

Leadership in Wonderland

Because sometimes leadership feels like
you're falling down the rabbit hole

Susan Goldberg & Rebecca Lacy

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In celebration of unique leaders everywhere.

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INTRODUCTION

Dear Reader:

Please allow us to introduce you to Leadership in Wonderland. We hope you two will become great friends.

Because you are unique, you will have a singular experience reading the book. Even we, the writers, each learned different things from our characters as they went through their journey.

This book is written to give everyone an individual experience; there aren't any 'prescriptions' – no set lessons of what you are 'supposed to do.' As a result, some will read it as a fun way to pass the time, while others will use it as a guide to help them grow as leaders.

While the book is written as a story, it is filled with personalities and situations common in the real world – some you will recognize, others will be new. Each chapter presents Alice with a new challenge to become more self-aware and confident in her skills as a leader.

At the end of each chapter you will find a corresponding workbook chapter. We encourage you to take time to respond to the questions. There are no right or wrong answers. Rather they are designed to help you reflect upon how Alice's experiences relate to your life.

We can tell you from personal knowledge, discussing the book and workbook is very beneficial. If you have friends or co-workers you can discuss this with, it will deepen your learning experience. You'll discover their decision-making process and insights into the characters and circumstances you may never have considered. It might even change your mind about the way you would have handled a situation.

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<http://www.leadershipinwonderland.com/Form>

Finally, if you are using this book to help a child learn leadership lessons or build confidence, it will provide an excellent opportunity for dialogue. Chances are she or he will see things in this book you wouldn't have thought of.

We hope you enjoy accompanying Alice on her odyssey.

Susan Goldberg & Rebecca Lacy

PROLOGUE

It seems a lifetime ago, although it could have happened recently, that Alice encountered a rabbit hole along with a colorful cast of woodland creatures. She was young then. Well, younger than she is today. Since those first introductions, a lot of things have come to pass.

Alice, the curious headstrong adventurer, had an epiphany, although she didn't know it was a brilliant idea at the time. Alice enjoyed the company of her friends from Wonderland. She also loved tea. One day, bored and with nothing to do, Alice thought about starting a game. The game's theme was to develop new tea ideas and sell them. She could play it with her friends. It would be like one big, grown up tea party.

Alice gathered the smartest ones she could find because she wanted it to be a challenging game. She was a smart girl. She explained the theme and the rules and said she wanted to hire them to play different roles, but the roles had to work together in order for the game to succeed. Caterpillar helped the players with the difficult task of choosing their roles, but almost by magic, each player gravitated to a title which would be most suitable for them and their characteristics even without Caterpillar's assistance.

All games become tiresome at some point, and, even more so to children who have yet to master self-control and discipline. After a time, Alice grew weary of the tea "game", although a responsible part of her knew it wasn't a game to the others; after all, she had "hired them" to play their roles. While she was tired of playing an adult businessperson, these folks were taking the game and their roles rather seriously. The others, including Hatter, the Queen, Duchess, Rabbit and Caterpillar would lose their places if she ended the game. Over time, it had become more real and more serious, perhaps that's why it wasn't fun for her anymore, but she didn't want it to end for the others. She didn't want to give up on the tea game; she just didn't want to play anymore.

She thought of an idea that would make them all happy. She spoke with Caterpillar about it because he was the one she trusted

most of the group. She told him she wanted to leave the game but she wanted it to continue for the others: Alice wanted Leaves-of-Wonderland to thrive but just not with her playing an active role.

Caterpillar had been advising Alice throughout the game how she could win and then they all could win. Caterpillar explained that with Alice pulling out of the active game board, it left an important place vacant. Together they devised a plan to find someone to take her place but with another additional player to enter into the game, looking out for Alice's best interest so that player would play fair in her place. While she would still have the role of CEO because she had started and organized Leaves-of-Wonderland, Purveyor of Fine Teas, one of the others would take the role of President and the new addition would be Alice's executive assistant.

