

"A captivating story of one woman's leadership journey packed full of lessons and tools for both leaders and coaches. An amazing one-flight read!"

- *Phil Harkins, Author, Thought Leader, Executive Coach and Consultant*

# RISE

## TO THE

COACHING  
INSIGHTS AND  
CHALLENGES  
FOR LEADERS

# TOP

JULIE COMPTON

# RISE TO THE TOP

Coaching Insights and  
Challenges for Leaders

Julie L. Compton, PhD

Rise to the Top: Coaching Insight for Leaders

By Julie Compton, PhD

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# What Executives and Thought Leaders Are Saying About Rise to the Top and Working with Julie Compton as Their Coach

“Ben Franklin advanced the thought that the best teachers are the ones who make you feel you are not being taught. This is an amazing read told through a captivating story—a plane-flight read packed full of lessons for leaders at all levels. Julie has provided a blueprint for leaders, as well as coaches.”

~ Phil Harkins, Author, Thought Leader,  
Executive Consultant, and Coach

“As my coach, Julie spent the necessary time to learn my strengths and improve areas using modern tools and techniques and developed an action plan to make immediate impact. Julie had the courage to speak truth about my situation in a way that was clearly intended for my development. Her work is not limited to management and leadership growth; she evaluates the whole person to

ensure proper balance in every aspect of the leader's life necessary for maximum performance.”

~ Greg Randolph, SVP of Global Sales, MobileIron

“This book is an essential guide to leadership! What makes this book truly special are the coaching challenges. The questions/assignments are practical and relatable. All one needs to do is open their mind for honest self-reflection and do the coaching challenges. Julie is a tremendous coach and the first person to help me understand my triggers, how to influence, and how to manage key stakeholders. She changed my life both inside and outside of the office.”

~ Missy Schnurstein, Head of Product Marketing and Demand Strategy at Verizon Media Group

“Julie has been in the trenches, and from those valuable experiences comes this sage advice for leaders. Follow the practical wisdom she offers, and you will get better as a leader of teams.”

~ Thomas G. Crane, Consultant and Author of “The Heart of Coaching”

“I can relate to Dianne’s career story portrayed in *Rise To The Top*. Many leaders are consumed with inner doubts about their abilities to lead a team or company effectively. After all, it’s extremely lonely the higher up an organization you travel. Julie’s book provides insightful thoughts, lessons, and challenges that assist leaders to be more effective. I learned a valuable lesson that leadership is about who we are and not governed by what we do. As my coach, Julie created a scope of work to evaluate my current status, identified areas of improvement, and generated a comprehensive plan to achieve our agreed goals. She is a consummate professional. I would highly recommend her to any individual or company.”

~ John McCulloch, Global Vice President,  
Current Business Owner



I dedicate this book to my beautiful, strong daughter—God gave you the power to lead and make a difference in this world. I am proud of you and blessed to be your mom.

Go girl!





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# Introduction: Why You Should Read This Book and What to Expect

WHETHER YOU WORK IN business, nonprofit, or education, if you are *leading* or *coaching* people, you will relate to this story. You may have faced similar scenarios and challenges in your own leadership journey. So set aside some time to disrupt yourself and gain insights and actions you can take from this book to be a more effective leader and coach.

First things first: let me introduce you to Dianne Gableton, a strong, successful woman who never planned on becoming a CEO, let alone being celebrated for her achievements. As you get to know Dianne, you'll encounter a few of the leadership lessons she has learned as she transitioned in her career. This is a “cut to the chase” story to captivate your attention and draw you into quick learning as you relate to Dianne. Each chapter progressively follows her career from a college graduate to becoming a CEO. There

are many lessons in her story for both coaches and leaders.

After you read a portion of Dianne's story, a nonfictional section that relates to one specific leadership insight will follow. There are 10 main insights. Each insight outlines current ideas on the topic, including suggestions and actions from your coach (*which is me*), and thought-provoking questions to help you dig deeper and learn more about each leadership skill or attribute. I encourage you to take the time to reflect and apply the action items at the end of each chapter. If you do, I guarantee you'll coach yourself to raise the bar on your own leadership capabilities.

I have been working as an executive coach, organizational consultant, and leadership facilitator for over 23 years. Prior to that, I worked in business and in academia. One thing I have seen repeatedly is that most leaders face the same learning opportunities and difficulties along their journey. How you show up as a leader and whether or not you continually learn and change are what make the difference! I know this book will provide you with numerous insights for those learning opportunities.

