

## **Introduction:**

It was bound to happen. Another book. I wrote a couple of motivational and inspirational books about ten years ago. I gave more of them away than I sold. But they were a blessing to people and that was all that mattered.

I've had a lot more experience since then in areas I never dreamed or imagined. For example, running for Mayor of Augusta, Georgia, in 2005. I was the first African-American woman to run for Mayor of Augusta, but that wasn't the focus of my campaign. You see, I was raised overseas, spending the first fifteen years of my life in Germany, Italy and Japan. Diversity, living with and among people who are different, having to move and make new friends every two to five years, was a way of life for me until I was sixteen years old. My formative years were spent this way and have shaped me into the person I am today. Having that background and moving and living in the American South has been at times challenging, yet stimulating.

I was living overseas during the Civil Rights era. I had barely heard of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and President John Kennedy when we arrived in Augusta, Ga. in April 1975. What brought us here? My parents were born and raised in Hephzibah, a city near Augusta. This was home for them, so it became home for me and my three siblings.

When I share the details of my experiences living all over the world, people are amazed and awestruck. It was our way of life, so it was no big deal to me early on. But later I realized how profound those early beginning years were to who I am, what I have become, what I am doing with my life, and how I've made an impact on those I come into contact with. That is the highlight of my life. That is, in part, what this book is all about.

I met a man once who, immediately upon meeting me, said I reminded him of something he read in a book that described people called "Connectors." The book he referred to is *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell. When this man later gave me a personal copy of Gladwell's book, I saw first-hand what he spoke to me about. It's a fascinating book, indeed.

Over the years, especially since the mayoral race, I have been asked time and time again to write a book about my experiences politically, personally and professionally. Initially I wasn't interested in writing a book about myself. I didn't feel I had a story to tell that would be compelling enough for people to pick up and read. However, as the years have passed and I've touched more and more lives through my daily radio program, speaking engagements, magazine columns, Facebook posts, Twitter posts and other communication vehicles, I began to realize that I have something worthwhile to share.

Sometimes it takes a lot of pushing and encouragement and motivation to do something. In my case, I was always waiting for the absolute perfect situation before beginning to write my book. In the years since the Mayor's race, I finally realized I could be waiting a long time. Deep down I believe this is something God wants me to do and the ideal opportunity may never present itself. So I began.

People say I seem like someone who is always positive and full of energy, but believe it or not, sometimes I get tired. I become discouraged and frustrated. No, it doesn't last long, nor does the average person even realize or pick up on it. I wonder why things can't be in the perfect shape I would like so that I can be free to write my book. I asked God that, and the answer came as though he was looking down on me saying, "My child, ye of little faith, I got your back." When you find a quiet place and simply ask God, "Show me what you want me to do, reveal to me what you want me to do with my gifts," He will give you an answer.

I was stuck one day not too long ago. I had only a few dollars in the bank. My bills were piling up and I was wondering how I could have gotten myself in such a situation. Here I am with my health and strength, wonderful family and friends, incredible social capital, a successful radio program, serve on the boards of prominent organizations, I know a lot of people and a lot of people know me, and yet I'm still asking the question, "What in the world am I doing? Why am I not where I should be?" Or 'am I where I ought to be?"

I read an intriguing book that was written by a friend. The name of the book is "The Last Freedom: A Novel on the real life adventure of Dr. Victor E. Frankl." Dr. Frankl wrote the book 'Man's Search for Meaning,' many years ago. There was a poignant statement in that book that helped me answer the questions I have asked myself over the years. "The only path to self-actualization is not to strive for it at all; instead you must aim for man's true target: self-transcendence -- The ability to devote yourself to things, ideals, causes, and people --- other than yourself."

Well, well, well. That's it. As I reflect on my life I realized that this described me. I've given when I didn't have much. Have organized conferences, seminars all designed to empower, network and educate while having little resources to carry them out, but having the ability to reach out to corporations that could.

The desire to help people in need was profound when I stepped out of my comfort zone, set up a trust fund and helped raise money for two babies that were killed at the hands of their mother. The image of these kids not having a proper Christian funeral drove me to publicly address this and over \$20,000 was raised in about ten days.

Recently I was asked to serve as Community Co-Chair for The Salvation Army Kroc Community Center which was the final push to meet our goal of \$20 million to build a multi-million dollar center. The campaign was a huge success.

I guess the bottom line is that I want people to go away from this book thinking they can do whatever their heart desires them to do -- no matter what their present circumstances are. There's not going to be a perfect time to do what God has for you to do. You do it anyhow. My life examples sprinkled throughout the book are what I have personally experienced. And sometimes it's not very pretty, I know.

