435.

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