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The Headlines That Matter

with

Athena Dean Holtz

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Athena Dean Holtz on Redemptive Leadership, Stewarding Influence, and Building What Outlasts You

By any traditional measure, Athena Dean Holtz has lived several professional lives. A four-decade publishing pioneer, founder of Redemption Press, and trusted guide to thousands of authors and leaders, her work today sits at the intersection of publishing, leadership formation, and redemptive influence.

Yet the clarity that now defines her leadership did not come easily or quickly. It was forged through experience, loss, and the slow, deliberate work of learning how to lead from wholeness rather than ambition.

“Early in my career, I believed leadership was primarily about endurance,” Holtz reflects. “I thought if I worked harder, stayed longer, and carried more, everything would eventually resolve. What I learned - sometimes painfully - is that endurance without discernment eventually costs more than it builds.”

That realization would come to shape not only her company, but an entire framework for leadership that now informs her speaking and consulting work across businesses, ministries, and organizations navigating unprecedented complexity.



Athena Dean Holtz

A Vision Born from What Was Broken

Redemption Press was not born from a business plan as much as a burden. Early in her career, Holtz watched gifted leaders - many carrying faith-driven messages - struggle to find a publishing home that treated both their work and their calling with respect. Traditional publishing often dismissed them outright. Alternative models promised accessibility but frequently delivered disappointment, confusion, or financial harm.

“I kept seeing authors pour years of their lives into a message, only to be wounded by the very process meant to serve them,” she recalls. “They weren’t naïve. They were faithful. And they deserved better.”

That conviction became the foundation for Redemption Press: a publishing company built on transparency, partnership, and excellence. The early years were demanding. Holtz wore every hat - coach, marketer, strategist, advocate - while navigating industry skepticism toward hybrid publishing models.

She built credibility slowly, often one relationship at a time. Trust was earned, not assumed.

But as the organization matured, so did her understanding of what she was really building.

“What I thought was a publishing company was actually a leadership platform in disguise,” she says. “Books were just the beginning.”



Athena Dean Holtz

When Leadership Replaced Hustle

The defining shift came when growth demanded more than vision and grit. As Redemption Press expanded, Holtz faced a moment many founders encounter but few anticipate: the realization that entrepreneurship alone could no longer sustain the mission.

“There was a season when my instincts and experience carried everything forward,” she reflects. “But eventually, the weight became too great to carry alone. That’s when I knew I had to step fully into leadership.”

That transition required a fundamental reorientation. Instead of solving every problem herself, she focused on building culture, developing leaders, and creating systems that reflected the organization’s values. It also required confronting a truth many high-capacity leaders avoid: unresolved pain eventually surfaces in leadership.

Holtz had weathered seasons of profound loss and betrayal - experiences that stripped away illusion and forced deep reflection.

“That was the birth of what I now call *Redemptive Leadership*,” she explains. “Leading from a healed place, with discernment and responsibility - rather than fear, striving, or self-protection.”



Athena Dean Holtz

Authority Earned, Not Claimed

In an industry where authority and trust are paramount, Redemption Press distinguished itself not through marketing bravado, but through consistency. The company became known for telling the truth - about costs, timelines, expectations, and outcomes.

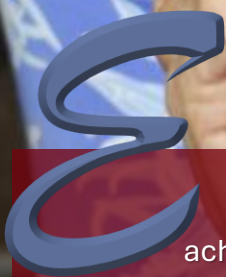
“Trust is a form of capital,” Holtz says. “Once you lose it, you don’t get it back.”

Redemption Press combined traditional publishing standards with innovative distribution and marketing strategies, earning credibility both inside and outside faith-based markets. But more importantly, it modeled a leadership ethos grounded in stewardship.

“Our authors are not products,” she says. “They are partners. And that posture changes everything.”

That same ethos now informs Holtz’s speaking and consulting work with executive teams, founders, and ministry leaders navigating growth, burnout, and mission drift.





Each day, I am constantly aware of God's faithfulness. I get to serve God, and the people He brings along my path, in many ways: as a publisher, speaker, leadership development coach, professional emcee, podcaster, blogger, former radio host, bookstore owner, spiritual abuse survivor, and pastor's wife.



Athena Dean Holtz

Leadership Under Pressure: Lessons from the Pandemic Era

The global pandemic became an unexpected crucible for Holtz's leadership philosophy. With a partially virtual team, Redemption Press faced the same pressures as many organizations - uncertainty, emotional exhaustion, and operational disruption - but also a unique opportunity.

"People weren't just navigating work challenges," Holtz says. "They were carrying grief, isolation, and fear into every meeting."

Rather than tightening control, she leaned further into trust, communication, and care. Leadership conversations shifted from productivity to presence.

"That season confirmed something I had long believed," she says. "Healthy cultures are built before crises - but they're revealed during them."

Redemption Press pivoted to a fully virtual team and emerged stronger, eventually earning recognition as a Best Christian Workplace multiple years in a row. Holtz views that affirmation not as an accolade, but as confirmation that values lived consistently create resilient organizations. Our people are more important than our projects, and it's important they know that fact.



Athena Dean Holtz

Inside the Boardroom: Leadership at a Crossroads

In her consulting work today, Holtz often encounters leaders at inflection points. One such moment stands out.

“I was sitting at a defining moment within our organization, with one team member affecting a number of others with bitterness. I didn’t want to have the hard conversation I knew I needed, so I simply ignored the red flags.” She questioned if this team member was really on the right seat on the bus ... or on the right bus altogether. She finally had to address it.

