

*Insightful Stories & Provocative Questions that Unlock
the Hidden Secrets to Winning Big in Business and Life*

THE SECRETS LEADERS KEEP

BY
AMYK HUTCHENS




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THE SECRETS LEADERS KEEP — Insightful Stories & Provocative Questions that Unlock the Hidden Secrets to Winning Big in Business and Life

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WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

“AmyK’s Secrets is a tremendously engaging read! By using creative storytelling followed by provocative questions, AmyK reveals the fears and foibles we all face, sparking readers to reflect on our own leadership challenges! AmyK’s characters give us plenty to think about along the humbling journey to becoming a leader worthy of our followers.”

–Marshall Goldsmith, author of the New York Times and Wall Street Journal best seller *Triggers*

“AmyK is a brilliant business strategist who helped me become a better leader and a better person. Her unique blend of intelligence, insight, irreverence and practical tools skyrocketed my leadership results. As each of us prosper, fumble and reflect on our quests to become better leaders, AmyK’s unique ability to always make us ask “the better question” amazes me. Her ability to intensify the secrets in each of these characters leaves you thinking, That’s my former business partner, competitor, mentor or heck, this one is me!”

–David Robinson, CEO, DSM, Serial Entrepreneur who couldn’t put a title on his business card until age 30

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“I was thrilled to see AmyK’s energy and inspiration jump off the first page of the book. I burst out laughing during the very first paragraph about Derek, the serial entrepreneur. She nailed it! AmyK has never pulled any punches and she isn’t going to start now. She sees right through our personas and knows what makes us tick, what makes us thrive and what holds us back. AmyK is a brilliant educator who has taught our leadership team to define our values, leverage our talents and execute on our vision for the company. In Secrets she reveals her insight into leaders like us—our vulnerabilities, insecurities and strengths—then shares her questions that challenge us to become the best version of ourselves. It helps me see how AmyK understands us, the real life leaders that she coaches, and sees us for who we really are—embracing our vulnerabilities as much as she embraces our talent. I am thrilled to have this new source of AmyK’s brilliance and humor at my fingertips.”

–Ali Flint, Chief Financial Officer, interRel Consulting

“AmyK captures brilliant, colorful, 3-D snap-shots of leaders’ complex business and personal lives. She shines such a creative, bright light on our fumbling human attempts to attain self-actualization, that I was hooked from the first story. Secrets is a fun, insightful way to learn about ourselves, and a must read for leaders!”

**–Eric Greenwald , President & Chief Operating Officer,
Grimaldi’s Pizzeria**

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

“Leadership is all about people ... starting with you ... imperfect you! The better you understand yourself, the more effective a leader you become. Secrets exposes leaders and their beliefs in this delightfully easy read. Whether you are new to the leadership game or are a seasoned veteran, your beliefs define who you are. Through extraordinarily ordinary people AmyK highlights a myriad of beliefs and consequences you will encounter in yourself and others throughout your career and then challenges you to understand, shape, and use your beliefs to effectively lead others.”

–HK Bain, Chief Executive Officer, Digitech Systems, Inc.

“AmyK speaks with brilliance and authenticity. We learn our very first lessons through stories, fables and parables, and this pattern continues throughout life as we are drawn to storytellers whether in books, movies or speakers. AmyK expertly brings this renowned skill to her book, The Secrets Leaders Keep, and this book shines with creativity. As you read her insights into the inner thoughts of leaders, may your life be enriched to the degree and capacity that mine was while reading this book!”

–Christine Martin, author of Recharged, Eight Ways to Lift Your Spirit

“AmyK’s creative ability to ignite meaningful reflection in our own leadership journey is a unique and valuable gift to leaders. The power in these stories is that each character contains a nugget or concept that could have been taken from my own personal and professional journey. I highly recommend this book if you are trying to improve your leadership skills.”

–Paul Noris, Chairman, CEO & President, Bank of Central Florida

THE SECRETS LEADERS KEEP

“You can only view yourself through a reflection or through a lens, and self-awareness requires that you look. In her new book, The Secrets Leaders Keep, AmyK masterfully pulls us into the secret misgivings, regrets and insights of industry leaders, and in doing this, she holds up a mirror to our own thoughts, rationales and inner demons. The reflection expressively and clearly teaches us about ourselves.”

