



# BUSINESS BOOK ROUND TABLE

DISCUSSIONS AND TACTICS FROM THE PAGES

**February 25, 2016**

**Frederick County Public Library • C Burr Artz • Trust Room**

**7:30 to 9:00 a.m.**

*Ambition is Not a Dirty Word: A Woman's Guide to Earning Her Worth and  
Achieving Her Dreams - by Debra Condon*

## Executive Summary

### Ambition is Not a Dirty Word: A Woman's Guide to Earning Her Worth and Achieving Her Dreams - by Debra Condron

If there's one take away from this book it's right in the title. Ambition, especially for women, is not a dirty word. This book identifies several cultural norms and behaviors holding women back, and discusses methods women can use to compete in the work place.

Condron advises everyone to 1. Accept that ambition is not only normal but necessary to success; 2. Create

a personal advisory board and ask for help and insight; 3. Identify your goals and check in regularly with your progress; 4. Monitor your interactions, reactions, and default behavior; 5. Recognize the freedom in unbalance; 6. Dare to be great.

Below are a few of the best quotes from each section of the book.

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#### Ambition is a Virtue

1. Ambitious men are go-getters, but ambitious women are bitches.
2. This is a book about redefining your ambition in the face of social sanctions and unapologetically going after your dreams.
3. Being the best woman you can possibly be comes from always staying true to your most ambitious self rather than feeling pressured, under social duress, to put your ambition last, after every other priority in your life.
4. None of them challenged the notion that the accepted definition of success might actually be holding women back because it is couched in such a positive way: "You don't have to be unabashedly ambitious. You're above all that. You are sophisticated enough to realize that ambition isn't as important as getting the life-balance equation right."
5. It Takes an Ambitious Woman to Know and Encourage One
6. I got where I am today because a group of ambitious women supported and taught me early in my career.
7. I saw this "yeah, but" theme repeat itself with countless other women over the years, along with other common self-sabotaging behaviors I identified. It became apparent to me that all of us—even women who are manifestly talented and experienced—struggle with confidence, don't feel entitled to get paid what we're worth, feel reluctant to go after the power and recognition we've earned, and don't pursue careers with wholehearted passion.
8. I knew we needed a sophisticated support organization for women in business to help us identify and navigate these issues.
9. I held a second monthly meeting called Open Forum Roundtable to serve as a think tank for women to throw business dilemmas, questions, and professional plans on the table and get a wealth of feedback, advice, and support from other successful people.

#### What a Difference a Word Makes

10. Living fully and authentically hinges on your ability to stay connected to the experience of lifelong passion for your work, to remain continually inspired, to stretch, to be open to fresh opportunities, and ultimately to be the best you can be at what you do.
11. Simply put, your ambition should be nonnegotiable. It fuels the core of your being.
12. am•bi•tious woman } noun (def.) a woman who: 1. earns her worth 2. has more power 3. gets the recognition she deserves 4. has the determination to go after her dreams and can do it with integrity and without guilt
13. Now reconsider all of those things that you do for others, all the time, day in and day out, at the expense of your ambitious dreams, because you think putting yourself last makes you a good woman. And ask yourself again—and be truthful—does this really make you a virtuous person? Are you still confident that this value system, this setup you've bought into under social duress, makes you the best person you could possibly be?

#### Embracing Your Ambition Makes You the Best You Can Be

14. WOMEN who are driven by a passion for what they do cannot be expected to give that up. Without acknowledgment of your ambition, a core part of you goes missing—the part of you that can only be fulfilled by pursuing your career ambition. Think about just what this means in your own unique, complicated, and precious life.
15. To be successful, all you have to do is accomplish the kind of things you're supposed to do at work. Whereas when you are ambitious, you're being a bit more extraordinary.
16. Now that you realize your ambition is a great thing, and costly to give up, let me ask you to think about these questions: Are you being as ambitious as you really want to be? Is it possible that you are settling for less when what you truly want is more?

17. 1. You must love your work. You must be willing to aggressively pursue the professional work you were meant to do and to strive for any career opportunities that inspire you.
2. You must regard your deepest career aspirations as unconditionally sacrosanct.
3. You must feel entitled to earn your worth.

