

CICELY SIMPSON

PULL UP

YOUR



C.H.A.I.R.

FIVE STRATEGIES TO **CHANGE THE**
TRAJECTORY OF YOUR CAREER

ForbesBooks

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This book is dedicated to ...

*My father, James Simpson
Corporal, United States Marine Corps
Vietnam Veteran
June 16, 1947, to April 12, 2020*

*My mother, Pat Simpson,
who always encourages me to take leaps
of faith in life, saying, "Just pray."*

*My brother, Shawn Simpson,
who is my rock. No words can express my
sincere gratitude to and for him.*

*Kelly Simpson and Jordan Simpson,
for their enduring support.*

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ABOUT
CICELY SIMPSON



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The most important acknowledgment is my faith in Jesus Christ. Every door that opens and every door that closes is God showing me a different path. I would never have guessed my career would be in business and politics. Even if you are not a person of faith, believe that there is something greater than you leading and directing your path.

I am thankful for the individuals who have shaped my leadership journey and believed in me over the past twenty-five-plus years: Amy Dement, Jan Cyr, Gail Norwood, Phyllis Menees, Bernie James, Connie James, Janet Kerr, Chuck Cagle, Beecher Frasier, US Congressman Lincoln Davis, US Congressman Jim Cooper, AJ Jones, Robert Primus, Justin Maierhofer, Vickie Walling, Chuck Merin, Steve Caldeira, Karen Raskopf, Nigel Travis, Chrissy Pace, Matthew Lopes, Jessica Falborn, Montee Wynn, and Dr. Adetola Kassim. These individuals, and so many others, have informed the leadership strategies and lessons that are captured in this book.

Ilene Rein and Chris Prouty: This book would not have happened without you. I'm humbled by your friendship and support.

I am grateful for my lobbying clients who trust me every day to represent them in the halls of power in Washington, DC.

I am also grateful and thankful for my coaching clients, who allow me to walk alongside them on their leadership journey. Thank you for trusting me to coach your career transformation to achieve the success you desire.

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P R E F A C E

TAKING A SEAT AT THE TABLE

In 2020, I was asked to be a guest speaker at a leadership seminar, talking to an audience of CEOs and executives. As I approached this speech, I wanted to come up with a new way to tell people what I've done and how I've done it. While preparing for my presentation, I came across a quote from Shirley Chisholm, the first African American woman in Congress, who said, "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair."

That was it! That brilliant statement summed up the way I've lived my life, and will continue to do so. When I shared the quote with my audience, people immediately wrote it down. I went on to

explain that I often needed to “bring my own chair” and “make my way” to job interviews, to meetings, to ... you name it!

After my presentation, I pondered Shirley Chisholm’s quote for days. The more I used the quote, the more it captured people’s attention, and the feedback was instantaneous. In fact, it became so popular that I developed the C.H.A.I.R. Leadership program. I am now on a mission to help you with tips and strategies that will change the trajectory of your career and your life.

While I did not know it at the time, the genesis for my leadership program—and this book—started in my childhood. My father was a Marine, a Vietnam veteran. As you can imagine, discipline and execution were the order of the day! He believed that all of us make our own paths in life, and we must take responsibility for ourselves and our actions. I always remember him as being firm but kind. He had a teacher’s heart and would use any circumstance or situation to help my brother and me understand how life works *for* us—when we decide to take responsibility.

For example, if my father needed a car repaired, he would have my brother or me make the call. If he needed to make a doctor’s appointment, one of us would call the office. If there was a problem with a utility bill—you guessed it—my brother or I would be handed the phone. Now, you may be thinking, *Why would he be mean enough to have his kids make these calls?*

Unbeknownst to my brother and me, my father had a logical and long-term reasoning for having us do this. He was standing right beside us, listening to the call, giving us directions to follow. He would say things like, “Okay, now say ... Now ask ...” My father did this with us well into our teen years, and by that time we were used to having conversations and articulating beyond our age. We learned to know what we were saying, why we were saying it, and how to say it

clearly to communicate our message. When I look back, I can see he was teaching us how to create conversations, to *champion* ourselves, to be *honest* with ourselves and others, and to have a positive *impact* on others.

Without realizing it, my father was coaching my brother and me. He was instilling principles and values that would make us successful.

My father challenged and motivated us to work harder than everyone else—to go the extra mile to accomplish our goals. My education is a great example. I enjoyed school, but tests and exams were a challenge. One day, I came home beaming because I received a ninety-eight on a test. I was so proud of myself and just knew my dad would be too. However, after he reviewed my test, he asked, “Why wasn’t it a hundred?”

I said, “Excuse me?”

He replied, “Why wasn’t it a hundred?” Then he asked, “Did you try as hard as you could? Could you have tried a *little* harder?”

