

**"Great leadership starts within. This book will show you the way."**

Marshall Goldsmith, leading executive coach and New York Times bestselling author

# Leading YOU™

The power of  
**SELF-LEADERSHIP**  
to build your executive brand  
and drive career success

# Brenda Bence

SENIOR EXECUTIVE COACH AND INTERNATIONAL BRANDING EXPERT

# Are YOU overlooking the most crucial aspect of leadership?

The most important driver of overall success is your own *self-leadership*. Without it, your career may stall. Why? Because how you lead yourself directly impacts your ability to lead others, and that, in turn, can prevent you from reaching your full career potential.

## Self-leadership. It begins and ends with YOU™.

In *Leading YOU™*, the companion book to the award-winning *Would YOU Want to Work for YOU™?*, Senior Executive Coach Brenda Bence reveals the 15 most damaging self-leadership behaviors she regularly sees in her practice. She then provides dozens of tips and techniques you can immediately apply to correct or improve these behaviors.

Packed with real-life executive coaching case studies from around the globe, this book will help you:

- Strengthen your Executive Presence and build an outstanding leadership brand.
- Quit acting like a victim of your calendar, your time, and “the system.”
- Utilize powerful mind management techniques to stop limiting behaviors.
- Learn how to successfully manage “up” to bosses and “across” to peers.
- Promote yourself without bragging, to help you gain visibility and the job you want.
- Successfully influence others even if you don’t have an official title or authority.

“Brenda Bence makes it clear: Great leadership is all about *self-leadership* and learning how to manage YOU as well as you manage others. A great read!”

PHILIP YUEN, Chief Executive Officer, Deloitte Southeast Asia



After earning her MBA from Harvard Business School, award-winning author **Brenda Bence** spent the bulk of her career as an executive in multinationals, building brands across dozens of countries on four continents. Now, as a Senior Executive Coach, she has guided hundreds of leaders from more than 60 nationalities to transformational growth and success. Trusted by many of the world’s most recognized companies, Bence is at the global forefront of executive leadership coaching.



[www.BrendaBence.com](http://www.BrendaBence.com)

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**Leading**  
**YOU<sup>TM</sup>**

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## **Limiting Self-Leadership Behavior #13: Not Being Clear About Your Long-Term Career Aspirations**

**T**hese are interesting times for leaders. Technology is changing the game every day, finding a good job can be difficult, and the international economic climate is as fickle as the weather in London. If you're like most executives, it's hard to find the time to sit down and contemplate where your career is going. But how can you be a good self-leader if you don't know exactly where you are leading yourself *to*?

It takes time and conscious effort to focus on your future, and most executives I've worked with have found that it's just easier to live from one moment to the next rather than make any kind of plan. But the truth is, if *you* don't make the time to determine your future, who will?

You're no longer at a level where you can leave your fate to "the powers that be" at headquarters or even to your immediate boss. If you wait for something outside of your control to change, you could end up

waiting a very long time. So, in reality, there is nobody better than you to look at the big picture and set the direction for the next move in your career.

Take my client, Scott, as an example. A very successful lawyer in a large multinational firm, Scott hadn't taken the time to look at his career in a "big picture" way. Don't get me wrong—he was progressing up the ladder, and quite nicely at that—but not in a *strategic* way. He was simply moving along from job to job. He had no long-term perspective because he had gotten too caught up in each position's specific set of responsibilities and was only focusing on how to move forward to the next one. He had never thought about how each job could actually position him for much greater longer-term success.

Scott said to me (and I hear this a lot), "The truth is, Brenda, I've just been lucky all my career. The companies and opportunities have simply come to me; I didn't need to plan or strategize."

If this sounds familiar to you, I may know why. Early in your career, it isn't unusual for the next opportunity to just land in your lap. You produce, you deliver, and doing so results in more jobs and more opportunities appearing on the horizon.

But as you move up the ladder to increasingly senior positions, the number of jobs at that level diminishes. It becomes important to shift from being *reactive*—simply choosing from among the various positions that are presented to you—to being *proactive*. When you are proactive, you ask yourself important questions that can change the trajectory of your professional life for the better: What do I really want long-term? Is my current position likely to lead me there? In order to reach my ultimate goal, what makes the most strategic sense for my career short-term, medium-term, and long-term?

