

The Leadership Journey



A Self-Assessment
Program for High
Achieving Women
at Midlife

by Janet O. Hagberg

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OVERVIEW

The Leadership Journey Program is designed for high achieving women at midlife or midcareer who are anticipating a transition in their lives or work. Whether they are drawn to the change or forced into it, they are seeking insight or guidance along the way.

Women with any of the following characteristics would benefit most from this program:

- ❖ High achieving women who have always liked to work, although they may have been questioning it recently. They are women who achieve at everything they do including leisure activities, parenting, even personal growth.
- ❖ Conscientious women who are now questioning their direction, inner drive, values, commitment, or energy level. Crises at work seem insurmountable. Challenging work no longer brings the satisfaction it used to. They frequently say, "if I can just get through this week (month, quarter), things will be better."
- ❖ Busy committed women who want more balance, clearer priorities. They may feel alienated from their friends or associates. They long for friendships but have no time for them. Family and work takes all their time.
- ❖ Normally healthy women who find themselves, perhaps for the first time facing major illness, or chronic pain and wonder what that means for them, their families, their work.
- ❖ Competent women who feel they've come to a wall, personally, professionally, or spiritually and can't break through it. They fear becoming dormant, yet they feel it might be happening to them. When they see younger people who seem to have fewer problems they feel jealous or angry.
- ❖ Family oriented women who now find that intimate relationships are strained, or at crisis levels. Children and aging parents are exacting a huge toll and they can't keep it all going as usual. They have more conflict with close friends or their partner than usual. They want to either withdraw or fight.
- ❖ Women who are usually under control emotionally but now feel desperate that the dream they had about themselves may not come true or that it has and it isn't what they thought it would be.
- ❖ Women who have a spiritual place somewhere within that has been dormant for quite some time. Now that spirituality is calling for exploration, for integration into their lives. It appears to be different from their childhood religious experience, but they are uncertain how to go about exploring it.
- ❖ Bright, engaging women who have relied on their heads for guidance, and who thought of feelings as either weak, missing, or unnecessary. Now their feelings are exploding, wanting to be recognized and appreciated.

If you have NEVER considered yourself a high achiever or a role model to others for your achievement, this program may not be right for you. The assumption behind this program is that you have already achieved confidence and leadership or success at what you do. This program deals with the steps *beyond* achievement. High achieving women may find the content of this self-assessment unusual. Most women achievers at midlife think if they can fix their career, or find other work their issues will be solved. When they make a

job change for a new challenge or to get away from a person or a situation, they are content for awhile, only to find the same problems or issues repeating themselves. Or the issues get more serious. They think work is the issue.

Much wisdom and research on midlife says just the opposite, that work, per se is not the major issue. Inner reflection is necessary to find out the underlying issues of distress. This is very different from earlier job or personal transitions in which job change or new challenges solved the problem. You may end up changing your work but for different reasons than you anticipated originally.

MIDLIFE RAISES PROBLEMS OF THE SOUL AND SPIRIT. THE WORK MUST START THERE.

Marion Woodman, in *The Pregnant Virgin*, speaks to the issues of soul and spirit. She says women who have lived high achieving lives in the driven masculine side do not easily give up their P.P.F.F. (prestige, power, fame, and fortune) for harmony with the cosmos. She likens the transformation to planting an amaryllis bulb. We must have faith that the bulb inside us that appears dormant, even dead, has indeed the ingredients that will result in glorious bloom if we tend to that bulb.

“We water the bulb, give it sunlight, watch the first green shoot, the rapidly growing stock, the buds, and then marvel at the great bell flowers tolling their hallelujahs to the snow outside. Why should we have more faith in an amaryllis bulb than in ourselves? Is it because we know that the amaryllis is living by some inner law—a law that we have lost touch with in ourselves?”

Only in the eternal stillness, silence, and mystery in the death of the blossom and rest for the bulb is the life ready for another bloom. But we do not trust that same inner law in ourselves. Insecurity lies at the heart of our fear of change.

When we have midlife issues, business failures, program cancellations, board conflicts, health problems, loss of interest, death, or powerless feelings, we are being presented with the possibilities for a new life—if we listen to the message in these events and trust the Amaryllis bulb inside ourselves.

More likely at this point in your life, something deeper or bolder is necessary, rather than business as usual. David Lloyd George, a statesman at the turn of the century said, “sometimes a bold move is indicated. You cannot cross a chasm in two jumps.”

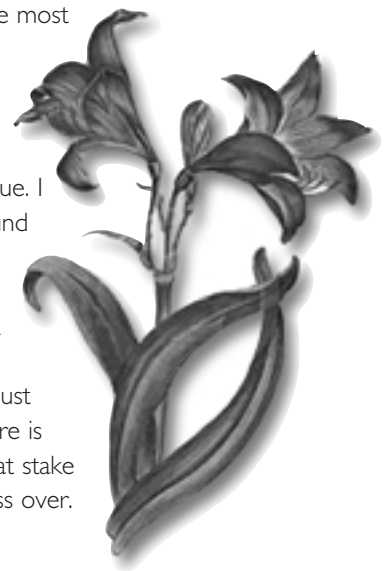
As achievers you had to go against the grain in the culture and the organization in order to achieve what you have now. You had to be courageous enough to take a leap in order to get to the point you are now. *You will have to do that again in this program.* You will have to take another leap, to the understanding that at mid-life the transformation occurs *inside* you, not outside of you, like it has in the past.

