



# Women Over 55 Reinventing

## Roundtable Summary Report

2025



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# Table of Contents



<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>SPEAKERS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>THEMES</b>	<b>5-10</b>
<b>The Philosophy of Reinvention</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Personal Branding &amp; Identity</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Networking &amp; Community</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Technology &amp; Continuous Learning</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Overcoming Fear &amp; Self-Doubt</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Negotiation &amp; Decision-Making</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>RESOURCES</b>	<b>11</b>

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# Introduction



The Women Reinventors Program was created in response to a growing and powerful reality: women over 55 are not winding down, they are reimagining what's next. Developed in partnership with [Chicago Innovation Foundation](#) and [The Chicago Network](#), and funded by the [RRF Foundation for Aging](#), this program was designed to create space for women to connect, reflect, and explore new possibilities alongside peers navigating similar moments of transition, curiosity, and ambition.

Participants entered the program with a wide range of experiences and aspirations, including career pivots, entrepreneurship, leadership reinvention, and greater alignment between work and life. The themes outlined in this reflection emerged through two interactive roundtable events where participants and panelists engaged in open dialogue, shared personal experiences, and exchanged practical insights.

Together, these conversations surfaced common patterns around how women are layering new purpose onto deep experience, reclaiming visibility and confidence, and redefining success in ways that feel authentic, flexible, and impactful.

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# Speakers



**Maria Doughty**  
**MODERATOR**  
**The Chicago Network**  
President & CEO



**MarySue Barrett**  
**MSB Policy**  
**Consulting LLC**  
Founder



**Lisa Wagamon**  
**RUSH Health**  
Former President



**Dorri McWhorter**  
**Executives' Club**  
**of Chicago**  
President & CEO



**Susan Abrams**  
**Golden Seeds**  
Managing Director  
& Chicago Co-Lead



**Maria Wynne**  
**Federal Home Loan Bank**  
**of Chicago**  
Former Independent  
Director



**Ellen Carnahan**  
**Machrie Enterprises**  
**LLC**  
Principal



## THEME 1

# THE PHILOSOPHY OF REINVENTION

Reinvention is about building on existing experience rather than starting over. It involves leveraging accumulated wisdom, embracing adaptability, and creating a portfolio of meaningful roles that evolve over time.

- **Layering vs. Starting Over:** Reinvention is not a total pivot or starting from zero; it is adding layers of purpose, wisdom, and courage to your existing foundation.
- **Crystallized Intelligence:** This is the wisdom gained across a lifetime through pattern recognition. The goal is to shift from “learner mode” to “intelligence mode.”
- **The Multi-Dimensional Self:** Avoid “the box”—the limited representation of how others see you. You must see yourself dynamically before you can communicate that to others.
- **Adaptive Leadership:** Being comfortable with the uncomfortable.
- **Portfolio Life:** Success after 55 is less about retiring and more about building a “portfolio” of meaningful roles—combining work, learning, service, and personal interests.

# PERSONAL BRANDING & IDENTITY

Personal branding begins with clarifying who you are now and communicating that clearly to others. Authenticity, visibility, and embracing a multi dimensional identity help shape how others understand your value.

- **The Two-Step Process:**
  1. **Internal:** Define who you are and recognize your strengths/triggers.
  2. **External:** Communicate all versions of yourself so others “get it.”
- **Authenticity & Aging:** As you age, being “unfiltered” and authentic becomes a priority. You can only fake it for so long; showing up as your true self is more sustainable.
- **The Brand Audit:**
  - **Specific Asks:** When seeking help, ask for a specific “slice” rather than a broad request.
  - **Digital Narrative:** “ChatGPT yourself” to see how you are perceived. Control the narrative by leaning into what makes you feel good and addressing negative affiliations.



## THEME 3

# NETWORKING & COMMUNITY

Networking is most effective when rooted in trust and genuine connection. Strong communities are built through integrity, long term relationships, and shared investment rather than transactional exchanges.

- **Trust as Currency:** In a “big small town” like Chicago, integrity is everything. People invest in people they know and trust.
- **Community vs. Networking:** Build genuine connections. Use personal touches (like yearly Valentine’s cards) to maintain bonds.
- **Identify Your Circles:** Look for tips and allies in unexpected places—from professional boards to your child’s soccer sidelines.
- **The Long Game (Mentorship):** Treat mentorship as a 20-year investment. A young mentee today could be a high-level client or partner in two decades.
- **Strategic Coalitions:** Build coalitions and pre-meet with allies to gain support before big moments or “making the ask.”



