

Beyond Bound
and Broken
*A Journey of Healing
and Resilience*

RIA STORY

Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

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WHAT READERS ARE SAYING ABOUT BEYOND BOUND AND BROKEN

“Ria’s book is full of hope and inspiration...and full of wonderful quotes and wisdom. There are also thought provoking questions at the end of every chapter designed for the reader to look within as we learn that ultimately happiness is an inside job.”

Madeleine Black, Author of Unbroken

“This book is brutally honest, powerfully transparent and will cause you to re-examine those many excuses you have as to why God can't use you powerfully to impact your world! The way Ria has shared her experience about such relevant subjects such as identity, forgiveness & overcoming shame and fear by allowing us a glimpse into her heart and how she herself has overcome, is nothing short of transformational!”

W. Sorgente

“This was a powerful book that touched my heart and encouraged me that God’s power along with unrelenting determination can heal the deepest

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wounds. The author has survived some of the most unimaginable circumstances, but her spirit was unbroken and her story can change countless lives. What an amazing journey. So thankful she shared it with the rest of us!"

Amazon Reader

"Beyond Bound and Broken is a deeply inspirational book; one that will stay with you for years to come. The lessons are deep, yet practical, and her advice leads to clear solutions. This is a profoundly hopeful book. We all face pain, difficulty, and doubt but with resilience, we can lead vital, flourishing lives. Ria's story, although sometimes painfully difficult to read because of the trials she endured, is a story of great courage and compassion. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who is struggling to move forward after experiencing a great trial."

Amazon Reader

"Amazing story of God's grace and Ria's resilience. Excellent read!"

T. Sadler

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A SURVIVOR'S PRAYER

By Ria Story

Thank you Lord for the gift of another day...

Help guide me to use it wisely, this I pray.

Thank you Lord for a loving husband in my life...

Help guide me to be a better wife.

Thank you Lord for the gift of health...

Help me remember the meaning of true wealth.

Thank you Lord for family and friends...

Help me be an example for good, instead of an example for the Fiend.

Thank you Lord for a chance to touch another's heart...

Help me remember that Your creation is a work of art.

Thank you Lord for the gift of free will...

Help me remember to use it for good, not ill.

Thank you Lord for forgiveness of my sin...

Help me remember it's an eternal battle we are fighting to win.

Thank you Lord for the responsibility of representing You...

Help me as I strive, when tested, to remain true.

Thank you Lord for strength in trials and tribulations...

Help me remember You temper me with those situations.

Thank you Lord for helping me forgive the one who broke trust...

Help me let go of painful memories of rape, abuse, and lust.

Thank you Lord for the stronger woman that was built...

Help me find freedom from a false sense of guilt.

Thank you Lord for helping me heal from corruption and abomination...

Help me remember it's a journey, not a destination.

Thank you Lord for bringing me to a safe place...

Help me let go of the shame, and claim grace.

Thank you Lord for the gift of Your Son...

Help me remember the battles that through Him, I have won.

DEAR READER

God doesn't cause the pain in our lives, but He uses it. Whatever you have gone through in the past or are going through now, never forget I love you, God loves you, and He has a special purpose and plan for you.

If my words touch your heart, then pay it forward. Share this book with someone else. The world needs more hope.

I would love to hear how this book changed your life. E-mail me at: ria@riastory.com

I am praying for you!

Ria Story

PROLOGUE

I am proud to be a survivor because that means I survived.

Regardless of the past, or the present, we have the ability to survive and even thrive. Healing from the wounds life deals you isn't easy. For some, the scars will fade with time. For others, the scars will always be there and will forever remind you of the wound.

Scar tissue isn't pretty, but it doesn't hurt any longer.

Healing is a journey, and we have to take it one step at a time. One day at a time. One hour at a time. One minute at a time. Maybe, even one breath at a time.

Beyond Bound and Broken is “the rest of the story,” sharing the lessons I learned about how to start to heal and how to truly live life. Some of you may prefer a chronological account of my story. If so, you can find that in *Ria's Story From Ashes To Beauty*, available online at Amazon.com and RiaStory.com.

After *Ria's Story* was published, I felt like I was finished writing for a long time, perhaps forever. But, less than six months later, I realized there is so much more to be said about learning to live life “after.” I had no idea just how many others would share with me a similar story of brokenness, abuse, or of being a victim. I had no idea how many would share how they found encouragement, hope, healing, and inspiration in my story. I also had no idea so many who were not victims of abuse but had experienced something painful, terrible, or traumatic would find encouragement, hope, healing, and inspiration in my story.

I don't pretend to have all the answers. *Ria's Story* was a first attempt at baring my soul, but even a year later, I

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realize how much I left out because I simply didn't have the strength to be vulnerable. At 110 pages, it was all I could do to write that much, and I had nothing left to say beyond those pages. I didn't have the courage to show you all my scars.

Perhaps I still don't, but I have a new confidence in my God-given purpose, and "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*" (Philippians 4:13) I am not a counselor, a psychiatrist, a doctor of anything, or a therapist. My claim to expertise is having lived what you will read on these pages, and then, making it my life's work to share with others how to be resilient.

Is there fear? Yes. Anytime we are vulnerable, there is fear. When we are open and transparent, when we expose our soft side, when we open our heart and soul, we always do so with some level of fear. Fear that being truly honest about whom and what we are will cause others to reject us. Fear that some people can't, or won't, accept our honesty. Fear that if we tell the world we aren't perfect, we won't be loved.

Is there shame? Yes. I struggle even today with a sense of shame, and perhaps, I always will. One of my biggest challenges is releasing that to God's grace and accepting His love.

Is there doubt? Yes. I know there is a temptation to question or doubt God and His plan – I've done it myself. Sometimes, it felt like God was so far away. I questioned if He really existed. But, through it all, God was there, and He has redeemed me. He has used the pain in my life to temper me and prepare me for a purpose. I am now beyond bound and broken.

The worst years of my life became a good thing when I realized I could use them for good. I can use them to bring hope to someone else. I am fulfilling my purpose

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when I help someone else realize, that no matter how bad life gets, we always get to choose how we respond.

I won't pretend my story is the worst thing that could have happened to me. Certainly, it left me scarred in many ways. It also shaped me, defined me, and then, refined me.

