

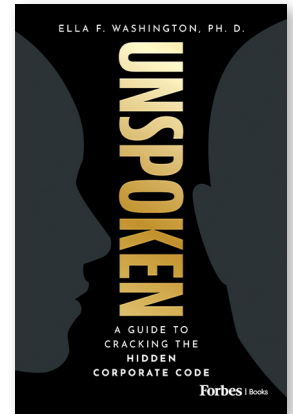


Executive Book Summaries[®]

Unspoken

A Guide to Cracking the Hidden Corporate Code

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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

So many of us go through life automatically assuming that work will always be hard and stressful, and will always suck. But most work environments can deliver a better experience for all of us if we change the dynamics of the workplace and maybe even our expectations.

In *Unspoken: A Guide to Cracking the Hidden Corporate Code*, the unspoken rules that determine success in corporate settings are explored, and empowering tactics to help shape a successful career are shared in detail. The practical strategies outlined will help you to own your story and build your strengths, leverage your skills, and identify opportunities to excel and advance.

The intention is for you to walk away with everything you need to uncover and manage the unspoken rules in any workplace, even those that may be uncomfortable, unfamiliar, or where you may be “the only one.” You’ll learn how to use this book’s practical, actionable content to overcome them, allowing you to thrive in corporate environments, develop leadership skills, and achieve your career goals.

IN THIS EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY:

- Gain clarity on your personal story to gain confidence and authenticity in your career.
- Leverage and develop your strengths to align your work with what you do best.
- Balance authenticity and strategy to foster strong workplace relationships
- Develop a personal playbook to intentionally plan your career and adapt to change.

Section One

Chapter One: Own Your Story

Unspoken Rule: Who you are outside of work impacts who you are inside of work.

Unspoken Rule: Owning who you are gives you confidence anywhere you show up.

Take the time and try to understand your story. The more you understand yourself, the better you'll be able to navigate your career and interactions with others.

Determine the differences between how you see yourself and how others see you. Try to understand why some might be getting the wrong idea about you—and how you might change things up to better show up as who you really are and who you want to become.

Understand the experiences you've gone through, both good and bad. What made them negative or positive? What role did you play in making them turn out the way they did? What role did others around you play?

CHAPTER EXERCISE: THE ELEVATOR PITCH

If you haven't heard of an elevator pitch, it's simply a capsule summary of something you can complete during an elevator ride. It's also a great way to get clear on and convey your story. Elevator pitches are short, concise, and meant to get your audience's attention. Generally, you want to keep it under thirty seconds. Break elevator pitches down into three distinct categories: the professional pitch, the future pitch, and the human pitch. These represent three ways you can "show up" in the workplace.

Chapter Two: The Power of Your Strengths

Unspoken Rule: Success comes from amplifying your strengths, not fixing your weaknesses.

Unspoken Rule: Seek opportunities to align your work with your strengths.

Unspoken Rule: Own your flaws, and turn stumbling blocks into stepping stones for success.

Unspoken Rule: Success is a team sport. Every star had a wingman or backstage hero who made the win possible.

Assess your own strengths. You can accomplish this by seeking feedback from your peers, managers, friends, and family. You can also use online tools to identify your assets. Knowing your strengths is the next step in understanding your story.

The more you understand yourself, the better you'll be able to navigate your career and interactions with others.

Leverage your strengths. Look for professional opportunities to take advantage of those strengths and help you shine in the workplace. Create quick fact-based statements that capsule your talents.

Develop your strengths. Focus on improving them through personal efforts. Also, look for outside help by recruiting accountability buddies and mentors and hiring professional coaches.

CHAPTER EXERCISE: SUPERSIZE A STRENGTH

Six-Month Activity: Strengthening Success Journal

Reflect on Your Strengths (Month 1): Journal about specific instances where they contributed to your achievements.

Strategic Opportunities (Months 2–3): Actively seek out and engage in professional opportunities that align with your strengths.

Personal Development Plan (Months 4–5): Create a personalized development plan outlining specific actions and milestones to enhance each identified strength

Reflect and Reassess (Month 6): Assess how leveraging and developing your strengths has influenced your career and interactions.

One final aspect of this exercise: Create a "strengths statement" that, in a couple of sentences, defines your primary strength and validate it by mentioning an achievement you've reached through that strength.

