



Know who you are, what you want, and how you're going to get it.

By:
Joe Tye

“What do you do?”

The question was innocent enough. Charlie had answered it thousands of times before: “I’m a senior consultant with Logistics Precision. We’re a management consulting firm that helps businesses become more profitable by developing effective competitive strategies.” The words were even printed on the back of his business card. Until now, he’d never realized the extent to which he relied upon his business card to double as an identity card.

Charlie and Pam were at a fund-raiser for the local symphony, which had been his wife’s favorite cause for many years. So far, he’d been successful at staying off to the side of the room, but now this elegant older woman, wearing more gold than even the most successful dentist would mold in a lifetime, wanted to know, “what do you do?” Charlie kicked himself for not having prepared for the question.

“I’m, well, I’m between jobs right now,” he stammered. “I’m looking at...”

She cut him off with a condescending pat on the side of the arm. “How interesting, dear.” She was already looking past Charlie to see who else was in the room. “I’m sure something will come up.” And she walked off.

Charlie was mortified. “I’m sure something will come up!” As if he was just sitting around all day, waiting for something to come up! Who did she think she was, anyway, to write him off as being unworthy of conversation simply because he was “between jobs?”

“Well, what did you and Madam Butterfly discuss in your little corner over here?” Pam glided up and took his arm. Short and spunky, she was his counterweight, buoying him

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up when he was in danger of sinking, and keeping him grounded when he was about to buy a oneway ticket on a flight of fancy.

“Madam Butterfly?”

“That was Wanda Wilmington. She's been chair of symphony society for, oh, the past eighty years or so. How much did she get you to pledge?”

“Me? Hah! The minute I told her I was unemployed, she disappeared faster than your father used to when Nathan needed his diaper changed. In fact, the look on her face was very much the same.”

Pam held Charlie's arm as she laughed. “Yes, that would be the Madam Butterfly I've come to know and love. Her time is for sale to the highest bidder, or should I say to the highest donor. She can be pretty ruthless, but without her the symphony would have folded years ago.”

“How awful!” Charlie moaned, prompting a sharp poke in the ribs.

“How would you know anyway? I could never drag you away from the office long enough to hear them play!”

“Oh, yes you did. And it really was awful!”

“Now that's not fair, to judge the symphony on that one night. Harold was just doing a favor for a Julliard classmate by premiering his first symphony. You should come on a night when they play something beautiful, like Bach, or something bold, like Stravinsky. In fact,” she smiled, “they're playing Brahms' second and Beethoven's sixth on Saturday night. Those are two of the cheeriest symphonies ever written, and you can't tell me you've got to be at the office.”

Charlie tried to look as though he were making a huge sacrifice. “Well, then, I guess it's a date.”

* * *

“I felt absolutely stark naked. She asked me what I did, and I couldn't answer. It's like nothing else in my life mattered, only my job description.”

Dr. Connors looked across at Charlie and waited for him to say something else. When the silence remained unbroken he asked, “What if, instead of asking you what you do, this Madam Butterfly had asked ‘Who are you?’ How would you have responded to that question? Who are you, Charlie McKeever?”

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Charlie looked toward the window beyond which lay the pool. Though he hadn't noticed it before, he now heard what sounded like a small army of kids splashing in the water. Charlie smiled, realizing that right now it felt as if his little troublemaker had invited an army of friends into his own mental swimming pool. The two sat in silence for a moment.

"Why don't we start with an easier question." Dr. Connors finally broke the silence. "Who are you not?" Charlie didn't respond, so Connors continued. "Let's start with the easiest answer first. You are not your possessions. That sounds so selfevident it should go without saying, but the fact is that most people make their first, their most lasting, and frequently their only impression of you on the basis of the clothes you wear, the car you drive, the house you live in, or the country club you belong to. Isn't that what Madam Butterfly did? As soon as she suspected your wallet was empty, you stopped being a real person in her eyes, didn't you? It's pretty disempowering when someone tries to reduce you to the contents of your wallet, isn't it?"