–Dr. Dave Martin, America's #1 Christian Success Coach and author of *Another Shot*

“AmyK uses storytelling to pull back the curtain, providing insights into a variety of leaders’ uncertainties, fears and limiting perceptions in a most entertaining way. Her interesting and frank profiles reveal the hidden insecurities that we now know many leaders share. The Secrets Leaders Keep is a must-read for anyone in, or aspiring to be in, a leadership role.”

–Vicky Carlson, President & CEO, LEAD San Diego

“At some point in our careers each of us has stumbled, had to face our fears, get a reality check or rethink our entire leadership strategy. AmyK lets us know that we are not alone. In fact, these trip ups and course corrections are healthy and normal! The Secrets Leaders Keep is a must read for anyone looking to reshape their leadership paradigm.”

–Dr. Brian Carroll, Executive Vice President, Southeastern University

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

“In The Secrets Leaders Keep AmyK proves why she is a highly recognized and respected voice in this industry. With keen insights, and her finger on the pulse of leaders’ real personal challenges, AmyK provides hilarious, provocative stories and follow-up questions for anyone who wants a fresh perspective and approach to solving their own leadership hang-ups. We might think we know who we are at work and as leaders, but we all need someone to show us where we get tripped up! I mean, who doesn’t want to get a kick in the pants when it actually works?! AmyK, thank you for making the sometimes painful act of self-reflection a lot more bearable, productive and fun.”

–Katie Goodman, Comedian, Creator of Broad Comedy and author of *Improvisation for the Spirit*

to my parents,
who have graced my life
with their generous hearts

my love for them is no secret

"The purpose
of a storyteller
is not to tell you
how to think,
but to give you
questions
to think upon."

—C.S. LEWIS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

GIVING BIRTH TO A BOOK is similar to having a baby, only without the epidural.

What reduced the angst and pain of this book-birthing process were those who rallied around me because they believed in me, and the message I'm delivering. Without friends and family, there would be no *Secrets* to celebrate and so I sincerely and specifically thank several of my most prominent "midwives."

I can always count on the friendship of a woman I met in Shanghai in the 1990s. We've been through a lot together. And her loyalty, support, encouragement and kicks-in-the-derriere over the years (especially with this book) underscore what it means to have someone in your corner. No matter where in the world she resides, Shary is certainly a BFF, for which I am enormously grateful and thankful.

On numerous occasions over Thai food, my dear friend, The Reverend Martha, and I discussed the choices

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humans make, the choices we resist and the quirkiness of life. Her theological perspective and discerning editorial eye cleaned up the characters' grammar and their life lessons. Sharing curry is apparently the perfect accompaniment to an editor's pen.

There is always the cast of characters that are so absurd, so hilarious, so real, that they turn pain into tears of laughter. The dynamic duo, Katie and Soren, are not only incredibly talented writers and performers ... they are incredible friends and cheerleaders.

Having a "test" reader who graciously read each successive draft without complaint, and who always provided constructive feedback was a blessing indeed. Mandy was the consummate "focus group" for ensuring the character's stories were easy to "follow."

Dr. Dave and Christine Martin believed in my ability to play bigger and bolder, and their support, referrals, inclusion and acceptance of me has given me a much bigger stage on which to share my gifts with the world. I'm humbled and honored that they have included me on *their* stage.

The timing of the writing of this book coincided with one of the most difficult personal years of my life. This book would not have come to fruition without the love and friendship of those who kept encouraging me to step forward. Kelley and Josh, Renee and Ben, Shelley and David, Vicky and Steve, Gayle and Fletch, Cindy and my

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

two sister-in-laws, Heather and Karen, I'm blessed by your presence in my life.

I am the youngest of three children with two protective, older brothers. Their phone calls—filled with their kid's antics, life's projects, good-natured ribbing, unrepeatable jokes and tremendous brotherly love—are exactly what a "little sister" needs.

Not everyone gets to say their parents are truly amazing. I am one of the lucky ones. From philosophical and theological discussions to the removal of commas; from better word choices to quote suggestions; and from constructive debate to words of encouragement, not only were they my biggest supporters, they were my best sounding board. I cannot fully express my level of gratitude for their love. Bonus: they often served me wine and dinner with these discussions too.

The final phase of the book process generates a whirlwind of activities. I want to express heartfelt gratitude for Christian's belief in this vision and his publishing expertise, and Anita for her editing and book design.