Chapter Three: Authenticity and Code-Switching

Unspoken Rule: Everyone code-switches at work (to some degree).

Unspoken Rule: Code-switching can be a strategy.

Unspoken Rule: Strong workplace relationships pave the way to success.

The term "code-switching" was initially coined in the 1950s by linguist Einar Haugen. He used it to describe the ability to move between languages and dialects, but today, it has come to mean changing something (or multiple things) about yourself, like the way you talk, dress, or, yes, style your hair, to fit in with a more dominant group. While authenticity is increasingly desired in the workplace, balancing authenticity with when you choose to code-switch can be a viable strategy.

When reading the room, analyze situations based on what is said and what is not said.

Code-switching, when carried to an extreme, can be harmful to your job performance and even to your mental and physical health. By being judicious with code-switching and only using it strategically, you can reap its benefits without sinking under its drawbacks.

Try to limit code-switching to instances where you do it as a conscious choice, not a fear-based reaction. Don't assume the worst, and seek instead to clarify the situation when you feel you're being slighted. Finally, look for ways to feel more connected to the people you work with by sharing more about yourself and looking for positive social situations.

CHAPTER EXERCISE: WHERE ARE YOU CODE-SWITCHING?

Do you feel you're doing too much code-switching? How much of it is actually necessary? Is your code-switching forced or strategic? Reflect on how you feel about the reasons behind your codeswitching to determine if and how you might want to try showing more of your authentic self.

Section Two

Chapter Four: Be Ready, Be Right, Be Excellent

Unspoken Rule: Excellence does not mean perfection. It means doing your personal best.

Unspoken Rule: Make sure you always have the receipts.

Unspoken Rule: Delivering your best helps you navigate shifting expectations.

Unspoken Rule: Work in a way where you will get recognized for it.

Over the long run, creating a personal standard of excellence and committing to it help pave your way. Seal the deal by making an impact so that it earns you recognition.

Discover the company's metrics for success you need to meet in your role and surpass their expectations if you can. Stay prepared and retain evidence of your efforts in case they're ever questioned. In short, be ready, be right, and be excellent.

Meet shifting expectations by remaining consistent. If you always deliver, you raise your value within an organization. If you're unhappy in your current role, tap into your passion and look for ways to fulfill it over time.

CHAPTER EXERCISE: DEFINE AND LEVERAGE YOUR STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

Go back and revisit your own professional and personal successes. What was your process in those instances? Can you replicate that process in the future and create your standard of excellence by examining it? Also, look at what creates the conditions for you to be at your best at work. Finally, get real with your manager, in terms of what they believe good performance looks like. Collect some concrete examples, get them to be as specific as possible, and have this conversation not just when you start in a new role.

Chapter Five: Read the Room

Unspoken Rule: What's not said is often more important than what is said.

Unspoken Rule: "Doing your job" only gets you so far.

Unspoken Rule: Power in the workplace goes beyond titles; it's also about access, resources, and relationships that allow you to get things done.

When reading the room, analyze situations based on what is said and what's not said. Look for recurring communication patterns so you can flag negative situations and lean into positive ones.

Understand the various sources of power that people draw from to increase their authority. Analyze them, and leverage them for your advancement.

Use distance and objectivity when you size up other people. Be aware of common biases both in them and yourself and work to minimize your natural blind spots.

CHAPTER EXERCISE: FIGURE OUT THE POWER DYNAMICS

It is important to understand the power dynamics in your

department and organization. Here are some questions to answer:

1. Who holds authority in your organization?
2. Observe who exercises different modes of power, for example:
 - Who do others seek out for information (information power)
 - Who always get approval for additional resources (reward power)
 - Who is well-known and liked (referent power)
3. Question whether there have been situational shifts in power. In certain situations, relational power can trump hierarchical power.

Chapter Six: Expand Your Networks of Influence

Unspoken Rule: If you want something, you must ask for it, even if it's uncomfortable.

Unspoken Rule: It's not what you know but who you know.

Unspoken Rule: Embracing invitations to build connections can unlock opportunities.

Unspoken Rule: Inside information is valuable information.

Work on losing your fear of approaching mentors and others you want in your network. Choose opportunities (walking them to their car, taking an elevator ride with them) where you can spend a few minutes alone.

