

HOW TO TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR OWN LIFE

A SELF-HELP GUIDE TO
MOVING FORWARD

SERIES 1

CATHY HARRIS



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my two daughters who have always believed in my efforts to educate the community.

Preface

Note to the Reader

Are you having a “temporary setback” because of the current administration, the outsourcing of jobs and the downsizing of corporations? If you answered yes to this question, then this book is for you.

Now more than ever community activists must speak for the people who have no voice such as the young, the elderly, the poor, the homeless, injured workers of America, and other sick people. Due to the current economy, these persons are now living without the basic essentials of life which are food, clothing, and shelter. We all need to be in the business of taking care of people. If we are not, then we need to seriously look at how we are living our lives.

The tragedy is that this book is necessary. The good news is that once educated on your options, you can make more educated decisions on how to live your life. This book provides options that can help put you on the right track toward taking control of your own life. It will guide you to the resources, mentors, and experts that you need to put you on the right path to peace, joy, and happiness.

This is the first of a “Take Control” series of books designed to provide you with powerful information that will allow you to take control of your own life and move forward. If you are not having a temporary setback, then buy this book and give it to others such as family

members, friends, and neighbors who might need a little help in moving forward.

Cathy Harris - Community Organizer & Activist
www.cathyharrisspeaks.com

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge all the community activists who have stood on the front lines and fought for those who couldn't fight for themselves. Thanks for sharing my passion for the community. Your exemplary courage will surely play a part in changing history.

I would like to thank my daughter, Monique Harris, an English and creative writing graduate student, for her expertise in helping me make this book more personable. A family of writers can truly change the world.

Special thanks to Tia Shabazz of Pentouch for her editorial services. Her editorial guidance and insight made this project a great learning experience. I look forward to working with her in the future.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION

PREFACE – NOTE TO THE READER

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SECTION I

HOW TO BE ACCOUNTABLE IN YOUR PERSONAL LIFE – TAKE ACTION NOW!

1. HOW TO SURVIVE EMPLOYMENT
2. HOW TO SAVE YOUR HOME
3. HOW TO GET YOUR FINANCES IN ORDER
4. HOW TO CHANGE CAREERS
5. HOW TO SET UP YOUR OWN NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

SECTION II

HOW TO HOLD THE COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABLE

6. HOW TO MOBILIZE EFFECTIVELY IN THE COMMUNITY
7. HOW TO BECOME AN EFFECTIVE LEADER IN THE COMMUNITY
8. HOW TO GET YOUR CANDIDATE INTO OFFICE
9. HOW TO GET LEGISLATION PASSED
10. HOW TO CHANGE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM
11. HOW TO STOP RACIAL PROFILING AND POLICE BRUTALITY
12. HOW TO SET UP LEGAL DEFENSE FUNDS (WRONGFUL TERMINATIONS, FALSE IMPRISONMENT, RACIAL PROFILING, POLICE BRUTALITY, ETC.)

SECTION III

HOW TO CHALLENGE WORKPLACE PRACTICES

13. HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND SURVIVE DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE
14. HOW TO BLOW THE WHISTLE ON UNETHICAL PRACTICES BOTH ON AND OFF THE JOB
15. HOW TO SURVIVE THE WORKER'S COMPENSATION SYSTEM

SECTION IV

HOW TO CREATE YOUR OWN MEDIA OUTLETS

16. HOW TO BUILD A PRESENCE ON THE INTERNET
17. HOW TO WORK EFFECTIVELY WITH THE MEDIA WHILE AVOIDING COSTLY MISTAKES
18. HOW TO LAUNCH YOUR OWN MEDIA CAMPAIGN ON ISSUES YOU ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT (WRONGFUL TERMINATIONS, FALSE IMPRISONMENTS, RACIAL PROFILING, POLICE BRUTALITY, ETC.)
19. HOW TO BECOME A FREELANCE WRITER
20. HOW TO BECOME A SYNDICATED COLUMNIST
21. HOW TO WRITE A BOOK
22. HOW TO BECOME A PROFESSIONAL SPEAKER

APPENDIX 1 IMPORTANT LINKS

APPENDIX 2 CAREER LINKS

BIBLIOGRAPHY

GLOSSARY

INDEX

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SECTION I

HOW TO BE ACCOUNTABLE IN YOUR PERSONAL LIFE

CHAPTER 1

HOW TO SURVIVE UNEMPLOYMENT

On May 1, 2005, I was terminated from my job after 27 years with the federal government. Along with my job, I lost my retirement, health, and life insurance. As I continued to fight back with an attorney, however, the agency (Customs and Border Protection) and I settled the case and I retired on July 27, 2005.