His question pierced my soul. He was challenging me to do my very best, not to settle for less than my best. He wasn’t being cruel; in his own way, he was teaching me the leadership lessons I use today in my life and leadership program.

This C.H.A.I.R. Is for You

Whether I’m on stage giving a presentation or engaged in individual conversations, at some point my audience will ask about my leadership path in politics and business. Among my accomplishments, creating the C.H.A.I.R. Leadership program is one of the most satisfying because I’m on a mission to help others achieve their goals and realize their dreams by pulling up their “chair” and making their way toward success. In the chapters that follow, you will find insights,

direction, and strategies that have made me successful ... all of which you can apply to your life, and I am here to coach and encourage you on your journey.

As you delve into this book, you will discover the power behind the words in C.H.A.I.R. I challenge you to ponder each page individually and each chapter as a whole, then begin to figure out how to apply what you are reading to your personal and professional life.

This is not a one-and-done book. It isn't a book that you read and say, "That's great!" then move on to your next one. This is a book to read and *reread*. It is a book that will give you strategies to implement that can drastically and radically change your life ... *if you practice, practice, practice* what you are about to read.

I've been doing exactly that—practicing, implementing, and mastering the strategies within these pages for over twenty-five years. Now, I want to coach you on your journey to do the same. A great thing about life is there's always something new to learn, a new way to challenge

yourself, a new aha moment that comes along, and I want to help you master those moments.

There's a saying in business: you don't have to "boil the ocean."

You have to pick a path to follow and choose a direction to go in.

That means you can't take on everything and fail to accomplish anything. You have to pick a path to follow and choose a direction to go in. But which path? And what direction? This book will answer both of those questions for you. Within these pages, you will read about *five actionable strategies* with practical tips for application that will help you walk the path and take the direction that is right for you. As you understand, apply, and practice these time-tested strategies, using this book as your guide, you will empower yourself to set goals that you can truly achieve.

This book is a road map, a practical manual, a transformative guide to self-leadership and leading others. As you read, I'd like you to keep something in mind. Throughout my career, I have been the only woman in many boardrooms across the country, often the only person of color, and the only woman of color. I've also been the youngest person to serve in particular roles. I've led transformational initiatives and produced results that have been celebrated as milestone achievements. So if you feel you're an underdog, I've been in your shoes. If you have been successful but want to achieve even more, I'm in your corner.

If you feel you're an underdog, I've been in your shoes.

As you apply what you learn, you will educate and empower yourself. You will learn and engage by challenging your own mindset and beliefs—about yourself and others. You will be able to shift your perspective, which can open new doors of opportunity and success. Feel free to dog-ear the pages, scribble notes in the margins, and add Post-it notes. Leadership is a lifelong journey—a marathon, not a sprint—and this book will affirm, equip, and empower you.

This C.H.A.I.R. Is about You

As you read through this book, remember this: C.H.A.I.R. is about you. It is about leading yourself *first*. I once heard someone say, “If you can't lead yourself, you can't lead others.” That is so true. I firmly believe that my life illustrates this self-application, and I'm sure you can identify with the same at some level.

The first summer I was out of college, my father told me, “I want you to work on a factory assembly line.” (My father had spent his working career doing just that.) He then added, “I want you to under-

stand the value of hard work, to understand the value of the experiences that you're being afforded, and the education you're getting."

I tried hard to get out of it, but when my father said he wanted us to do something, that meant it really wasn't a choice. Here is the rub: The job was an hour and a half away from my house. I had to wake up every morning at 4:00 a.m. to get there by 6:00 a.m., work until 3:00 p.m., come home, and do it all over again the next day. I did this for an entire summer, and I was miserable. My mother was my saving grace that summer. She knew how dejected I was, so she woke me up every morning at 4:00 a.m. to ensure I left the house on time. What I learned from that experience far outweighed what I was paid—work ethic, commitment, keeping your word, doing the hard work. That experience stays with me to this day.

As a young woman, I had no idea how these lessons would benefit me in the long run. But one thing I did know: no one was going to live my life for me. As I look back, the self-discipline I developed that summer has stayed with me, and I've realized that self-discipline is a foundational building block to self-leadership.

Now let's focus on you. Before you read any further, here's your first assignment. Take a pen and a blank sheet of paper, or open up a Word document on your computer, and write down the following:

- What are your leadership goals?
- What makes you different from others?
- How does your answer to the previous question impact your leadership journey?
- Write down a word, phrase, or quote that motivates you.

You will need all these pieces of information as you continue to read.

TAKING A SEAT AT THE TABLE

Are you ready to take your seat at the table? Great!

Pull up a “chair” and get ready to learn and apply five actionable strategies that can drastically—and radically—take your self-leadership skills and ability to lead others to the next level!

All my best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cicely Simpson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'C' and a long, sweeping tail.