

## INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time, before I went to college, my mother worried. I didn't know how to prepare what she called "any decent meals." So she bought me a copy of *The Joy of Cooking*, and sat me down to watch and learn. She opened the cookbook to a favorite recipe and began to show me how to make it.

"Here it says use vegetable oil, but I always use olive oil."

And then "here it says use chili peppers, but I always leave those out, because the dish gets too spicy."

And on it went. Just like that.

"It says here to add salt, but *never* do that—salt is bad for your heart."

After some time, I interrupted the process.

"What is the point of the recipe if you do whatever you want anyway?" I asked.

And then, as sometimes happened in my mother's bright red kitchen, a pearl of wisdom was passed down to me in the uniquely memorable Louise Fox way.

"Listen to your mother. A meal becomes good by starting with quality instructions. It becomes great when you add a quality chef."

Since that day more than twenty years ago, I've come to understand my mother's teaching as a proverb that applies far beyond cooking. Actually, it applies to every important activity in our lives. In negotiating the highways and byways of life, recipes can take us only so far. Beyond getting the right ingredients or dutifully following instructions, to become a "quality chef"—in cooking and

in life—we need to reach beyond the fundamentals and learn to adapt, improvise, and innovate as life demands. We need to use not only our utensils—our “best practices” and techniques—but also our inner strengths and deeper wisdom.

The key to mastery, to achieving greatness, in the kitchen or in the boardroom, is not your toolbox. *It’s you.*

### Getting Out of Our Own Way

Life is a series of attempts to get things right. You work to achieve your goals. You hope to fulfill your potential. And you want to be a good person. You aim to live well, love and be loved, and if all goes well, make a contribution. Some of these come easily; others don’t. You do the best you can.

Still, despite your best efforts, things don’t always go according to plan.

Who hasn’t said or done the wrong thing, making a bad situation worse? Or said nothing, when we might have made a difference if we had? Who hasn’t lain in bed at night thinking, “I can’t believe I said that!” or “Why didn’t I speak up when I had the chance?” We may especially beat ourselves up when we fall into the same old traps. “*I did it again . . . even though I knew better.*”

Everyone has some version of this experience. You prepare for an important meeting, or a weighty conversation. You think in advance about what you want to say. And then, in the moment of truth, it doesn’t go the way you pictured it the night before.

The interesting thing is how often the difference doesn’t come from what other people said or did. We like to point fingers, yes. But in truth, the reversal of fortune from the night before quite

often *comes from us*. We go in with one plan. Yet we end up doing something else entirely.

Why?

Consider the following scenarios:

In a conversation for a promising contract, Tonia, who owns her own business, is surprised when a potential client pushes back on her fees. She'd gone into the meeting intending to be flexible—new opportunities had all but disappeared since the economy tanked. But in the moment, Tonia feels insulted and undervalued. She walks away from the engagement, despite needing the work and having a decent offer on the table.

While meeting with a valued client of his firm, Pierre learns that the client rejected his recommendations for upgrading their IT system. The client tells Pierre why he doesn't think the strategy will work for them. Pierre knows he should use the "active listening" he learned in a seminar. But he's proud of the strategy, and believes it's right for the client. Pierre explains why the reservations are unfounded, laying out again the merits of the proposal. The client doesn't want to argue. Instead, he asks Pierre's boss for a different consultant.

Susan comes home from a long day at work and wants to connect with her family. At the dinner table, she describes her taxing day at the office. Her husband, Mike, complains that Susan isn't paying enough attention to their daughter Jennifer, who's struggling at school. Susan bristles. "My job isn't the cause of Jenny's problems," she says. Mike disagrees. "You seem more concerned with your

customers than with our daughter!” Susan snaps back. “*You* have no idea what it’s like to be a working mother!” Jennifer shrinks into her chair as Susan and Mike finish dinner in a tense, uncomfortable silence.

