

Sharon Melnick, PhD

A series of concentric circles in a light gray color, centered on the right side of the white upper half of the book cover.

IN YOUR POWER

React Less,
Regain Control,
Raise Others

WILEY

“Reading Dr. Sharon Melnick’s book *In Your Power* feels like having a conversation with one of your most trusted mentors and committed advocates, and at the end you feel full of clarity and self-trust to handle any challenging situation. She offers valuable, practical, loving guidance to become the best, most powerful versions of ourselves.”

—**Anne Davis Gotte, Global Vice President of Talent at Bumble, Inc.**

“Sharon Melnick has done the world a huge favor by demystifying power and making it accessible to anyone who wants to use power to create good in the world. If you feel disconnected or beaten down or know someone who is, get this book and begin accessing the power that is already within each of us. Her ability to reflect back to you your own power is unmatched.”

—**Charlene Li, New York Times bestselling author of *The Disruption Mindset*, Chief Research Officer at PA Consulting.**

“If you have always been successful, but feel your efforts are not being recognized or valued within your organization, this book is for you. Sharon’s warmth and wisdom showed me all the things I could control to be in my “power”—to start seeing myself in the way I wanted others to see me, which enabled me to achieve the promotion I had been working for my entire career but had seemed out of reach. I now feel rock-solid as a confident leader, and use the tools she taught me to navigate my new role leading the team responsible for growth of a large, multibillion-dollar, publicly traded company. She’s truly changed my life.”

—**Melanie Lewis, Chief Business Development Officer, Encompass Health**

“*In Your Power* hits between the eyes, it’s so beautifully, powerfully, and honestly written. It completely impacted me, supported me, made me feel ‘seen’ as a Mom and head of a business that I didn’t even want to let go of the feeling at the end. I have a bazillion pink underlines, notes in the margins, and this

morning I was absolutely compelled to make a video for my team reading a passage from the book as a way to start our charge for the week. Right on Dr. Menick, I love this book!”

—Amber Vilhauer, CEO of NGNG Enterprises

“As a girl I was taught to believe that I had power, but I wasn’t shown how to access, own, or grow it. Sharon Melnick hits all of those out of the park by giving you an all-access pass to understanding how to tap into your power in the midst of chaos, with a bonus key to understanding how others operate. I’m now producing masterpieces that matter most from the boardroom to the dinner table. Now that I know how to handle situations that put me out of my power, my energy and self-happiness are at the highest ever.”

—LaTasha Stewart, Finance Executive

“Every one of us has moments where we’re not our best. We freeze up when we should talk. We snap when we should reflect. We hide when we should be bold. And in those inopportune moments, we lose ourselves. We forfeit our power to be good and do good. But thank goodness Dr. Sharon Melnick is now here to accompany us through the messy intricacies of those moments. In *In Your Power*, Sharon sits right beside us, accompanying us, whispering in our ear about how to reflect on those moments, and prepare for the next many moments with fresh eyes, new responses, and a whole heart. She asks us to face hard questions and embrace rescripted truths about ourselves. She invites us (back) to our power. You’ll want to read this book v.e.r.y. slowly. Twice. You can’t possibly come away unchanged for the better.”

**—Ron Carucci, Managing Partner, Navalent;
award-winning
author of *Rising to Power* and *To Be Honest***

“Sharon is an absolute titan and valuable resource to women everywhere. She helped me create meaningful change in my career while being true to my authentic self. Your career will thank you after reading this book.”

**—Neela Bushnell Hummel, Co-CEO, Abacus
Wealth Partners**

“There is no topic more relevant than power right now; not just who has it and who doesn’t, but how to find and unleash it, in ourselves. Dr. Melnick is to me the leading authority on the nuts and bolts of this transformation. She has equipped thousands of leaders to access more of what we’re fully capable of, so that we can own where we are and move forward with certainty and confidence, to have the impact we need to have through our careers and on the world around us. This book is absolutely full of applicable frameworks, mindset shifts, and language for us to unabashedly inhabit our power. This is world-changing stuff to build a more inclusive workplace!”