It breaks my heart to know so many others have suffered as I did or even worse.

My heart breaks for those who have suffered in other ways, like the mother who has lost a child to cancer. My heart breaks for the husband who lost his wife in a car wreck and must raise their three children as a single father. My heart breaks for the young boy who is bullied in school until he takes his own life.

I don't know what plan God has for bringing you through the darkness to the light, but I do know He has a plan. I do know God has brought healing to me, and He can and will bring healing to you. You only have to accept it.

Some wounds in life heal quickly and easily, but others scar the soul forever. Any kind of trauma – emotional or physical trauma, physical or sexual abuse, losing a loved one, losing a job, losing a limb, losing yourself, just a few examples I could name – can leave us with scars from the wounds. Sometimes, the scars are physical, visible, and tangible; sometimes, the scars are emotional, mental, and psychological.

Sometimes, the bad times can be forgotten, as can the good. Often, there are memories you can't walk away from and can't forget. It doesn't matter how big or how deep they go. Healing doesn't mean there was never a wound there. Healing means the wound has closed over, and there is no festering infection. While there is a scar, it will fade with time. What matters is how we heal from the

damage. We have to learn to be resilient, to rebound, and spring back. Lou Holtz said, *“Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you respond to it.”*

I realize more each day how incredibly blessed I am to be traveling this life journey with my husband Mack. Without him, I wouldn't be the person I am today. He is, and has always been, incredibly supportive of me, encouraging me to find my way forward.

It can't be easy, being the spouse of an abuse victim. Actually, it's probably not easy to be a spouse at all! But, being the spouse, parent, or even the child of an abuse victim brings a few more challenges.

There are times I simply need space, room to breathe, time to think, and a little extra grace in our relationship. Too often, I don't share what I'm thinking or feeling because it feels safer. These are the times I am so fragile that to touch me would shatter me. The only way I know how to protect myself is to pull back into my shell.

For years, even after we were married, I wasn't secure in our relationship because I wasn't secure in myself. I thought sharing my pain or my struggles would drive him away. I thought no one could love me broken, so I pretended to be whole. How beautiful it is now to realize I don't have to pretend to be perfect. I don't believe in “soul mates” because I believe God is my soul's companion, but I do believe my life's companion should, and will, love and accept me for who I am. Sometimes, my steps forward are only inches, and yet, I need him to applaud each one as though it were a giant leap. And, he does. I wouldn't be the woman I am today without him.

I'm a survivor, and I learned how to survive. I would have gone on surviving, somehow, someday, even if God had not sent me a knight in a shiny Camaro. But, would I have learned to thrive?

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I believe God places people in our lives. Sometimes, it's for them to help us. Sometimes, it's for us to help them. Maybe, it's both. We all touch the lives of the people around us, even though we don't always know it.

I pray that through my words I touch your life for the better. I pray that I touch everyone for the better. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, *"To know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to know that you have succeeded."*

"How did you do it?" is a question I get asked often. As in, *"How did you manage to move on and live life after years of being abused sexually and emotionally?"* My first attempts at blogging and writing tried to answer that until I realized I really didn't have a pat and perfect answer.

I don't believe in a miracle cure or a one-size-fits-all plan to move from surviving to thriving in three or twelve steps. We all have a different path to walk on our journey, and we must walk it, just like everyone else, one step at a time. I can only share my journey with you and pray you find inspiration and courage for your own.

Your pain may be different from mine. Your journey almost certainly has been. Or perhaps, it's not your journey. Perhaps, you are a spouse, loved one, parent or friend who needs to read a true, no holds barred account of some of the things your loved one is going through or has been through, an account of the things he/she wants and needs to say but can't. Everything they wish you knew but can't tell you.

Like any daunting task, sharing my journey with you and writing this book seems overwhelming, and at times, much bigger than I am. There are some days it would be so much easier to go back to a regular job with a steady paycheck that doesn't require me to be *more*. A job that doesn't require me to be strong yet vulnerable.

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I refuse to turn back because I'm in the HOPE (Helping Others through Positive Encouragement) business. I won't give up on the thousands and thousands of people out there who need hope to start the healing journey, to break free of their own bonds, and to live life beyond broken, one day at a time. I refuse to turn back because a life lived in the shadows of the past is a life not fully lived. I know because I've been there.

Chapter One
THE RESILIENCE FACTOR

“The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.”

~ Nelson Mandela

I learned far too young life isn't fair. Raised on an isolated farm in Alabama, I was sexually abused by my father from age 12 – 19. I was dressed up, photographed nude, beaten, tied up, raped, emotionally blackmailed, and psychologically abused. I was forced to play the role of a wife and shared with other men due to my father's perversions. Desperate to escape, I left home at 19 without a job, a car, or a high school diploma.

I don't think there is “complete healing” here on earth. God gives restoration, but we don't ever forget or completely get over the effects of our brokenness because it shapes who we are. But, you can find the place of resilience.

I wasn't always resilient. I don't think you can learn to be resilient until you have lived through the dark and come through to the light.

Resilience. The word makes you want to sit up a little taller or lift your head a little higher. Resilience is the ability to recover, to spring back, to thrive, and to become strong after, or in spite of, weakness. Resilience in others inspires us, and we admire those who have learned to thrive. Resilience looks glorious when we see it in others because we only see the triumph, not the struggle. We only see the light after the darkness, and in truth, that's all we want to see. It's only inspirational when we see the worthwhile fight and the victory.

Some people master resiliency at an early age, while others may not find it until old age. Some never find it. Some people learn to be resilient to some circumstances,

but not others.

The journey of resilience can be broken down into three phases. These are emotional stages, not physical ones.

The first phase is the most difficult. It's the dark time when you are actively living through despair. I call this the Captivity phase.

The second phase is the Coping phase where you are out of the worst of the situation, and you are "okay" but still bound and broken inside in some places.

The third phase is the Conquest phase where you have overcome and can now call yourself resilient.

How fast and how quickly we rise to resilience is determined by our Resilience Factor, our ability to move beyond surviving to thriving. The higher our Resilience Factor, the greater our ability to overcome whatever happens to us in life and move from the Captivity phase to the Conquest phase.