Charlie nodded, but still did not speak. "The second thing you are not, but which other people want to distill you into, is your job. That's a tougher one to figure out, because even you yourself will often link your identity as a person with what you do for a living. Especially in our culture, occupation and selfworth are closely intertwined. That's why the question you recently looked forward to answering is now one you dread, because even in your mind, 'What do you do?' and 'Who are you?' are almost the same question. Am I right?"

Charlie started to nod yes, but his chin seemed to get stuck on the downward swing. He looked at the floor, and was again fighting back tears. At the age of 36, had he become so superficial that his whole identity could be captured on the back of a business card?

"You're at a crossroads, Charlie." Connors looked across the room with an unaccustomed intensity. "You're about to make a decision that could determine the course of the rest of your life." The children had left the pool below, and for the first time in all of his appointments with Connors, Charlie realized that there was a grandfather clock ticking away in the far corner.

"Up to this point in your life, the decisions you've made have primarily been intended to please and impress other people. You tried to do what was expected of you and to be the person you thought they all expected you to be. You've never really stopped to ask the question, 'What should I do to please and impress Charlie,' have you?"

Charlie wasn't even trying to stop the tears now. He shook his head. "No."

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“Did you hear about the aborigine who bought a new boomerang?” Dr. Connors laughed softly as he asked the question. Charlie sniffled and shook his head again. “Spent the rest of his life trying to throw the old one away.”

Charlie laughed through his tears, then, frantically reached for the Kleenex box on the table next to the sofa.

“That’s the question, Charlie. Are you ready to throw away the old boomerang, and to keep throwing it away every time it comes back to you? The old boomerang is caring about what other people think of you; trying to do what you think will please and impress everyone else, even if it makes you unhappy; playing it safe by staying close to the ground when deep in your heart you want to spread your wings and soar, even if at first it’s terrifying to fly? Are you ready, Charlie, or do you want to hang on to the old boomerang for a while longer?”

“I think I’m ready,” Charlie replied, “but I’m not sure I’d even know where to start. How does one throw away an old boomerang?”

“I won’t kid you by saying it’s easy, Charlie, but you’ve already made a critical first step.”

“What’s that?”

“You recognize that the boomerang is not part of you, that it’s something you can throw away and replace, if you want to.”

“I want to.” Softly, but with conviction.

“Remember last time we were together, when I mentioned The Iron Triangle of False Personality? It’s bounded on each corner by ego, emotion, and ambition. Now, each of those things are good, if you manage them effectively by staying outside of the triangle looking in. But most people don’t manage them. Instead, they react to ego and emotion, chase false ambitions. They get trapped inside the triangle, and it becomes a prison that prevents their development as a human being, stunts their growth as a spiritual being.”

Charlie looked up, a bit surprised. It was the first time Doctor Connors had touched upon a spiritual theme. “Is religion compatible with psychiatry?”

Connors laughed. “Your religion – the church you attend, or don’t attend – is your own business. But as long as I’m your counselor, your spiritual life is my business. If your attitude about life is the same as the bumper sticker that used to be popular – ‘The one who dies with the most toys wins’ – then you’re setting yourself up for an incredibly superficial and inevitably painful existence. ‘Who are you?’ is ultimately a spiritual

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question, because when you break out of the Iron Triangle of False Personality – Ego, Emotion and Ambition – what you find on the other side is soul.”

“The first point of the Iron Triangle is ego. I don't mean ego in the technical sense that Freud described, but rather in the everyday sense you think of when you hear that someone has a big ego, or a fragile ego. It's the embodiment of that troublemaking little kid, whose primary concern is for the opinions of other people. For ego, image is everything, substance is nothing. It was ego that got crushed when Madam Butterfly gave you the brushoff. It's ego that still nurses the hurt feelings rather than just letting them go. You've probably heard reference to your inner child? Well, ego can be your inner spoiled brat.”

“If ego stands in the way of my discovering soul, then how do I distinguish between the two? Sometimes, it's awfully hard to know just exactly who's talking up there.” Charlie crossed his arms and stretched his legs out straight.

“Great question, Charlie, and one I can't answer directly. Let's finish our analysis of The Iron Triangle and see if we can't get a little closer to the answer. Ego is the Great Defender. Its primary purpose is to protect you from being hurt by the outside world, but in doing so it prevents you from touching the world in more positive and constructive ways. It was ego that slammed the door in Dick Dierdron's face when he was offering to help you. It may have felt good at the time, but if nothing else, knowing that someday Dierdron might be an important job reference for you, it was a pretty counterproductive behavior, wasn't it?”

