



Staying on Top When Your World's Upside Down

Edited by:
Joe Tye

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Introduction

The title of Harold Kushner's classic book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* conveys an eternal truth – it's not *if* bad things happen to good people, it's *when*. At one time or another, we all have our worlds turn upside down on us. We are overwhelmed by health problems, money troubles, relationship challenges, career crashes, and dark nights of the soul. When (not if) these things happen to you, how you choose to respond will, more than any other single factor, define your character and set a path for your future.

When bad things happen to good people, they often happen unexpectedly: the cancer diagnosis, pink slip, court subpoena, divorce papers; the fall down the stairs, the fall in the stock market, the fall in sales as a new competitor enters your market; the call every parent dreads: "there's been an accident." The world suddenly turns upside down and you must respond – even hiding out in paralyzed fear and doing nothing is a response of sorts.

The purpose of this book is to help you avoid reacting in ways that are counterproductive and self-sabotaging, and instead respond with courage, determination, and faith – to respond in such a way that you grow as a person and create new opportunities out of apparent adversity. *There is nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so*, said Hamlet in Shakespeare's play. When bad things happen, it's tough to see how anything good can come from it. It takes a conscious act of will to find the silver lining, the blessing in disguise that will help you find, or create, meaning from adversity.

Eric LeGrand was on his way to a professional football career when he was paralyzed making a tackle in a college game. The way he chose to think about what had happened to him set him on a path where, through his writing and speaking, he is helping many others better handle the challenges in their lives. Marcus Blank was fired from his dream job as CEO of Handy Dan's. The way he chose to think about what happened set him on a path to launch Home Depot, one of the great American business success stories. Candace Lightner's daughter was killed by a drunk driver. The way she chose to think about what had happened set her on a path to found Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), an organization that by some estimates is responsible for saving the lives of more than 300,000 people who otherwise would have been killed by drunk drivers.

This book will not prevent bad things from happening to you, nor can it stop your world from turning upside down. My goal, with the help of the "coauthors" whose books are quoted within, is to help you be prepared to respond in ways that are positive, nurturing, and constructive. When bad things happen, they do not un-happen; no amount of crying, complaining, self-pity, being a victim, or blaming others will return you to the *status quo*

ante, the way things were before. But by the way we choose to think about and respond to what has happened, we can change everything. We might or might not someday be able to say it was the best thing that could have happened (almost everyone who has ever lost a job will eventually say that, but no parent who has ever lost a child will), but we *will* be able to say that we did what we could to make something good come from it. And though it might not be immediately obvious, the way in which we handle the adversity might confirm the audacious claim of Friedrich Nietzsche that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

How this book is organized

Staying on Top When Your World's Upside Down is a completely different book than the original 1996 edition. Instead of 1001 bite-sized bits of advice, this version features 101 short chapters. Each chapter is introduced by a brief excerpt from a book written by one of the 101 people I think of as my co-authors because they each have something important to say about coping with, and emerging stronger from, hard times. I hope you will be inspired to read some of these books as well – think of it as homework.

Your world *will* turn upside down. Following the advice in this book will help you make sure that when it does, you come out on top.

The Laws of Adversity

“Every difficulty in life presents us with an opportunity to turn inward and to invoke our own inner resources. The trials we endure can and should introduce us to our strengths.”

Sharon Lebell: *A Manual for Living: Epictetus – A New Interpretation*

Adversity has certain laws – and, as with physical laws such as the law of gravity – they apply equally to everyone. Understanding the laws of adversity can help you persevere through the inevitable challenges. Refusing to believe that they apply to you, that you are somehow exempt because you are a good person, will not change the fact that bad things do happen to good people, that adversity can be a life-defining event for better or worse, and what happens to you is less important than how you respond to what happens to you. Here are the laws:

Law #1: The rain will fall on the just and the unjust, and bad things will happen to good people - including you. Understand that adversity will come and be ready to welcome it when it does for the lessons it will bring, for the strength and wisdom you will gain from it, and for the people it can bring into your life.

Law #2: You must pass through the valley of the shadow, but you don't have to take up permanent residence in the cold darkness. Life is a motion picture, not a snapshot - your trajectory is more important than your current position.

Law #3: Whether it's the best of times or the worst of times is defined by what you choose to see. Without the valleys, you won't appreciate the mountains, and there are millions of others who would love to have your problems.

Law #4: One door closes, another door opens. There is opportunity hidden in every single adversity if you have the strength and courage to search for it and to pursue it when you've found it.

Law #5: Falling on your face is good for your head. We learn and grow more from our setbacks than we do from our successes. When things aren't working, it forces you to look at more creative solutions.

Law #6: Surviving adversity is a great way to build self-confidence, and to give you a more positive perspective on future adversity (if we survived that we can survive anything!). Adversity prepares you for bigger challenges and accomplishments in the future.

Law #7: What you've fought hard to gain you'll fight hard to keep and vice versa - easy come, easy go.

Law #8: Playing the role of victim or martyr does not prevent adversity or make it go away, but it does make you weaker and diminishes your ability to cope and grow from the experience.

Law #9: Adversity makes you stronger by helping you connect with others. There is something immensely therapeutic about asking for help, even if the help you receive doesn't really solve your problem. Perhaps it's the therapy of setting aside false pride and self-sufficiency. Adversity helps prevent hubris, arrogance, and complacency.

Law #10: Adversity keeps teaching - it provides great stories for the grandchildren! Your setbacks can, if you're committed to learning from them and teaching about them, be the source of great learning for others.

And the ultimate law of adversity:

Every great accomplishment was once the "impossible" dream of a dreamer who refused to quit when the going got tough.

The Great Divide – defining moments in adversity

“One of the things that comes out in myths... is that at the bottom of the abyss comes the voice of salvation. The black moment when the real message of transformation is going to come. At the darkest moment comes the light.”

Joseph Campbell: *The Power of Myth*

In his studies of the classic myths (e.g. Beowulf), and their modern counterparts (e.g. Star Wars) Joseph Campbell shows that the story almost always follows a predictable trajectory. At one point the hero is severely tested: he falls off his horse, loses his sword, and is lying face down in the mud as the fire-breathing dragon hovers above him. But then, somehow, he miraculously finds a way to slay the dragon, remounts his horse, rescues the damsel in distress, and they ride off into the sunset to live happily ever after.

This is also, to quote the title of a book by my friend and business school professor Michael Ray, “the path of the everyday hero.” That means you and me. Adversity often creates defining moments in our lives, gives us the opportunity to be an everyday hero. The adversity might be one searing moment as in a car crash, or it might drag out over time, as in the failure of a business or a marriage. But as a result, we are forever changed. For the everyday hero (including you and me), that change can be positive and it can be permanent.

Here are some of the ways hitting one of life’s brick walls can serve as a Great Divide that marks a powerful change in our self-identity:

From victim to visionary: Victims are rooted in the past, their frame of reference defined by things that have happened to them or been done to them. Visionaries are rooted in the future, their frame of reference defined by their dreams and the work they can do to achieve them. You can be a victim or you can be a visionary, but you can’t be both.

From entitled to empowered: The entitled mindset expects someone else to do things for you because you deserve them; the empowered mindset knows that you must do the work yourself. No one can empower you but you, because loaned empowerment is not the real thing.

From complainer to contributor: Complainers whine about bad things that have happened to them, or about good things they think they deserve but that have not happened to them. Contributors focus their emotional energy on solving problems and

helping others. The drunk who becomes an AA sponsor has made the transition from complainer to contributor – and been personally transformed in the process.

From greed to gratitude: One of the most remarkable, and paradoxical, ways that having their world turned upside down for some people is that their perspective changes from “what’s in it for me?” to “what can I do to share my blessings with others?” Adding to the paradox, people who make that mind shift are almost always happier.

From Midas to Appleseed: King Midas wanted everything he touched to turn to gold, and his wish was granted. He starved to death because you can’t eat gold. Johnny Appleseed devoted himself to planting trees that he himself would never see grow much less eat apples from. One of the things I’ve observed in my conversations with people who have survived significant adversity, and grown stronger as a result, is that they become more generous with both their time and their money.

From gardener to forester: Gardeners are focused on harvesting and consuming or selling the next crop; foresters are focused on nurturing the woods for future generations. Some of the most significant changes in the world have come about as a result of the work of people whose focus was on passing along a better world to their children and their children’s children.

From wishful to positive: Wishful thinking is hoping for something and waiting for someone else to make it happen for you. Positive thinking is expecting something and then doing the work to make it happen yourself. There’s nothing like getting knocked down by life to teach you the value of being a self-reliant positive thinker.

That which doesn’t kill you will make you stronger, Nietzsche famously said. It’s a paradox of adversity – by knocking you to your knees adversity will, if you survive it, help you stand taller on your feet. There will be life before and life after, and no going back. You cannot change what’s already happened – whether or not what comes next is positive and productive will be determined by you.

Carve the statue of you

“A man is both a seed and in some degree also a gardener, for good or ill... I am impressed by the degree in which the development of ‘character’ can be a product of conscious intention, the will to modify innate tendencies in desired directions; in some cases the change can be great and permanent.”

J.R.R. Tolkien: *Letters*

Self Made Man by Bobbie Carlyle, photo used with permission (you can order posters and statues of various sizes at <http://www.bobbiecarlylesculpture.com/>)

Michelangelo said he didn't carve statues, rather he liberated the forms that were always there hidden in the stone. That's a great metaphor for the human process of becoming the person you are meant to be. Throughout life you are given tools – at home, at school, at church, at work, in this book. You can use those tools to carve away those parts of you that do not reflect you at your authentic best and to liberate those parts of you that do. This magnificent statue by Colorado artist Bobbie Carlyle is a beautiful representation of that metaphor. To become your best self is a lifelong process of carving away the excuses that hold you back, the complaining and self-pity that make you small, and the emotional baggage that holds you down. By carving away the small and petty, you liberate the sublime and the wonderful aspects of who you are.

There are numerous Biblical references to the fact that no one would light a candle and put a basket over it, yet that's a very apt metaphor for what most of us do, at least on occasion. As Marianne Williamson wrote in *A Return to Love: Reflections on the*

Principle of a Course in Miracles (a quote often attributed to Nelson Mandela because he included it in his 1994 inaugural address): “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.”

It takes courage to remove the basket from your candle, to carve away the accumulated rubble that conceals your authentic best self. In a paradox we shall see repeatedly in this book, it is often when you are flat on your back that you find the courage to stand tall.

It's often when you're flat on your back that you find the courage to stand tall.

The four ways to handle brick walls

“Brick walls are not there to stop you, they are there to make you prove how much you want something.”

Randy Pausch: *The Last Lecture*

Randy Pausch was living the American Dream. He had a job he loved as a professor at Carnegie Mellon University, a wonderful family, and fascinating hobbies. Then he was diagnosed with terminal pancreatic cancer and given less than six months to live. As he was dying, he was giving speeches and writing a beautiful book about lessons on how to live.

We all sooner or later run into brick walls. When that happens, we need to remember the admonition in the title of the book by W Mitchell book (of whom more later): *It's Not What Happens to You It's What You Do About It*. There are four possible responses to running into a brick wall, each of which can be appropriate, depending upon the situation.

Response #1, Quit: The first is to quit, giving up the quest. After a certain number of years, someone who's been toiling away in the minor leagues has to accept that the dream of playing in the Big Leagues is not going to be realized and to find a new set of goals to pursue. I started Values Coach in 1994 after realizing that the insurmountable brick wall standing between me and my then-goal of being CEO of a large hospital was trying to tell me that my calling in life lay elsewhere. Sometimes brick walls are there to tell you that you are on the wrong path.

Response #2, Keep hammering: The second is to keep pounding away at that brick wall, enduring all the pain and frustration of picking yourself up time and again, knowing that it will knock you down many times before you finally crash through. Every spouse of an alcoholic or parent of a child who's gotten into drugs knows the daily anguish of running into a seemingly impregnable brick wall, hoping that this will be the day that one last crash into that wall will lead to a breakthrough. So does every author who has papered his or her walls with rejection letters and yet continued to buckle down at the writing desk the next day.

Response #3, Shift gears: The third is to find a way over or around the wall. When Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard started the company that still bears their names, their first project was a pin counter for bowling allies. It hit the market and immediately ran into an impenetrable brick wall. Rather than pounding away trying to sell the device with brute force marketing, they tried something else - and developed the technology that Walt Disney used for the soundtrack *Fantasia*. They launched a company that for more

than seven decades was a model of both technological and cultural excellence, and that today is trying once more to get around another brick wall.

Response #4, change the playing field: The fourth is to find a new wall. When I visited the Center for the Intrepid, a high-tech rehabilitation facility for the most horribly injured Veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, I met men and women who, because of their injuries, would need to find careers other than the ones they were pursuing before being sent to war. Their work at CFI represented the first of many new walls that will continue to test their resolve.

It's important for you to ask what the brick walls you run into might be trying to tell you. In my case, the brick walls that stood between me and my "dream job" of hospital CEO were trying to tell me that I needed to change course and find what author Carlos Castaneda famously called "a path with heart." But the brick walls I run into when I get rejection letters from publishers are trying to tell me that I need to work harder at being a better writer and being a better promoter of what I've written.

It's Not What Happens to You It's What You Do About It

Embrace the 4 personal freedoms

“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms - to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

Viktor Frankl: *Man’s Search for Meaning*

In his 1941 State of the Union address, Franklin D. Roosevelt outlined his Four Freedoms (freedom of speech and of worship, freedom from want and from fear). Viktor Frankl, who survived a Nazi concentration camp where those four freedoms were all denied, wrote that the only freedom which can never be taken away is the freedom of attitude – the freedom to choose how you respond to what happens to you even when you cannot control what it is that happens to you. Today, I offer a new set of 4 Freedoms. These are not freedoms that can be granted or guaranteed by someone else – they are freedoms that must be claimed and nourished by you yourself.

Freedom from the past: We all carry around emotional baggage and to a greater or lesser extent we are all plagued by the mental graffiti of negative self-talk (you know the voice I’m talking about – the one that tells you that you’re not good enough, not pretty enough, not smart enough, not popular enough, that you are not capable of success and wouldn’t deserve it anyway). Negative self-talk is nothing more than a malignant echo of things that were said to you in the past and that are now insinuating themselves into your sense of self-identity.

Every historian knows that the past is what you choose to remember and how you choose to remember it. In his study of geniuses, psychologist James Hillman found that they consistently fabricated a past that supported who they wanted to be in the future – for example, a musical prodigy who “remembered” waking up in the middle of the night with a desperate need to practice when her parents said she slept the sleep of the dead.

You “remember” a more positive and nurturing past by letting go of the emotional baggage of ancient hurts and grudges and focusing your mental faculties on those memories that help set the stage for the future you wish to create – even if you have to massage those memories the way the prodigies in Hillman’s studies did. In our workshops I often show people how to use a Metaphorical Visualization technique of carrying around a rock to represent old emotional baggage. I have them carry on an imaginary conversation with their rock, explaining to it why they are going to leave it behind. On the final day of the trek we build a cairn (a pile of rocks that marks the trail for other hikers – another beautiful metaphor!). Everyone lays their rock, and the emotional baggage it represents, on the cairn and says goodbye to it. Then we turn our backs to the cairn and hike out. Some of the changes people have made just by calling out and leaving behind their emotional baggage have been nothing short of miraculous.

You confront and rewrite negative self-talk by recognizing that it is actually not you talking – and I mean that literally! Negative self-talk is *always* in the second person: you will *never* hear that toxic voice say “*I’m fat, stupid, and ugly*” – it will always be “*You are fat, stupid, and ugly*” as if it were someone else talking to you. The reason it’s in the second person is that *it is* someone else talking – you are listening to the malignant echo of things said to you long ago that hurt and stuck and metastasized (that’s what cancer does). Stand up for yourself and talk back to that voice – re-scripting your inner dialog is the essential first step to give yourself the mental and emotional freedom you must have to achieve your most authentic dreams and goals and become the person you are meant to be.

Freedom from self-limiting assumptions: We all make assumptions about ourselves, about other people, and about how the world works. These assumptions are almost always wrong, but when we act upon, or fail to act because of, them we impose serious limitations upon our potential. In his book *Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff... And It’s All Small Stuff* the late Richard Carlson said that when you argue for your limitations, they’re yours. Never assume you “can’t” because you will never know until you try.

Challenge assumptions you make about other people by being what I call a Dionarap – which is the word paranoid spelled backwards. Assume that, unless and until proven otherwise, everyone likes you and wants to help you achieve your goals. This assumption will help you overcome the fear of rejection and worries about what other people think of you (and trust me on this one – you will worry a lot less about what other people think of you if you will admit to yourself how *infrequently* other people think of you).

And challenge assumptions you make about how the world works. I recently read the manuscript for a brilliant book that I know will never be submitted to a publisher because the author has made all sorts of assumptions that have become excuses: she doesn’t have friends in the right places, she doesn’t have an agent, no one is buying books in her genre, and the like. These assumptions are holding her back more compellingly than iron bars of a jail cell.

The initial challenge to changing your assumptions is recognizing them in the first place. Assumptions are often implicit, acting below the level of conscious awareness. Any time you find yourself stuck and not taking action you need to take to achieve your goals, ask yourself what assumptions you are making – about yourself, other people, and how the world works. Then change the ones that are holding you back – assume the best and you are likely to get it.

Freedom from emotional vampires: Extensive research shows that the single-most powerful impact upon your attitudes, your behaviors, your beliefs, and even your income is the people with whom you associate – what sociologists call your reference

group. If you spend time with toxically negative people – the emotional vampires who suck the life energy from everyone around them – it will pollute your emotional wellbeing the same way hanging around with smokers will pollute your lungs. Unfortunately, one of every five employees in the typical workplace is aggressively disengaged, and some of these people are emotional vampires who spend a good part of each day sucking the life’s energy out of people they work with.

These emotional vampires will criticize you for wanting to work hard, for being passionate about your profession, and for wanting to bring joy into the workplace. They will put you down with names like “overachiever” and “quota buster” and make fun of you for wanting to be part of anything positive or constructive like participating in the daily promise from [The Self-Empowerment Pledge](#). They will steal your energy – and this is a theft even more damaging than if they were to steal your money. Unfortunately, in some cases these people are managers (Gallup calls toxic and disengaged managers “bosses from hell”).

Ideally, you will be able to claim your freedom by walking away as soon as the criticizing, complaining, gossiping, and finger-pointing begins. If you are unable to leave the room, you can claim your freedom by putting a big smile on your face and giving a positive spin to every topic of conversation. For example, whenever I fly I preempt having to hear the inevitable whining about delays, uncomfortable seats, and whatever else has my seatmate feeling victimized by saying “Isn’t this amazing? We live in a world where you and I can do something that the most creative man in the history of the world, Leonardo DaVinci, spent his whole life fantasizing about – flying above the clouds. What a miracle!” After that, I *never* have to put up with their whining; they might dump their misery (co-miserate = be miserable together) on the person across the aisle, but they never dump it on me!

Freedom from the fear of humiliation: When people talk about fear of rejection or fear of failure, what they are really talking about is fear of humiliation. It’s embarrassing to be rejected, it’s embarrassing to fail. Fear of humiliation is a prison that can be more confining than any prison cell. An author I know has a ritual to deal with this fear. Before submitting a proposal or a manuscript to a publisher, he writes his own rejection letter. Here’s one that he shared with me:

Dear Author (pardon the expression):

Thank you for submitting your manuscript, and thank you in advance for never doing it again. It’s not just that your writing is trite and hackneyed, though it certainly is, or that your plot wouldn’t make a daytime soap, much less a work of literary fiction, though that is also quite true. No, dear (ahem) author. We actually had a moment of silence in memory of the tree that died so you could create this insult to the English language. We suggest you go back to the writing exercises you undoubtedly did early in your school

career – you know, writing over-and-over the sentence that begins, “I will not...” Then, dear (ha ha) “author,” complete those sentences with this promise: “I will not ever again sit down at a keyboard with the intention of writing something more serious than a letter to the editor.”

My friend finds this therapeutic. He has received hundreds of rejection letters, but none as harsh as those he writes to himself. And in the process, he is discovering an important element of the diagnosis – that none of those rejection letters are rejecting *him*, they are only rejecting something he has written. It also reminds him that when an editor rejects a book proposal, it often says more about that editor’s tastes than it does about the author’s writing.

Claim your freedom

Set aside some quiet time for yourself and to think about how you can claim your freedom by declaring your independence from the baggage of the past, from the assumptions of the present, from the negativity of emotional vampires, and from the fears that are holding you back from pursuing your most authentic goals and dreams and becoming the person you are meant to be.

In today’s world, no one can give you the freedoms that really matter. You must claim them for yourself.

Get clear about your values

“One of the most important keys to self-motivation is to clearly identify your core values in life. You must decide what matters most. Many people think, ‘I know what’s important, I don’t need a list to remind me.’ What they don’t fully understand, however, is that core values often serve as critical guides for making important decisions.”

Mac Anderson: *Charging the Human Battery: 50 Ways to Motivate Yourself*

One of the most powerful sources of energy you can have comes from knowing that you are living your values. And while most people intuitively have good solid values, few of us have put much thought into what those values are, much less how they are reflected in our daily attitudes and actions.

When you think about your values, be sure to distinguish between values and the things your value. Many of the things we call values are in fact outcomes: good health, financial security, a great family life, rewarding work – even personal character – are outcomes. They are the result of your actions and behaviors. The more clear you are about your underlying core values, the more your daily actions, and the habits they build, will help you carve that statue of the ideal meant-to-be you I mentioned before.

The most comprehensive and systematic course on personal values that I know of is the Values Coach course on *The Twelve Core Action Values*. These are universal values that transcend specific political opinion or religious belief (or non-belief). From Authenticity (Core Action Value #1) through Leadership (Core Action Value #12) these are *your* values, and living them will give energy to your life. Each of the twelve values is reinforced by four cornerstones that put action into the value. The course outline is included in the graphic below. And as a special benefit, you can download a complementary eBook edition of the 400-page workbook on *The Twelve Core Action Values* – which is not available for retail sale – at this web link: <http://www.valuescoachinc.com/the-twelve-core-action-values-free-ebook>.

Align your goals with your values

“The only natural law I’ve witnessed in three decades of observing successful people’s efforts to become more successful is this: *People will do something – including changing their behavior – only if it can be demonstrated that doing so is in their own best interests as defined by their own values.*”

Marshall Goldsmith: *What Got You Here Won’t Get You There*

The reason people so often get on the health improvement roller coaster – lose the weight then gain it back, quit smoking then start again, go to the gym then let your membership lapse – is because they’re doing it for superficial reasons: to impress other people, to get a nagging spouse off their back, to get the employee health insurance discount, etc. But as Marshall Goldsmith points out, people will only *sustain* these behavior changes if they are in line with their personal values.

Health Solutions is a company based in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, that provides health coaching for employees of corporate clients. Because they understand the “natural laws” described by Goldsmith, they are working with Values Coach to incorporate key elements of our course on *The Twelve Core Action Values* into their coaching programs. Core Action Value #1 in the course is Authenticity. If you were to ask overweight smokers if smoking and being obese reflected their authentic best selves, the answer will almost always be a resounding NO. As they strive to become more authentic, quitting smoking and losing weight will happen almost spontaneously, as a by-product of living their core values.

The very best time to think about and commit to your core values is when your world has turned upside down; it is in those desperate times that you are most likely to make the behavioral changes that will stay with you for the rest of your life. Go to any fitness center during normal working hours and many if not most of the people you see there will be those who are out of work, working off their frustrations. Some of them will maintain the fitness habits they create long after they have found another job.

Have the courage to pursue your highest goal

“You connect with your highest goal when you awaken full of enthusiasm for the day and when you know you are making a contribution. It is synonymous with being in the flow, periods in which you are so totally absorbed with what you are doing that time stops and fulfillment comes naturally. It is making your life itself a work of art.”

Michael Ray: *The Highest Goal: The Secret that Sustains You in Every Moment*

The single most important class I've ever taken I wasn't even registered for – I was a stowaway. When I was at the Stanford Graduate School of Business in 1984, by far the most popular course was Michael Ray's class on Creativity in Business (he was also author of the bestselling book of the same title). I didn't even make the waiting list. So I showed up anyway and sat on the floor at the back of the room. While it was not policy to allow students to audit classes that had been fully subscribed, this being a course on creativity we came to an agreement on how I could participate, since I'd shown up (remember – Woody Allen says 90 percent of success is simply showing up).

Twenty years later I was Michael's guest speaker for his last class before he retired. In the interim I'd founded (created) a nonprofit organization to fight the tobacco industry and the company that is now Values Coach Inc. I know I never would have done either had it not been for what I learned – both about the world and about myself – by auditing Michael's class.

The night before that class Michael and I went out for dinner. I told him that in the years since school I'd come to realize that his wasn't really a class about creativity, it was a class about courage. He gave me a conspiratorial wink and said, “Don't tell anyone – they never would have let me teach a course about courage.”

It's too bad, really, that we don't teach courses on courage and perseverance in school. Nothing is more important – especially when your world is upside down.

For an eloquent poem about highest goals watch Taylor Mali perform [What Teachers Make](#)

Thank God Ahead of Time (TGAoT) for whatever happens

“Solanus did not worry about those things that lie beyond the power of humans, like healing. Instead he simply urged people to go beyond their limited power to God. They were advised to manifest their thanks to the God who heals by gratefully doing something both before and after the healing.”

Michael Crosby: *Thank God Ahead of Time*

Father Michael Crosby wrote a biography of Solanus Casey entitled *Thank God Ahead of Time*. That’s a great philosophy for dealing with the tragedies and travesties of life. When I’m speaking about courage and perseverance, I often ask listeners to visualize the letters TGAoT stenciled on the insides of their foreheads as a way of pre-programming their thinking to accept adversity and loss as a well-disguised blessing, not as a curse. Bad things do happen to good people; if you’ve prepared yourself ahead of time with the TGAoT commitment to face those bad things with courage and equanimity, the silver linings will become evident much more quickly.

Almost everyone who’s ever lost a job will eventually look back and say that it was the best thing that could have happened (the primary exception being people who choose to spend the rest of their lives seeing themselves as having been victimized by their former employers.)

Not many people are thankful for a diagnosis of cancer, but if you’ve ever spent time with people in a cancer support group you know that, while they would love to just make it go away, the disease has brought blessings in its wake. The book *Not Quite What I Was Planning* is a collection of 6-word memoirs that were submitted to the website of *Smith Magazine*. My favorite one was written by a 10 year old kid: “Cursed with cancer, blessed with friends.” If a 10 year old can say that about cancer, what can happen to you or me that we can’t immediately begin looking for the TGAoT silver lining?

When your world turns upside down, immediately saying “thank you” – even though you don’t know what you’re going to be thankful for – will help you pay attention to the well-disguised blessing that you know is in there somewhere.

Use adversity as a platform for change

“Fate cannot be changed; otherwise it would not be fate. Man, however, may well change himself, otherwise he would not be man.”

Viktor E. Frankl: *The Will to Meaning*

No one has ever had their world turned upside down as radically and tragically as Viktor Frankl and the other victims of the Nazi Holocaust. Frankl went from being a successful psychiatrist with a busy practice to being an inmate in the infamous Auschwitz concentration camp, where he saw death all around him, and knew that every day could be his last. In his bestselling book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl wrote that the one freedom no one can ever take away from you is the freedom to choose your attitude, the freedom to choose how you respond to what happens to you

In the quote above, Frankl is saying that you cannot undo what has been done; you cannot undo fate. But what you can do is choose how to interpret it, and how to respond to it. You can choose whether to become a victim or, assuming it hasn't killed you, emerge even stronger, as Nietzsche promised you would (what doesn't kill you makes you stronger!).

As I write this, I've just had an email exchange with a young man whose eyes were badly damaged by a Lasik procedure; he is depressed and has been contemplating suicide. I shared with him the story of another exchange I had several years earlier with a young woman in a very similar situation. She almost took her life because the catastrophic Lasik outcome left her with severe and unremitting pain and untreatable vision anomalies. But rather than taking her own life, she started a nonprofit organization to help other young women understand that cosmetic surgery, including Lasik, would not help with self-esteem issues, and in fact could well make them worse (Maxwell Maltz was a plastic surgeon who developed the concepts of Psycho-Cybernetics based upon his insight that surgery on the outside cannot fix problems that reside on the inside).

Whatever way your world has turned, and whatever emotional or physical pain you are suffering, the message is this: you cannot, perhaps, change that fate, but you can choose how you respond to what has happened. You can, as a result, become a stronger and more powerful person.

Fear of failure is really fear of humiliation

“Why is the prospect of failure so frightening, that we can’t risk failing even when we know that’s the only real path to genuine success? Actually, it isn’t failure itself that scares us most. What really makes our hearts thump and palms sweat is the prospect of being *seen* as a failure. . . The fear of humiliation is the least understood, but most paralyzing, of all inhibitions” (emphasis in original).