Last, but certainly not least, are the numerous leaders over the years who shared their stories with me. By revealing their secrets they have given a gift to all of us—knowing we are not alone.



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INTRODUCTION

THEY STARED AT ME. Faces blank, unsure. What I was asking was strange, unsettling, too intimate.

...

Not long ago I flew to Northern Ireland to facilitate a CEO Think Tank. Located 30-minutes north of Belfast is the Galgorm Hotel, situated on 163 lush acres with it's own fishing stream, a family of blue herons and Guinness on tap. A bucolic environment for 18 all-male leaders to explore their leadership style and expand their capacity to play bigger and bolder.

I started the day's opening session with a question.

"Who are you?" I asked.

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I paused for a second before adding, "Take one minute each to share your answer with your partner."

As I walked around the room I could hear snippets of their responses. These leaders described themselves as: *Father, son, husband, boyfriend, uncle, friend, brother, boss*. Over and over, they each repeated many of the same labels.

"Let's challenge you a little more," I continued. "We're going to wake your brain up. I'm going to pose another question, and you cannot repeat anything you said from your previous answer. *All new responses*," I emphasized. "One minute each. Ready?" Heads nodded, coffee was sipped. I asked, "Who are you?"

They blinked.

"Huh?" one grunted.

"That's not a new question," said another.

"It's a new question if you can't repeat your prior answer," I replied. "Come on guys. How about, *'I like to cook. I love football and my wife,'* not necessarily in that order," I teased.

"Actually, that would be true for John," one joked, and they all laughed. As soon as the laughter died down there was a moment of awkward silence. But then they found phrases and short descriptors to better personalize their responses. *I coach my son's soccer team. I do like to cook, but only if it involves meat. I'm a vegan, but I'll eat fish. My*

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wife is my best friend. I go to church. I raise money for kids with cancer. Each of their minutes went by quickly.

"That was great," I sincerely praised. "How many of you learned something about your partner that you didn't know?" Heads nodded. A few eyebrows arched as if to say, *Yeah, that was not a bad exercise.*

"One more question, before we move on," I said, the energy in my voice rising. "I'm going to pose one last question, and you cannot repeat anything you said for the prior two questions. *All new responses,*" I emphasized again, "and you each get two minutes for this round." Pause. "Who are you?"

No one balked. No one rolled their eyes. They *got it.* The room was momentarily filled with silence, but it was no longer awkward. It was a silence filled with the hum of focused thinking, a harnessed energy that was palpable, and then each leader started to tell his story.

...

People have been telling stories for thousands of years. Storytelling is ingrained in our DNA. There are some aspects of life where we need to hear stories in order to better understand the message.

The 14 stories in this book reveal secrets that most leaders would not normally share—secrets about their politics, philosophies and perceptions. Secrets about who

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they are, how they play, why they lead in a certain way, and secrets about what prevents them from leading more effectively.

Each story is a creative amalgamation from my work with leaders. Each story represents the themes and patterns I witnessed while working with numerous executives from hundreds of companies around the globe over the past 20 years.

While each of these characters presents their own unique story, they harbor many of the same secrets and endure many of the same uncertainties and fears faced by a wide variety of individuals in leadership roles. Leaders often keep secrets because they believe others will find it difficult to understand the basis for their leadership success or failure. They believe others will scoff at the simplicity or complexity of their leadership style or criticize their work ethic. Many leaders find it even harder to share their secret fears, weaknesses and self-doubts for fear of being judged harshly or being perceived as unworthy of their leadership position.

Underneath the title, the role, or the business jacket of a leader, is a human being struggling to figure it out—a leader with secrets. If you relate to one of these leaders' struggles, triumphs or perspective, or even think, *Hey, this is eerily me*, that's the point.

Each story poses questions that as leaders we must

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ask and answer for ourselves. It is only when we have answered these questions and gained insight and clarity, that our learning can be applied with wisdom. In some instances, the leader that drives us the craziest or that we find the most exasperating, is offering us a rare opportunity to reflect upon our triggers and values. Additionally, even a leader that annoys us can help us better understand the parts of ourselves we are less comfortable with accepting. Many experts say that we often dislike traits in others that we secretly dislike about ourselves. Understanding this possibility requires a bit of self-reflection and empathy. In today's increasingly complex, ever-shifting world, we need more wise and compassionate leaders willing to articulate and follow their values. And as both leaders and followers, we need to understand that leadership is an enormous learning curve for maximizing and actualizing our potential to serve.