Charlie nodded, but he was starting to get a better appreciation for what Dr. Connors had said earlier. Gaining control of the little troublemaker was the hardest work in the world because it *still* felt good to have closed that door in Dierdron's face, even knowing that he might someday pay a regrettable price.

“When ego wants to get your attention,” Doctor Connors began again, “it has a very handy set of chains to yank – your emotions. Emotions can be a beautiful thing. They make humans unique and special, but all too often they are also the enemy within. The research into emotional intelligence is finally starting to get its due, but not many people who make it as far as my office are aware of it. Ego loves to stir up emotions that make *it* feel good, make *it* feel important, but which can provoke *you* to do things that end up being very selfdestructive.”

Connors went to the sink in his back counter and filled up a big glass of water, which he sat upon his desk. Then he removed a small box from the cupboard above and sat back down. “When ego starts stirring up emotions, it rarely hits on just one. What you often end up with is a confused witches' brew.”

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Connors tapped the glass. "Crystal clear, like the swimming pool before it was disrupted by our little troublemaker friend. A mind this clear would be a perfect environment for perceiving reality with accuracy and making decisions with clarity, do you agree?"

Charlie nodded his assent.

"When Dick Dierdron fired you, it was excruciatingly painful to your ego, wasn't it?" Charlie nodded again, as the mere thought of that meeting caused his stomach to knot. "So in its agony, your ego started to stir up emotions, didn't it? What were they, Charlie, what were some of the emotions you felt that day?"

Charlie clenched his teeth, feeling like he was being dragged against his will back into a room where he didn't want to be. "Anger," he hissed.

"Ah, good old anger," chortled Doctor Connors as he pulled a small bottle out of the box on his desk and removed the top. "Favorite emotion of Mars, the Greek god of war. Bloody red anger." He squeezed several drops of red food dye into the water. "Nothing better to distort your perception and cloud your thinking than anger." Charlie was momentarily mesmerized by the red dye as it swirled its way through the glass of water, seemingly fighting a losing battle to maintain the integrity of its separate identity.

"What other emotions did you feel that afternoon, other than anger?"

"Fear," Charlie replied without hesitation. "Sheer terror, total panic, heartstopping fear."

"Fear and anger. Never one without the other," Connors said as he squeezed several drops of yellow dye into the water. Charlie watched as the red and yellow, each pretty on its own, melded together into a murky orange. "What else did you feel, as you sat in Dierdron's big office looking across that gigantic desk, knowing that when the meeting ended you would go and he would stay?"

"Envy. At that moment, I think I would have given anything to trade places with him."

"Ah, so let's add a little envy to the brew," Connors said as he squirted green food coloring into the glass, causing the water to become a dark purple. "And what about Dierdron himself, what emotion did you feel toward him?"

"Hate. Pure unadulterated hatred." Charlie shuddered. "It was actually scary to feel that much animosity towards another person, especially one I had considered a friend and a partner just hours before."

Connors squeezed some purple dye into the concoction on his desk, then stirred it up with his pen. It looked like India ink. Connors picked up the glass and held it out toward Charlie. "Care to drink some of your little brew?"

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Charlie recoiled at the thought of putting that vilelooking concoction in his mouth.

“This is what happens to your mental clarity when ego starts to stir up all those negative emotions. It goes,” and he poured the contents of the glass into the sink, “down the drain.”

“So now you're in a mess, aren't you, Charlie? You have a wounded ego stirring up all sorts of painful emotions. How do you deal with that, huh? I'll tell you how: you focus on your ambitions.”

Connors was pacing back and forth, more animated than Charlie had ever seen him. “Your fear is painful, so you give yourself an ambition to find another job as quickly as possible to reduce the frightening uncertainty of being unemployed. You hate the little snake – I think that was the word you used to describe Dierdron the last time we met – who fired you, so your ambition wants to think of ways to get back at him.”

