

# **WISHCRAFT**

How to Get What You  
Really Want

**BARBARA SHER**

with Annie Gottlieb

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**To my mother,  
who has always believed in me.**

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–BARBARA SHER

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–ANNIE GOTTLIEB

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# Introduction

This book is designed to make you a winner.

Not the Vince Lombardi, get-out-there-and-stomp-‘em kind—unless that’s really your heart’s desire. But I don’t believe it. I don’t think most of us get real pleasure out of stomping the competition and ending up all alone on top of some mythical heap. That’s just a booby prize we go after because nobody ever told us what winning *is*. I have my own definition, and it’s a very simple, very radical one.

Winning to me means getting what you want. Not what your father and mother wanted for you, not what you think you can realistically get in this world, but what *you want*—your wish, your fantasy, your dream. You’re a winner when you have a life you love, so that you wake up every morning excited about the day ahead and delighted to be doing what you’re doing, even if you’re sometimes a little nervous and scared.

Is that you? If it isn’t, what would make it that way for you? What’s your fondest dream? It might be to live in peace on your own five-acre farm, or to step out of a huge Rolls-Royce with flashbulbs popping; to take pictures of rhinoceroses in Africa, or become a vice president of the company where you now type and file; to adopt a child or make a movie. . . start your own accounting business or learn to play the piano. . . open a dinner theater or get your pilot’s license. Your dream will be as individual as you are. But whatever it is—and whether it’s grand or modest, fantastic or practical, far away as the moon or just around the corner—as of right now I want you to start taking it very, very seriously.

Contrary to what you may have been taught, there is nothing frivolous or superficial about what you want. It isn't a luxury that can wait until you've taken care of all the "serious" business of life. It's a necessity. *What you want is what you need.* Your dearest wish comes straight from your core, loaded with vital information about who you are and who you can become. You've got to cherish it. You've got to respect it. Above all, you've got to *have* it.

And you can.

Wait a minute. You've heard that before. If you're at all like me, the very words "You can do it!" are enough to set off a little alarm bell in your head. "The last time I fell for *that*, I broke every bone in my body! It's a tough world out there, and I'm not in such great shape in here. I don't think I'm up for any more of that positive-thinking stuff. Maybe *you* can do it. I happen to know from hard personal experience that I can't."

As the bruised victim of every success book and program that ever promised me ten easy steps to self-esteem, self-discipline, will power, or a positive attitude, I know what I'm talking about when I say this book is different. I wrote it for people like me—people who were born without any of the virtues that made Horatio Alger great and who have given up all hope of ever developing them. Can you persevere? I can't. There is no diet of any kind, physical, emotional, or financial, that I haven't fallen off by Wednesday if I started it on Monday. Self-discipline? I jogged once—I think it was about four years ago. Self-confidence? I've walked out of dozens of seminars bursting with it. It lasted three days. I'm an ace procrastinator, I love nothing better than to watch old movies on the Late Show when I'm supposed to be doing something important. My positive attitudes are invariably followed by gloomy slumps. As a well-meaning but tactless friend once said to me, "Barbara, if you can make it, anyone can."

And I did.

I landed in New York City eleven years ago, divorced and penniless, with two children to support and a B.A. in Anthropology. (I hope you're chuckling, because it means you know exactly what that's worth.) We had to go on welfare until I found a job. But luckily, I found one I loved, working with people, not with paper. Over the next ten years I started and ran two very successful businesses of my own, wrote two books and the training

manual for my seminars, and raised those two boys up healthy and sweet. (I lost twenty pounds, too. And I even quit smoking. Twice.) And all this without the slightest noticeable self-improvement. I still can't stick to things. I still have a rotten attitude a lot of the time. But I made it—on my own terms—and I love my life even on the days when I hate myself. By my own definition, I am a winner. And that means you can be, too.

How?

I have the kind of unholy respect for that little three-letter word that someone who's been starving has for bread. If, ten years ago, some kind soul had given me hard information on how to turn my dreams into realities, instead of just assuring me blandly that it could be done, it would have saved me an incredible amount of time and anguish. As long as I kept trying to believe in myself and reform all my bad habits, I kept crashing—and blaming myself. It wasn't until I gave up on ever fixing *me* and tried to improvise a set of aids that would work for me anyway (because I wasn't going to go to my grave without getting what I wanted, whether I deserved it or not) that I stumbled on the real secret behind the scenes of all successful people's lives. It's not superhero genes and a jaw of steel, like the myths say. It's something much simpler. It's know-how and support.

