

Stedman Graham

**EDITORS' NOTE** Stedman Graham is an author, educator and speaker who consults and conducts training with corporations, educational entities, the military and veterans, non-profits and the government. His *Identity Leadership* message is grounded in the fact that the key to success is self-leadership capability. Graham has authored eleven books, including two New York Times bestsellers, *You Can Make It Happen: A Nine-Step Plan for Success* and *Teens Can Make It Happen: Nine Steps to Success*. His last release, *Identity: Your Passport to Success*, was a Wall Street Journal bestseller. His new book, *Identity Leadership*, was released in early 2019. His clients have included the Indiana Pacers, Minnesota Vikings, Gulfstream Aerospace, Microsoft, Deloitte, Wells Fargo, Lenovo, General Dynamics, the U.S. Departments of Labor, Education and Agriculture and CVS Pharmacy. Graham has also lectured throughout Europe, the Caribbean, North America and Africa. He received a bachelor's degree in social work from Hardin-Simmons University, a master's degree in education from Ball State University and honorary doctorates from several universities.

**COMPANY BRIEF** S. Graham & Associates ([stedmangraham.com](http://stedmangraham.com)) is a management and marketing consulting company specializing in programs for the corporate and educational markets. SGA offers keynotes, seminars, curriculum and consulting based on the *Identity Leadership Nine Step Success Process* which was first introduced in Stedman Graham's New York Times bestsellers, *You Can Make It Happen: A Nine-Step Plan for Success* and *Teens Can Make It Happen: Nine Steps to Success*.

### What made you feel it was the right timing for your new book, *Identity Leadership*?

It's very interesting because I had no idea that this would be such great timing for the book, but leadership is a hot topic right now. It's the number one issue in the world today. I wrote this book to help people self-actualize, to teach them how to organize their lives around themselves,

# Identity Leadership

## An Interview with Stedman Graham, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, S. Graham & Associates

and to develop an identity for themselves. This is a reflection of my own development.

Leadership is crucial. I work every single day and compete with people in the global marketplace. At every level, whether it's the educational level, the corporate level, the family level or the athletic level, leadership is key.

Tom Brady is able to lead his team because he's a strong leader. His leadership is what allows them to outdistance most other teams.

At every level, leadership is critical and *Identity Leadership* puts it all together. I started off with identity and then I realized that if you put that with leadership, you're able to find your authenticity and you're able to organize your life around yourself. It's based on the philosophy that you can't lead anybody else until you first lead yourself, so it's all about self – you have to be self-made in the leadership arena to be authentic.

### Can leadership be taught or is it something you're born with?

Well, you can have it and then not accomplish much. You can have it and not be worth a lot. You can have it and be dysfunctional. You can have the potential and still not know how to organize it. Sometimes you need help. If you're lucky to have parents who teach you their leadership skills and who are role models for you every single day because of their work ethic, their drive, their education, their understanding, and their cognitive ability, you're very fortunate.

It used to be leadership training was readily available; the community taught leadership, the churches taught it, the schools taught it and it was an everyday occurrence in the Boy's & Girl's Clubs, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and 4H. All of those were geared towards building character and building stronger leaders for the future.

Today, it's a little bit different because we don't have the personal interaction like we used to, we don't have the one-on-ones like we used to, and we don't have communities functioning the way they used to. Now, we have technology, we have television, we have people living in the external world, really focused on themselves. They don't know who you are, they don't know who they are, they don't know where they are going and they don't know how to get there. They are looking for all the answers on the outside, but the answers are on the inside.

### What needs to be done to change this?

Today, we have more opportunities than we've ever had in the history of the world because of technology.

The problem is that everything is outdated as soon as we learn it according to where the technological revolution is going, so we've got to turn it around to where information becomes relevant to the core of who we are – the missing piece is that we don't know who we are. We don't have a foundation for development. We don't have a foundation for organizing information around our talents, our skills, our passions and our purpose. The new leadership discipline has to be around organizing ourselves first and then taking the access that we have in terms of information, knowledge and education and making it relevant to our everyday lives.

There has to be a paradigm shift, just like there is a paradigm shift with taxi cabs to ride-share and there is a paradigm shift from gas to electric cars; there has to be a paradigm shift with human development. If that paradigm shift doesn't happen, we are pretty much outdated and we are going to have all these artificial intelligent robots taking over and jobs will be eliminated because we are outdated and don't have a learning process to keep up.