Our central metaphor or image for this program is the Amaryllis bulb, which draws in strength and nourishment during the dormant period and then bursts forth in glorious bloom. This program will allow you to go inside, to look at the issues that have been lying dormant there or have perhaps been seeking attention. You may even want to get yourself an Amaryllis bulb and when you are ready, start watering it and watch what happens.

THE BASIC ISSUES OF PEOPLE OVER THE AGE OF 35 ARE AT THEIR BASE SPIRITUAL—QUESTIONS OF PURPOSE, MEANING, VALUE, PASSION OR CALLING.

Those are the hardest issues to face and to resolve, but also the most crucial in your entire life.

Some readers are already saying, “that all sounds good, but that’s not my issue. I don’t have time to sit around and navel gaze.” We ask you to try it long enough to see the payoffs. It **WILL** take longer to experience changes in your soul than just changing jobs, because there is more at stake. But what’s at stake is far too important to gloss over.



There is no established cultural ritual, no rite of passage into the second half of life. THIS PROGRAM COULD BECOME ONE FOR YOU. One thing is clear. You do have to give up or reorder some things in midlife in order to get other things that are more important. You can't have the frantic life and peace of mind. You can't seek perfection and be whole.

The main outcome of this program for you may be the patience to wait for the underlying issues to emerge. And that outcome may be the most important.

So we ask you to let yourself move into your interior frontier, your inner domain. Lean into the unknown, face

your fears, take a step inward and forward. It may even feel distasteful, but somewhere inside you, you know it is time to face yourself and do some hard inner work. Your future depends on it. Your leadership in this century demands it.

You are not alone, nor are you crazy, although you might think so. You may envy women who look like they have their lives in order but many women cover their dissatisfaction well, especially high achievers. If their lives really are "together" they have been working on it, doing things you can do too. The satisfying life begins with a process—an inner journey.

R E S U L T S

RESULTS

While everyone who completes this program will experience self-assessment in several forms, each woman will emerge with different insights and different needs for the future.

The range of life and work outcomes will be broad. You can expect to...

- ❖ Stay at your job but change the way you function in it
- ❖ Find that a referral for counseling, body work, or spiritual work will take you the next step
- ❖ Make personal changes, therefore altering the way you see work in your life, or the way you see yourself at work
- ❖ Change the way you relate to intimates and family, not focusing on work at all
- ❖ Change jobs or employers but stay in the same field
- ❖ Change careers or drop out for a while to do more personal work or explore non-work aspects of yourself
- ❖ Find this is not the right time for self-assessment so you will make no changes now

Because this segment of THE LEADERSHIP JOURNEY is a soul search, we expect you to treat it differently than other professional programs you've participated in. You will explore in a different way, more reflectively. You may experience a slowing down. And there is clearly an expectation that you will be vulnerable, which may be new to you.

Reflection means mulling things over, asking questions, resting, being restless because of unanswered questions, struggling with paradox and unmet expectations, considering new approaches, being quiet, receiving from others, getting flashes of insight. It's not the same as putting

together a strategic plan for next year's business. Ease into this, especially if it is new for you. You may reflect best by walking, talking to others, taking hot baths, doing hobbies, or writing. Try out different ways, depending on your personal style. But do reflect.

The format of this program is simple: You begin by meeting with your Leadership Journey counselor. Then you work through this series of nine self-assessment packets on different subjects, while reading assigned books and writing in your journal.

During the time you work through the packets, you will meet regularly (usually monthly) with your Leadership Journey counselor for reflective sessions. This is very important, because talking things out is an effective way of sorting out ideas and putting together your insights. The counselor can help you focus on the things that are emerging for you, things you may not even be aware of until you talk about your reactions.

Lastly, you and your counselor decide what the next steps will be for you and what resources you will need to pursue them.

If you are feeling drawn to this leadership Journey, this reflective experience so far, let the anticipation of what will unfold grow within you. Ride along and let the process take you with it. Trust the underlying intent, to take a soul search and find peace of mind.

Pick out a friend, a co-worker, or soul mate who will share your journey with you as your Leadership Journey Partner. It will help you stay on track. You do the talking, sorting, and reflecting. She or he listens. Set time aside to see this person so there is someone besides your Leadership Journey counselor who gives you continuity. It can be a lonely journey all by yourself. Write the name and number of your Leadership Journey partner here.

EXPECTATIONS

OF PARTICIPANTS

- ❖ A commitment to the time it will take to complete these packets (minimum of eight months)
- ❖ A willingness to work through the packets and answer the questions and exercises as honestly as possible
- ❖ Private time for reflection and journal writing, or tape recording of your responses
- ❖ Meetings with your Leadership Journey counselor
- ❖ Change, based on your conclusions, with feedback from your Leadership Journey partner and your counselor
- ❖ Selecting next steps in your leadership journey, including any or all of the following:

career counseling referral
spiritual direction referral
therapy referral
support group, 12 step program
medical advice
body work specialists
books
retreats
other specialists



