

"Don't wait for change or for someone to hand you an opportunity. Follow Becky's priceless advice. Read on—and learn from the best!"

—FROM THE FOREWORD BY **ANNE MULCAHY**,
former Chairman and CEO, Xerox Corporation

DARE

Straight Talk on Confidence, Courage,
and Career for **WOMEN IN CHARGE**

BECKY BLALOCK

JOSSEY-BASS™
A Wiley Brand

DARE

Straight Talk on Confidence, Courage,
and Career for **WOMEN IN CHARGE**

BECKY BLALOCK

JB JOSSEY-BASS™

A Wiley Brand

Cover design by Adrian Morgan

Copyright © 2014 by Becky Blalock. All rights reserved.

Published by Jossey-Bass
A Wiley Brand

One Montgomery Street, Suite 1200, San Francisco, CA 94104-4594—www.josseybass.com

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, 978-750-8400, fax 978-646-8600, or on the Web at www.copyright.com. Requests to the publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, 201-748-6011, fax 201-748-6008, or online at www.wiley.com/go/permissions.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Neither the publisher nor author shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages. Readers should be aware that Internet Web sites offered as citations and/or sources for further information may have changed or disappeared between the time this was written and when it is read.

Jossey-Bass books and products are available through most bookstores. To contact Jossey-Bass directly call our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 800-956-7739, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3986, or fax 317-572-4002.

Wiley publishes in a variety of print and electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some material included with standard print versions of this book may not be included in e-books or in print-on-demand. If this book refers to media such as a CD or DVD that is not included in the version you purchased, you may download this material at <http://booksupport.wiley.com>. For more information about Wiley products, visit www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Blalock, Becky, 1955-

Dare : straight talk on confidence, courage, and career for women in charge / Becky Blalock. — First edition.

1 online resource.

Includes index.

Description based on print version record and CIP data provided by publisher; resource not viewed.

ISBN 978-1-118-74465-9 (pdf)—ISBN 978-1-118-74473-4 (epub)—ISBN 978-1-118-56264-2 (hardback)

1. Women executives. 2. Leadership in women. 3. Success in business.
4. Businesswomen. 5. Career development. I. Title.

HD6054.3

658.4'094082—dc23

2013028525

Printed in the United States of America

FIRST EDITION

HB Printing

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

More Praise for *Dare*

"*Dare* will give you that push we all need from time to time, showing you how to excel by believing in yourself, acting boldly, and being unafraid to take risks."

—Carole Hyatt, bestselling author,
and founder and CEO, The Leadership Forum

"Are you still waiting to be noticed? Stop it. Becky Blalock shows you how to overcome the single biggest thing that holds women back: fear. Read *Dare* and learn how to boldly seize the reins of your career, and your life."

—Lisa Earle McLeod, author, *Selling with Noble Purpose*

"Becky has assembled a treasure trove of practical, well-illustrated advice, from communication techniques to getting valuable personal feedback to negotiating salaries and much more. Her personal stories are supplemented with research and vignettes from other successful executives. A valuable book for every woman in business!"

—Martha Brooks, retired president and COO,
Novelis, Inc., and board member, Bombardier,
Harley-Davidson, and Jabil Circuit, Inc.

"Looking for something to help you tackle a challenge in your career? In *Dare*, you will find the encouragement and coaching you need to believe in yourself and challenge the status quo. Successful women share their stories of lessons learned, and practical advice is given to provide you with the confidence to tackle anything. Everyone's journey is different. Learn from the best, apply it to your situation, and enjoy success."

—Mylle Mangum, chairman and CEO, IBT Holdings, and
board director, Reynolds Metals Company, Haverty Furniture
Companies, Barnes Group, Express Inc.,
PRGX Global Inc., and Decatur First Bank

“Top leadership in corporate America is no longer a lofty goal for women. *Dare* is full of wisdom from great female leaders who help you understand how you, too, can reach your full potential.”