Richard Farson and Ralph Keyes: *Whoever Makes the Most Mistakes Wins: The Paradox of Innovation*

In his book *Orbiting the Giant Hairball: A Corporate Fool’s Guide to Surviving with Grace*, Gordon Mackenzie, former Creative Directive for Hallmark Cards, wrote he used to host field trips for young children. He would ask the youngsters if they could draw, sing and dance. Kids in kindergarten didn’t just answer – they demonstrated their abilities right then and there. Mackenzie said that by the time they were in third grade, more than half of the kids had “learned” that they could not sing, dance or draw. Why not? It wasn’t because they had forgotten what they’d known two years earlier – it was because they had learned how to be embarrassed. Then we grow up and get serious (“I’m dead serious about this” we say, but if you’re dead serious long enough you end up seriously dead: we all know people who are deader than cut grass, but who haven’t stopped breathing yet so we can bury them without breaking the law).

They stuff us into suits and ties (or pantyhose, which I hear are worse) and our days of singing, dancing, and drawing are over (unless we’re taking a class – then it’s okay to be bad at something). Sometime between the ages of 5 and 10 we begin to be conditioned to not do things that might embarrass, humiliate, or mortify us (or our parents). One of the blessings that can come from having your world turn upside down on you is that you can unlearn some of those lessons and erase some of that programming. Heck, if you can survive cancer, the possibility of having a business fail is really no big deal.

Congratulate yourself on being rejected and on failing

“A person who’s trying to achieve the pleasure of success without ever experiencing the pain of rejection will never succeed long-term. In fact, this person will sabotage himself before he ever truly succeeds on a major scale.”

Anthony Robbins: *Awaken the Giant Within*

In my speaking engagements I will sometimes ask for a show of hands of those who have been rejected: every hand goes up. I then ask people to keep their hand up if they really enjoyed the experience; you should see how fast those hands go back down! Then I ask for a show of hands of people who have failed. Again, every hand goes up. But when I ask how many can’t wait until they fail again, hands quickly return to laps. Everybody gets rejected, everybody fails; nobody enjoys it.

Unfortunately, when pursuing big goals, you cannot get from where you are to where you want to be without facing rejection and experience failure. What you need to do is reframe how you interpret those experiences.

Rejection is the Medal of Honor in the world of work. It takes courage to ask for what you need and face the possibility of rejection; it takes even more courage to pick yourself up and do it again and again and again following each successive rejection. Cowards don’t earn many medals of honor because they don’t try very often.

And in the world of work failure is the Red Badge of Courage. It takes courage to try something with no guarantee of success. It takes even more courage to keep at it when everyone around you is convinced that you have already failed and your determination is the only thing keeping it all going. Cowards don’t earn many red badges of courage because they quit after the first one or two.

Rejection is the Red Badge of Courage Failure is the Medal of Honor

You must overcome your fear of success

“As far as I’m concerned, people who think they fear failure have got it wrong. They really fear success. If you truly feared failure, you’d be very successful. People who truly fear anything stay as far away from it as possible.”

Barbara Sher: *I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was*

I know what you are thinking: when your world has turned upside down, the last thing you need to worry about is the fear of success. But that’s not true. In fact, that is often when the fear of success can be most insidious. Why? Because when your world turns upside down, all sorts of new possibilities might open up. Even something as daunting as cancer can create opportunities. When Christine Clifford went through treatment for breast cancer, she found the inspiration to found The Cancer Club (www.cancerclub.com) and reach a wider audience as a speaker and author. But as we start to imagine our new lives, say as a successful entrepreneur, the alarm bells start to go off. If we fail, we’ve lost some time and some money, gained some experience and learned some lessons, and we go back and get a job doing what we were doing before. But if we succeed – then we are *committed*. And that can be a frightening prospect.

Fear of success is far more dangerous than fear of failure, because the subconscious mind works to prevent that which it fears. People may fear success because of low self-esteem and a feeling of not deserving it; because it will increase the hassle factor in their lives and what others expect of them; or it will run them headlong into the Peter Principle. The symptoms of fear of success include as anxiety, doing work that is less than your best, lack of focus and concentration, not working well under pressure, and not keeping your commitments. Here are some steps to overcome fear of success:

Clearly define your purpose and goals – what is your One Big Yes and why is it important to you?

Why did you choose those goals? Why do you deserve to achieve them?

What is the service component; how will other people benefit from your success?

Study role models who have accomplished similar successes before. What did they do that you can emulate?

Every day, visualize yourself in your new successful role; make it as tangible as possible, a “memory of the future.”

Do the thing you most fear to do but which you know should be done, and do it now.

Fear of success is sometimes manifested as a sort of internal circuit breaker. If it seems like things are going too well or too fast, and you suddenly run out of steam, ask yourself whether or not fear of success has pulled the plug on you, and if so, go plug it back in.

Leadership is most important when the world is upside down

“Perhaps the most impressive and memorable quality of the leaders we studied was the way they responded to failure... [T]hese leaders put all their energies into their task. They simply don’t think about failure, don’t even use the word.” Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus: *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge*

Think of the leaders you most admire. I’ll bet that the reason you admire them is not so much for what they accomplished as it is for the challenges and adversities they overcame en route to that accomplishment. We remember George Washington at Valley Forge and crossing the ice-laden Delaware in the middle of a snow storm in the middle of the night to route the British at Trenton, save the revolution and the infant nation.

We remember Florence Nightingale at the Scutari Barrack Hospital; in a letter to her father she wrote of the horrendous conditions that “surely this is the kingdom of hell.” Yet in the next 22 months, working in this kingdom of hell, she defined what it means to be a nurse and established nursing as a real profession and, more than any other person, created a blueprint for the hospital as we know it today.

We remember Martin Luther King writing his famous letter from the Birmingham Jail and Nelson Mandela changing the course of South African history from behind bars.

We remember Steve Jobs returning to a money-losing and demoralized Apple, the company he founded and that had later fired him, to spark one of the most incredible corporate resurgences in business history.

When your world turns upside down there is a natural and understandable tendency to want to hide under the bed. But that is precisely the time when you need to be standing on the table, waving the flag, and pointing the way forward for those who are depending upon you for leadership.

The flip side of love is loss

“When you love someone, every moment is shadowed by the fear of loss. Then loss occurs, and you feel more love than ever. The more you loved, the more you feel the loss. Depression, then, may be seen as the strongest expression of love.”

Roger Rosenblatt: *Kayak Morning*

“If I’d never loved I never would have cried,” goes the song “I Am a Rock” by Paul Simon. Turning yourself into a rock would be a surefire way to make sure that you never cry, that you never experience grief, and that it wouldn’t matter if your world turned upside down because you wouldn’t care.

It would also be a cold, sterile, and pretty meaningless existence. To love someone is the ultimate expression of the soul, and to love is to, eventually, experience loss. To love is to eventually cry.

In grief seek comfort - and give comfort

“In grief, one seeks and finds comfort in situations that would otherwise be harrowing, if not unbearable... With every painful step, the Lord provided a new comfort, and with each there was the opportunity to express a continuing faith in a God who makes no mistakes.”

C. Everett Koop and Elizabeth Koop: *Sometimes Mountains Move*

After their son was killed in a mountain-climbing accident Dr. and Mrs. Koop wrote this beautiful little book. It was, I think, partly to assuage their anguish and partly to create a legacy for their son. The title came from the fact that just as their son had placed a piton in the rock, “the mountain moved” and he fell to his death.

Notice the progression in what the Koops have written. First comes the tragedy, harrowing and unbearable. Then every painful step forward, each providing a new comfort. And last the opportunity to express a continuing faith – to keep taking step after painful step, and to create meaning in a tragedy that has no inherent meaning.

I once had a chance to ask Dr. Koop what he thought was the most important development in the healthcare field during the 20th century. I thought he would mention the incredible technological advances, since he had been a pioneering pediatric surgeon, or the fights he had led against smoking and AIDS. He surprised me by saying it was the evolution of support groups, because in a support group people come together to reclaim responsibility for their own health and wellbeing.

I’ve spent many evenings with support groups of various sorts, and even when I was there because I’d been invited to share some words of inspiration it is always the case that I am more inspired by them than they are by me. And it is often the case that I see people creating some of the most important friendships they’ve ever had as they reach out to comfort one another in what would otherwise be unbearably tragic.

Imagine your organization as a support group

“The single most powerful predictor of the ability to withstand and rebound from adversity is the perceived support of others. The resilient leader should keep this in mind and strive to build a resilient culture.” George Everly and Douglas Strouse: *The Secrets of Resilient Leadership: When Failure is Not an Option*

I've spent many evenings over coffee and cookies with members of support groups. It's amazing how often real magic occurs in these meetings. When people leave, they still have cancer, they are still addicted, the child they've lost still isn't ever coming back to them. But they have renewed hope and courage, new ideas and new friends. The problem didn't go away, but their ability to cope with the problem was strengthened, and they were uplifted in the process.

I often wonder why the workplace can't be like that. What would it be like to work in a place where there was such a spirit of fellowship that at the end of the day everyone would go home physically tired and mentally drained because they've been working hard all day, but emotionally and spiritually uplifted by the support of a caring boss and coworkers?

Wouldn't it be great to work in such a place? Wouldn't it be great to work in an organization where the culture encouraged everyone to have a positive self-image, that promoted constructive self-talk, and that inspired self-belief. Take a look in the mirror: the lion looking back at you is the person who can get that started.

Grieve – then move on

“If we hesitate to swallow the bitter losses time inevitably brings us, we cannot enter fully into our humanity. Depression, boredom, neurosis, melancholia are all in differing degrees the refusal to accept loss, to mourn, and to begin again.”

Sam Keen: *Inward Bound*

There seem to be two basic schools of thought on the subject of depression. To oversimplify, many motivational experts believe that depression is an unnecessary distraction from pursuing your goals, while many psychological and spiritual counselors believe it can be a powerful signal from your subconscious that changes are needed. I think of it as depression of the ego versus depression of the soul.

Here’s one way of viewing your own depression: If it relates to fundamental questions of who you are and what you do, it might be *depression of the soul*, which should be carefully considered. If, on the other hand, the depression is related to how badly you think you’ve been treated or how hard you’re having to work, it’s probably *depression of the ego*, which should be transformed into more rational thinking.

Listen to depression of the soul. It could keep you from making a major career mistake. For example, if you find yourself getting depressed whenever you think about all those phone calls you’ve been meaning to make in your search for another job as an accountant, explore whether it’s merely laziness or fear (depression of the ego) or whether your heart is weeping at the prospect of another stint crunching numbers when it really longs to be working with children (depression of the soul).

Depression of the soul could also signal a deeper disturbance – a questioning of your secular, material life and a longing for a more meaningful Quest, a spiritual awakening. Depression of the soul can be anesthetized by finding a new job, putting money in the bank, and filling time with busy work and pleasant distractions. It can only be healed by an introspective and probably painful and lengthy inner searching process.

Don’t try to tough it out if depression or some other disorder is interfering with your career planning and job search. Seeing a psychiatrist or psychologist might help you maintain your objectivity and give you a new perspective. If your physician recommends anti-depressant medication, don’t reject the advice without careful thought and research. For some people, it can be like a tow truck that pulls a car out of a ditch, to be discontinued when the wheels are rolling again.

On the other hand, depression of the ego is often just a synonym for self-pity, for playing the role of the victim. If that’s what you’re experiencing – get over it.

There's no such thing as false hope

"The one thing that usually persists through all these stages [of dying] is hope."
Elisabeth Kubler-Ross: *On Death and Dying*

In his 2009 commencement address at the University of Portland author and entrepreneur Paul Hawken said, "The most unrealistic person in the world is the cynic, not the dreamer. Hope only makes sense when it doesn't make sense to be hopeful."

There is a scene in my book *The Healing Tree: A Mermaid, A Poet, and A Miracle* where a doctor tells Maggie Mermaid to not share her poem "The Hope Diamond" with a seriously ill patient because he doesn't want to give her false hope. Maggie asks which he would rather his patient have – false hope or genuine despair.

There is an important distinction between hope and optimism. You don't need to justify hope like you do optimism. If I were to tell you that I'm optimistic that this book will sell a million copies, you could quite justifiably ask me for the grounds of my optimism: what is the size of my current platform, what sort of marketing strategies have I planned, and how big is my promotional budget – all are legitimate questions that you could use to challenge (in this case successfully) my optimism. But if I were to say that *I hope* this book sells a million copies, I don't have to justify that statement because it's true – I do hope that a million people will read this book and put these ideas to work in their own lives.

One more thing: Hope is the foundation for optimism. You can be hopeful without being optimistic, but you cannot be optimistic if there is no hope. And since Job #1 of every leader (this includes every parent in their role as leader of the family) a senses of optimism, there truly is no such thing as false hope.

Practice a healthy humility

“To understand man’s significance, I saw, you must first accept his insignificance. Only then could you focus him into importance against this stupendous, unshruggable background [of the Grand Canyon]. And now, accepting this vision utterly, accepting it without fear and with joy, I had, for the time being at least, found all I needed.” Collin Fletcher: *The Man Who Walked Through Time*

The first time I ever hiked in the Grand Canyon I had recently been terminated from my job as a hospital chief operating officer, had no idea what to do next, and was frankly terrified. A week in this vast, natural cathedral did not bring any answers, but it did help me start to ask better questions. The humbling experience of feeling totally insignificant in a canyon millions of years in the making, sleeping under the light of billions of stars – light which had traveled billions of years before reaching my eyes – was, I think, an essential factor in being able to give up the ego-driven dream of being a highly-paid big shot executive and beginning the quest to find my real purpose here.

It might be the ultimate paradox: when your world has been turned upside down it is easier to accept your insignificance on the cosmic scale but, as Fletcher says, that is often the essential first step to truly grasping your significance on the human scale.

Go off alone somewhere

“The capacity to be alone is a valuable resource when changes of mental attitude are required... The capacity to be alone is necessary if the brain is to function at its best and the individual to fulfill his highest potential.”

Anthony Storr: *Solitude*

Winston Churchill wrote that anyone who aspires to great accomplishments must first spend some time alone in the desert. He meant this metaphorically, but it is advice I take quite literally – I try to spend at least one week every year alone or with a small group of friends in my favorite place in the world: the Grand Canyon. Spending time in the wilderness is a great way to learn about yourself, to become more grounded and centered, and to discover strengths you didn't know you had.

I was 44 years old and recently unemployed the first time I ever experienced wilderness hiking. I went on a week-long Outward Bound trek in Big Bend National Park in West Texas. Several months later my good friend Dave Altman and I spent a week in the Grand Canyon. I was hooked. Today I can honestly say that some of the best ideas I've ever had have not come from carrying a briefcase, they have come from carrying a backpack.

You can learn more about the options for Outward Bound at www.outwardbound.org. One of the best ways to explore the Grand Canyon is by taking a guided trip with the Grand Canyon Field Institute; you can learn more at www.grandcanyon.org.

In the trials of adversity work on character strength

“It is through character that personal leadership and excellence are exercised; it is character that sets the example and the standards by which you behave... The greatest gift you can give yourself is the practice of good character; the greatest gift you can give to others is a model character. Character inspires and is inspiring.” Gary Ryan Blair: Everything Counts: 52 Remarkable Ways to Inspire Excellence and Drive Results

“Character is destiny” said the Greek philosopher Heraclitus. It’s true. From Enron to Lance Armstrong, we’ve seen over and over how character flaws can bring down an organization and permanently damage the reputation of an individual.

When your world turns upside down, it really is a test of character. Will you be a victim or a fighter? Will you accept responsibility or point fingers? Will you tell the hard truth or try to pass off the easy lie? Character is tested, defined, and refined by adversity. Helen Keller, a woman who had more than her share of adversity and so spoke from experience, said it best: “Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.”

Confucius thought a great deal about character, often using the contrast between what he called the superior man and the small man to make his point. His sayings were included in *The Analects*, a collection of his teachings compiled by his followers after his death, which I’ve excerpted in the illustration. As you read each line, ask yourself where you fall on the “small-superior” continuum, and what you can do to move yourself in the direction of superior character. Be completely honest with yourself because no one will see it but you. It’s a test of character.

Confucius on character

The superior man works to develop the superior aspects of his character. The small man allows the inferior aspects of his character to flourish.

The superior man is easy to serve but difficult to please. The small man is difficult to serve but easy to please.

The superior man can see a question from all sides. The small man can see it only from his biased perspective.

The superior man calls attention to the good points in others. The small man calls attention to their defects.

The superior man can influence those who are above him. The small man can influence only those below him.

The demands that the superior man makes are on himself. The demands of the small man are placed upon others.

The superior man is slow in word but prompt in deed. The small man is quick to make promises but slow to keep them.

The superior man is diligent in ascertaining what is right. The small man is diligent in ascertaining what will pay.

The superior man is calm and at ease. The small man is fretful and ill at ease.

When things go wrong, the superior man seeks blame in himself. When things go wrong, the small man seeks blame in others.

The small man thinks he is a superior man. The superior man knows he is a small man.

In the presence of a superior man, think all the time how you might equal him. In the presence of a small man, evaluate your own character to be sure you are not like him.

The superior man has the quality of wind. The small man has the quality of grass. When the wind blows, the grass cannot help but to bend.

“To see what is right and not to do it is cowardice.”

Confucius: *The Analects*

Identify the problem behind the problem

“The fact that you don’t have any money is a result of all your other problems. You have thinking problems, attitude problems, self-esteem problems. You are lazy. You lack discipline. You lack integrity. You don’t take responsibility. You lack goals. Your priorities are out of whack. Your biggest problem is not in your wallet or your bank account. Your biggest problem is between your ears. You will fix your money problems when you fix your other problems.”

Larry Winget: *You’re Broke Because You Want to Be*

There is a total quality management technique called “the 5 whys.” When you ask why something went wrong, the first response is usually superficial. You have to ask the question five times before you really get to root causes. Here’s an example using a hypothetical problem at a hypothetical car manufacturer:

Q#1: Why are our legal expenses so far over budget?

A#1: Because we’ve lost so many lawsuits.

Q#2: Why have we lost so many lawsuits?

A#2: Because wheels have been falling off cars and causing injuries.

Q#3: Why have wheels been falling off our cars?

A#3: Because assembly line workers haven’t been installing them properly.

Q#4: Why haven’t they been installing them properly?

A#4: Because they haven’t been properly trained.

Q#5: Why haven’t they been properly trained?

A#5: Because the training budget was cut so we could hire more lawyers.

By the time you got to why #5 you are addressing root causes. And more often than not, you are also looking in the mirror. As Larry Winget (who calls himself “the pit bull of motivation”) says, if your financial world turns upside down, by the time you get to why #5 you will have stopped blaming your employer (or ex-employer), the economy, the government, the stock market, or anything else, and will be looking directly at the face in the mirror.

Change your questions

“A world of questions is a world of possibility. Questions open our minds, connect us to each other, and shake outmoded paradigms. Our orientation should shift from one of answers and opinions to one of questions and curiosity. We would see quick judgments, fixed perspectives, and old opinions give way to exploration, discovery, innovation, and cooperation.”

Marilee Adams: *Change Your Questions Change Your Life*

As with the 5 whys in the previous section, a good question will always lead to another good question. Questions can challenge assumptions. You assume you can't do something but the right questions ask “Why not?” and “What if?” Core Action Value #1 in the course on *The Twelve Core Action Values* is Authenticity. We ask course participants a question that can be life-changing: What would you do if every job paid the same and had the same social status?

If your answer is something different than what you are doing now, that opens up a whole range of new questions. What is keeping you from doing work you love? How can you create a path from what you do now to doing that work you would do for the joy of that work itself? Alternatively, what might you do to bring some of that ideal work into your current day job? Answering this question led one nurse who loved to write poetry to a practice of writing poems to share with her patients. Paradoxically, in the eyes of many of her patients that one thing – something that was not part of her nurse training and not part of her job description – did more to create the perception that she was a great nurse than did all of the clinical skills she had learned and upon which her performance was evaluated.

If you don't have a question

- you don't have a clue

If you aren't searching

- you must really be lost

- McZen (www.McZenpoems.com)

Make the most of midlife crisis

“Perhaps middle age is, or should be, a period of shedding shells; the shell of ambition, the shell of material accumulations and possessions, the shell of the ego... Perhaps one can at last in middle age, if not earlier, be completely oneself. And what a liberation that would be!”

Anne Morrow Lindbergh: *Gift from the Sea*

Midlife crisis gets a bad name. It is often associated with red sports cars, extra-marital flings, and other craziness. But those are just superficial symptoms of something much deeper. What Dante called “the middle of this road we call life” there comes a growing, and often painful, awareness that one is closer to the end than to the beginning. “Midlife crisis” is often where the “dark night of the soul” first described by the medieval Christian mystics occurs. Alternatively, it can be seen as a whole-life crisis that has finally broken through to the surface somewhere around the midpoint.

As Lindbergh points out, on the other side of the pain, there can be liberation. Many a second career has been more rewarding than the first (often including in a financial sense) precisely because at that point one is able to shed the old shells and learn to be more authentic.

Stop doing what isn't working and try something new

“An absence of overriding personal ambition together with shrewd common sense are among the essential components of wisdom... [There are two common] characteristics of folly: it often does not spring from a great design, and its consequences are frequently a surprise. The folly lies in persisting thereafter.” Barbara Tuchman: *The March of Folly*

Here's a great question to ask when your world turns upside down: what attitudes or behaviors should I change because they aren't working for me? You have probably heard this definition of insanity: doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. If that's insane, how crazy is it to double down – to work even harder at those things that have brought you to this present situation?

This is the voice of experience speaking. I had been Chief Operating Office of a large community hospital for five years, and after having been passed over for the CEO position was let go. Had I asked myself that essential question for authenticity – what would I do if every job paid the same and had the same social status? – I would have immediately started Values Coach. Instead, I took a disastrous detour by accepting another COO position at another large hospital. It was only after being fired from that position that I recognized I was on the wrong path in life and could begin doing the work that was the answer to that question – the work I am doing today.

Lisa Bluder is the head coach of The University of Iowa women's basketball team. Her email signature says “If you want what you've never had you must do what you've never done.” There is no better time to dream new and bigger dreams than when your world has been turned upside down. There's also no more important time for you to stop doing the things that have not been working for you and to start doing things you've never done before.

If you want what you've never had you must do what you've never done

When you put the pieces back together make the vessel stronger

“The work of healing is like finding, sorting, and putting together the pieces of an ancient pot. The work is often tedious, and some of the slivers may be sharp and dangerous. The result, if you are patient, is a beautiful object, elegant in form and function, and elegant in the tales it tells of its creation. If put together carefully, it will also be watertight and can be filled up with good things.”

Richard A. Moskowitz: *Lost in the Mirror*

W Mitchell, author of the book *It's Not What Happens to You It's What You Do About It*, had his face and hands burned off in a fire after his motorcycle was run over by a truck. After years of painful rehabilitation he built a new life, moved to Colorado, started a business, ran for mayor of his small town (campaign slogan: not just another pretty face), and bought an airplane with special controls that he could fly without use of hands. One day his plane crashed on take-off; his back was broken and he was paralyzed. And you think you've had some bad days!

Mitchell is often asked whether, if he could go back and undo those two accidents and have his body restored but be the person he would have been had the accidents not happened, would he do it? His answer is always an unequivocal No. It's the answer you almost always hear from people who have endured terrible adversity and emerged stronger as a result. Like the broken ceramic pot described by Moskowitz, the glued together parts are perhaps not as physically attractive as the original, but the rebuilt pot is more beautiful at a deeper level, and is stronger and more functional.

If your world has turned upside down, imagine yourself as a pot that fell from the shelf and was broken. What are the pieces that need to be reassembled? Your self-esteem? Your pride? Your balance sheet? Your career? Your relationships? As you reassemble this pot, how can you make sure that the inevitable scar tissue makes you stronger and protects you from future blows without making you brittle and insensitive?

Stop thinking about yourself

“Of all the things people think about during the day, the one topic of thought related to the worst moods is the self. The reason for this seems to be that generally when a person thinks about him- or herself, the first and often the only thoughts that appear in consciousness have to do with things that are going wrong – for instance, about getting old, fat, or losing one’s hair, or feeling that one is not successful in some aspect of life.”
Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi: *The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the New Millenium*

Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is the leading authority on the optimal experience of flow, a state of total absorption in one’s work that requires forgetting about the self. When you are fully engaged in your work, you aren’t thinking about yourself or your problems. In those moments you are not obsessed about getting old, fat, or becoming a failure. But after your world turns upside that those self-absorbed thoughts can overwhelm you.

Here’s the paradox: it is easy to forget yourself and your problems when things are going great. It is hardest to do so when your world has turned upside, but that is precisely when it is most important for you to do so. Focusing in on yourself and your problems just makes you more depressed, and the more depressed you are the more difficult it is for you to connect with other people, effectively search for a job, start a new business, write your novel, or whatever it is that should come next in your life.

Pay attention to what’s going on in your head. As soon as you see your thoughts beginning to focus on your Self, immediately shift your focus outward. Think about the work you need to do, think about others you need to meet, think about the contributions you can make.

Stop ruminating

“New solutions and fresh ways of seeing a problem do not typically come from worrying, especially chronic worry. Instead of coming up with solutions to these potential problems, worriers typically simply ruminate on the danger itself, immersing themselves in a low-key way in the dread associated with it while staying in the same rut of thought.”

Daniel Goleman: *Emotional Intelligence*

Here’s another paradox: you most need to think creatively when what you are doing now isn’t working. As Goleman points out, it’s hard to think creatively when you are worrying. But it is precisely when your world has turned upside down that you are most likely to sink into chronic worry, and obsess about the potential dire consequences that might come about because your world is upside down.

It’s been said that worry is like paying interest on a debt you might not even owe. I think of worry as abuse of the God-given gift of imagination – it’s imagining bad things that you don’t want to have happen.

Action and faith are the one-two punch for dealing with chronic worry. Define the problem you are worrying about as clearly and specifically as you possibly can and take action to deal with that problem. Then have faith that those actions will, all in good time, bring about the necessary results. Repeat the process as necessary.

Action and faith are the one-two punch for dealing with chronic worry

Train your doubt

“Doubt is torture. If we give ourselves fully to something, it will be clearer when it might be appropriate to quit. It is a constant test of perseverance... Don’t listen to doubt. It leads no place but to pain and negativity.”

Natalie Goldberg: *Writing Down the Bones*

Between 1902 and 1908, the German Rainer Maria Rilke wrote a series of letters to a young poet that have since been published (and are still in print). The young poet was wracked by self-doubt about the quality of his work. Rilke responded that he needed to train his doubt, to teach it to ask better questions. That is great advice when your world turns upside down.

The dictionary definition of doubt gives it two meanings:

1. a feeling of uncertainty
2. a lack of conviction

If the doubt you are feeling is of the first variety, do what you can to reduce your uncertainty level with more research, but then accept the fact that some things must remain uncertain. The young poet can study the masters, write and re-write his poems, but he cannot dictate how the critics will respond.

If your doubt is of the second variety, a lack of conviction, ask yourself whether that is because you really don’t believe in the cause, whatever it is (your job, your half-written book, your marriage, your diet and fitness program, etc.), or rather that you simply are not willing to pay the price, make the sacrifice, and do the work. In such cases, doubt is often just an excuse for laziness and cowardice.

As Goldberg says, doubt is a constant test of your commitment and perseverance. Train yours to work for you and not against you by teaching it to ask empowering questions and to stop pestering you with disempowering questions.

One more thing: virtually every major breakthrough in the history of the world has come from someone acting upon doubt. From Copernicus doubting the conventional wisdom of a geocentric universe to J.K. Rowling doubting the conventional wisdom that an unemployed single mother can’t become a successful author, people who act upon their doubt have changed the world. So if you are feeling overwhelmed by doubt, ask yourself if it might not be that you are on the verge of some sort of breakthrough yourself.

When one door closes, push open another

“When something ends – a job, a relationship, one’s good health – you just don’t stand by and wait for something good to happen. You can’t depend on luck or anybody else to pull you out of the situation. You must use your own efforts to push a new door open, kick it open if you have to, using that setback as an inspiration to move ahead and make a new beginning for yourself.”

Arthur Pine: *One Door Closes, Another Door Opens*

The miners came to Grand Canyon looking for gold and jewels. Instead they found asbestos, uranium, and a little bit of copper. Most of them went away broke and broken-hearted. The door to unimaginable wealth had been closed on them. But a select few opened another door. They had empty bunkhouses for miners who were no longer there, mules to carry up the gold they never found, and one of the most spectacular views on earth. They opened the door to the tourism industry and became fabulously successful.

One of the doors that has closed on millions of people is the employee entrance of their former employer. Most of them, not being independently wealthy, must find a new door to open, or to kick open. There are two essential steps to finding and opening that other door: perception and action. You have to see the opportunity and then, more important, take action to pursue it. Here are some of the questions to ask when a door closes on you:

What resources do you have that can be redirected? Don’t just focus on physical resources, include personal resources such as your education and ambition.