Captivity

Captivity can come in many forms. We can be in Captivity to emotions and feelings like fear, anger, doubt, shame, or guilt. We can be in Captivity to food, drugs, drama, alcohol, gambling, sex, work, exercise, bad relationships, or any addiction. It's not as much what we do as why we are doing it that determines if we are in Captivity to something. Captivity can be an overindulgence or a starvation, when either one is done for the wrong reasons or to our detriment. Sometimes, we are in Captivity to a need to control ourselves or others, or we are captive to other people and what they say or think about us.

Because this is emotional Captivity, it may or may not show outwardly, at least at first. Sooner or later, it will show up. In the words of Robert Morris, *“A physical bruise is caused by inward bleeding. A person’s skin is hit, and at first there is no outward sign...Emotional bruising can follow the same course. A person suffers through rejection or loss or hurt, and at first there’s no outward sign. But inwardly the person is bleeding, and soon the signs of that hurt will appear for anyone to see.”*

The Captivity phase for me lasted until I was physically able to leave my parents’ home at age 19. I left behind years of hopelessness, physical restriction, sexual abuse, and emotional despair.

Growing up, things seemed okay on the surface. Maybe not normal – anyone could, and some did, see my dad was too “familiar” with me. I dressed in clothes he bought me that were too tight, too revealing, too sexy. I barely spoke to anyone. I didn’t date or talk about boys. I wasn’t allowed to socialize much, and we were isolated from church, school, and family.

How often we turn a blind eye to the things we don’t really want to see. Or, we are willing to see but don’t know what to look for. Or, we see what is going on but don’t want to “get involved in something that’s not my business.”

I was desperate for help but didn’t know how to ask for it. And, since I felt so alone, I tried not to think about how hopeless my situation was. When I did think about it, I became very depressed.

Satan attacks the hardest when we are down, not when we are strong.

I didn’t realize I could emotionally overcome my circumstances without physically leaving. I was emotionally living in captivity because it was the only way I knew how to survive. The only way I could protect

“me” was to build a strong wall to shut out the chaos of the outside world.

In the Captivity phase, we may even refuse to acknowledge there is a problem.

Coping

In the Coping phase, we are still struggling with some issues internally. We aren't in complete Captivity any longer, but we are still fighting a battle. We have moved beyond complete despair, but are still wounded inside.

We have acknowledged there is a problem and taken some steps to overcome it. This is the “rebound” phase or the healing phase where we have hit the bottom and are on the way back up. This phase could last for minutes or years, and there are some people who will never get to the next phase. We each travel a different path, and there isn't a wrong way or a right way, just your way, which is different than my way.

After leaving my parent's home and the Captivity phase, I stayed in the Coping phase for 13 years. I stayed until I realized I was the only one holding myself back.

The Coping phase can be deceptive because it's easy to tell yourself you have overcome whatever battle you were fighting. Dissociation is a survival mechanism, protecting us from the force of whatever happened. But, the event or trauma itself hasn't truly been processed, only stored. The lie I told myself was I had left my past behind, and it wasn't affecting me, which wasn't true.

I didn't want to define myself as a victim. I didn't want others to define me that way. I still don't. I told myself I was perfectly fine – I didn't have anything to heal

from. It was many years before I purchased my first “self-help” book for abuse victims. I started reading it and never finished it. *“I don’t need that stuff.”* I told myself. It was only after I had written my own book that it occurred to me to look again for resources to aid my healing. When I did start reading some of those resources, I realized I wasn’t the only one to have felt those feelings of rejection, shame, and worthlessness.

Our past always affects us. We don’t get to leave it behind like it never happened. That would be like losing a leg and going around trying to pretend you could still function exactly the same. You can lose a leg and learn to walk again, but it will be different. Emotional healing is very much the same.

From 2000 to 2013, I was Coping, and Coping pretty well, but I still carried some of the burdens I had brought from Captivity around with me. Shame, guilt, depression, and a feeling of unworthiness were always tucked away in a little corner ready to come out again if I let them. Anytime I was feeling especially vulnerable about something else that wasn’t going quite right in life, at work or at home, those feelings would start whispering to me, compounding whatever else I was dealing with.

Ultimately, it’s our decisions and determination that will allow us to move beyond the Coping phase. Until we reach the Conquest phase, we are much more vulnerable to influences that hurt us.

Be careful who and what you allow to influence you, especially in areas where you are still not strong. It’s important to be mindful of what thoughts you allow yourself to think, what words you allow yourself to say, and what actions you allow yourself to take.

Even a little tiny crack can grow to destroy a strong foundation if we let it. Be very careful to seek the positive

things you want to grow in your life, instead of the negative things you want to leave behind.

Conquest

The third phase is the Conquest phase where you are truly living in the light and have reached a complete victory over the past. Let me be clear – you can physically be in a prison, but emotionally you are able to reach this phase, and you are in a place of light

This phase is only possible with God's love, healing, and forgiveness and isn't dependent on anything except you.

I couldn't have written this book five years ago because I hadn't achieved victory at that time. I had learned to be resilient in many ways, but I was still on the rebound emotionally about my past.

Conquest is just that – complete victory. When we are living *Beyond Bound and Broken*, we are living in this phase. We have mastered resilience and have learned to thrive in spite of our circumstances. That doesn't mean life gets easy all of a sudden – far from it. It simply means we are better equipped to deal with the storms of life because we have learned to be resilient. The more resilience you have, the faster you can spring back up when life, or Satan, knocks you down. There will still be times when you get knocked down, but now you have learned how to get up again and again. This is the place where you have learned to find contentment in the small things as much as the big things.

I reached the Conquest phase on August 14, 2013 when I told a room full of 200 people I wasn't going to let my past hold me back, and in doing so, I proved it.

The greatest step for me on my rise to resilience was realizing I didn't need anyone to empower me. God had already empowered me. When we talk about empowering someone, we really mean equipping them, giving him or her tools or knowledge to help them. Resilience comes from within.

Emotional resilience isn't dependent on your physical circumstances.