Alice's first idea was to have Caterpillar play the President but Caterpillar declined, believing he could better serve Alice as a jack of all trades, a fill-in position, as the game progressed, because he was so flexible in his skills. Alice's second choice was less clear, but still logical. Since Hatter had proven himself as a great organizer, planner of tea parties, and obviously had a grand passion for tea, she looked at him as a potential successor for her place in the "game". With Alice and Caterpillar to guide him, when needed, and with the Queen of Hearts, as head of the board of overseers, also managing Hatter, he could wear the hat of President well enough.

Time has passed and the game has blossomed into a legitimate business. Departments have grown, key executives have been added and sales have been very healthy. Since the business, or game in Alice's mind, has been doing well without her guidance and with her assistant in place to report back to her on a regular basis, Alice has allowed the whole thing to progress without her interfering. Caterpillar has since moved on to become an outside consultant because all the key roles of the business have been filled and he can best offer his services on an as needed basis. It has been a dreamy time...until now.

1 THE TEAS

A business can change from a dream into a nightmare in the flash of a smile.

Alice had drifted off to sleep under the leafy oak tree after having a lovely cup of tea. After a time, she had a sense someone else was present. She half-opened one eye and peered out. The first thing that came into focus was Cheshire Cat's grinning whiskered face. She frowned and pouted. "Can't you see I'm busy?" she demanded wearily.

"No," the cat smiled even more broadly, "but I can see you were napping."

"What business is it of yours?" Alice asked crossly.

"It isn't my business, it's yours," he answered without really answering.

"Of course it is my business," she replied then realized there was more he wasn't saying. "But to what are you referring?"

"Your business. It seems while the cat is away there are mice at play."

"You talk in riddles!" she exclaimed. She would love to be rid of the pesky cat, but he was aware of everything everywhere. If he left, he would also take his eyes and ears, which really wasn't at all fair, Alice thought, for it would be so easy for him to leave them behind as he often did when he faded from view. And those eyes and ears were very useful.

"What do you get if you slice a pie in half?" asked the cat.

"What a silly question! Everyone knows you get half a pie," responded Alice peevishly.

“That is what people think, but really you get a whole pie cut down the middle. It isn’t until someone eats one half that you have a half remaining.”

“I want to go back to sleep now! Please go away and leave me alone!” said Alice laying her head back on her arm in preparation to resume her nap.

Ignoring her demands, Cheshire Cat said, “Hatter is hungry and he wants to eat his half of the pie.”

“Then he should,” yawned Alice.

“And so he shall . . . unless, you stop him.” taunted the cat, slyly luring the girl back into conversation.

“Why should I stop him from eating his pie, you silly cat?”

“Because the Queen of Hearts is planning on eating the other half. Your half?”

With this Alice bolted up. If there was one thing she simply could not tolerate, it was the Queen of Hearts getting something that was rightfully hers. The thought of the Queen eating her half of the pie made Alice cross, more cross than hot cross buns. Then the girl realized: wait, she didn’t have any pie for the Queen to eat. The cat was playing with her, and was evidently enjoying it. This conversation was becoming increasingly infuriating. Lacking the ability to be subtle, she demanded, “Speak to me in plain English, please.”

The cat, slowly began to fade from view, leaving only his toothy smile hanging in the air, warning, “If you don’t hurry, you will have all the time in the world to dream.” Then it, too, silently faded from view.

Alice was still not certain exactly what the cat had meant, but she sensed Hatter and the Queen were up to no good, and whatever they were planning involved taking the pie away from her. That pie was her company, Leaves-of-Wonderland, Purveyor of Fine Teas.

* * * *

Sometime later Cheshire Cat reappeared in front of Alice, startling her. The cat began to tease her with the mention of a foreign threat, one far, far away. Her head spun and worry set in when he further explained that a foreign business was delving into Alice’s market and competing with her products directly, even using name brands which resembled hers. That combined with what the cat had described earlier of the two conspirators vying to sabotage her

influence and gain control of her company was too much for her. She was raging with disbelief, denial and panic.

Alice seemed a girl of two minds and many doubts, as her head reeled from one thought to another. She talked to herself as she considered her predicament.

“Surely this can’t be true, because if it were it would mean I am ignorant, and surely I am not ignorant because I was always told by my mother and sisters how smart I am.”

“Why should I believe Cheshire Cat? What does *he* know anyway? He’s just a cat. He disappears and reappears so often, how could he know what he’s really seen and really heard or just imagined?