What needs are there, or can be created, toward which you can deploy those resources?

What dreams have you been putting off due to the requirements of making a living?

What actions can you take to get started right now?

What obstacles will you need to overcome?

“When one door closes, another opens; but we often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened for us.”

Alexander Graham Bell

Ignore the nattering nabobs of negativity

“Ignore the ones who say it’s too late to start over. Disregard those who say you’ll never amount to anything. Turn a deaf ear to those who say you aren’t smart enough, fast enough, tall enough, or big enough – ignore them.”

Max Lucado: *He Still Moves Stones*

Ex-Vice President Spiro Agnew’s enduring contribution to the English language was the phrase “nattering nabobs of negativity.” After your world has turned upside down, and you begin taking action to move in new directions, you will meet these people in abundance. Some of them are well-meaning friends and relatives who think they are protecting you from the consequences of risk-taking. Others are not so well-meaning, including those who fear that your success will illuminate their failures.

Mark Twain said that great people will help you see your own potential for greatness, while small people will do everything they can to keep you small. Nurture your relationships with the former; ignore, disregard, and turn a deaf ear to the latter.

Better yet – show them that you can do whatever it is they say you cannot do.

Utilize your gifts

“In truth, everyone faces hardship and rejection and loss in their lives, even those who may appear to be blessed. There is another truth here: we are all blessed in some way. In a very real sense, all of us have a certain magic, a gift, a talent, or an ability that if developed and put to its highest use can help us overcome setbacks, defeats, and difficulties.”

Stedman Graham: *You Can Make It Happen*

Another personal story: for almost the entire 27 years that I was bound and determined to become the CEO of a big teaching hospital, I always had a side project that – though I never would have publicly admitted to the fact – I was more passionate about than I was my day job. In fact, looking back on it, I can see how these outside passions reflected a deep inner struggle between soul and ego. My ego desperately wanted to be a big shot CEO; my soul wanted to have work in which I felt as though I was making a bigger difference in the world, and also could have substantial control over how I chose to use my time.

These side ventures always shared several things in common: they were non-traditional, they were activist, initiative-focused on solving big problems, and they always involved a substantial degree of creative writing and public speaking. It was as if, even as I tried to suppress them in my quest to get a job that truth-be-told I was not called to do, these deeper gifts, talents, and abilities kept bubbling up to the surface. I was born to be a teacher and a writer, not an administrator.

Had I listened to what my soul was trying to tell me, I would have quit the hospital administration field much earlier and started Values Coach much sooner. Had I not been fired from my last “real” job I’m not sure when, or if, I would ever have found the courage to change paths and start the organization that is now Values Coach.

So we come back again to the central paradox: it is often only after your world has been turned upside down that you are finally able to acknowledge, embrace, and pursue your God-given gifts and become the person you are meant to be.

Hang tough!

“Now it’s time to practice hanging tough. That’s a necessity, because every accomplishment, every success, has to go through tough times... Patience is the possibility thinker’s all-powerful secret weapon.”

Robert Schuller: *If It’s Going To Be It’s Up To Me*

A friend who works as an accountant told me about one of his clients who had quit his job to start an accounting business of his own. Every year at tax time, the man complained that he could be making more money with a lot fewer hours and taking less risk if he simply folded up the company and went back to his old job. This went on every April for 13 years. Then, during the 14th year the man sold the business for more money than he’d made in all the previous years of his working life.

There was, of course, no guarantee of that happy outcome during those first 13 years of toil and travail, but there is a guarantee that had he quit he would have gone back to Go without his \$200 and had to start all over again.

Another of Schuller’s books is titled *Tough Times Never Last, But Tough People Do*. The question is how important is your biggest dream to you, and how badly do you want it? Are you willing to hang tough?

One more thing – and this is very important: be tough *with* yourself by having high expectations but do not be tough *on* yourself with abusive self-talk when you don’t always live up to them. Just try harder tomorrow.

Be tough with yourself without being tough on yourself

Don't give in to apparent failure in the middle

“My favorite maxim in management, if not life, is: ‘Everything can look like a failure in the middle.’ Predictable problems arise in the middle of every attempt to do something new... Stop a project because of these problems, and, by definition, that project will be a failure. Persist and... a chance for success remains.”

Rosabeth Moss Kanter: *On the Frontiers of Management*

At Values Coach, we've worked with organizations that have achieved amazing results; the CEO of one of our client hospitals wrote that after participating in our Values Collaborative he “got a whole new team and didn't have to change any of the people.” We've had reports of substantial enhancements in employee engagement, customer and patient satisfaction, and productivity. On the other hand, we've also worked with organizations participating in some the very same programs where one year later it was as if nothing had happened. It was just one more “program of the month.”

In the quote above, Harvard Professor Kanter has precisely nailed the difference between the two: where we have seen the greatest success has been where the leaders have insisted upon participation, persisted in the face of inevitable criticism and cynicism, and resisted every call to quit. The more committed the leadership team, the greater the result; the less committed the leadership team, the less the result.

Predictable problems arise, she says. You might not know the specifics but you know that you will have problems. Money troubles, troubled relationships, career derailments, health problems. These things, sooner or later, happen to us all. But if you persevere, you just might pull it off.

As the ancient poem Beowulf says, fate often saves a doomed warrior when his courage endures.

Anything can look like a failure in the middle but it only becomes a failure when you quit

Rescue your failures

“You will take risks, and you will have failures. But it’s what happens afterward that is defining. A failure often does not have to be a failure at all... It’s all about mastery of rescue.”

Atul Gawande MD: “Failure and Rescue” in *The New Yorker*, June 4, 2012

In the article quoted above Dr. Gawande, who is a surgeon, says that problems are inevitable in any surgical procedure, and the skill of the surgeon is as much about rescuing a situation gone bad as it is preventing that failure in the first place. Again, anything can look like a failure in the middle. That is where the leader, as with the surgeon, is called upon to shine.

In business, the most loyal customers are often those who had a bad experience in which the company went above and beyond the call of duty to make it right. I once purchased a back-up power supply on Amazon.com. It failed almost immediately and I posted a negative review. Within several hours I got an email from the manufacturer asking me to return the device for a replacement. This arrived several days later, having been shipped out before the defective unit was returned. A week later I got an email asking how the replacement unit was working (it was fine) and offering to send me a free cable for my new iPhone (which I didn’t need). I went back to Amazon.com and amended my review from one to five stars, and wrote that if I could I would have given the company six stars for customer service.

Conversely, a failure to make good on a problem can result in unhappy ex-customers who go out of their way to tell others about their bad experience.

Contrast the customer service excellence I experienced with a defective power supply with the atrocious treatment I received at the hands of the eye clinic where I had Lasik surgery. After Lasik left me with serious double vision, impaired visual acuity, chronic eye pain, and a host of other problems, the clinic that performed the surgery dropped me like a hot potato. Trying to get them to help me cope with the damage they had caused was about as productive as trying to carry on an intelligent conversation with a dead bug.

Had I been treated half as well by the clinic that mangled my eyes as I was by the manufacturer that sold me a defective power supply I would have let it drop there. But in the frustrating trial-and-error process of trying to navigate the medical system to find ways to cope with the damage done to my eyes I learned that there are thousands of Lasik casualties and that far too many Lasik surgeons (including those at the clinic

where I had mine done) have compromised their integrity by putting their financial interests ahead of patient welfare.

Had the eye clinic made a reasonable effort to “rescue their failure” by helping me cope with the damage they caused, it would not have turned me into a raving fan but it *would* have prevented me becoming an activist trying to warn others, especially young people, about the potential dangers of Lasik that too many financially-conflicted doctors try to minimize, and from posting a series of videos and documents, including a complete record of the almost-exclusively one-way correspondence between me and them and a copy of a malpractice lawsuit filed against them by a patient who suffered injuries far more catastrophic than mine.

By the way, if you or someone you love is considering Lasik eye surgery, please do your homework. The scientist who was head of the FDA ophthalmic division when Lasik was approved is now trying to get the procedure banned because the industry submitted fraudulent data to gain the approval and continues to cover up bad outcomes to prevent the procedure from being banned. I have good reason to believe the clinic that mangled my eyes failed to report the adverse outcome to the FDA, which they are legally required to do, and settled the catastrophic lawsuit out-of-court to keep it out of the public eye.

These videos and documents are posted at www.BadLasik.org.

There is no free lunch

“It’s that old inescapable cosmic reality again: no such thing as something for nothing. The greater the happiness you wish to achieve, the greater the price you must pay to achieve it.”

Robert J. Ringer: *Looking Out For #1*

There was once a microbrewery in my small town that has a sign on the door which read “free beer tomorrow.” Of course, when it comes to free beer, tomorrow never comes. Many years before, I saw a more honest sign in a restaurant: Free steak dinner when you buy the \$29.95 glass of water.

One of the hardest things for young people to learn is the difference between having fun and being happy. It is a cliché, but for some high school football quarterbacks and cheerleaders, high school was the high point of their lives. Whatever success you want to achieve, there is always a price that must be paid. Time spent in the library is more likely to lay the foundation for your future happiness than time spent partying with friends at a bar. There is no free lunch. This is a law of the universe.

TANSTAAFL! – There ain't no such thing as a free lunch

Robert Heinlein: *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*

Raise your expectations

“A high expectation of success is the single most valuable quality you can bring into any challenging situation. A high expectation of success is more important than natural ability or the lack thereof. It’s more important than practice or preparation. This has been proven in any number of controlled experiments.”

Denis Waitley: *The New Dynamics of Winning*

Another paradox: high expectations have the greatest leverage when your world is upside down, if for no other reason than there is nowhere to go but up. It is precisely when the weight of an upside world is resting upon your shoulders that it is hardest for you to create those high expectations, and to believe in their ultimate realization.

T.J. Rodgers is CEO of the Cypress Semiconductor Company. He has a sign behind his desk that reads: “Be reasonable, demand the impossible.” Year after year, his company does exactly that; in a cutthroat industry, it delivers near-impossible results.

I often ask Values Coach clients what I call the “magic wand” question: If you could wave a magic wand and have anything happen, what would it be? That’s a great question for you to ask yourself when your world has turned upside down. Then turn the answer to that question, whatever it is, into your expectation for the future. Be reasonable, demand the possible, and expect a miracle!

Live into your potential

“One of the central troubles that human beings fear is the waste of their potential. Again and again the sadness that people long to share with their friends or counselors is a sense that we’re going nowhere.”

John Carmody: *How to Handle Trouble*

If your answer to the question “What would you do if every job paid the same and had the same social status?” is different than what you are doing now, you won’t magically make the transition to that work tomorrow unless you start planning for it today.

But there are things you can do. You can start now taking classes, saving money, networking with people, and taking other steps to build a bridge from where you are to where you would like to be. My father, Joe Tye Jr. (yes, I am the third), was a dedicated career officer in the U.S. Air Force. But he was also a born artist. Evenings and weekends he could be found at his easel honing his craft. By the time he retired, he was good enough that he could launch a second career as a professional artist.

And you can start now finding ways to bring elements of your ideal state into your current reality. I once met a nurse who loved writing poetry. She knew she shouldn’t make a living as a poet, but she *could* write poems for her patients. She said it was often the case that when patients called her a wonderful caregiver, they were referring more to the poems she wrote for them than for the nursing care she gave them.

River Walk, a painting by Joe Tye Jr.

Click here for my video on [Six Actions You Can Take to Build a Bridge from Where You Are to Who You Are](#).

You don't need OPA

“The courage to risk the disapproval of others, while at the same time going through the doubt of self-examination, is rare. When we begin to examine ourselves, we feel most insecure. It is then that we most look for approval. Finding none, many abandon the quest. This is the time for courage and perseverance.”

Laurence G. Boldt: *Zen and the Art of Making A Living*

Several years ago, business writers were promoting the idea of starting up new companies with OPM – Other People's Money. Funny thing: since the stock market crash of 2008, you don't see that reference nearly so much anymore. The fact is, however, that in many cases what holds us back is not the need for OPM but rather the need for OPA – Other People's Approval. The more authentic you seek to become, the greater will be the disapproval you receive from people around you. This will include people closest to you who think they are being helpful by preventing you from getting into something that could end up being humiliating for you, and, perhaps, for them through association.

If you want to test for yourself how important this need for approval is, and how unlikely you are to receive it for doing something that is out-of-the-box and outrageous, just do this test: go skipping and singing down an airport concourse (what could be more authentic than reliving the joy of a two-year old?). And watch the reaction of people around you. Even your closest friends will suddenly forget that they know you (come to think of it, perhaps you should try this experiment somewhere other than an airport since it's a virtual guarantee that you will not receive the approval of airport security personnel).

In my book *The Healing Tree* the character Maggie has a simple test that she applies to her poetry. She calls it the “es freut mich” test. Es freut mich is German for “it pleases me.” Maggie said that as long as her poetry passed the “es freut mich” test she didn't worry about what others thought.

One more paradox: when your world has turned upside down, you might well have the greatest freedom you will ever have: freedom to break with your old job, your old roles, your old self, and to strike out in new directions. Unfortunately, this is also the time when your ego most needs approval from others but, because your world is upside down, it's also when you're least likely to receive it.

Use DDQs to redirect your actions

“Success begins the moment we understand that life is about growing; it is about acquiring the knowledge and skills we need to live more fully and effectively... Any joy and exuberance we experience in living are the fruits of our willingness to risk, our openness to change, and our ability to create what we want for our lives.”

David McNally: *Even Eagles Need a Push: Learning to Soar in a Changing World*

The Direction Deflection Question (DDQ) is one of the tools that you can use to carve that statue of your ideal self that I mentioned at the beginning of this book. The quintessential DDQ is this: Will what I am about to do or say help me be my ideal best self?

If you really think about it, you’ll see that the DDQ is really three questions in one. The first question is some variation of “Who am I (or what am I doing) when I’m being my best self?” Using the DDQ challenges you to think about your best self as a parent, as a professional, as a time and money manager, or any other dimension of your life that you want to change.

The second question is an adaptation of the “stop, look, and listen” routine that you learned in kindergarten. Before you shout at your kid, blow your paycheck on the annual sale at J.C. Penney, waste a day watching television when you know you’d be better served getting outside and exercising or networking, you ask yourself whether that action will help you be your best self. If you’re being honest (often harder than you’d think it is!), you will hear “no” a lot more than you hear “yes.”

So the third question is the “what would I do if I were being my best self” question. If you listen carefully, you will hear a soft voice whispering an answer: “Put away the donuts, turn off the television, and go to the gym.” You will know that you are listening to your authentic best self if what that voice is telling you to do is more difficult than what you were about to do. Why? It’s human nature to take the path of least resistance, the easy way out.

Especially when our world is upside down.

The DDQ is infinitely adaptable and can be used to help you change your thinking, change your behaviors and habits, and ultimately change your life. Here are several examples of how people I’ve worked with have adapted the DDQ:

Will what I’m about to do for the next hour help me achieve my primary goal?

Is what I'm about to spend my hard-earned cash on going to help me achieve my dream of being debt-free and financially independent?

Will what I'm about to say to this person help build a more trusting relationship?

I have seen people use variations of the DDQ to get out of debt, get in shape, lose weight, overcome fears, become more loving parents and partners, and change many other facets of their lives.

Here's the kicker: you are most motivated to effectively use DDQs when your world is upside down, because that is precisely when it is most apparent that what you have been doing is not working for you.

Click here for my [6-minute video on DDQs](#):

Use EDQs to redirect your moods

“That’s one of the peculiar things about bad moods – we often fool ourselves and create misery by telling ourselves things that simply are not true. And the strange thing is that we usually don’t have the vaguest suspicion that we’re being conned by our misery and self-doubt.”

David D. Burns: *The Feeling Good Handbook*

Any time you are feeling one of those bad moods, use an Emotion Deflection Question (EDQ) to change your emotional channel. Start by simply asking yourself whether your current mood or emotion is helpful. If your answer is no, ask yourself what mood or emotion would you like to be feeling at this moment (what would be the most helpful mood for me to be in right now?).

Once you have identified your desired emotional state, ask yourself this question: If I were feeling that emotion right now, how would it be reflected in my physical posture and in my facial expression? Imagine yourself looking in a mirror and seeing a reflection of yourself with that look on your face and that bearing to your body. Make that mental image as vivid as possible. Now (here comes the hard part) force your body posture and facial expressions to conform to that mental picture. Drape your face with that look of happy confidence, and wrench your body into that upright posture. Go for a brisk walk, moving twice the speed of normal.

It won’t be long before you find your emotional state actually moving in the desired direction. This is because (as we know from the science of psycho-immunology) not only does your mind talk to your body, your body talks to your mind, and your mind listens. When your body is saying “we are happy and confident,” your mind gets the message.

For more on the power of body posture, watch this 18-minute video of the TED Talk by Harvard Professor Amy Cuddy: [The Power of Posture](#).

Do good for others

“At some point each of us has to discover that our self-interest is better served by doing good work than getting good things. The more our job and our survival is on the line, the easier it is to make this discovery. In this way hard times are an ally.”

Peter Block: *Stewardship*

Millard Fuller had it all: the business he'd started had made him rich and he was flying high, flying fast, and flying first class. Until the day he came home to a letter from his wife saying that she was leaving him because he was no longer the man she had married. His world suddenly turned upside down. After much soul-searching by both partners, Millard and Linda decided to give all of their possessions (all of them!) to charity and move their family to Africa for three years of service commitment. Upon their return to Georgia, they founded Habitat for Humanity, which became a world-wide movement that has built more than 400,000 houses providing “a simple decent place to live” for more than 2 million people, and in the process helped change the way we think about welfare.

Speak with anyone who has been through a terrible time and come out stronger as a result and they will almost always talk about how an important factor in their ability to endure was a stronger commitment to helping others. You see it in every support group, you see it when ex-cons visit schools to warn kids against a life of crime, and you see it when someone who has lost a job decides to run for the school board.

Practice Rafe's Law

"If you want to experience moments of sheer joy and downright fun... there is nothing better for the heart, mind, and soul than to get involved in helping some individual or family less fortunate than yourself."

Millard Fuller: *The Excitement is Building*

The late Zig Ziglar often said that he included this line in every book he ever wrote: "You can have everything in life you want if you will just help enough other people get what they want." That line, in turn, was the inspiration for something I wrote in the book *Never Fear, Never Quit*, which I now call Rafe's Law (because it was spoken by a character named Rafe):

Whatever you most need in life, the best way for you to get it is to help someone else get it who needs it more than you do.

When your world turns upside down, you will need *something*: a new job, more money, moral support, wise counsel, etc. If you need a job, spend four days a week on your own job search and one day a week helping someone else find a job. If you need moral support, join a support group and give moral support back to others. If you need money, increase your giving to those who are even more desperate than you are. This is my guarantee: someday you will look back and say that the time and money you devoted to helping others was far more beneficial to *your own success* than the time and money you spent directly trying to secure your own.

A Personal Experiment – Extravagant Generosity in Small Ways

You have no doubt heard that it is more blessed than it is to receive, and that as you give so shall you receive. In fact, you might have heard words to the effect that the surest way to receive is to first give. And I suspect that (like I once did) you smiled, said "that's nice," and filed the aphorism away with Santa Claus and the other fairy tales of childhood.

If that's the case – if you would like to believe that giving really is the best way to open the door to receiving, but you really don't – please try this experiment. It will cost you a bit of money, but nothing more than you can afford, and the results will occur so gradually that it might be quite some time before you recognize in a flash of epiphany that the experiment worked just as I said it would. But the results will occur.

Become an extravagant tipper. Not a generous tipper – an *extravagant* tipper. If your breakfast bill is six dollars, leave a ten dollar tip. If you hand over a five dollar bill for a cup of coffee, leave whatever change you are due in the tip cup. When you check out of

a hotel room, leave a twenty dollar bill on the bed for the housekeeper. For you, this will be a minor expense; for a single mom working two jobs to support her family, it might well be the highlight of her entire day.

I predict with great confidence that three things will happen. First, after the initial twinge of regret at having lightened your wallet, you will feel good about yourself. Second, you will experience this attitude of generosity begin to permeate other areas of your life as you think less about what's in it for you and more about what you can do for others.

And third, as a direct result of the first two outcomes, in ways that could never be predicted or explained, you will begin to experience greater abundance in your life (including, perhaps, the monetary variety). This will not happen overnight, but if you think of it as a lifetime habit rather than a one-shot experiment, the return on your investment will be extravagant.

Work until your mission is finished

“Here is a test to find whether your mission on earth is finished: If you’re alive, it isn’t.”
Richard Bach: *Illusions*

Grandma Moses first picked up a paintbrush at the age of 76 because she could no longer hold a needle due to arthritis. When she died (or, as her physician put it, “just wore out”) at the age of 101, she was one of the world’s most celebrated artists.

If you break down the word retire you get re-tire, or get tired again.

Instead of dreaming about being re-tired, why don’t you dream about being re-inspired.

Bigger problems = better life

“Every business will always have problems... A good business has interesting problems, a bad business has boring ones. Good management is the art of making the problems so interesting and their solutions so constructive that everyone wants to get to work and deal with them... Good problems energize. Bad problems enervate.”

Paul Hawken: *Growing a Business*

The faster you ride, the stronger the headwind. If you hop on your bike on a perfectly still day and start down the road at ten miles per hour, the wind in your face will feel the same as it would standing still in a ten mile per hour breeze. Crank it up to fifteen mph and it will *feel* like the wind has more than doubled its velocity. It's the same in life. The faster you're moving, the stiffer the resistance you're likely to encounter. It's important to know this for two reasons. First, increasing resistance can be an early warning signal that you're perhaps moving too fast. The overly aggressive salesperson who can't figure out why he doesn't close as many deals as his more laid-back counterpart might become more productive by paying better attention to the wind he's riding into.

When I was a young hospital administrator, I seemed to have run into more than my share of relationship problems. The usually wasn't because I was doing the wrong thing. Rather, it was that I was doing the right thing, but doing it too fast, before having taken the time to inform effected parties and build consensus behind the decision or action. Had I taken the time to better understand the resistance, I would have slowed down and built a more solid foundation before plowing ahead into the wind.

The second reason it's important to understand this phenomenon, however, is that a stiff headwind could well be an indicator of huge opportunity if you keep on pedaling into it. When Herb Kelleher and Rollin King sketched out the plan for Southwest Airlines on the back of a cocktail napkin in 1966, they had no idea of the hurricane of resistance they would stir up. Their intended competitors held them up with court delays for six years before they were able to get their first plane in the air. Bill McGowan and his team at MCI had to ride into a similar headwind in their fight to pry a share of the telecommunications market away from the (then) AT&T monopoly. By pedaling into the wind, leaders of MCI and Southwest Airlines changed the world.

Sometimes the headwind is more benign, but no less hindering. Almost every entrepreneur can tell you of well-meaning friends and family members who encouraged a go-slow (or no-go) approach, when what was warranted was a flat-out sprint to, in the words of the Confederate cavalry officer Nathan Bedford Forrest, to “get there firstest with the mostest.”

The most pernicious headwinds are the ones we create for ourselves. Fear of success, ambivalence about money, and low self-esteem can all lead to self-sabotaging behavior when it feels like things are going too well, like we're moving too fast. To give in to this headwind will not make you more secure. In this dynamic and turbulent world, trying to avoid risk – slowing down when resistance increases – can actually make you less secure. There are times when we must, to quote the memorable title of Susan Jeffers' book – “feel the fear and do it anyway.”

How do you know when a headwind is an indication that it's time to slow down and build consensus, and when it's a signal that you must really be onto something with huge potential to have provoked such a reaction, so “damn the torpedoes and full speed ahead?” There's no easy answer. But here's a clue I always look for: if the cause of the resistance has a vested interest in maintaining the status quo – whether it's an outside competitor trying to keep you out of its market or inner resistance trying to keep you from quitting a boring job to start a business doing work you love – then it's time to shift into a higher gear, put your head down, and fly.

On the other hand, if the one causing the resistance could really benefit from the change you're trying to bring about, and would likely become a tailwind if properly informed of the rationale, pulling off to the side of the road to communicate more clearly about where you are going, and why you're in such a hurry to get there, might result in your ultimately going farther, faster, than trying to bulldoze your way headlong through the tempest.

The difference between courageous and crazy is often

“Unless you are willing to take risks, you will suffer paralyzing inhibitions, and you will never do what you are capable of doing. Mistakes – missteps – are necessary for actualizing your vision, and necessary steps toward success.”

Warren Bennis: *On Becoming a Leader*

I had my nose broken twice when I was in high school. The first time was when the school bully – who was quite a bit bigger and stronger than me – challenged me to a fight. When we got to the alley after school, there was already a crowd waiting for the spectacle – including some of the prettiest girls in the school. I had psyched myself up – it was going to be Rocky versus Apollo Creed, the Wild Hogs taking on the outlaw motorcycle gang. Of course scenes like that usually only happen in the movies. I never saw the hard straight right that connected with the tip of my nose, but was later told that it made a memorable sound.

Two years later I was working out at the gym of the military base where my Dad was stationed. I’d gotten pretty good at working the speed bag. If you’re not familiar with how such things work, you hit them but they don’t hit back. I’d gotten sufficiently proficient that I thought I was ready for something that would. I should have known it was a mistake when the midshipman I entered the ring with was wearing real boxing shorts instead of the high school issue grey gym shorts I had on. This time it was a stiff left jab that did the trick on my nose. (A left jab! Can you imagine the humiliation of being knocked out by a left jab? It was only later than I learned my “sparring partner” was the base welterweight boxing champ that year.)

Before each fight I had people comment on how courageous I was, but in retrospect I was crazy to have accepted either challenge (the word stupid also comes to mind).

After graduation from the Stanford business school in 1985, most of my classmates went on to lucrative careers in business, consulting, and banking. With no money in the bank and a mountain of debt, I started a nonprofit organization called STAT (Stop Teenage Addiction to Tobacco) to take on the white collar drug pusher of Philip Morris and RJ Reynolds. It was a lost cause, and everyone thought I was crazy for doing it (including me). But, as Jimmy Stewart memorably said in the movie *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, lost causes are the only ones worth fighting for.

Over the next ten years, STAT made important contributions to preventing the illegal sale of tobacco to minors and outlawing cigarette vending machines, and to the demise

of the Marlboro Man and Camel Joe and to surreptitious paid cigarette advertising in movies made for kids.

I am now proud to have been one of a small group of men and women who took on a lost cause and brought about one of the most profound societal changes in the history of this country – the eradication of toxic cigarette smoke from public places and outlawing of the tobacco industry’s most egregious efforts to recruit children to be their next generation of addicted customers.

The Difference between Crazy and Courageous

Anyone who has ever quit a day job to start their own business has heard the word “crazy” applied to their decision. You often hear the figure that 8 of every 10 new businesses fail within five years. Even if that figure were accurate (it’s not), it’s not true. *Businesses do not fail, owners quit.* The difference between crazy and courageous is often evident only in retrospect. Win the fight and you were courageous, lose the fight and you were crazy. Close the doors of your new business and you were crazy to have quit the day job.

Make one more call, work one more late night, do whatever it takes to make I through one more day so you can try again tomorrow, endure one more sleepless night worried about how you will survive what marketing guru Seth Godin calls “the dip” in his book of that name, and someday they will remark on your courage. Courage isn’t stepping through the ropes into the ring so much as it is getting back up after you’ve been knocked down. Courage is working your way through the slump, and finding a way over or through the brick wall if you can’t smash through it.

Escape prisons you've made yourself

“The box many find themselves in is self-defining and confining. The walls of the box are fear, anger, lack, and so forth. Some circle the walls, pacing like trapped animals, failing to look up from their feet enough to see just how easy the walls are to step over.”
Eldon Taylor: *Choices and Illusions*

Why is it that so many people fail to change the attitudes and behaviors that, at least to an objective observer, are so obviously not helping them get where they want to go – in fact, may be preventing them from getting there? The fact is that many of us are “stuck.” We’re caught in traps that we often don’t even recognize (or choose to ignore), traps which hold us back from realizing our dreams. No matter how hard we try to push, we just can’t seem to get ahead. This is the nature of a trap.

A coyote caught in a trap will gnaw off its leg in order to escape. It instinctively knows that it’s better to be a three-legged coyote than a four-legged fur coat. It’s willing to go through (relatively) short-term pain in order to gain its long-term freedom.

It’s Better to be a 3-Legged Coyote than a 4-Legged Fur Coat

Contrast the coyote with the monkey. According to a traditional Indian fable, a monkey can be caught by leaving a banana inside a large clay pot that has a very narrow opening at the top. The monkey grabs the banana and struggles to extricate it from the pot as his captors approach. The banana will not fit through the narrow top while wrapped in the monkey’s clenched fist. Now the monkey has a choice, doesn’t he? He can let go of the banana and escape (hungry but free), or he can hang on to the banana and hope against hope to keep both the banana and his freedom. The monkey takes the second approach, clutching the banana as he attempts to run off, dragging the pot behind. He is, of course, quickly captured.