## Stop Ambition Sabotage

18. It has been said that “the surest way to keep a man in prison is not to let him know he’s there.” And the surest way to keep a woman from embracing her pure career ambition is to make her believe she’s already done it.
19. Women are natural team players, or women are born to be moral compasses. The covert messages—the wolves—are the subtle, sometimes unconscious beliefs we metabolize from those overt messages. For example, because women are natural team players, it’s wrong to toot our own horns and grab for the credit; or as moral role models, it is a duplicitous violation of personal and social ethics to acknowledge and master workplace politics. Believing these messages makes us behave in ways that sabotage us over and over.

## Ambition Rule 1: Be a Contender

20. And even when they do take that chance, they don’t ensure that they get the credit they deserve, which is an absolute prerequisite for earning leadership opportunities, recognition, promotions, and a salary commensurate with expertise and contributions.
21. Why is it so hard for women to lay claim to their accomplishments? Why don’t we grab more opportunities to compete as team leaders, as power brokers, as hungry and effective movers and shakers?
22. During my research for this book, I e-mailed queries to thousands of women and always received a flood of responses that generated a flurry of debate, discussion, ideas, and stories from the trenches. But after sending this one—“What advice do you have for other women, and what works for you when it comes to the art of taking credit at work?”—my inbox remained conspicuously empty.
23. Starting now, keep a file on winning projects you’ve spearheaded. It will be your KaChing! File, filled with your successes. Write a note-to-self summary at the completion of a project while the facts are still clear in your mind—do it right then and there, even if you’ve just pulled an all-nighter; record it while it’s fresh or you risk not doing it at all or forgetting important points. Include dates, numbers, and dollar amounts documenting how your ideas, decision making, and leadership increased revenues, boosted the bottom line, improved customer retention, or led to better employee relations. Keep notes from thrilled clients. Don’t be shy about asking a client to call your boss or CEO to relay how pleased he or she is with your performance.
24. E-mail is a really great medium for taking credit. If you’re so good at what you do, then if you’ve done something great, you should be able to send an e-mail to somebody (boss, client, prospect) that either tells the story or conveys an idea

that is sophisticated and reflects the level of skill that has caused you to be successful—without directly saying how great you are. You’re showing, not telling; you’re showcasing your brilliance by making your thought processes or your decision tree or the obstacles you faced and how you overcame these challenges transparent.

25. The 2005 Catalyst survey finding that women executives are still viewed, by both their male and female peers, as less skilled than male executives in “‘take charge’ behaviors such as delegating and influencing upward.”
26. Ways to demonstrate you are a credit contender:
  1. Avoid verbal softeners.
  2. Suppress the urge to acknowledge everyone else’s viewpoint before you express your own.
  3. Speak in the first person when discussing your proposals:
  4. Don’t fish for validation after you’ve made your point by asking, “What do you think?” It makes you seem insecure.
27. Never assume someone is ignoring you or got your message but didn’t return your phone call or e-mail because they aren’t interested. I see women do this all the time—they assume the worst.
28. To avoid looking like a jerk and get buy in and support - even from rivals - stay humble and open to improvement by asking for frank feedback from your peers, direct reports, supervisors, and clients.
29. Asking others every so often for candid feedback gives you hard data about how you can improve your performance and your ability to be a contender. Give them two or three specific questions or areas you’re seeking feedback on, and you’ll be more likely to get a reply.
30. Women hate to feel that they’re boasting. So storytelling is a great way to get around this. You tell the tale of why you deserve credit—without explicitly bragging. Especially when you’ve spearheaded a project or accomplished a difficult goal or solved a hairy problem, it’s the perfect opportunity to sit down and say, “Hey, this was an important situation. Here’s the story of what happened. . . .” You tell the tale, not in a self-congratulatory way, but in a humble way that makes it apparent, through the storytelling, through the narrative, that you’ve played a crucial role.
31. All too often I see ambitious women self-sabotage by refusing an award or title or leadership role.
32. Exploiting organizations’ interest in recognizing visible women is a perfectly respectable way to keep yourself in the game. These days, companies and organizations want to be viewed as women-friendly. Bottom line: It doesn’t matter what the motivation is—exploit it.
33. The reality in life and in business is that some people are better than others: some people are leaders, some are managers, some are decision makers, some people are born to go the distance—and other people aren’t. They’re followers, or they’re just flat-out not as good as you are at the work you do.