To start creating the life you want, you don't need mantras, self-hypnosis, a character-building program, or a new toothpaste. You do need practical techniques for problem-solving, planning, and getting your hands on materials, skills, information, and contacts. (See Chapters 6, 7, and 8 on "Plotting the Path to Your Goal.") You need common sense strategies for coping with human feelings and foibles that aren't going to go away, like fear, depression, and laziness. (See Chapter 5, "Hard Times, or The Power of Negative Thinking," and Chapter 9, "Winning Through Timidation.") And you need ways of riding out the temporary emotional storms your life changes can cause in your closest relationships—while still getting the extra emotional support you need for risk-taking. (See Chapter 10, "Don't-Do-It-Yourself.")

That's the "craft" part of Wishcraft. It is based on the needs and potentialities of human beings as we are, not as we ought to be. I had to figure it all out for myself, by trial and error. I don't think you should have to do it the hard way. So I'm giving you the results of my experiment: techniques already tested by thousands of women and men who have used them in Success



Teams to bring their dreams to life—from horse ranches to hand bookbinding, from choral singing to city planning, from writing children’s books to selling blue-chip stocks. The whole second half of this book is a detailed answer to the question, “How?” All I’m going to tell you right now is that you won’t have to change yourself because, one, it can’t be done, and two, you’re fine the way you are. With nothing more than pencil and paper, your imagination, your family and your friends, you’re going to create a life-support system that will do much of the hard work for you and free you to function at your best.

But first, of course, you have to know what you want.

The first half of this book is all about wishing. Unlike the skills for bringing dreams into actuality, which are nuts-and-bolts skills like engineering or carpentry, wishing doesn’t have to be learned. It’s inborn in human beings the way flying is in a bird. For your desirous imagination to take wing, nothing—no knowledge—has to be added to you. But it’s very likely that something *does* have to be taken away: the spellbinding cultural curse that says, “It can’t be done,” and the heavy weight of discouragement you may be carrying if you’ve tried for your dreams before and failed. Because so many of us never were told how to make our dreams happen, after a few tries we assumed it was impossible or horribly difficult. So we adjusted our sights downward and settled for what we thought we could get. But it’s a funny thing: the craft of WISHCRAFT won’t really work for you unless you bring your highest hopes and deepest dreams to it. Because while techniques and strategy are the “how” of winning, wishing is the all-important “why”—the power source that makes all that machinery run.

Our language is full of phrases that tell us wishing is unrealistic and impotent: “Wishing won’t make it so.” “She wants the moon.” “Idle fantasy.” “He’s an incurable dreamer.” That’s nonsense. Wishing and dreaming are the beginning of all human endeavor. Look—mankind wanted the moon for thousands of years, and in the twentieth century we got there. That’s what *wishing plus technique* can do: it can change reality. It’s true that wishing *alone* won’t make it so. Like steam without an engine, it just dissipates. But technique without desire is like a cold and empty engine: it won’t go. If you’ve ever found it difficult to do things, stop and consider what you’ve been finding it difficult to do: typing? digging ditches? mopping floors? You can do them if you have to, but it’s awfully hard to get your heart into any of them as a lifetime goal.

There are plenty of hard-working, responsible men and women in our society who do know *how* to get things done but have never felt free to explore themselves and find out *what* they want to do. If you are one of them, the first half of this book will be a revelation. It will show you how and why you may have lost touch with your dreams, and it will give you simple, enjoyable exercises for rediscovering them. And then it will help you shape a real-world goal out of what you love. So far from being “impractical” or “irresponsible,” doing what’s closest to your heart is like striking oil: you tap into a surge of energy that will propel you to the heights of success.

If, on the other hand, you’ve picked up this book already knowing what you want and just looking for clear instructions on how to get it, you may be tempted to skip to the “craft” part. Take the time to read “wish” anyway. It will help you define your goals more clearly than you ever have before—which is half the battle toward getting them—and I promise that it will greatly enrich your sense of what's possible in one human lifetime.

The well-known psychotherapist Rollo May once wrote a book called *Love and Will*. This book is about *love and skill*—the two vital ingredients of real success. Here’s to yours.