As Laurence J. Peter, author of *The Peter Principle*, wrote: "If you don't know where you are going, you will probably end up somewhere else."

## A Career with a View

It's one thing to say that you want to look at your career from a strategic vantage point, but it's another thing to actually do it.

To do this for Scott, he and I worked through what I call the "End-Point Exercise." You can try it, too:

1. First, draw a horizontal timeline with this year's date at the farthest-left end of the line. Then, reflect: At what age will you retire and/or quit working full-time? Be transparent with yourself. How many years do you honestly have remaining in your career? 10? 15? 20?
2. Write that retirement year at the furthest-right end on your timeline.
3. Then, ask yourself:
  - What does "success" look like at that final stage?
  - What do you want to be doing by then?
  - What is your ideal final post in this career of yours?
4. Spend some time visioning what your life will look like at that point. Don't limit your vision to your work life; think also about where you want to be with your family/personal life, community, spiritual life, philanthropy—all aspects of what is important to you.

Your "ideal" might be having the financial means to never have to—or want to—work again. Maybe you would like to take on an independent director board position, work part-time, or even start a business of your own, either for fun or for additional income. Your vision might include making sure you have enough money coming in for your children's university tuition and for your own retirement years. You might want to live in another country, spend more time with family, travel, or simply live the life you want as a happy, healthy retiree. But how do you make sure you get there?

This first step is key. You must be *crystal clear* in your mind about your “end game.” Don’t move forward with any other steps until you’re absolutely certain that you have clarity about where you are headed.

To help you with this, I encourage you to create a vision for yourself. It can be a written narrative or a pictorial vision (with photos or magazine visuals that you pull together)—or it can be a combination of both. Be specific. You may want to talk about or develop your vision with your spouse or your significant other to assure that you have the same end game in mind.

Once you are crystal clear on the desired outcome, here’s how to make this vision come to life: Envision that it is the last day of your work life. You’ve fast-forwarded to the year you’ve written at the farthest-right end of the timeline you drew.

Try it now. In your mind, imagine you are at your retirement party, and a big banquet has been organized in your honor. You are seated at the head table. All of your past and current coworkers are there to celebrate your life and career—your direct reports, peers, bosses, suppliers, and industry colleagues. Each individual stands up and pays tribute to you. What will they say about you in general? About what you did? About the specific contributions you made? About the kind of person you are? What would you like to hear them say as you sit there, listening to speech after speech?

Then, ask yourself this fundamental question: What will I need to do, and how will I need to be, to get to that point and deserve those accolades?

It helps to take a 360-degree approach to this exercise and look at the situation holistically:

- What character traits will you need to hone and polish?
- What specific skill sets will be key to your success?
- How much money will you need or want to have by then?
- What kinds of networks and connections will you require?

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Create a list for yourself, and keep adding until you've written down all of the skills, attributes, and actions that you will need to get you to where you want to be.

Once that is clear, come back to the reality of today, and ask yourself: How would you rate yourself in each of those individual areas *now*? If the “end game” is a 10 (on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being high), how would you score yourself today in each specific area?

This assessment allows you to get crystal clear about (a) how well you are honestly doing now, and (b) where you will need to place the most focus between now and then. Which of your skills and talents need strengthening in order to achieve your goals by the end date? Get specific.

As I took Scott through the End-Point Exercise, he realized that he had aspirations to be a General Counsel in a large multinational corporation. That would involve carefully plotting his career to include new skills—both in the legal field and with people-leadership—that he hadn’t previously considered. He would also need to network across other areas of the larger organization where he worked—with divisions where he hadn’t made connections in the past. This prompted Scott to set up a series of lunches and coffees with various high-level leaders from other areas of the organization. It was a great example of getting proactive and taking self-leadership in career planning to a whole new level.

Matthew, another client, also completed the End-Point Exercise and realized that, after 25 years of working in global corporations, he wanted to experience some years as an entrepreneur once he retired from corporate life. Like Scott, Matthew had to reflect on the skills he would need in order to be a successful business owner as compared to working as an employee of other companies for so many years. This choice had important financial ramifications, too.

Another advantage of the End-Point Exercise is that it helps you break up your future into smaller, more manageable chunks of time. That, in

turn, allows you to plan your self-leadership trajectory in an actionable and pragmatic way. You can tell yourself, “During ‘this’ particular period of time (e.g., Years 1-3), I will focus on developing ‘this’ specific skill and networking within the industry. Then, during the next period (Years 4-6), I will focus on developing ‘these’ other skills and networking across ‘these’ industries.”