—Susan Stautberg, cofounder and cochair,
WomenCorporateDirectors, and president, Partnercom

“Becky has been a leader in the United Way movement as well as in business. She has brought her full experience to this leadership book by women, for women. It has taken years to reach a point where there are enough women in senior roles to model the way for others, and *Dare* contains priceless wisdom from some of the most accomplished women of our time. Their lessons learned and success strategies will boost your confidence and challenge you to achieve more.”

—Cynthia Round, executive vice president,
United Way Worldwide

“*Dare* is an excellent resource for any professional woman. Becky’s practical and insightful advice will give you a clear path to the top.”

—Kathy Ameche, author and traveler-in-chief,
womanroadwarrior.com

“Becky Blalock has risen to the very top of the male-dominated information technology industry. She is a national treasure. *Dare* is simultaneously inspirational, informational, operational, and recreational. A must-read for future leaders of every gender.”

—Thornton May, futurist; author, *The New Know*,
executive director, IT Leadership Academy

In memory of my remarkable mother: Dorris Faulkner Bradford

In honor of my remarkable daughter: Alexandria (Alex)

Nicole Blalock

In recognition of remarkable women everywhere

FOREWORD

By Anne Mulcahy

Former Chairman and CEO, Xerox Corporation

When Becky approached me to write the foreword to *Dare: Straight Talk on Confidence, Courage, and Career for Women in Charge*, I was thrilled. She and I share a strong desire to mentor the next generation of women leaders in business. We know how critically important it is to learn from others, through their successes and their failures. There's no magic wand for leadership, but there is much to be taught and much to be learned, and what Becky has learned and is now about to teach will greatly increase your chances of rising through leadership positions and succeeding in each of them.

I first met Becky when she was the CIO of Southern Company and a big Xerox customer. In one customer visit, she asked if I would be willing to meet with the executive women of her company and talk about my career journey. I was honored to comply. Later, we met again when I was the keynote speaker for the Georgia CIO Leadership Association. These two meetings revealed to me the breadth and depth of Becky's generous and collaborative spirit. I'm excited but not at all surprised that she is now extending the reach of her generosity through this wonderful book.

Becky understands that what we women leaders most need is the willingness to take risks. Too often too many of us just

don't have the self-confidence—or the support!—to step out of our comfort zone and tackle new challenges. Yet, of course, it is these very challenges that help us grow from one stage of our career to the next. Even more important, it is through these challenges that we grow the companies we work for.

My own experience echoes and affirms so many of the lessons you will find in this book. I have seen the stark necessity of effective leadership in times of crisis and prosperity. Many of us remember the Xerox of the 1990s, when it was an unrivaled icon of operational expertise. When I began my tenure as president and COO in May 2000, however, we were facing some real problems. I can't think of a time in my career when leadership was more important. I saw that our company had two major assets: great customers who didn't want the brand to die, and a committed workforce who didn't ask me, "When will we be closing our doors?" but instead asked, "What will we look like going forward?"

I took these as the positive signs they were, and I took them also as a call to leadership. As Becky says, leaders need to have a clear vision, set clear objectives, align their organization, and communicate like crazy. One of my mentors told me, "When things are good, talk about what needs improvement. When things are bad, talk about when they will get better." Just as Becky advises here, we took some big risks, and we made tough choices. We restructured, and we sold businesses not core to our future. We partnered with others to use our internal talents better. In 2002 we lost almost \$300 million, but in 2006 we made over \$1 billion.

Becky stresses the importance of being grateful for what we have and making sure we leave a legacy. I subscribe to her call to action. On my retirement, I also decided it was time to give back, and I took on the role of chairman of the board of trustees for Save the Children. I now use the great experience I gained in corporate America to help this wonderful, vibrant organization address the needs of children challenged by poverty.

Effective and bold leadership is every bit as important today as it was back in 2000. The demand for it will only increase in years to come. Every person who reads this book has the opportunity to make a commitment to leadership that will have a positive impact on her organization, her team, and her career.

You need to embrace the challenges in front of you. Don't wait for change or for someone to hand you an opportunity. Follow Becky's priceless advice: look for needs, create opportunities, then take the risk and step confidently into leadership. Those in the generation behind you need your success, and those of us who have gone before are rooting for you. Read on—and learn from the best!