Too often people react to the traps that hold them back just as the monkey did. They envision a goal – financial independence, entrepreneurial success, spiritual equanimity – as being “out there” in front of them somewhere. But they are trapped and either unwilling or unable to, like the coyote, go through the painful process of chewing off a paw (changing spending habits, ending an abusive relationship, quitting drinking, quitting a soul-sucking job) so they can escape to a better future. They cling to their “banana” and wonder why they’re stuck, why they can’t seem to move toward the future they say they wish to create.

Though I’ve never tried this personally, I’ve read that if you drop a frog into a pot of boiling water, it will instantly jump out. If, on the other hand, you put the frog into tepid water and gradually turn up the heat to the boiling point, the frog will relax into a fatal

stupor. Perhaps that's how we get stuck in our own little traps: we grow so accustomed to the pain that it becomes tolerable, even comfortable, when compared to the risk of making a leap into the unknown. The keys to escape the traps of life might be simple common sense, but the locks are rarely easy to open. We become so used to our traps, so comfortable in them, that we hardly recognize them for what they are. And we end up sleeping with the frogs.

Some lizards are equipped with a break-away tail; if they are caught in the beak of a predator, they yank so hard that the tail comes off and they can run away, diminished in stature but still alive and free. And before long, they grow a new tail. Perhaps that's an even more apt metaphor than the coyote, because once we escape from our traps, we can usually grow back whatever we've lost – in fact, more often than not, it will be stronger than the original.

Why don't you put some thought into your traps (we all have them). What is the price you will need to pay in order to escape? What is the price you will pay for refusing to escape? What are you waiting for?

It's not personal, permanent or pervasive

“If we habitually believe, as does the pessimist, that misfortune is our fault, is enduring, and will undermine everything we do, more of it will befall us than if we believe otherwise... Pessimistic prophecies are self-fulfilling.”

Martin Seligman, PhD: *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*

In *Learned Optimism*, Martin Seligman admonishes that we should avoid interpreting adversity in a way that makes it seem personal/ pervasive/permanent (“I lost the job because I’m incompetent/ I screw up everything because I’m incompetent/ I will always be incompetent.”) You can teach yourself to expect positive outcomes, and your optimistic expectations will help you create the reality. Optimists do better professionally, are happier, and live longer than pessimists. It’s as simple as ABC, says Seligman: Adversity leads to Beliefs which lead to Consequences. What you choose to believe about adversity will powerfully influence whether it has positive or negative consequences.

In his follow-up book *What You Can Change and What You Can't*, Seligman emphasizes that it’s not sufficient to improve your self-esteem; you must first and foremost stop seeing yourself as a helpless and passive victim and take personal responsibility for your own future.

Develop emotional power

*“It’s better to make a mistake with the full force of your being than to carefully avoid mistakes with a trembling spirit. Responsibility means recognizing both pleasure and price, making a choice on that recognition, and then living with that choice without concern.” Dan Millman: *Way of the Peaceful Warrior**

Did you read the book *Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand (soon to be a movie)? It’s the amazing story of Louis Zamperini, Olympic athlete and World War II hero who survived two horrendous years in a Japanese prisoner of war camp - and through it all remained “unbroken.” There is a crucial lesson in the Zamperini story - and in all such stories of heroic survival: the hero never gave up emotionally. It would have been so easy for Aaron Ralston, whose story is recounted in his book (and movie) *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, to give up when his arm was pinned down by a boulder for five days – but had he ever thrown in the towel emotionally, he almost certainly would not have survived.

Zamperini and Ralston – and anyone else who has ever survived a difficult experience – emerged stronger than they went in. Here’s how Ben Horowitz, Cofounder and General Partner, Andreessen Horowitz venture capital firm (quoted in *Success* magazine, January 2013) put it: “Whenever I meet a successful CEO, I asked them how they did it. Mediocre CEOs point to their brilliant strategic moves or their intuitive business sense for a variety of other self-congratulatory explanations. The great CEOs tend to be remarkably consistent in their answers. They all say: ‘I didn’t quit.’”

Toughness is the third Cornerstone of Core Action Value #5, Perseverance, in our course on *The Twelve Core Action Values*. That doesn’t mean physical toughness nearly as much as it means mental toughness. Viktor Frankl, author of *Man’s Search for Meaning*, didn’t survive the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp because he was physically tough – it was because he was made of stern stuff emotionally.

Here are five things you can do to foster that sort of emotional strength that you will need when bad things happen to you (and, as Harold Kushner told us in his book of that title, bad things do happen to good people, often unexpectedly):

Shout down fear: There is a scene in the PBS series on Ernest Shackleton where some of his men have given in to the fear that they would all die stranded on the Arctic ice. Shackleton, played by Kenneth Branagh, stands toe-to-toe with the ringleader of the negative thinkers and shouts “Nobody is going to die!” When you are in a tough situation and fear tries to take hold of your thinking, that is exactly what you must do: stand toe-to-toe with the emotion and shout out your determination to prevail.

Take action, take risks: Over the past ten years, millions of people have lost jobs. The ones who are most likely to now be saying that “it was the best thing that ever could have happened” are those who used the experience as the jumping off point for doing something new – starting a business, changing careers, going back to school, writing a book (think J.K. Rowling).

Never be a victim: The prison camp guards did everything in their power to degrade and humiliate Zamperini, but the one thing they could never do was make him play the role of victim or martyr. Viktor Frankl said that the one quality that characterized survivors in the concentration camp was the determination to never give up that one and only freedom left to them – the freedom to define their own attitude.

Keep walking: The 23rd Psalm says that we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, not that we take up permanent residence down there in the darkness. One of the most important things for you to do when you are in those shadows is to keep walking. Keep moving physically by getting more exercise; keep moving intellectually by reading more and better books; keep moving emotionally by rewriting negative self-talk; keep moving spiritually by setting aside your own problems and reaching out to help others cope with theirs.

Pray for guidance: Some years back I read an article by a man who had recently retired from a long and successful career. He said that over the years he’d kept two journals – one labeled “Plan and Work” and the other labeled “Pray and Wait.” As he went back through them, he was surprised to see that his greatest, and most authentic and cherished, accomplishments had first been inscribed in the “Pray and Wait” journal. Soren Kierkegaard is widely quoted as having said that “The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays.” It really doesn’t matter what your religion, or non-religion, happens to be: when your world is upside down, carrying on a conversation with a higher power, however you conceptualize such, can provide you with strength and emotional toughness. In his classic 1902 book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James wrote: “How can it possibly fail to steady the nerves, to cool the fever, and appease the fret, if one be sensibly conscious that no matter what one’s difficulties for the moment appear to be, one’s life as a whole is in the keeping of a power whom one can absolutely trust?”

Get real by integrating ego and soul

“The wonderful thing about letting go of the fear of failure is that it liberates us to try new experiences and new relationships. Once you know in your heart that Real inventiveness, creativity and even love are impossible without the lessons we learn from failure, you feel more courageous about making an effort.”

Toni Raiten-D’Antonio: *The Velveteen Principles: A Guide to Becoming Real, Hidden Wisdom from a Children’s Classic*

The Yin and Yang of Ego and Soul

For thousands of years, philosophers have written about how we humans are torn by conflicting inner drives. We want to be recognized, but we want to be left alone. We want material possessions, but we want our lives to be uncomplicated. We want to work hard at work that really matters, but we want to spend time sitting on a riverbank with a fishing pole. We are torn between temptation and virtue, almost as if there really is a little devil sitting on one shoulder and a little angel sitting on the other. How we resolve this inner conflict has everything to do with becoming Authentic (Core Action Value #1 in the course on [The Twelve Core Action Values](#)).

I think of it as a battle between Ego and Soul. Ego wants things, Soul wants time. Ego wants fame, Soul wants friends. Ego is insecure yet arrogant, Soul is centered yet humble. Ego is concerned about what other people think, Soul is concerned about others. When things go wrong, Ego points a finger, Soul looks in the mirror. Ego complains, Soul gives thanks. The voice of Ego is loud and demanding, the voice of Soul is soft and accepting.

Ego and Soul are the yang and yin of personality. It’s not that one is always bad and the other good; they can be complementary. When I start working on a new writing project, Ego is motivated by the prospect of having a bestselling book; Soul loves the feel of a good pen rolling across a clean sheet of paper and the thought that people I might never meet will be inspired by my words. The combined motivation produced by Ego and Soul together is more powerful than just one would be alone.

There are, of course, times when the two are in conflict. Ego might be secretly pleased to see a perceived rival fall on his face, while Soul wants to help him up, dust him off,

and give him a gentle push in the direction of the winners' circle. Ego might want to go to Las Vegas while Soul wants to help build a house with Habitat for Humanity. Ego might want to take a nap while Soul wants to go for a walk.

Do something!

“It is possible to be without resources. It is inexcusable to be without resourcefulness. That is about character, not cash. There is ALWAYS something you can do. There is always SOMETHING you can do. There is always something YOU can do. Pick up the phone and make calls. Get on your horse and get out in the field. Knock on doors. Proposition a host. Hustle.”

Dan Kennedy: *The Ultimate Marketing Plan*

The two most impressive business turnarounds of the past several decades have been those engineered by Steve Jobs at Apple and by Howard Schultz at Starbucks. Marissa Mayer is now trying to add Yahoo! to that roster (but at Yahoo! they are not calling it a turnaround – they are calling it a Renaissance, recognizing the power that just one word can have for influencing culture).

New products and new strategies were obviously part of these turnarounds, but in each case Job #1 was to revitalize a demoralized and pessimistic corporate culture. That’s also the primary challenge facing Mayer at Yahoo! The most important duty of the leader (and of the parent on the home front) is to instill hope, optimism, and confidence when to all outside appearances there is none. In his book *Onward: How Starbucks Fought for Its Life without Losing Its Soul*, Schultz makes it clear that saving the company was first and foremost a cultural and a spiritual challenge, and that the business and economic challenges were secondary. At Yahoo!, Mayer knows that her biggest challenge is re-sparking that “can do in the face of all odds against us” spirit, which will be the non-negotiable prerequisite for recruiting and retaining the hotshot engineers that have been deserting the company for Silicon Valley startups.

Here are four key steps for sparking that sort of a cultural Renaissance (don’t you just love that word!?) in your organization – and in your family:

Focus on what’s important: There is nothing more demoralizing than seeing your precious and irreplaceable time being wasted on things that don’t make a difference and that, truth be told, probably don’t need to be done at all. Steve Jobs slashed the product line at Apple, Lee Iacocca slashed meetings during the legendary turnaround of Chrysler, and Mayer is slashing red tape at Yahoo! in order to help people make sure that the work they do really is making a difference. We had a productivity consultant visit us at Values Coach and her first recommendation was that we (and especially me) slash the amount of time we spend on email and internetting (I know that’s not yet a word but it should be) by handling it in a more efficient manner.

Lighten up and make it fun: Southwest Airlines is the most productive and profitable of the major carriers – they also have more parties than all of the others put together. At Southwest they understand that people are more productive when they're having fun. Every day of the week employees at Fillmore County Hospital in Geneva, Nebraska (a member of the Values Collaborative) get together for their daily reading from *The Self-Empowerment Pledge*. During one meeting Laurie Brandt, an LPN in the FCH Specialty Clinic, received the hospital's custom-made Traveling Spark Plug Trophy for the way her work reflects *The Twelve Core Action Values*. There was applause and there was laughter – and the entire event took less than five minutes. It was a great way to start the day – both at FCH and for us at Values Coach.

Build on small wins: No matter how dire the situation, there is always something you can accomplish that will give you a reason to celebrate – and get people's minds off of what's not working, at least temporarily. A while back Values Coach was in the midst of a significant cash crunch and the phone was ringing about as often as the rocks in the parking lot. So I installed a ship's bell on the wall and we all got to ring it any time we had a sale of at least \$100. That's not a very high bar – 20 copies of *The Florence Prescription*, which sells for \$5 a book, will do it. But it gave us an excuse to ignore the silence of the phones and celebrate for a few minutes. By the way, we have graduated from that particular crunch but the bell has become a permanent fixture in our office – and in our culture.

Don't run away from risk: There is a natural tendency to become more risk-averse when the chips are down, but that's often the worst thing you can do. As each of the business turnarounds mentioned above shows, it is often *precisely* when things seem bleakest that the greatest opportunities are just around the corner (or just on the other side of the mountain). Chrysler was on the verge of bankruptcy when it took one of the biggest – and one of the most successful – risks in the history of the car business: creation of the minivan.

Get more sleep and practice Neuro-Attitudinal

“If physical energy is the foundation of all dimensions of energy, sleep is the foundation of physical energy. No single behavior, we’ve come to believe, more fundamentally influences our effectiveness in waking life than sleep... Nevertheless, sleep is also one of the first behaviors many of us are willing to sacrifice, on the mistaken assumption that doing so will allow us to be more productive.”

Tony Schwartz (with Jean Gomes and Catherine McCarthy Ph.D.: *The Way We’re Working Isn’t Working: The Four Forgotten Needs that Energize Great Performance*)

If you listen to the blues or country western songs, you know that having your world turned upside down is associated with sleepless nights. This can create a real downward emotional spiral because, at a time when you most need to be positive, cheerful, and optimistic sleep deprivation causes you to be anxious, depressed, and pessimistic. Compounding the problem, chances are that you were already operating on too little sleep in the days before you got the pink slip, the divorce papers, the cancer diagnosis or whatever else it was that caused your world to flip upside down, so you entered the crisis with a serious sleep debt on which your payments were way behind.

Every mental capacity suffers when you are sleep-deprived and emotionally sleep deprivation is the equivalent of living under a grey cloud. All this is bad enough, but unfortunately the first mental capacity to disintegrate when you are sleep deprived happens to be the one you most need when your world has gone upside down: creativity (and its cousin curiosity). You can still do most of the things you’ve done before when you’re tired or exhausted, albeit not as well. Although it’s a dumb and dangerous thing to do, we’ve all driven a car along a familiar road when we could hardly stay awake.

The one time in your life it is most vital for you to ask new questions and to try new things is when what you have been doing is no longer working (if it ever really did). If you are cheating yourself on sleep you are unlikely to ask questions that yield new answers or to have the courage to take the actions that those new answers would lead you to take. As Vince Lombardi famously put it, fatigue makes cowards of us all.

There have been whole books written on the importance of sleep that have included chapters devoted to sleeping better (for example *Power Sleep* by James Maas) but here are a few of the basics: 1) limit your intake of caffeine and other stimulants especially later in the day; 2) have a regular time for going to bed, which is probably earlier than when you go to bed now; 3) limit alcohol consumption and don’t eat heavy meals too close to bedtime; 4) keep your bedroom dark and quiet (Mindfold eyeshades, which you can get for about twelve bucks on Amazon.com, are a great way to darken a room

while comforting your eyes); and 5) have a nice pre-bedtime ritual such as reading an inspirational book or scripture while sipping a cup of herbal tea.

Neuro-Attitudinal Positivity (N.A.P.)

Schwartz also speaks about what he calls “the undervalued power of naps” saying: “Perhaps no single daytime renewal behavior more reliably influences performance – and is less common in the workplace – than taking a nap.” But you already know that, don’t you? You have no doubt experienced the rejuvenating power of taking a nap on a weekend afternoon. You also no doubt have a very clear mental picture of what would happen if your boss came into your work area and found you curled up on the floor with a “do not disturb” sign (one never hears “sleeping on the job” as a compliment!).

Some of history’s most productive people were notorious nappers: Thomas Edison, Winston Churchill, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Napoleon Bonaparte among them. If you are unable to, as Churchill advised, to put on your PJs and hop in the sack for an afternoon nap, try the approach that artist Salvador Dali used. He would sit in a chair holding a heavy key or knife between two fingers directly above a pie pan placed upside down on the floor then close his eyes and let himself drift off to sleep. When he lost his grip on the key and it clanged onto the pie pan he went back to work, refreshed and ready to be creative. If you do this at work, you might also want to have some sort of early warning system that would cause you to drop the key anytime the boss approached.

Practice strategic laziness

“Relaxation can be achieved in many different ways, and learning what works best may be a process that takes time... This may be some of the most productive time and effort you will ever put into managing anxiety for a lifetime.”

Margaret Wehrenberg: *The 10 Best-Ever Anxiety Management Techniques: Understanding How Your Brain Makes You Anxious & What You Can Do to Change it*

The late C.W. Metcalf, author of the book *Lighten Up*, was one of the funniest – and most insightful – speakers I ever heard. When he spoke at one of my *Never Fear, Never Quit* conferences, he commented on how people would often say that it must be a riot working in his office because he had such a great sense of humor. His response was that after a week on the road, he came to work with a lapel button that said “Back off, fish breath” then hid in the closet for the rest of the day.

We all need days like that. I think of it as strategic laziness. By giving yourself permission to take some time off, you recharge your batteries.

The lion is the king of beasts, but he spends most of his days lyin’ around.

We all need our lyin’ round days!

Break your addiction to negative thinking

“Negative thinking must be treated like any addiction – with commitment to life, patience, discipline, a will to get better, forgiveness, self-love, and the knowledge that recovery is not just possible, but, following certain guidelines, inevitable.”

Peter McWilliams: *You Can't Afford the Luxury of a Negative Thought*

Psychologists tell us that the human mind will automatically gravitate toward negative, frightening, and depressing thoughts unless a conscious effort is made to steer thinking in a more positive direction. Compounding this hardwired predisposition, from a very early age we are subjected to negative messages from parents (the first word a toddler learns is “no”), teachers, schoolyard bullies, and abusive bosses (which is what schoolyard bullies often become when they grow up). Negative thinking actually does share many characteristics with substance addiction. It starts with a small dose – usually with someone else giving you the first one free (the parent, the teacher, the schoolyard bully).

You grow tolerant to it over time and so the dose increases. “Look at that pimple” over time becomes “You’re ugly” which in turn transmogrifies into “You’re unlovable.”

Like any gateway drug, one negative thought opens the door to other forms of negative thinking. The suspicion that you’re unlovable leads to increasingly desperate attempts to get other people to prove you wrong, and to increasingly intense fear of rejection – both of which lead to behaviors that are almost guaranteed to eventually bring about the feared result.

As with any addictive substance, you develop a tolerance for negative thinking. You get to the point where you hardly notice that it’s going on, and when you do it doesn’t strike you as being a problem (Me? No, I don’t have a drinking problem! Me? No, I don’t have a negative thinking problem!).

And as with any addiction, you are aided and abetted by co-conspirators – the people who don’t want you to stop listening to their whining and being in on their gossip sessions; well-intentioned friends and relatives who discourage you from quitting the day job you hate, and that is the source of much of your inner negativity, so you can start a business doing something you love; the shrink who assures you that it’s all your parents’ fault.

And as with any addiction, nobody can break you free until you take complete and total personal responsibility for yourself.

Transform negative self-talk into positive affirmation

“Speaking wisely is essential when you speak to yourself. . . Words matter. We cannot risk speaking untruths to ourselves because of the strong likelihood that we will believe them”

Jennifer Rothschild: *Self Talk, Soul Talk: What to say When You Talk to Yourself*

Some 2,500 years ago, Confucius was asked what would be the first thing he would do if he ruled China. He answered that he would fix the language. Your choice of words – both in speaking with others and in speaking with yourself – has a powerful impact on your self-identity and self-esteem. Despite what the children’s song says, the words you use to describe yourself and your circumstances can be more harmful than any sticks and stones. In his book *Awaken the Giant Within*, Anthony Robbins describes how to use Transformational Vocabulary to create a self-empowering mindset, to modulate negative emotions and intensify positive ones, to enrich the range of your experiences, and to break old self-defeating behavior patterns. In one exercise, he recommends making a list of words with which you disempower yourself and converting them into more empowering words. (Shortly after my own job loss experience, I transformed the words “scared” into “exhilarated,” “intimidated” into “challenged,” and “cocooned” into “recharging.”)

Try the exercise yourself. Divide a piece of paper in half. Down one side make a list of disempowering adjectives that you apply to yourself. Down the other make a list of empowering language that could be applied to the same adjectives. Every day, select one old adjective that you are going to consciously transform into one of the new ones. Make a list of all the negative labels you pin on yourself, and then each day convert one from a label to a description. For example, “I’m lazy” may become “I don’t like to waste my time doing things for which there doesn’t seem to be much benefit.”

Erase the graffiti of negative self-talk

“Like a gardener, you choose the specific thought-seeds you want to plant. Hypnosis helps you to care for and nourish those thought-seeds to grow and bear fruit. Your subconscious mind is your secret garden where the thoughts you plant grow to become your reality. This garden is more fertile than you may realize, so plant carefully!”

Henry Leo Bolduc: *Self-Hypnosis*

Your thoughts have a huge influence on creating your future reality. But you are not your thoughts. You choose whether to master them or to let them master you. To paraphrase what Winston Churchill once said about how we shape and are subsequently shaped by our buildings, we first shape our thoughts and then our thoughts shape us. You become what you think about. A mind full of fear of failure will increase your chances of failure. A mind confident of success will help make you a success. Obsession with the fear of poverty will create poverty. Confidence in your ability to create abundance will bring you abundance. Whether you see yourself as a failure and a victim, or as a competent and successful person experiencing a temporary setback, what you see is what you’ll get.

Over 3,000 years ago, a wise person wrote in the *I Ching* that every negative thought must be purged before it takes root in the garden of your mind. Buddha said that no enemy can hurt you as much as your own unwise thoughts. Your thoughts create your reality. If you spend your days with fears of failure, poverty, crisis, rejection, and disappointment, that’s what you’ll get. If you spend your days with images of success, acceptance, love, happiness, and fulfillment, *that’s* what you’ll get.

Researchers have shown that the human brain has an extraordinary capacity to rewire itself in response to both experience and thought. The technical name for this capability is “brain plasticity.” Using a computer metaphor, it is as if by changing the software you can actually have a transformative impact on the hardware. In other words, if you make a good faith effort to change your inner self-talk, over time you will actually begin changing the physiological structure of your brain so that negative self-talk is more automatically replaced by a positive inner dialogue.

Pay attention to the metaphors by which you create your perception of reality

“We have found... that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.”

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson: *Metaphors We Live By*

A picture is worth a thousand words, and the most important pictures are those we use to create the stories by which we define reality. Usually without even being aware we're doing it we use metaphors (and similes, as when you say one person reminds you of another, which for our purposes are the same thing) do define ourselves, other people, and the world around us. These metaphors powerfully influence our self-identity and our beliefs.

If someone asks how you're doing and you respond “I'm hanging in there,” you've just used a metaphor. You're not really hanging, but you've just told that other person – and more important you've just told yourself – that things are not well in your world. After all, who hangs? Desperate people hang – by their fingernails at the ends of their ropes. So do the worst of criminals. Not a very encouraging way to describe how your day is going, is it?

Now, if you've just gotten a promotion and a big pay raise and are about to leave for a Caribbean cruise and someone asks how you're doing, you're probably not going to complain about just hanging in there, are you?

Once when I was going through a pretty rough patch I caught myself saying that every time I came up for air it felt like a giant thumb came down from the sky and pushed me back down underwater. That is obviously a metaphor – there really wasn't a giant thumb and I wasn't really drowning – it was a word picture. Then it occurred to me that I could just as well have said that every time I sank beneath the waves it felt like a giant palm came up from the deeps and lifted me up to catch my breath.

Exact same circumstance, but the metaphor I chose to tell the story would give it a completely different interpretation.

Direct your dreams in a positive way

“The cultural bias toward the waking state as ‘real’ and any other state as ‘unreal’ – and therefore unworthy of attention or study – exists as a mental block for many. Yet if we assume that little can be learned from any state other than waking, we largely ignore any state other than waking and thus perpetuate the bias.”

Robert Waggoner: *Lucid Dreaming: Gateway to the Inner Self*

Do you ever have a recurring dream that seems to prey upon your greatest fears? I do. If those dreams are real and vivid enough – and if I let them – they can cast a shadow over the entire next waking day. Here’s one that is particularly anxiety-provoking. I give a hundred or so speeches every year. So you can imagine how disconcerting it is for me to wake from a dream where I have showed up late for a presentation where I have no idea of what I’m supposed to be speaking about or what I’m going to say – not that it would matter much because no one in the hall has the slightest interest anyway.

Now when I have this dream in any of its many variations I practice what I think of as *Directed* Dreaming, my own version of lucid dreaming (technically, some lucid dreaming experts would say that it is not possible to “direct” dreams, but this works for me). When I realize that I’ve been playing a part in this subconscious drama in one act, before I get out of bed I’ll reimagine that dream, only in a way that lets me play the hero instead of playing the buffoon. For example, I’ll visualize the group’s leader coming up to the podium and demanding attention, then saying “I regret that our featured speaker Anthony Robbins has been unavoidably detained and will not be with us today.” Groans of disappointment from the audience. “However,” the man at the podium continues with a flourish in my direction, “it is our vast good fortune that Joe Tye just happened to be staying at our convention hotel, and he has agreed to share a few words with us.” Thunderous applause, cheers, and hurrahs. Once more motioning for silence the emcee says, “Mr. Tye warned me that he knows nothing about our conference topic of bovine genetics, but I assured him that we’d much rather hear him speak about values and culture – am I right?” Fade to a rapturous standing ovation as I walk onstage.

Grandiose and ridiculous? Guilty on all charges. But tell me, how would you rather start your day: having awoken from a dream where you’ve showed up in your underwear to give a speech you don’t know to people who don’t care, or to a standing ovation for having been at the right place at the right time with the right message?

Interpret dreams to your benefit

“We have all said, ‘I had an extraordinary dream,’ when perhaps we should have said, ‘an extraordinary dream visited me.’ Extraordinary because of the comfort and wisdom dreams can bring us.”

Nancy Willard: *Telling Time: Angels, Ancestors and Stories – Essays on Writing*

I believe that there are certain very special dreams that are messages from your soul, and perhaps from beyond, that you should pay very special attention to because they are intended to shape your thinking and guide your actions. I think of these as keystone dreams. When you have such a dream, it’s really up to you to decide whether the dream has a deeper meaning and what that meaning is – and what you are going to do about it. As with lucid dreaming you should take great liberties with interpreting keystone dreams to your benefit.

After I’d left the field of hospital administration and was struggling to find a new path I had a dream where I showed up at the ticket booth of a theater. Reaching into my pocket I pulled out a ticket to get into the show but to my horror the ticket was blank – it had no printing on it whatsoever. Shaking her head, the woman at the ticket booth told me that my ticket was not valid for that show. “Well, what show is it good for?” I asked. She shrugged and replied “I don’t know, sweetie. You have to write your own ticket.”

The next morning I found a picture of a blank ticket and posted it on my wall as a reminder that I could indeed write my own ticket. Assuming, of course, that I was willing to do the necessary work and pay the necessary price.

If you can dream it you can do it
Hearing that the ambitious young man
Went to bed with
a smile on his face One big sleep away from success

- McZen (www.McZempoems.com)

Distinguish between problems and predicaments

“Dreaming is one thing, staying on the path is another. Sustaining the vision is the most difficult part. Along the way we can be so easily distracted by other, easier paths, or disheartened by the relentless effort required to forge ahead. Only those capable of climbing through adversity see the vision realized.”

Paul Stoltz: *Adversity Quotient: Turning Obstacles Into Opportunities*

Dissatisfaction can be a powerful source of personal motivation if, *and only if*, it is effectively channeled. To complain about anything and everything, though, is to fritter away that motivational power. Pay attention to the things you complain about (even if you're just complaining silently, not saying the words aloud). Are you complaining about problems or predicaments? Here's the difference: a problem has a solution, a predicament does not (a problem is an alcoholic neighbor, a predicament is an alcoholic mother-in-law; you can deal with a problem but you have to live with a predicament).

When you are clear about whether whatever it is that's bothering you is a problem or a predicament, then you can cease wasting your emotional energy on either. If it's a problem, start working on a solution. If it's a predicament, grin and bear it.

And remember the famous Serenity Prayer by Reinhold Niehbur: “Grant me serenity to accept the things I cannot change (predicaments), courage to change the things I can (problems), and wisdom to know the difference (and the strength to not whine and complain about either!).”

Create rituals

“Of all the ways to create [meaningful] work one is more crucial to our time than all the others. It is crucial because it has been most roundly neglected during the industrial era. I am speaking of ritual.”

Matthew Fox: *The Reinvention of Work*

In his book on the craft of writing, novelist Stephen King describes the ritual he goes through every single morning before he sits down to write. Steve Pressfield does the same thing in his book *The War of Art*.

Mark “the bird” Fidrych was one of the most popular baseball pitchers of all time, but not just because he was a great pitcher. The fans loved him because of his unquenchable enthusiasm and genuine love of the game – and because of his rituals. Including talking to the ball. When he was asked if the ball ever talked back, he would reply, “The only time that happens is when it’s going over the fence, it yells back to me that I shouldn’t have thrown that pitch.” How could you not love such a guy? (Want to know more: check out *The Bird: The Life and Legacy of Mark Fidrych* by Doug Wilson.)