We always have the freedom to choose resilience. Viktor Frankl, concentration camp survivor, said, "*The last of human freedoms is the ability to choose one's attitude in a given set of circumstances.*"

We always have the freedom to choose faith over fear. We always have the choice to claim grace and have gratitude. Someone close to me once said, "*Freedom is such a sacred thing that not even God Himself imposes His will on any man.*"

To be resilient, I had to learn to change my thoughts. There was no reason to spend energy in wishful thinking, fantasizing my parents had been the parents I wished they had been. I had to accept reality and move on.

It's so very simple and yet so difficult to do. To move through each phase and ultimately reach our own victory, we must start by changing our thoughts. Our thoughts will determine our feelings, and our feelings start to determine what we do, what we say, and where we end up.

To change my thoughts, I had to change the way I was thinking and what I was thinking. I started to do this by reading books and listening to audios that were focused on thinking positive and how positivity can affect you overall.

Norman Vincent Peale said, "*Our emotional life is profoundly regulated by our thought life.*"

It's not that I was a negative person when I was in the Captivity or Coping phase. Far from it, I've always known keeping a positive outlook and attitude was the only way to be effective in living life and overcoming negativity. I have always tried to proactively identify what I have to be thankful for, rather than reacting to what I have to be bitter about.

It's not that I've ever let myself stay negative for long, but when I became more intentional about positive thoughts, attitude, and intentional personal growth, I rapidly accelerated myself to the Conquest phase. Once you discover a new way of thinking, you can't go back and un-think it!

You've heard it before – *“Garbage In, Garbage Out.”* When I learned to start changing my thoughts on purpose by focusing on controlling them, rather than letting them control me, I rapidly realized which thoughts didn't serve me well.

It's much like realizing you can affect your health by putting good food into your body instead of junk food. If you put good thoughts into your mind, you can affect your emotional health in much the same way.

I probably take it farther than some people. For example, I'm not very tolerant of Facebook “friends” who post negative words, pictures, or comments. If someone posts something negative, I simply “un-friend” them. I don't mean someone sharing their struggles, I mean someone sharing something rude, crude, ugly, profane, demeaning or anything along the lines of blaming someone or putting someone else down. I unfriended someone today for tagging me in a political post without my permission.

Another example is how I don't spend time with negative people. I've left behind friends in the past, not

because I'm better than they are – I'm simply focused on moving in a positive direction. If we aren't going to the same place, there isn't any reason to travel together.

I don't want negative emotions getting even a tiny foothold in my life. That's a door I don't want to open.

I know it sounds simple. It is simple. But, simple doesn't mean easy. It's something I've learned to do over the years, and I've learned to do it much better in recent years. I expect I will continue to improve as I develop my mental discipline in this area. I don't expect to be perfect, but I will always be trying to get better.

The only person who can change your circumstances is you. God helps us in many ways, but many of those ways are the abilities, intellect, and capabilities He gifted each of us with. He expects us to use them.

Questions for Contemplation or Group Discussion

1. In what areas of your life are you in the Captivity phase? The Coping phase? The Conquest phase?
2. What are some ways you can focus on more positive influences in your life? (Some examples could be friends, social media, books, songs, etc.)
3. Think of one or two ways you can intentionally say, or do, something positive this week.
4. Read, reflect, and/or discuss these Bible verses: Romans 8:31; Romans 8:38-39; Lamentations 3:22-23; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Chapter Two
FINDING FORGIVENESS

“To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.”

~ Lewis B. Smedes

Forgiving Yourself

According to some statistics, one out of six women and one out of 33 men in America will be the victim of sexual assault in their lifetime. And, those are only the reported statistics. I imagine there are many others who never report what happened to them. Sadly, what happened to me isn't rare.

The secret I carried around with me was ugly. It was dirty. It was festering inside. I was too ashamed to tell anyone – my dad started sexually abusing me when I was 12 years old. I was innocent. He was not. He would wait until we were at home alone, and then, he would make me dress up for him, so he could take pictures of me. He would tell me it wasn't a sin because God had given me to him to fulfill his needs as a man since my mother didn't. He told me no one else would understand.

It progressed as I got older. By the time I was 17, he was regularly having sex with me and would bargain with me for sexual favors in return for something like an outing with my friends. He started sharing me with other men, whom he would connect with on the Internet, so he could help me find an *“ultimate experience in life.”*

An ultimate experience meant lots of things. One time it meant taking nude pictures of me riding my horse. One time, it meant tying me up naked and beating me with a riding crop until I was black and blue. One time, it meant watching while another man had sex with me. And then, they changed places.

Concentration camp survivor Viktor Frankl was a psychiatrist who shared his experiences and insights from imprisonment in his book, *Man's Search For Meaning*. It's a profound story because of the depth of suffering he and so many others tragically experienced along with his realization that regardless of our circumstances, we have the ability to choose our response and attitude.

What struck me when I read Frankl's book was the realization each of those survivors almost certainly had to learn to forgive themselves. Frankl shared: *"On the average, only those prisoners who could keep alive who, after years of trekking camp to camp, had lost all scruples in their fight for existence; they were prepared to use every means, honest and otherwise, even brutal force, theft and betrayal of their friends, in order to save themselves. We who have come back, by the aid of many lucky chances or miracles – whatever one may choose to call them – we know: the best of us did not survive."*

I can't imagine the depth of his experience or how he learned to survive and later forgive himself for doing so. I know an important part of my ability to move forward to healing was finding a way to forgive myself for my actions. It doesn't mean I would do things differently. It does mean I realize I can't change the past, and I can't have peace without forgiveness.

By age 17, I was living a life of sin and deception. Driven desperately to escape, I sought any outlet I could find. When I discovered the Internet, it was only a matter of time before that became a source of corruption. I started meeting people whom I had met online, sneaking out at night to do so, and then sneaking back inside before morning. No easy task, since I had to climb out of my bedroom window, climb down off the porch roof to the ground, and then walk three quarters of a mile to reach the county dirt road.

It became easier and easier to slip further away from the pure heart I once had. By that point, I was playing the role of a surrogate wife every night for my dad, including intercourse, and I didn't see any reason not to become sexually involved with someone whom I had met online, someone I thought might "*rescue me.*"

That didn't work out. This happened a few times - he would get what he wanted and move on, and I would once again be searching for a savior in the next man I would meet. When one wanted to take nude pictures and even a video of me, I didn't say no. It was several months later before I realized why he pushed me so hard to participate in the video and pretend to be enjoying it. He was selling pornography on the Internet. He had been involved in trafficking and selling pornography of minors, including me, and the FBI tracked me down through him.