34. You can still be warm and fuzzy outside of work. But at work, strike a competitive pose.
35. As a bright, capable, ambitious woman, your job is to speak your mind when you've done your homework and have a strong opinion. You must learn to do this regardless of how powerful the boss or client you're dealing with seems to you to be, and regardless of whether or not you see yourself as a rookie.

## **Ambition Rule 2: Get more Power from Powerful Advice**

36. The single most important thing I learned through my participation in the Women's Business Alliance is that it's okay to ask for help.
37. From time to time, every ambitious woman needs feedback and advice. We need a sounding board. If we don't ask, we risk putting ourselves through unnecessary work every time we attempt to advance our ambitious goals.
38. Used effectively, a board of advisers can be a high-yield, cost-effective, and fast-track resource for advancing your professional objectives. Its sole purpose, from your perspective, is to educate and mentor you in your quest to open your horizons. The members can offer fresh and diverse perspectives as well as steer you in the right direction. It will dramatically increase your overall business acumen because its focus is geared to your specific career situation, it operates on your own level of knowledge, and it aims directly at your goals. It can quash a strategy that is headed over a cliff.
39. Your initial task is to identify five to seven movers and shakers to advise you. You'll need to keep a few things in mind: They'll have to agree to advise you; you'll have to establish a relationship with them; they'll be the ones offering advice and moral support; and they'll be the ones you'll celebrate your thrilling wins with. The ultimate goal is to surround yourself with an uplifting, inspirational team. It may be just as rewarding for them as it is for you.
40. Your goal is to create a group that can offer expert advice in as many professional areas as possible, depending upon your needs: leadership and performance development, management, business plan development, public relations advice, long-term strategic career planning, marketing, finance, strategies for profitability, budgeting, accounting, sales, customer service, or legal advice.
41. If you are still reluctant to ask for help, consider this: in my experience, about seven out of ten people will be happy to share their knowledge because they want to give back in some way, especially to someone in whom they feel invested—which will happen over time as you build a relationship with them, assuming you do it the right way. As for the other three, they might have reasons for rejecting your request that have nothing to do with you. Don't take it personally; just move on to more enthusiastic supporters.
42. We all occasionally need legal advice or information from other professional service providers. Don't wait until your

feet are to the fire to assemble your paid advisory committee. Make a list of providers you might need at some point: An intellectual property attorney? A transactional attorney? A bookkeeper? A certified public accountant? A computer/tech support person? A publicist or media trainer? A coach? An editor? A Web site designer and e-commerce team? A financial adviser? A marketing strategist? An agent?

43. Start your list now. Start asking around—word-of-mouth referrals are best. And when you need expert advice, don't scrimp, don't hire a cut-rate service provider.
44. She explained how getting into the habit of feeling comfortable turning to her network to ask for help has made her more effective.
45. This willingness to ask for help builds on itself; it shores up your network and reciprocal relationships.
46. I've also found that it then is reciprocated—people are more willing to call me for a question.
47. Be a diligent student of what it is these people do that makes them so successful. Study their processes. Break them down. Dissect in your mind just how they handled a tough negotiation, corralled a meeting that was getting offtrack, defused an explosive client matter, handled a tough sales pitch, or closed a deal. What worked? What didn't work? Pay very close attention—this is your opportunity to gain more power by learning from powerful, brilliant people.
48. The more you are able to identify in advance what you are specifically looking for, the more precise the advice will be.
49. There's no faster way to turn off interest in giving you advice than to outright reject and close your mind to the opinions of those who are taking the time and making the effort to help you. Even if you disagree with what they are saying, even if their advice may be hard to hear, keep your mouth shut and listen. Think about what they have to say. Force yourself to ask yourself hard questions about why you are being so resistant to their perspective. Often, it is the most dead-on recommendations that we initially recoil from.

## **Ambition Rule 3: Don't Be Afraid of Confrontation**

50. I've seen many women wait until it's too late. Why? Because they avoid confrontation at all costs. Evidence abounds that a woman is being gaslighted—meaning people are hiding their true intentions and acting in sleazy, manipulative ways to cause her to begin doubting the reality of her perceptions. It would be apparent to any objective observer that people are trying to sabotage her at work.
51. So whenever you must confront someone, your goal is simply, declaratively to say, "No, that isn't what happened," and then move on.
52. When it comes to really successful people, they state the facts. They make the point, they make it quickly, they say it once, with conviction, and that's it.
53. It's hard for women to stay centered in the face of being belittled, particularly by a group. It's easier for them to feel

that maybe there is some emotional thing going on that's keeping them from thinking clearly. Don't let this dynamic cause you to doubt your instincts, your expertise, or your willingness to confront.

