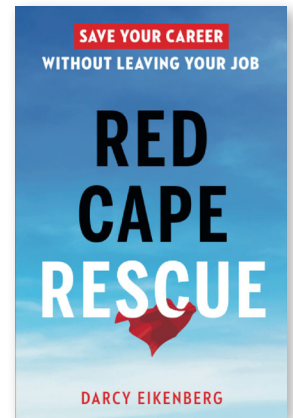


Red Cape Rescue

Save Your Career Without Leaving Your Job

by **Darcy Eikenberg**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Remember when you were a kid and you'd grab a towel and fling it around your neck? You tossed your shoulders back and stuck your chin out. You felt confident and courageous. You felt in control there in your imagined red cape—even if you only controlled the backyard. Fast-forward to your world of work, where life may feel anything but in control. What if you could don your red cape, layering new strengths and confidence? Perhaps you've hit a speedbump in your once reasonably fine career. That shift might have originated from the outside, sparked by an economic crash, illness, or government uncertainty. Or your career chaos might have been ignited by changes only visible to your company or profession, such as a technology breakthrough, outsourced talent, a merger, or a leadership shake-up.

You can save your career and succeed on your own terms at work. Darcy Eikenberg, in *Red Cape Rescue*, shows how to do this without the drastic interventions of finding a new job, starting a business, bowing to an early and unwanted retirement, or, worse, compromising your health and happiness.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to shift your mindset and build your confidence.
- What you control and what you don't.
- Fresh strategies for powerful conversations.
- To battle the blocks, protect your time, and move your career forward.

Reset How You Think

Right now, you might feel overwhelmed, confused, or even angry about what's happening at work. In this first step of our adventure, you'll unlock the secret to taking charge once more.

Know Your Core Powers

Here is the complete list of everything in the world you control: Everything you think. Everything you say. Everything you do. That's it. Our internal desires for control are merely a well-trained response—an attempt to stay safe. But “safe” isn't a route to more meaning, impact, or happiness. It's only a route to more of the same. The good news is that once you see what you control—and what you don't—you'll create a stronger sense of power, safety, self-worth, and freedom. Focus only on the things you think, say, and do. When you do, you'll reclaim your power and start recreating your life at work.

Conquer the Battle of the Brain

When your world goes haywire, you can use your newfound power to control what you think, learning to conquer the battle of the brain. Your brain isn't always on your side. The amygdala, which in the old days would trigger us when we'd hear a tiger roar, now triggers us when we hear our manager roar. The well-meaning amygdala works like an alarm to the body, alerting the hypothalamus, which signals the adrenal glands. Their job is to shoot you a dose of adrenaline, forcing your heart to race and blood to pump. We might freeze and hide. Alternatively, we sweat, feel the flush in our face, and get defensive, we're in fight mode. When you separate the fearful, judging thoughts from the real you, you regain energy and confidence, and you take back control of your biggest assets: your brain.

Unveil Your Values

Your values are the soundtrack playing behind each scene in the movie of your life. Clarifying your values might take some work and make you uncomfortable. But the only way to operate in sync with your values is to first know what the heck they are. Not what you think they should be. Not what your parents valued. Not what your spouse, boss, or fave celebrity values, either. But what they are, right now, with you just as you are. You'll feel clearer and more confident. You'll make decisions faster and grow more secure about saying yes or no. Then you'll generate the kind of confidence that helps you soar.

Imagine Positive Intent

You know that moment. A colleague says or does something that pushes your button. The one that makes your face flush hot, your fists clench, your jaw tighten. Maybe they say that thing in an email. You read it, mutter a few choice words to yourself, and start to hammer out a heated response. Your keyboard quietly cries out in pain as you power through and hit send. Later, you discover that the sender meant something entirely different from what you read into it. Your flushed face is now covered in egg. Prevent this embarrassment. Imagine positive intent.

Psychologist David D. Burns describes it this way. Imagine a clear glass of water. Then imagine squeezing a drop of black ink into the glass. Soon, the entire glass turns dark. That's how negative thinking colors our perspective about ourselves and others. But here's the truth: there's still a lot more water in that glass than ink. See the water, not the ink.

Listen to the Whispers

Jan worked in a corporate sales role when she started to hear her whispers, and she didn't trust them. Her whispers were pulling her toward design—a field that seemed miles away from what she was doing in sales. She developed a plan to tune in to those messages from her future self. Jan uncovered that her whispers were pointing her toward working with clients long-term. Jan chose to identify others in similar roles, scheduling conversations, and researching different roles in her company. Jan's whispers grew louder when she acted. Her actions not only clarified who she wanted to be, but also how she wanted to be in her life at work.

Revise What You Say

Don't be fooled by our soundbite world. Words still matter—the ones we think and the ones we say out loud. Let's tell a new tale about the hero you're becoming—and the one you already are.

Rewrite Your Story

How do you get from where you are now to the new story that works for you, even if it's not yet happily ever after? To start, shine a light on your existing story. What are you telling yourself and others about your current situation? Write it down or record it. Play it back and listen for two things: a seemingly powerful outside force and any negative emotions or commentary.

Now, let's write a new story, giving yourself permission to

feel clear, confident, courageous. You have total power over all you control (what you think, say, and do). Don't censor or judge your story. You're working with what you've got, and it's likely more than you realize.