# 1. Today

THE ALARM IS RINGING again. It's disorienting after a long night working with my team. Who even invented the alarm? It's such a loud noise interrupting my deepest, most peaceful state of sleep. Even with the iPhone's calming Calypso chime, the abrasive intrusion demands that I haul my butt out of bed. Some days I wonder, *How can I still be creative, productive, and lead from the front when my day begins this way?*

My temporary moodiness melts away the minute my feet hit the floor. As usual, I head for my latte and start getting excited about what the day will hold. Then I remember—and I begin to smile—today is the day I've been hoping for my entire career!



## 2. Twenty Years Earlier

*“Pearls don’t lie on the seashore.  
If you want one, you must dive for it.”*  
—Chinese Proverb

I WAS 21 YEARS old. College flew by in the blink of an eye, and no one—and I mean *no one*—was going to stop me from achieving my dreams and all that lay ahead. It was a stereotypical ceremonious day: an inspiring speaker, hats tossed high in the air, and parents proudly hugging their graduates. Most college grads agreed they felt inspired because they had survived their college journey. Listening to the speaker served to further inspire and motivate them on to greater achievements.

“Are you Dianne Gableton?” asked a tall man wearing small, wire-rimmed glasses. He proceeded to look me over as if assessing me. “It depends who’s asking,” I laughed boldly. I was in the zone and feeling very successful.



“Well, that depends on if you’re Dianne.” Without any hesitation, he had easily matched my tone. Pausing briefly, I took the leap and responded, “Yes, I’m Dianne.”

I felt exposed, like I was putting myself out there with no idea of his agenda. It was as though we were in a chess match and he’d just claimed, “Checkmate!”

“Well, in that case, if you’re willing, come with me. I want to introduce you to your employer.” Employer? Now that was odd. I’d turned down every offer I had received over the last three months throughout the college recruiting process. To be honest, I had found them all very boring.

“There must be some kind of mistake,” I voiced quite adamantly. “I haven’t secured a position yet.”

He looked at me and very slowly said, “Well, it’s up to you. But I honestly believe the mistake is about to be yours if you don’t follow me.” He pointed me in the direction of a big, black limo that was sitting in the roundabout, apparently waiting for me. I stood there for a minute, pausing to look back at my friends who were all laughing, hugging, and reminiscing. For a moment I was almost lured back, but something inside, like a sixth sense, stopped me.

“Who are you?” I asked. He handed me a card, and without giving it another thought, I took a step toward the stranger and my future.

# Lesson: Risk

*“The biggest risk is not taking any risk.  
In a world that’s changing really quickly,  
the only strategy that is guaranteed to  
fail is not taking risks.”*

—Mark Zuckerberg

LEADERSHIP REQUIRES RISK, AND risk is inherent in everything we do. Risk is essential to innovation, improvement, and sustainability. Exceptional leaders must always be aware of the level of risk required in specific situations. Leaders need to be able to determine whether or not an action, decision, potential product, or path is the right one. After you’ve done your due diligence and reviewed all your options, you’re left with only one thing: to calculate and measure the risk and make a decision. Risk management simply helps us make better decisions.

As a leader you have to be fully aware of your own bias, both toward or against risk. What drives your bias? What

are the indicators of too much risk? What signs suggest you aren't taking enough risks? Think about it: all quality financial planners include risk models in their planning, professional surfers calculate risks before committing to a big wave, and fashion designers know the risks before launching a new design.

No profession is without risk; some risks have bigger pay-offs and bigger fallouts than others. So, how do we assess risk? Many leaders would say it's about listening to your "gut" or intuition. Listening to that inner voice begging to be heard. Exceptional leaders acknowledge this voice but only while also employing logical and analytical tools to calculate risk. So yes, listen to the voice but also use your intelligence and tools to make a decision.

What are those tools? Here are a few ideas: gather and analyze data to determine risk; look at people who have gone before you and made similar mistakes or successes; calculate the ROI of the risk; reach out to consultants and seek diverse opinions. You can apply risk models, read books on the subject of risk analysis, hire a coach, or meet with a mentor. Whatever methods you choose, stay open to outside ideas other than your own. There is such a thing as balance. You want to avoid becoming too much of a risk taker, or on the flip side, of becoming a leader who shies away from risk. Know yourself well enough to

know how you work best and, in turn, how to maximize your tolerance of risk.

You might also face career opportunities that require you to take a risk. As an executive coach, I have watched many individuals struggle with decisions on career advancement, changing organizations, and overseas opportunities. These decisions are tough and should be well thought out. What is right for one person may not be right for you.

For example, I coached a woman who had made a job change within the same large, retail organization every two years or less. She was well respected for her problem solving and her deliverables in the different functions she had worked in. At one point she was asked to interview for a position in merchandising, which would be entirely new for her and she could potentially fail. At the same time, she had an additional interview for a position she knew she could excel in, but it would not provide the same level of learning or exposure.