Despite our best intentions, we often miss opportunities and generate breakdowns. We walk away from good deals, harm relationships, and generally act against our own interests. Plenty of books tell us what to do about “difficult people.” The truth is we need advice for succeeding when the difficult person *is us*.

Until now, experts have paid little attention to mapping the myriad ways we get in our own way. Yet when push comes to shove, we are often our own worst enemy.

The advice we do get about improving ourselves emphasizes changing our behavior to get better results: we should assert less, or assert more; listen, and ask more questions. The problem is that focusing on tactics and techniques misses the mark in many cases, because you’re throwing darts at the wrong board.

Remember my mother’s advice on cooking. Trying to fix behavior is like focusing on a recipe. It’s necessary, but insufficient to achieve high performance. You’ll start seeing big impact when you pay attention to what you, the “chef,” are bringing to the meal. Lasting change starts with you.

Despite what you might think, what happens inside you is something *you can change*. If you know how. When you do that, you start making new choices, and getting better outcomes. You feel good about how you get things done. And you’re much more likely to make a meaningful difference.

This book takes that challenge head-on.

*Winning from Within* provides insight into how you get in your

own way and what to do about it. It gives you a map for understanding your inner world, and a method for sorting yourself out. By understanding yourself and the common traps you fall into, you'll learn to turn breakdowns into breakthroughs, whether you're struggling with a difficult colleague or arguing with your teenage son. If you practice the steps in this book, over time you'll stop planting your own minefields. And better yet, you'll finally be able to capture life's wonderful opportunities when they come your way.

### My Journey

I came to write this book by standing on the shoulders of giants. In 1981, my mentors in the Harvard Program on Negotiation (PON), William Ury and the late Roger Fisher, wrote the landmark *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, a book that has since sold more than 3 million copies. Their work changed the negotiation game by introducing the famed “Harvard Concept”—how to “separate the people from the problem”—and calling for “win-win” collaboration over blind competition for the mutual benefit of all concerned.

In 1999, my friends Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen built on those ideas in their best-selling book, *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*. They shared the new best practices from PON, addressing what had become a recurring question about the first theory: what happens when you *can't* separate the people from the problem, because, in fact, the other people *are* the problem? They introduced the notion of the “three conversations” to help resolve that quandary.

I'd graduated from Harvard Law School (HLS) in 1995 and

started teaching there in 1996. HLS is the home of PON, the leading think tank in the world on making deals and resolving disputes. PON has been my professional home for nearly two decades, for which I am profoundly grateful. I was blessed with the mentorship of luminaries in the field, from thought leaders to pioneers in practice. I also built friendships in my early years at PON, with people who remain my inner circle to this day.

As a protégé of Roger and William, and as a colleague of Doug, Bruce, and Sheila, I taught the material contained in these books to Fortune 500 corporations, government agencies, not-for-profits, and every kind of organization in between. I had the privilege to share these ideas on nearly every continent. I also learned the art of developing new frameworks and methodology.

In addition to taking negotiation workshops like ours, our clients had often studied the bestselling books on effective habits and how to influence people. They certainly knew what they “should” do to succeed. Yet all too often, in the heat of the moment, they’d lose sight of their goals. They’d find themselves failing to speak up at a meeting; lambasting a co-worker before hearing her out; leaving money on the table when they might have gotten more; or vowing to communicate gently with a spouse but snapping sarcastically instead.

I had to wonder. Why weren’t the best practices we’d taught these professionals—such as focusing on interests rather than positions, or listening carefully to people with strong emotions—enough? When push came to shove, why did people shut down, lash out, or avoid the conflict altogether?

I saw a clear need for a new and deeper approach to leading and living. I was inspired to resolve this disconnect between what people know they *should say* and what they *actually do* every day. I was

determined to work toward a practical solution, following in the PON tradition of linking theory and real-world usefulness.

