

Beyond Confident Leadership

Reclaim Your Power
Self-Coaching Guide

Are you accidentally sabotaging
your influence, income and impact?

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SERVICE-MOTIVATED HIGH ACHIEVERS ARE WIRED TO GIVE THEIR TIME, ENERGY AND RESOURCES, AND TO GET THINGS DONE. EVEN AT THEIR OWN EXPENSE...

The strength that defines them (as the 'person who gets things done') starts to get in the way of their next level of success and fulfilment. It's the High Achiever Paradox.

High achievers tend to have above-average levels of energy, cognitive capacity and skill. They're *hyper-competent*. They're also *hyper-independent* and forget to ask for help. They believe it's easier and quicker to do the job themselves.

(Note: A high achiever isn't someone with a particular set of achievements. It means that, for your peer group, you tend to be the one who gets more done and do things better).

Over time, high achievers become the go-to person. People expect them to say 'yes'. They forget how to say 'no'. Their boundaries become almost non-existent. It's as though they have no needs. They become office-approved superheroes. Their well-being (physical, mental, financial) starts to take a hit. Even self-care starts to become a task: "I'm tired and stressed. But I just need to get to that yoga class and book that holiday..." (another task for the endless to-do list). They try to push themselves through procrastination rather than deal with the underlying problem. Soon, they start to burnout and lose confidence in their capability. These patterns magnify with leadership and having greater responsibility.

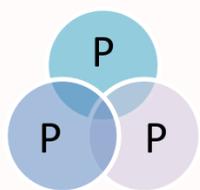
If you relate to this, it's likely that when your career started, your vision wasn't to become a good worker who delivers on other people's endless agendas. You had a vision of how the world could be and who you would be in it, right? But perhaps you didn't know that realising your vision would demand difficult decisions and feeling uncomfortable in order to protect it.

Have you ever felt like you have no boundaries? Or that you give a lot to others and don't have much left for yourself?

We all have days like that. And sometimes it seems like the best way to show that we care is by doing more. But we need to remember: the point of life is not to make everyone else happy — it's to do fulfil our own potential in life and inspire others to do the same. That is the beginning of power. It's not about confidence but about resting in alignment with what is true for us. When you exude that kind of congruence with yourself and do what you're here to do, others feel nourished and inspired by that. They connect with their own power to do the same. And so a ripple effect ensues.

WHAT IS POWER?

Power comes from the Latin *posse* meaning "be able". The Oxford Dictionary defines power as "the ability to control people and things". I like Martin Luther King Jr.'s definition: 'Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice.' On a very practical level, this definition from Miki Kashtan also works: 'power is the capacity to mobilise resources to meet needs'. My own approach is to see power as a capacity operating alongside two others in a holistic and mutually amplifying way that liberate us from limiting beliefs. These **liberating capacities** are:



1. **Presence**: the capacity to be with the reality of the moment as it is, in a non-judgmental, non-reactive way. Not better, not worse, just as it is.
2. **Power**: the capacity to choose based on intuition – a sense of agency informed by the sum of my own sensing and processing of reality.
3. **Possibility**: the capacity to imagine and engage with new ways of being, doing and existing alone and together.

That's all fine, Amina! But why am I still holding myself back and what do I do now?

OK, let's look at the other side of the power coin: how you might be accidentally disempowering yourself without realising.

THE TWO FACES OF DISEMPOWERMENT

You might think that lacking power (or confidence) is when you're afraid of taking action. But it can also look like situations where you're taking too much action as we saw above. The reasons underneath start to become important the more you look into the issue.

Often, we might be trying to overcompensate out of fear of failure or because we feel like we're not good enough. We start trying to prove ourselves unnecessarily (hello Imposter Syndrome!) And this really drains power because it's totally divorced from the reality of your proven track record of learning, competence and success.

These patterns of overcompensation are engrained neurobiologically. But they can be changed through transformational coaching whether self-directed or with support.

The first step is awareness.

HERE ARE TWO TYPES OF DISEMPOWERMENT_

We often cycle between the two, but you may have a dominant type

- **Type 1 - The Quiet Martyr:** the tendency to be quiet, step back and people please so as not to cause waves (a freeze-flight-fawn pattern)
- **Type 2 - The Relentless Superheroine:** the tendency to be on the go all the time and overthink/analyse everything (a fight pattern).



You're always giving and receiving.

The patterns are driven by a 3-headed fear that has you believe: "I'm not good enough" (powerlessness); "I cannot have what I want" (scarcity); and/or "I don't belong" (separation). The patterns keeps you locked in cycles of frustration or burnout – never feeling like you're getting what you want or need. A good sign that you're disempowering yourself: life starts to feel like a constant struggle with all this self-neglect and battling. In fact, both of the disempowerment types are expressions of a rescuer identity.

By the way...

If you're not sure whether you have rescuer tendencies, here are 10 signs.

