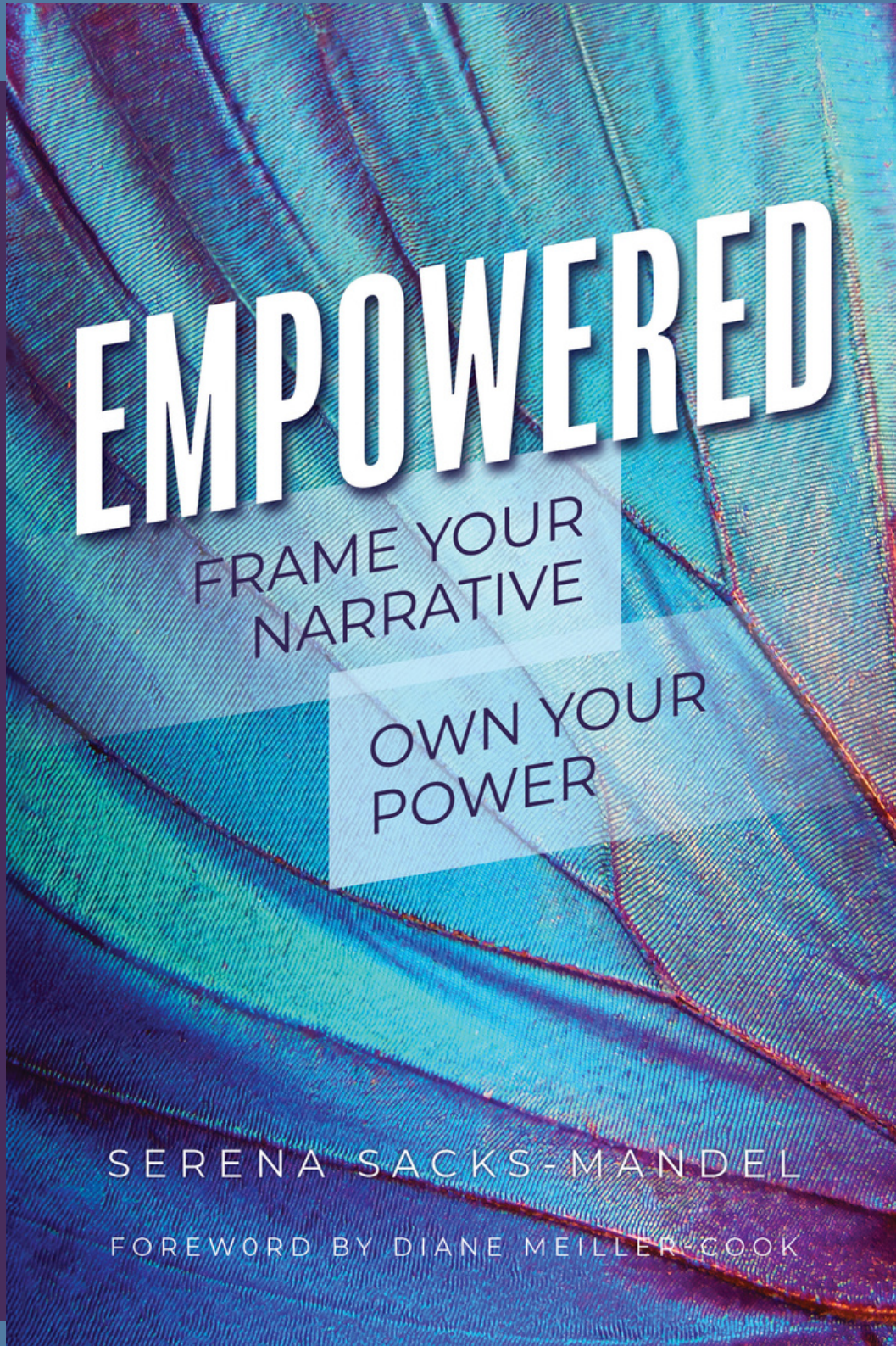


Media Kit



Serena Sacks-Mandel

EMPOWERED

Through our challenges, we all need a reminder that our stories can empower our journeys!

Serena Sacks-Mandel built a successful tech career on the foundation of a tough childhood. Brick by brick, she laid a new foundation for herself, one where she saw each of her successes as evidence that she could do more.

A huge part of her self-empowerment came from framing her own narrative—her personal story—in a way that each roadblock became a lesson, something she overcame.

