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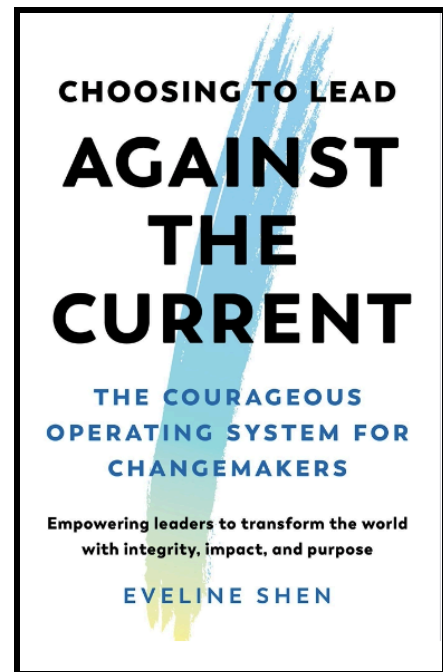Fauzia Burke, fsburke@fsbassociates.com

Media Kit

***Choosing to Lead Against the Current:
The Courageous Operating System for
Changemakers—Empowering leaders to transform the
world with integrity, impact, and
purpose***

By Eveline Shen

Publication Date: August 2025

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"It is not easy being a leader when the world is coming undone. As leaders committed to making radical social change, we are engaging in something revolutionary. We are leading against the current."

In the face of complex challenges, capable leaders need more than a simple box of leadership tools. They need an internal system of leadership, a tested operating system to help them navigate successfully through forces of oppression, while staying connected to their purpose, values, and vision.

In *Choosing to Lead Against the Current: The Courageous Operating System for Changemakers—Empowering leaders to transform the world with integrity, impact, and purpose* (August 2025; North Atlantic Books; Trade paperback) by award-winning movement leader, social change strategist, and executive director Eveline Shen shares her Courageous Operating System, a revolutionary system designed to help positive transformation leaders cultivate their power, sustain themselves both mentally and physically, and create lasting conditions for success.

With inspiring stories and case-studies drawn from her own experiences, as well as from her work with other change leaders, topics include how to:

- Turn encounters with adversity into sources of strength
- Redefine success on one's own terms,
- Build creative momentum against the forces of oppression
- Transform failures into progress
- Prioritize short and long-term self-care.

Shen teaches anyone leading against the current how to harness their full leadership power to build a future that values the liberation of all people and life on this planet.

F S B A S S O C I A T E S

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Advance Praise

"This book is an extraordinary gift to movement workers everywhere." —Shanelle Matthews, former Director of Communications for the Movement for Black Lives and Distinguished Lecturer in Anthropology and Interdisciplinary Studies at City College of New York

"Eveline Shen's Courageous Operating System is more than a framework—it's a call to action for those of us who refuse to bow to the forces of greed and brutality." —Lateefah Simon, US Congress member and MacArthur "Genius" Fellow

"This book is for any leader working to envision a better world." —Heather McGhee, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*

"This book's lessons and offerings will deeply resonate with social justice leaders." —Sarita Gupta, Vice President of Programs, Ford Foundation

"Eveline Shen provides the inspiration we need to step up and lead in this moment." —Sulma Arias, Executive Director, People's Action

"... a bold and beautiful blueprint for courageous leadership in these high-stakes times." —Dimple Abichandani, philanthropic advisor and author of *A New Era of Philanthropy*

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Interview Intro

Eveline Shen is an award-winning leader and social change strategist who has spent over two decades empowering others to lead with courage and authenticity. As the executive director of one of the larger women-of-color-led multi-issue organizations in the country, she helped to build and expand the national Reproductive Justice movement.

Now, as the founder of Leading Courageously, she teaches the Courageous Operating System. This framework helps leaders stay true to their values, transform adversity into strength, and sustain their impact.

Her new book, *Choosing to Lead Against the Current*, offers a bold blueprint for changemakers committed to building a just and liberated future.

The author prefers to be called Ev in interviews.