DARE

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword by Anne Mulcahy, Former Chairman and CEO, Xerox Corporation</i>	<i>ix</i>
INTRODUCTION: FOLLOW ME	1
1 DARE TO SET THE TARGET HIGH Harmonize Vision and Values	11
2 DARE TO KNOW YOURSELF Develop Self-Assurance by Identifying Your Weaknesses	27
3 DARE TO STAND OUT Differentiate Yourself and Become Your Own Best Advocate	41
4 DARE TO PROJECT A CONFIDENT ATTITUDE Embrace the Behaviors and Mind-Sets of Powerful Leadership	73
5 DARE TO LEARN AT EVERY AGE Become a Knowledge Seeker to Maintain Your Competitive Edge	95

6	DARE TO FAIL	111
	Celebrate Failure as the Fast Track to Experience and Reward	
7	DARE TO REACH OUT	131
	Build a Support Network of Allies, Mentors, and Sponsors	
8	DARE TO BE MORE THAN THE BOSS	159
	Nurture Productive Relationships on the Front Line and Across the Organization	
9	DARE TO BE THERE—FOR OTHERS	177
	Give Back and Invite Others to Join You at the Top	
	<i>Appendix</i>	195
	<i>Notes</i>	205
	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	211
	<i>About the Author</i>	215
	<i>Index</i>	217

INTRODUCTION

FOLLOW ME

In 1978 I began my career at Georgia Power, and I worked for the next thirty-three years in the Southern Company system. Until 2011 I was senior vice president and chief information officer, directing IT strategy and operations across the 120,000 square miles and nine subsidiaries of Southern Company. I led more than 1,100 employees in delivering information technology to one of America's most respected companies. I had a guiding hand in executing over a billion dollars in the new technology initiatives that repeatedly earned Southern Company recognition as one of the "100 Most Innovative Companies" from *CIO* Magazine and also a spot on *Computerworld's* "100 Best Places to Work in IT" list.

Three-plus decades doesn't seem such a terribly long time when you're the one who's lived them, but, in terms of women in business, it's practically an eternity. When I started out, most women went to college to become nurses or teachers or, let's face it, to find a husband. Although nursing and teaching are great professions—and there's nothing wrong with finding a husband, either—I soon realized that women could also do great things in a host of occupations traditionally associated with men: as doctors, attorneys, accountants, and, yes, business leaders. Of course, back in the 1970s, few women majored in

business. I was one of only a handful in my program at the University of West Georgia. When I went to graduate school at Mercer University in 1984, I saw a few more women around me, but not many.

The women of my generation fell prey to the discouraging myth that “women can’t do math,” and math is essential if you’re going into business. But even bright women I knew who *did* excel at math—and *knew* they excelled at it—didn’t pursue a business career. Of my closest friends, not even one considered going into the business world.

So how did I end up there, holding C-level positions at one of the most successful companies in the nation?

I learned early how to dare.

My dad was a sergeant in the U.S. Air Force, and we moved, well, a lot. I attended eight elementary schools, three junior high schools, and four high schools. Over the years, many well-meaning friends and colleagues have shaken their heads with sympathy when I’ve mentioned this.

“It must have been tough,” they said. “How could you possibly have adjusted?”

Maybe being an Air Force brat *was* tough sometimes, but I don’t remember it that way. What I *do* remember is that being the new kid just about every year I went to school made me stronger—or at least made me *feel* stronger, which may well amount to the same thing.

As the perpetual new kid, I realized I had a choice. I could keep my head down and my mouth shut in an effort to blend in, or I could dare to introduce myself, to raise my hand in class, and to generally make myself known. It took some confidence and some courage to do this, but with each and every move to a new town and a new school I discovered inner reserves of more confidence and more courage. Each time I dared made it easier to dare the next time. It was like working a muscle, developing it, making it stronger and more reliable with use.

A young life of one new situation after another was not the only thing my dad gave me. He was always a good listener and adviser, but he was absolutely adamant about two things: *don't* smoke, and *do* go to college. He didn't care what my sister and I chose to study or how we paid for it. Both were up to us.

