

## *Preface*

Houston's July heat made the shirt stick to my back as I parked my Chevy and walked into the Veterans Administration Hospital. It was Thursday, time for my one o'clock session, and I dreaded it like hell.

Nine pairs of eyes watched me enter the group therapy room. I scanned the place and saw a range of expressions: simmering anger on the face of the big guy...weariness and resignation on a couple of others...a spark of hope and energy over on the left. The air conditioner was raging and the sweat drooling down my back began to cool, so I grinned and got down to business.

I was doing an internship for my Ph.D. in psychology. Twice a week I spent an hour and a half counseling these veterans who were transitioning out of the psychiatric ward and back into the world of work. At least, that was the idea. But we were struggling.

Once again my group of guys started down the usual depressing road, sharing play-by-play accounts of how badly the world was treating them. Maybe the heat got to me on this particular day...I don't know. But after half an hour or so of their complaining and commiserating, I couldn't take it anymore, so I hit my feet and headed to the blackboard.

For the rest of the session I used chalk and lectured—about personal accountability, the power of choice, and how they could engineer positive relationships to change their lives. That impromptu rant, decades ago, was the genesis of this book. The ideas that bubbled up inside me that sweltering summer day show up here as the core concepts for developing deep strengths.

So what do I mean by the term deep strengths?

I'll get there, but let me give you a little more background. After getting the doctorate I aimed my career toward the business world, building a consulting firm that was the first in the world to specialize in merger integration strategy. Over the years we've had the opportunity to work with the best of corporate America as these companies wrestle with the challenges of major organizational change. Our job? Guide executives and their workforces through uncertainty, pain, and upheaval...bring out the best in the people...help the organizations adapt to a rapidly changing planet.

But I finally figured out that something terribly important is missing: organizations are working hard to adapt to change, but doing virtually nothing to develop deep strengths.

Why does this matter?

It matters because deep strengths are those attributes we depend on to carry us through the most difficult episodes of our lives. They're the psychological assets that also enable us to make the most of opportunity. If we want to become more effective at dealing with high-velocity change, if we wish to develop as individuals or organizations, this is where we should start.

Part One of this book explains the concept of deep strengths, presents the findings from our Deep Strengths Research Project with chief executive officers and entrepreneurs, then lays the foundation for "strength training." Part Two provides a methodology, a process for building deep strengths in individuals and organizations.

Finally, Part Three offers specific tactics for implementing strength-building practices on a day-to-day basis.

As a frustrated young intern sweating it out in a group therapy session so many years ago, I drew heavily on common sense to make my points. Today we can turn to sophisticated research for proof that these concepts and practices prepare us best for the challenges and opportunities that are sure to come.