If Serena's story teaches us anything, it's that we can change how we view our personal challenges to lead us to bigger and better things than we ever dreamed of!

If you've always been an outlier, a trailblazer, a mover and shaker—or want to be—then you'll love the inspiration you get from Serena's story. From unwanted child to solo woman in a board room full of men to cancer survivor, Serena has stretched for the next level every step of the way and routinely reached it through perseverance, education, resilience, and an eagle eye on her purpose.

When you control your narrative, you can only keep climbing higher!



ABOUT SERENA SACKS-MANDEL

Serena Sacks-Mandel is the worldwide chief technology and transformation officer at Microsoft for the education industry. Prior to joining Microsoft, she was the chief information officer at two unique technically advanced large public school districts where she enabled student-centric teaching and learning, which resulted in significant improvements in student outcomes.

Prior to pivoting to education, she led innovation and transformation teams at IBM, Walt Disney World, and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and provided management consulting at many others. Serena has won numerous state, national, and global awards for leadership, vision, technical excellence, and her commitment to supporting women in technology.



In her new book *Empowered: Frame your Narrative, Own your Power*, Ms. Sacks-Mandel shares how we can all overcome both personal and professional challenges. By framing ourselves as the hero, not the victim of our stories and forgiving those who have harmed us, we free ourselves from the burden of carrying past pain. Taking responsibility for our narrative enables us to own our power, choose our purpose, and define our own version of success. She believes that true power is the power to empower others. Her life story is rough and yet she finds the opportunity for humor, contribution, exhilaration and ultimately joy and serenity.

In her non-working time, Ms. Sacks-Mandel and her husband Scott are adventure seekers—biking, hiking, traveling, and boating, often with their three wonderful adult daughters.

ABOUT SERENA SACKS-MANDEL

Serena has been honored with the following awards:

- 2023 — CIO Look Top 10 Women in Tech to Watch
- 2021 — Global 100 Education Visionaries
- 2020 — HMG Strategy: Technologist Who Matters
- 2020 — CIO 100 Award for Data Analytics and Dashboards
- 2019 — Global Women in Technology “Woman of the Year”
- 2017 — Georgia “CIO of the Year” Inspire Leadership
- 2015 — Georgia WIT “Woman of the Year”

Some places Serena has been seen and heard (click for more):



PRAISE FOR EMPOWERED

"Serena's wonderful book is a timely and important reminder that successful leadership requires empathy, understanding, compassion, and strength. In her book, Serena shares her stories of achievement, renewal and career ascent. She also shares her stories of disappointment and heartbreak. That's what makes this a powerful and helpful book. Definitely worth reading!"

~ Mike Barlow, Award-Winning Journalist and Coauthor of *Smart Cities Smart Future*



"From the very first moment I met Serena in Atlanta I was drawn into her absolutely compelling story of navigating life's challenges both professionally and personally. She is a fearless and relentless navigator, tirelessly steering the path for positive outcomes regardless of the circumstances being faced.

"For emerging and existing leaders who want to overcome personal and professional challenges or inspire others to do so, Serena's life lessons in survival, self-sufficiency, and the power to empower others is a must read.

"Kudos to Serena for sharing her very personal look at life and the working world."

~ Mark Pelliccio
Office of the CEO, HMG Strategy, LLC



"Trauma lingers and lies to us about our worth and capability in this world. This book will be a treasured resource of inspiration not just for those who have experienced trauma, but for anyone who desires to be an impactful leader. Serena is a powerful speaker, and I'm so grateful that her story has now transitioned to book form. The world needs this story. The world needs to see and know the power of forgiveness to heal and create true autonomy and joy in our lives."

~ Andrea Flack-Wetherald
SOCIAL WORKER | COMEDIAN | SPEAKER, Author of *The Funny Thing About Forgiveness: What every leader needs to know about improv, culture & the world's least favorite F word.*

PRAISE FOR EMPOWERED

“As someone who has closely collaborated with Serena and witnessed her unwavering dedication to personal and professional growth, I believe *Empowered* will be an invaluable resource for emerging and existing leaders.

“It holds special significance because it addresses the personal and professional challenges we often encounter on our journeys, especially as female leaders, while also serving as a powerful tool to inspire others. Serena's extensive experience, spanning over 35 years in various industries and roles, gives her a unique perspective that resonates deeply with readers. Through her personal anecdotes and lessons learned, you will gain practical insights on overcoming obstacles, finding resilience in the face of adversity, and embracing the qualities that define impactful leadership.