Rituals can also have enormous identity-shaping power for organizations: each of the eight legendary business leaders described in my book *All Hands on Deck: 8 Essential Lessons for Building a Culture of Ownership* used rituals to craft and shape organizations whose cultures have stood the test of time. In building IBM into one of the most successful organizations in the history of the world, Tom Watson Senior ritualized virtually everything – the white shirts, the sales approach – they even had an IBM song book and salesmen (back then they were all men) would start their days with the IBM Fight Song, much in the way that Sam Walton built the early Wal-Mart culture by having people start their days with the Wal-Mart cheer.

Having little rituals, such as starting your day with a full-throated lion roar, and at work gathering a group every day for that day’s promise of *The Self-Empowerment Pledge*, can revitalize and reenergize you and the people around you.

And the best time to begin rituals in your life and your work is often when your world has turned upside down.

Playing it safe can be a dangerous game

“The play-it-safe pessimists of the world never accomplish much of anything, because they don’t look clearly and objectively at situations, they don’t recognize or believe in their own abilities, and they won’t stretch those abilities to overcome even the smallest amount of risk.”

Benjamin Hoff: *The Tao of Pooh*

In Ken Kesey’s masterful novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, it didn’t take long at all for Randall Patrick McMurphy to realize that Billy and some of the other nuthouse inmates weren’t crazy at all – they were scared to death and it was easier for them to pretend to be mentally ill so they could stay in a place where they did not have to face the realities and the responsibilities of the real world.

If you’ve ever been to Key West you have no doubt visited Last Flight Out, a shop owned by my good friend Clay Greager. Every morning since my first stop there in 1996 I’ve had my coffee in a Last Flight Out mug with this poem by Elise Franzetta emblazoned upon it:

Courage

What are the fears from which you run?

What are the obstacles to overcome?

What is the path you’d like to take?

What are the changes you’d like to make?

Where would you go?

What would you do?

If every window was open to you?

Do you have the courage without any doubt...to reach for your dream stake your Last Flight Out?

Great questions, these.

Use the 6-A Formula to Create Memories of the Future

“Believe Big. The size of your success is determined by the size of your belief. Think little goals and expect little achievements. Think big goals and win big success. Remember this, too! Big ideas and big plans are often easier – certainly no more difficult – than small ideas and small plans.”

David J. Schwartz, PhD: *The Magic of Thinking BIG: Acquire the Secrets of Success... Achieve Everything You've Always Wanted*

One of the exercises we do at my annual *Spark at Dream at the Grand Canyon Workshop* is have everyone draw a picture of their dream on the front of a t-shirt. For this exercise, no artistic talent is required – just a picture clear enough to remind you of that dream on those days when it feels so out-of-reach. I've heard some amazingly wonderful stories back from people who have told me that the simple exercise of drawing their dream, and then wearing it next to their heart underneath whatever costume they happened to wear to work, helped them stay focused on what they had to do in order to transform the dream into reality.

It's a great metaphor for creating what I call a *Memory of the Future*. If you were about to drive to Tuscaloosa for your sister's wedding and had never been there before, the first thing you would do is consult a map and plan the journey. You are much more likely to arrive at the church on time than if you simply hopped in the car and started driving in the general direction of Alabama. Studying the map is a form of mental rehearsal that greatly increases the odds you'll be there for the big event.

In the same way, transforming your dreams into a Memory of the Future is a mental rehearsal that greatly increases the odds you'll show up on time for your own celebration party. There are six sequential steps to creating a memory of the Future, which I call “The 6-A's:” Aspiration, Articulation, Affirmation, Asking, Action, and Adaptation. Let's say that your big dream is having that dream home. Here's how you can transform that dormant dream into a vibrant Memory of the Future:

Aspiration: This is the fuel for transforming wishful thinking into positive thinking. Aspiration is the desire to make things better. Without the aspirations of those who came before us there would be no cities, no schools, no corporations, no churches – no societies. We would all still be hunting and gathering in small tribes.

Articulation: The second step is being able to articulate the dream, in multiple ways and as specifically as possible. Instead of just “a big house” can you describe the ideal location (country or city); do you have a mental picture of the ideal floor plan; in your

mind, can you feel the brass fixtures with your fingertips, smell the new carpet on the floor, and hear the wood crackling in the fireplace? The more vivid your mental image, and the more different senses and emotions involved, the higher the likelihood of achievement.

Affirmation: This step is vital, because we dream in pictures but we worry in words. You've got the picture of the dream house painted in your mind, but the negative little inner voice is saying, "You can't afford the mortgage you have now, how are you going to pay for that monstrosity?" It's essential to counteract this negative self-talk with affirmations that are positive and nurturing. Of course, the next "A" will make the affirmations more believable...

Action: Without action, a dream is just a fantasy. Action is the acid test that determines the difference between a daydream and a memory of the future. But you don't have to do it all at once: small actions consistently applied can yield great results. Every time you do something, *anything*, in pursuit of your dream, even something as simple as setting up a savings account for the down payment on that dream house of yours, you are reinforcing a future reality, *a memory of the future*, in your own mind, which is ultimately where the battle is won or lost. The secret is to do something every single day.

Asking: Any dream of significance will require help from others, and the way you get that help is by asking for it. In the case of the dream house, for example, you will probably have to ask the bank for a mortgage. The best approach is to, very early in the process, go to the bank and share your dream, then ask: "What do I have to do in order for you to give me the loan I need to make this happen?" The bank is in the business of lending money, and your banker would love nothing better than to be in a position to approve your loan request. Let them help you make sure that they can say "yes" when the time comes.

Adaptation: Finally, you must be willing to adapt to changing circumstances. In many cases, that will mean adapting *upward*. When that greatest of dreamers Walt Disney astonished the world with Disneyland, no one - not even him - could have imagined the empire that the Disney company was to become. One of the participants in my Grand Canyon workshop came with a dream of writing a book; once that was successfully accomplished, the book spawned a new business that had not been part of the original dream.

What's Your Memory of the Future? I challenge you to draw a picture of a dream that's important to you. You're not creating fine art, you're crafting a memory of a future reality: you living in that new house, going to work in the ideal job, sending the book manuscript off to the publisher. Then write down at least one thing you can do for each of the 6-As of creating a memory of the future. If you make a commitment to do those

things, you will have moved dramatically closer to transforming that dream of today into your reality of tomorrow.

Here's what's on the back of those t-shirts upon which we draw our Grand Canyon dreams:

Face the granddaddy of all fears

“Contemporary psychological research into the importance of meaning and purpose in life demonstrates that without a sense that life is meaningful, people are more prone to anxiety, depression, and a variety of physical ailments. Studies have found that hope too is essential to physical and mental well-being and is a major ingredient in a person’s resiliency in the face of crisis, illness, and suffering. Hope, meaning, and purpose turn out to be critical for mental and physical health and for psychological strength and coping.”

James W. Jones: *In the Middle of This Road We Call Our Life*

One of the most memorable of all the memorable lines in *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien is this one, spoken by Gandalf the wizard: “All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”

In the years since I wrote *Never Fear, Never Quit: A Story of Courage and Perseverance*, I’ve thought a lot about fear and courage, and about perseverance in the face of obstacles and setbacks. Lately I’ve become convinced that the greatest fear of all, the Granddaddy of All Fears, is not fear of rejection, fear of failure, fear of humiliation, or even fear of success (which author Steve Pressfield calls the mother of all fears). No, I’m convinced that the greatest fear is that we eventually and inevitably run out of time. It’s a cliché that football coaches say they don’t lose games - they run out of time. It’s also a metaphor for the Granddaddy of all fears - we don’t fear dying so much as we fear running out of time for life. We don’t fear failing as much as we fear running out of time to get back up and try again.

When I’m speaking about Core Action Value #9, Focus, from our course on [The Twelve Core Action Values](#), I’ll make the (rarely contested) statement that no one on their deathbed says “I wish I’d watched more television.” Then I’ll ask what people do regret toward the end of their lives (as they realize how close they are to running out of time). The same four things come up, and always in the same order.

Relationships: Without exception, at the top of the list comes family and friends. People know that someday they will wish they had spent more time on relationships and less time on things that were really much less important. Spending time on relationships is always something we intend to do later, but in too many cases later never comes because we run out of time.

Experiences: The second thing I hear is that toward the end of their lives people regret that they didn’t travel more, didn’t write the book that had been burning up inside of them, didn’t quit the job that was killing their soul and start the business doing

something they had a burning passion to do. These experiences were always something they'd get around to one day, but that day never came because they ran out of time (Zig Ziglar used to give people in his audiences a wooden nickel with the letters TUIT on it; he'd say you've always been saying that someday you'll get 'round tuit - and now you have a round tuit, taking away your last excuse.

Finances: The third thing people always say is that in old age, people regret that they weren't more responsible for their finances. Because of youthful indulgences, many older people retire to the equivalent of Jeff Foxworthy's redneck retirement community, where the houses have wheels and the cars don't. When people blow ten grand for a week in Vegas or Disney, the implicit assumption is that they'll have time to make it up before they have to retire; the fear is that they'll run out of time before that happens.

Health: You often hear older people saying some variation of this: If I'd known I was going to live this long, I'd have taken better care of myself. We buy exercise machines and gym memberships and diet plans with the resolution that we'll actually use them - eventually. But all too often, "eventually" never comes because we run out of time.

An Unpleasant Truth You will run out of time. Period. No exceptions. You might have some warning that your hourglass is about to run out, for example with a diagnosis of terminal cancer. Or your hourglass might run out suddenly, the way an aquarium would drain when the side is smashed in by a rock. Procrastination causes you to push off what you need to do today into tomorrow with the consequence that you are always living in the shadows of yesterday. It takes courage to act, to conquer the procrastination that robs you of your precious time.

Ignore the chatter of the world

“The world is a powerful conditioner. It’s working on you all the time – negativity is normal, positivity is abnormal. To win, you must train to beat that external conditioning, to overcome the brainwashing exerted by a powerful world of negative influence.”

James Loehr and Peter McLaughlin: Mentally Tough: The Principles of Winning at Sports Applied to Winning in Business

In one presentation on values I had someone ask about dealing with the negative people who seemed to take great pleasure in inflicting their misery upon the people around them (remember, when you break the word commiserate down you get co-miserate, be miserable together). I suggested several tactful and diplomatic approaches, but she kept insisting that the kid-gloves approach had never worked and would not work – an opinion that was shared by most everyone else in the room. Finally, and at a loss for further nice-guy options, I suggested that when this happened she simply shake her head and silently say two words to herself. Then I wrote this on the whiteboard:

F _____ ‘Em!

“You decide for yourself what the F stands for,” I said.

Someone else in the audience shouted out “Flush ‘Em!”

Everyone thought this was outstanding advice.

Stop whining

“Remember, if you have a problem, it’s your problem. Solve it. Don’t blame other people. Don’t burden people with your complaints. Ninety percent of the people you meet don’t care about your troubles. The other 10 percent are glad you have them.”

Lou Holtz: *Winning Every Day*

I was in my seat on an airplane one day when a muscle man bursting out of a Gold’s Gym tank top came strutting down the aisle with a mean scowl on his face and took the seat in front of me. If he’d been green he could have auditioned for the part of The Hulk. I wasn’t the only person on the plane thinking to myself – now there is one strong dude!

Then he pulled out his cell phone and, right before my eyes, the man who would have us all believe he was a hulk transmogrified into a crybaby. His previous flight had been delayed and they hadn’t put him in first class and because of the short connection he hadn’t had time to go to Starbucks and now had to drink the regular coffee that regular people drank on airplanes and – it went on and on. From the time he sat down until they closed the airplane door, causing him to complain that he couldn’t finish his list of complaints, he pouted and whined. Poor baby!

This man’s physical strength was a whole lot less impressive when it was illuminated by his obvious moral weakness. The world had not bent over backward to make his life easier and more comfortable and it was everyone else’s fault but his. It would have been funny had it not been so pathetic.

The Pickle Pledge – a simple promise that will change your life

“We complain to get sympathy, attention, and to avoid stepping up to something we’re afraid of doing... We complain to get ourselves out of taking risks and doing things. The complaints seem legitimate, but they’re thin excuses.”

Will Bowen: *A Complaint Free World: How to Stop Complaining and Start Enjoying the Life You Always Wanted*

The Pickle Pledge is a simple (but not easy) promise that you make to yourself – to turn every complaint (my head is killing me; I had to park six blocks away and walk all the way to the mall) into a blessing (thank God for modern pharmacology; thank God you have legs that work and you don’t live in Haiti where there is no mall to walk to) or a constructive suggestion (the first symptom of dehydration is a headache so drink some water; maybe if you got more exercise walking six blocks wouldn’t be such a hardship).

I call it The Pickle Pledge because people who are always whining, pouting, and complaining look like they are sucking on a dill pickle. And because a pickle is a great metaphor for the toxically negative human being – it’s a fresh cucumber that has been soaked in vinegar.

Of all the techniques I teach, the one that has been most profoundly life-changing for me personally is this simple promise to turn every complaint into either a blessing or a constructive suggestion, and to not allow the negativity of other people to deprive me of the joy of being alive. When I really started paying attention to the soundtrack in my head, I was appalled at how much negativity there was up there. *I teach this stuff – I should know better!* But sure enough, every time I hit the road (an almost weekly occurrence) I found things to mentally whine about – delayed flights, bad food, the person sitting next to me on the flight: it almost seemed like my subconscious mind was seeking out any excuse to complain as a way of keeping me from thinking about my work.

When I really internalized The Pickle Pledge and committed to making it a part of my life, it was the emotional equivalent of moving from a room filled with cigarette smoke to sitting in the clean air by the bank of a river. And like the reformed smoker, I will never go back to my pre-Pickle thought patterns and am highly intolerant of other people trying to drag me into their emotional toxicity. I’ve learned to appreciate how wonderful life is when you take The Pickle Pledge to heart.

The Pickle Pledge played a particularly important role in my life after Lasik eye surgery left me with severe double vision, impaired visual acuity, and chronic eye pain. With the

help of a very good friend who administered a dose of tough love, I stopped whining and playing the role of victim and instead directed my anger toward helping young people be aware of the serious risks they take if they have the one set of eyes with which they will ever be blessed to be carved up for cosmetic reasons. I'm still angry at the unethical behavior of the Lasik industry, but I like myself as an angry activist much better than I would have like myself as an angry victim.

Take The Pickle Challenge

“Blaming, whining, deflecting accountability, risk aversion, and resistance to change are but a handful of symptoms of the adversity-beaten individual and organization. More serious indicators include individual and collective helplessness, organizational turnover, and general stagnation.”

Paul Stoltz: *Adversity Quotient at Work*

The emotional climate of a workplace is determined by what you expect and what you tolerate, and over time what you tolerate will dominate what you say you expect. A positive workplace culture begins with intolerance for toxic emotional negativity. As I said in my book [The Florence Prescription: From Accountability to Ownership](#): “One toxically negative person can drag down morale and productivity of an entire work unit.”

When everyone on a work unit makes a good faith effort to break the complaining habit (and yes, it is a habit) it changes everything. I know of one 12-person hospital department where someone brought in a pickle jar and, in a good-humored way, they started fining each other a quarter for every instance of toxic emotional negativity. They raised more than \$80 in one month – and you know they didn’t catch them all! Both patient satisfaction and employee engagement went from the bottom quartile to the top ten percent almost overnight.

Wherever you work, I can promise you this: if I could wave a magic wand over your organization and for 30 days there would be no bitching, moaning, whining and complaining (the *other* BMW Club!), you would never go back. Just as we will never again tolerate people lighting cigarettes in the workplace, you would quickly appreciate how nice it is to work in a place that is free of toxic emotional negativity. In fact, you might even use the word miracle to describe the transformation.

The Pickle Challenge™ is taking on a life of its own! All across the country we’re hearing about singing pickles, dancing pickles, pickle piñatas, pickle pledge boards, Pickle Pledge(tm) fundraisers, signs designating pickle-free workspaces (the way we used to designate certain areas as smoke-free zones), and pickle-free pins, buttons, and t-shirts.

I think there are two reasons the Pickle Challenge has gotten such traction. The first is simply that it is such a great visual metaphor. We can all visualize the chronic complainer and gossip who looks like he or she was suckled on a dill pickle instead of a pacifier.

The second reason is far more important – because people are finding that it works. At both the level of the individual trying to cultivate a happier and more positive mental attitude and of the employee group working to foster a more collegial and supportive workplace environment, The Pickle Challenge and the simple promise included in The Pickle Pledge can have a literally miraculous effect.

Build up your stamina

“The one common link among all unstoppable people is adversity – they struggled, tripped and stumbled, and had setbacks and failures, but they pulled themselves up and kept on going... With each trial, they emerged stronger, surer, and more deserving of the dream itself.”

Cynthia Kersey: *Unstoppable: 45 Powerful Stories of Perseverance and Triumph from People Just Like You*

Some years ago I heard a speech by Bill Kinsella, author of the book *Shoeless Joe*, which became the movie *Field of Dreams* (“Is this heaven? No, it’s Iowa”). What I most remember is his telling us that being a successful writer requires four things. As I recall, the four things were technique (which he said was five percent of the equation), creativity (another five percent), vocabulary (another five percent) and stamina (the remaining 85 percent). He went on to define stamina as sitting down to write your 50th short story after having received your 49th rejection letter.

You might have read that eight or nine out of ten new businesses fail. Whether or not that statement is technically accurate (and if you count out the people who “start a business” by setting up a website and then sit back and wait for the orders to come in, it’s not), it is not true. The truth is that businesses do not fail - owners quit. For every business that has “failed” there is another somewhere else in the same industry facing the same problems where the owner, instead of throwing in the towel, made one more call, went hat-in-hand to one more bank, made one more personal sacrifice to keep the business from going under. And in the end it was that flirtation with failure, and the commitment to push the rock up the hill one more time, that gave the company the stamina and strength of character to endure, to beat the odds, and become one of the survivors.

Joseph Campbell - author of many books on the power of myth - wrote that we all, one way or another, live out the hero’s journey. At one point in the story, the hero falls off his horse and loses his sword. The dragon hovers over him, breathing fire, and you want to close your eyes because a horrible end appears inevitable. Yet somehow, against all odds, the hero finds his sword, slays the dragon, saves the beautiful princess, and they live happily ever after.

Businesses don’t fail – owners quit

Don't pick fights you don't need

“Only fight those battles worth fighting. Not every call is worth answering nor should YOU be the one to respond. Learn to negotiate assignments... Respect your energy limits. Know those limits. By refilling, you'll have more stamina for the long haul.”

Eileen McDargh: *The Resilient Spirit: Heart Talk for Surviving in an Upside Down World*

Most of us pick fights we don't need, that we can't afford to wage, and that we cannot possibly win. These unnecessary battles divert attention and energy from the fights that really do matter, and eventually suck the joy and enthusiasm from our lives. We make these gratuitous little declarations of war on a daily, even hourly, basis. Worse yet, we're often not even aware that we're at war, much less the price we will pay for this constant inner conflict. Because they constitute lots of little skirmishes as opposed to one climactic clash of arms, these interminable battles wear us down in a constant war of attrition, the impact of which is so gradual and cumulative that we are barely aware of it happening.

What are these insidious little declarations of war? Complaints. Every time you complain about something – about anything – you are simultaneously telling yourself, and anyone else who will listen, that you are a victim, and declaring emotional war on that which you perceive to be victimizing you. For example:

“This soup is awful.” (I'm declaring emotional war on the restaurant.)

“They don't pay me enough to put up with all of this frustration.” (I'm declaring emotional war on my employer.)

“My back is killing me.” (I'm declaring emotional war on my body.)

“This lousy weather is ruining my vacation.” (I'm declaring emotional war on Mother Nature.)

It's still hotly debated whether or not war is the natural state of humankind, but there is no doubt that complaining is the natural state of many humans. As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi points out in his book *The Evolving Self*, for a variety of evolutionary reasons the human mind gravitates towards negative, frightening, and depressing thoughts. In the absence of anything legitimate on which to focus that negativity, such as a rapidly approaching saber-toothed tiger, we tend to complain about whatever is at hand, unaware of the terrible price we pay for it.

Most of these little declarations of war are unnecessary and unwarranted. As Eric Hoffer wrote in *The True Believer*, the people who complain most vociferously are those who already have a great deal and want even more, not those who have nothing and want something. Not only is it unwarranted, it can be downright dangerous since, as Maya Angelou points out, whining alerts bullies that there is a victim in the vicinity. Complaining is the most visible outward symptom of the downward Victim Spiral, which begins with:

Learned Helplessness: “If I could actually do something about this, do you think I’d be complaining about it?”

Once complaining has sufficiently conditioned us to feel helpless, we spiral down into:

Blame Game: “This isn’t my fault and I can’t do anything about it, so someone else must be to blame.”

In the process of pointing fingers at the culprit (including the ubiquitous anonymous “they”) we hit bottom at:

Victim Syndrome: “Since I can’t do anything about this, and somebody else is to blame for it, that makes me a victim.”

Complaining and its conversational companion commiserating (co-miserate: to be miserable together) are the emotional equivalent of trench warfare: they make life a dreary slog through the mud of no-man’s land while being shot at by unseen adversaries. We’ve all had the experience of sailing along in good spirits and then having some pickle-sucker come along bitching and moaning about whatever ache happens to be in their belly at the moment, sucking the wind right out of our sails – the emotional equivalent of a trench raid.

In her book *Everyday Zen*, Charlotte Joko Beck writes, “We love our drama. We like to complain and agonize and moan.” Yes, indeed, we cling to our messy, miserable little dramas the way Brer Rabbit stuck to the tar baby. It’s easier to complain about a problem than it is to fix the problem; it’s comforting to complain and have someone else share the misery (commiserate) with us.

But complaining is *always* living in the past. Whether it was five seconds ago or five years ago, the thing you are complaining about is over with. At this precise second, nothing or nobody is causing you harm; nothing or nobody is hurting you in the future except in your imagination. Dragging around this anchor of the past will drain you of your energy and enthusiasm.

Think of dissatisfaction as a resource – you are only capable of so much of it. You have the choice of spreading it around with constant complaining, or you can concentrate it on

a very small number of things that really matter. For example, if the one and only thing upon which you are focusing your dissatisfaction is an unhappy living situation (like Jeff Foxworthy's redneck, your house has wheels and your car doesn't), you won't have extra emotional energy to spare complaining about your job (you're too busy doing a great job so you'll get a raise to help pay for that new dream house) or about the weather (every time it rains, the leaky roof on your mobile home motivates you to turn off the TV and get to work on that home-based business with which you're making the money for the down payment).

If you get into the victim spiral, you end up circling the drain

The steepest hills are in your mind

“Most people dramatically underestimate what can be influenced when adversity hits, and this underestimation kills the majority of what’s possible. Conversely, becoming utterly obsessed with what you can influence opens worlds of possibilities that others simply don’t see.”

Paul Stoltz and Eric Weihenmayer: *The Adversity Advantage: Turning Everyday Struggles into Everyday Greatness*

Indian Garden is a beautiful piece of heaven that straddles Bright Angel Trail as it snakes its way from the south rim of the Grand Canyon to the Colorado River nearly eight miles and 5,000 feet below. When you’re coming up from the river hauling a heavy backpack, by the time you reach Indian Garden you’re tired, probably *very* tired. You stand in the shade of a cottonwood tree for a bit, fill up your water bottle, and then look ahead at the sheer vertical cliff that stands between you and your destination at the top.

“Impossible,” you think, your eyes disbelieving what your mind knows to be true, that there is a trail which will take you up that vertical wall to the village. Looking back down on Indian Garden from the top, you’re likely to smile the tired smile of hard-earned accomplishment, and tell yourself it really wasn’t that difficult after all. The toughest challenge was mental.

The same holds true for riding a bike, taking difficult classes in school, starting a business, or most of life’s other challenges. The hills always seem a lot steeper from the bottom than they do from the top. When you’re at the bottom, if you convince yourself that the hill is too steep to climb, you can be sure it will be. You’ll end up walking the bike, or turning around and going back. On the other hand, it’s amazing how often you can start what seems to be an impossible trek, only to find that a previously hidden path unfolds before you your feet as you climb.

Turn off the tragi-tainment

“For the reporter, the natural bias for bad news is compounded by the difficulty of relating good news in the form of personal stories... ‘Postal Worker Satisfied with Life’ isn’t much of a headline – unlike ‘Postal Worker Kills Eight,’ which is bound for the front page.”

Daniel Gardner: *The Science of Fear*:

Over time, the choices you make with regard to allocating your attention profoundly influence the kind of person you become. As Ralph Waldo Emerson famously put it, “A man becomes what he thinks about all day long.”

Pay too much attention to the news (which I call the tragi-tainment media, because their business is turning tragedy into entertainment) and you’ll become a more frightened and anxious person.

Pay too much attention to television sitcoms and you will ineluctably become more cynical and sarcastic. Pay attention to educational and inspirational books and tapes, though, and you’ll become a more positive, self-empowered, and motivated individual.

Build upon The Pyramid of Self-Belief

“You have to find the beliefs that support your outcome – the beliefs that get you where you want to go. If your beliefs don’t do that, you have to throw them out and try something new.”

Anthony Robbins: *The Way to Peak Personal Achievement*

The Pyramid of Self-Belief

Belief is a force of nature, like gravity or magnetism. Unlike gravity, belief *is* subject to mental control. By using techniques of affirmation and visualization you can boost your energy, enhance your belief, and wire yourself for success. Self-belief is developed at four levels. Imagine a pyramid, with self-concept at the foundation, self-image and self-esteem in between, and self-confidence at the top. Each element rests upon, but also interacts with, those below. In other words, working on changing any element of the pyramid will cascade through the whole.

Level One, Self-Concept: An underlying awareness, either implicit or explicit, of your role as a human being in this universe. What do you see when you look around you: a world of scarcity and risk, or a world of abundance and opportunity? What is your concept of a higher power, and of your relationship to that higher power? Questions like these cannot be answered in an absolute sense, but rather depend largely on what you choose to see as you look around you and within you.

Level Two, Self-Image: What do you see when you look in the mirror? A winner? A victim? You will never on a sustained basis exceed your self-image. If your self-image is that of being a victim, no matter what happens, you will always be a victim. On the other hand, the self-perceived winner who loses everything will eventually find a way to get it all back, and probably sooner rather than later.

Level Three, Self-Esteem: Do you like what you see when you look in the mirror? People with high self-esteem get a lot done and make substantial contributions; people with low self-esteem tend not to. Self-esteem is not arrogance – quite to the contrary,

arrogant people are often hiding low self-esteem: the only way they can feel good about themselves is by making other people feel bad about themselves.

Level Four, Self-Confidence: Do you believe that you have skills and resources to meet the challenges of your life and to effectively pursue your dreams and goals, or you are reasonably certain that you can obtain whatever you need but are now lacking. Genuine self-confidence is usually quiet, as opposed to the loud boastfulness of arrogance. You are not born with self-confidence, it is earned through experience.

One of my favorite definitions of selling is that it is the transference of belief from one person to another. The most important sale you will ever make in your life is selling you on yourself; once you've made that sale, all the others will be much easier. Building upon the four levels of The Pyramid of Self-Belief will help you make that sale.

In his book *Live Your Dreams* Les Brown wrote: "I believe the most important thing you can sell people is a belief in themselves." That is also, I believe, one of the most important opportunities of leadership – to help people look in the metaphorical mirror and not just see who's there now looking back at them, but to see who could be there if they could walk through the fears that are holding them back, stop listening to the nagging voice of negative self-talk, and really live their values.

Act confident to earn confidence

“Self-confidence is the trait of envisioning victory from situations where others see only defeat, to find promise where others find grounds for pessimism, to see opportunity where others see obstacles.”

James B. Arkbauer: *Ultrapreneuring*

In her book *Capture the Mindshare and the Market Share Will Follow*, Libby Gill describes research showing that self-confidence often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. People who act confident are more likely to gain the confidence, encouragement, and support of others; they are more likely to be looked up to and to be listened to. This external response, in turn, reinforces their inner belief in themselves and their abilities. It can motivate them to study longer and work harder to justify the confidence that others have placed in them and that they have expressed themselves.

Self-confidence and optimism are essential traits for leaders – and I include parents in this category. When the world is turning upside down – you’ve just lost a job, the business is operating at a loss, whatever – is the most important time for you as a leader to show the unshakeable confidence that Ernest Shackleton (who’s story I mentioned earlier), to inspire those who are trusting you to lead them out of the mess.

The writer Jonathan Swift once wrote that you should keep your fears to yourself and share your courage with others. That is perhaps the ultimate test of confidence: keeping a vision of victory in front of people even when you don’t know exactly how it is to be achieved.

