

## Preface

I always knew I wanted to publish a book at some point. In my business of leadership and coaching, I had learned a great deal in pursuing mastery of my craft and I wanted to share these things with others. However, the book became a casualty of my schedule or more pressing priorities. This continued for some time, until I had an internal personal crisis that brought me to a turning point in both life and work.

I will always recall this event vividly, as it is really the day and time this book began its earnest journey to completion. I was at a good place in life and business. I had just received my MCC certification as a coach, and my business was doing well in its fifth year. I was what I considered “successful” and becoming masterful at my work. I had “hit my stride,” or so I thought. Then one day an unexpected turn of events meant my husband and I would be making room in our blended nest for one more child — another teenager. I won’t relate all the details of this now, since you will read it soon in the coming chapters. This addition meant certain sacrifices for me, and my responses fell far short of where I thought I had matured, both personally and professionally. When I found out what else my new daughter would be bringing, I went right over the edge. That afternoon I was coaching a client who was having some real struggles, but not about his work. His crisis involved parenting his teenage son, and I was giving him advice. When I ended the call, I felt like a fraud. Here I was responding selfishly, seeking support for my position (*and not finding any*), preaching rules above relationships and stubbornly holding *my* ground for *me* and *my* needs. I am not very proud of those moments, which unfortunately lasted for some time until I was confronted by my own coach. I realized in a moment — one big crashing and crushing moment — that I was horribly out of integrity.

That was several years ago, but I clearly remember feeling so uncomfortable with myself, knowing that I was operating in a completely selfish place, but still unable to climb out of that pit. I always thought to myself that one of the reasons I was good, even masterful, at what I did — coaching others to greater levels of leadership — was because I always stayed one chapter ahead of my clients in terms of the challenges and changes they were making. Coaches need to live their own lives well in order to help anyone else. It is about being *your* best, to elicit the best from your clients.

It was also about this time that I was introduced to a Dewitt Jones video, “*Celebrate What’s Right with the World,*”<sup>1</sup> that in turn introduced me to the life-changing concept of being the best *for* the world, not just the best *in* the world. As I explain in the chapter on the Significance Level of my Summit Advance Model, this thinking was

what helped me right myself after being upside down with a heavily weighted self. It, combined with great coaching from my own coach, Pat White, MCC<sup>2</sup>, is what enabled me to climb out of the hole I had dug. It gave me something to hold onto, a rope to climb up and out, and continue my journey to not only Success, but to Significance. I had been acting like a Victim, instead of seeking Significance.

Shortly after this moment of truth, my own personal awakening, this book was conceived, and has since been in its gestation until the time was right. That time is now. I tried to write it earlier, but my motivation then wasn't authentic. I had to grow first, and I had to once again stay a chapter ahead in my own development in order to write it for others. My work with clients allowed me to observe in detail what processes, behaviors, attitudes and motivators enable people to climb to new heights, overcome obstacles and be transformed into new people, new leaders. I began to feel almost pregnant with the book in me. I had my own "*Phoenix*" rising, my own transformation out of a bad, dark place of inauthentic behavior to the lightness of significant being. The Summit Advance Model, which is what this book details, and the 3A's process which fuels and gives wheels to our journeys to Significance, began taking shape.

On large poster paper, I started by sketching out my thoughts and observations about paths that would lead to significance. The resulting Summit Advance Model has three levels — Survival, Success and Significance — each with narrowing "territory" which obviously led to a triangle, or what has become a very appropriate *mountain metaphor*. Getting to Significance is indeed a climb, and one that is serious business. I have mentioned in the book that this is not a day hike, but a life time pursuit. I had a large body of systematic anecdotal evidence, my own laboratory of leaders that I had observed, coached or led, which allowed me to identify behaviors and values that fit each of these levels. I soon had the makings of a rich personal self assessment, and accompanying values and distinctions between two sides of this mountain model (left and right) and each of the three levels. The corresponding processes of what I have termed "The Three A's" (*acknowledge, align, advance*), the actions required to move up and across this mountain of significance, were also clearly visible in the personal and professional lives of my clients, and others I observed at various levels of achievement.

And, of course, I have my own life, which has served to very personally illustrate the territory and the trials associated with a climb to significance. I have climbed my own mountains, and experienced my own failures. And one thing I have learned,

above all else, is that we always have the opportunity to get back on the right path, and continue pursuing significance, no matter what has happened before.

A coach often becomes the choreographer of an intricate *pas de deux*, a dance between the creative tension and personal aspiration of leaders working in organizations. In the Summit Advance Model, personal aspiration is aspiring for a *life* of significance. If we are awake, we all feel the human drive to not just survive, not just succeed, but to be of significance, to make an impact, no matter how large or small our world or stage may be. I have observed how entwined, and sometimes *entangled*, the dance of ego and purpose is – sometimes so tangled that it prevents us from reaching significance.