When you first talk to a potential mentor, start by offering to help them with their work. Lighten their burden; don't add to it by asking them immediately to do something for you.

Create your board of directors—a group of people with experience in different walks of life who can advise you on different situations. Expand that network to reflect your goals and focus, to help you on your way rather than hold you back.

CHAPTER EXERCISE: MAP YOUR NETWORK

“Network mapping” is a visual representation of all the elements in a network and how they are connected. Create a map of your network, giving you a visual representation of your areas of influence. The goal is to have a diverse and varied group of people in your network so that you can get a multitude of perspectives when you need them. How does your network stack up?

Section Three

Chapter Seven: Master the ABCs of Negotiations

Unspoken Rule: Everything is negotiable.

Unspoken Rule: Negotiations can happen at any point in the employee life cycle, not just during hiring.

Unspoken Rule: The stronger your plan B, the stronger your negotiating power.

Don't be afraid to ask for what you want. All they can say is no. But prepare the way for that ask, and do what you can to prove you deserve it.

Understand the ABCs of negotiation — awareness and agency, building relationships, and creating clear outcomes. Try to be objective about the process and not make it personal.

People may make assumptions about you, but a skillful negotiator is best positioned for favorable outcomes.

CHAPTER EXERCISE: NEGOTIATING WITHOUT NUMBERS

Reflect on your experience with a real-world negotiation that did not involve numbers but instead involved advocating for behavioral or organizational change. You might consider times when someone else was trying to persuade you to change or you were trying to persuade someone else. In either case, consider the perceptions and significant insights you gained from this negotiation, and analyze what this says about your style of negotiating.

Chapter Eight: Lean In To Grow

Unspoken Rule: Opportunities for growth often hide in uncomfortable moments.

Unspoken Rule: Negative feedback can be a blueprint for growth.

Unspoken Rule: A strategic no will make space for a meaningful yes.

Discomfort, if handled correctly, can be a cheat code to positive growth. No true progress comes without some pain.

Sometimes an unwanted request can actually be transformed into a great opportunity. And sometimes, if it's unfair and forces you to do more work without much reward, it should be avoided.

Your nos and your yesses should be part of your strategic growth, so be thoughtful about both.

Your nos and yesses should be part of your strategic growth, so be thoughtful about both.

CHAPTER EXERCISE: HOW DO YOU HANDLE DISCOMFORT?

Consider one way to push yourself out of your comfort zone professionally. Whether it's taking on a new project, learning from your failures and trying again, or identifying your fears, write down one way you step outside of your comfort zone in the next thirty days.

Chapter Nine: Create Your Own Niche

Unspoken Rule: Your job is always more than what it says in your job description.

Unspoken Rule: The thing that makes you different could be your superpower.

Unspoken Rule: Corporate resources are treasures — maximize them for your ascent.

To build your niche, think beyond your job requirements, and look for opportunities to fill other needs within the organization with your specialized skills and abilities.

Ask high-quality questions to uncover the truth about situations, and find common ground solutions, as well as position yourself as a positive presence in the company.

Don't hide your differences. Share and leverage them to create a unique role for yourself, and bolster your niche.

Think past your current role and organization, and build your niche externally so that you establish yourself outside your current company.

CHAPTER EXERCISE: DEFINING AND EXPRESSING YOUR NICHE

Jeff Bezos once said, "Your brand is what people say about you when you're not in the room." It's the same with your niche.

Here are four steps you can take to both define and communicate your niche effectively in the professional world:

1. DEFINE YOUR NICHE AND PUT IT IN WRITING

What's your long-term vision and mission?

What values do you want to embody?

What motivates others to turn to you?

How do you make a difference in your environment?

Create your own personal mission statement that answers these questions and defines your niche.

2. AUDIT YOUR NICHE

Analyze where you are today with the niche you've defined in step 1.

3. EMBODY YOUR NICHE

Be aware of what impression you're giving others and what messages you're sending consciously and unconsciously. Align your communication with your niche in an authentic and positive way.

4. CONTINUE TO REEVALUATE AND ADJUST YOUR NICHE

Your niche should always be regarded as a work in progress. With that in mind, regularly assess how your niche mission statement fits into your current professional position, and then tweak it accordingly.