—**Jennifer Brown, bestselling author of**
How to Be an Inclusive Leader

“In our careers and in our lives it can often feel like we have ceded control to external forces. Sharing stories and strategies learned from her experience coaching and training over 40,000 leaders, Dr. Sharon Melnick provides us with a road map to take back control of our effectiveness, increase our impact, and ultimately our happiness.”

—**Laine J. Cohen, Global Head of Learning, Citi**

This is an illuminated book and allows us to bring the best of Dr. Sharon Melnick home. Through her genius, she provides tools and leads by example how to stand in our infinite power and how to know when we are out of alignment with our power. Each of us is born with the infinite potential to live a life of wonder and consequence on this planet. Sharon’s gifts help unlock this potential in each of us, and as a result our impact is far greater than we could have ever imagined. This is a book for our times where so much sovereignty has been lost. It’s one read that will change your life. I attribute so much of the ways I’ve elevated in my life to what she taught me about how to stand in my power.”

—**Teri Cochrane, CEO, The Global Sustainable
Health Institute**

“Sharon has a unique approach to helping individuals identify their blind spots to success. She is one of the most thoughtful and intentional thought leaders in this arena today and is a joy to work with and know. Anyone with a desire to take their professional lives to the next level or to just live their best life should read this book.”

—**Emily Pitts, Chief Diversity Officer,
Lindenwood University,
Retired General Partner of Edward Jones**

“WOW! The first time I heard Sharon speak about this topic I knew she was talking directly to me! What if I could be “in my power” when working with my team, my clients, even my family!? I have always been successful in my career as a Mortgage Loan Originator working on my own, avoiding managing or leading a team. I took the challenge on one year ago and with Sharon’s help increased my business by 350%! I also saw changes in how I responded and behaved in other areas of my life. Being “in your power” is no joke. Take the journey in this book with Sharon. . .you will be unstoppable!”

—**Jacqueline Frank, SVP of Mortgage Lending**

“I am so thankful to Dr. Sharon Melnick’s advisement for me to think differently and be “in my power.” Her ideas and techniques have turned me into an enterprise-wide leader with emotional intelligence. I strongly believe this book will help many to regain control, be intentional, and act with high emotional intelligence.”

—**Tushar Nuwal, Vice President of
Business Development and
Alliance Management, Pharmaceutical Company**

“Dr. Sharon Melnick’s book is a game changer. It’s profoundly impacted my life by giving me the tools to stand fully in my own power; to cut through the noise in my mind and to be a powerful and effective global leader raising millions of dollars, and running a multi-million dollar business. Get ready to dog ear its pages!”

—**Sara Vetter, CEO, The Soul of Money Institute;
Major Gifts Officer, The Pachamama Alliance**

“In Your Power is what every female leader needs now. It specifically goes into the root of issues that interfere with mental well-being and success. Her tools and insights are incredibly practical to own my power in new ways. I learned things I haven’t found anywhere else and highly recommend it for anyone wanting a new toolkit for leading.”

—**Kristen Clark, serial entrepreneur, CEO,
Prajna Strategy and Granate**

“Over the course of my 24-year career, despite continuous promotions and rising through the ranks, I found that I was losing both my power and my voice. I was overwhelmed, burned out, and emotionally hijacked by my leader and certain team members. Disappointed, discouraged, and disheartened, I felt like I had peaked and there were no signs of hope or improvement. Then I started working with Dr. Sharon Melnick to learn the tools, tips, and techniques developed through her years of research and experience, that are covered in this book. And **WOW**, things began to change dramatically! They have helped me beyond measure to react less, focus on what I can control, stop the mental and emotional “swirl,” and regain my power. Through her approach, I’m now clearer, calmer, and focused on what I want to accomplish both personally and professionally. This book is a must-read for anyone looking to regain or stay in their power!”