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Suggested Questions

1. What inspired you personally to write *Choosing to Lead Against the Current* at this moment in your life and career?
2. Can you share more about your own leadership journey, what experiences shaped your commitment to leading "against the current"?
3. What can everyday acts of courage look like, and why are they more important, and more numerous, than ever?
4. In your book, you speak about "failing forward." Can you share a personal story where failure actually propelled you toward greater impact?
5. What led you to design the Courageous Operating System, which you discuss in the book?
6. Many leaders feel burned out, especially in social change movements. What practices from your Courageous Operating System can help leaders build resilience?
7. How can leaders balance the urgency of addressing injustice with the long-term self-care needed to stay in the work?
8. Can you talk more about the operating systems that hold us back, like perfectionism and people-pleasing, as well as your own experiences with these systems?
9. You emphasize turning adversity into strength. What's one example where a setback became a turning point for you or someone you've coached?
10. What advice would you give to young leaders just starting out who may not yet feel "courageous enough" to lead against the current?
11. If you could leave our listeners with one message, what would it be?

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Excerpt from *Choosing to Lead Against the Current*

"My leadership journey brought me face to face with difficult situations and challenges, raising the following questions: How do I want to show up as a leader in this moment? How do I stand firm amid the intense pressure to compromise a core value? How do I find meaning in taking the hard way forward instead of the easy way out? Whether I was tackling a new project, learning a new skill, launching a new strategic initiative, or dealing with a crisis, I inevitably had to wrestle with a constellation of questions like this. And the answers to these questions depended on what was demanded of me and my capacity to respond.

The most important insight I have gained through my work and by supporting other leaders is that when we are going upstream against a formidable current, we need more than a box of leadership tools. We need an internal leadership system or an operating system that we can call on to guide us as we make our way upstream effectively.

The advent of computers popularized the term operating system, but living organisms also have operating systems that guide how they navigate their surroundings. A redwood tree's operating system includes extensive roots that allow it to withstand winds and flooding, chemical compounds that provide it with resistance to pests and disease, and protective bark that acts as a barrier from forest fires. These characteristics allow this tree to grow and live for thousands of years, making it older than most other living beings on Earth.

Similarly, elephants have an extraordinary operating system that has helped them live to an average age of sixty-five in the wild, even when they continue to face many threats from nature and humans. Elephants live in herds of up to one hundred, creating close and enduring cooperative social relationships that are rare in the animal kingdom. Members of these social networks work collaboratively to defend each other, find food, care for offspring, and make decisions.

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Each herd is led by mature matriarchs: The older the leader, the greater the chance of survival for the entire herd. The herd leverages the wisdom gained from an older matriarch as part of their operating system to navigate the various threats in their environment. Science journalist Lesley Evans Ogden describes the survival advantage based on decades of research. Older matriarchs are more adept at identifying which elephants from other herds might be dangerous or antagonistic. They are also better at leading their networks to hard-to-find water sources during droughts as they remember the location of rare water and food resources from different parts of their lifetime. And older matriarchs are more skilled than younger ones at being aware of and fending off predatory lions.

Like plants and animals, humans have operating systems that help us navigate the world. Whether we know it or not, these operating systems also profoundly affect how we lead. They inform the way we communicate with our team members and the way we approach tough decisions. Our leadership operating system influences the kinds of impact we make and how we respond to adversity and conflict. It shapes the examples we set for others by informing how we treat those around us, the values we embed in our actions, and how willing we are to learn from our mistakes.

Thus, our operating system serves as an internal guide to approaching work and the world. It informs the answers many of us come up with to the plethora of challenging questions we face as leaders. For example, a leader with a command-and-control operating system has different answers to questions like "How will I invite and incorporate constructive feedback?" or "How can we create a culture that welcomes creativity and new ideas?" than a leader who uses a collaborative approach.

Often, the most critical questions take work to address. Grappling with complex dilemmas requires time and care. Along the way, we may wrestle with the needs and values of others if they conflict with our own. Although this kind of work may be

challenging, it is easier when we have an effective leadership operating system that can guide us."

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