Charlie squirmed uncomfortably. He had, in fact, been daydreaming about taking critical business away from LPI, and more recently had even begun to sketch out a business plan for doing so.

“Here's the sad fact. None of those ambitions are authentic. They are for things you don't really even want. They are intended to placate ego, and to please and impress other people. Listen, one of my clients has built a very successful career in a profession he despises. He got into it because he thought it would please Mom and Dad, and now he doesn't know how to get out of it, even though Mom and Dad died a long time ago. The rest of the world sees a busy, successful executive with all the luxuries worldly success can buy. But once a week, I see a lost, lonely, disillusioned little man who hates himself and everything he does.”

They sat in silence for a long time, now comfortable enough in their relationship that neither felt the need to break into it with unnecessary voice. At last, Connors pulled a book from his shelf and handed it to Charlie. “This is *The SelfTransformation Workbook*, which many of my clients have found to be especially helpful in trying to get a better handle on who they are and what they want.”

Charlie took the book and pointed to the Never Fear, Never Quit logo at the top. “I see this on Tshirts all over the place. I didn't realize it was more than that.”

“I was one of the first members,” Dr. Connors smiled. “The movement has come a long way since then.”

Charlie started to thumb throughout the workbook, which seemed to be full of ideas, inspirations and exercises. “Your friend Cheryl told me she locked herself into her room with that book and didn't come out until she had worked her way through it, from

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beginning to end," Connors said. "Judging from what she's done with her life since, I'd say it's made quite an impression."

"You know," Charlie said, "I really need to call Cheryl again. I'm afraid the fragile state of my ego prevented me from really connecting the last time."

"Cheryl has a lot to offer, Charlie. She's going to make a difference in this world."

Connors went back to his shelf and pulled off another book. Charlie recognized it as the *Dreamcyclopedia* that Cheryl had taken from her purse, but this one did not yet have anything in it. "Here's a blank slate, Charlie. Go fill it up with a beautiful future."

* * *

If anything, today was even more beautiful than the first day Charlie met Cheryl for lunch at dockside on The Patio. Even better, this time Charlie felt the sunshine on the inside as well as on the outside. When she joined him, Charlie noticed that a second jewel now graced one of the indentations in her FPN pin.

"Future Perfect Now," Cheryl was saying, "means just what it says. Instead of waiting around, hoping that a brighter future will somehow happen, we are determined to reach out and grab that future, to start living it now as if it were already a reality, which it actually is, even if it may not have yet showed up on your calendar."

"OK, I believe you Cheryl – you yourself are a living, breathing billboard – but what exactly is FPN? What do you do?"

Cheryl smiled, but shook her head No. "You're not ready yet, Charlie, your dreams are still too small. Until you can let go of them and replace them with big dreams, Mount Everest-sized dreams, it would be worse than a waste of time to tell you about it. You wouldn't get it, you'd blow it off and never come back, and that would really be a shame."

"Well," Charlie replied, "you said that there was something you wanted to walk through with me today. If it's not Future Perfect Now, what is it?"

"This will take most of the afternoon, Charlie, but if you're willing to take the time and work through it with me, it could change your life in a radical, beautiful way, like it has mine. Are you willing?"

"Ready, willing and able... And eager!"

Cheryl unfolded a long sheet of paper with six empty blocks, each progressively smaller, forming a pyramid. "This is the Self-Empowerment Pyramid," she said, writing those

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words at the top of the page with her heavy black felttip pen. "It's a powerful tool for figuring out who you are, what you want, and how you're going to get it."

"Starting at the beginning, with IDENTITY at the base of the pyramid," and she wrote that word in big bold letters in the biggest box at the bottom of the page, "we'll use this tool to crystallize your identity, mission, vision, goals, and then the action steps you can start taking right now to make sure that your future is the perfect one you want it to be."

Underneath the word Identity, Cheryl wrote out in longhand "Authenticity," and then the numbers one, two and three. "Crystallizing your identity means to discover the real you, the meanttobe you, the authentic you that has probably long been overshadowed by the false you that ego has created to please and impress other people." Charlie could hear echoes of Dr. Connors in Cheryl's voice, but also sensed that she was about to tell him something new and different, and very important.

