

PEAK PERFORMANCE

Go With Your Gut

Honing intuition can sharpen business decisions

IN 1969, AS THE FIRST BLACK WOMAN to earn an M.B.A. from Harvard Business School, Lillian Lambert thought she was destined for a brilliant career advocating for social justice. But after a couple of dead-end jobs with federally funded programs, Lambert felt she'd make more headway as a businessperson. Her intuition pushed her into the cleaning industry, where she launched Centennial One Inc., a commercial cleaning business in Landover, Maryland. The company grew to \$20 million in annual revenues and employed 1,200 people before Lambert sold it in 2001.

"When I went to work for a janitorial company [first as a consultant and later as a manager], I can't say it was because of the attractiveness of that particular industry," Lambert recalls. "I just had a feeling this was the place for me."

Karol Ward, a licensed psychotherapist based in New York City, says flashes of insight like the one that led Lambert into a successful yet unintentional career should be part of every businessperson's decision-making process, especially now as the economy continues to push many businesses into uncharted territory where they can no longer rely on what were once tried-and-true business practices. "If we can trust more that there's a scientific basis to what we perceive, why not give that feeling a little bit of weight," she says. "Pay attention if feelings seem to appear out of the blue. Literally, sit with it. See if you can see what it means before discounting it."

Ward, who is also the author of *Find Your Inner Voice: Using Instinct and Intuition through the Body—Mind Connection* (Career Press; \$14.99), likens the physical sensations or gut feelings to a primal language that can communicate vital urgings and warnings if we learn to listen to and interpret them. That was certainly the case when Lambert went out on a limb to fill a key position at her company. "It was an investment I didn't feel comfortable



LEANING ON HER INTUITION, LAMBERT IS PLEASED WITH THE RESULTS.

making, but I had an intuitive feeling he was the right person for the job," she recalls. "I had no guarantee it would pay off." But it did.

Although 18 months passed before the new hire's efforts resulted in a contract, he stayed with Centennial One Inc. for 10 years and was instrumental in diversifying its client roster. The expansion saved the business from collapse.

And intuition can be refined over time. Lambert trusted her instincts when hashing out a book contract. One of her first requests was to sit down with her editor face-to-face. The 69-year-old explains: "You get a reading of a person through eye contact, hand movements, physical things." The collaboration was successful and her book, *The Road to Somewhere Better: from the Segregated South to Harvard Business School and Beyond* (John Wiley; \$25.95), will be released in January.

But remember, intuition enhances thoughtful decision-making; it doesn't replace it. "In business, you can't rely strictly on intuition," urges Lambert. "You have to deal with the facts of the situation too." —Maya Payne Smart

Strengthen Your Intuition

1 Cultivate self-knowledge
Get in the habit of asking yourself, "How do I feel?" Ward says. "Taking our emotional temperature, our baseline mood, helps us notice when that shifts or changes in a business situation."

2 Take a time out
"When you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed with information, push away from the desk or step away from the situation," advises Lynn Robinson, author of *Trust Your Gut: How the Power of Intuition Can Grow Your Business* (Kaplan Publishing; \$18). "Stop external stimuli and ask, 'What's right for me to do right now?' Sometimes people will get an answer as a voice, image, or physical sensation."

3 Go slow
"If you're not sure and following your intuition is all new to you, take small steps in the direction it's taking you," Robinson suggests. "If it's a good decision, doors will start opening."

PEAK PERFORMANCE

Keep the Faith

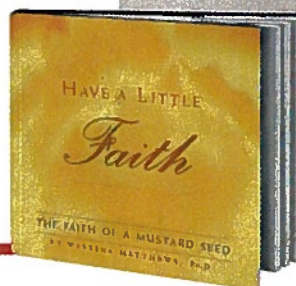
Three ways to strengthen yourself from the inside out

WHEN WESTINA MATTHEWS WROTE her inspirational book, *Have a Little Faith: The Faith of a Mustard Seed* (www.havealittlefaith.com) back in 2005, she was surprised so many were touched by her message that life will work out for the best if you believe it will. "The reference comes from [the Bible passage] Matthew 17:20," says Matthews. "Where all you need is the faith of a single mustard seed, and you know how tiny that seed is."

Her book is relevant even more so today, with people reeling from the effects of the recession. This past summer, Matthews retired from her position as a managing director with Merrill Lynch, but she isn't among those fretting about the future. With faith and confidence, she looks forward to walking an uncharted path and encourages others to do the same.



MATTHEWS RELIES ON HER FAITH DAILY.



Got faith? Matthews offers advice on making it through these uncertain times:

Gather spiritual tools. Whether it's meditating, yoga, exercise, or long walks, know what activities bring you peace because you'll want to turn to them during anxious times. One stress reliever isn't enough in times like this, says Matthews. "Just like you need to diversify your portfolio in your personal and business accounts, you need to diversify your portfolio in your spiritual account."

Learn to surrender. "So much of what's happening is beyond anything we had any responsibility for," says Matthews. Unfortunately, much of it will continue to be out of our control, but faith is about

believing in a higher power. While it's important to take steps to look for a job or improve your financial situation, you must also learn the art of patience and of allowing that higher power to work its magic. Of course, Matthews concedes that being patient takes effort, especially for professionals and entrepreneurs. "You're so used to making things happen," she says. "But you've got to know there's nothing too hard for God and believe that all things are possible."

Get a supporting cast. All of us have times when we're overcome by fear and anxiety. That's why you must identify those who can be calm in the midst of your storm. Matthews observes, "When your faith is weak you can often find someone else's faith to lean on."

—Tamara E. Holmes

PEP TALK



I have a passion for writing and recently published a book geared to bring back the spark in relationships. I sent query letters to national publications. I also reached out to radio personalities and famous authors, but I received no response. I believe in my work, but I am not getting any feedback. What else can I do?

—L. T.
Via E-mail

Keep believing. You cannot allow those that have yet to examine your work alter the way you feel about it. And in this case, I'll be cliché and say, 'No news is good news.' Not good regarding the lack of response, but good in that it allows you time to analyze and tweak your efforts, and in the process, reaffirm your desire to share your talent with others.

Re-evaluate your target and rethink your approach. Do those you reached out to normally publish or broadcast the type of material you want to submit? Did you also include a Website, blog, etc., to provide more information about you or your book? Can couples attest to your book enhancing their relationship? If none of this information is available online and no one has seen your material, then you need to get to work and make this happen. Getting people interested in and responding to your work starts and ends with you. Develop an effective plan to bring people in.

Seek advice from others in your area who've aimed at similar goals and succeeded (nothing like a firsthand account that it can be done). In doing this, you'll begin to identify creative ways to showcase your work, and if you are doing something you love it won't matter if it's for the benefit of one or 1 million.

—Tennille M. Robinson

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