An Air Force sergeant doesn't earn a fortune, and I didn't have much cash for college. One semester, I worked a retail job, making \$1.65 per hour. When a marketing professor approached me to get my help with a market research study and said he would pay me \$5.00 for every survey I was able to collect, I jumped at the opportunity. I did not have money, but I did have friends, and I knew my friends would take the survey. After I collected the surveys—and my fistful of fives—he asked me to help him analyze the data. I agreed, and I quickly learned that I had quite a knack for data analysis, taking a large amount of information and seeing the trends within it. The professor advised me to major in marketing, saying, “You would excel in the field.”

Maybe all those years I spent choosing to dare made me especially receptive to those three words: *you would excel*. In any case, I chose to dare again, and that is how my journey toward business began.

As the years passed in a career marked by relentless change, my daring became the true constant and secret of my success. My willingness to step into positions in which much was unknown, to open my mouth and speak up, to innovate and push unpopular agendas—all these “dares” led to my biggest wins and ultimately made me a successful executive and leader.

C-SUITE OR BUST

I've written this book for any woman looking to lead in corporate business, or contemplating the idea. But even more specifically, I've written it for the woman in middle management who is

wondering how to make that climb—difficult for anyone, but really hard for women—to C-level management. Although mid-level managers are critically important to business, and although the job can be rewarding, for a certain kind of woman even a very good middle-management slot begins to feel like a hole, and she begins to feel stuck. I've been in that hole, and I'd like to give you a hand up.

As a former CIO I'm still part of an all-too-small group: corporate women who made it to the top. As of 2012, women made up 46.9 percent of the U.S. labor force and 51.5 percent of "management, professional, and related occupations."¹ Impressive—and yet, at the *very* top, in executive leadership positions, women are still in the minority. In 2012 women made up 14.3 percent of executive officers in Fortune 500 companies, up from 14.1 percent in 2011. And they held 16.6 percent of Fortune 500 board seats in 2012, up from 16.1 percent the year before.²

I would never argue that senior leadership is for every woman, and I can't answer the question of why so few women have broken through that glass ceiling. I'm not a scientist or a sociologist; I'm a businesswoman. I learned my own lessons on the way up, but perhaps more important, I managed and mentored hundreds of men and women as a senior leader in my company. In doing so, I saw how the most successful employees positioned themselves to climb the corporate ladder. I also watched as many others either backed away or tried but fell short—and much to my distress, all too often it was the women.

There are many obstacles to reaching the executive suite. The senior executive women I interviewed for this book pointed to a shortage of executives, male and female, willing to advocate on behalf of rising women, and although they stressed the importance of taking "stretch" assignments, those roles that push you beyond your current expertise, even at the risk of failing, they also admitted that few executives—again,

male or female—were willing to give these opportunities to rising personnel, especially young women. Of course, it is just such assignments that prepare us to reach the top rungs on the corporate ladder.

Yet, precious as the stretch assignments truly are, many women lack the confidence to seize them when the rare opportunity arises. They fear they are not ready for the assignment or the move, or they are reluctant to take on controversial issues. Faced with a choice between middling comfort and risky opportunity, they often choose to stay where they are. Rather than “lean in,” in the now-famous coinage of Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg, too many step back and assume that diminishing their career or working independently are the only ways one could possibly balance work with a satisfying family life.

For some women, stepping back is the right choice, and I applaud all those who make that choice consciously. This book is for those women who are all-in, determined to become part of that select upper echelon of corporate leadership and share the job of determining the direction and success of the largest economic engines of our time.

DARE TO LEAD

Continuous career advancement happens only when you dare to take risks, and what I’ve seen myself and heard from other women *and* men is that men seem to have a leg up compared to us when it comes to this particular arena.

Over and over again, as I interviewed successful senior executive women for this book, asking them why they thought there were not more women in jobs like theirs, I received a variation of the same reply: *women need to be more open to new opportunities; to take more risks; to say yes, even when they’re unsure.*

Women need to dare.