

My Advantage as a Woman in the CIA

When Michele was hired to work as an undercover intelligence officer in the CIA, she suffered from Imposter Syndrome-wondering how she got hired and when the agency would figure out they had made a big mistake. Looking and acting differently from officers who had risen up through the ranks and obtained leadership positions, Michele wondered how she could excel in that atmosphere. It took years in the field and almost half of her CIA career to figure out that what made her different enabled her to succeed. It was Michele's first operation with a terrorist that showed that she was exactly what she needed to be to do the job. And the "soft, feminine" skills of empathy and intuition made her a stand-out in the agency, and one of the few who could untangle tough cases.

- Think about the ways in which you've held back due to Imposter Syndrome, intimidation, or uncertainty.
- Identify the traits that make you YOU and think creatively how to harness those to achieve your goals and objectives.
- Realize that our alleged "disadvantages" may actually be the secret sauce of future success.

Our Speaker

Michele Rigby Assad

Speaker, Author, Counterterrorism Specialist ([click for profile](#))

Michele Rigby Assad began her career in the government relations department of an international relief and development organization in Washington, DC, in 1995. She joined the CIA in January 2002 to work as an intelligence officer in the Directorate of Operations, the covert arm of the agency. Specializing in counterterrorism and counterintelligence issues, Michele worked in Iraq and other secret Middle Eastern locations. To date, Michele has lived in six countries in the Near East region and traveled to more than forty-five others.

After a decade of government service, Michele left the undercover life to serve as a public speaker, author, trainer, and international security consultant focused on the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe. Her book, *Breaking Cover: My Secret Life in the CIA and What It Taught Me about What's Worth Fighting For*, published by Tyndale Momentum, was released February 2018 and is currently in production to be made into a major motion picture.

She and her husband, Joseph, live in Florida. Michele holds a master's degree in contemporary Arab studies from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and a political science degree from Palm Beach Atlantic University.

Michele credits student-led mission trips to Egypt, Russia, and Ukraine and a study abroad program in Egypt, Israel, and the West Bank as being the catalysts for her passion for foreign cultures and international travel. The year she spent studying in the Middle East changed the course of her life, taking her from rural central Florida to the front lines of the war on terror. Michele is motivated to use her unique platform to educate and inspire, showing how critical courage is to living a life of impact and purpose.

Michele writes about her many passions at www.michelerigbyassad.com, where she features articles on counterterrorism, personal security, the Middle East, faith, and inspiration. Connect with her there, as well as on Facebook (Michele Rigby Assad) and LinkedIn.



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Michele Rigby Assad shared 3 stories that led to a series of realizations that transformed her from someone who believed she was an imposter in her role at the CIA to a confident professional who fully owned her power. In each story, Michele worked through self-doubt to face a complex, high-stakes interaction or negotiation and each helped her see the high value of her skill and talent.

3 TECHNIQUES

PROJECT CONFIDENCE

Let the other person know you're completely comfortable with the conversation, even if you're not.

SHOW POWER

Compliment the other person for something they've done, which subtly gives you power in the conversation.

PURPOSEFULLY DEMONSTRATE YOUR INTELLIGENCE

Prepare a comment on the topic and use it to show that you know your subject and what you're there to accomplish.

SHARE THE LEARNING



Pull your team together and ask them to do 2 things.

- Write down their 2 top strengths
- List their 2 strongest points of expertise

Now take a minute to talk about how they're similar and how they're different. Appreciate and validate both.

BONUS QUESTIONS

- How can you use empathy to establish common ground with your colleague or stakeholder's viewpoint?
- How can you tap into your intuition to help you make decisions?

A MEETING PLANNER RELATES

Here is how meeting planner, Hallia Baker, related it to her experiences.

"I was newly hired to the meetings department and was assigned to work on a high tech conference with an Analyst that no others on the team wanted to work with. He had a reputation for being difficult to work with.

I had my reservations but I had to do it since I wanted to remain on the team. I steeled myself and determined he couldn't be that bad. I had my pen and pad and walked in with the mindset, "I'm here to help you get it done".

I introduced myself and immediately asked him about his conference and what he needed to get accomplished. I gave him good eye contact and body language that assured him I'm here to make *you* look good.

We had a great meeting and an extremely successful conference. He said I turned around his expectation 360 degrees. Subsequently after that great meeting the company went into a merge with another firm and a significant amount of personnel were downsized – that analyst and his assistant among them. A few weeks after their exit, I was given my walking papers. However, I kept in contact with the assistant and when she and the analyst landed another job at a new firm, she told her boss and he contacted me immediately. I got my next job at that firm. I was only out of work for 1 week!

So, Michelle's story resonated with me. You may have a difficult assignment but don't go in defeated. Find your ground and stand firm and confident that you can meet the challenge – and you will!"