Stop waiting for someone else to “empower” you

“I see so many men and women fail in this life waiting for somebody to motivate them. Nobody can motivate you. You have to motivate yourself. You’ve got to be excited about life, pumped up about life.”

A.L. Williams: *All You Can Do Is All You Can Do But All You Can Do Is Enough!*

In a growing number of organizations across the country, people are gathering in groups to take each day’s promise from *The Self-Empowerment Pledge* – promising themselves and each other to make the effort to live those promises. This group reading has a double benefit. First, people are more likely to stick to the promises they have made if they’ve been made publicly (and if coworkers gently remind them of the promises when they break them). Second, when a critical mass of people within an organization internalize and act upon the promises, they inevitably have a positive impact on culture.

Roger Steinkruger, CEO of Tri Valley Health System in Cambridge, Nebraska says that group readings of each day’s promise have had a highly positive impact on the culture of the organization, and on the lives of many of the people who work there. Watch a 2-minute video of the team at Tri Valley Health System as a group reciting Wednesday’s Promise on Determination – and if you look closely you will notice that more than half of the people in the group are not reading the promise – they have memorized it! [The Self-Empowerment Pledge at Tri Valley Health System.](#)

Take to heart The Self-Empowerment Pledge

“No empowerment is so effective as self-empowerment... In this world, the optimists have it, not because they are always right, but because they are always positive. Even when wrong, they are positive, and that is the way of achievement, correction, improvement, and success. Educated, eyes-open optimism pays; pessimism can only offer the empty consolation of being right [because it creates a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure].”

David Landes: “Culture Makes All the Difference” in *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress* (edited by Samuel P. Huntington and Lawrence E. Harrison)

You can download the slide show and all of the posters for *The Self-Empowerment Pledge* at the [resources page of the Values Coach website](#) .

One of the most overused and misused buzzwords in the English language is the word “empowerment.” The word implies that somebody other than you can give you power. If someone else can give you power, they can also take it away – and loaned empowerment is not real power. In truth, no one can empower you but you. The only genuine empowerment is self-empowerment. Once you empower yourself, though, nobody can take that power away. Empowerment is a state of mind – not part of a job description, a set of delegated tasks, or the latest management program brought in by the boss. *The Self-Empowerment Pledge* includes seven simple promises that will change your life, if you are willing to invest one minute a day for a year. Read these seven promises, and then ask yourself these two questions:

Question #1: If I were to take these promises to heart and act upon them, would I be better off in every way – personally, professionally, financially, and spiritually – in one year than where my current life trajectory is taking me?

Question #2: If everyone where I work were to take these promises to heart and act upon them, would we do a better job of serving our customers and supporting each other, and would this be a better place to work?

If you’re being honest, the answer will be absolutely yes – how could it be anything else? The promises themselves are simple, but keeping them will require desire and determination. Fortunately, you don’t have to do it all at once. Focus on one promise each day, so that you make all seven promises to yourself each week. Do this each day for one year – it will be the best daily one minute you ever invest in yourself.

Repeat each day's promise to yourself at least four times – morning, afternoon, evening, and right before bed. Each reading will take you about 15 seconds – so four times a day is one minute. At first, you'll hear a negative little voice in the back of your head telling you that you look ridiculous and you could be watching a TV commercial instead of wasting this minute. Ignore it – the inner critic is easily bored and will eventually go away. But now it's going to get even tougher, at least temporarily. You'll begin to experience what psychologists call cognitive dissonance, which is trying to hold two incompatible beliefs simultaneously. Cognitive dissonance is a painful emotional state, a form of mental illness.

When you've been promising yourself to be responsible, accountable, and determined, but then catch yourself procrastinating, making excuses, and giving up, you're experiencing cognitive dissonance. At that point, one of two things *must* happen. Either you take the easy way out and stop making the promises, or you change your attitudes and behaviors in such a way as to start keeping the promises. When you do that, you will start to get better results. Now you're over the hump, and repeating the promises becomes an easy and pleasurable habit, because it's self-reinforcing. Let's look at each of these seven life-changing promises.

Monday's Promise: Responsibility

“Remember, if you have a problem, it’s your problem. Solve it. Don’t blame other people. Don’t burden people with your complaints. Ninety percent of the people you meet don’t care about your troubles. The other 10 percent are glad you have them.”

Lou Holtz: *Winning Every Day*

Monday’s promise says you will take complete responsibility for your life and refrain from blaming other people for your circumstances. Legendary basketball coach John Wooden told his players that no one is a loser until he blames someone else for the loss. Life-altering success only begins when you take complete and absolute responsibility for your circumstances and your outcomes. When you stop playing the “blame-and-complain game” and take responsibility for your life, you’re on the road to achieving your goals.

I previously described the distinction between a problem and a predicament: a problem has a solution while a predicament does not. Monday’s Promise says that you will deal with problems and live with predicaments, but not complain about either.

Tuesday's Promise: Accountability

“Refuse to blame anyone for anything. Accept complete responsibility for your life and everything in it that you can do something about... Criticizing and blaming others actually lowers your own self-esteem and reinforces your own feelings of guilt and inferiority.”

Brian Tracy: *Maximum Achievement: Strategies and Skills That Will Unlock Your Hidden Powers to Succeed*

On Tuesday, you promise to hold yourself accountable – not just for meeting your obligations, but for fulfilling your true potential. In his book *The War of Art* Steve Pressfield describes Resistance (he capitalizes the word to denote that it is a real and visceral presence, like cancer or a great white shark) as the inner accumulation of fears and doubts that blocks us from expressing our creativity. “The more important a call or action is to our soul’s evolution,” he says, “the more Resistance we will feel toward pursuing it.”

The key to conquering Resistance is internalizing and operationalizing Tuesday’s Promise. Pressfield says that Resistance is like cancer. It’s a fight to the death, and every time you let it beat you, a little part of your soul dies.

Wednesday's Promise: Determination

“When the pain gets so bad that you’re ready to quit, you’ve set yourself up as someone with nothing to lose. And someone with nothing to lose has quite a bit of power. You can go for broke. Challenge authority. Attempt un-attempted alternatives, Lean into a problem; lean so far that you might just lean right through it.”

Seth Godin: *The Dip: A Little Book that Teaches You When to Quit (and When to Stick)*

On Wednesday you promise to bravely confront your fears. Every great accomplishment was once the “impossible” dream of a dreamer who simply refused to quit when the going got tough. For the person starting a new business, it takes time to get the product and the marketing right, to get word-of-mouth working for you, and to find the right people for the team. There will be frustration and failure along the way – it’s all part of the game.

The difference between winners and losers is that winners are determined to do what it takes to stay in the game, no matter what the score happens to be at halftime. And they know that in order to stay in the game, they must be willing to ask for the help they need, since no one can achieve big goals all alone.

Thursday's Promise: Contribution

“When you make life easy for others, you become a guardian angel—someone who can be counted on for great work and little hassle. Once you have that reputation, people will give you whatever you want to keep you in their corner.”

Marc Myers: *How to Make Luck*

With Thursday's promise, you commit yourself to paying forward as well as to paying back. As you internalize Thursday's Promise, you will begin to appreciate the ancient wisdom of the Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu, who said you can never become happy and successful by trying to achieve happiness and success, but only by helping others to be happier and more successful.

One of the great paradoxes of life is that the more you devote yourself to service to others, the richer and more rewarding (and eventually rewarded) your life will be. If you read the book or saw the movie *Pay It Forward* you'll recognize that philosophy.

Friday's Promise: Resilience

"We only need to be strong enough to stand. Whether we stand shaking in fear or shaking our fist, as long as we stand, we are strong enough."

Joseph M. Marshall, III: *Keep Going: The Art of Perseverance*

You often hear figures quoted about business failure – i.e. eight of every ten new businesses fail within the first five years or something like that. Not only is that inaccurate (excluding people who are just sticking a toe in the water the five-year survival rate for new businesses is much greater than that), it is also just not true. Businesses do not fail – owners quit. For every business that has “failed” there is another where, in the very same dire straits, the owner(s) put in one more late night, made one more sales call, did whatever it took to survive that dark night of the business soul and went on to build a very successful enterprise.

In his book *The Last Lecture* (with Jeffrey Zaslow), Randy Pausch said that brick walls are not there to stop you, they are there to make you prove how much you want something. Internalizing Friday's Promise will help you bounce back every time you fall and blast your way through every brick wall.

Saturday's Promise: Perspective

“Facing a diagnosis of cancer and the subsequent treatments can profoundly change the way we live the rest of our lives. We can wallow in self-pity with a ‘Why me?’ attitude, or we can embrace the time we have left on this earth (cancer diagnosis or not), treasuring each and every moment, and treating each day as one full of life. When you feel discouraged, look all around you: at the beauty of the earth, the love of your family, and the support of your friends. The world is a better place because you are with them today.”

Christine Clifford: *Not Now... I'm Having a No Hair Day*

On Saturday you make the “silver lining” promise of seeing the best in every situation. One of my favorite sayings is “Thank God Ahead of Time” (the title of a book by Father Michael Crosby). Bad things do happen to good people: when they happen to you, you can play the victim or you can say “thank you” and plumb the experience for its lessons.

Almost everyone who has ever lost a job will eventually say that it was the best thing that could have happened (the exception being people who choose to play the lifelong victim role); the sooner you internalize Saturday's Promise, the more quickly you will find the silver lining in every dark cloud. I've spent many evenings with support groups, and am always impressed with how people choose to find hidden blessings in apparent tragedy. If they can find blessings in cancer, addiction, or even the loss of a child, what can happen to you or me that we can't immediately say “thank you – I don't know why yet, but I'll figure it out.”

Sunday's Promise: Faith

“Rather than specifying to the universe what the situation means and what is required for it to be fixed, the Buddhist approach is one of openness, and attitude of ‘don’t know.’ ‘Don’t know’ allows for stillness, and stillness for wisdom. From this perspective, hope is not at all a future wish, but a depth of understanding that can transform past and future as well as lead to conscious action that shapes future events.”

Joan Borysenko: *Fire in the Soul*

On Sunday you promise yourself to be faithful. This isn't a promise about religion – everyone, regardless of their religious belief or non-belief, needs faith: faith in oneself, faith in other people, faith in the future, and hopefully faith in things unseen. On the wall of my home office is a shadow box that's home to a delicate handmade paper angel. A dear friend gave it to me several days before she died of cancer, at much too young an age. During her last year on earth, her faith and her gratitude for the blessings of her life radiated outward like sunshine pouring through a stained glass window. She was a constant inspiration to her family, members of support groups she stayed with to the end, and many others, including me.

Ending your week with Sunday's Promise will remind you to be thankful for all that you have been blessed with. And if you live in the America of today, you have been blessed indeed.

Keep a personal journal

“Keeping a personal journal is a high leverage Quadrant II [important, but not urgent] activity that significantly increases self-awareness and enhances the synergy among it and consciousness, independent will and creative imagination.”

Stephen R. Covey: *First Things First*

One of the most effective ways to get to know yourself better is keeping a personal journal. It will help you rid yourself of negative emotions that shouldn't be vented on others, gain a higher level of self-understanding, and crystallize your goals and dreams. A daily journal can be much more than a diary; it can be a powerful method of tapping into the untold spiritual power of your subconscious mind. Don't be discouraged if you miss several days or even weeks, just keep coming back to it. Here are ten good reasons for you to keep a journal:

It will help you improve your memory.

Recording in a journal can be an effective and safe emotional catharsis.

Regular journaling can help you better understand why you think and feel the way you do, and achieve a rational understanding of why you react the way you do.

It can help you see the major patterns in your life, such as how you spend your time and money or how you respond to stress.

It clarifies your goals and values.

Reflection and writing can uncover hidden talents and aspirations — you may decide to become a poet or a writer!

It can be the forum where you give yourself permission to be the person you want to be and do the things you want to do.

Journaling creates discipline, thereby enhancing self-esteem.

It helps you set aside some protected time for yourself.

Time with the journal gives you a regular opportunity for reflection and prayer.

Keep your journals. Every so often, at least once a year, go back through and read the old ones. It will help you keep a long term perspective, and monitor the changes that are continuously taking place in yourself. And, you might find that you're becoming a

pretty good writer compared with the rough early attempts at putting your thoughts and emotions down on paper.

Pay attention to the patterns in your life

“When not preoccupied with ourselves, we actually have a chance to expand the concept of who we are. Loss of self-consciousness can lead to self-transcendence, to a feeling that the boundaries of our being have been pushed forward... It almost seems that occasionally giving up self-consciousness is necessary for building a strong self-concept.”

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi: *Flow*

“My life is made of patterns that can scarcely be controlled,” went the Paul Simon song. An essential element of self-awareness is to identify the driving patterns of your life, determine which patterns can be controlled and which cannot, and then to follow the advice of the Serenity Prayer: to have the courage to change the patterns that are within your power to change (e.g. eating and spending patterns), the serenity to live with the patterns you cannot change (e.g. weather and the price of gasoline), and the wisdom to know the difference.

In his book *The Power of Story*, Jim Loehr writes about how our perception of ourselves is profoundly influenced by the stories we allow to shape our thinking. These stories both shape and are shaped by the patterns in our lives (“there I go again – it’s the same old story”). The Authenticity journey often begins by recognizing, and quite often interrupting, those patterns. Here are several examples:

Career Patterns: One of the biggest mistakes I’ve made in my life was spending too many years chasing what I thought was my dream job, and in the process running away from my real strengths and passions. I ignored many signs along the way that I was on the wrong path, a path that for me lacked heart. Only after being fired for the last time (a friend of mine says that if you haven’t been fired at least three times, you’re not trying hard enough – on that score at least, I was an overachiever!) did I recognize the patterns which had so often caused me to act in ways that were counterproductive to my stated goals, and only when I interrupted those patterns with a radical career shift (the founding of Values Coach) did I see commensurately radical improvements in my own life. So the question I have for you is: *What are the patterns evident in your career, and what are they trying to tell you?*

Behavior Patterns: It’s no fun being depressed, but for many people depression is a symptom of self-defeating behavior patterns. Many studies have shown a direct correlation between watching lots of television and being depressed; many other studies have shown a direct correlation between physical exercise and the amelioration of depression (as well as anxiety). So if you’re anxious and/or depressed, before you make an appointment with your shrink try turning off the TV and going for a brisk walk. And

if part of the reason you're anxious and depressed is that you're in debt, read *The Total Money Makeover* by Dave Ramsey, cut up your credit cards, and make good use of the time you've saved by turning off the TV and get a second job or start a home-based business. Changing your life begins with changing your patterns of behavior.

Personality Patterns: Some psychologists will tell you that your personality is substantially fixed at a ridiculously early age, that you are stuck in your Myers-Briggs box and there's nothing you can do about it. I don't buy it. If Keith Harrell can go from being a shy and insecure kid who stutters to being a world-class professional speaker, what says that you can't get out of whatever personality box you've been living in? No doubt, it won't be easy. You might have to get way out of your comfort zone by joining Rotary and the Toastmasters Club, or taking Dale Carnegie classes. You might have to sit on a busy street corner trying to sell home-made poetry. (I did this once as a way of overcoming an inner demon of my own. I met a man who had spent the previous night in a jail cell talking to Jesus – and having Jesus talk back.)

Think about his paradox. There are six billion (give or take a few hundred million) souls on the face of the Earth. Of all those billions of faces, the only one that you will never be able to see is the one that is most important to you - your own. You can glimpse approximations - a photograph, a reflection in the mirror, a cameo shadow, a friend's description - but you are forever barred from directly laying eyes upon your own face. That's a great metaphor for self-awareness. It requires indirect measures. The more willing you are to make the journey of inner exploration, the more certain it is that you will discover and become the meant-to-be you.

Do you want to be one of a million or one in a million?

Overcome your own laziness

“Ultimately there is only the one impediment, and that is laziness. If we overcome laziness, all the other impediments will be overcome. If we do not overcome laziness, none of the others will be hurdled.”

M. Scott Peck, MD: *The Road Less Traveled*

Ouch! I don't know about you, but for me that hurts to read – because it hits too close to home.

It's not just physical laziness – more important is mental laziness.

We've seen that Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (author of *Flow* and *The Evolving Self*) says that the most depressing thoughts have to do with the self. Unfortunately, when we are not consciously structuring our thinking it tends to automatically and spontaneously gravitate toward the self. And often when our world has turned upside down (as in the loss of a job or the failure of a business) we don't have nearly the motivation to think about anything other than ourselves and the plights we have found ourselves to be in.

So we tend to wallow around in worry and self-pity and other forms of negative emotions and negative thinking. It's just too hard to focus our attention and our conscious awareness on something more positive and constructive. In a word, we need to overcome our laziness.

Even if, in the case of the recently unemployed, you don't have a job to go to where your thinking must be structured in a more positive direction for at least part of the day, there are things you can do. You can read an intellectually challenging book; you can work on building a personal website (or improving the one you have); you can volunteer for a worthwhile cause; you can spend more time at the gym and less time in front of the television set.

Transform despair into determination

“Optimism can be sparked by leaders who reframe disastrous events in positive, empowering ways.”

Dennis N.T. Perkins: *Leading at the Edge: Leadership Lessons from the Extraordinary Saga of Shackleton’s Antarctic Expedition*

Prevention is the best defense, but when despair strikes anyway, the best strategy is to transform it into the energy for determination. Many very successful, very creative people have stood on despair’s doorstep, perhaps for a very long time, and returned more determined to become the person they were truly meant to be and to pursue their most authentic dreams. Og Mandino, Buckminster Fuller, Billy Joel, Harold Hughes, and Robert Fulghum are among those who were actually on the brink of suicide when they turned around and realized that they had important work remaining to be done. As Robert Fulghum wrote about his experience: “Death isn’t what I wanted. It wasn’t less life, but more life – life with meaning” (emphasis in original). Great leaders recognize that despair is an emotional wasteland, and are quick to transform it into determination by investing the situation with meaning and with commitment to prevail against all odds.

When Ernest Shackleton’s ship *Endurance* was first trapped in and then crushed by Antarctic ice in 1916, one of his most daunting challenges was to maintain the morale of his twenty-eight crew members during their 634-day ordeal. In *Leading at the Edge*, leadership consultant Dennis N.T. Perkins and his co-authors describe some of the strategies that Shackleton used to hold his team together and bring them all home alive:

Shackleton kept his men busy, knowing that idleness can foster a sense of lost control, which in turn leads to despair.

He was quick to defuse conflict, and used every excuse to hold a party or celebration of some sort.

He made sure his men understood that he had no doubt whatsoever they would all survive, and set a personal example of courage and self-sacrifice in doing the things that were necessary for that to occur.

He encouraged creative thinking to solve what appeared to be intractable problems, and when inaction would have been a fatal choice, he was willing to take what otherwise would have seemed unthinkable risks.

Shackleton knew that a leader’s first duty during tough times is to maintain hope and optimism, and to stave off despair, no matter how desperate the situation might seem. In retrospect, one can speculate on how frequently members of the crew were tempted

to quit before the breakthrough that led to their rescue. Shackleton himself later wrote: “I have marveled often at the thin line that divides success from failure and the sudden turn that leads from apparently certain disaster to comparative safety.”

Enthusiasm is the master value

“Every memorable act in the history of the world is a triumph of enthusiasm. Nothing great was ever achieved without it because it gives any challenge or any occupation, no matter how frightening or difficult, a new meaning. Without enthusiasm you are doomed to a life of mediocrity but with it you can accomplish miracles.”

Og Mandino: [*The Greatest Salesman in the World*](#)

Enthusiasm is Core Action Value #10 in the course I teach on *The Twelve Core Action Values*, but sometimes I think I should have placed it first because I am increasingly convinced that enthusiasm is the master value. When people are enthusiastic, it makes everything easier: enthusiastic people have the courage to take risks, the determination to persevere their way through obstacles and setbacks, are more committed to service, and tend to become natural leaders. But without enthusiasm, everything is more difficult – making it through the day is like swimming across a pool filled with Jell-O.

Enthusiasm is the ultimate sales pitch. Aren't you more likely to buy from someone who is cheerful, optimistic, and passionate than you are to buy from a negative, bitter, cynical and sarcastic pickle sucker – even if they are both reading from the very same sales script? Here are ten actions you can take to be more enthusiastic and cultivate a more positive attitude – beginning with yourself and then sharing with others at home and at work:

1. Recognize that enthusiasm is a series of choices. The most important development in human evolution was not the offsetting thumb or the enlarged brain. It was the realization that by conscious will, the mind can be disciplined, that people do not have to be slaves to their thoughts and emotions. We each have the power to consciously decide how we perceive the world, and to discipline how we react to what we see. By conscious will we can decide whether to be an optimist or a pessimist; whether to accept personal responsibility or blame others; whether to see in adversity a door closing in our face or another door opening to exciting new opportunities; whether to become an educated skeptic or an ignorant cynic.

2. Be a visionary, not a victim. You can be a victim complaining about past injustices, or you can be a visionary dreaming about future accomplishments, but you cannot be both. Visionaries are usually bubbling over with enthusiasm, while victims are more likely to suck the enthusiasm out of everyone around them. Choose to be a visionary and walk toward your future with passion and enthusiasm, and never to be a victim dragging around a sad past behind you.

3. *Turn off the TV.* Just in case you hadn't already been given enough reasons to turn off your television set, researchers have demonstrated that watching TV is positively correlated with being depressed; the more time a person spends in front of the boob tube, the more likely they are to be discouraged, depressed, and unenthusiastic about life. Turn off the plug-in drug and get a life!

4. *Be an energy faucet.* Are you an energy faucet or an energy drain? When you leave a group, do people feel energized or exhausted by your recent presence? People like to be around others who energize them, and seek to avoid those who sap their energy. The best way to become an energy faucet is to truly take an interest in the concerns of others, and to elevate their confidence and ability to address those concerns. Make it a point of smiling and saying hello to everyone you pass in the hallways. Your enthusiastic smile might be the best gift they have received all day!

5. *Erase the Graffiti of Negative Self-Talk.* Nothing can sap your energy and enthusiasm more quickly and thoroughly than your own negative self-talk. In his book *The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the New Millennium*, Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi showed that for a variety of evolutionary reasons, the human mind automatically gravitates toward negative, frightening, and depressing thoughts. It is your challenge to confront these self-inhibiting notions before they interfere with your pursuit of your future vision. Pay attention to all of the negative self-talk going through your mind. Hint: it will almost always be in the second person ("You are an idiot," not "I am an idiot"). Every time your inner critic verbally abuses you, stand up to it. The inner critic is a bully, and bullies always buckle when confronted with courage. Whenever your spoiled inner brat tells you that you're not good enough, that you can't achieve great goals, or otherwise puts you down, erase that mental graffiti and replace it with a positive (and more likely to be truthful) self-talk saying exactly the opposite.

6. *Get enough sleep.* Sleep deprivation can increase anxiety and worry, says James Mass in *Power Sleep*. When you skimp on sleep, you can end up with "overwhelming feelings of not being able to cope, even with simple problems or moderate workloads; increase in worry, frustration, and nervousness; and inability to maintain perspective, or to relax, even under moderate pressure." Most of us require *at least* eight full hours of sleep every night. "The process of sleep," says Maas, "provides tremendous power. It restores, rejuvenates, and energizes the body and the brain." Turning off the TV and setting aside that mystery novel so you can go to bed earlier can help you be more fully alert, creative, enthusiastic, and alive during your waking hours.

7. *Outlaw gossip.* Participating in gossip saps the energy from group conversation, and beyond that it is a fundamentally dishonest act. Even if the words being said by the gossip-monger are technically true, they will be subject to false interpretation and to distortion as the gossip is spread.

8. *Change your reference group.* Sociologists tell us that one of the most important, if not *the* most important, influences on our lives is the people we spend time with, the people with whom we identify. This is what they call our reference group. We are all profoundly imprinted by the characteristics of the reference groups with which we identify, in both conscious and subconscious ways. If your reference group consists primarily of people who are depressed, pessimistic, and chronically whining about how the world has made them a victim, over time it will be almost impossible for you to not fall into that emotional quicksand. On the other hand, if you spend time with people who are confident and optimistic, their attitudes will rub off on you. Consciously seek out people who have the qualities you would like to emulate. This entails sticking your neck out, making those proverbial cold calls, joining Rotary or the Optimists Club, and otherwise getting out of your shell.

9. *Stay in shape.* Commit yourself to engaging in some sort of exercise as soon as you get home, and before you open the fridge and turn on the tube. Regular exercise is a proven catalyst for a more enthusiastic perspective on life.

10. *Give your complaints the Valley Forge test.* Whenever you find yourself complaining about something, imagine being transported back through time to Valley Forge during that horrible winter of 1776-77. Visualize yourself describing this complaint of yours to the freezing, starving patriots who sacrificed so much to win the freedoms that you now enjoy. If your suffering makes them cry out in sympathy, then you *really do* have a legitimate gripe, so by all means keep whining about it if you must. If, on the other hand, your mind's ear hears them laughing at your "problem," then either drop it or deal with it, but stop whining about it.

In its original Greek usage, "enthusiasm" referred to being blessed with a divine spirit within. When it comes to your life and your business, that divine spirit is happiness at home and money in the bank.

Stop awfulizing

“We have repeatedly observed how easily people can become trapped by their negative assumptions. The worst case is a way of thinking that happens so naturally and usually so fast that people hardly notice. This is especially true during times of change.”

Kathleen D. Ryan and Daniel K. Oestrich: *Driving Fear Out of the Workplace*

Every time I see a lone cross-country bicyclist go by, I feel a pang of envy. They look so free, so independent, so self-contained. Off to see America in a way that their car-bound fellow citizens never experience it. I’ve spoken with many people about the spirit of enterprise that drives people like this – the adventurer, the explorer, the entrepreneur. Almost everyone has the same reaction I do: admiration, blended with a big dollop of envy.

That being the case, why do so few of us “just do it” – just go out and follow that road to wherever it might lead us? I was recently speaking with a friend who had lost a job. Truth be told, it was the best thing that could have happened to him. He didn’t like his work all that well, and certainly would not have chosen that career but for the big paychecks. Now he was free to try something new. Free, and scared to death. I asked him why he didn’t just break away, follow his heart down the road to see where it would lead him.

“I need a bigger safety net,” he replied. As if having just a little (or a lot) more money in the bank (that’s the way he defined his safety net – more money) would somehow make the fear go away. I pointed out that he’d worry a lot less about his safety net if he would appreciate how close to the ground his trapeze really was. He couldn’t really get hurt too badly if he were to fall. Oh, sure, he might have had to move into a smaller house for a while, or experience the humiliation of going to Uncle Ben for a loan. But there are no more debtors’ prisons in America. And chances are the closest he’d ever come to real starvation is having the pizza delivery guy show up late.

In the world that we are blessed to live in, even if you do fall, you won’t fall far, and someone will likely be there to help you back up if you do. So what is it that’s holding *you* back from that cross country bike trip, or whatever else it is that you have a secret longing to do? Just do it! The worst thing that can happen just isn’t that bad.

Adopt the Nedlog Rule

“If we learn to accept our imperfections with humor, as the reflection of our very humanity, we will experience humility and tolerance, we will understand that we are already filled with forgiveness, we will see the gift of our lives, the chains will fall away, and we will be free – free not so much from fear or ‘dependence,’ but free for love, for life itself.”

Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham: *The Spirituality of Imperfection*

We are all familiar with The Golden Rule: *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*. And there’s a reason that, in one form or another, it appears in the scriptures of every major spiritual tradition – it’s the right thing to do. The Nedlog Rule is The Golden Rule in reverse (don’t look up the word Nedlog – I made it up by spelling “golden” backwards):

Be willing to ask others to help you in whatever ways you would be willing to help them.

In healthcare we ask “who cares for the caregiver?” It’s an important question because, as is often said, you cannot pour out of an empty pitcher. It’s wisdom as ancient as the *I Ching*: every now and then, the pitcher needs to be taken out of service and refilled.

In our Lone Ranger culture, we are often reluctant to ask for the help we need. We mistakenly think that it’s a sign of weakness to ask for help. But actually, the reverse is true. It takes a strong person to ask others for help. Paradoxically, when you ask someone else to help you, more often than not both of you benefit – isn’t it true that most people feel good about being needed and about being able to help someone else?

Think of how much more positive and productive our organizations – and our families – would be if everyone were to practice the Nedlog Rule:

Passive-aggressive behavior would be replaced by people openly and honestly confronting the issues and discussing their differences.

Martyr complex would be replaced by people asking for help before they become overwhelmed, and asking for a break before they reach the breaking point.

Chronic complaining would be replaced by people asking for help to fix the problems that can be fixed and to cope with the predicaments that are beyond immediate solution (obviously a restatement of the Serenity Prayer).

Burnout would be replaced by the sort of collective spirit one sees in a support group, where people who are facing intractable problems reach out to one another to share hope, inspiration, and courage – and a culture where it's almost impossible to distinguish between helper and helpee.