### How can this paradigm shift be moved forward?

Eventually, it is going to happen, but if we can get there faster, we can begin to raise the consciousness of people around those things that are really important. I try to serve as an example by creating a customized system to run the Nine-Step Success Process that helps people understand how to do this. We have to turn it around and show people how to make information relevant to their development everyday so that they can develop a process of continuous improvement.

### In the book, you share personal experiences and stories. Were these insights in hindsight or did you recognize them as you were having these experiences?

I was kind of thrown out into the world, because I started with low self-esteem and a lack of confidence since my family situation was somewhat dysfunctional.

I was searching; I was trying to figure it out, so I read every book I could get my hands on. I studied it. I had to live it every single day because I was defined by the outside world. The world was defining me and putting me into a box and, either you sink or swim, and I was trying to survive through all of it.

In that survival effort, I'm on point every day. I'm thinking every day. I'm creating every day. I'm writing. I was trying to figure it all out, and I realized it's not how the world defines you, it's how you define yourself. Unless you can create self-actualization, you're not going to be in the game.

I started writing about this and organizing my thoughts and then came up with a book and with a process. When I started that process, I realized it was the missing piece for me and then I realized it could also help other people.

**Does self-fulfillment, no matter what level you're at, start with identity leadership, self-awareness and self-reflection?**

It's all self. What I realized – and this was a big ah-ha moment for me – is that the process of success is the same for everybody. The difference is that some people know it and some people don't. However, there is only a small percentage of people – probably 1 percent of the 1 percent, who understand it – who are able to take control of their learning, take control of their development, and take control of the decisions they make. They know how to build relationships and they know how to organize their lives. They're focused on themselves as a way to create self-mastery and self-empowerment and self-efficacy.

They're present in the world that they live in every single day. They're watching things. They know how to apply things. They don't waste a lot of time. They eliminate all the time-wasters. They're what I call identity leaders who work from the inside out and who are authentic in their development.

**Do you worry about where we are culturally today?**

I do worry about that. I worry about a lot of young people wasting their time doing all kinds of things with technology that has nothing to do with their development. I worry about the access that they have to information that's not good for them. I worry about them being seduced by all the advertisements and all of the pictures and everything else out there when they are really not even capable of making good decisions because they are so young.

I worry about everybody thinking that technology solves all of the problems when it's really just a tool. It's a wonderful, wonderful tool when used correctly to empower who you are as a person. If you can create self-mastery based on your purpose in life, and then create a vision based on where you want to go and raise your socioeconomic development

because you have access to a machine that gets you all around the world; that's a pretty good opportunity.

**You wear many different hats. How do you maintain your focus when you are pursuing so many passions?**

That is the secret of the work that I teach – you organize every part of your life and you organize all of your passions. You can create work/life balance that is long term, but you have to have a long-term vision of who you want to become, not who you are now.

today. You have to create the vision. You have to create the opportunity.

You can't create this vision standing still. You can't create it by doing the same thing over and over. You have to create it with your thinking. You have to create it by understanding the power of education and information. Einstein said, "You cannot solve a problem with the same mindset that caused it," so you have to be able to disrupt the routine of what you're doing every day and read more, learn more, and develop more and take that information and make it relevant to your passions, to your talents, to your skills, and to your abilities because those are your strengths. That's what keeps you in the game.

**Since you have been in such a public relationship with such a powerful and well-respected person, has identity been a key to what has made that relationship work so well?**