I was very satisfied with how everything turned out. I knew it was time to move on and become the person I was really meant to be.

Sometimes in life we will be thrown a “curve ball.” Either we handle those curve balls or those curve balls will handle us. After my termination, I knew I had no other choice but to build another career. I chose to handle that curve ball.

I was excited about the new opportunities this termination had afforded me. I looked forward to moving on and changing my life. I set out on a new career path and even trademarked my own slogan “When They Fired Me, God Hired Me” to uplift others who have been wrongfully fired from their jobs.

No one is immune to being terminated. In this economy anyone can be laid off at practically any time. Hot-shot executives, top-notch technicians, super salespeople, and blue-and white-collar workers down in the trenches can all lose their jobs on a moment’s notice.

Consequently, we should all have or be devising some type of ultimate escape plan—our step-by-step strategy outlining what we'll do if or when we get laid off.

Here are some strategies to fight off the proposed termination and how to react if you are fired:

KEEP YOUR HEAD

When you get the news that you are being let go (fired, terminated or laid off), keep your head. Say as little as possible. Don't scream, don't show your anger, and don't threaten litigation.

Your main goal is to enhance the package. How you conduct yourself in this initial meeting could go a long way toward determining how much severance pay you'll receive.

DON'T ACCEPT THE FIRST OFFER

If the company makes an immediate offer, insist that it be in writing. Don't cave in and accept whatever they offer.

HIRE A LAWYER

Take any offer home with you, study it, and perhaps hire a labor lawyer to evaluate it. Hire him or her not necessarily to negotiate for you but to coach you, inform you of your legal rights, and help you draft a severance package. This severance packet should at least give you everything your other laid-off peers have squeezed out of the company or similar deals offered by other companies in your field.

Aim for higher severance. Shoot for four weeks of pay for each year of service, but be happy with three weeks and settle for two.

To help you negotiate, you can offer to sign a release absolving the company of blame, pledging, “I won’t sue you” and “I won’t compete against you.”

Be sure you also get your share of any bonus or profit-sharing plan for which you are eligible. For example, if you are due to collect a ten percent (10%) annual bonus at year-end and you lose your job at mid-year, you should be paid a five percent (5%) bonus upon leaving.

Make certain that you get the main components of packages: health insurance and severance pay. Many companies stray from the contract and the company might be able to allow for a few more months of pay and medical coverage.

DON'T THREATEN TO SUE

Threatening to sue will simply compel the company to dig in its heels. This company has deeper pockets than you.

If you think you might be fired, hire the best highly experienced employment attorney that you can find beforehand.

MAKE THEM FIRE YOU

Upon hearing that they are being fired, many employees let their pride take control and blurt out, “You can’t fire me, I quit!” Don’t make a rash decision you’ll regret. Once you quit, you lose all your negotiating clout. If you

demand anything in subsequent negotiation, the company representative can turn you down.

TAKE STRESS LEAVE

If you feel you are going to be terminated and you are under great stress, you may legitimately take some stress leave before they hand you a termination letter. Remember, though, many times this leave might be UNPAID.

NOTICE OF PROPOSED TERMINATION

If you are handed a notice of proposed termination, especially if you are employed by the federal government, do not sign it. Tell them you will sign it after conferring with your attorney. Whether you sign the letter or not, you will probably still be terminated but the strategy is to delay the process so you can continue receiving income and health benefits while you seek other employment. Respond to the proposed termination in writing and also request an extension. There is a valid basis for delay. Management is required to review and take into account your responses to the notice.

Other steps to take if you think you might be fired or decide to quit:

- If you plan to quit your job, ask for a reference that day and not before then.

- When you go to a job interview, do not mention anything about being mistreated at a prior job.

FILE YOUR CLAIM

One of the first things you need to do if you are laid off or fired is file your claim for unemployment. Do not procrastinate. File a claim for unemployment insurance at your local state unemployment office on the FIRST business day after you lose your job. If you are denied unemployment benefits, use your last paycheck to hire a labor attorney. Get referrals for attorneys because some of them may cheat you, particularly in light of your vulnerable position.