We discussed her long-term career goals and her current family needs, along with thinking through what it would take to succeed at either job. She ultimately decided on merchandising. She was up for the challenge because she was willing to do whatever it took to succeed. She knew the short-term sacrifice would have the long-term payoff for where she wanted to go in the company.

## Coaching Challenge

As your coach, I challenge you to do the following:

1. Think about a risk you took that worked out. What were the contributing factors that ensured its success? Now, think about a risk you took that didn't work out. How did you go about analyzing both decisions? Was there something different about the risk that worked out? What can you learn from the decisions you made?
2. What is your overall view of risk? How could it possibly impact your career?
3. Given this reflection, what are you considering doing differently in your leadership, business, or life today? What is the risk? What are you going to do differently to confront that risk?
4. Check out some risk management models that include risk identification, risk analysis, and risk response planning and monitoring.

### 3. The First Months on the Job

*“Leadership and learning are  
indispensable to each other.”*

—John F. Kennedy

I SAT PROUDLY BEHIND an oversized glass desk in front of the largest office window I have ever seen in my life overlooking the city. *Mind you, I hadn't really seen much at my age.* I tried to hide my excitement. To be honest, my elation felt a little immature and unprofessional. But there I was, an associate in a major startup company who—through the help of some risk-averse investors—had become successful almost overnight. *Me!* An account executive at one of the top-10 startups. This company had even earned an award for the best place to work in my state.

I was the envy of all my friends and the main topic of conversation at my parents' social parties. And to be honest,

I felt this job was a bit over my head. I wanted to pinch myself, but of course I hadn't admitted that to anyone. In fact, I was scared to death they would find out that I wasn't capable.

Every once in a while I'd hear this little voice suggesting they had made a mistake and it wasn't going to last. It wasn't that I lacked confidence in my ability to learn or to execute, but I was unsure of the business world and how to navigate my way in it. It seemed I had everything I needed to succeed in my office; everything I could possibly need to do my job was at my fingertips. I had the latest computer equipment, virtual reality meeting rooms, and access to any building on this beautiful, expansive campus. I was responsible for one of the largest new accounts we had just sold—seriously, it was the business deal that was going to sustain our future. And you know what? That account was my idea!

As a student, I had become friends with Justin, an innovator extraordinaire. It wasn't his handsome face that drew me to him; it was the way my excitement grew when he talked about artificial intelligence and the convergence of the Internet of Things. I felt intrigued and excited when I was around him. He was different from me, yet I knew we had many things in common.

When I landed this position, he was the first person I thought of contacting. He fit our company profile for clients we wanted as partners. Little did I know, Justin's company would end up signing on, and it would be the *biggest deal* in our company's history. To top it off, my manager suggested I be put on the new account—I was *thrilled*.

Now there I was, only 30 days into my position, as the adored newcomer who brought in the big fish, but somehow I still didn't feel like I had done anything. It's sort of like when you think you missed the mark with a dessert recipe and everyone thinks it's incredible, or when my friends were in awe over my renovated house, which seemed to me to be so easy to do that anyone could have done it.

I'm not sure why I struggled with internal doubt. Others said I needed to believe in myself—to see myself the way other people saw me. But here's the thing . . . I *did* believe in myself. It was just that it was so easy to get there that I felt like I must have been a fake, or that I was missing something. Maybe I was not as good as people thought. Of course, my brother kept telling me, “Enjoy it,” and “Don't worry about it! Unless you do something wrong, you're solid.” I *wish* it were that easy. My brother's advice didn't get rid of that nagging, doubting voice inside.



You may be thinking I had low self-esteem, but it definitely wasn't that. I did believe in myself, trusting that I'd win; it was just that deep down inside I felt like I didn't know enough to be where I was and have people's respect. I wished I had a better handle on exactly where that doubt came from and what caused it. Every time I was handed something, I executed it like a charm. I received accolades, but inside I questioned if I really knew what I was doing. My brother called it being a poser. "Dianne," he said, "that's not you!"

It wasn't like I managed people or anything—now THAT would be amazing. I wasn't sure I could even *be* a manager. I felt comfortable maintaining the account and overseeing its growth with a little help and mentoring from others. I knew I could compete in that part of the organization, but I wasn't sure if I could do anything else.

# Lesson: Competence, Humbleness, and Managing Our Internal Dialogue

*“Everyone must be quick to listen,  
slow to speak, slow to become angry.”*

—The Bible (James 1:19)

MOST OF US NEVER really know exactly what we are doing when attempting something new, until we work hard enough at it to master the skill. Sports is a great analogy: it takes years of training, repeating the same exercises over and over again to create muscle memory, reactions, and the timing to be a master at whatever sport you choose. Ask all the greats, from Michael Jordan to Peyton Manning: repetition, repetition, repetition. We learn from our mistakes. Habits are formed over time.