### **Ambition Rule 4: Make 'Em Pay**

54. I deserve to earn my worth. I will take control of my own economic empowerment.
55. I want your mind-set always to be: "I deserve to earn my worth and to feel independently in control of my financial situation and security at all stages of my life."
56. Women Don't Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide,
57. 20 percent of adult women (22 million people) say they never negotiate at all, even though they often recognize negotiation as appropriate and even necessary.
58. Generally, any deal is negotiable. Women just don't tend to do it—especially for ourselves. Negotiation is part of the game. And if women don't negotiate, those who do look at them as fools.
59. If you work for yourself, submit to clients three options with different services and prices; clients will be more likely to engage your services if they have options. If you are interviewing or entering salary negotiations, and are asked what you expect to earn, answer, "That depends on the opportunity. What is your range?" And if you've done your homework, you know what you should be making.
60. When I hire NYU students to do things for me I'll tell them I'll give them some training in this or that. And the men are always much more specific about what they want: "They'd really like X, Y, Z from me; they want the opportunity to do this or that." And they want to know how it's going to help their career. Whereas the women are thrilled to have the work. They're like, "Great." They never ask for anything more. I sometimes think these guys are ballsy—I'm thinking, these guys are twenty-five years old, I'm paying them. I'm paying all of them—women or men. And only the guys want to know what else it's going to do for them,

### **Ambition Rule 5: Be More Irresponsible to Others - And More Responsible to Yourself**

61. We women are far too generous with our time and resources by helping others—particularly other women—when we ought to be more mindful that we're in the minority of people at the top of our fields and need to use those resources to reach our own ambitious goals.
62. I do want to point out one excellent part of Morgan's response that illustrates a subtle yet critical distinction between what you should and shouldn't say. Morgan said, "We're just going to have to disagree." Morgan did not qualify her limit-setting by saying the more commonly used phrase that adds just one bad word: "We're just going to have to agree to disagree." Do you see the difference? The other person does not have to agree with you. And whether or not that person gets the distinction, you will. You'll feel far more grounded and

powerful if you simply eliminate the agree qualifier when deploying this limit-setting statement. Mantra: We're just going to have to disagree.

63. For some people, the only taste of success they'll ever have is the bite they take out of you.
64. So often, women have trouble simply saying no, and that can be a real problem, because there are always encounters with people who are willing to take advantage of your weakness.
65. To implement this, you need stock phrases and tacit tactics for when you're getting hit up for free advice.

### **Ambition Rule 6: Be a Power Broker**

66. Bottom line: the workplace isn't always a meritocracy, so women have to learn to advocate for themselves, because no one is going to do it for you.
67. Women give away power because we fail to stick up for ourselves or fight back against hostile criticism or below-the-belt attacks on our hard-earned reputation and power position. Face it—people get jealous. People get territorial. And when they do, they will fight dirty. And they won't hesitate to try to make themselves look better by making you look bad. Why don't we fight back?

### **Ambition Rule 7: Disable Detractors**

68. But there is no such thing as constructive hostile criticism. Positive brainstorming questions or ideas have a different feel to the recipient. And the intention on the part of the person delivering the information is different. It's supportive rather than destructive. Think of how liberating this new mind-set will be and how much energy will be freed up to focus on your goals, rather than on people who aim to bring you down with negativity.
69. If you sense that someone is doing something to you, then they probably are. If you feel it in the pit of your stomach, or wherever else in your body you experience instincts—a tightening in the chest, a heavy feeling in the shoulders—then pay attention. Don't try to talk yourself out of your own perceptions. And don't bother trying to reason with detractors. It's a waste of your time and effort—they won't admit to their behavior, and they'll keep tying you in knots about your own.
70. "My best advice to women is this: Learn to spot one of your least obvious enemies, which is yourself. And rise to your own expectations by thinking how you'll feel if you doubt that you have the power to do what you really want to do. Learn not to accept no as an answer—from yourself, to yourself." To underscore her point, she recounted this self-detracting, power-draining struggle she waged with herself:
71. As ambitious women, we can gain more internal power by learning to look at ourselves almost from the perspective of an outsider. Taking a whole new vantage point helps to quell the voice inside our heads that would otherwise cause us to stumble and to keep from revealing just how great—and powerful—we truly are.