People have told me that I'm good at bridging divides in so many different arenas. Everything I do is about building bridges -- Building and cultivating relationships. One consultant told me, "You seem to be able to bridge divides on every level in society -- personal, economic, political. If you're able to articulate these, they could be practical lessons that will exponentially increase my impact". *Impact!* That's a powerful word. My desire is to demonstrate how your leadership, with impact, can make a difference in this world and to not focus on what little resources you have to work with. That's what this book is about.

Each chapter brings a dimension of hope that you can employ and execute in your personal or professional life. Chapter 1 reveals the significance of the number eight from a biblical perspective. As you read this book, I am hoping that you will find new beginnings and new chapters you can add to the flavor of your life. As you ponder the importance of starting anew from where you are, I believe there's greatness just waiting for you to capture.

As we look at diversity in Chapter 2, you will notice that we all come from different places and have various frames of reference. Because one is different doesn't make one superior or better than another. What diversity does, in my mind, is offer perspectives and opportunities that you may not

have ever considered before. Fear is addressed in this chapter because it often is one of the culprits that hold us back from being the best we can be.

Chapter 3 shares nuggets of proven methods I have successfully used on developing and cultivating relationships. I've spent my entire life doing that and you can start today too. This chapter gives you tips on how to network, what to expect, how to give and how 'not' to focus on yourself, but focus on the other person. It's quite an exciting chapter. Truly it is.

Communication, or the lack of, has been responsible for broken relationships, both personal and professional. Allowing yourself to open up and yes, be vulnerable, to an individual, a group, or a community can be difficult to do. And it can also be hurtful. But in order for effective communication to exist, we have to let our guards down and allow what is to be, to be. As someone who communicates, in a variety of ways, for a living, I realize that it doesn't come naturally for some people. Chapter 4 addresses one's self-esteem and emotional well-being from a mental health perspective. It forces us to take a look at ourselves so that we can see others differently.

The media impacts us on a daily basis and many of us don't realize precisely how much – negative and positive. Chapter 5 reveals media moguls such as Oprah and Tyler Perry and nationally known radio talk show hosts such as Rush Limbaugh and their impact on how we think and how we react to things that happen. This chapter also addresses how we should do a better job of how and where we obtain our information so that we can make better informed decisions on issues that impact our lives.

As we look at the world's problems and become frustrated with what's going on, the question one can ask is 'what are we doing about it?' Are we simply waiting for someone to solve the problems for us or are we engaged and mobilized in social, community, political and economic issues ourselves. I'm an advocate for civic engagement. Chapter 6 addresses a solutions-oriented economic development initiative that I had the privilege of being a part of. The two-year long project had a far reaching impact that the Augusta community will benefit from long after I'm gone. This step by step process as revealed in this chapter can be implemented in cities and communities all over the world.

Chapter 7 brings home the point that everything is political. I know you don't want to hear that. But think about your child when he/she wants something that he knows he shouldn't have. But he's going to negotiate, make a deal, get on your good side, say the right thing or do whatever (within reason of course) to get you to say 'yes, you can have it.' That's political. Yes, perhaps a little elementary in the explanation, but I had to make my point here. So as you read this chapter, open your mind to what I'm saying as I describe my run for Mayor of Augusta, Ga., the community and relationship focus of my campaign, and how politics, as messy as it can be, is the fabric of our society. The more you understand that, the better we, as community and business leaders and individuals can be at solving the problems of the world. It's not just the job of the politicians.

And our final chapter, Chapter 8 closes up on the subject of leadership in a very specific way. The entire book is about leadership, leadership with impact. Without good and effective leadership, we are doomed to failure. Leadership also encompasses all of the facets addressed in each chapter of this book. Leadership doesn't always mean you're going to be popular and oftentimes, you're going to feel like you're all alone. Leadership also doesn't mean you have to be an elected official. There are leaders all around us. This chapter shares some of my real life experiences and my thoughts on what leadership is and should be.

Each of the chapters in this book is designed like a puzzle or a beautiful tapestry that when all of the pieces are put together, you've got something pretty special. My prayer is that you will find this book thought provoking, engaging, empowering, funny, sometimes sad, and motivating. That is my prayer for you. My prayer is also that you will take this information and enhance your leadership skills in a way that will make a profound impact on your life, your family, your community, your business and your world.

And so here it is: *Unlikely Allies: Eight Steps to Bridging Divides that Impact Leadership*