“What does he get out of lying? Perhaps what he’s saying is true.

“Wait, if the Cheshire Cat sees this and I don’t, how many others are aware of this while I’ve remained ignorant? What are the others saying? How far have the conspirators gone? How far does their influence go? What’s going to become of me and my company?

“I’m just a child, and even though I am a smart girl, should I know all of these things? Am I really ready and equipped to run a company? What was I thinking?”

After a few moments thought, Alice exclaimed, “Hatter may own half the pie, but, but, my half is bigger!” Her confidence was short lived, however. So, it wasn’t but the blink of an eye later she once again doubted herself and said, “Still, maybe I shouldn’t have given out so much control...but, I don’t know everything and I had to bring in experts that did. Yet, did I make the right choices? Did I pick the right characters to run the business? Obviously not, if they are trying to take it away from me. I could say I did nothing to cause this conspiracy, but, obviously I hired selfish characters. Okay, then, I may have made some bad choices but how far do my bad choices go? And what am I going to do about the foreigner problem?” After a moment of thought she continued, “No, never mind the foreign threat, the problem at my doorstep is the one I must address first.”

In the midst of her thoughts and worries, Alice was absentmindedly walking. She was so distracted she was unaware of her surroundings and that she had traveled through the woods and into Caterpillar’s mushroom lair.

Alice was startled out of her reveries by a voice, which exclaimed, “I say, you seem rather befuddled. What is going on in that

mind of yours that you've found yourself at my door?"

"Well...well...well..." She blurted out, "well, I just don't know where to start..."

"Well then, why not start at the beginning?"

"I don't know where the beginning is, Caterpillar. Oh, where does it all start?" Alice cried, wringing her hands and then throwing them up in the air in exasperation.

"So then start in the middle." He thought for a second, his hookah in his hand, considered his consulting background, and rephrased what he had meant to say with more clarity, "What is making you so upset, my girl?"

Alice had no time to organize her thoughts. She spoke with raw emotion as she blurted out her story to Caterpillar. She had no time to process the information that was given to her by Cheshire Cat and as a result she seemed a rolling ball of fire with no filter. "I just saw Cheshire Cat. He faded in and out like he always does. Out of nowhere, he starts telling me there's another country producing my teas, or at least a company from that country is producing the teas, my teas, our teas, oh, you know what I mean.

And if that isn't upsetting enough, I have enemies at the company, my own company, our company. They are selfish, greedy characters who want the company for themselves, and are doing this and that to me...and I really don't know what to me. And I don't know what to do. And I don't know what's real, and what's not, or even if the cat is telling me the truth. And I don't know what I don't know and it's all so very confusing and—"

Caterpillar, who always appeared calm, perhaps because of his demeanor in general or possibly because of his fondness for his pipe, was having a difficult time following Alice's rant. Exhaling a giant smoke ring, he interrupted her, saying, "Excuse me, can you please slow down a little? I can't follow you."

"No, I can't! I just can't! Can't you see I am very upset?" Alice calmed herself a little, perhaps conceding that sometimes she does have to slow down to gather her thoughts, and perhaps she should listen more to others. She considered that Caterpillar had worked inside the company as an employee and still works for the company as a consultant. However, she wondered how clear his ideas would be since he always seemed to be so attached to his hookah. She remembered he had been a good friend to her, but he was not privy to everything at the

company any more.

“Perhaps, you need to consider things clearly - without so much emotion. You want to have some of my pipe? It might calm you. It seems to help me.” He extended his hookah nozzle, offering it to her.

She ignored his kind offer and quickly responded, “How am I supposed to do that? I’m just a child! I’m limited. I don’t know what I am supposed to know yet and what I am not. How can I put it all together? I am at a disadvantage.”

Adjusting his glasses, Caterpillar thought for a moment while inhaling from his pipe. He was rewarded by a memory of a somewhat similar circumstance from their past. After exhaling a huge wreath of smoke he smiled down at her and said, “Alice, when you were developing the company you were at a similar point to where you are now, and you knew you couldn’t do it all by yourself. You couldn’t be an expert in everything a company needs, but you were smart enough to know what you wanted to accomplish and also what direction you wanted the company to follow, what your strengths are and also what you weren’t capable of giving. So you hired people to help. You now find yourself at a similar juncture again. Carefully consider all of this. You are again in need of outside help.”

