

# BOOK SNAPS™

Zooming In On Your Next Read



## Unapologetically Ambitious

By Shellye Archambeau

Shellye Archambeau is one of high tech's first female African American CEOs and has been featured frequently in Forbes, the New York Times, Business Insider, and more. Formerly an executive at IBM and President of Blockbuster.com, Archambeau was recruited to be the CEO of a then-struggling Silicon Valley startup, which is now MetricStream, a recognized global leader in governance, risk, and compliance software solutions. She currently serves as a Fortune 500 board member and holds board seats at Verizon, Nordstrom, Roper Technologies, and Okta.

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## Go After What You Want - Unapologetically

Shellye Archambeau is the product of a family that had “limited means and high ambitions.” As a student at Wharton she set the lofty goal of becoming a CEO. After catapulting herself through the ranks at IBM, she became one of the first female African American tech CEOs in 2003 at the age of 40. She cannot count the number of times she has been asked, particularly by women and people of color, how she did it. The simple answer is, “ambition.” “Ambition supported by conscious choices” got her to where she is today.

Archambeau's book is the result of gathering those “values, experiences, lessons, ideas, strategies, and actions” into one place so that others can do the same. In *Unapologetically Ambitious*, Archambeau gives readers permission to blow past the “solely supportive roles others expect them to fill” and instead, forge their own path, rising to whatever heights their ambitions demand, including all the way to the very top. It asks readers to question what they really want from life, what values they live by, what lifestyle they desire, and what they find fulfilling. It provides practical strategies, tools, and approaches to make our actual lives match the answers to those all-important questions. It empowers us to go after what we want, unapologetically.

## Getting Around Imposter Syndrome

Each of us is born into a unique set of circumstances that can help or hinder our ability to succeed. Archambeau believes that regardless of where we begin, we can put ourselves on the track to achievement. Rather than letting the fates decide, we can effectively create our own luck by “setting a goal, creating a plan, developing the right skills, maintaining the right attitude, and aligning everyday choices with those goals.” We can gain wisdom that will last a lifetime from these early lessons.

In early childhood, we all view ourselves as being pretty much the same as everyone else around us. This does not hold true forever, however. Around the age of six, research shows that we begin conforming to gender stereotypes and begin seeing and organizing our lives around differences between us. This is true in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity. We look to the adults in



our lives to confirm or deny our attitudes towards sex, race, and how those demographics impact us. This shows itself in our tendency to choose friends that are similar to us and to believe that we are unable to do certain things because of our race or sex. If we are never shown that we can break any and all molds, we may unwittingly form ideas about ourselves and others that are difficult to change. Experiences in our early life can lead to “imposter syndrome,” which is “what happens when you start believing what an unjust society says about you.”

Imposter syndrome is very common among girls and women, especially those of color, but it can develop in anyone who seeks to break barriers and enters “unfamiliar territory.” It subconsciously gives you a sense that you don’t belong and that you don’t deserve the success you have achieved. Imposter syndrome pops up when you get a promotion that you feel you aren’t qualified for or someone compliments your work and you can’t take it at face value. It constantly whispers, “one day, they’re going to realize I’m not as great as they think I am.”

Imposter syndrome can “severely undermine your aspirations.” Achievement requires risk taking. You cannot take those risks if you don’t have faith in yourself and your abilities. Through education and hard work you may acquire a wealth of skills and knowledge, but it means nothing if you don’t have the confidence to apply them. The good news is that you can overcome the limitations of imposter syndrome. Here’s how:

**Step One:** Understand that you are not alone. Countless “accomplished people” feel like imposters. If they can find a way around it, so can you!

**Step Two:** Become aware of the “critical and self-doubting” voice inside your head that tells you that you cannot do something. Understand that this voice is not speaking the truth. Don’t believe the false narrative those voices create.

**Step Three:** Learn to take compliments and wins at face value. When someone recognizes your worth in the form of a promotion or praise, understand that it is happening “because you deserve it.”

**Step Four:** In all things, “adopt a “fake it ‘til you make it” mentality.” This will help you project confidence, even when you feel anything but confident. Put your game face on and know that over time, you will know what you are doing and won’t have to fake it anymore.

## Sticking to the Plan, One Choice at a Time

One major misstep that is made by so many of us is the failure to devise a plan for reaching our goals. Knowing where you want to end up is a huge step in the right direction but without a clear plan on how to get there, you will likely end up lost along the way. Archambeau recommends making conscious, strategic choices that align with your goals to bring you ever closer to realizing them. A logical, fully thought out plan can serve as the guide when presented with a decision to go in one

direction or the other. This recurring need to make a choice means trading short-term gratification for a far greater future success, and it pays greatly.

One way to ensure that you make choices that are in line with your goals is to not flounder on your own. When you need help or are faced with uncertainty, reach out to those who can provide support. If you are struggling with a concept in school, ask your professor for clarification. If you are unsure what role or area of work you would like to pursue in your career, talk to people who are already in those roles to see what the job really looks like day to day. Archambeau urges us not to “struggle in silence.” It gets us further away from our goals and reflects a lack of strategy.

Women are especially vulnerable to perceive the act of asking for help as cheating. It is not cheating and it does not make us inadequate. Archambeau says that she has “known many women who have gotten stuck in their careers because they were unable to master a skill they could have delegated, unwilling to delegate a task someone else could do, or unwilling to seek guidance when they needed it.” Don’t make the same mistake.