1. Your rescuer identity may be reflected in your field of work (e.g. healthcare or activism) or in your role (e.g. the fixer in the organization).
2. You tend to jump into situations to help.
3. You anticipate people's needs before they do.
4. You experience *Helper's High*.
5. You like being independent (and perhaps relationships feel draining).
6. You may feel that you don't need help (or dislike asking for it).
7. You can get annoyed with other people who do ask for help.
8. You have problems articulating your own feelings and needs.
9. You have outbursts of anger or frustration and don't understand why.
10. You're not comfortable being vulnerable or appearing weak/needy.

Here's a video with more explanation.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kujZplowliY>

A word on hidden emotional labour

For various reasons, service-motivated high achievers who are women or in minority groups often end up doing a lot of hidden emotional labour (although the pattern can affect anyone). This can look like **creating safe spaces in a toxic environment; placating angry bosses and pacifying team member tantrums; or managing the emotional impact of being undermined or treated unfairly, not to mention managing the stress of caring for family while working** which falls disproportionately on women and certain minority groups.

This emotional labour is rarely acknowledged or remunerated properly (if at all). So you may have to make a decision as to whether to keep doing it or explore what other options may be available to you to do your best work without doing this extra, **unrecognised work**. It may trigger feelings of guilt, but **if you feel constantly drained and don't know why, it's highly likely that you are doing hidden emotional labour**. These hidden costs on your energy ultimately disempower you as well as others you're trying to help, for multiple reasons that are too complex to go into here.

Of course, this extends to any kind of non-physical labour. If you're contributing innovative ideas and insights to your team or organization and you're still thinking about them, **processing, analysing and ideating of any kind after work**, this will have an impact on your energy and therefore power. This is hidden cognitive labour.

In summary, your mind (and body) never get to relax and you're sending yourself a signal that you have to be constantly 'on' which ultimately disempowers you. So you need to find ways to manage this effectively. In other words, you need to **complete your stress cycle on a daily basis** by stopping work (both visible and hidden) and taking space for yourself.

Ask yourself: *Where am I accidentally disempowering myself through hidden labour?*

Scientific reasons to say 'no'!

The University of Exeter (UK) published a study of (FTSE) 100 Index companies. They found that women and people from minority groups are often given higher positions that carry high risks of failure. They are promoted to higher positions during times of crisis or duress, or during a recession when the chance of failure is more likely. This puts them in an impossible situation. They end up with 'opportunities' that men prefer not to take. They called this the "glass cliff". It may look like they are given the opportunity to break a glass ceiling, but they are actually at the edge of failure which reinforces the perception that women and minority groups can't lead. How disempowering!

For example, Caroline was promoted to Director of Operations in a dream NGO only to realise that she was facing an impossible situation and that her task became leading the company through an insolvency process. It was a poisoned chalice that had her lose confidence in her ability. It drained her power and she started avoiding applying for roles she wanted because she felt like she was failing. This can happen to anyone (from any group) in a toxic environment. But you can protect yourself by taking time to contemplate a decision, tune into your intuition about when to say 'no' and trust it even if you feel guilt. The cost of failing to discern which opportunities are right for you and which aren't is to accidentally disempower yourself and sabotage the true career and leadership opportunities available to you.

Here are a few quick tips to start reclaiming your power

- Decide what your non-negotiables are and stick to them e.g. no email before 8am or after 6pm.
- Say 'no' when it's 'no' (feel the guilt and say 'no' anyway). Remember that what looks like an empowering opportunity may not always be. Not everything that glitters is gold.
- Schedule time for rest, meditation and exercise in your calendar as 'do not disturb')
- Make space for things that feel like a luxury especially if you keep deferring them e.g. that check-up about your health or finances, the writing class or the walk in the woods.



"No" is a complete sentence.

Now it's time to dive deeper and start self-coaching to reclaim your power. You'll never have to wonder what to do when people say 'you should be more confident' (which is totally meaningless by the way)!

STEP 1: POWER DIAGNOSTIC

(Recognise your disempowerment habits)

First, get a sense of how disempowerment shows up you, using the table above. Different situations will activate different types. You may have tendency towards one (Are more of a Quiet Martyr or a Relentless Superheroine and in which situations?)

When [situation X] happens, the type that shows up for me is....



You are more than your identity.

THE QUIET MARTYR (FREEZE-FLIGHT-AWGN RESPONSE)

THE RELENTLESS SUPERHEROINE (FIGHT RESPONSE)

Disempowering pattern

- Apologising excessively
- Feeling annoyed with people who ask for what they need or who enjoy the pleasures of life
- Avoiding (intimate) relationships
- Your team often wonder where you are but know you'll help them
- Lacking joy and pleasurable activities
- Using mindfulness practices/self-care as a tranquilizer to eliminate negative emotions and be "at peace"

- Saying 'yes' to everything and feeling uncomfortable saying "no"
- Forgetting personal needs and thinking others are weak if they complain
- Engaging in intense relationships or too many relationships without depth
- Your team burns out, others can't keep up with you
- Lacking quiet time and yearning for nature.
- Doing mindfulness practices/self-care as a filler or another 'task'

