

PICADOR

Discussion Guide

Lead from the Outside

by Stacey Abrams

National leader Stacey Abrams has written *the* guide to harnessing the strengths of being an outsider and succeeding anyway.



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ABOUT THE BOOK

Leadership is hard. Convincing others—and yourself—that you are capable of taking charge and achieving more requires insight and courage. *Lead from the Outside* is the handbook for outsiders, written with an eye toward the challenges that hinder women, people of color, the working class, members of the LGBTQ community, and millennials ready to make change. Stacey Abrams uses her hard-won insights to break down how ambition, fear, money, and failure function in leadership, and she includes practical exercises to help you realize your own ambition and hone your skills. *Lead from the Outside* discusses candidly what Stacey has learned over the course of her impressive career in politics, business and the nonprofit world: that differences in race, gender, and class provide vital strength, which we can employ to rise to the top and create real and lasting change.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Before starting to read *Lead from Outside*, what do you believe are some of the challenges underrepresented groups, such as people of color or LGBTQ+ people in politics, face? Do you expect your views to shift or strengthen? In what ways do you hope this guide will help you?
2. Abrams begins her book with a defining moment in her young adult life: being selected as a Rhodes Scholarship finalist when she thought she did not stand a chance against her white peers. How might that anecdote be relevant to her future as an attorney, and eventually, Minority Leader?
3. Abrams discusses her personal experience as a minority leader in detail as a way to “help locate our ambition and use it to create a path to leadership that does not bow to inner doubts or outside prejudice.” Through personal questions and exercises at the end of each chapter, she puts her experience, drive, and perspective directly in parallel to your own. How impactful is this process? Do you see yourself through her lived experiences?
4. Abrams stood up to former Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson—a man she admired—to question his beliefs and policies: “In front of the cameras and the crowd, I demanded to know what the mayor had done for the dispossessed youth of Atlanta.” Have you ever stood up to a person whose beliefs you thought aligned with yours, or a person you simply disagreed with? If you could go back, would you do anything differently?
5. Abrams’ passion and drive propelled her to raise money and help African Americans register to vote, even though she was simultaneously being greatly criticized for earning a large salary. The hypocrisy of the criticism did not destabilize her, and she managed to register “tens of thousands.” Have you ever been criticized for something you were passionate about? Were you ever implicitly told to tone down your efforts?
6. On finding a mentor of any kind, Abrams writes, “you must first verify that you are a person worth the investment of time and energy you seek, which can be a daunting task.” Do you find that statement controversial, or is it affirming? How does it fit within a guide about your leadership capabilities and assertiveness?
7. In her introduction, Abrams writes, “what we’re in pursuit of is power: the power to control our lives, to change our fates, and to win what some have been raised to take for granted.” After reading her chapter “Money Matters,” how do you understand that claim? How are knowledge, wealth, and power all intertwined and debilitating to underrepresented groups?
8. Abrams breaks down an inherent prejudice she has always faced: “what we confront is a tacit call for meekness, to hide our lights lest we become too noticeable and change the discussion.” Do such methods of silencing have a presence in your home and/or work life? If witnessed rather than experienced, how might you stand up against it?
9. Abrams’ family, and especially her parents, are extremely present throughout her narration in a variety of ways from providing the reason for her context of poverty in a highly educated Black family, to being some of the first people to stand up for her when her voice was belittled. How has Abrams’ relationship with her family impacted her decisions and the person she is today? How have your close ones helped shape you in significant ways?

10. Abrams admits that while working at her company, her ambition was misplaced: “My ego balked at not having the highest titles in our companies, until I realized I actually didn’t want the role of CEO.” Have you ever been blindsided by having to choose between a more prestigious title and what you personally wanted to accomplish?

11. When discussing private life and work life, Abrams refuses to talk about a “work-life balance” but rather a “Work-Life Jenga... restacking along as you go.” She does not believe that both can be weighed equally, as both strike at unprecedented moments, life often taking over on the work. Based on your experience, do you agree? Why/why not?

12. Abrams ends her book with a positive take on her critics: “There’s a colloquialism I’ve embraced: let your haters be your motivators.” Is that easier said than done? Have you been able to transform negativity aimed at you into productivity?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stacey Abrams is an author, serial entrepreneur, nonprofit CEO and political leader. After eleven years in the Georgia House of Representatives, seven as Minority Leader, Abrams became the 2018 Democratic nominee for Governor of Georgia, where she won more votes than any other Democrat in the state’s history. She has founded multiple organizations devoted to voting rights, training and hiring young people of color, and tackling social issues at both the state and national levels; and she is a lifetime member of the Council on Foreign Relations. Abrams is the 2012 recipient of the John F. Kennedy New Frontier Award and the first black woman to become the gubernatorial nominee for a major party in the United States.



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