We must lead ourselves well before we can lead others. This requires *personal* leadership. Significance may be a very difficult and nebulous term to nail down into a simple description for everyone. But in order to reach it, we have to know that's where we are going. We have to know what it looks like, and where it is on the map of life. You will find that after reading the chapter on Significance, you will have a much better idea of where it is in your own life. But there is still one more place to go, one even higher destination at the top of the model. I have called this place the Summit. The Summit is perhaps the biggest distinguisher of my model over other books about significance. Getting to the Summit involves more than self, or even others. It involves a partnership with the divine, an alignment with what we have come to call a “higher power.” As I crafted the Summit Advance Model over time and observation, I became even more aware of how incredibly important the actual Summit is, even over arriving in the territory of Significance. I have experienced this in my own life, and I have been privileged to observe this partnership in other leaders at all levels, in all places.

The structure of the Summit Advance Model provides the organization and outline for this book. I found I was able to use this model to achieve breakthrough results coaching others. Over the birthing process of the book I also noticed that some amazing things were happening in our world. The tragedies of 911 seemed to blow open a door of world changing events over the next decade. The push to globalization and rapidly shifting geo-political boundaries and mindsets, economic downturns, increasing weather anomalies and the rapid rise and head spinning advances in technology are changing us. I was seeing clients who had formerly ridden the prosperity wave into shore now paddling for their lives in the shallow end. These people appeared as if the wind had been knocked out of their sails, their stuffing was hanging out and they were paralyzed watching their industries

circle the drain. I saw leaders I knew to be full of zest and that certain “mojo” now on the sidelines. Some of these top leaders, these movers and shakers, had lost their sense of purpose and didn’t know where they were headed anymore. Unforeseen events, whether in the natural, financial or political world means we have all had to make some very big changes. We now live in a world where we can no longer *play* at leadership, or play at success. And we cannot stand on the sidelines watching. It is time to commit to a pursuit beyond all that. It is time to commit to *significance*.

Today *no one* can be on the sidelines. That is not an option. I expect the reader who picks up this book will be ready for this commitment. I haven’t climbed any physical mountains, at least not the ones I have written about that require oxygen and real Tibetan Sherpas. But I am an athlete, and I have played competitive golf and done my share of marathons. I know what it takes to be committed to tackling a mountain of any kind, and I have advanced my own summits. I have suffered the pains of defeat and failure, but I have also known the joys of achieving the peaks. I know what it means to fall, but also to get right back up and continue climbing. I won’t be staying at the base of the mountain. In fact, partly as a result of this book, I have committed to climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro as part of a team fund raising project for an organization that raises awareness and resources for clean water in various regions of Africa. My hope for you, the reader and committed climber, is that you will see yourself as one engaged in a *lifetime* pursuit of significance. You will see yourself on this mountain. We may need to sit down a while. We might need time to heal from injuries, bad decisions, and just plain old bad weather. As with Kilimanjaro, we may need time and conditioning to acclimate to the dramatic increase in altitude. But we always get back up, back on the path, and resume the climb.

Though I have emphasized significance as a place and contribution to others that does not cater to self, there are very tangible personal rewards to your climb. The greatest reward of pursuing significance, of making this lifetime commitment, is the certain knowledge that *you are living your purpose*. That has been the question and pursuit of the ages. Knowing that you have not only discovered it, but are truly living it, is a reward that cannot be achieved any other way, and will provide you the greatest joy in life. It is well worth your commitment.

When I first thought of writing this book, I was thinking and living only on the left side of the middle level of the mountain model. You will know more about what I mean here after you read the chapter that introduces the model. The book never materialized at that point because my driving forces were not authentic. None of us can make a summit advance if we don’t come from an authentic place. We may

try to force things, and we might even have a modicum of success, but it won't last, and the journey won't be real. It will not end up in significance. Now, years later, and after many of my own summit advances, the time is right. This book can serve as your personal Sherpa, friend, advisor and climbing guide for the mountain of significance. It will be a mirror into your soul, your purpose and passion, and a window to your future. It will provide you an abundance of tools, tried and true "Triple A" journey maps (*you won't get lost*), and the resources to create and become part of powerful and productive communities that join you in climbing *UP: PURSUING SIGNIFICANCE in Leadership and Life*.

This Irish mountaineer wishes you the traditional Irish blessing for your climb:

*May the road rise to meet you,  
May the wind be always at your back,  
May the sun shine warm upon your face,  
The rains fall soft upon your fields and,  
Until we meet again,  
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.*

**Joan O. Wright**  
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