IF YOU WERE FIRED FOR FILING A DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINT

If you were fired for filing a discrimination complaint, prepare a brief one-page statement for the unemployment office which describes your experience in a work environment made hostile by discrimination.

Inform them that you filed EEO and/or civil complaints against your agency or company and that you felt the firing was retaliatory. You might not know at the time whether or not you will appeal, but inform the unemployment office that you are looking for an attorney to file an appeal. Or, if you have filed the appeal, tell them you expect to succeed. You will have a brief time to complete the paperwork at the unemployment office, so have all your information readily available to fill in the blanks.

If you worked for a federal agency, many will blackball or attempt to bar you from further employment. This is

common practice for federal agencies, so it might be best to open your own business. See Chapter 4 on “How to Change Careers.”

When you apply for another job, you will be asked why you left former jobs, including the federal job you held. State “involuntary separation” and leave it at that.

TAKE TIME TO REGROUP

Unemployment can be extremely stressful whether you knew about the proposed termination or lay-off or it was a surprise to you, so it's best to take time to recover. Take care of yourself by getting plenty of rest, exercising and eating healthy. You will need your energy once you regroup and concentrate on your next step.

While you are regrouping, however, the bills can't wait. So go over your budget and find out where you have been spending money and where you can cut back.

Be realistic about future plans in case you don't have funds coming in right away. Some of the questions that you need to ask yourself are:

- ❑ Do you have money saved?
- ❑ What bills do you have to pay and which bills can you put off for now?
- ❑ Do you have a 401K, Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) (www.tsp.gov) in the federal government or some

other retirement plan from which you can draw funds? This could carry you for a few months, but not forever. During this time, you need to be realistically thinking about your future.

- ❑ If you are single, can you afford to stay where you are?
- ❑ Do you need to move in with family members for now?

Stay positive and think realistically. Tough times mean tough choices. Stay focused on what you really have to do.

Make sure you are not disturbed by family and friends when seeking employment. Explain to them that you need to concentrate during this time.

You might want to write down a plan of action. Writing things down makes it real. Writing them down also keeps you on track.

PUT TOGETHER A DYNAMITE RESUME

Take time to put together a dynamite resume. There are many books at the library and in stores that will guide you in developing a quality resume.

When you are laid off or quit your job, don't flood the job market with resumes. Focus and conduct research on select companies and send out one or two resumes per week. Learn all you can about your target companies. Find out the names of their officers. Then, and only then, send a resume tailored to exactly what

the opening calls for. Be sure to include a cover letter with the resume.

Many employers accept resumes online, and some accept resumes online only, so get access to the Internet at home, a relative's home, library, church, job, community center, or some other place.

Don't forget to write cover letters to go with the different resumes. A good site on how to put together a cover letter and resume is Resume Edge (www.resumeedge.com)

Monster.com (www.monster.com) is one of the largest and most popular job search sites on the Internet. They accept resumes online and forward them to employers, so be sure to sign up and submit your resume to this site.

Other career sites are located on my webpage (www.discrimination101.com/careerlinks.html) and in Appendix B (Career Links).

Be confident when you attend interviews. Prepare for the different interviews and ask the interviewer questions about the job and the department. Remember this is the time to be assertive and demonstrate your knowledge about the company from your research.

Not all training will come from educational institutions. Education is also acquired through books, lectures,

seminars and workshops, Internet, etc., so never stop learning. This will be the time for you to continuously read educational and motivational books. Keep yourself positive by training yourself. Make it a point to read at least 20 to 30 minutes every day. Remember that there is educational material at libraries. You can also order books from online bookstores such as Amazon.com (www.amazon.com). If you choose to order used books, they may cost only a few dollars.

WORK WITH TEMPORARY AGENCIES

Temporary agencies are also called staffing agencies. Some employees attend school between temporary jobs. The disadvantages of working for temporary agencies are that you aren't entitled to receive company benefits such as health, dental or life insurance. If you are a good worker and build a good relationship with the companies at which you are placed, they may offer you permanent employment.

Some new employers might even pay to send you to take free courses so check out your options.

SEEK NEW SKILLS

It's always good to seek out mentors and other experts for help and guidance in any field you wish to explore.

When making a different resume for the different fields that you will be applying for. Now might be the time to tap into your other talents. Remember, we all have other skills so think realistically about what else you can do well.