"There are three steps to cultivating your authentic identity: first, know yourself; second, master yourself; and third, believe in yourself. Since you've spent some time with John Connors, I don't need to tell you about the Iron Triangle of False Personality and how important it is to cut through all the clutter that appears to be part of the authentic you but really just misleads you down the easy road of being what you think other people expect you to be, rather than having the courage and determination to take the more difficult road that leads to being the person you are meanttobe."

She checked to see that Charlie was tracking with her then continued, "One of the most simple, practical, and effective methods for defining your true identity is with 'I Am' declarations. I've written one of these for myself at three different levels: spiritual, professional, and personal. Would you like to see them?"

Charlie nodded and she opened her *Dreamcyclopedia*, which she had placed on the table. She put a piece of paper across the page, so Charlie could only see the top third. "This is my spiritual 'I Am' declaration," she said, then read aloud:

I am a beloved and beautiful child of God, and have been put on this Earth with an important mission that I alone can fulfill. That mission will be made clear to me as I continue to work and grow, but so long as I am pursuing it with enthusiasm and good faith, I will not be allowed to fail, no matter how severe the obstacles may seem.

"Whenever someone asks me that universal icebreaking question, 'What do you do?' I tell them about my work with FPN, because that's what they expect to hear. But when I see the covert looks of disapproval, which is fairly often because FPN is pretty far off the beaten path, I remind myself of this 'I Am...' declaration. No matter what someone thinks of my work, they can never take this away from me. It's not a job, it's a life's

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calling.” Cheryl moved the paper down to uncover the second third of the page, and read her professional ‘I Am’ declaration:

I am a naturalborn entrepreneur, and I love nothing better than helping other people grow wealthy and wise right alongside me.

“There in this one sentence is my entire business philosophy,” Cheryl said. “Wealth is not enough without wisdom; my own success is not enough without the success of those around me. I must be creating something of unique and lasting value – the hallmark of an entrepreneur. Whenever I get discouraged – when I’ve been rejected too often, dejected for too long, and being ejected altogether seems like a real possibility, I center myself on what’s most important by mentally declaring who I really am: a natural born entrepreneur with a bonedeeep commitment to the success of others.” Cheryl lifted the paper from the book, revealing the bottom third of the page. Charlie read:

I am a loving and compassionate wife and mother, and will do whatever I can to help my family be more harmonious and my children be more successful.

Cheryl laughed. “Every time I come in the house and see chaos reigning, chores neglected, homework not done, TV blaring and children fighting, I stop, take a deep breath, and before I follow my first instinct I remind myself of who I am and who I want to be. Guess what? Nine times out of ten, what my first instinct would have led me to do was an inappropriate response. It was ego pulling the strings, not soul.”

Charlie pointed to the “I Am” declarations. “I know I’m supposed to write my own, but would you mind if I copy yours down. They sort of hit home.”

“Not at all,” Cheryl replied. “That’s how I got started, by massaging someone else’s declarations around until they felt right for me.”

Behind the number 2 Cheryl wrote the words Master Yourself. “In order to become the authentic you, you need to keep a tightrein on ego, emotions, and ambition. Have you heard about tough love?”

“You mean that ‘get tough’ philosophy for parents whose kids are into drugs and things like that?” Charlie asked.

“Exactly. Well, your ego is like a truculent little kid who’s into drugs of a different type. Drugs like selfpity, pessimism, cynicism, and other loser attitudes. And believe me, those negative attitudes and beliefs are just as addictive as narcotics, and just as dangerous. They suck people into a downward spiral that begins with ‘learned helplessness’ – pretending there’s nothing you can do to solve your problems; then swirl downward into the ‘blame game’ – trying to hold someone other than yourself responsible for those problems; and culminates in ‘victim syndrome’ – feeling sorry for

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yourself because you've somehow been singled out for special abuse. And of course, the spiral never ends, because once you feel like a victim, it just reinforces your belief in your own helplessness and you continue to spiral down into the vortex of despair.”

“To become the authentic you, you must be tough with yourself by holding yourself accountable for achieving high standards, values, and performance. By the way, being tough *with* yourself doesn't mean being tough *on* yourself by beating yourself up if you don't live up to those high expectations.”