If there's one overriding theme to this book, it's this: You have the power to make the future what you want it to be. You can continue to learn, grow, and succeed throughout your professional life if you're willing to be thoughtful and strategic, work hard, and leverage your strengths in such a way that they continually raise your profile and deliver amazing results.

In a corporate world ruled by "If You Know, You Know," you now have the knowledge. You know what these rules are and how they work. Your next step is to take them on in a way that's true to who you are while also serving your organization's needs (or preparing to move to an organization where your own needs will be better served, if that's what the situation calls for).

Just as you had a major and a minor in college, you can also continue to have both in your career. Your major would

represent your primary career push, such as your full-time job, while your minor could represent a different passion or interest. You do have choices, but feel free to open yourself up to more than one. We only have one life to lead, and the personal and professional can't help but intersect.

Harold Kushner, rabbi and author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, famously wrote, "Nobody on their deathbed has ever said 'I wish I had spent more time at the office.'" Perhaps that's true, but you don't also want to look back with regret at what you never allowed yourself to accomplish. The challenge is to manage your own mental and physical health along the way.

Workplaces are always evolving, and we have to evolve with them. This book has emphasized the need to deal with things as they are, not as we'd like them to be. When we fight change, we enlist in an unwinnable war, because change is inevitable.

You must own your own story. That's where you should begin in terms of writing your own playbook. Aim for a real understanding of what you want out of your career, what personal strengths you can leverage, and how you can connect the dots of your education, experience, and achievements to reach your personal and professional goals. And, perhaps most importantly, try to clarify your overall mission and what you want to achieve.

You shouldn't just let your career happen. You should plan your path and travel fearlessly down it. So, be intentional. Be strategic. Be in the next room before you get there. And even if you don't exactly know what your ultimate end goal is yet, you can know what kind of work you love to do, what kind of environment you want to do it in, and what type of impact you want to have. Only you can define what a well-lived life looks like for you because that definition is different for everyone.

When you're writing your own playbook, it doesn't really matter what company you're at. It doesn't matter if you're not at a company and, instead, swimming in your own lane. Because your playbook isn't about where you are; it's about who you are. It's a living document that changes as you change. What matters is being in alignment with your own self and your own superpowers and what you feel like you were put here on this planet to do. You won't acquire all that wisdom overnight. It will take some time to figure your goals out, and even then, some of them will continue to evolve.

But if you're committed to this process and mastering the skills we discussed in this book, that commitment will bring you closer to getting what you want out of life. So, with that in mind, let's finish this journey, or at least this part of it, with one final exercise.

OWN YOUR STORY AND MAKE IT YOUR PLAYBOOK'S FOUNDATION

Use your history to look at situations where you've excelled in the past, both professionally and personally. Analyze what conditions allowed you to shine and which of your strengths were most important to your success at that moment. Also, note what was most satisfying about those positive outcomes and what aspects you might be able to replicate in the future. Conversely, also examine when you fell short for one reason or another.

FINAL EXERCISE: LET'S CREATE YOUR PLAYBOOK

It's important to develop your own professional playbook to meet your needs and find the best opportunities to showcase your superpowers. With that goal in mind, take a comprehensive look at yourself and use the concepts from this book to go deep and develop your playbook for the future, keeping in mind where you've been, where you want to go, and how you can get there.

There is tremendous power in self-awareness, strategic planning, and adaptability as cornerstones of a fulfilling career. By owning your story, leveraging your strengths, navigating challenges, and building meaningful relationships, you can create a personal playbook for success that aligns with your values and aspirations.

You should embrace authenticity, seize opportunities for growth, and define your unique niche in the professional world. Ultimately, this journey is about crafting a career — and life — that reflects who you truly are and the impact you want to make, empowering you to thrive in an ever-evolving workplace.



A recognized expert on DEI and a range of workplace issues, organizational psychologist Ella F. Washington, PhD, is the Founder and CEO of Ellavate Solutions, an integrated DEI strategy firm, and the author of *The Necessary Journey: Making Real Progress on Equity and Inclusion*. She is a Professor of Practice at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business, where she has won honors including Excellence in Teaching 2021 and Poet and Quants 40 under 40 MBA Professors in 2023. Additionally, she is the Founder of the Ellavate Charity Foundation and a sought-after author, speaker, and consultant.

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