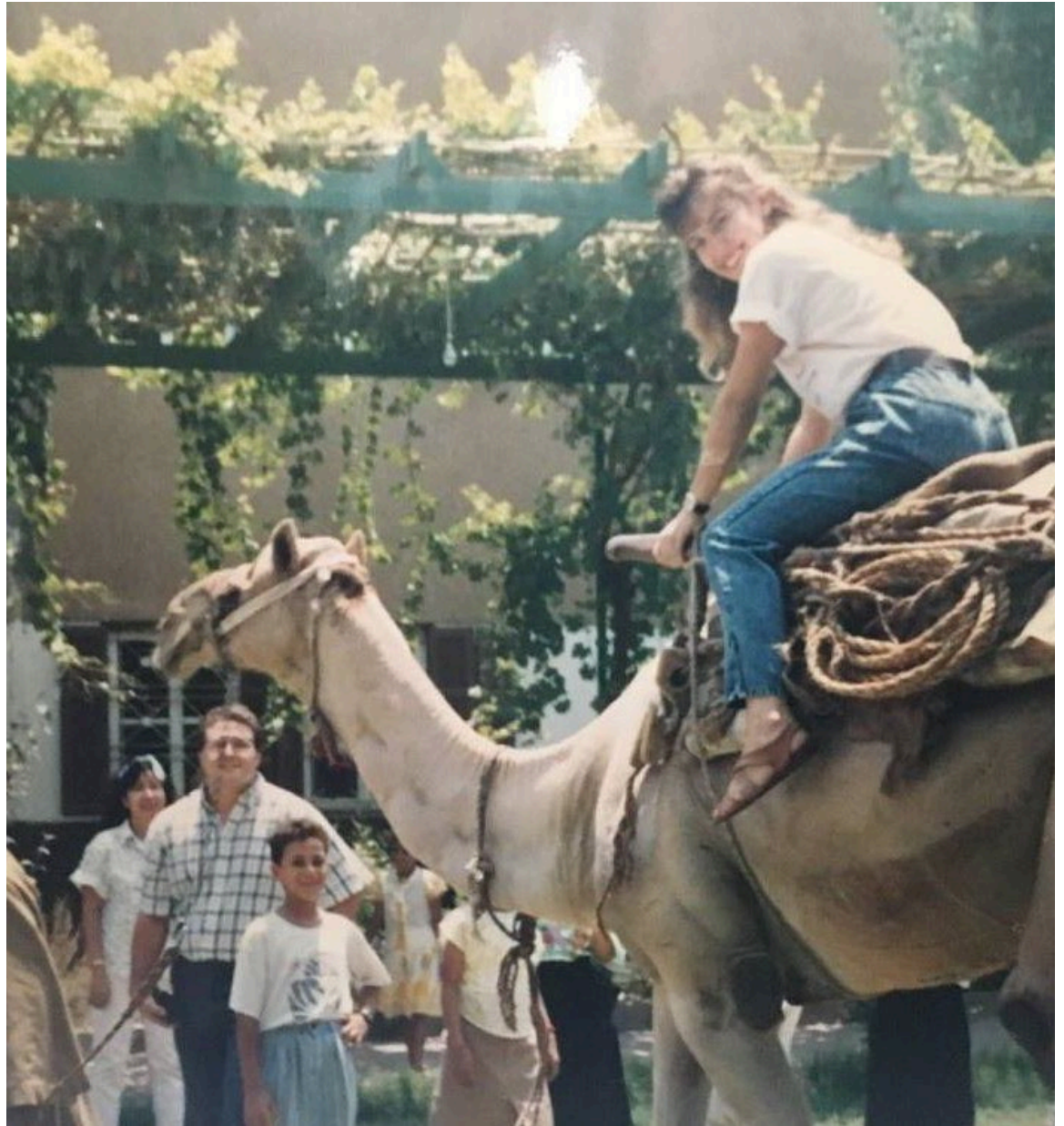
To book Michele, contact Jenna Jorge jenna@goodmanspeakers.com

MPI Greater NY Chapter

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Michele Rigby Assad



Exercise

Write down your top 2 strengths.

List two of your strongest points of expertise.

STORY #1

From small town to the CIA
(What are my strengths?)





CIA = Hollywood?

Training: Can
I do this?



Realization

- I am fierce and determined
- I have a hunger to learn (I have a learning mindset)
- I don't give up



STORY #2 My first terrorist operation

Realization

- I am an expert on Arab culture
- I am gifted in dealing with others—even terrorists (Emotional Intelligence, Empathy)
- I can turn my perceived disadvantages into my advantage

Story #3

Ahmad and
the quick
assessment



Realization

- Intuition is important—and actually a “hard skill,” verses “soft skill”
- I can handle incredible amounts of stress
- I can make good decisions quickly

Questions?