Noel Burch developed a learning model that suggests we are incompetent and unconscious about what we try in the beginning.<sup>1</sup> Over time and with repetition, we gradu-

ally move up the ladder to become consciously competent and finally, unconsciously competent. The journey is similar with most everything we undertake. No one is born with great parenting skills or management abilities, or can even compete and win a bike race without learning and repetition.

Once we've learned something and feel competent in it, it's important to claim that attribute or skill in a humble and authentic way. We all have different levels of comfort with our abilities, talents, and knowledge. In the early stages of our career, it's normal to feel doubt, question ourselves, and perhaps even be overly humble and not take enough credit. Once we start receiving feedback from our team, customers, peers, and managers, we begin to solidify our perception of self.

There's a crossroad at some point in which we have to "own" our abilities and successes instead of downplaying or dismissing them. It doesn't mean we take credit for everything; in fact, we become better at sharing the credit with the team while remaining confident in ourselves as leaders. Leaders either tend to give too much credit to their team at the risk of not being perceived as capable or involved, or alternatively, leaders can take all the credit and alienate the team, being perceived as egotistic and boastful.

Later on as we progress in our careers, some leaders are challenged to remain humble. Often, I run into leaders who believe they should have a certain demeanor and level of arrogance in order to be perceived as a competent executive. This couldn't be further from the truth. There are many great leaders, such as Mark Bertolini, past CEO of Aetna, who are very strong capable leaders, confident yet humble in their approach. Other leaders have strong, demonstrative egos to show they are in control. Usually they are hiding behind a protective barrier or are unaware of the internal fears they wouldn't dare show. Other leaders demonstrate their inappropriate ego through nonverbal communication, aggressive tendencies, or always trying to be the focus of the room. Gathering honest feedback to determine how you are perceived is the best way to stay in check of your own ego. Just make sure you ask those who will be honest with you.

There's a reason why it's "lonely at the top." There are many expectations for higher-level leaders. Once you are at the top of the ladder, there are few "safe" opportunities to discuss concerns, fears, and your own internal dialogue.

Managing your internal dialogue is a must! It's a necessity no matter what your level of leadership is within an organization. Experience, age, culture, and many other factors contribute to how you form your self-image and present it to others. And although no one else can see or hear your

internal dialogue, it has a deep impact in every way on you as a leader.

Your internal dialogue manifests itself in many ways: through facial expressions, body language (e.g., slumped shoulders, eyes rolling), and your tone of voice. How do you show up to others? Your internal dialogue might be saying to others, “I’m not good enough,” or “Why would they believe me and what I have to say?” Or “How can that person be so stupid!” Whereas, to the other extreme, your inner voice might suggest, “I’m the expert here. Nobody else knows as much as me, given my experience,” or “They couldn’t have done it without me.”

We all have an internal dialogue to manage. The theory of emotional intelligence (EQ), made popular by Daniel Goleman,<sup>2</sup> helps us to understand how to manage our internal dialogue. One of the four components of EQ—*self-regulation*—specifically relates to managing our dialogue. If we’re aware of our inner dialogue and we’re able to control and adjust it as needed, we are displaying high self-regulation. Self-regulation of our emotions, thoughts, and behaviors isn’t always easy, especially when we are “triggered” in the workplace by people and events that connect with our history and personal baggage.

One of my clients had a perfect example of this. Every time she walked into an executive leadership team meet-

ing, she was reduced to short sentences and often never spoke up at all. This change in her style was noticed by her peers, but no one ever gave her any feedback. Eventually, she gained a reputation in the meetings as someone who didn't speak up, and therefore she didn't receive her next promotion. Through coaching, she recognized that the executive vice president (EVP) of human resources (HR) was the individual who triggered her quiet demeanor and feeling of intimidation. In fact, we went back into all her prior interactions with the EVP to sort out what had occurred and where she could start changing the tapes in her head.

Of course, we all take our humanness to work every day! I encourage you to dive into understanding what triggers you and learn how to alter your thoughts, develop new scripts, and embark on new techniques for self-regulation.

## Coaching Challenge

As your coach, I challenge you to do the following:

1. Think about what you're good at and whether or not you "own" your skills and abilities in a respectful, humble, authentic way.
2. List your strengths and the areas that you struggle with. Decide on actions you can take to practice and master those skills.
3. List common, internal dialogue statements you consistently say to yourself—good or bad. What do they tell you? What affirmations and positive statements can you use to replace those negative thoughts?
4. Challenge yourself to show up differently. Pick one thing you would particularly like to work on, and focus on this skill for the next 10 days in a row. Doing this will give you an opportunity to be aware of yourself and to see if you're committed to changing your habits.
5. Check out the book *Triggers*, by Marshall Goldsmith, listed in the recommended reading section in the back of this book.