I reached a new low point when they contacted my parents and told them. The agents asked me to testify against the man, but I refused to say anything at all. They wanted to talk to me in private, but dad made it clear on the drive down to meet them he would be present for any and all interviews. I knew better than to go against him. The agents didn't realize my dad's anger wasn't the shocked feelings of a parent who realizes his daughter is sexually active, but the jealous and possessive nature of a man who felt like his "*wife*" had cheated on him. I kept my sunglasses on and wouldn't look at the agents.

I was more than ashamed, I felt violated, betrayed, and guilty. I harbored unreasonable anger toward everyone – the agents for contacting my parents and destroying my life, the man for violating my privacy so completely, and my dad for punishing me for what I did. He sat me down in front of my mother and brother and told them what I had done. Then, he demanded to know

when I had my next period, so they would know I wasn't pregnant.

I found the whole experience humiliating. Dad was having sex with me. He knew I was on birth control because he bought it. He also took me to a clinic and made me get tested for HIV/AIDS and punished me for "*endangering his life*" by having sex with someone else. He would righteously lecture me, and then, go right on with his inappropriate relationship with me.

There is much from that time of my life I would rather forget completely. I don't think saying I'm ashamed of my actions conveys the depth of pain, guilt, and worthlessness I felt. I felt like I was such a sinful person, and no one could love me for me instead of for my body.

I still find it difficult to talk about and admit the things I was doing. I would give quite a lot to be able to go back and change it. But, I realize I must choose to forgive myself.

We can't change the past. Regardless of the bad decisions we have made, we must move on and forgive ourselves. For me, that only happens when I realize God has offered me forgiveness. It doesn't mean I will ever stop regretting some choices I made, but I won't continue to beat myself up for it. Forgiveness of self comes before forgiveness of others.

Forgiving Others

Soon after publishing my book, *Ria's Story From Ashes To Beauty*, I had a local book signing in my community. I was sitting at a table with a sign promoting my book. There were also books for sale. One man walked up and

stopped briefly to read the sign before approaching the table.

“I just have one question for you,” he asked me, *“Is he dead or in jail now? He deserves one or the other, and I know you won’t rest until he gets it.”*

Shocked, I mumbled something about it wasn’t important at this point. I always think of great responses after the fact. But typically, I verbally stumble around when I’m surprised by a question or comment. The man moved on, leaving me with my thoughts.

His question assumed I still held hate in my heart towards my dad, and I don’t. I certainly wouldn’t wish harm on someone because I was wronged.

When we can’t offer forgiveness, it only poisons us. Forgiving someone does more for us than it does for them. If we continue to hold on to anger, hurt, or resentment, we will be unable to find peace. The other person may not know how we feel. It only hurts us if we hold on to a wrong done. Even worse, we may feel we have a right to retribution when someone hurts us.

No one has a right to do wrong, regardless of whether someone has wronged him or her. You’ve heard the saying *“Two wrongs don’t make a right.”* How sad it is when two people get divorced, and one person feeling wronged, seeks to make the other one pay for it, usually at the expense of the children they had together.

I wrote about forgiveness in *“Ria’s Story From Ashes To Beauty”* from the perspective of how much it helps us when we forgive someone. That’s a large part of my message - how we can choose to forgive. Sharing my message to help others is why I shared my story to begin with. It’s not about seeking to hurt someone else because I was wronged – it’s about letting go and moving on. I received the following message from a reader. I’m

humbled when my words help someone in their own journey:

“Ria, I just finished reading your book...I will admit I had been hesitant to read it because of the things I knew from your past life.

I think you handled things beautifully and showing how you have forgiven so many people and moved beyond the horrible things that happened in your childhood...So what I got out of it was that there are things that have happened to me in the past year that I need to forgive and forget and move beyond and refocus my life back on promising positive things.

The most important part of the book is the paragraph, which says forgiving another person is part of our own personal growth journey. We must choose to move forward down the path rather than backwards. If there is something in your life you need to forgive, or if there is something you need to let go of in order to move on, and of course the answer is yes, and so that’s what I will be working on.”

None of us are perfect, certainly not me. There are times when, even inadvertently, we will hurt someone else, and we need forgiveness just as much as others do. The Bible says, *“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”* (Matthew 6:14)

The more someone loves you, the more power you have to hurt them, and the more forgiveness you will need from them when you hurt them.

The more you love someone else, the more power they have to hurt you, and the more forgiveness you will need to extend them when they hurt you.

Forgiveness is a gift you give yourself. The other

person might not know or care if you forgive them, but the difference it makes in your life is everything. Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting. It does mean letting go of the blame and the bitterness. Holding on to those negative feelings will only hurt you.

One more thing on forgiving someone else – you shouldn't approach them and tell them you forgive them, unless they ask. Forgiving someone has everything to do with your feelings toward them and not their feelings toward you.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, *“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”*

Forgiving God

Where was God when I was suffering? Where was God when my dad told me his only regret was *“not starting sooner”* so he could have watched my breasts develop? Where was God when I hated my dad for taking away my privacy? Where was God when I found myself so ashamed of what dad was doing to me that I begged him not to tell my mother? Where was God when I was being raped while my father watched and then took his turn? Where was God when I was tied up and beaten with a riding crop until I was black and blue? Where was God when my body betrayed me, and brought me shame, by responding when I didn't want it to? Where was God when I cried out in despair and wanted to simply give up living?

We need to forgive ourselves. We need to forgive others. And, we need to forgive God. Not for His sake, but for ours. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, *“The weak*

can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.”

Playing the victim role allows us to hold on to anger and blame someone or something else for what happened to us. Norman Vincent Peale said, *“Many people suffer poor health not because of what they eat but from what is eating them. If you are harboring any ill will or resentment or grudges, cast them out. Get rid of them without delay. They do not hurt anybody else. They do no harm to the person against whom you hold these feelings, but every day and every night of your life they are eating at you.”*

Sometimes, we suffer consequences from the decisions of someone else. Sometimes, we suffer from the consequences of our own mistakes and decisions. Sometimes, terrible things happen to those who don't deserve it.