Here's to facing your truths, answering the question *Who are you?*, finding the secrets you are hiding from others and from yourself, and realizing you're not alone in the journey of figuring out how to be a leader worthy of your followers.



"What, you too?
I thought I was
the only one."

—C.S. LEWIS

DEREK

SERIAL ENTREPRENEUR

FAKIN' IT

WHAT DO YOU CALL a highly irritable, slightly depressed, non-stop-talker whose self-grandiosity is only challenged by his own self-doubt, and who only needs a few hours of sleep a night but lots of sex? A person diagnosed with bi-polar depression. Or an entrepreneur. I prefer the label *Start-Up King*. Sold four companies for \$50-million plus by the time I was 26.

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I have a love-hate relationship with success. I want it. I'm good at getting it. I'm even better at losing it.

A lot of the guys I meet have competency addiction. They are so caught up in the amazingness of themselves, their inherent talent and skill, that they lose sight of the fact that they are slipping, they are on the downward spiral. Maybe it's a blessing, their addiction. They don't know they've got it: *ignorant arrogance*.

My addiction? I'm aware of it every day. The highs are high, the lows are low, and in-between is that awful sensation in your stomach that you know you've done something horrible. You're just waiting to be caught. It's that pre-break-up or post-stupid-comment feeling that makes you wish time moved a lot faster and that you weren't such an idiot after all.

That's one thing that always gets me about the whole concept of failure. We're quick to say we're all on a journey, we all make mistakes, we all mess up, but you know what? What we really mean is: You just can't do it and stay in my world, on my path, as a part of my journey. So move along. Yeah, it's okay to mess up—as long as it's before your time with me.

I was diagnosed with ADHD when I was in middle school. It was becoming a fad in some ways, but in my case it really was hard to focus. Prescribed drugs worked. Mentally I could tune in a little longer, but my personality tuned out. I got through history and math, but I'm still catching up on my own psychology. It took me six years to get my college degree. I majored in business, then political science, then econ, and

finally back to business. My dad is just glad I finished. My mom said that ending up where I started—business—validates my instincts. Moms are great that way. My parents are super cool. Super supportive. I tested them over the years ... too much. They and my sister Bitz are the only people who still welcomed me on their path when I failed. I'd say they don't have a choice, but actually they do. I met kids in college who had horrific relationships with their parents and I realized I was lucky. Really lucky.

My first business at 19 was diapers. Crazy, I know, but my older sister Bitz had twins. She was literally up to her elbows in doo-doo when she had a sleep-deprived burst of rage over running out of diapers one day. She wanted to know why a stupid stork couldn't deliver them to her door. I started an online diaper business two weeks later and sold it three days before my 21st birthday. I celebrated early. I was a millionaire. I made more money before I was 21 than my dad made in his whole entire life. I liked the taste of it. I wanted more.

My second business was kilts. Don't ask. It flopped. My mom expressed pure displeasure at business number three. Condoms. All colors. All sizes. Sold it after only nine months. I personally love the irony of that timing. Bitz celebrated the sale by throwing me a party with balloons made out of my extra-large product. Maybe I should have kept this biz though. The gal that bought it from me built an empire. As I said, I'm good at losing stuff too. If I'd kept it—I probably would have eventually run it into the ground.

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I joined an entrepreneur organization earlier this year that pulls business owners together to help each other out, and then we go for drinks afterwards. I'm hoping that they don't kick me out. I have no business being in the room. These guys are freaking smart. It's insane. They're millionaires. Multiple times over. They made their money the hard way, unlike me. They earned it. I think a few of them might be exaggerating the money success, but they have unbelievable amounts of confidence and they get it. They know how it works. They either sold to the big players or they got to lead large organizations pre or post acquisition. They are intimately familiar with how business gets done. They know how to build and *sustain* success. They're way ahead of me. I'm not in their league.

Sometimes I can go in, order a scotch and talk their stupid ears off. Other nights it's like my throat closes, and all I can do is nod or laugh at somebody's joke. Some nights I absorb like a sponge. I'm in over my head. These people know more, they've done more, seen more, read more, traveled more. I have this dream where I'm sitting at a conference table and two cops show up to escort me out, and all the other members are snickering, rolling their eyes, and nodding like they knew I was a phony all along.