Ask for What You Need

When making the case for a promotion, Gretchen recognized that a change in her role would create stress for her boss and might generate tension on her team. She proposed a plan for how her team would operate should her promotion be granted. "I listed duties that I could easily transition to the team members I had trained," she said. "I outlined how my promotion would be an opportunity for others to grow, and how it wouldn't add work to my boss's day." After continuing the conversation and anticipating how her advancement would personally affect others, Gretchen was soon promoted to vice president. Satisfying, meaningful careers are all about asking.

Watch Your Language

When you recall how your brain triggers your thoughts, you can change your thoughts. And when you change your thoughts, you can change your words. Emotion puts us in motion. When we speak positive words about ourselves (or to and about others), we move forward. When our dialogue is drowning in the negative, those words hold us back, keeping us right where we are or, even worse, digging a hole so deep that climbing out is hard. Words create worlds, and what you say matters. Don't wait for the right words to appear like magic. Create the right ones now to help your ideal situations appear.

Affirm the Squirm

A Red Cape Rescue calls you to redefine success—in your job, in your company, in your profession—on your own terms. For most of us, that's just plain uncomfortable. Discomfort is the only path to growth. There is no substitute. Take Alison Levine. A world-class mountaineer, she's not only climbed the highest peak on all seven continents but also skied to the North and South Poles. That's despite three heart surgeries and Raynaud's disease, which impacts the circulation in her hands and feet, leaving her at extreme risk for frostbite. For this adventurer, discomfort—physical and mental—goes with the territory. Make uncomfortable your new comfortable.

Accelerate Appreciation

When you're under tremendous stress ignited by changes

at work, giving gratitude a little room can be a struggle. You smell fakery, as though you're desperately trying to convince yourself that "I'm happy and whole" when you feel like anything but. Gratitude is an emotion, a feeling that emerges in positive experiences, prayers, moments of quiet thanks. Appreciation is the vocal expression of that emotion. It's the emotional punch that makes the gratitude become real, because you've expressed it in a genuine and useful way. When you accelerate appreciation, you turn your view from inward to outward. As you do, you'll start to notice more things to be thankful for.

Reinvent What You Do

Amid the forest of career change, fear, anxiety, and worry inevitably pop out from behind the trees, challenging you to turn back. Let's anticipate their presence and learn a countermove that'll fend them off every time.

Forge a Fear Strategy

When a handful of big players in her industry started purchasing smaller companies like hers, Anaya worried her company would be next. Consolidation could mean her upper-level job would be eliminated. At first, the fear froze her, keeping her up at night. I asked her, "If you believe that fear to be true, then what can you do about it? How can you take control?" The answers to those questions always lead to a plan. Anaya focused on people. When the fear kicked up, it signaled her to reach out to someone. Her outreach began as a basic "hello" email or call to an old friend. Soon, she was scheduling conversations with company leaders to raise her profile, communicate her contribution, and assess how others understood her value. Later, she started reaching out to people outside her company to build her network. That plan was powerful, helping Anaya take control of what she could do, letting go of the fears of what she would never control.

Counteract Chaos

We humans become exceptionally creative, changing our words and ways, sometimes in an instant. Kate Braestrup knows this to be true. A law enforcement chaplain in the state of Maine, she knocks on doors to deliver the terrible news of an unexpected death. In holding hundreds of people through that first wave of immense grief, she discovered something remarkable. The initial, devastating reaction never lasts more than half an hour. Certainly, it returns as people adjust to their loss, but, Braestrup observes, even

in the first sixty minutes, people begin creating next steps. They ask, “Where is the body?” “When can we have a funeral?” “What do we do next?” Within an hour, she notes, survivors begin to create their new lives. Choose creative action instead of suffering in chaos. It’s the only way to the new beginning that you want.

Drop Some Balls

Taking on more to the degree that it wears you down or distracts you from what’s most important is not a success strategy. It’s a recipe for failure. You push your needs into tiny corners of time in between meetings, conference calls, and commutes. Your sleeping habits, healthy eating, or regular walks outdoors can shift to the back burner fast. You end up sacrificing you. Let’s not do that. There’s a success strategy in doing less.

Magnify Momentum

If you’ve ever tried to grow a tomato, you know you can’t just plant it and leave it alone. The eventual tomato is heavier than its branches will hold. You need a stake or cage to give the new growth more security, something to hang onto during its precarious journey upward. You need to provide structure that will support what the plant’s growing into, not what it was at the start. It’s the same with me and you. For our momentum to grow properly, we need a success structure to support us.

Pursue Progress

TA-DAs are typically the sole province of Olympians, circus folk, and toddlers proudly waddling, arms up, toward their parents. Right now, I bet you can even hear the two chords that often accompany the move: TA-DA! Although

there’s no precise record, ta-da seems to have originated in the early 1900s, when an orchestra leader encouraged his musicians to end with a flourish—the kind of long and short notes that let you know the king is about to appear. He said, “Let’s hear a ta-da,” and the rest is history. I invite you to do the same.

Throw your shoulders back, shake out your red cape, and raise those hands in the air. You’ve more than earned the applause. Don’t pretend you’re a hero. You are one, red cape and all. In fact, you’re the hero you’ve been waiting for.



Darcy Eikenberg is on a mission to help us change our lives at work without having to change everything in our lives, especially during times of great change (and face it—when AREN’T we managing change?). She’s coached leaders at companies such as Aon, The Coca-Cola Company, State Farm, and Deloitte, and offers encouraging ways to change work for the better, for good. Before launching leadership career coaching firm RedCapeRevolution.com, Darcy was a principal at human resources consulting firm Hewitt Associates (now part of Alight Solutions), where she served on both the Southeast and the North American Communication Consulting Leadership teams.

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