I love the story of Job in the Bible. Whenever I start feeling sorry for myself, I remember Job and how he suffered because Satan wanted to test him. Job lost almost everything. He lost his home, his children, and his land. He suffered from boils all over his body. His friends and wife told him to curse God. But, he would not. Job knew God is the source for good not evil. Job questioned God, but then he repented. God restored him in the end.

It's natural to have doubts or to want to question God. As John C. Maxwell says, *“God doesn't mind questions; it's doubt that He hates...No matter how dark our circumstances may grow, we must resist the temptation to doubt God's holy nature.”*

We are human. We all make mistakes. Remember, the bigger the battle, the greater the victory when we do overcome.

God doesn't cause the pain in our lives. God didn't cause my dad to do what he did or my mom to stand by him. God gives us the freedom to choose for ourselves. Satan tempts us to make the wrong choices. We live on

earth with pain, suffering, and sin. Bad things will happen to good people. I had to learn to let go of my anger and stop blaming God for my situation. I learned we sometimes pray for a miracle, and the answer is no.

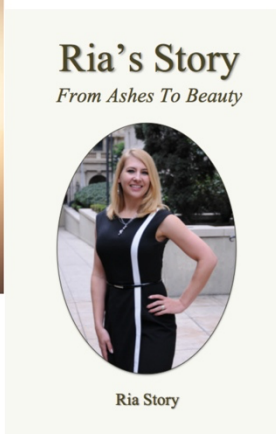
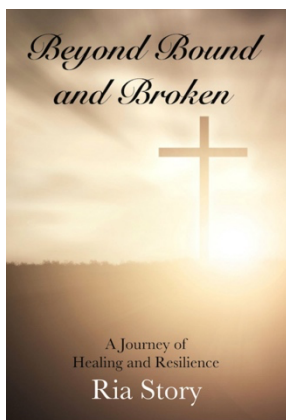
Today, I still pray for miracles, but I also pray for peace with God's answer.

Questions for Contemplation or Group Discussion

1. What do you need to forgive yourself for?
2. What has God given you forgiveness for?
3. Is there something in your life you need to ask someone else to forgive?
4. Who do you need to forgive?
5. Read, reflect, and/or discuss these Bible verses: Matthew 6:14; Acts 3:19; Ephesians 1:7; Psalms 103:12; Romans 12:2

[Like what you read? Click here to order your copy of Beyond Bound and Broken: A Journey of Healing and Resilience!](#)

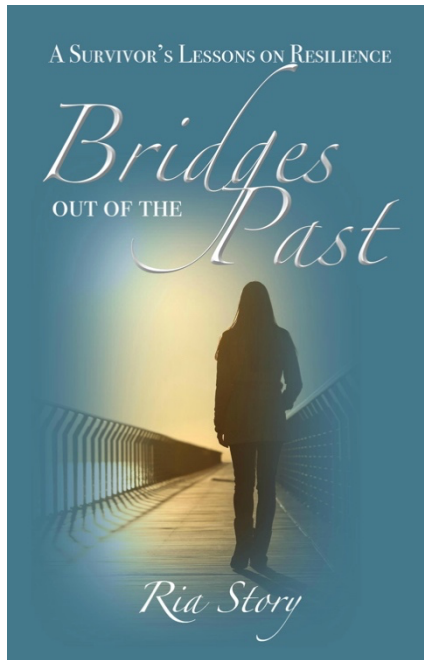
Read more books by Ria



In *Beyond Bound and Broken*, Ria shares how she overcame the shame, fear, and doubt she developed after enduring years of extreme sexual abuse by her father. Forced to play the role of a wife and even shared with other men due to her father's perversions, Ria left home at 19 without a job, a car, or even a high-school diploma. This book also contains lessons on resilience and overcoming adversity that you can apply to your own life.

In *Ria's Story From Ashes To Beauty*, Ria tells her personal story of growing up as a victim of extreme sexual abuse from age 12 – 19, leaving home to escape, and her decision to tell her story

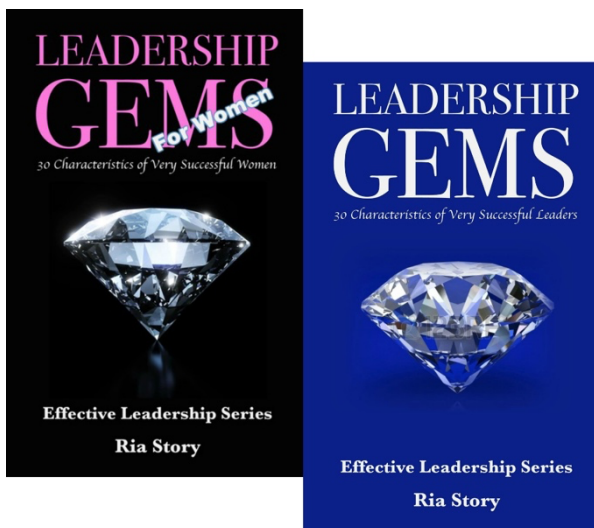
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It's not what happens to you in life. It's who you become because of it. We all experience pain, grief, and loss in life. Resilience is the difference between *"I didn't die,"* and *"I learned to live again."* In this captivating book on resilience, Ria walks you through her own horrific story of more than seven years of sexual abuse by her father. She then shares how she learned not only to survive, but also to thrive in spite of her past. Learn how to overcome challenges, obstacles, and adversity in your own life by building a bridge out of the past and into the future.

(Watch 7 minutes of her story at RiaStory.com/TEDx)

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Note: Leadership Gems is the generic, non-gender specific, version of Leadership Gems for Women. The content is very similar.

Women are naturally high impact leaders because they are relationship oriented. However, it's a “man's world” out there and natural ability isn't enough to help you be successful as a leader. You must be intentional.

Ria packed these books with 30 leadership gems which very successful people internalize and apply. Ria has combined her years of experience in leadership roles of different organizations along with years of studying, teaching, training, and speaking on leadership to give you these 30, short and simple, yet powerful and profound, lessons to help you become very successful, regardless of whether you are in a formal leadership position or not.

