



## Red & Black Approach To CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION



OK, how did we end up developing workbooks for Career & Technical Education (CTE) courses?



I believe it started with your crisis. You turned to me hoping I would tell you what to do. Instead, I decided it was time for you to grow up and learn to make your own decisions.



Yes, I will never forget that you yanked my ostrich head out of the sand. Or, the fact you decided to turn my crisis into a book – a brand – a business. But the book was written as the basis of a sitcom, not a textbook!



Well, life rarely goes as planned. Who could have imagined that our book would be approved by the Texas State Board of Education as a personal financial literacy (PFL) textbook?



And now we have the opportunity for CTE students to learn from your decades of experience in the corporate world combined with your unique mindset and perspective, not to mention all the practical, step-by-step strategies and “lessons” that you taught me.



Your role is equally important. Your experience, as a straight-A student, mom, and “mere mortal” (your words, not mine), brings a highly relevant perspective that is resonating with so many people, including students.



What I find fascinating is how many people had the same fear of personal finance that I did. I was intimidated by all the numbers and terminology so avoided the subject. Until you forced to me to deal with it, but at least you explained it in simple terms.



Personal finance is part of our daily lives. You cannot ignore it. It affects decisions ranging from daily habits to evaluating career opportunities. But it is more than numbers – it is about critical thinking and problem-solving. All of which explains why we are involved with CTE. As you know, I believe CTE, with its emphasis on teaching students real-life knowledge and skills, is the closest thing that the education world has to a “silver bullet.”



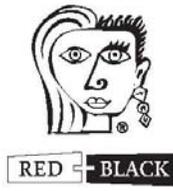
I agree. As always, you're looking at the big picture. I just wish their alignment forms had a place to provide feedback from teachers who are already using our materials to let them know that we're already “student approved.”



Our approach may be unusual, but we developed highly targeted, chapter-by-chapter worksheets, as well as additional resources on a wide variety of skills that are critical for students to be prepared for the workforce. And, for life. Topics such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication skills, teamwork, respect, and integrity.



I understand that, but let's face it, our workbooks are traditional textbooks. It will be interesting to see who's willing to take a chance and try something different.



## From A Sitcom To The Classroom

Red and Black are sisters. Both born in New York (both now living in Texas), raised in the same house by the same parents – that is where the similarities end. Red is a self-described warm and fuzzy, philosophical mom, and her sister, Black, is an extremely pragmatic retired executive who decided to turn Red’s crisis into a book – a business – a brand.

**Red (aka, Tina Pennington):** After getting a degree in Theater Arts from Wake Forest University in North Carolina, Red moved back in with her parents until she married an outgoing Englishman and followed his career around the globe. Her prior “career” had been full time mom, but her husband getting fired was the catalyst which forced her to face reality and take control of her life. Red, who likes to refer to herself as a “mere mortal”, initially thought she was stupid because she was 40+ years old and had managed to avoid learning many important “life lessons,” but she soon realized she had merely been sheltered.

**Black (aka, Mandy Williams):** Black, on the other hand, is all business. Black has an Economics degree from Wilkes College (now Wilkes University) in Pennsylvania and an M.B.A. in International Finance from New York University and London Business School. She retired from the oil & gas industry by the time she was 40 and when boredom sank in started racing cars – first Porsches, then Ferraris, and is the first woman to race the road course at Indianapolis. Along the way, she raised over \$1 million dollars for Make-A-Wish. When her sister’s husband got fired, she saw an entrepreneurial opportunity and started a new career.

Red and Black never expected to journey into the world of education as their book was intended as the basis of a sitcom (which explains why it was written using emails, Instant Messages and telephone conversations). However, life rarely goes as planned and shortly after *What I Learned About Life When My Husband Got Fired!* was launched by Neiman Marcus, the sisters were asked to develop and teach a personal finance program based on their book for the seniors at KIPP Houston High School.

Working with a task force of students to develop the curriculum, it soon became more than just a finance class, as it covered many “Life 101” topics and addressed essential skills such as critical thinking and problem solving, communications, and teamwork. In addition, the students brought to Red and Black’s attention that it utilized information they had been taught in other classes (such as ELA, mathematics, and social sciences). The students then suggested the book be used as a textbook, calling it “a reality show in a book.”

A year after the book’s launch, it was approved in 2010 by the Texas State Board of Education as a Personal Financial Literacy resource meeting 100% of its requirements. Red and Black are proud to say it is also student-approved, and their first-hand knowledge indicates that middle and high school students are hungry for information on personal finance and other “Life 101” topics. And, if along the way, they also learn critical skills that have applications in their personal lives and in the workforce, that is an added bonus.