—**Jennifer Lokenvitz Schwitzer, Associate General
Counsel, U.S. Venture, Inc**

“Dr. Melnick has, once again, gifted us with another body of research-based work and a logical plan to advance goals, both professionally and personally. Our women leader participants rave about the successes they have in using the tools in the “power portals” that she’s taught in her trainings and this new book *In Your Power: React Less, Regain Control, and Raise Others*. We can channel that resilience into the power to make the changes we wish to see in the world and in our own lives. We definitely plan to incorporate Dr. Melnick’s new research into our executive leadership development program.”

—**April Benetello, CEO, Momentum Leaders**

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*To my clients, who are in their power and raising
everyone around them. You inspire me.*

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Introduction

“**I** can’t sleep. I can’t focus. It’s like I’m under siege,” Mary shared.

“He’s squeezing me out and trying to lower my ownership stake.” In her partnership group in a financial firm, Mary told me the senior partner started spreading rumors that she’s a bully and the team is afraid of her. The young analysts joined in. She tried to speak to the offending partner, but he reacted with hostility, making the situation worse. She didn’t feel she could get a fair response from the HR director or from their regional head because they were longtime buddies of his. She feared her only way out was to leave the firm. But that would be a big blow to her reputation, and why should *she* have to sacrifice all of the clientele she had worked for 20 years to establish?

The senior partner also criticized her for her “quality over quantity” client service approach. “He’s making me feel like a failure. I’ve lost my confidence, and now I’m even questioning—maybe I *should* change, and maybe I really am a bully.”

Mary felt powerless.

So did Steve. He was the head of a fast-growing technology start-up, and his team members’ repeated mistakes were like nails on a chalkboard to him. “I can’t *get them* to be more careful and to follow through on their work plans,” he explained. He was getting impatient and would react, thinking, “They’re lazy,” and also questioning, “Am I a bad leader?” He brought his irritation home to his wife, which he knew was unfair.¹

Mary and Steve were in situations that are similar to those many of us face: You feel that *other people* determine what happens to *you*. Their behavior ‘gets to you’, and puts you into a mental swirl. You rehash the scenario, convincing yourself they’re wrong or that there’s something wrong with you. You get hijacked and react emotionally instead of responding with thoughtful intention. You see limited options to resolve the problem because whatever you’ve tried hasn’t worked. You feel trapped. You want to be a role model for others or be the bigger person in the scenario, but you can see you are showing up as a diminished version of yourself.

This is what it’s like when you are “out of your power.”

You want *relief*. You want the other person to do what you think they should do, believing that is the only way to achieve a good or fair outcome. What you really want is to get back to your calm confident self and refocus on living your life and making a difference for others in your company, community, or family. You want to be back “in your power.”

If this describes how you are feeling anywhere in your life, this book is for you.

I share the psychological insights and strategies you can use to immediately stop the mental swirl and quickly recover to be “good in you.” With fresh ways of overcoming your automatic reactions, you’ll be free from the effects of other people on you. You’ll achieve bigger business results, get promoted, improve the culture, and connect with difficult loved ones.

You’ll shift your experience from that of the thermometer to the thermostat. When you are the **thermometer** your mental and emotional state goes up and down according to other people’s behavior. You fixate on others’ actions and see yourself at their mercy, as if “others act, all I can do is react.” The climate outside of you determines the weather inside of you. You experience yourself as the casualty, not the creator of the outcome.

As the thermostat, instead *you* set the tone of your interactions with others, no matter what their behavior is, and you set the temperature of your internal state as well. You are able to bring people along in your vision. The thermostat harmonizes all the conditions in a room—the humidity, air flow, movement of people—to reach the decided-upon temperature. As the thermostat, you can steward the whole situation to make it better.