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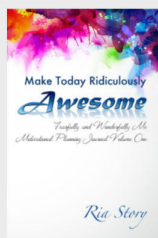
You have hopes, dreams, and goals you want to achieve. You have aspirations of leaving a legacy of significance. You have untapped potential waiting to be unleashed. But, unfortunately, how to maximize your potential isn't something addressed in job or skills training. And sadly, how to achieve success and find significance in life isn't something taught in school, college, or by most parents.

In *ACHIEVE: Maximize Your Potential with 7 Keys to Unlock Success and Significance*, Ria shares lessons to help you become more influential, more successful and maximize your potential in life. Three-page chapters are short, yet powerful, and provide principles on realizing your potential with actionable takeaways. These brief vignettes provide humorous, touching, or sad lessons straight from the heart that you can immediately apply to your own situation.

Beyond Bound and Broken

Motivational Planning Journals

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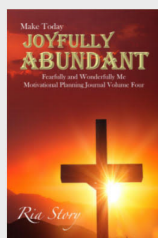
Motivational



Purposeful/Living
Your Legacy



Productivity



Joy/Faith



Resilience



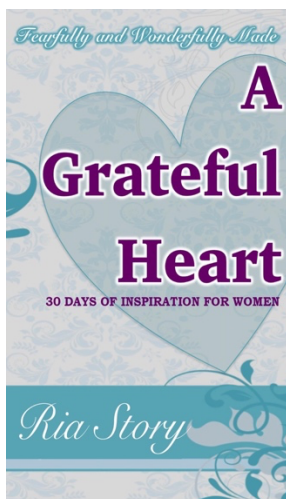
Make the Most
of Today

Start each day with a purposeful mindset, and you will achieve your priorities based on your values.

Just a few minutes of intentional thought every morning will allow you to focus your energy, increase your influence, and make your day all that it can be!

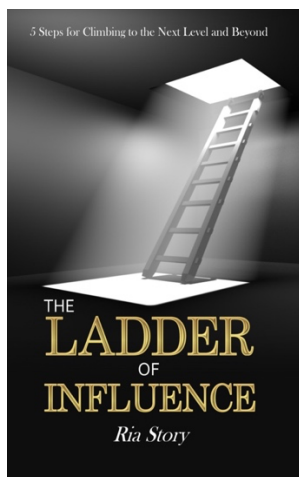
Each journal in the series has different motivational quotes and a motivational theme. Choose one or get all six for an entire year's worth of **Motivational Planning!**

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Become inspired by this 30-day collection of daily devotions for women, where you will find practical advice on intentionally living with a grateful heart, inspirational quotes, short journaling opportunities, and scripture from God's Word on practicing gratitude.

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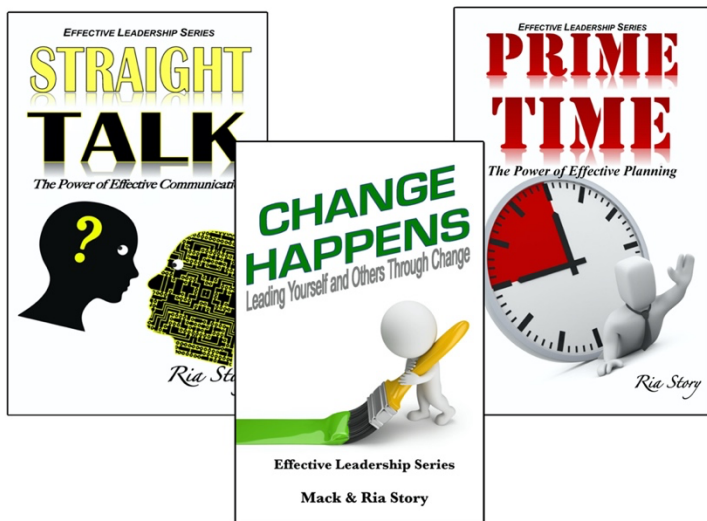


The Ladder of Influence provides a powerful, yet simple, framework to help you realize the practical steps you can take to increase your influence with the people around you: family, friends, co-workers, your boss, etc.

We all have some influence, yet we all want more influence. Simple. But why, how, where, who, and when we influence others as well as how we in turn are influenced by others is incredibly complex because people are incredibly complex.

When we have more influence, we have more options, opportunities, and more choices. Life will always be better with more options, more opportunities, and more choices.

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Ria's *Effective Leadership Series* books are written to develop and enhance your leadership skills, while also helping you increase your abilities in areas like communication and relationships, time management, planning and execution, leading and implementing change. Look for more books in the *Effective Leadership Series*:

- *Straight Talk: The Power of Effective Communication*
- *PRIME Time: The Power of Effective Planning*
- *Change Happens: Leading Yourself and Others through Change (Co-authored by Ria & Mack Story)*
- *Leadership Gems & Leadership Gems for Women*

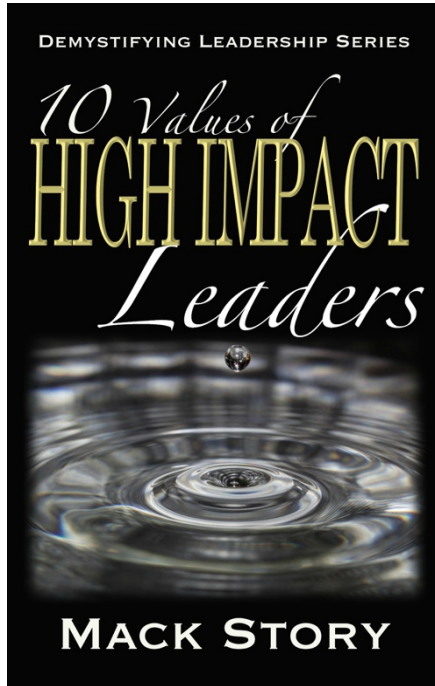
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You have untapped potential to do, have, and be more in life. But, developing your potential and becoming the best version of yourself will require personal transformation. You will have to transform from who you are today into who you want to become tomorrow.