“And third,” she continued, writing down the words behind the number 3, “you have to believe in yourself. You have to believe, at the deepest level of your heart, that those I Am declarations are true and authentic. After all, if you don't believe in yourself, who will?”

Cheryl now wrote in big block letters the word MISSION in the second box. “Once you've got a clear fix on who you are, the next step is to crystallize what you're here for. When you go from having a job to having a mission, you become unstoppable. One of the most powerfully motivating and focusing things you can do for yourself is write a mission statement. Have you ever done that, Charlie?”

Charlie shook his head. “No, but every now and then I read the one posted in the lobby at LPI. It sounded pretty much like every other mission statement, and could just as well have applied to a sausage factory as a consulting firm.”

Cheryl turned the page on her *Dreamcyclopedia* and pointed out where she had written her own mission statement:

My mission is to help people succeed as entrepreneurs by teaching them how to dream big, think creatively, believe in their own abilities, and act courageously so that they can accomplish magnificent goals.

“If you dissect my mission statement,” Cheryl pointed out, “you'll notice three distinct elements. First is my guiding value, which is magnificence as opposed to mediocrity. That word captures everything I stand for, personally and professionally – raising people's standards and expectations and achieving quantum leaps in their performance and outcomes.

“The second element is the key action that makes my guiding value become real. In my case, it's teaching. Being able to teach other people how to be successful entrepreneurs is more central to my own success than being a successful entrepreneur myself, as paradoxical as that sounds. So when I think of how to spend my limited resources, learning how to be a good teacher is more important than anything else I can do.”

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Charlie gradually became aware of another presence, and realized that their waitress was standing behind them, looking over his shoulder at Cheryl's dream book. Redfaced at being caught eavesdropping, she stammered, "Can I get anything else for you two?" Charlie and Cheryl smiled at each other and the waitress said, "Sorry, I just came over to check on you and got taken in listening. I sure don't want to be a waitress for the rest of my life."

"What are you doing right now to try and get out of that rut, Sarah?" Cheryl asked, reading the woman's name tag.

"Well, it's hard to find much time," Sarah replied. "I'm a single mom, and my boys are at an age where they pretty much need me to be around. But," and at this point Sarah lowered her voice as if she were bringing Cheryl and Charlie into a magnificent conspiracy, "I've been taking this home study course on how to think like an entrepreneur, and it's really opened my eyes to the possibilities out there. It was, like, if I'm still waitressing in five years, it will only be because I made that choice."

Sarah looked uncertainly from Cheryl to Charlie to make sure they really wanted to hear the rest of her story. "One of the assignments my teacher – the guy who does this home study course – gives is to start a new business doing something we've never done before, and to keep at it until we've grossed at least one hundred dollars." When Charlie raised his eyebrows at the token amount, she snapped "It's a lot harder than you think it is!"

"So what are you doing to earn your hundred dollars?" Cheryl asked with genuine interest.

Sarah looked around to make sure she wasn't being observed by her supervisors, then reached into the pocket of her apron and pulled out a large round pin. It was clearly hand-painted, not mass-produced, but just as clearly done by someone with both talent and pride of workmanship. In the middle of the button was painted the head of a bald eagle, which Charlie noticed was actually winking, and around the circumference the words, *Winners Don't Quit!*

"That's my motto," Sarah said proudly. "I'm a winner, and winners don't quit. Working at this job, I have to remind myself of that pretty often."

Charlie caught himself looking at the young woman with new respect. It was funny, he thought, how something as simple as trying to sell little inspirational buttons that she painted in her spare time transformed a generic waitress into a real person with dreams and aspirations. "How much do you sell the pins for?" he asked.

"Well, sir," she replied, almost defiantly, "if price is your most important concern you can get buttons down at Target for about two bucks. If you want a work of art like this

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that you'll be proud to wear wherever you go, the price is ten dollars." Her eyes never wavered from Charlie's during this entire little speech.

After a brief but awkward silence Cheryl started laughing, between bursts managing to get out the question, "How long did you have to practice that so you could pull that off with a straight face?"