Another way to support conscious decision making is to foster self determination in yourself. Archambeau defines self-assurance as “the ability to say yes to yourself when most people around you are saying no. It’s the power of believing in your own ability to make choices about your life—and not just to make choices, but to make them responsibly.” Self assurance allows us to make the sometimes surprising discovery that our potential is always greater than we once imagined. We can foster this in ourselves by fulfilling needs in the three psychological areas of competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

Competence has to do with the ability to handle yourself, navigating familiar situations with a degree of confidence and skill. Autonomy is living with the sense that you are in control of your own destiny and the knowledge that the choices you make impact your life and your interests directly. Relatedness is about feeling like you have a place in the world and that you fit in with others. A deficiency in any of these areas means “you’ll be more likely to struggle or withdraw from challenges.” On the other hand, developing yourself in these areas leaves you more “prepared to set your own life goals and reach them.”

There will be times when you will not want to make the choice that you know you must make in order to stick to your plan. These will be difficult and trying times. Archambeau shares that long before she even became pregnant with her first child, she planned to take five weeks maternity leave and get back to work and the path she laid out to become a CEO. However, as the clock wound down on those five weeks she found the prospect of leaving her baby at home almost impossible to bear. But she put her faith in the plan and reminded herself that she had to trust it. She and her husband had “strategized in accordance with her ambition” and when she remembered that, it helped her get back on track. When the trade off is viewed as a conscious choice rather than a sacrifice, it makes all the difference.



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## Forget “Work/Life Balance”

Archambeau plainly states that she is not a big fan of the phrase, “work/life balance.” In fact, she “hates it.” Here’s why. The word balance “implies a fixed equilibrium” like the scale of justice with only two sides. Life is much more complicated than that. If balance is the metric we use, we are “bound to feel like we’re failing.” “We need a different metaphor” that accounts for “all the overlapping responsibilities of career, family relationships, friendships, self-care” and any other facets or circumstances particular to our particular life. Archambeau prefers to use “work/life integration” instead, which is more inclusive and descriptive of reality.

To make life work, we don’t “put on one hat and take off another.” We wear all the hats, all the time. The roles in your personal life will never be fully separate from your roles at work. Shellye Archambeau is a wife, CEO, mom, friend, volunteer, mentor, mentee, and more all at the same time. Finding a way to integrate those various roles into one meaningful, workable life is the goal.

In order to achieve that integration, you must explore all options. Ask things like, “Where can you make room for the things that are currently a priority? Who can help you get it done? How can you accomplish multiple things in one action?” Striving for balance is limiting while aiming for integration is empowering.

## Top Five Tips for Improving Your Odds

Archambeau believes that anyone can get what they want if they strategize and follow their plan. That being said, she fully recognizes that the hill is inherently steeper for some of us than others. Opportunities for women and minorities have improved immensely since she was starting out, but the comparative odds of success are still not that great. In order to increase your chance of success, follow the five tips she says are her “best advice for improving your odds.”

1. Find Your Mentors: “Mentoring is one of the best ways to improve your career progress and opportunities.” Unfortunately, most of us go about it the wrong way. Traditionally, mentoring is a formalized process. The mentee asks a potential mentor if they will serve in the role and if the mentor has the time and desire, they accept. Mentor and mentee meet infrequently and frankly, nothing much comes out of the relationship. Archambeau has a secret. She found the most meaningful mentors by skipping the formalities and instead, simply “adopted them, treating them like a mentor without ever formally asking.”

2. Build Your Network: People who network achieve higher

levels of career success. Your first network may very well be your own family and you should lean on them and get as much support as possible. Your friends, colleagues, community groups, and online connections are all part of the network you already have. Continue growing that network, always looking for opportunities to connect with others, and you will soon have a vast pool of contacts to leverage when you need help.

3. Find the Current: Wherever you aim to end up, there is a clear and flowing current that will take you to that place. When Archambeau decided she wanted to be a CEO, she investigated how the power flowed to that position. Once the current is identified, you can jump into it and allow it to propel you forward. “Sail past the opportunities that will lead you into the weeds and take the opportunities that will move you toward your goals.”

4. Take Risks: Regardless of the path you choose, you are going to encounter risks along the way. If you attempt to avoid risks all together, your opportunities will be limited. No doubt you’ve heard that with great risk comes great rewards. This is true with your ambitions as well. That doesn’t mean risks should be taken lightly or jumped into blindly. In order to turn risks into rewards and not mistakes make sure you have that support system in place, trust yourself, and measure your fears against facts.

5. Plan Your Life: You have a long life ahead of you. You’ve got to plan for the big picture goals you have or you will never achieve them. Archambeau recommends taking a hard look at five major areas in your life and making a plan for how you want them to play out. Those areas include “getting your first job, marriage or partnership, career planning, having children, and long-term life plans.”

Anyone who finds themselves grappling with what to study in school or how to forge a path towards an audacious goal, who are eager to climb the corporate ladder or looking to change directions midstream will find Archambeau’s book an invaluable resource. Centered around her family and personal experience, the book reads more like a conversation between mentor and mentee than a guide on goal achievement. Her advice is delivered candidly but in a heartfelt way, convincing readers that she really cares about what happens to them, believes that they can do anything, and understands the hurdles they will face on the journey.

As one of the very first African American tech CEOs in America, she understands better than most people how to swerve around obstacles and not let anything stand in your way. Archambeau’s unique voice is an important one to hear, especially for young women and minorities that aim to blast their way into a more inclusive future.