When you're in your power, you make an impact not by reacting to the behavior of people who are limited, but rather by raising yourself and others to be limitless.

By the end of my first discussion with Mary, she regained this sense of control and confidence. She stopped taking the situation personally, her emotional upset evaporated, and she slept well that night. She no longer looked to others to know her worth. Within days, the discussions she initiated with her partners led them to cease badmouthing her. She earned so much respect from them and for her client service approach that within 60 days they voted *her* Partner in Charge of the group. Within 90 days, she brought in the biggest deal of her career, producing a windfall they all benefitted from now that she'd begun enforcing their contractual agreement to do an equal draw on profits. Then she led an approach to diversify the talent in their group, and together they've grown the pie.

Mary got back in her power!

I have coached and trained over 40,000 senior leaders, entrepreneurs, and professionals in all levels of organizations around the world, and what I've found is that in the challenging situations where you find yourself off your game, *the underlying issue* is always that you're pulled out of your power.

We are made to feel powerless in many ways. We feel unseen, unheard, or can't make an impact on people who are important to us in our professional and personal lives. We may be dismissed,

overlooked, or uncredited by a manager, or sabotaged by a colleague. We can't convince executive peers to move past corporate scorecards toward true transformation in the culture. We might feel disrespected by a bully boss, a difficult family member, or be overloaded with more than our fair share of work. We can't get our team members to live up to our expectations or respect our leadership. We don't get our needs met by a partner or friend. We're made to second guess ourselves.

Business as usual can put us out of our power by piling on excessive demands and constant change. In the workplace and culture at large, we don't feel psychologically safe, and these places are rife with harms in the form of inequitable pay and advancement, microaggressions, and violence. On social media, we have reason to fear we'll be cancelled or trolled. Political systems make us feel our values are not protected, or are violated.

Being out of your power is not a sign of some inherent weakness within you. Usually it means you care—about getting a good result, about fairness and respect, and about the greater good. Everyone can get out of their power regardless of how emotionally intelligent or highly accomplished they are. An acquaintance of mine is a former army general. His son verbally attacks him regularly and every day he has the sinking feeling he's a bad father. As we'll explore in the next chapter, we are even biologically hardwired to get kicked out of our power.

When we get out of our power we do what we can to help us regain control. We blame the offending person for what they've done, or haven't done, and plan what we'll say to them if we have the chance. We seek sympathy in venting to others. We spin about whether to stay or go and then get to the point we start to disengage. We try to not think about the situation by drinking, numbing ourselves with social media, or other unhealthy habits.

Well-meaning advice from friends, family, or blog writers tells us to "let it go; just leave! give it time; be persistent!" This advice offers encouragement rather than true empowerment.

It suggests we grit our way through the problem or continue to do things that aren't working. It doesn't address that something fundamental to you is being crossed—your sense of self, your truth, your boundaries, your vision, your sense of fairness about the way the world should work, or all of these.

Wrestling with these situations can interfere with our mental well-being and contribute to burnout over and above our culture of “too much to do.” We can even develop mental health symptoms, such as anxiety, which comes from thoughts about lacking a sense of control. Or depression, which can come from anger that is turned against oneself when no recourse is available. Emotions and behavior from past traumas can be reactivated, and post-traumatic symptoms can develop when you experience the situation as inescapable.

Not having an effective way to navigate these scenarios derails careers. I've seen it be a major reason people leave an organization (or relationship) or decide to stay but just go through the motions, which is not who you are. The temptation is to avoid collaborating with the other person, eroding connection and trust among coworkers, friends, and family members. Leaders can react with overwhelm or pursue their own agenda rather than serve the team.

Being out of your power destroys dreams and kills joy.

More than ever we are determined to overturn these situations when we face them, personally or collectively. We are fed up with situations where someone else's actions make you feel bad about your value or constrain your success. With the ongoing stress of pandemic-related circumstances, economic uncertainty, and an overdue reckoning on social injustices, our resilience is worn down.