I got my MBA from Arizona State. It was less torturous than I thought because I did it most of it online. I could make sure diapers were going out the door, my fantasy football team was winning, and my paper was turned in—all at the same

time. It still took longer than most, but hey, my diploma hangs on my wall like I could offer you a consultation on your kidney failure as easily as I can tell you exactly why I am not really certified to be in this business.

I was recently engaged. Sarah. I thought she was it. I thought she thought my mood swings were quirky, but it turned out she was faking it. I don't mean—she was faking being *okay* with me. My sister Bitz asked me if I was sure she wasn't faking the horizontal mambo too. It's great to have a big sister isn't it?

She gave me my ring back. Sarah, not Bitz. I mean, I didn't buy Bitz a ring. I bought it for Sarah. Bitz said that her returning it was a testament to my character and how well I treated her. I don't know. I think Sarah was just exhausted and felt guilty pretending for so long. It's a testament to *her* character—not mine. She said that she could picture way too many manic periods and that it was not how she wanted to live or how she wanted to raise a family. I'm not a crier. I can go dark, I can go inside and get quiet, but I'm not a crier. Sarah somehow found that switch. She flipped it on her way out the door.

Last Tuesday was this weird day where everything that came out of my mouth was wrong. It was like my brain was showing off just how dumb it could be. I was a guest panelist at an innovation conference in Dubai. Apparently the conference committee didn't know that I was really a fake. They were only looking at the first two businesses I had started so young and sold for insane numbers.

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I won an award last year because of my new golf club design. Long story, let me just say my new clubs all but drop the ball in the hole. So there I was adding my two cents. I'd be cool with a screwy-stupid day like that except I was with strangers that I wasn't going to see again, and instead of being like, *Screw it, Derek—who cares?* It's been haunting me. It's eating at me that there are these people out in the world who only know one side of me, one slice of who I am, and it's not the best tasting slice or the most flattering side of me.

I answered the panel questions too quickly. Then someone else would speak up and his answer was better. And they were right, and it wasn't like I just had a different opinion, it was that I was factually wrong. I remember thinking, *Shut up, shut up, shut up!* But my mouth was disconnected from my mind, and it said some crazy stuff. In front of thousands of tech-savvy people I actually said at one point, "*I think the Internet is held together with duct tape.*" I'm sure they wondered if I was on drugs, because they asked me if I could be a superhero what would people call me, and I said, *The Shank-erator*. It was not good. People were confused. Was I eliminating the shanking in golf, or fostering more of it? Did I mention I'm an idiot? I could see them joking later about who got fired for inviting me to be on the panel.

I keep thinking that days like that will cause them to take away my membership cards. Right now I still belong to The Entrepreneur club, The Movers and Shakers Under Forty club, The Nice Guys Making Waves & Changing the World club, but

it's just a ruse to keep 'em confused until they discover that I still need the acronym HOME to be able to say the names of all the Great Lakes. That if you asked me to name the Supreme Court justices I could tell you Ginsburg because she's Bitz's hero, or Sonia Sotomayor, which I know because the alliteration is so cool, and there's a Kennedy, but not a Kennedy from the Kennedy's, at least I don't think he's a real Kennedy, I mean he's a real Kennedy because he's alive—never mind. There's a black guy. Isn't that lame? I know there's a black guy and I can't even—Thomas! Clarence Thomas! Thank you, God. But now I'm really done.

And don't get me started on keeping track of what's going on in the Middle East. I'd blame our education system, but that's too easy. When the news comes on at night I follow it, I get it, but when it comes to keeping all these groups straight my brain is like a sieve. If you say their name, then I think, *Of course!* But if I have to recall it? Nope, ain't happening. I have to stay quiet when these things are discussed. Because the minute I'm sure I got it—I'll be a professed idiot. Ask me to overhaul the engine of your car? No sweat, I can do that. I really can, and there won't be a missing screw or a leftover head bolt. All good. Ask me who runs Canada and I'll say, "*The maple farmers and the hockey players. Pass the Canadian whiskey please.*"

Sarah was beautiful. Not Latin bombshell beautiful, more like Finland meets Ireland. She'll have cuter kids without me. But I wanted our kids. I'm having more trouble with this than

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I thought. I'll be minding my own business when my brain throws down a gauntlet like, *Hey, we would have had cute kids together or we would have rescued dogs together. And not just little mangy ones, but big, personality laden dogs that would have walked with us, and slept at our feet, and fetched, and taken the wrap for an occasional fart that would be way too rough for me to claim.* I pictured a future. I wanted forever. Sarah didn't want manic forever. She didn't want me.