## As Simple As A Book Club

Nationally recognized and a best-seller, *What I Learned About Life When My Husband Got Fired!* (despite the challenge of its title), is being embraced by men and women, ranging from middle school students to senior citizens, and is being used by individuals, schools, community organizations, churches and synagogues, and even by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (for offenders, parolees and TDCJ employees) for educational, philosophical and spiritual purposes, as well as just plain reading pleasure.

Red and Black strongly believe the “power” of their book and program is released when it is used in a true book club setting. By using this approach, students, instead of feeling like they are in a traditional “sit and get” classroom, have the freedom – and are encouraged – to share their thoughts and their experiences, which in turn motivates them to ask questions and to seek additional knowledge and skills. In addition, the educator is “reading along” with their students, which dramatically changes the dynamics of the learning process and demonstrates learning never ends.

English teachers have used book studies for years, recognizing their potential to build vocabulary, develop the writing process (drafting, revising, editing and publishing), and encourage cooperative learning. In addition, it accommodates different learning styles. However, students can be apprehensive when it comes to reading books that do not interest them, so the key is to relate the literature to real life situations.

*What I Learned About Life When My Husband Got Fired!* is a three month chronology of Red’s life when she learned to take control of her life instead of having her life control her, and addresses critical knowledge and skills. However, its use in the classroom was never expected as it was intended as the basis of a sitcom, and explains why feedback consistently indicates it provides a “laugh and learn” experience.

Of course, the fact that book clubs are more popular than ever before, both in the workplace as well as for personal enjoyment, is an added bonus of this approach. By using a learning format that is not only easy, but provides much needed “human interaction and communication” (as so much of our lives are being taken over by technology), participants are given the opportunity to expand their knowledge and skills in a flexible and stress-free, yet highly productive, learning environment.

Each student is provided with a copy of *What I Learned About Life When My Husband Got Fired!* and educators have indicated it is an extremely useful resource for demonstrating and developing annotation skills. (Black has always highlighted and written in books, whereas Red prefers to keep hers pristine.) In addition, and maybe more importantly, feedback from students and program participants indicate that after the completion of the program, they have continued to use the workbook as a reference guide, as well as sharing them with family members and friends.



## A Case Study

A case study fits the pragmatic approaches used by Black, so it only seemed logical that we should use bullet points to address the key considerations:

- People, not just students, often learn better from examples than from merely explaining basic principles which makes a case study approach an effective classroom technique.
- Case studies are a useful method to apply the concepts learned in school to real world situations. When students see the relevancy of a topic, they are more likely to “buy in” and participate.
- Case study assignments typically require students to answer open-ended questions or solve problems that have multiple potential solutions.
- Case study assignments can be done individually or in groups. When done in group they provide opportunities to develop teamwork and leadership skills and strategies, including those related to diversity.
- Since *What I Learned About Life When My Husband Got Fired!* was written in a conversational format (emails, Instant Messages and telephone conversations), several educators have used a role-play approach to the program. Feedback indicates the participants were not only actively engaged, but it provided opportunities for them to understand the perspective of others.
- Depending on the other topics that are being covered in this course, case studies can easily be coordinated with other reading assignments and activities.
- Since case studies typically have a specific objective, the teacher (or team leaders) can steer discussion and questions to keep the class on track.



## TEKS Alignment & More

This workbook has been developed not only to align with the course TEKS, but also to provide maximum flexibility to incorporate other elements of the subject matter as educators may deem appropriate. In addition, it may include topics and discussions not specifically mentioned in the TEKS but considered relevant to the course. Red and Black acknowledge, and appreciate, that the course is being taught by individuals who have the knowledge and expertise to select and integrate resources in order to provide their students with the best possible learning experience.

### The Workbook:

Each chapter in *What I Learned About Life When My Husband Got Fired!* has an accompanying worksheet in this workbook, structured as follows:

#### Section I. Chapter Topics

This section provides a bullet point list of the key topics covered in the chapter.

#### Section II. Additional Resources

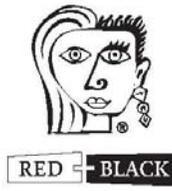
- **Career and Technical Education Topics:** Each topic is easy-to-use and can either stand alone or can be used in conjunction with Section III, and begins with a one page “banter” between Red and Black to draw students into the topic in a fun, but relevant, manner. Each includes potential questions/research topics/activities/discussion, with some featuring additional student worksheets, designed to be thought-provoking, but interactive, fun and relevant.