Now might be the time to go back to school, get trained in another field, or open your own business.

Even if financial aid isn't available to you, you can still take trade classes or college courses. These classes are really inexpensive at community colleges especially at night. Also, the employment office offers free courses on how to sharpen your skills or get your GED.

OPEN YOUR OWN BUSINESS

Go to the Small Business Administration to learn what it takes to open your own business. There is a book entitled "Working Solo" (www.workingsolo.com) which offers several questions to see if you have what it takes to open your own business.

The Small Business Administration (SBA) (www.sba.gov) has an organization called SCORE (www.score.org) through which counselors and retired business people provide free information on opening your own business in any of these business structures:

- ❑ Sole Proprietorship
- ❑ Partnership
- ❑ Limited Partnership
- ❑ Limited Liability Company (LLC)
- ❑ Corporation (for profit)
- ❑ Nonprofit corporation (not-for-profit)

The SBA also offers small business classes. Many of these classes are very inexpensive and offer great information on starting and running your new business.

You might also ask a family member, friend, neighbor, or member of your church who is a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) or tax attorney to explain your tax responsibilities with each business. This will help you decide which type of business to open.

NEVER STOP NETWORKING

There are also business leagues, networks, or resource centers in many cities which will provide you plenty of information, so never stop networking.

When you try to get back into the workplace, knowing someone on the inside is often the key to gaining employment again. Use word-of-mouth advertising to let people know you are seeking employment. Ask family, friends, and neighbors to inform others that you are seeking employment and what type of job you seek.

DON'T BECOME ISOLATED

So often terminations and/or the loss of a job makes people become isolated. Sometimes they resort to unhealthy habits such as excessive drinking, prostitution, or selling drugs. Do yourself a favor and don't become isolated. Continue to stay positive and interact with people.

CHAPTER 22

HOW TO BECOME A PROFESSIONAL SPEAKER

People who develop public speaking skills may also develop into better human beings. Everyone has his or her own story that needs to be told. These life lessons are golden to their audiences. Stories must relate to individuals, yet have a universal message.

Some people start speaking careers in high school, after graduate school and others learn much later that speaking is their destiny. I guess I have known for some time now that I was destined to be a professional speaker. I had so much to say. My story had to be told. I set out on a journey to tell my story while I educated the community. The first thing that I did was to buy a domain name (www.cathyharrisspeaks.com).

Because of a fallen economy, many people are looking into this career. Professional or public speaking can be very lucrative. Some of us are already professional speakers and don't realize it. Legislators have to be speakers to be legislators, for example. Most authors become experts and eventually speakers.

TIPS TO BECOME A GOOD SPEAKER

- ❑ Plan with the audience in mind.
- ❑ Be polished; practice before your presentation.
- ❑ Arrive early; get to know the audience.
- ❑ Have a strong opening then connect logically.
- ❑ Keep the presentation interesting by using examples.
- ❑ When appropriate, make the talk interactive.

- ❑ Visually look the part—dress, eye contact, gestures, body language.
- ❑ Have vocal variety to hold interest.
- ❑ Work the room.
- ❑ End with strength; have a strong closing.

IDENTIFY YOUR SPECIALTY

When deciding that you want to become a professional speaker, identify your specialty. Remember, everyone has some sort of talent that no one else has. What's your target area? Do your homework. Know your subject. Speak on your own background, business experience, military experience, youth leadership, family, education, and current events. Read everything you can on your specialty.

Ask the research librarian in your area to assist you. What industry did you grow up in? Listen to what the marketplace is asking for and get in tune with the problems your target group is facing. Most importantly, give the community what they need or want. What resources or information is the community craving?

Purchase books, cassettes, video albums, and tickets to hear the best speakers you can find. If you don't have funds to purchase this material, then use the library. Listen to tapes and CD's when you are home, at work, or in your car.

UTILIZE SURVEYS

Remember, when deciding to become a speaker, you need to give the community what they need and what they want, then reach in their hearts to see what type of

talents they have. One way to do this is by conducting surveys.

Conduct surveys to help you decide which subjects or topics to speak on. Take a survey of the industry in which you are interested in speaking. Take surveys orally or in writing by mail, in person, by phone, fax, and/or e-mail.

If you conduct the survey by phone, record it. What really helped me in deciding which topics to write or speak about was that I conducted surveys by e-mail. I think the response that you can receive from a survey is essential in giving the community what they need and want.