Re-empowerment practices

- Replacing 'sorry for' with 'thank you for' e.g. 'thank you for your patience' instead of 'sorry for the delay'
- Incorporating more joy, pleasure and fun in your life to energise and help you break out of a chronic freeze
- Allowing other people into your inner world - sharing thoughts and emotions
- Working through feelings of shame when expressing yourself publically
- Taking more outer risks (doing unusual things that feel risky but fun i.e. they are 'edgy' and therefore energising)

- Better boundaries (saying no)
- Slowing down and spending time alone or in nature
- Reducing stimulation and stimulants
- Having clear office hours and a non-negotiable, realistic schedule
- Work through feelings of guilt when saying 'no' or taking time off.
- Taking more inner risks (connecting with emotions and thoughts as well as releasing tension that has built up over time)

Situations where it shows up

- In meetings (letting everyone else speak first)
- In conflict (when disagreement may arise)
- Around authority figures

- When someone/the team/family has a problem
- When there's uncertainty about something
- When feeling sad, angry or confused.

STEP 2: PLUG THE POWER LEAKS!

(Rapid turnaround and power boost)

On page 1 you had a few quick tips to start reclaiming your power. Now it's time for you to create your own, personalised power practices based on your understanding of your disempowerment habits. Using the table above, identify habits that you choose to stop and habits that you choose to take on from today.



Remember to breathe.

Write 1-5 habits in each column in the table below.

5 HABITS THAT <u>DISEMPOWER</u> ME	5 HABITS THAT EMPOWER ME
1)	1)
2)	2)
3)	3)
4)	4)
5)	5)

STEP 3: CHALLENGE THE HABITS

(Understand and deeply transform old patterns)

By now, you're hopefully feeling a bit of a fire in your belly. Whether it's from frustration at realising what you've been doing accidentally or from excitement at how you can start changing things immediately, that fire is your power in energetic form! Use it for transformation.



New possibilities await.

Once your list is complete, pick **one habit** in the right-hand column that disempowers you.

Work with the habit you want to transform using these self-coaching questions:

1. How does this habit serve you? *(Think about how it may have helped you in the past and supported you to achieve your current success e.g. working overtime made you useful and got you your first promotion)*

2. How does this habit not serve you? (Think of how this is getting in the way of showing up as a leader rather than a worker e.g. working overtime means I never get to the decision-making conversations, I make more mistakes, I'm less patient and alienate my team.)

3. What would happen if you stopped this habit? What's the worst-case scenario? (Let yourself name any fears or concerns freely).

4. Who would you be without this habit? What could you do instead of this habit? (Notice how it feels to imagine yourself free of this habit. Then imagine what more empowering habits you might take on instead. Go for something that feels edgy for you i.e. a little scary and a little exciting – that is your Power Edge. That's where you can reclaim your power e.g. stopping work at the same time every day, gradually reducing your daily finish time until it feels reasonable and sustainable.)

Behaviours versus beliefs

Habitual behaviours are informed by habitual beliefs. While this guide has focused on tangible behavioural habits, rather than thought patterns, it's important to **be aware of the underlying beliefs** that inform your behaviours. You may have surfaced a few as you engaged with the exercises in this guide.

For example, you may have surfaced a belief that: 'working overtime is the only way to get all my work done'. This is a belief that can be explored. For one, it doesn't match up to the evidence ([see this article for example](#)). But more importantly, it may not be true for you and will therefore sabotage your own power and unique path to fulfilment.

If you want to work more deeply with disempowering beliefs, you can use a [High Achiever Paradox Transformation \(HAPI\) worksheet](#). If you feel it's too challenging to do alone, you can also work with a Transformational Coach, guide or skilled friend to help you understand and transform them. **Transforming unhelpful or limiting beliefs is the most worthwhile work you will ever do and a skill that will sustain your power for life.**



Life is change.

FINAL STEP: AFFIRMATION

One thing you've realised about your power: -----

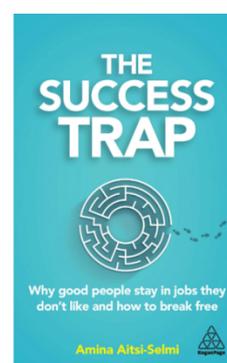
One thing that you will do differently from today: -----

One reason this is important: -----

Share one of these with me on LinkedIn or Instagram.



Hi I'm Amina. I'm a Transformational Executive and Career Coach. I'm known as the doctor who delivered babies in war zones and worked on UN global health policy then left it all. In 2016, I created my own coaching and advisory practice, replaced my full-time doctor's income by working with talented professionals and visionary leaders who are committed to creating the values-based career, life and impact they truly want. In 2020, I published an award-winning book called *The Success Trap: Why Good People Stay in Jobs They Don't Like and How to Break Free*. You can download a [free chapter here](#) or invest in the book [here](#). The transformational path is not always easy but it's worth it!



Want to go deeper?

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You are more than your habits.