We are factoring in our mental well-being and prioritizing environments where we can do meaningful work drama-free. We're ready to be the change we want to see in the world, making things better for all involved. We want to go beyond the temporary

effects of a massage, a manicure, or a good workout. We seek a practical response repertoire we can use in the heat of the moment to further our goals and experience lasting well-being.

Being in your power is the ultimate form of self care. It is the root cause solution for the successful life you want.

As a business psychologist and executive coach, I began to make the connection between being out of our power as adults and insights I learned from 10 years of research at Harvard Medical School in my early career. My initial focus was on studying what we bring with us from childhood into our parenting in the next generation. For people who had difficult experiences, I came up with methods to heal the wounds, become their own person, transcend their patterns, and act toward their children in a way they would have wanted for their own life.

Without realizing it, in my research I had been putting together the psychological processes of getting back in your power. Over 20 years of coaching clients, I heard about the issues they were struggling with in their workplace, and I started to see how the approaches I had developed for helping people overcome early trauma-related patterns in their parenting applied to a broad range of work and social environments in which people don't feel seen, heard, or can't have the impact they're here for.

And I needed this myself! I was a person who reacted all day long to other people and got tossed about by matters large and small that didn't go my way. If a friend said something ambiguous to me, I'd spend the rest of my day rehashing it. I sought others' approval and tried to prevent their disapproval. Books told me to "look within," but all I found was a cacophony of self-criticism. Life happened *to* me. When I used my voice, I didn't see it have an impact. As is true for so many, being out of my power had become my way of being in the world. I plunged myself into learning how I could coach people to apply these approaches in

work challenges, starting with how I could use them to build ownership over myself as well.

From coaching thousands to be confident influential leaders, I've observed that the biggest unlock to business outcomes rarely comes from one or another specific tactic but rather from knowing how to get in and stay in their power. It comes from their new way of understanding what the problem is, the energy they emit, and the command with which they bring others along into win-win solutions.

The word “power” is loaded. We associate it with being predatory, selfish, or manipulative and with people abusing their power. Being in your power is *not* about wielding your power *over* others or achieving your ends through force. This happens with people who are *in* power but not in *their* power. They may behave in these ways because of insecurity, fearing that if they don't show they are powerful, they will be subject in the same ways to others' power.

Research suggests that, as the saying goes, power can go to your head. Studies show that high-power individuals *are* more likely to direct their energies in pursuit of their own goals and that their empathy can be reduced.²

Being in your power has a different character. The word “power” comes from the Latin root “posse,” which means “to be able.” In your power is your ability to stay “good in you,” no matter what's going on around you. Being in your power is the *ability* to alchemize the challenging aspects of what goes on outside of you in order to get “into a good place” inside of you *so that* you can then take actions to achieve your aims and make the situation as you envision it should be outside of you.

Being “in your power” actually encompasses two abilities: To be in your power and to use your power as a force for good. The

“for good” piece is key. I want to redefine “power” so we embrace it as a force for good.

When I refer to using your power, I mean the *power to use yourself as an instrument to make a situation better*. The power to get a better result, to resolve friction at root cause, to implement innovative ideas, or to create a culture in which you and others thrive. It’s the potential of this positive use of power that led Ron Carucci, expert on executive success and author of *Rising to Power*, to say what he found in his 10-year study among those who assume leadership positions is that the biggest abuse of power is not using it!³

When you are in your power, you have a sense of control over your own mental and emotional state, thoughts, and actions—you respond rather than react. You decide who you are and what you will and won’t accept—you own your choices. The course of your life isn’t happening *to* you, it’s happening from you, through you, and for you.

You achieve your desired impact to make the situation better, not only for you but for *everyone* involved.

In your power, you stop taking things personally or holding onto them. Your well-being is preserved regardless of others’ behavior because other people are not the supply line to your emotional oxygen, you are. You don’t have to worry about their judgments of you, because you decide who you are. That gives you freedom!