“Serena's guidance will empower you to navigate the complex maze of your career, instilling in you the perseverance and authenticity needed to thrive. Her book is a gift that encapsulates her journey, filled with triumphs, struggles, and invaluable lessons learned along the way.”

~ Julie Young - Vice President of Educational Outreach & Student Services at ASU; Senior Advisor to ASU Prep Academy



“*Empowered: Frame Your Narrative Own Your Power* is an important resource for individuals striving to identify and/or accomplish career goals and achieve their personal best selves.

“Serena Sacks-Mandel tells her compelling story of overcoming adversity, lack of support, lonely times, and illness to become an outstanding leader in the male-dominated field of information systems and technology. She has overcome challenges thrown at her and has emerged as a strong, empathic, internationally recognized industry leader and speaker. The book will surely inspire others to examine and overcome the roadblocks we all invariably face.”

~ Selma C. Kunitz
Founder and Former President at KAI Research, Inc.

Q & A WITH SERENA

You have had a lot of challenges in your life. What can you credit for your resilience in these situations?

Early on, my drive came from “jet fuel,” a mixture of defiance (I’ll show you!), anger (how dare you do this to me), fear of failure (I might be homeless, starving, in jail, or worse if I don’t persevere), and a need to be self-sufficient (my mother indoctrinated this requirement in my head). Later, as I let go of the anger and forgave those who hurt me, I was afraid that I would be less driven and not successful. But I traded the jet fuel for purpose and realized that my success and fulfillment was tied directly to uplifting, supporting, and developing others—people I cared about as well as the vast anonymous student population around the world. So, it was not until I was in my late 40s that I became driven by my purpose and passion for *tikkun olam*, a Jewish concept meaning to repair the world. Now, in my late 50s, I have redefined success on my own terms. Being in nature, exploring the world with my husband, and enjoying time with my family are most important. However, my work continues, as I hope to inspire and support future generations of leaders, especially, but not exclusively women in technology.

As a woman in tech, how have your life challenges impacted how you've been able to navigate a career space that is dominantly male?

Early in my career, I was grateful to have many strong, smart, successful women above me at IBM in NYC, many who were mentors. Interestingly this trend continued through my time at Disney, Harcourt, a hospitality company, and Florida Virtual School. It wasn’t until I was CIO at Fulton County Schools, where I was the only female “chief” and highest-ranking woman in an organization of 14K employees that I felt underrepresented and even diminished as a female. More than once, the male superintendent asked a male colleague to “interpret” what I said. He simply restated my words, and then they were “heard.” This experience and the data I saw on the lack of women in technology and gender disparity in leadership has given me the passion to support more women in technology.

My early career was in the 1980s and ‘90s. I was in NYC working at the largest technology company in the world, supporting the finance industry. It was very buttoned down with an explicit dress code. Implicitly, the message was to behave like a man. Leave your personal life at home and come to work with a smile and can-do attitude no matter what just happened on the other side of that physical door. The long commute gave me the time and space to adjust between worlds. I became very good at compartmentalizing.

Q & A WITH SERENA

Even when I had my children, although I could be pregnant at work—a luxury my aunt who worked for IBM in the '50s was not permitted—performance expectations were not adjusted for this life change. I had to do whatever it took regardless of my other responsibilities. Once again, compartmentalization served me well.

Since the 2000s and now after the pandemic, everything has changed. Men and women can be seen on video calls with pets, children, in their homes, and on the road. Our personal and professional lives have become far more blended. Turning off email and the camera for dinner or sports with children is acceptable and even encouraged. However, this acceptance of various work styles has not been enough to bring significantly more women into tech and leadership. In fact, we are seeing fewer women in tech and leadership than when I started my career.

I love that you share both your personal and professional stories together in this book. What is the overarching message that you want other women building their careers to take from your experience?

There are three main points that I hope the reader takes away. These apply equally to men and women building their careers:

- Be your authentic self. This is not the trite, common form of authenticity. This is a call to dig deep and define your values, strengths, goals, and opportunities. It requires a periodic examination as we change from year to year, life phase to life phase. Write these down, reflect, and be vulnerable with your partner and your colleagues. That's the authenticity I am talking about.
- In every role and every day, ask yourself "What am I contributing? How am I adding value? And what am I learning?" This takes you out of the moment and provides you with perspective. You need to add value and contribute to earn your current position and to excel to the next level. Whether you feel comfortable in your role or it stretches you in painful ways, you can always learn and then use those learnings for the next position.
- Live your values. How you spend your time, money, and energy is the embodiment of your values. Do an accounting regularly, and make sure yours are aligned. If not, make adjustments.
- I should have written a chapter about Forgiveness and Gratitude because these are the keys to joy and happiness. Letting go of that which holds you back and having appreciation for what you have versus what you think you want are the key messages. You can find much more about these in Brené Brown's vast body of work and Andrea Flack-Wetherald's book *The Funny Thing About Forgiveness*.