Please note that many topics (such as critical thinking and problem solving, communications, teamwork, and leadership) appear in multiples chapters. The Additional Resources are referenced in the chapter deemed most appropriate, but you can adjust as best meets your needs and objectives. (The CTE Topics appear in alphabetical order in the Table of Contents and in the associated section of this workbook.)

- **Teacher Resource:** These reference relevant pages from *The Book Club Approach To Personal Finance & Life 101*, a companion guide to *What I Learned About Life When My Husband Got Fired!* (It is basically Red & Black Book’s 2010 Texas State Board of Education submittal that was “polished-to-publish” in response to requests from educators.)

#### Section III. Chapter Questions/Activities/Discussions

This section provides an extremely wide variety of options available to students and educators to not only meet the TEKS requirements, but to broaden their knowledge of the subject in the context of real life applications, as well as demonstrate the transferability of knowledge and skills. Designed in a way to stand alone as an educator’s only resource or to augment other resources, this section provides flexibility and recognizes that different options will appeal to different students and educators. Red and Black believe this section provides interesting and relevant food-for-thought and will generate informative discussions and activities.



## Educational Strategies

Red and Black admit they understand the power of experience and the importance of relevancy. However, they never thought about the fact their approach to critical life (and workforce) skills and knowledge places emphasis on WHY the information is important rather than merely discussing how and what. And, they never imagined that their approach incorporates a number of proven, educational strategies. At least, not until a fateful day ...

After the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) began using *What I Learned About Life When My Husband Got Fired!* book as the basis of a personal finance and Life 101 book study program, TDCJ suggested that Red and Black meet with research experts from the George J. Beto Criminal Justice Center at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas, to discuss how to capture statistics to document the success of the program. When they met with the research experts, Red and Black explained that they attributed the success of the program to the fact it is formatted as a book club, and that the feedback they had received indicated this very simple approach gets people talking—and therefore thinking, which is the key to getting people to apply the lessons in their daily lives. During the meeting, Red quietly listened while Black and the experts struggled with ways to “prove” the success of the program. Red became frustrated with the researchers, who were focusing on quantitative results, and she questioned how to measure the value of someone driving you crazy asking “why” all the time. It was at that point that one of the experts explained that the questioning process Black used with Red, which is demonstrated throughout the book and used in the various book study programs, is a proven, evidence-based technique called Motivational Interviewing. Black immediately turned to Red and said, “I am not your big sister, I am your motivational interviewer.” Needless to say, Red was not amused.

When Black relayed this story to several educators familiar with their program they were not surprised, and proceeded to mention other strategies (listed below) demonstrated by their approach. A few even mentioned how it is well-suited to move up through the pyramid of Bloom’s Taxonomy. Black started doing her research (as she often tells students, homework never ends, when you get older you merely call it research) to learn more about the “techniques” they are apparently using.

- Bloom’s Taxonomy
- Motivational Interviewing/Critical Thinking
- Interdisciplinary/Cross-Curricular Teaching
- Relevant Expansion of “Prior Knowledge” (Scaffolding)
- Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)
- Inquiry Based Learning
- Cooperative Learning
- New Generation Text Writing
- Back-Mapping

Of course, Red and Black just shake their heads in amazement since their book was originally intended as the basis of a sitcom, not as an educational workbook.



## The Big Picture

Throughout *What I Learned About Life When My Husband Got Fired!*, Red is faced with an assortment of problems (Red's word) or challenges (Black's word). Black never tells her sister what to do, and instead uses a simple process by which Red, as a 40+ year old woman, learns to take control of her life – using knowledge and skills she already had as well as acquiring more. At the time, they did not recognize they were using a “process” but shortly after the book was published, Black recognized it was the Socratic Method. However, she decided to re-brand it and calls it Q-I-D.

### The Q-I-D Process

- **Q = Question: Ask questions**
- **I = Information: Gather information**
- **D = Decisions: Make smart, conscious decisions**

Career and technical education instruction provides content aligned with challenging academic standards and relevant technical knowledge and skills for students to further their education and succeed in current or emerging professions. The Q-I-D process can become an integral part of a life-long approach to learning. And, as this program will demonstrate, you are never too young or too old to learn.



## Parting Words



We hope that you'll find our workbooks and program not only effective, but fun and engaging. And we would love your feedback. Compliments are nice, but Black has taught me that constructive criticism will help us to improve our program.



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You know you're going to get your standard lecture from them about us "giving away" so much of our work.



Which I will continue to ignore. Since you like to have the last word, is there anything else you would like to add?



Yes. If you have any questions or need any additional information, please don't hesitate to contact us at [education@RedandBlackBooks.com](mailto:education@RedandBlackBooks.com).