As the conversation unfolded, it became clear that unaddressed anger, exhaustion, internal misalignment, and fear-based decision-making were quietly eroding trust.

“Hard conversations ... they can either divide or they can disciple.” Holtz says. “The question was, is this team member teachable enough to be disciplined or would her bitterness win out?”

Redemptive Leadership, in that setting, was not about quick fixes. It was about slowing the conversation long enough to surface what had been buried - anger, fatigue, grief, miscommunication, and unresolved tension. From there, clarity began to emerge.

“You can’t redeem what you refuse to acknowledge,” Holtz said. “And you can’t lead people well if you’re unwilling to look honestly at what’s costing you *and* them.”



Athena Dean Holtz

The Heart Work of Influence

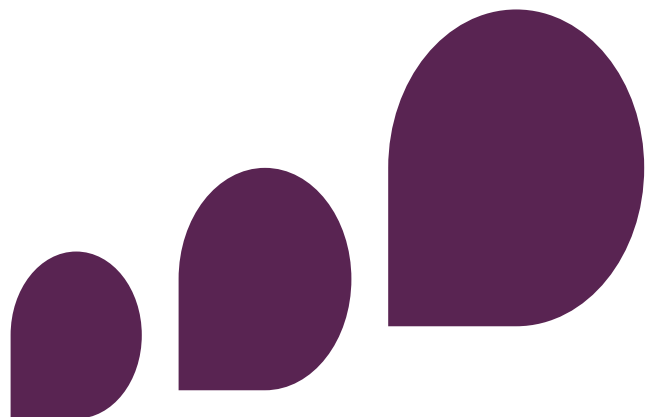
Having worked closely with thousands of thought leaders, Holtz has developed a discerning eye for what creates lasting impact. The difference, she says, is rarely talent.

“The voices that endure are the ones shaped before they’re amplified,” she notes. “They’re anchored in clarity, humility, and conviction.”

She frequently encounters leaders eager to publish or platform a message before doing the internal work required to sustain influence.

“A book can’t compensate for unhealed leadership,” she says candidly. “Eventually, what’s unresolved surfaces - often in ways that damage people, culture, and credibility.”

Redemptive leaders, by contrast, are willing to slow down. They welcome accountability. They lead from wisdom earned, not insight borrowed. When they speak or write, their message carries weight because it has been tested under real pressure.



Athena Dean Holtz

Legacy Over Applause

For Holtz, legacy is not an abstract concept - it is a daily filter for decision-making.

“Success can be measured in numbers,” she says.

“Legacy is measured in lives.”

That conviction shapes how she leads Redemption Press and how she engages leaders through consulting and speaking. She is less interested in rapid expansion than in building organizations that are healthy, ethical, and sustainable.

“I want to help leaders build things that won’t collapse when pressure comes,” she says. “That means investing in people, not just outcomes.”



Athena Dean Holtz

Where Faith, Purpose, and Excellence Meet

Holtz is unapologetic about the role faith plays in her leadership, though she resists simplistic formulas.

“Faith establishes the foundation. Purpose clarifies direction. Strategic excellence ensures sustainability,” she explains. “Remove any one of those, and leadership becomes unstable.”

In this season, her work increasingly focuses on helping leaders integrate these elements - especially those navigating growth without losing their soul.

“Redemptive Leadership gives language and structure to what many leaders intuitively know but struggle to articulate,” she says. “You can lead with faith *and* excellence. You don’t have to choose between the two.”





Looking Forward

As publishing continues to evolve, Holtz sees books becoming anchors within broader ecosystems of influence - integrated with speaking, leadership development, and community.

“Our future isn’t just about producing content,” she says. “It’s about forming leaders who can carry influence well - in boardrooms, churches, and culture at large.”

When asked what she hopes her life’s work will ultimately be remembered for, Holtz pauses.

“I hope it’s said that I helped leaders lead well,” she says. “That I created space for voices to rise with integrity and courage.”

“If what I’ve built outlives me in health and purpose,” she adds, “then it was worth it.”





Athena Dean Holtz

Athena Dean Holtz is a Christian publisher, author, and speaker with more than forty years of experience equipping leaders in ministry and the marketplace. She is the founder of Redemption Press, recognized as a Best Christian Workplace three years in a row, and author of multiple books including ***No Longer Hidden: You Cannot Resist What You Do Not Recognize***. Athena speaks nationwide at conferences, churches, and retreats, empowering audiences to lead with discernment, resilience, and servant-hearted influence.

Walking alongside women who have been wounded by the church or other traumatic life experiences has become her greatest joy. Together they experience healing through the power of God's Word and His Spirit.

After 13 years of a "Job-like" experience where she lost everything, she held dear, she found God redeeming her in ways she could never have expected. Through this intense period of suffering and healing from the fallout of toxic leadership and extreme spiritual abuse, God proved Himself faithful to walk with her through the valley of the shadow of (emotional) death and brought her into wholeness and restoration.

Her modern-day Cinderella story is a testimony to the faithfulness of God.

At the beginning of the pandemic, she experienced some struggles in her publishing business that forced her to look at unhealthy ways she avoided conflict and ended up paying a dear price for sticking her head in the sand. How faithful is God! He moved in her own heart as she faced a challenge that brought refining to her business with unexpected rewards! In fact, Redemption Press qualified as Best Christian Workplace 3 years running, in 2021, 2022 and 2023!

Her favorite time of day is early mornings with Jesus. She loves sailboats and RV time with her prince charming, meeting friends all over the country at conferences and events, and boutique shopping.

