



Now, Near, Next: A Practical Guide for Mid-Career Women to Move from Professional Serendipity to Intentional Advancement

Cynthia Bentzen-Mercer

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Amplify Publishing

(260pp)

978-1-63755-893-5

The inspiring career guidebook Now, Near, Next encourages women to invest in themselves, their values, and their futures.

Cynthia Bentzen-Mercer and Kimberly K. Rath's self-promoting career guide *Now, Near, Next* is geared toward women who are midcareer, whom it encourages to reevaluate the present and plan for the future.

Based on data and interviews gathered from over two hundred midcareer women, Bentzen-Mercer and Rath argue that women spend too much time reacting to in-the-moment concerns and not enough time preparing for what comes next. They call this decision errant: spending the middle of one's career with one's head down means failing to embrace the future. To counter such behaviors, the book recommends a paradigm shift—a three-step blueprint for practicing self-agency, investing in oneself, and charting an intentional path forward. Its interactive work includes journal prompts, goal setting exercises, and challenges designed to help women align their talents with their values, reject imposter syndrome, speak up, and adjust to new challenges.

In prose directed by urgency and momentum, each chapter builds upon the last, promoting introspection and change throughout. However, the book's examples are sometimes insular and self-referential, as with Bentzen-Mercer's interjection that she faced a career-altering shock while working on this book, forcing her to apply the *Now, Near, Next* framework to her own life—a testimonial designed to add credence to the method. This is too reflective of the book's more self-promotional elements. Indeed, there are frequent mentions of the Talent Plus personality assessment, sold by Rath's business and available at a discount with a provided code, and the complementary *Now, Near, Next Companion Guide*. Portions of the book are built around these outside tools, limiting its use as a single volume.

Further, distracting stylistic decisions and question-raising presentations interrupt the book's delivery. While authorship is attributed to both Bentzen-Mercer and Rath, for example, much of the book reflects Bentzen-Mercer's perspective alone; Rath contributes the afterword. And while each chapter ends with the personal reflection of a midcareer woman, it is often unclear who is telling each story. In addition, the inclusion of quite familiar quotes, as with Oscar Wilde's encouragement to "Be yourself; everyone else is already taken," and common career advice, such as to develop a personal board of directors, undercuts the book's sense of originality.

Inspiring but self-promotional, the career guidebook *Now, Near, Next* encourages women to invest in themselves, their values, and their futures.

HANNAH PEARSON (February 16, 2024)

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