Carrie Anne Murphy, the fictional character in my book [The Healing Tree](#), wrote this poem to convey the message to a nursing audience, but it applies across the board:

Growing Soul

Take care of your garden, caregiver

Don't plant it with brambles and weeds

You won't grow orchids and roses

If in spring you plant dandelion seeds

Take care of your garden, caregiver

Nurture it with kindness and care

Help delicate buds become lovely flowers

With water and sunshine and prayer

Take care of your garden, caregiver

Protect it from bugs and from blight

Walk daily the rows with a vigilant eye

Shelter it from frost in the night

Take care of your garden, caregiver

At its heart erect a maypole

Then dance and sing as twilight falls round

Cultivate this home for your soul

Practice mutuality

“When you declare your dependence on others, they usually agree to help. And during the course of making you a better person, they inevitably try to become better people themselves. This is how individuals change, how teams improve, how divisions grow, and how companies become world-beaters.”

Marshall Goldsmith: *What Got You Here Won't Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successful*

There is a principle in Alcoholics Anonymous called “mutuality.” It means that the relationship between the sponsor and the one being sponsored is lateral, not hierarchical. It's not one person depending upon another, it is two people depending upon each other. The sponsor needs the one being sponsored as much as the other needs him or her.

Mutuality lies at the heart of every win-win relationship. It is also the underpinning of every great organization. Schools are great when teachers know that they need their students as much as their students need them. Hospitals are great when caregivers know that they need their patients as much as their patients need them. Companies are great when employees know that they need their customers as much as their customers need them. Leaders are great when they know that they need their followers as much as their followers need them.

Mutuality is a great antidote to arrogance, complacency, and self-centeredness. It is the fuel for a great career and for a great life, because it is the key ingredient of trusting relationships.

The best time to begin a more conscious practice of mutuality is when your world has turned upside down because that is when you are most acutely aware of how greatly you need other people's help, and are most willing to accept that help.

Just don't forget the lesson when the world is right-side-up again.

Say Yes to what matters by saying No to what doesn't

“The fact that some choice is good doesn't necessarily mean that more choice is better... As a culture, we are enamored of freedom, self-determination, and variety, and we are reluctant to give up any of our options. But clinging tenaciously to all the choices available to us contributes to bad decisions, to anxiety, stress, and dissatisfaction – even to clinical depression.”

Barry Schwartz: *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less*

In today's frenetic world we are overwhelmed with choices, options, and opportunities. Between computers, smart phones, TVs, shopping malls, restaurants and coffee shops, not to mention the day job, we can be endlessly occupied. Sometimes we try to do it all by multi-tasking, but researchers have now definitively shown that multi-tasking does not increase our productivity, it reduces it.

In the field of economics there is a concept called opportunity cost. This means that every dollar spent in one way cannot be spent anywhere else. A million dollars invested in building a new plant cannot also be invested in marketing new products. Opportunity cost forces choices.

The same principle applies to your time. One hour spent watching television cannot simultaneously be spent giving quality time to the kids or working on the Great American Novel. The principle of opportunity cost implies that the level of your success will be less defined by the number of things that you say “yes” to and more by the number of things that you say “no” to. I have a sign in my office that reads:

The one BIG YES requires lots of little NOs

The bigger your dream the more distractions, diversions, and detours you will need to say No to no matter how pleasant they seem at the time. This is especially true when you have the weight of an upside down world on your shoulders. You need to focus your time, emotional energy, financial resources, and your attention on that one BIG YES that will help you turn your world right side up again.

Write a poem

“Considering the ways in which so many of us waste our time, what would be wrong with a world in which everybody were writing poems? After all, there’s a significant service to humanity in spending time doing no harm. While you’re writing your poem, there’s one less scoundrel in the world. And I’d like a world, wouldn’t you, in which people actually took time to think about what they were saying? It would be, I’m certain, a more peaceful, more reasonable place... In writing poetry, even those poems that fail and fail miserably, we honor and affirm life.”

Ted Kooser: *The Poetry Home Repair Manual: Practical Advice for Beginning Poets*

Writing poems is great therapy for someone whose world has turned upside down. I think there are several reasons for this. First, most of us have not seriously attempted to write a poem, at least not since fourth grade. Sitting down to write a poem drags you into corners of your brain that you have not visited in many, many years. It can also be highly therapeutic. Poetry can express the highs and the lows of life, the pains of the past and the faith for the future, in ways that prose cannot. And while you’re writing a poem you are not thinking about your problems (or, as Kooser suggests, committing a crime).

When I was going through a particularly time some years back I started work on a book that eventually became *The Healing Tree: A Mermaid, A Poet, and A Miracle*. A somewhat ethereal character named Maggie somehow wormed her way into the story and insisted that she was a poet. I had never in my life written a poem, did not like reading poetry, and tried to convince Maggie that she was something else – an Olympic ice skater, maybe, or the first female president of the United States. She would have none of it, and kept insisting that I had to make her a poet.

What could I do? I started reading poetry, and to my great astonishment found that I enjoyed some of it – especially that of former Poet Laureate Billy Collins. I started writing (really bad) poetry, and found that I actually enjoyed doing it. Maggie became a poet, and she is now one of my favorite invisible friends!

This is the only life I have and I never step out of it except to follow a character down the alleys of a novel or when love makes me want to remove my clothes and sail classical records off a cliff.

Billy Collins, from *“One Life to Live”* in *Questions About Angels: Poems*

Train your brain

“[W]e are seeing evidence of the brain’s ability to remake itself throughout adult life, not only in response to outside stimuli, but even in response to directed mental effort. We are seeing, in short, the brain’s potential to correct its own flaws and enhance its own capabilities.”

Jeffrey M. Schwartz, M.D. and Sharon Begley: *The Mind and the Brain: Neuroplasticity and the Power of Mental Force*

As we have already seen, when your world turns upside down your brain tends to go haywire. The ancient fight or flight reflex causes you to pick fights you don’t need to fight, or run away from problems you *do* need to face. Anxiety leads you to panic or paralysis. A distorted perception of reality makes things seem much worse than they really are, and closes the door on a great future. And the voices of negative self-talk are no longer just talking, they are shouting.

At this point it is essential for you to recognize what’s happening and redirect your cognitive and emotional processes. In their recent book *You are Not Your Brain* Dr. Schwartz and Dr. Rebecca Gladding describe a four-step process for doing this:

Re-Label: Identify deceptive and self-abusive brain messages and how they are reflected in negative and painful emotions such as anxiety and behaviors such as avoidance.

Re-Frame: Give negative thoughts and emotions (such as catastrophizing, all-or-nothing thinking, discounting the positive, etc.) a new and different interpretation.

Re-Focus: Find ways to shift your attention from negative thoughts and emotions to something more positive; this can be something as simple as taking a walk, smiling, paying attention to your breathing, or writing out a gratitude list.

Re-Value: Learn to see life from the perspective of what the authors call “a loving and compassionate Wise Advocate” who always has your best interest at heart. The authors, who are both pioneers in our understanding of brain plasticity, conclude that “with time, you will rewire your brain in such a way that those new activities become a regular, routine part of your life, and those unhealthy habits will increasingly become a thing of the past.”

Replace anguish with hope

“As he had done so many times before, Lincoln withstood the storm of defeat by replacing anguish over an unchangeable past with hope in an uncharted future.”

Doris Kearns Goodwin: *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*

One of Abraham Lincoln’s greatest strengths was what today would be called “emotional intelligence.” As Doris Kearns Goodwin documents in her brilliant biography of this brilliant man, Lincoln was able to put his ego on the back burner and work with people he had every right to dislike and keep out of the seats of power. But perhaps his greatest attribute was his ability to endure one sorrow after another without every losing faith in what the future would bring. He was able to, as Winston Churchill – another of history’s great leaders in the darkest of times – would later put it, go from one defeat to another without loss of enthusiasm.

Note carefully that Lincoln’s faith in the future did not include denial of the present. You can sense his anguish in almost every letter, every speech, during the Civil War. But without fail, he would point from the dark present to a brighter future, as in the Gettysburg Address which concluded that the men who died there shall not have died in vain, and that their government and nation should have a new birth of freedom.

Combine ignorant bliss with unearned confidence

“In hindsight, all this failure was my good fortune... That’s what I say in retrospect. At the time, it all just seemed like banging my head against a wall. To persist in the face of continual rejection requires a deep love of the work itself, and learning that lesson kept me from ever taking Calvin and Hobbes for granted when the strip took off years later. But in the midst of repeated failure, some self-delusion about your abilities also comes in handy.”

Bill Watterson: *The Complete Calvin and Hobbes, Book One*

My all-time favorite cartoon strip was *Calvin and Hobbs*. I was heartbroken when Bill Watterson retired, and thrilled beyond belief when I received *The Complete Calvin and Hobbs* as a Christmas present.

Watterson has captured the essence of starting over on an exciting new path after our world has turned upside down. You must be tough enough to face continued rejection, blissfully ignorant of the even more daunting challenges likely to come, and slightly self-delusional about your own abilities to do the work and overcome the challenges.

Check these out:

[Ten life lessons from Calvin and Hobbes](#)

[Excerpts from Bill Watterson’s 1990 commencement address at Kenyon University set to cartoons](#)

You can be a victim or a visionary but not both

“Self-pity is poison. There is no time. I need a future and refuse to become a victim. Too often we become oblivious to our own prisons, taking the bars and high walls for granted. Sometimes we construct them ourselves, and the barbed wire goes up even higher. Too many of the limitations placed on us are an extension of our own timidity.”
Richard M. Cohen: *Blindsided*

When bad things happen, when your world turns upside down, it's okay to be angry. It is not okay to be a victim. Despite living with serious medical conditions that have been physically debilitating and eventually caused blindness, Richard Cohen was able to become a very successful television producer. Just being blind did not prevent him from being a visionary.

Victims are, by definition, focused on what has happened to them in the past. Visionaries, on the other hand, are focused on what is possible in the future.

You can be a victim or you can be a visionary. But you cannot be both.

Work fast

“The function of the overwhelming majority of your artwork is simply to teach you how to make a small fraction of your artwork that soars. One of the basic and difficult lessons every artist must learn is that even the failed pieces are essential... The best you can do is make art you care about - and lots of it!”

David Bayles & Ted Orland: *Art & Fear: Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking*

In the book referenced above a study was cited in which two groups of art students were given an assignment to make ceramic pots. The first group was told to make as many pots as possible; the second group was told to make the best quality pots they could. Guess what? The group given the assignment to make the most pots also ended up making the highest quality pots. Why? Because the “quality” group sat around thinking about it while the “quantity” group got to work, made really bad pots, learned from the experience, and continuously improved their technique.

When I was in business school, we studied the learning curve, which states that as volume increases, costs go down and quality goes up. That’s because experience *is* the best teacher. It turns out to be a more general principle of life. Don’t worry about what it looks like, whether or not it will sell, or what anyone else thinks of it. Just do your work, make your art, write your novel, create your products, send out your resumes, making it better with each iteration. Eventually you will hit the quality you need.

Caring is the root of courage

“The more scared we are of a work or calling, the more sure we can be that we have to do it. Resistance is experienced as fear; the degree of fear equates to the strength of Resistance. Therefore the more fear we feel about a specific enterprise, the more certain we can be that that enterprise is important to us and to the growth of our soul. That’s why we feel so much Resistance. If it meant nothing to us, there’s be no Resistance.”
Steven Pressfield: *The War of Art: Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Inner Creative Battles*

I have no idea how many times I have read *The War of Art*, or listened to it as a book-on-tape. What Pressfield calls Resistance is a force of nature, like cancer or great white sharks. He capitalizes the word, the way a historian would capitalize Black Plague or Great Depression. We all face resistance, and it all has one and only one purpose: to prevent you from taking risks, from being creative, from becoming your authentic best self.

One of the greatest blessings of having your world turned upside down is that it can be enormously liberating. You can finally give yourself permission to ask life-changing questions like the one I posed earlier: “what would you do if every job paid the same and had the same social status?”

But as soon as you answer that question and begin to work toward that dream, Resistance will rear its hideous head. The bigger and more wonderful the dream, the greater the Resistance. It is often manifested as fear. The fear won’t go away. In fact, as you become more serious in your pursuit of the dream, Resistance will become more insistent that you quit and go back to doing something that feels more safe and comfortable.

When this happens, remember what Pressfield said: “You’re scared because you care.” Then remind yourself that caring is the root of courage.

See the world as it really is

“As I grew older and more experienced, I realized that the ability to distinguish between real and apparent dangers is fundamental to good judgment, and people who don’t possess it are seriously handicapped. They dwell in a state of incipient catastrophe, thinking only of what can go wrong and trying to ward it off before it occurs. They aren’t masters of reality, although they like to think they are; they’re masters of unreality because they let their fears, which are figments of an untrustworthy imagination, govern their lives.”

Richard Bode: *First You Have to Row a Little Boat*

Here’s my definition of objectivity: to see the world as it really is – not as it used to be, as you think it should be, as you wish it were, or as you fear it might become. As it really is.

This is, as you might guess, more challenging than it seems.

Here’s a little game that will help you be more objective: play reporter. Anytime you feel that your emotions are getting the best of you, pull out a pen and a steno pad and start making notes as if you were a reporter who had to write a newspaper article about the situation.

Journalists (as opposed to editorial writers) are not allowed to inject their opinions into their articles: they must be observant and they must be objective.

Playing reporter will help you be both: be more observant and be more objective about what you see.

There’s an added benefit: when you are in an emotionally charged state, you are more likely to say or do things that you later regret. If you write the words down in your steno pad instead of saying them out loud you’ll have less to regret later on.

Fear can make you stupid

“When we find ourselves in trouble, when we find ourselves on the cusp of failing, our survival instinct - and our fear - can evoke lurching, reactive behavior absolutely contrary to survival. The very moment when we need to take calm, deliberate action, we run the risk of doing the exact opposite and bringing about the very outcomes we fear.”

Jim Collins: *How the Mighty Fall*

One of the biggest problems of having your world turned upside down is that it can provoke emotional reactions that actually make things worse. At the top of the list is fear, and the fight or flight reflex it invokes. The fight or flight reflex is ancient neuro-programming that, with rare exceptions, is outmoded today (when is the last time you had to run away from a saber tooth tiger?). The problems we face today cannot be physically fought and they cannot be run away from.

If you get a note from your bank stating that your mortgage is overdue, challenging the bank president to a duel will just get you into a lot more trouble, and running away from the problem (i.e. denial) will not make it go away.

When your world turns upside down, you need to remember what you were told in kindergarten before crossing a street: stop, look, listen. Before you say or do anything, think twice and seek advice. Don't let fear make you stupid.

Maintain your momentum

“Momentum is really a leader’s best friend. Sometimes it’s the only difference between winning and losing... When you have no momentum, even the simplest tasks can seem to be insurmountable problems. But when you have momentum on your side, the future looks bright, obstacles appear small, and trouble seems temporary.”

John C. Maxwell: *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*

You often hear statistics to the effect that 8 of 10 new businesses fail in the first several years. Even if that were accurate, which it’s not, it’s not true. It’s not accurate because it includes too many people who are just sticking a toe in the water – setting up a website and then pulling the plug when it does not spontaneously go viral. More important, it’s not true, because businesses do not fail, owners quit. Let me repeat that: *businesses do not fail, owners quit.*

For every business that has “failed” there is another business in the same or worse straits in which the owner made one more phone call, went had-in-hand to one more bank, stayed up one more late night, made one more tweak to the website or the product, did whatever it took to keep the business going. From the outside, both businesses appear to be on the verge of failure. In one, the owner turned off the lights while in the other the owner burned the midnight oil because, in his or her mind, failure was not an option. When your world turns upside down, you will start over. The question is, are you sticking a toe in the water or do you have the “failure is not an option” determination that will assure you don’t quit?

The most important choice you ever make

“You should choose your attitude thoughtfully because it determines how you respond to the many challenges you will encounter.”

Keith Harrell: *Attitude is Everything: 10 Life-Changing Steps to Turning Attitude into Action*

Enthusiasm is Core Action Value #10 in the Values Coach course on *The Twelve Core Action Values*, and I am increasingly convinced that this is the master value. When you are enthusiastic, everything else is easier and comes more easily, and when you're not everything drags. The first cornerstone of Enthusiasm is Attitude.

Your choice of attitude is the most important choice you make every day (in fact all day every day). It can be a difficult choice to make. If you don't make the choice consciously and deliberately to have a positive attitude, you will almost certainly end up with a more negative, pessimistic and cynical attitude than if you have done the hard work to cultivate positivity.

Illuminate the darkness

“A distinguishing characteristic of the creative mind is that it can accept reversals of fortune without emotional damage – indeed, processes them at once into something rich and strange.”

Edmund Morris: *Beethoven: The Universal Composer*

By the time he wrote his fifth symphony (you know, the one with the “victory” theme), Beethoven was already losing his hearing. By the time he wrote his ninth symphony (you know, “Ode to Joy”) he was stone deaf. What could be worse for a musician than to be stone deaf? Any yet, in that aural darkness, Beethoven saw shapes that became some of the greatest music ever written.

What could be worse for a football player than to be paralyzed? Rutgers’ defensive lineman Eric LeGrand was on track to become a professional football player when a smashing tackle left him a quadriplegic. In his book *Believe*, he wrote about how he had been inspired by the story of another quadriplegic who believed, as Eric believes, that he would again walk one day: Christopher Reeve. And now Eric has become that voice of inspiration for many others. In his book, he recounts the story of how, during a speaking event for middle-schoolers, he was asked by a blind child what advice he had for him. His response reflects the soul of a man who has found life in the darkness (the way Beethoven did) and is now sharing that light with others. He said:

You have to believe in yourself. You can’t let anything stop you from being the best you can be, from being yourself. You have a lot going for you. You can talk, and you can think, so let me leave you with that encouragement.

In his book *Illuminate: Harnessing the Positive Power of Negative Thinking* my good friend David Corbin wrote: “I think you’ll find that you will never be able to eliminate the negative until you have the gumption to illuminate it first.”

By the way, David is the person I referred to earlier who called me on the carpet for just whining about my catastrophic Lasik experience rather than doing something constructive to help prevent other people from suffering similar experiences.

Get out of stuck

“Use your mistakes as a springboard into new areas of discovery; accidents can hold the key to innovation. When things fall apart, make art. Carry this spirit through to every area of your life.”

Philip Toshio Sudo: *Zen Guitar*

Ever have days where you feel like this – stuck in the mud? Most of us do. And when you’re stuck in “stuck,” it is imperative that you get yourself moving. Momentum is one of the four cornerstones of Core Action Value #4, Focus in our course on *The Twelve Core Action Values*. Everything’s better when you’re on a roll. Here is my 6-Get It Formula for Getting and Staying on a Roll.

Get real: When you’re stuck, it’s easy to hope and pray for someone to rescue you – which all too often leads to playing the victim role and blaming other people for your problems. The first step to getting out of Stuck is to accept responsibility for your circumstances and to acknowledge to yourself that the cavalry is not coming and you are not going to win the lottery. You are going to have to work your way out of the problem, whatever it is.

Get the facts: Anxiety and fear breed in ignorance. When you’re stuck in “Stuck” the first step to freeing yourself is often to ask more and better questions, do some research, and get the facts. In particular, the assumptions we make (about ourselves, about other people, about the world) can contribute to keeping us in “Stuck” – challenging assumptions with knowledge is often the first step to gaining freedom of movement.

Get centered: Being stuck can be seriously anxiety-provoking, and when you’re in a state of high anxiety three bad things can happen at a cognitive level: memories are distorted so past failure loom large and likely to be repeated while past successes seem insignificant and unlikely to happen again; perception is distorted so risks seem much bigger and more threatening than they really are while the resources you have to draw upon seem small and inadequate; and vision is distorted to the point that it’s hard to imagine a positive outcome because a bad outcome feels so inevitable. Getting emotionally centered helps achieve the mental toughness and spiritual equanimity that are essential to pulling yourself out of the metaphorical mud.

Get connected: The cavalry is not going to rescue you, but you probably can't get out of "Stuck" all by yourself. Think about the help you most need – counseling, a bank loan, a new customer, the support of a caring friend – and be willing to ask for it. And don't just ask – keep asking. In their book *The Aladdin Factor*, Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen say that the secret is to ask the right question of the right person at the right time.

Get out of your mental box: You've probably heard that one definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different outcome. When you are stuck in "Stuck" because what you've been doing isn't working, it's time to try something else.

Get moving: Tom Peters says the only characteristic of excellent companies that has stood the test of time in the 40 years since his book *In Search of Excellence* was published is having a bias for action. What specific action can you take to help you free yourself from the state of "Stuck"? Just do it – and do it now.

You cannot change the past but you can rewrite your memory of it

“The most obvious thing about which you can do nothing now is your past behavior. Everything that you ever did is simply over, and while you can almost always learn from it, and sometimes change effects that are continuing into the present, you cannot undo what you have done.”

Wayne Dyer: *Pulling Your Own Strings*

Every historian knows that the past is largely that which you choose to remember - and the way in which you choose to remember it. A history of the Civil War would have been written very differently by a freed slave and a Confederate general. Any trial lawyer will tell you that if six different people witness an accident, reports will read as if it were six different accidents - and if you wait a week and ask again it will read as another six altogether different accidents.

This has a very real implication for how you remember your own history. In his book *The Soul's Code*, psychologist James Hillman shares research showing that people we consider to be geniuses often make up their own past by creating fictional memories of a past that, while it never really happened, is more supportive of where they want to be in the future than the factual past would have been. For example, a virtuoso violinist “remembers” having awakened in the middle of every night with a driving desire to practice, while his or her parents report that child having slept like a stone.

Many of us are held back by negative memories, such as being told by a teacher that, “You’ll never amount to a hill of beans.” That is a negative and constraining memory. On the other hand, recalling the teacher having said, “You have so much potential, and I just know you’re going to do great things once you tap into it,” creates a very different mindset, even though the essential message is the same.

Remember this: the truth is more important than the facts. The fact might be that the teacher humiliated you with the former statement, but in all likelihood the truth is that he or she intended to help you raise your sites and standards. By remembering the past so as to make it more truthful (even if less factual), you can avoid a great deal of pain and lay the foundation for a much more magnificent future.

When I’m working with groups we often do an exercise in which everyone carries around a rock to represent some emotional baggage they’ve been carrying around - in some cases for decades. We have a ceremony of some sort in which people leave their rock - and the emotional baggage it represents) - behind. ([Click here for a 2-minute video in which I describe this from the Grand Canyon.](#))

Some of the most touching experiences have been when someone has the courage to leave behind scarred memories of childhood abuse. It's not that they pretend the abuse never occurred, or even that they forgave the abuser for this most sinful of crimes. Rather, it means that they've promised themselves to no longer allow their lives going forward to be poisoned by anger, hatred, and shame from the past. They've left that rock behind, stopped hauling it around in the backpack of their lives.

Here are several questions that will help you remember a better past:

What benefits do you gain from hauling around the deadweight of painful memories from the past (sad but true, it's human nature to nurse our grievances)?

What other interpretation could you give to painful and disempowering memories? (I had such an empowering moment when it dawned on me that the teachers who inflicted what at the time were humiliating punishments for classroom transgressions were really trying to act in my best interest.)

What positive past experiences can you call up from the recesses of memory and amplify in such a way that they reinforce your vision of you as your ideal Self pursuing your most authentic dreams and goals - the way the geniuses in Hillman's book amplified their memories of perfection?

If you "remembered" a past that was ideal in every way, how different would your attitudes and actions be today? Other than the emotional ghost of those ancient memories, what's stopping you from being that ideal "Best Self" starting today?

Turn bad news into the best thing ever

“Though hidden from plain sight, on the other side of every challenge is the opportunity to experience immense personal growth. Starting now, make the effort to view all challenges that come your way as hidden opportunities. This simple shift in mindset will make a tremendous difference in the number of accomplishments you experience throughout your life.” Josh Hinds: *Live Big: It’s Your Life*

Several months ago, within a three day period I heard from three friends who each had lost their executive level positions. As you might expect, they were angry, anxious and depressed, and worried about what the future might bring. That’s human nature, and we’ve all been there, one way or another.

Without really being aware it was happening, they had begun the process of “awfulizing” – visualizing mental images of their families living under a bridge because they were unable to support them. When I assured them that they would very soon look back and say it was the best thing that could have happened, I think they understood the message at an intellectual level, but in their hearts really didn’t buy it.

Over the past week I heard from all three friends. Two of them have just started new jobs, and the third is trying to decide which of several job offers he wants to accept. In every case the new job is closer to their heart’s passion than what they were doing before, and they get a pay raise to boot.

Sooner or later something like that is going to happen to all of us because, to paraphrase the title of Harold Kushner’s wonderful book, bad things do happen to good people. And when they do, you would ideally look back and say it was the best thing that ever could have happened – and if you can’t say that, at least be able to have found some blessing from the experience.

Write your own horoscope – a Youroscope

“Gradually I discovered that a golden thread runs through all the teachings and makes them work for those who sincerely accept and apply them, and that thread can be named in the single word belief... Why belief works miracles is something that cannot be satisfactorily explained; but have no doubt that there’s genuine magic in believing.”

Claude M. Bristol: *The Magic of Believing*

You should write your own horoscope (why would you trust a total stranger – and probably a pretty weird one at that – with something as important as your daily horoscope?!?). Call it your Youroscope. Whenever I suggest this, I have two reactions: people who have never tried it think it’s one of the most ridiculous things they’ve ever heard (writing your own horoscope – how silly is that?); people who actually do it write later with to me with tales of incredible, even miraculous, happenings. Here’s my Youroscope for today. Please read it and then I’ll make a few observations.

Joe’s Youroscope for today

The sun will rise in the east, a sign of amazing things out on the horizon. A long-time “someday maybe” wish will finally crystallize into a “very soon absolutely” project, but it will not happen spontaneously so block off time to make it happen. You will not receive one single important email today, so don’t waste your most productive hours checking for it. The seeds that are being planted now will yield a generous harvest, but make sure you have a plan for cultivating those seeds in the months to come. Someone you don’t know in a place you’ve never been is working on a project that will engage you in a significant way, though neither of you are yet aware of this. Take a long walk this evening – throw a big question up to the sky and see if you don’t have an answer float back down to you. Send an anonymous gift “from out of the blue” to someone who is in need of it. Stick to the yellow brick road and don’t be tempted into the poppy fields: Core Action Value #9 is Focus and today’s Promise [from *The Self-Empowerment Pledge*] is Resilience. So put on your hard hat, pick up your lunch pail, turn pro, and go do your work.

It’s not a to-do list: I don’t know how anyone can make it through life without having a to-do list, but that’s not what the Youroscope is. Rather, it’s an overarching description of your ideal day, including factors that are beyond your control – like the “fact” that someone I’ve never met in a place I’ve never been is working on a project in which I will someday be directly engaged. There’s work to be done, a friend to be made, and when the time is right it will come to me from out of the blue.

From out of the blue: There are certain words that have a disproportionate impact on the subconscious mind, for better or worse. Take the word “accountability” for example. Tell someone that you are going to hold them accountable for something and pay careful attention to their facial expression – you will not see a big smile, and that’s a guarantee. But tell someone that they’ve received something wonderful and unexpected “from out of the blue” and watch them beam. That’s why those words – from out of the blue – often appear in my Youroscope. They help me think bigger by reminding me that I don’t have to do everything myself, that there is help somewhere out there in the blue, and they help me to be more resilient in tough times by expecting that the help I need will come when I most need it “from out of the blue.”

Reinforce personal commitments: Every day I choose one of *The Twelve Core Action Values* to work on – today I’ve chosen Core Action Value #9, Focus. And every day, I make a commitment to that day’s promise from *The Self-Empowerment Pledge* – today’s promise is Resilience. And I am reminding myself to follow the advice from Steve Pressfield’s indispensable book *The War of Art* by turning pro. By weaving these commitments into my Youroscope, I impress them into my subconscious. To-do lists are of the left-brain, Yourosopes are of the right-brain – when the two work in tandem, you achieve a whole-brain commitment to the resolutions you’ve made for yourself on this day.

Make it public: Making your Youroscope public by pinning it on the bulletin board, reading it out loud at a staff meeting, or (as I have done today) putting it in a blog or a newsletter is a great way of keeping yourself on track. I know that if anyone in the Values Coach office gets an email from me today at any time other than my designated email window over the noon hour, or if they see me working on anything other than that “someday maybe” wish that I want to be a “very soon absolutely” project, they will gently (or not so gently) remind me of the commitments I’ve made to myself in my Youroscope.

Creating Memories of the Future

I absolutely believe that you can remember the future more clearly and more accurately than you can remember the past (prove it to yourself: try to remember your second birthday – now visualize where you will be this afternoon at 5:00). But it’s not enough to just *remember* your ideal future – you have to work to *create* it. Writing your own daily Youroscope is an incredibly powerful tool that will help you remember, and then build, a better future for yourself.