This is how you develop a concrete plan to plot your career strategically and make sure you’re on track to end up where you want to be.

## **A Memorable Example of an Executive Who Made It Work**

Does this kind of strategic planning work? Yes. Not only have I seen it work again and again in my Executive Coaching practice, but I was also exposed to this very early in my career—right out of business school—when I interviewed for a job at Procter & Gamble in Cincinnati.

At that time, applicants for brand management positions had to undergo three interviews by three potential colleagues and bosses. If you passed all three, you were given an employment offer. Each interview progressed higher up the corporate ranks, with the senior-most executive conducting the third interview.

I had apparently done well in all three interviews, but—for a variety of reasons—I wasn’t all that excited about what I had seen or heard. So, in my head, I had decided this company and I were not a good match.

As I was leaving the third interview, however, I was summoned to the office of AG Lafley, who was at that time a Vice President in charge of a major division. (AG was eventually “kicked upstairs,” serving both as P&G’s CEO and as the Executive Chairman of the company’s Board.)

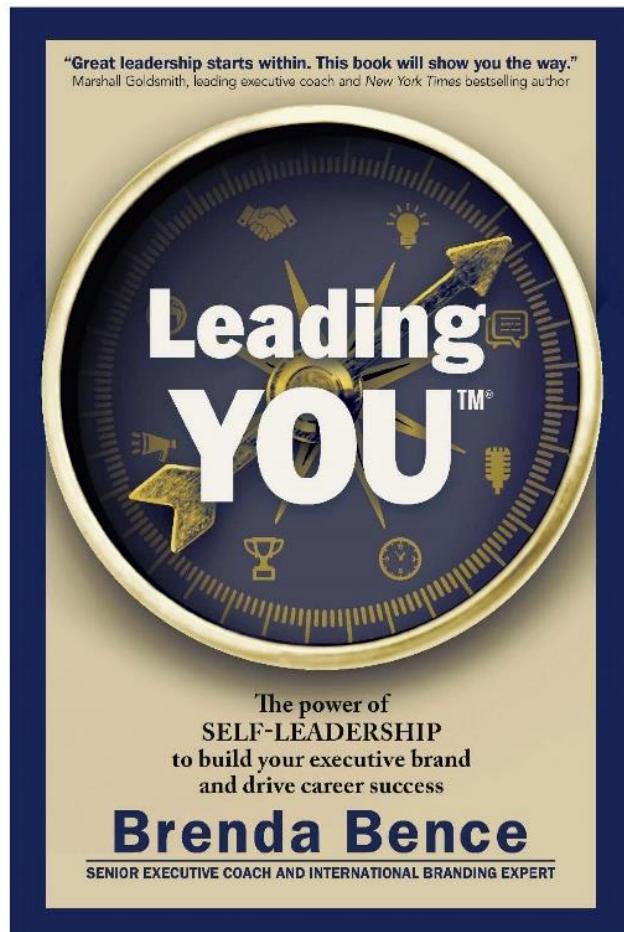
In the short 45 minutes that I sat across the desk from AG, he convinced me to take the job—hook, line, and sinker! He was incredibly inspiring, and I remember his words very clearly, “You take care of this company, Brenda, and this company will take care of you.” (They stuck to that, by the way.)

But beyond that, what was it that convinced me in such a short period to completely change my mind and sign on the dotted line? While AG and I were talking, he opened one of his desk drawers and pulled out a sheet of yellow-lined paper, which seemed to have been torn from a legal pad. It was his full, handwritten career plan, with one line devoted to each key post he wanted to attain and by when. You see, years before that, he had written his goals, outlined the skills he would need to learn, and highlighted the connections he would want to make. In short, he had laid out everything he would need to do to reach his personal and career goals for each year and as he moved forward.

I was incredibly impressed by AG's foresight which he had set down on paper so many years earlier. And I decided I wanted to work for someone like that, someone who was clearly a strong self-leader.

How about YOU™? If you're not yet clear about your desired career future, I encourage you to walk through the End-Point Exercise and begin to crystalize the end game. Where do you envision your career and your life taking you, and how will you get there?

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