The ideas in this book sprang from these realizations, but also from two other experiences: the death of both of my parents within one year and, during that same twelve-month period, the events of September 11, 2001.

### *The Personal Side of the Story*

On Friday afternoon, November 10, 2000, I called my mother to wish her a peaceful Sabbath, as I always did before lighting my candles. That Saturday night, my sister called to tell me that Mom was in the hospital. She had collapsed from a stroke. By Sunday, November 12, she was gone.

For the next year I said memorial prayers for my mother every day. My main focus was to support my dad. He'd lost his companion of forty years.

As I weathered this year of personal challenge, a national tragedy took place: the events of September 11, 2001.

The sense of shock, grief, loss, and disarray was overwhelming for everyone. Stories poured forth about the workers in the towers, the passengers on the planes, the fire and police crews who had rushed to the rescue.

As a conflict resolution professional, I found myself profoundly disturbed. *Getting to Yes* and the worldview behind it helped to usher in a new era of negotiation strategies, ones built on fairness and mutual understanding. The notion of a “win-win” outcome had become conventional wisdom in many parts of the world. With my colleagues and friends, I'd fanned across the globe teaching these methods and tools to help people work out their differences

without violence. Yet here in my own backyard, people were flying planes into buildings. Thousands of innocents went to work in the morning and never came back.

The ashen faces of New Yorkers streaming away from the flames haunted me. What were we negotiators doing wrong? What were we missing?

As the public grappled to make sense of this horrific bloodshed, I approached the milestone that would end my private mourning period. By marking the first-year anniversary of my mother's death, I wanted to turn the page and move forward with my life. But that didn't happen. Not two months after September 11, and the week before commemorating that first anniversary, my father very suddenly passed away.

When my father died, I felt profound grief. I also inherited a large responsibility. As the only lawyer in my family, I took over all legal matters. I dealt with a mountain of paperwork while continuing every day for another year to say the Jewish memorial prayers for a deceased parent.

### *The Negotiation Cyclone*

Ironically, when I took a break from my professional world of engaging conflict to focus on my family, I was thrust into a negotiation cyclone of my own. In the days before my father passed away, it was with doctors, ICU nurses, my rabbi, my siblings. Then came the lawyers, insurance agents, tax accountants, art appraisers, and myriad other estate professionals.

One of the more memorable negotiations was with "Al the Garbage Guy," who wanted thousands of dollars to take away our trash. And then we faced the sea of Donation Ladies—some wanted

clothes sorted by color, some by size, others by season. Some wouldn't take summer clothes at all. If there was a method to their madness, I never figured out what it was.

Friends watched me navigate this tender, endless process and would invariably ask me the same thing: "You know, Erica, you're an international leader in negotiation. You've taught this stuff all over the world. After all of your training and the hundreds of workshops you've led . . . *does any of this stuff really help?*"

I had to pause and think about this. I'd spent countless hours negotiating with doctors, lawyers, insurance agents, and hospital bureaucracies. I'd dealt with high-stakes, high-pressure situations, literally the stuff of life and death. I'd had incredibly raw conversations with my sisters. I'd negotiated from morning until night. Had my immersion in negotiation skills prepared me to engage all of this successfully?

Yes and no.

On the one hand, of course, years of teaching best practices for managing conflict had helped me. I had tools for breaking down complex situations and problem solving. I knew how to consider different points of view. I could mediate among people holding strong emotions and the conviction that their perspective was the only correct one. I could generate a range of potential solutions to disputes that seemed to have no answer. And I had the communication skills to keep very challenging conversations moving forward when impasse loomed.