Don't hit the brakes when you hit the gravel

“It is our self-preserving nature, to see something daunting on the trail, and slow down. Slowing down gives us the illusion of increased control. But riding slowly requires more control, balance and energy. When we ride cautiously, the rocks are bigger, the climbs longer and the ability to stay upright diminishes. Conversely, steady forward movement reduces energy demands, and decreases balance and skill demands. Momentum carries us over obstacles with less exertion and effort. When we approach a part of the trail where our inclination is to slow down, we should try the opposite and speed up.”

Susan Thompson: *Mountain Biking for Life: Finding Your Path*

If you're speeding along down the road on your bike and unexpectedly hit a patch of loose gravel, the temptation is to immediately hit the brakes. But if you do, more likely than not you will just as quickly hit the ground. A much safer approach is to coast, to ride it out as you gradually slow down, keep your concentration and maintain your balance, and not even think about falling.

We're faced with similar challenges in our everyday lives. At the first sign quarterly profits might not hit the expectations of analysts and shareholders, the CEO might be tempted to slam on the brakes by slashing “discretionary” expenditures like advertising or staff training. Although it might take longer for the effects to be felt than would a tumble from a bike, the damage can be very real, and it can take a long time to heal.

At an organization where I once worked, I was holding a staff meeting in a department characterized by low morale, marginal productivity, and lousy attitudes. When I asked about this, a participant remarked, “It all started when ‘the suits’ decided to save money by canceling the employee picnic. It was the one nice thing they used to do for us.” I'd been at the organization for a number of years, but I'd never heard about an employee picnic. “Picnic? How long ago was this?” I asked.

The response: “Oh, I don't know – five or six years ago.” We on the management team were furiously pedaling away, wondering why our “knees” hurt so much, oblivious to the wounds that had been inflicted five or six years earlier when a previous rider hit the brakes on the proverbial patch of gravel.

The effects can be similarly traumatic at home. A teenager comes home way past curfew. Instead of riding it out until morning, when the situation can be handled with love, compassion, and understanding, the parent slams on the brakes: “You're grounded! Give me the car keys and go to bed.” Though it might not be superficially obvious in the morning, a wound has been inflicted that will require first aid if it is to heal properly. The danger is, like the long-forgotten (by management), long-

remembered (by staff), cancelled employee picnic, what might have been a minor abrasion can turn into an ugly scar.

If you mentally rehearse your reaction to hitting a patch of gravel before it actually happens, you're less likely to panic when it does. So, too, in business and in life. If you anticipate the possibility of an economic downturn, or a rebellious teenager, and mentally rehearse your response, you're more likely to respond with intelligence rather than react in anger.

Dealing with the energy vampires

“When we don’t feel safe, fear drives our actions and interactions. Fear causes us to not be ourselves as individuals. In organizations, fear holds us back from performing at the level we’re capable of. When we’re afraid, we’re guarded, cautious, and restrained, and we do everything we can to regain a feeling of security.”

Jim Haudan: *The Art of Engagement: Bridging the Gap Between People and Possibilities*

Are you old enough to remember the days when people could smoke everywhere? How one person lighting a cigarette would instantly pollute the lungs of everyone else in the room? It’s the same thing with energy vampires, the aggressively disengaged employee who sucks the energy out of a room and the people around them. It’s not just their lack of energy that hurts the business, it’s the way they suck the energy out of everyone else.

When he’s giving a speech, my good friend Roger Looyenga (retired CEO of Auto-Owners Insurance, with whom I co-authored the book *Take the Stairs*) will often illustrate this point by holding up two clear coffee cups – one half full of coffee and the other half full of water. He takes a teaspoon of water and dumps it into the coffee, but there is no visible difference. That’s about what happens when one positive employee is injected into a toxic negative environment. They eventually quit, hibernate, or flip over to the dark side.

Then Roger takes one teaspoon of coffee and pours it into the water. Instantly, the water in the cup discolors. A second and a third teaspoon and the cup of previously clear water begins to look a lot more like the coffee, and certainly not like something you would want to drink. That can be the effect of one toxic negative emotional vampire who is not effectively dealt with by the management team.

Be productive

“Somewhere deep inside we all desire happiness and peace through authentic productivity. I say productivity because by being productive, in an authentic way, we make the world a better place. We sustain a support system that pays it forward and all of humanity shares in the bountiful harvest. It’s a win/win deal.” Jay Johnston: A Leap of Faith Takes Courage

Here’s a personal productivity system that’s fun! Create a mental cartoon task force and empower each of its members to take charge of a certain phase of your life, to push you ahead when you feel like sitting it out. Here are some suggested task force members:

A bean counter, complete with green eyeshades and a Bob Cratchet ink quill, to give a cold eye to every expenditure, and make you sit down with your checkbook at least once a week to balance your finances.

A Marine drill instructor to give you some old-fashioned high decibel motivation when you can’t drag your tail out of bed on those cold mornings, or can’t bring yourself to doing those unpleasant jobs like cleaning out the garage or making a networking call.

A university professor who can take charge when you have important material to review or new subjects to learn. You may find that the professor has a hard time keeping the Marine drill instructor out of the picture for very long, since there is no end to unpleasant jobs that need to be done, so give him or her a strong backbone.

A Zen master full of wisdom and peace to help you always keep your attention in the right here and now.

A circus clown to keep reminding you that all work and no play will make you dull, listless, and a bore to be around.

Your trajectory is more important than where you are at any point in time

“Encountering obstacles after we’ve made a determination [to achieve a goal] isn’t just an indication we’re making progress. It’s often the very thing required for victory.”

Alex Lickerman MD: *The Undefeated Mind: On the Science of Constructing an Indestructible Self*

During times of trouble, we often think of life as being more like a snap shot than a motion picture, and implicitly assume that things will never get better. If your life has generally been improving over the past ten or twenty years, but you’re going through a rough spot now, there’s no reason to assume the upward trend will not resume, so long as you don’t quit and give in to self-pity and victim-itis. However, you also must be honest with yourself. If things have been steadily deteriorating for years and now you are in a crisis, it’s a safe bet that things won’t change unless you change.

Remember how at the outset we used the rocket ship illustration to show how a small change in direction can, if sustained over time, result in a huge alteration of the ultimate destination? This is a good place to remind your participants that times of difficulty and adversity are often where the greatest opportunity lies to alter your trajectory – to make those changes for which you simply cannot find the courage or motivation when things are going great.

Forgive

“Carrying a grudge against someone or against life can bring on the old age stoop, just as much as carrying a heavy weight on your shoulders would. People with emotional scars, grudges, and the like are living in the past, which is characteristic of old people.”
Maxwell Maltz: *Psycho-Cybernetics*

When bad things happen, bad feelings can be created. Very often, one of the greatest challenges to dealing with adversity is finding forgiveness. In many respects, the quality of our lives will be determined by the extent to which we are able to forgive – forgive ourselves, our parents, other people, and even God.

One time I’d been fired from a job in such a way as to create a lot of bad feelings and painful emotions. (A friend of mine says that if you haven’t been fired at least three times, you’re not trying hard enough; at least on that score, I was an overachiever!) My anger was so toxic that it was driving out every positive emotion, and bubbled so close to the surface that it was making it almost impossible for me to effectively search for another job. I was living out the classic definition of a grudge: drinking poison in the hopes of hurting someone else.

While this was going on, I happened to visit my good friend Vern Herschberger (an incredibly talented artist and cartoonist). I told Vern that even though I knew this hateful grudge was darkening every corner of my life, its hold was too strong and I simply could not let go. I couldn’t fight it, and I couldn’t run away from it. Even as I recognized my lesser self of ego suffocating my better self of soul, I could not chew off the paw and move on.

“The solution is simple,” Vern told me. “You’ve got to pray for the success of the person who fired you.”

I thought about that for a moment, then replied, “I can do that.” I closed my eyes, folded my hands, took a deep breath, then said, “Dear God, please make that man be very successful... at stepping in front of a speeding dump truck.”

“No, no, no!” Vern exclaimed. “You’ve got to pray for him to be successful according to *his* definition of success, according to God’s definition of success. What you just said sounds more like the devil’s definition.”

I shook my head. “I can’t do it, Vern. It’s not in my heart to pray that prayer.”

“That doesn’t matter,” he replied. “You just say the words. Say them every day, as if you mean them. Saying that prayer will break the ice. Keep at it, and eventually the ice will melt.”

Vern was right. It didn’t happen overnight, but gradually the grudge released its hold on me. In *The Spirituality of Imperfection*, Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketchum wrote that forgiveness is a miracle, because it’s not something you can will upon yourself. It certainly felt like a miracle to me the day I realized that my prayer had been granted. I had no idea whether the man who’d fired me was successful. What I did know was that I genuinely *hoped* he was successful. I had forgiven him. He might not have cared a whit whether or not I’d forgiven him, but that didn’t matter. For me, the peace I’d gained meant everything.

This miracle of forgiveness brought in its wake the blessing of clarity. As I began to see through the anger and hostility, several other things became clear to me. First, I not only needed to forgive, I also needed to ask for forgiveness. I’d been fired for a valid reason (I wasn’t really cut out for that job), and for my part had not handled the separation in a particularly graceful manner.

Equally important, with forgiveness came the realization that being fired really was the proverbial best thing that ever could have happened. The reason I’d been fired was that I was trying to pound the squiggly peg of me into the square hole of a career for which I was unsuited, and which I was pursuing for all the wrong reasons. Being fired liberated me from the treadmill; forgiveness (including forgiveness for myself) freed me to find a new path in life, a path with heart (to borrow the memorable phrase of Carlos Castaneda).

Even when the last thing you want to do is to forgive

“If we cannot forgive, we end up crucifying ourselves on the very cross we construct for our scapegoats. Our hate will be the hatred in ourselves that we have repressed, and that hatred of others masking our own self-hatred will continue to crucify us in their name.”

Michael H. Crosby: *The Seven Last Words*

I’ve spent many an evening with support groups. I’m always inspired by the sharing of hope and courage that so often turns out to have been nothing less than planting the seeds of future miracles. The one exception was an evening I spent with a support group for parents whose children had been murdered. Most of these crimes remained unsolved. I don’t think I’ve ever seen so much hatred and latent violence in one place. There is no doubt in my mind that, had one of the murderers been dragged into that room, those angry parents would have beaten him to death right then and there. I’m also certain that a month later they all would have felt immeasurably more miserable for having taken out their vengeance.

One man remarked that neither he nor his wife had enjoyed a single a moment of peace in the years since their daughter’s battered body had been found in the trunk of a car. His wife nodded in agreement. I wanted to ask them what their daughter would say if she could return to Earth for just one minute. Would she say: “Mom and Dad, I want to thank you for honoring my memory by allowing your lives to have been ruined by my death.” Or would it more likely have been: “Please, Mom and Dad, let go of the anger and hatred that have turned your souls to ice. I have long since forgiven the person who took my life. Can’t you find it in your hearts to do the same? Not because he deserves to be forgiven, but because you need to forgive.”

When God told Job to pray for his friends, I believe He was telling him to forgive them. Though they were undoubtedly trying to be helpful, they had in effect been telling Job that it was all his own fault. In so many words, they said that because of his past deeds, Job was guilty of causing the deaths of his children and his servants. Had Job not been a terrible person who had done terrible things, they implied, God would never have allowed these bad things to have happened to him. Job was clearly angered by these accusations. By instructing Job to pray for his friends, the way Vern told me to pray for the man who’d fired me, God was also telling him to forgive them.

Mahatma Gandhi said that only the strong can forgive. The quality of our lives, and the nature of the world that we pass on to our children, will be profoundly influenced by whether or not we have the courage and the strength to heed that call.

Forgive 360

“The greatest challenge we humans now face is not scientific or technological or even economic. It is emotional... The real demon is the ignorance and fear that lead to the hatred that leads to the judgments that lead to the killings in wars. No one is free of it. All we can do is try to refuse to live under its rule. All we can do is try to forgive.”

Edward Hallowell: *Dare to Forgive*

In their book *The Spirituality of Imperfection*, Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham tell the story of the innkeeper who kept two ledgers, one recording the sins he had committed and the other recording bad things that had happened to him. At the end of each year, he read both journals. Then he confessed his sins, but reminded God that many bad things had happened to him as well. “We are beginning a new year,” he concluded. “Let us wipe the slate clean. I will forgive you, and you forgive me.”

Earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, war, and other “Acts of God,” large and small, will cause you pain. If it is beyond the capacity of your faith to believe that God acts for good reasons, then try forgiveness. It may be the only way for you to let go of a malignant resentment than can block you from further development.

Stop abusing your imagination with delusions of grandeur and delusions of disaster

“Letting go of old stories requires changing the perspective from which you view not only yourself, but also how you observe other people and the way the world operates in general.”

Margie Warrelle: *Find Your Courage!*

Imagination is the second cornerstone of Core Action Value #8, Vision, in our course on *The Twelve Core Action Values*. Imagination is a God-given gift which only we humans have been given: the ability to see things in our minds that are not (at least not yet) visible in the physical world. As Jonathan Swift said, vision is the art of seeing the invisible. Unfortunately, most of us tend to abuse our imaginations in two ways: fantasy and worry. Fantasy is imagining wonderful things happening to you without any effort on your part: winning the lottery or being discovered by Oprah are common themes. Worry is imagining something awful that you don't want to happen; “awfulizing” about losing a job or losing one's health are common themes.

Delusions of Grandeur (DoG): Fantasizing often takes the form of Delusions of Grandeur (if you've read the famous short story *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* by James Thurber you'll know what I'm talking about), the sort of magical thinking in which all of your dreams are realized and all of your problems are resolved without any real effort on your part.

Delusions of Disaster (DoD): Worry often takes the form of visualizing the worst possible outcome without recognizing the actions you can take to prevent that outcome from occurring (such as learning new skills to make yourself more valuable on the job or replacing donuts with pushups to prevent health problems).

A little bit of fantasy and a little bit of worry can be good things if they propel you to action, but they can be debilitating when they're just mental churning that prevents you from thinking clearly and taking effective action. Making it worse, fantasy and worry are frequently below the level of conscious awareness, so you don't even see the cognitive dead-ends into which you are being led. It's harder than you would think to pull the plug on this sort of thinking because it's human nature to let your mind wander down the path of least resistance – which is where fantasy and worry will take you, because just fantasizing or worrying about something is easy because there is no real work involved.

I've started a practice that is helping me stop wasting time and precious mental energy on Delusions of Grandeur and Delusions of Disaster. Whenever I catch my mind wandering into fantasy or worry (I have RBADD – *Really Bad!* – so this is a frequent occurrence), I identify the thought pattern and then say the word DoG or DoD. I actually say it out loud unless I'm in a place where blurting out DoG! or Dod! would be too embarrassing.

The simple act of giving that thought pattern a name is the first step in redirecting my thinking into a more construction direction. It helps me transform Delusions of Grandeur into thinking about the next steps I need to take in order to achieve important goals. It helps me transform Delusions of Disaster into a realistic assessment of my situation, and the next steps I should take to prevent whatever I'm worried about from happening.

Give it a try yourself. Pay attention to your own thinking, and whenever you start falling into fantasy or worry, label it as a delusion of grandeur or a delusion of disaster, and call it out with the word DoG or DoD and refocus your thinking on the actions you must take next in order to achieve your goals and prevent your worries from becoming your reality.

Stop procrastinating

“Habitual delays can clutter our lives, leave us in the annoying position of always having to do yesterday’s chores. Disrespect for the future is a subtly poisonous disrespect for self, and forces us, paradoxically, to live in the past.”

Robert Grudin: *Time and the Art of Living*

Read all of the time management books, and you will come up with a mechanical prescription for overcoming procrastination that reads pretty much as follows:

- Make a list of all the reasons why you want to or need to accomplish the particular task.
- Make a list of all the factors that are blocking you from doing it.
- Sketch out a plan for breaking the task down into manageable chunks, and for accomplishing each chunk.
- Be patient and be positive; keep reminding yourself why you are doing it and praising yourself for your progress.
- Give yourself big blocks of time for each chunk, to minimize gearing up and down time.
- Be decisive; ask yourself what is the worst that could happen, and if that is acceptable, proceed forthwith.
- Stick with your decisiveness: plow right through doubts and second thoughts.
- Change gears the minute you sense yourself bogging down.
- Reward yourself for each completed chunk, and reward yourself lavishly for completing the project.

If you’re not into mechanical solutions to the procrastination problem, here’s one that will delight your right brain. Create a small imaginary army of cartoon characters, each of which are assigned to tackle a specific part of the procrastination problem:

A little gardener with pruning shears, clipping away all of the “shoulds” that may be keeping you from focusing on the most important job at hand.

A big road-worker with a jackhammer blasting through all of the resistance keeping you from what you want to be doing.

A demolition squad that will take all of your negative thoughts and emotions and bulldoze them into a big pile and blow it to smithereens.

A paint crew coming out with big cans of industrial strength glue with which to affix your butt to the chair until the job is done.

A clown running around with balloons to keep everybody's spirits up through the drudgery.

A scorekeeper standing up on an old-fashioned scoreboard keeping you posted if the inning and the score.

One great way to overcome procrastination is to find joy in the work itself, irrespective of the outcome. Why is it, the Zen master would ask, that you like sitting in a Jacuzzi and dislike having your hands in warm dishwater?

Create something knowing there are no guarantees

“What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway. It is a harsh fact that the things you build may be destroyed during your lifetime. You may lose them overnight. Even if they last beyond your lifetime, they will eventually be lost. Still, they are worth building. The act of building brings joy and satisfaction.”

Kent Keith: *Anyway: The Paradoxical Commandments*

With very few exceptions, no one has ever started a business with an ironclad guarantee that it would make them rich, no one has ever penned a first novel knowing it would hit the bestseller lists, no one has ever gone to graduate school with absolute certainty that it would pay off in their career, and no one has ever conceived a child secure in the knowledge that he or she would be born healthy and go on to be a straight-A student who never talked back or violated curfew. When it comes to the things that really matter in life, there are precious few guarantees.

But as Keith says, that doesn't mean they aren't worth creating. In fact, the bigger and more magnificent the dream, the less likely it will be to come with a guarantee.

Create anyway.

Get started

“The most pernicious aspect of procrastination is that it can become a habit. We don’t just put off our lives today; we put them off till our deathbed. Never forget: This very moment, we can change our lives. There never was a moment, and never will be, when we are without the power to alter our destiny. This second, we can turn the tables on Resistance. This second, we can sit down and do our work.”

Steven Pressfield: *The War of Art: Winning the Inner Creative Battle*

David D. Burns, M.D. says in *The Feeling Good Handbook* that we must recognize the many positives to procrastination: it is easy; we can do more enjoyable and relaxing things; we can, for a while, forget our problems and avoid hard work; we can frustrate the people who are nagging us; and we can prevent people from pressuring us to do more work by proving our unreliability. Stop pampering yourself and take responsibility for becoming the person you want to be and for doing the things you want to do. And do it now.

Procrastination is the root of much evil. Had the Western powers confronted Hitler much earlier, rather than appeasing him and hoping for peace, great evil might have been prevented. Likewise, procrastination can be a cause of much frustration in one’s career, personal finances, and personal happiness. The most important principle for overcoming procrastination is to not wait until you feel inspired, but to go to work right now.

One reason for procrastination is becoming paralyzed with all of the possible negative outcomes of taking action. As Rafe stated in my book *Never Fear, Never Quit: A Story of Courage and Perseverance*, “fear is many tomorrows, but courage is one today.” Don’t worry about all the possible futures over which you have no control; concentrate on the one today that is within your power to influence.

Lost causes are only really lost when you stop fighting for them

“Lost causes are the ones most worth fighting for because they tend to be the most important, most humane ones. They require us to live up to the best that is in us, to perfect ourselves and our world. Lost causes cannot be won, but because they are so crucial to us, we nevertheless must try.”

Richard Farson: *Management of the Absurd*

In 1986 I was working fulltime as executive director of STAT (Stop Teenage Addiction to Tobacco), a nonprofit organization I’d founded to fight against unethical tobacco industry marketing practices, particularly those intended to influence children to become addicted to a product that would kill many of them.

I was on a cross-country flight working on the next edition of our *Tobacco Free Youth Reporter* when the person next to me lit a cigarette. I politely asked if he would wait until the plane landed to smoke – he took a long drag, blew it in my face, and said no. He smoked continuously for the rest of the flight – as did a significant number of other passengers. I was sick as a dog by the time we landed – as were a significant number of other passengers. And I almost gave up the fight. If people were allowed to poison the air in the tightly-confined space of an airplane, what chance did we have for preventing the white collar drug pushers at cigarette companies from addicting successive generations of replacement smokers for those they’d killed off?

When later that year Dr. C. Everett Koop (a true American hero) called for a smoke-free society, many people wondered what he’d been smoking. It truly did appear to be a lost cause.

The changes that came about in succeeding decades were nothing short of miraculous. Almost all public spaces are smoke-free, even in the heart of tobacco land; cigarette vending machines have been outlawed and tobacco products must be kept behind the counter; cigarette advertising has been banned from television, movies, and billboards, and the white collar drug pushers can no longer use characters like Camel Joe and the Marlboro Man to make smoking appear glamorous.

There are still far too many people smoking (almost all of whom eventually wish they could quit), far too many young people starting (many of whom will sicken and die as a result), and the tobacco industry has, in what can only be termed corporate evil at its worst, targeted third world countries as an expansion market. It is still in some sense a lost cause – there is no hope that tobacco addiction will somehow just go away, or that tobacco industrialists will see the evil of their ways and stop, in the words of author

Thomas Whiteside, selling death. But it is still and always will be a cause worth fighting for.

When your world turns upside down, one of the first casualties is often the dreams you had for your future. Dreams of going back to school, of writing your first novel or starting a business doing work you love to do, dreams of traveling the world or retiring to a cabin in the north woods. Those dreams now seem like lost causes.

They might be – which is all the more reason why you should hang onto them tenaciously and fight for them ferociously.

What doesn't kill you...

“Every time we prevail – if even for a moment – over anxiety, fear of failure, feelings of vulnerability and inferiority, we are not left even. We are not as we were; we are ahead. With each obstacle we conquer, we grow larger.”

Walter Anderson: *The Confidence Course*

I often give this mini-poster to people who have had their worlds turned upside down. It was good advice when Napoleon Bonaparte gave it to one of his generals who'd suffered a setback in 1810, and it's good advice today.

Expect a miracle

In truth, the greatest miracle is this: the miracle of profound self-transformation. Many of the miracles recorded in history are simply metaphors for this simple truth, that we each have the power in our own hands to create the miracle of becoming the person we were meant-to-be.

Joe Tye: *Never Fear, Never Quit*

Miracle is not too strong a word for the connections that faith will make, for the changes that are possible in your life, but you must first understand what a miracle is, and what it is not.

A miracle is not a magic trick. It is the bringing about of a change that would previously have been thought impossible.

A miracle is not an event. It is a process.

A miracle is not a gift. It is something earned through hard work and painful introspection.

A miracle is not free. It comes with strings attached, and if you're not willing to share it, you will be unable to keep it.

Dream a Big Dream, make it a Memory of the Future, and Expect a Miracle.

But don't give the Universe a deadline.

Contribution

Collection: Staying on Top When Your World's Upside Down

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Module: The Pickle Pledge – a simple promise that will change your life

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/ddbdfef/1>

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Module: Take The Pickle Challenge

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/bddf1a82/1>

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

Module: Build up your stamina

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/b8479581/1>

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Module: Don't pick fights you don't need

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/f6545673/1>

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Module: The steepest hills are in your mind

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/ae4495bf/1>

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Module: Turn off the tragi-tainment

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/d0080f2c/1>

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Module: Build upon The Pyramid of Self-Belief

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/327ad326/1>

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Module: Act confident to earn confidence

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/1c293e6a/1>

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Module: Stop waiting for someone else to “empower” you

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/81c3716e/1>

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Module: Take to heart The Self-Empowerment Pledge

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/bdbf0109/1>

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Module: Monday's Promise: Responsibility

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/d935b66d/1>

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Module: Tuesday's Promise: Accountability

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/685765d4/1>

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Module: Wednesday's Promise: Determination

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/ddf4b16c/1>

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Module: Thursday's Promise: Contribution

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/27d0cacb/1>

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Module: Friday's Promise: Resilience

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/b0e2c999/1>

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Module: Saturday's Promise: Perspective

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/fa560cc4/1>

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Module: Sunday's Promise: Faith

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/0d8c93fe/1>

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Module: Keep a personal journal

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/33cffa1/1>

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Module: Pay attention to the patterns in your life

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/8f84d3fa/1>

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Module: Overcome your own laziness

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/fc5e931f/1>

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

Module: Transform despair into determination

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/3431c8b8/1>

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Module: Enthusiasm is the master value

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/b2ad7505/1>

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Module: Stop awfulizing

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/fa55aad2/1>

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Module: Adopt the Nedlog Rule

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/fcd08e4f/1>

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Module: Practice mutuality

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/c46b4b17/1>

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Module: Say Yes to what matters by saying No to what doesn't

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/f138f72e/1>

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

Module: Write a poem

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/84353c5b/1>

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Module: Train your brain

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/cdb6b382/1>

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Module: Replace anguish with hope

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/6a863a5f/1>

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Module: Combine ignorant bliss with unearned confidence

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/cb23debb/1>

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Module: You can be a victim or a visionary but not both

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/5889bef7/1>

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Module: Work fast

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/dc00f6c3/1>

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Module: Caring is the root of courage

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/22ecff87/1>

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Module: See the world as it really is

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/75e1a8a8/1>

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Module: Fear can make you stupid

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/e4bfee5e/1>

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Module: Maintain your momentum

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/33903075/1>

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Module: The most important choice you ever make

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/bbd57a62/1>

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Module: Illuminate the darkness

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/24701113/1>

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Module: Get out of stuck

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/ffe7348d/1>

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Module: You cannot change the past but you can rewrite your memory of it

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/8b68f667/1>

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Module: Turn bad news into the best thing ever

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/afb99337/1>

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Module: Write your own horoscope – a Youroscope

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/0ea6b4ce/1>

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Module: Don't hit the brakes when you hit the gravel

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/c8787601/1>

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Module: Dealing with the energy vampires

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/231f0662/1>

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Module: Be productive

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/97769487/1>

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

Module: Your trajectory is more important than where you are at any point in time

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/164a6def/1>

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

Module: Forgive

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/dd0d3077/1>

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Module: Even when the last thing you want to do is to forgive

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/45552dc7/1>

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Module: Forgive 360

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/80c3b38e/1>

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Module: Stop abusing your imagination with delusions of grandeur and delusions of disaster

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/a722ca8a/1>

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Module: Stop procrastinating

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/ca56a0aa/1>

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Module: Create something knowing there are no guarantees

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/0d466ed9/1>

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Module: Get started

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/672a8d04/1>

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Module: Lost causes are only really lost when you stop fighting for them

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/37da7349/1>

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Module: What doesn't kill you...

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/49cdf75c/1>

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Module: Expect a miracle

Authors:

URL: <http://voer.edu.vn/m/85d8573d/1>

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The Vietnam Open Educational Resources

Hanoi Spring is an advanced technology platform designed to allow the public to share teaching and learning materials and curriculum development. It is based on the concept of open educational resources (OER). This revolutionary concept of knowledge sharing was pioneered by MIT University and Rice University in the U.S. more than a decade ago. Since then, there has been a growing OER movement globally, and UNESCO has embraced OER as an official program in many countries around the world.

The Vietnam Foundation and its technology team in Hanoi play a leading role in the development, technology and framework for global OER. Vietnamese OER experts have been invited to Paris to advise UNESCO on its OER policy recommendations, and they have traveled to other countries to help educational institutions implement OER programs.

Under the management of the Vietnam Foundation, the Vietnam Open Educational Resources (VOER) has become a major portal for students and teachers inside and outside of Vietnam. Every day, thousands visitors access VOER (www.voer.edu.vn) to research and download materials. There are more than 21,000 knowledge modules from nearly 4,000 contributing authors; among them are well-known scientists living inside Vietnam such as Dr. Nguyen Van Hieu (Physics), Dr. Nguyen Lan Dung (Biology), and Dr. Pham Phu (Mathematics), as well as Vietnamese scholars living abroad such as Dr. Minh Do (Electrical Engineering); Dr. Thanh Truong (Chemistry) and Dr. John Vu (Information Technology).

Dr. Ray Gamble of the U.S. National Academies, and also the founding chairman of the Vietnam Foundation, observes “The participation and support of the best scholastic minds of Vietnam is a testament to the success of VOER. Now we can offer Hanoi Spring to the global OER community to further advance educational opportunity. It is a gift from the Vietnamese people to the world.”

Hanoi Spring was designed and developed over the last two years by a team of Vietnamese software experts and volunteers located in Hanoi, working with the support and direction of the Vietnam Foundation. The platform is robust; it is easy to install, manage and use. It can handle thousands of concurrent users and supports different national languages.