"Lady," Sarah replied, Cheryl's laughter having given her permission to show a softer, more vulnerable side, "you don't even want to know how many hours I stood in front of the bathroom mirror and talked to my kids in their car seats 'til I felt like I could ask for what they're worth. That's one thing the teacher for this home study course really hammers home. You have to rehearse great answers to simple questions like, 'What do you do?' and 'How much does it cost?'"

Charlie extracted a ten dollar bill from his wallet and handed it to Sarah. "After a sales pitch like that, how can I not buy a pin? I'd also like to know where I can sign up for this home study course you mentioned, if you don't mind giving me a phone number or address."

Sarah handed Charlie the pin, then turned to Cheryl. "I've got another one pretty much like it, if you'd like one too."

"Actually, Sarah, I need 150 of them. But I need them for a special function on September 22. Can you make them that fast?"

"At ten dollars a pin?" Sarah asked, looking at Cheryl over the top of her half-moon glasses.

Cheryl smiled and nodded. "You certainly don't need to worry about being a waitress for the rest of your life, Sarah. Ten bucks a pin, but on one condition."

"What condition?"

"This sale doesn't go against your quota. You still have to sell at least ninety dollars worth of pins to someone else to satisfy your homework assignment. Here's my card. Why don't you give me a call next week so we can talk more about what goes on the pin."

Sarah put the card in her pocket. "Thanks a lot. These pins are going to be perfect, you have my guarantee of that. But I'm not ready to stop being a waitress quite yet, so I better get back to work." Sarah turned to go, then looked back at Cheryl. "By the way, I'm already way past my hundred dollar quota. See you next week."

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Cheryl started to say something to Charlie, then stopped. "Hey, what happened to your pin?"

"It's in my pocket."

"What's it doing in there? Don't you want people to know you're a winner?"

Charlie rolled his eyes, but did fish out the pin and put it on. "OK, it's on. So where were we, as we dissected your mission statement?"

"Actually," Cheryl said, "Sarah came at just the right time, because she is the third element of my mission statement."

"Excuse me, did I miss something?"

"The first element is my guiding value – magnificence over mediocrity. The second element is my critical action step – teaching skills and attitudes for success. The third element is my intended audience, and that is people who have big dreams and want to achieve them on their own terms. People like Sarah."

"People who want the future to be perfect right now?" Charlie added.

"Precisely. And I predict that I'm going to help Sarah sell a lot more than 150 pins to my friends in FPN, if that's what she really wants to do, but also that she's going to end up doing a lot to help me succeed in my own business." Cheryl smiled. "I knew she had what it takes as soon as I saw her look you right in the eye and tell you that the price was ten bucks, take it or leave it."

Returning to the Empowerment Pyramid, Cheryl now put big block letters in the third box spelling out the word VISION. "What would your world look like if you were being the real you, the authentic you, and pursuing the work that is your true calling? What would be the work you would be doing every day? Where would you be doing it? With whom? Where would you live? In what kind of house? The more clear and detailed the mental map of your perfect future, the more certain you are to take the actions now that will assure it becomes your reality, and probably sooner rather than later."

Cheryl sketched an hourglass on the side of the paper. "This is the way future vision works." She placed her pen on the paper and drew a straight line right across the bottom of the hourglass. "This is the present. My vision of reality is very broad, very accurate. I can tell you precisely about the work I'm doing, the house I live in, anything else you want to know."

Now she drew a second line, parallel to the first but up slightly, closer toward the middle. "This line is tomorrow. I still have a very clear and accurate picture of where

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I am and what I'm doing, but it's just a bit narrower than it is today, because there's a hint of uncertainty thrown in, isn't there?" Charlie nodded. "Now, if I go out a week or a month," and she drew two more lines, each fractionally shorter and closer to the midpoint, "my vision becomes even more circumscribed, and still more if I go out a year, or two years."

"At some point," and she drew a line straight across the narrow waist of the hourglass, "there is a great deal of uncertainty, because in the intermediate term, so many things are beyond our control. Somewhere out here, maybe three to five years, I really can't tell you with a great deal of confidence and certainty where I will be and what I will be doing."