Alice was still riding a fireball of emotion, and didn’t have any patience. Caterpillar’s words immediately started to fade as Alice hurried away from him. She simply couldn’t listen to anymore of his comments; she was too busy weighing her weighty thoughts in her mind. She knew it was rude of her to leave him in mid-sentence, yet she couldn’t listen to him pontificate in consultant’s language anymore. After all, who was he to give her advice? However, as she walked along in a fog, his words ‘You can’t do it all. You need help’ played over and over in her mind.

Suddenly, Alice became aware of the sound of bustling activity coming from nearby. The sound grew louder and she looked around to see where it was coming from. She could make it out clearly now. There was splashing mixed with crashing, crunching, and snapping.

Ah, she found it!

A beaver was building a dam in a pond. He was so industrious and steadfast in his activities that Alice became hypnotized by his fluid motions of swimming and placing sticks in a very structured and deliberate manner. She had become so immersed watching the

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beaver's machinations she hadn't realized her feet were also becoming immersed. She stopped and looked down, finding herself standing in the pond. She swiftly became acutely aware she had cold feet!

WORKBOOK

1 THE TEAS

SUMMARY

Years have passed since the first story of Alice took place. It is somewhat later in time. How much later? Does it matter? Alice, in her later state, is napping, when Cheshire Cat pays her a visit. He explains to her in riddles that Leaves-of-Wonderland: Purveyor of Fine Teas, the company she started earlier in her life, is experiencing problems: The Queen of Hearts and Hatter are plotting against her. In another riddle, the cat leaks to her a foreign entity is an additional threat to her business. Alice questions whether to believe the toothy feline. She also questions if he is telling the truth, does she have the ability to change the situation? Our heroine finds it easier to mull things over while walking, and dreamily walks into Caterpillar's home turf. She mentions her earlier discussions with Cheshire Cat to Caterpillar, once an employee of Leaves-of-Wonderland, now a consultant. As a friend and consultant, Caterpillar tries to offer the founder support and guidance, yet, Alice will have none of it as she is not ready to hear anyone's advice. Further befuddled and emotional, she wanders again, this time becoming easily distracted by a busy beaver's dam building, leaving her vulnerable to further mishaps. This time it's a physical mishap: Alice winds up smack dab in the middle of a stream.

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WHAT ALICE LEARNS

- She has an unrealistic sense of her own abilities and expects herself to be perfect in everything.
- She doesn't know who she is and what she offers.
- When she lets her imagination run away with her, it creates further problems and fears.

What other lessons do you see Alice has encountered in this chapter?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Was Alice's nap at the beginning of the chapter symbolic of anything? If yes, what?

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What other symbolism or metaphors did you see in the chapter?

2. Alice may doubt her credibility as a CEO and owner, and therefore refers to herself as a “just a child”. Have you ever felt like you were an imposter parading like a professional, questioning your own credibility like many leaders have at some point in their lives?

If this has this happened to you, how did you handle the situation?

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3. When Alice is told two very negative tales from Cheshire Cat, how can she know whether to trust the Cat? How can she know whether to believe the tales?

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS:

1. Rumors/gossip can hurt an organization by: (circle all you feel apply)
 - a. Damaging its reputation
 - b. Reducing employee morale
 - c. Causing employees to question leadership and each other
 - d. Damaging trust internally and externally
 - e. Creating stress
 - f. Producing self-doubt in leaders and employees
 - g. Negatively impacting productivity
 - h. Costing the organization money

2. Is Cheshire Cat, a...? (circle all you feel apply)

- a. tattler
- b. gossip
- c. an ally
- d. nuisance
- e. spy
- f. feline
- g. soothsayer

3. It's difficult for Alice to listen to Caterpillar's advice. Do you feel that's because ...? (circle the best answer).

- a. She believes it's a sign of weakness to need advice
- b. She doesn't fully trust him
- c. She doesn't like him
- d. She judges his dependency on his hookah
- e. He is no longer a full-time employee but an outside consultant
- f. She is still in denial about anything wrong

Why did you pick this answer?

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