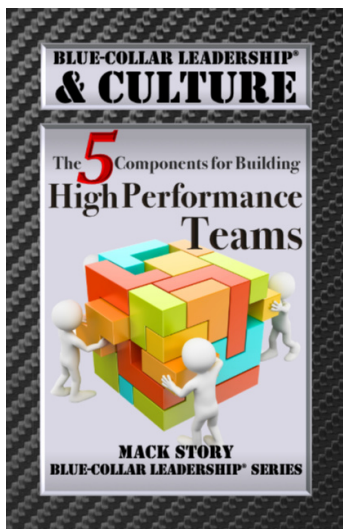
Ria Story brings unique insight in her book, “Fearfully and Wonderfully Me: Become the Woman You are Destined to Be” and the accompanying workbook to help you: believe in yourself and your potential; embrace your self-worth; overcome self-limiting beliefs; increase your influence personally & professionally; and achieve your goals & develop a mindset for success. These two resources will empower you to own your story, write a new chapter, and become the woman and leader you are destined to be.

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High impact leaders align their habits with key values in order to maximize their influence. High impact leaders intentionally grow and develop themselves in an effort to more effectively grow and develop others. These *10 Values* are commonly understood. However, they are not always commonly practiced. These *10 Values* will help you build trust and accelerate relationship building. Those mastering these *10 Values* will be able to lead with speed as they develop 360° of influence from wherever they are.

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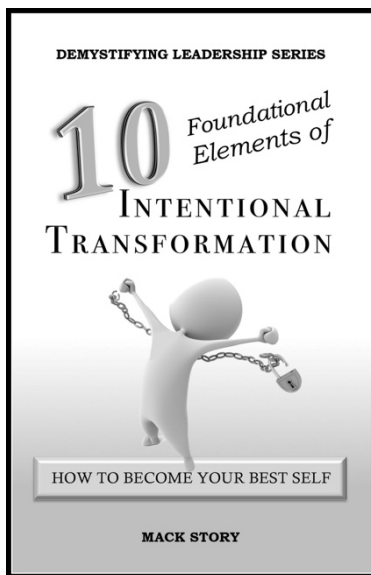


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In *Defining Influence*, Mack breaks down many of the principles that will allow anyone at any level to methodically and intentionally increase their positive influence.

Mack blends his personal growth journey with lessons on the principles he learned along the way. He's not telling you what he learned after years of research, but rather what he learned from years of application and transformation. Everything rises and falls on influence.

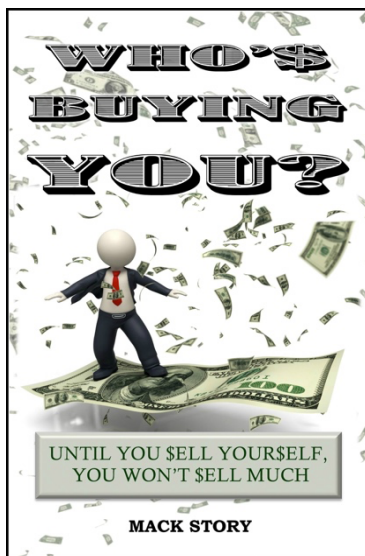
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10 Foundational Elements of Intentional Transformation serves as a source of motivation and inspiration to help you climb your way to the next level and beyond as you learn to intentionally create a better future for yourself. The pages will ENCOURAGE, ENGAGE, and EMPOWER you as you become more focused and intentional about moving from where you are to where you want to be.

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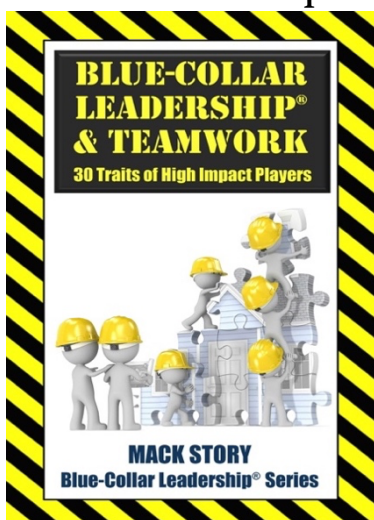
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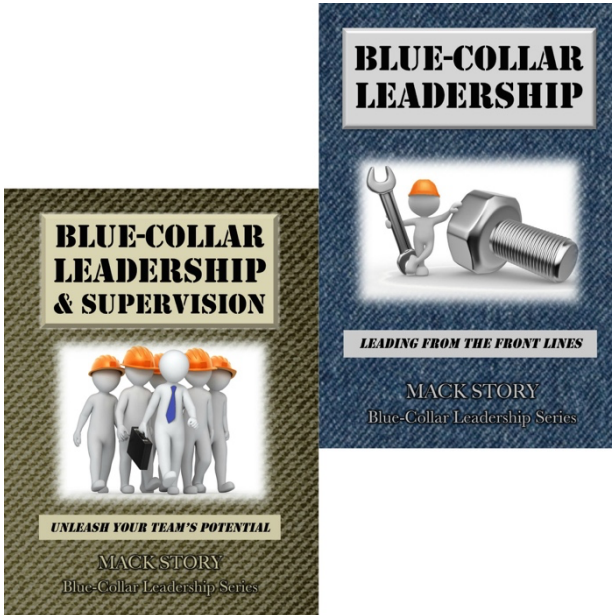
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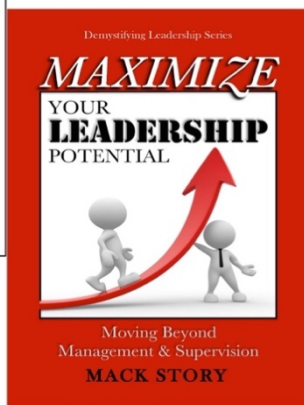
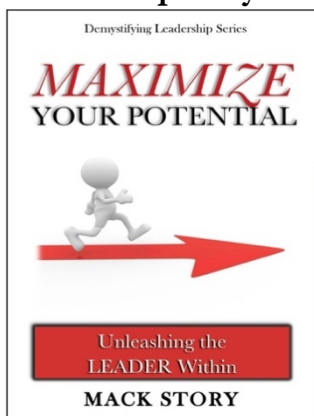


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