I can't sustain anything. I can't get a girl to stay with me. I don't really know how to run a business. I'm great with getting an idea off the ground. I can get it moving, but I can't keep the momentum going. I lose interest, I stop caring, or I get a new idea. In these entrepreneur meetings I act like I'm all busy getting emails on my phone, but I'm writing down the concepts or terms they use to look up later. I think if I asked what they meant out loud they'd shake their heads. I was better at asking questions a few years ago. Now I feel like I should know. I'm just waiting for somebody to find out I'm a fraud.



Exploring Leaders' **Secrets**

High-performers/over-achievers often believe that they are smart, but not as smart as others believe them to be, so they worry that some day someone will discover they're at the top of the bell curve, meaning smack dab in the middle of average. These leaders, just like Derek, believe that they don't have enough intelligence, skills or talents in certain areas that warrant the position or title they hold. They worry that some day others will find out that they aren't as talented and skilled as everyone thinks they are, and they will be ousted for being an imposter.

Leaders who fear being "caught" may also avoid taking risks that could reveal their perceived inadequacies, or they settle for less, not believing they deserve better than mediocre results or average opportunities.

Fear of failure, looking foolish, not-being-worthy are fears of perfectionism, the nemesis of self-acceptance. When high-achievers move back and forth between the extremes of narcissistic over-confidence and punishing self-doubt it can prevent them from taking needed actions or cause them to self-sabotage their own efforts. Derek's feelings of inadequacies are a prime example of how our hidden belief systems about ourselves can manifest in real life mistakes or self-induced failures.

At the root of the *Imposter Syndrome* is a lack of self-acceptance. We mistakenly believe that possession

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of a specific domain expertise should equal mastery or perfection without a human's understandable imperfections. When leaders replace their feelings of inadequacy and paranoia about being discovered a "fraud" with realistic assessments about their valuable contributions, they focus less on their shortcomings and failures and more on how they can best use their gifts and talents to create value.

"I don't know how to act anyway,
so why am I doing this?"

—MERYL STREEP

• • •

"I still have this background
feeling that one of the
security guards might come
and throw me out."

—MICHAEL USLAN, Movie Producer

CONCEPTS

- Feeling like someone will discover we are a fraud
- Being too hard on ourselves
- Undervaluing our contribution
- Self-doubt versus self-confidence
- Feeling competent even when we don't have it all figured out

REFLECTING ON YOURS

1. When have you said or done something inane with no opportunity to correct someone's impression of you?
2. Where in your life are you "fakin' it"?
3. How might your self-doubts be inhibiting your ability to lead?
4. How might your self-talk be perpetuating your current circumstances?
5. How are you realistically measuring the value of your gifts and contributions?



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"AmyK is a one-of-a-kind speaker!

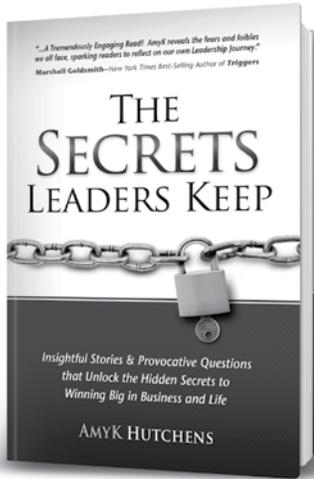
It was an eye-opening experience to learn how all of us can tap into more creative and innovative thinking and behaviors."

-Rhett Asher, VP, Asset Protection, Data Security & Crisis Management, Food Marketing Institute

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*Excellent! Warning:
fasten your seatbelt!*



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"Spending time with AmyK is captivating and uncanny all at the same time. It's like she's been in your head those nights you wake up at two a.m. to worry and wonder about life and what the right path is. She has this way of asking the one question that makes you go, "Whoa, are you a mind reader?!"

– Paul Noris, *President & CEO, Bank of Central Florida*