In your power, you’re Teflon to the negative effects of situations—you can see them as they unfold in real time, understand everyone’s motivations and needs, and respond strategically. You model new standards and hold space for new conversations. You also know how to quickly step back into your power if you do get kicked out of it.

What you say is heard, you get the outcome you want, the situation gets resolved at root cause. You are proud of how you

handled it; it doesn't fester or continue to drain you. Your energy is freed up to devote to the people and activities you love and the contribution you are here to make. You are able to inspire and lift others, empowering them with your power. You leave the situation better than it was when you came into it.

When you are in your power, you raise everyone around you.

You'll see the effects everywhere in your life. Being in your power:

Fuels resilience and mental well-being. It gives you a calm, clear mind so you can hold onto your important thoughts. And have renewable energy.

Allows you to resolve problems rather than deciding to leave. Being able to handle unyielding situations allows you, if it's the right fit, to stay and rise in the organization, transform a poisonous relationship into a fruitful collaboration, and bring a huge win to the team—or grow your own company.

Enables you to make a difference for others. You can grow power in other people once you've grown it in yourself.⁴ Being able to make a bigger impact makes my clients giddy and brings the delight back into work.

Helps you cope with societal injustice and change it. Systemic inequities must be resolved by dismantling the structures that hold them in place, that is the only and ultimate fix. Until that is complete, being in your power can help you personally deal with injustices—helping you not be triggered and overcome their personal effects on you. Being in your power will set you up to sustain yourself and respond effectively and emphatically so you can be an agent of change.

In the following chapters, I'm going to show you how much power you have, right now, within you, that you can use immediately to start feeling good in you and achieve the change you desire. I take you on a tour of what I call Power Portals. They are like doorways that lead to new ways of understanding the

situation you are struggling with and how you can transform it. There are 12 of them.

The first six Portals will show you how to get in your power and stay there when challenged. The next six Portals show you how to use your power for the good of all, both in interpersonal scenarios and in positions of power, regardless of what role you are in. You'll learn from a wealth of stories of others who were challenged and out of their power and then turned their situations around to get buy-in for their ideas, get promoted, get the team performance they wanted, or resolve personal friction to strengthen a relationship.

As you learn to access the power the Portals open your eyes to, you will find that being *in your power becomes a lifestyle*. You'll walk in the world as an infinite creative force to make any situation serve your good intentions and steward outcomes where everyone wins. In your power you are a Change Agent, simply by the way you show up.

Around the time this book was starting to become a possibility, I had a call with a colleague of mine, Jo, who's a senior HR leader. A few days prior she had left her role as the HR lead in a start-up after one year, saying about the experience, "It was like quicksand, but I persevered." She was confused: "I was hired to bring in a new vision, and then the founders blocked the vision." She started to question herself: "Am I smart enough to do this? I became afraid of saying the wrong thing when these jackasses say the first thing that comes to mind. I felt like I was losing my mind." She confessed: "I know that whole idea of putting your oxygen mask on first before you can do it for others, but I lost that ability even though this wasn't my first rodeo. I'm usually the one telling *other* people how to handle this."

What does one do in this situation? "I went to people I follow on Instagram searching for a quote or a meme that could help me. I saw a video by a guru telling me how I should

look in the mirror and tell myself I believe in me. That helped for 30 seconds.” Then she said to me, “I know I have that within me, but I’m unable to find it and tap into it now. I wish there was a place I could go and fill up how to be in my power, how I could find this within rather than have to seek it elsewhere or through other people. Can you recommend a book I could read over and over again to regain it?”

I shared with her my framework for understanding her situation to ensure it doesn’t happen again. At the end of our conversation she said, “This is the first time I’ve felt calm in months.”

Oh, and about that book recommendation she asked about, “I got you, Jo. Here it is.”

PART I

Be the Thermostat
(Not the Thermometer)