JOIN TOASTMASTERS

You can take a speech course or join Toastmasters (www.toastmasters.com) to become more productive employees. You will receive formal training on how to be a great speaker. These classes might be just down the street from you or at your job or church. Fees are very low, sometimes only \$30 every six months. Look into these classes and learn how to become a better communicator.

Take as many speaking classes, seminars, and coaching sessions as you can. It's always a good idea to work with professional speaking coaches. Many speaking coaches are located at colleges and universities, so seek them out if you are serious. Like Toastmasters, they

offer exercises to strengthen and tone your speaking voice.

JOIN NATIONAL SPEAKERS ASSOCIATION

You can also become a great speaker by joining the National Speakers Association (NSA) (www.nsa.org) which is similar to Toastmasters. These groups may hold meetings in your community. Their annual conventions are held nationwide.

Other places to get formal training are local continuing adult education classes. They are always looking for speakers.

The networking opportunities and careers built from belonging to Toastmasters International and the National Speakers Association are great. Many of its members go on to become officers locally, then regionally and nationally. Many of their meetings take them to international countries. It's wise to join these groups to improve your communication and speaking skills.

SEMINARS

Presenting seminars in the community will:

- ❑ Help you position yourself or your business in the marketplace.
- ❑ Serve as great promotional services that increase the awareness of your services.
- ❑ Demonstrate your expertise on the subject matter.
- ❑ Establish you as a spokesperson.

- ❑ Provide you with name recognition.
- ❑ Establish you as a consultant on the subject matter.

There are two types of seminars: 1) self-promoted and 2) those hosted by someone else, usually public seminar companies. Some of the public seminar companies include Career Track, American Management Association, Dunn and Bradstreet, Fred Pryor, Keye Productivity Center, National Seminars Group, Padgett-Thompson, and SkillPath, Inc.

These companies market their seminars to mailing lists that bring hundreds of people to hotel meeting rooms for low-cost, one-day learning experiences. The charge generally ranges from \$85 to \$175. Speakers earn from \$200 to \$500 per day, plus a commission on sales of books and tapes.

CONSULTING

The more you make yourself and your expertise available to others, the more you become known in the community and your industry. You can also make yourself available for in-home consulting for which you can charge about \$200 an hour.

OPEN YOUR OWN SPEAKER'S BUREAU

More than five hundred bureaus have been formed in the United States since the mid-1970's. There are very

lucrative careers to opening up your own speaker's bureau. Many speakers who are passionate about speaking go on to open their own speaker's bureau. You can fund the bureau with commissions earned from your speaking engagements. It's a great way to get others speaking on the subjects you are passionate about.

The bi-monthly magazine, *Sharing Ideas*, owned by Dottie Walters, Walters International Speakers Bureau (www.walters-intl.com) charges \$95 for two years and offers updated information on speaker's bureaus.

SPEAK FOR FREE

Never turn down the chance to speak for free on radio, TV or at community events. Remember, speaking for free affords you the opportunity to:

- ❑ Build a reputation
- ❑ Acquire a data base
- ❑ Gain exposure
- ❑ Attract media attention
- ❑ Get referrals
- ❑ Collect testimonials and endorsements

Initially, you might want to get as many unpaid speeches under your belt as possible before you start accepting paid speeches. You will know when it's time to get paid.

PAID SPEAKING FEES

You can start working with speakers' bureaus when your speaking fees reach \$2,000 to \$3,000. You can find

many speaking bureaus on the Internet. Do your research and check them out.

What I have found since choosing to go into this field myself is that professional speakers really make their money when they have a product line such as books, CD's, audiotapes, videos, e-books, etc. These products will continue to educate others long after the speakers are gone.

OTHER AVENUES FOR SPEAKERS

Many speakers are also freelance writers or syndicated columnists. It's always a good idea to build a career as a freelance writer or syndicated columnist before starting your professional speaking career. These writers and speakers tend to be well informed on current events.

There are many places a speaker can begin speaking on issues about which they are passionate. You can also speak at chamber of commerce meetings, rotary clubs, Kiwanis, Lions, Shriners, Hadassah, Women in Business, and at college dormitories, fraternities, and sororities that features speakers and are often interested in local talent.