## THEME 4

# TECHNOLOGY & CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Technology is a tool for amplification, not replacement. Experimenting with AI and digital platforms supports visibility, efficiency, and continued growth across evolving industries.

- **The AI Gender Gap:** Men often experiment with AI despite corporate discouragement, while women may be less likely to try or have less access. Experimenting with new tools ethically is a necessity.
- **Tactical AI Resources:**
  - **Search/Audit:** Use Perplexity and Claude to research your brand footprint.
  - **Visuals:** Aragon AI (100 professional headshots for \$49 via 5 selfies).
  - **Broadcasting:** Use LinkedIn Live and Restream to host expert talks and build a “3D” profile.
- **The “Quantum” Space:** Women must include themselves in developing fields like Quantum.



## THEME 5

# OVERCOMING FEAR & SELF-DOUBT

Fear is a signal, not a stop sign. Shifting thought patterns, drawing on past successes, and taking small actions can build confidence and momentum through uncertainty.

- **Mindset as a Tool:** Fear is a thought that leads to a feeling. Since you can change your thoughts, you can change your outcomes.
- **The “WAIT” Method:**
  - **W**hat am I thinking?
  - **A**m I using my own voice? (Or is it a parent/critic?)
  - **I**dentify the opposite thought.
  - **T**ransform your actions based on that new belief.
- **Physical Reset:** Like a top ballerina, “shake yourself” each morning to release insecurities. Reflect on past wins as fuel for future confidence.



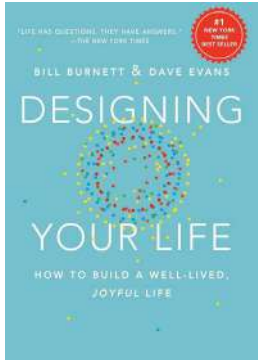
## THEME 6

# NEGOTIATION & DECISION-MAKING

Effective negotiation centers on knowing your value and defining non negotiables. Clear frameworks, trusted advisors, and scenario planning support confident and informed decision making.

- **Win-Win Strategy:** A successful negotiation leaves both parties feeling they've won. Know your BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement).
- **The Value Report:** Create a written report outlining your contributions to prove why you deserve higher compensation.
- **Direct Voice:** Own your voice and find the confidence to negotiate for your worth.
- **Decision Metrics:**
  - **"Kitchen Cabinet"** of trusted advisors to vet pro/con lists.
  - **SWOT analysis** or spreadsheet to weigh outcomes two years out.
  - **The Worst Case:** Ask: *"What's the worst thing if I do this? What's the worst thing if I don't?"*

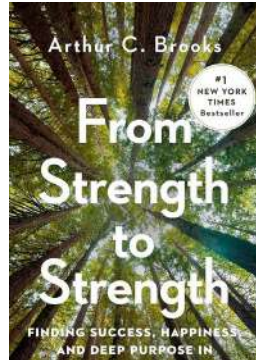
# Resources



## BOOK

### **Designing Your Life: How to Build a Well-Lived, Joyful Life**

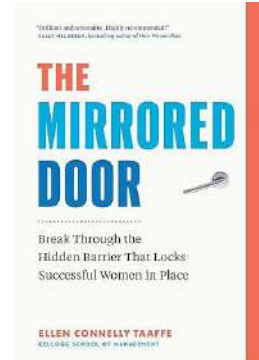
by Bill Burnett,  
Dave Evans



## BOOK

### **From Strength to Strength**

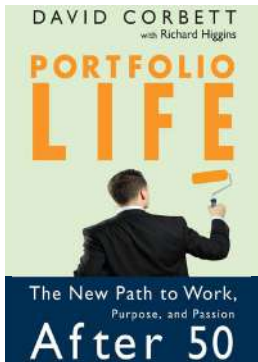
by Arthur Brooks



## BOOK

### **The Mirrored Door**

by Ellen Connelly Taaffe



## BOOK

### **Portfolio Life: The New Path to Work, Purpose, and Passion After 50**

by David D. Corbett



## TEDx TALKS

### **Why People Really Hate Their Jobs**

Laurie Swanson

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WOMEN'S  
**MENTORING**  
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