At the same time, as I reflected over the course of a year on this question, I saw that the skills and capabilities we had taught for all these years were insufficient to the task. People had come from around the world to Harvard to learn the fundamentals of negotiation, and we had delivered that. We offered a sound con-

ceptual foundation and core behaviors that foster competence. But when push came to shove, this foundation by itself hadn't been enough to produce results when it mattered most. When the going got rough, real-time effectiveness required something more. I wondered: *What else is there?*

The nexus of my personal odyssey and the public catastrophe of September 11 made this question unavoidable and urgent. I took a yearlong sabbatical to explore and learn. I contemplated why, in the heat of the moment, I wasn't always able to use commonsense negotiation tips or prevent discussions from escalating into hostile debates. What made the stuff work, or not?

I noticed that during the more "successful" interactions, I'd relied on techniques I'd learned beyond the Harvard classrooms, some based in wisdom traditions thousands of years old. These same tools were gaining recognition at the time through discoveries in neuroscience. Brain science and philosophy were converging on the power of looking within to generate powerful and lasting change.

### **The Next Step in Best Practice**

What I came to realize during that complex time is a simple truth: that what makes the difference in successful negotiation and leadership lives *inside* of us. The key to a good outcome, whether around a conference room table or the dining room table, is to undertake a negotiation within ourselves. Yes, we can learn to say and do helpful things. But ultimately the ability to achieve mastery over how we lead and live with each other comes from a place within, what I call "center of well-being," or our "center."

When we anchor ourselves in our center, we are mindfully aware of our reactions and choices. The actions we then take produce better results, stronger relationships, and more of life's deeper rewards.

I realized I needed to bring this insight into my teaching. So I founded the Harvard Negotiation Insight Initiative (HNII) in 2002 at PON. The mission of HNII was to explore the integration of the world of action and the world of reflection. HNII served as a living laboratory, bringing professionals together for executive education from around the world.

One summer, people came from more than forty-five countries to experience the innovation that was stretching the Harvard Concept to a new level. Our programs gave equal weight to neuroscience and to the creative arts; we taught PON's best practices combined with the insights of psychologists, poets, and theologians. Across these diverse disciplines, the consistent wisdom pointed people back to themselves. Out of this eclectic melting pot, the ideas and methods in this book were born.

In the years since this research started, my personal life has changed course dramatically. My parents' memory now brings me warmth instead of sadness. The estate is long behind me. My focus is now on my new family—my wonderful husband, Bernardus, and his beautiful son, whom we affectionately call the Little Dude. I'll share more of *that* part of the story in the pages to come.

### **An Idea Whose Time Has Come**

At the beginning of this journey I wondered if the idea of self-exploration would fly in corporate environments. It turned out the

answer is yes. More than a decade after its inception, *Winning from Within* isn't an experiment anymore. Thousands of people have used the map and the method to get out of their own way and get the results they really want.

At Mobius Executive Leadership, a company I cofounded with my sister Amy Elizabeth Fox, my partners and I now have substantial experience teaching this material to senior teams, managers, and emerging leaders. In turbulent times, when the pace of change makes your head spin, business leaders and public servants alike want a system that helps them stay balanced as they face unprecedented complexity and uncertainty.

Consensus is growing in the business community that “the next big thing” in leadership relates to transforming the capabilities of leaders themselves. Reality has leapt ahead of people's capacity to cope, no less thrive. Leaders need tools for examining how they operate, and methodologies for evolving to new mindsets and behaviors. The ability to “lead yourself” is emerging as today's new leadership requirement. *Winning from Within* provides a necessary road map for that leadership development.

## **Your Journey, Our Journey**

I've now shared part of my journey. I'll tell you more of my story to illustrate ideas. But the rest of this book is fundamentally about *your* journey.

*Winning from Within* is about reconnecting all the parts of yourself and engaging them skillfully as you navigate your interactions with the world around you. It explains the links between personal mastery and high performance. It provides you with a way

to fulfill the broadly felt wish to experience a world in which daily life at work and at home reflects the best of who you are.

As you will soon see, the method is not a quick fix. It doesn't offer shortcuts or tricks to get your way. Instead, it provides a map for lifelong learning. While the path is challenging, and the results at times hard won, the process fosters genuine and lasting transformation.