Many avenues will open for you once you become a speaker. Other avenues for speaking include serving as a panelist, master of ceremonies, infomercial host, commercial spokesperson, expert witness, consultant, coach, troubleshooter, professional advisor, writer of educational articles, trainer, in-house seminar presenter,

workshop presenter, moderator, entertainment/humor speakers on cruise ships, training classes for government agencies, non-profit organizations, trade shows, facilitators, and corporate training programs. Once a company has hired you, you can be hired again. Training can be delivered to a large group or one on one.

CATHY HARRIS
LECTURES, SEMINARS & WORKSHOPS

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If you have enjoyed this book and want more assistance on how to move forward, consider attending one of Cathy's lectures, seminars or workshops.

Lectures, seminars and workshops are planned for the U.S. and internationally. You can benefit from a half, full day or several days of Cathy's lectures, seminars or workshops. She will gladly travel to your city and meet with your group.

Be sure to sign up on her website at:

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CATHY HARRIS CONSULTING SERVICES

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Cathy Harris does for activism what the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. did for the civil rights movement. She gives people what they want and need.

Cathy Harris is an advocate for justice. She is an expert on how to fight back and move forward whether it's in Corporate America or government. As a community organizer and activist, she provides powerful resources and information for people dealing with just about any issue.

She learned early on as a federal whistleblower that the best outlet for a whistleblower is the media; therefore, she is an expert on each section of this book.

Cathy is available for consulting including one-on-one consulting in your home. Contact Cathy at www.angelspress.com or info@angelspress.com.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

“You can sit back and watch as the world goes by or you can find opportunities to make it better.” Cathy Harris

Cathy Harris is a courageous advocate for justice. She embraces the promise of opportunity and democracy for us all. Before embarking on a writing, speaking and consulting career, she, was a Senior Customs Inspector for the U.S. Customs and Border Protection under the Department of Homeland Security.

During her 27 year tenure in the federal government, she received many honors both on the job and in the community. She successfully challenged the federal government on their demoralizing practices against international travelers and employees. Because of her actions, many reforms took place. She was responsible for the introduction of the “Civil Rights for International Travelers Act” and the “Reasonable Search Standards Act” to protect the American people. Her bravery has been recognized by many national newspapers and magazines.

Cathy’s life-altering decision has made an extraordinary impact on many whose lives she has touched. Her bold stance against such a large bureaucracy has made her an unwavering civil rights heroine of the 21st Century.

Being a community organizer and human rights activist, Cathy empowers many through her educational hands-on lectures, seminars and workshops. Her forums inspire others to surmount every obstacle that stands

between them so they can live a more fulfilling existence.

With the release of her first book in 2001, she is hard at work on a line of motivational and non-fiction books. She is a veteran and lives in Atlanta, Georgia.

Cathy is available for Lectures, Seminars and Workshops. She can be contacted through her website at www.angelspress.com, info@angelspress.com, consulting@angelspress.com or (800) 797-8663.

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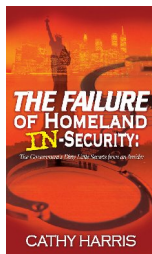
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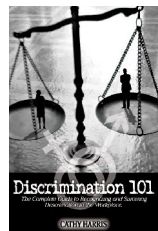
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DISCRIMINATION 101: HOW TO
RECOGNIZE AND SURVIVE DISCRIMINATION
IN THE WORKPLACE (SERIES 1, 2, 3)
ISBN 978-1-933576-03-9

Book Back Cover

THIS BOOK WILL GIVE YOU WHAT YOU WANT AND NEED.

Are you, a family member, a friend or neighbor having a “temporary setback” because of the current administration, the outsourcing of jobs and the downsizing of corporations? If you answered yes to this question – then this book is for you:

You Will Learn:

How to Be Accountable in Your Personal Life

- How to Survive Unemployment
- How to Save your Home
- How to Get Your Finances in Order
- How to Change Careers
- How to Set Up Your Own Non-Profit Organization

How to Hold the Community Accountable

- How to Mobilize Effectively in the Community
- How to Become an Effective Leader in the Community
- How to Get Your Candidate into Office
- How to Get Legislation Passed
- How to Change the Education System
- How to Stop Racial Profiling and Police Brutality
- How to Set Up Legal Defense Funds

How to Challenge Workplace Practices

- How to Recognize and Survive Discrimination in the Workplace
- How to Blow the Whistle on Unethical Practices
- How to Survive the Worker’s Compensation System

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