

# Your Life's Work

These days you may be thankful for your job but unhappy. Discover your true calling with a career expert's new book

BY KELLIE TABRON

There's a point in our careers, in the middle or the later stages, when it's our responsibility to develop other people, explains Ella L.J. Edmondson Bell, Ph.D., a leading authority on race, gender and social class in organizations. "But you can't do that if you're running around chasing your tail and putting out fires." Such insight is the reason Bell's new book, *Career GPS: Strategies for Women Navigating the New Corporate Landscape* (Amistad) is a must-read. It will serve as the business coach you've always wanted, offering timely advice on everything from landing a plum position to getting rewarded for a task well done.

**ESSENCE:** Most people will have many nine-to-fives over a lifetime. If you're just starting out, what should be the goal?

**ELLA L.J. EDMONDSON BELL:** Your goal is to determine who you are. Some might consider this "pie in the sky" thinking, but it's not. Many people find themselves midway through careers that have nothing to do with who they are because they focused on external markers like money or status. We all need money to live, but most successful people's work matches up with their values and their passions.

**ESSENCE:** How can we gauge that we're on the right track in our careers?

**BELL:** Do some self-reflection. Ask yourself, *What kind of life do I want? What do I enjoy? Does what I'm doing now bring purpose to my life? Or is it time to scale back to enjoy other aspects of my life?*

**ESSENCE:** When new opportunities arise, how can we take advantage?

**BELL:** Have the right network, contacts, sponsors and allies in place. And be flexible. I hear young Black women say, "I

don't want to do this or that" or "I want to work for that company, but I don't want to live there." You've got to be open.

**ESSENCE:** In the chapter on embracing all of you, you mention facing your demons. How did that affect your career?

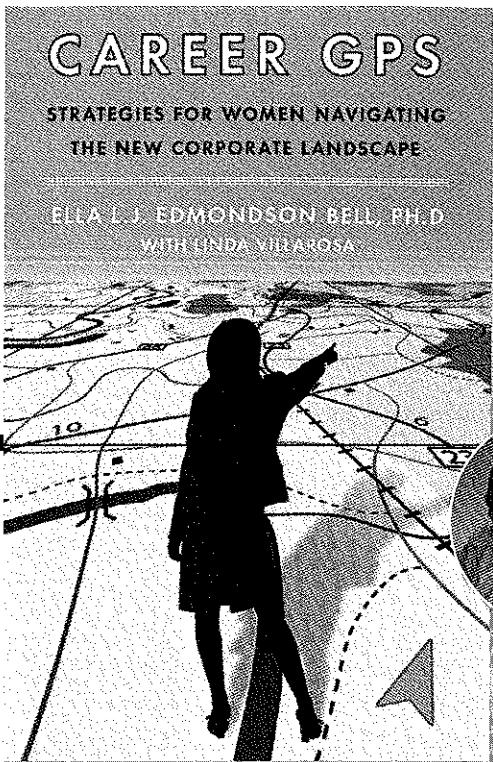
**BELL:** Growing up in the South Bronx I had teachers who were prejudiced against little Black girls like me and whose idea of fun was to leave me in the doll corner all day. That experience fueled my passion to become an educator.

**ESSENCE:** Speaking of empowering yourself, is it okay to want to achieve only up to a certain level?

**BELL:** Success is defined by what you desire out of life. There's a wonderful woman here [at Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth, where Bell is an associate professor] who's an assistant. When the workday is over, she's out the door. She builds her craft business after work, so her equation is, "I do this job to make enough money to do what I want at night." There's no one formula for everyone. □

**40%** of ESSENCE readers say they've checked out! They just go to work for the money.

—ESSENCE.com poll



Bell says:  
Know your  
intent before  
making a  
move.

## 5 WAYS TO STEER YOUR CAREER

1. CREATE A MASTER PLAN. Include what you enjoy and where you'd like to work.
2. BRAND YOU, INC. In the first 90 days, decide who you will be at the office. Don't wait for others to define you.
3. GET FEEDBACK. Ask your manager, mentor, peers and sponsor for an honest assessment of your performance throughout the year, not just at review time.
4. FOLLOW THE COMPANY'S COMPASS. There's more to getting to your destination than striving hard. Make sure your wheels are in alignment with the overall goals of the business.
5. THINK GLOBALLY. To stay competitive, trade in your car for an airline ticket to a gig overseas. If it fits with your plan, dust off that passport, pack your bags, and say adios!