Q & A WITH SERENA

You were incredibly vulnerable about your early life, health challenges, career, and relationships. Was it challenging for you to be so open with all of this? How did you pull yourself through writing about the more challenging times?

I wonder, now that it is out there, if I over-shared. There was an interim female superintendent at the district who was my leader for just a few months when I was recovering from a year of chemo and I did my victory trek in Nepal on Mt. Everest. She said to me, “You have a story to tell. You should write a book and inspire others.” I shrugged and smiled, but that suggestion came back from many others and nagged at me. I thought she didn’t know the half of it; cancer was only my latest challenge.

Then I remembered thinking when I was about ten years old that my siblings and I should write a book to tell our story of surviving that original family divorce because it could help other children deal with their situation. But of course, we didn’t, and we all went on to live our own adult lives, burying the impacts of those early years.

Writing this book was no easy feat and I learned through the process why so few people tell the whole truth about their lives. It has been gut-wrenchingly painful at times, especially to get up in front of a large audience and speak about it. Editing, organizing, and rewriting sections meant gearing up for opening wounds, feeling ugly stuff, and letting it go again.

I followed Brené Brown’s advice by starting with an “SFD” (shitty first draft). Just let it out and don’t edit anything. I wrote the first draft on vacation in Belize while my husband went for day-long scuba dives. He was amazing at taking my sometimes-drunk draft and making sense of it, organizing it into chapters, removing repetitive statements, and interviewing me to get to the “feeling” not just the factual story. He actually found and read my high-school diary to learn more about me and how I overcame a self-defeating junior year. He found out much more than I remembered!

Other trusted editors with an eye for detail followed, including Chelsea Mandel and Ben Sacks. Finally, my daughters worked with Ben to remove words and sections that they found hurtful. Their feelings and our relationship are more important than anything else. Then I let it go, trusting them and my publisher, Cori Wamsley, to take it from there.

Q & A WITH SERENA

Who do you most want to impact with this book and why?

My hope is that others benefit from hearing my story and that it provides inspiration, empathy, and encouragement to empower and uplift those who are struggling with any of these issues. You can overcome and even thrive. Sometimes it's as simple as learning to use our voice, ask for help, and truly receive the gifts that others want so much to give us.

I've had to learn the hard way that we are social beings and need to feel connected to each other to reach our potential. I used to think I was an island and if everyone just took care of themselves, all would be well. I know now that everyone we care about needs us and we need them.

If my story and hard-earned learnings help just a handful of readers, I've achieved a purpose greater than me, and the challenges I endured would all be worthwhile.

FROM THE INTRODUCTION

“Most people I know have wondered about whether they were making the right choices and doing the right things at some point in their lives. Many times in my life, I questioned whether I was on the right path—if all the struggle could and would someday pay off.

“It's difficult to see around the corners of our lives. When we make one choice, we never know how life would have turned out had we made a different choice. Choices often seem limiting—making one decision eliminates the possibility of another.

“I feel compelled to tell my story with the hopes that it will inspire my contemporaries and support the next generation of leaders. Beyond that, I sincerely hope that this book can benefit any woman who is an emerging leader who wants to overcome personal and professional challenges or who wants to inspire others to do so.”

Serena

CONNECT WITH SERENA

***Empowered* launches on March 27. Download the Kindle eBook for \$0.99 on 3/27. Link will be shared on launch day!**



Serena Sacks-Mandel is represented by K2 Creative Strategies. She is available for interviews, conferences, speaking engagements, and book signings. Inquiries can be directed to Kelli A. Komondor at 412.302.3463 or kelli@k2creativellc.com.

Empowered is published by Aurora Corialis Publishing. Contact Cori Wamsley at cori@auroracorialispublishing.com.

Serena is a Founding Board Member of the Computer Museum of America.

The Empowered launch party will be at the Museum on March 27 from 5:00 to 7:30 pm.



Visit Serena at serenasacksmandel.com and click the icons to connect with her on social media.