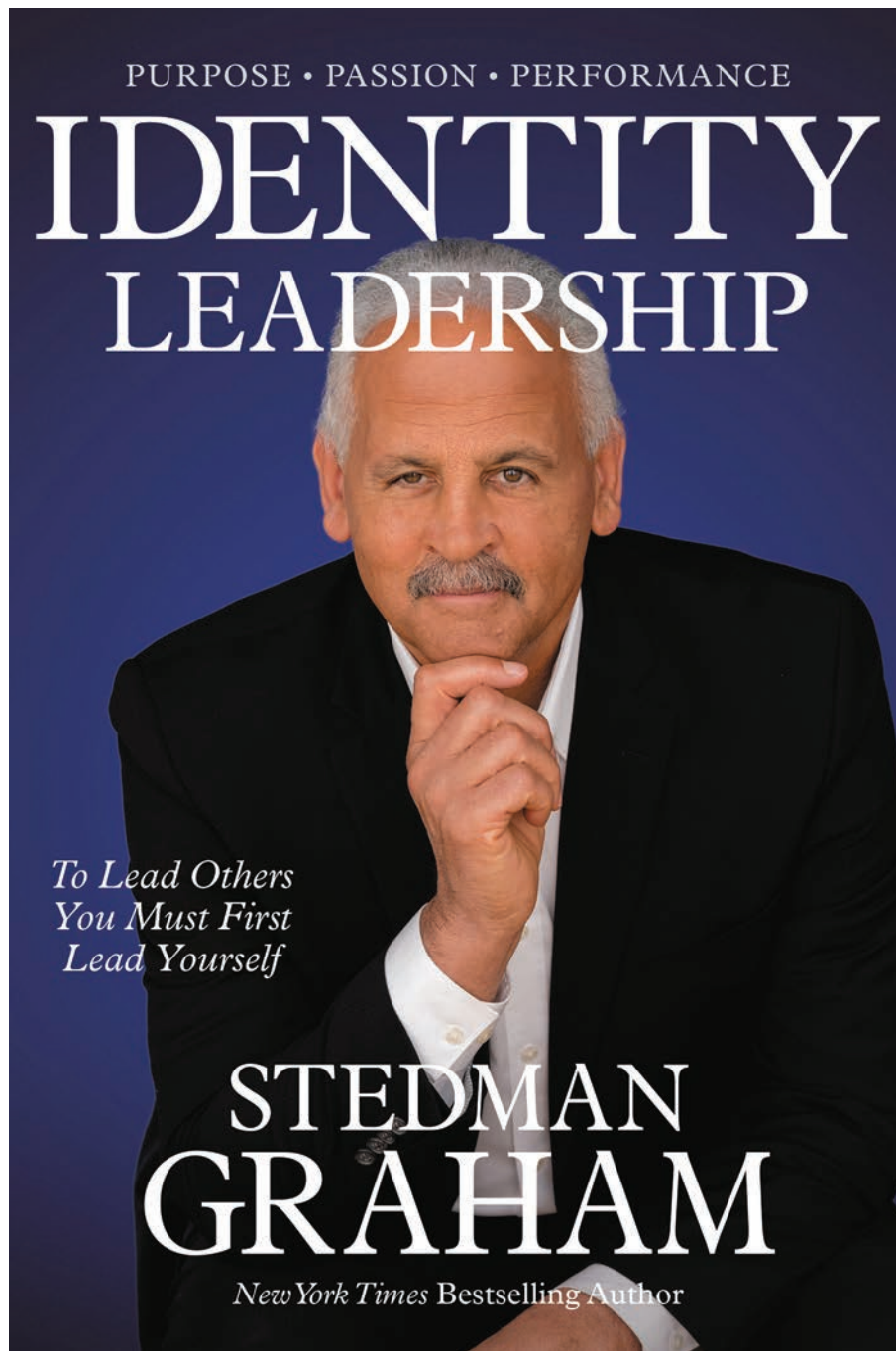
Yes, it's because I've been able to be comfortable with myself and not worry about what other people think about me based on what Oprah has done in her own life. I support her in her own quest for happiness and freedom and meaningfulness, and she deserves that because she's worked hard for it, but that's her. That's her life and, while I'm there to support her and I'm happy for her, it has nothing to do with who I am or what I do every single day.

You don't want to turn your power over to somebody else to define you because whoever you turn that power over to will almost always define you as less than them, so you can't afford to buy into that. You have to be able to create your own, get your own, develop your own, build your own and be happy with that. And when you're happy with that, you're really not looking around to see what somebody else is doing.

**With all the things that you are involved with, are you able to enjoy the process?**

I have a great life and I'm the first one to admit it. I get to travel around the world. I get to play golf around the world with my buddies. I get to meet all kinds of folks. I get to eat in great restaurants. I get to go where the weather is warm sometimes. In many cases, I can decide what my schedule will be.

Is it tough? Yes, it's very difficult. Do I have to work for it? Yes, I do, but I like the process. I have to work hard, so I can play hard. It balances long term and the seeds that I plant eventually will come up and I can enjoy the harvest every once in a while. ●



I know who you are. You wake up in the morning, you wash your face, you brush your teeth, you get breakfast, you get the kids off to school and you work all day. You come home in the afternoon, spend time with the family, watch TV, go to bed and maybe dream. Every single day, the same routine.

To get to who you can become, I need to interrupt/disrupt the routine that you have and then I need to get you to understand who you want to be and I need you to create that based on the vision that you have for yourself that's bigger than the circumstance of where you are