72. When you hear yourself tearing yourself down, try to become aware of it. The next step is to pretend you care as much about advocating for yourself as you do for others.

### **Ambition Rule 8: Stop the Fraud Police - You Deserve to Be Here**

73. I've rarely talked to a woman client, no matter how accomplished, who didn't express that sense of it's-all-going-to-blowup. Someone is always going to find out that they don't know what they're doing—even if they're running Hewlett-Packard.
74. The disclaimer is a preemptive strike on the part of the speaker; she disparages herself before anyone else can leap up to do it to her.
75. Women's nature is to be more willing than their male counterparts to self-reflect and to question, in a positive way, how they can continually improve themselves—or even if they want to compete in the marketplace as it's laid out.
76. My challenge to you is to allow yourself to feel like the real deal. And why shouldn't you? You've worked hard. You've had the guts to dream big and the stamina and determination to chase your dreams. You should enjoy yourself as you move through your ambitious career.
77. A study found that 50 percent of the professional women surveyed, compared with 20 percent of their male counterparts, said they would decline a public speaking opportunity if given the opportunity.
78. Stop Apologizing

### **Lifelong Ambition Maintenance**

79. EACH ambitious woman has within her unique contributions to make. Your challenge for lifelong ambition maintenance is to have the courage to stay your ambitious course.
80. This is a twofold challenge: One, protecting your passion by checking in with yourself periodically throughout your career to see if you're heading in the direction you want.
81. Two, asking yourself if you are making the unique contributions you are capable of. Remember—the world deserves to hear from you.
82. Having a strategic plan and checking in with it—and with yourself—on a regular basis allows you to trust in your self-directed wisdom and your sense of what your real, current ambition is.
83. Your only limits are the breadth and depth of your imagination and the strength of your ambition.
84. Above all, remember that you are the kind of woman for whom the sky is the limit.
85. Check in with yourself at least once a quarter, and then at the end of each year, to look over your ambitious goals, progress, roadblocks, obstacles, and opportunities you've pursued or haven't yet tackled, to measure where you are against where you want to be.

86. And keep in mind that protecting your passion doesn't mean setting your cap to reach the top of your field, or to stay there if you decide to switch ambition directions. Many successful women decided, with intention, that the top of the pecking order is precisely where they don't want to land.

87. Learn to say no when you have to and free up your time to pursue your real goals.
88. Make sure you set limits with people who want to push you into a quick decision by saying, "I'll get back to you on this when I've had time to absorb all the factors and information."
89. When you're feeling confused or overtired, don't act. Concentrate on laying the groundwork for the next steps to take in your career.
90. You don't have to decide today. And you don't have to do anything you don't want to do.
91. Go through your résumé and take in the sheer volume of experience and knowledge you have accumulated.

### **Ambition Integration Imbalance, Not Balance, Makes for a Great, Ambitious Life**

92. If you want to abandon the tired old work/life balance myth and free yourself from its tyranny, you have to construct a new paradigm.
93. To make your life easier, give yourself permission to create a flexible blueprint that will work better than the outdated work/life balance idea.
94. Trust yourself enough to be the author of your own rules and establish the right balance for your life.
95. Buddha said, "Life is a struggle." Struggle is code for imbalance. Struggle and imbalance are a normal part of life; balance is not normal. This realization is freeing.
96. Authenticity has an irresistible integrity, and it's easier—and more compelling—just to be you, whatever situation you find yourself in.

### **Dare to Be Great**

97. Staying determined to live an ambitious life doesn't mean that your confidence isn't shaken at times. It doesn't mean that you won't have clashing priorities. But your ambitious passion will sustain and nourish you even when you can't fix other things in your life.
98. Ambition is my anchor because it comes from within me, rather than from some external source—be it colleagues, promotion, friends, partner, boss, fat paycheck, mentor, or some mercurial other.
99. We cannot look to others to live out our dreams for us.
100. Dare to be great. You have a responsibility to yourself to actualize the talents you were born with and to make the contribution you were put here to make.