Cheryl drew a line perpendicular to the horizontal one she'd drawn across the center of the hourglass, then put an arrowhead at the end so that it pointed toward the opposite side of the hourglass. "But if you give me enough time – and I happen to think there's something magic about seven years – I can begin to have complete certainty that I'll be doing what I want to do, where I want to do it, and with the kind of people I want to be doing it with."

Cheryl held up her empty glass to catch Sarah's attention, signaling that they needed refills on their Cokes. "That's the paradox of memories of the future, Charlie. You can be far more certain of your reality in the distant future than you can for the intervening five years or so, if you're willing to keep working, keep adjusting, and not quit," and with this she tapped Charlie's new eagle pin with her pen.

"Memories of the future?" Charlie asked with a quizzical smile.

"That's an FPN technique. We don't have time to go into the details right now, but basically it's a frequently replayed mental motion picture of your ideal future that is reinforced by continuous verbal affirmation and daily action."

"Wow!" Charlie drew out the word as if to emphasize how impressed he was. "You really are taking this business seriously, aren't you?"

"If I just blow it off, be satisfied to take whatever life tosses my way, and then one day wake up and decide I want more, will I be given the chance to do it over again?"

"No, of course not."

"Of course not, indeed! You're darned right I'm taking it seriously. I want magnificence, not mediocrity! There are just way too many things I want to do in this life. Which brings me to the next block of the Empowerment Pyramid," and she wrote into the next empty box in big block letters the word GOALS.

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“Goals are the stepping stones that take you from where you are now to where you want to be in your perfect future. At FPN, we talk about the two possible impossibilities.”

Charlie laughed incredulously. “First memories of the future and now possible impossibilities? I'm sorry, Cheryl, but FPN is beginning to sound more like a nuthouse than a business.”

Cheryl smiled the smile of a mother trying to be tolerant when a child has asked “Why?” about ten times too many. “The difference between courageous and crazy is often evident only in retrospect, Charlie. It takes a lot of courage to commit yourself to a vision of a beautiful future, especially when everyone else thinks it's just an impossible daydream and that you're nuts for pursuing it.”

“Yeah, I'm sorry,” said Charlie, his contrition genuine. “My thinking's just been stuck in the corporate box for too long.”

“You mean your dreams have been too small,” Cheryl said as a statement rather than a question. “But at least I see the beginning of a crack at the top of that box. Maybe you're about to break out.”

“Crazier things have happened.”

“Let's hope so. The first possible impossibility is to have one magnificent dream, one goal that is so stupendous that other people think it's impossible.”

“I remember reading once that lost causes are the only ones worth fighting for,” Charlie said,” and just then the picture of Mt. Everest in Dick Dierdron's office popped into his head, with its inscription “Big Hills Are the Only Ones Worth Climbing.”

“The second possible impossibility,” Cheryl continued, “is to have an impossible number of possible goals. To write down everything you'd like to do, all the places you'd like to go, the people you'd like to meet. You'll find that when you start getting these goals organized, in your mind and on paper, the seemingly impossible becomes inevitable, and your goals start becoming fulfilled in big clusters. I know, because it's starting to happen to me right now, in my business and in my personal life. I'm achieving goals I never even would have thought to strive for if I hadn't written them down.”

“One more thing about goals,” Cheryl went on. “Whenever you begin an activity, have more than one goal in mind so that your likelihood of success is higher.”

“I'm not sure I'm with you on that one,” Charlie said. “Can you give me an example?”

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“Sure,” Cheryl replied. “Let’s say you go somewhere for a job interview. What’s your objective?”

“To get the job, of course. What else would it be?”

“If that’s your only objective going in,” Cheryl responded, “you’re setting yourself up for a win-or-lose outcome. If you get the job you win – well, you win if it actually turns out to be what you’re hoping it will be. But if you don’t get the job, you feel like you’ve lost, because you didn’t achieve your sole objective.

“If, on the other hand, getting the job is only one of several objectives, you set yourself up to win, no matter what the outcome is. You might not get the job, but you’ll achieve your other objectives of learning more about the industry, getting names and telephone numbers for other people you can network with, and analyzing how your resume and your interview skills might have been more effective at helping you land the job. With all that to gain, you’re a winner no matter what happens.”

“Easy to say,” Charlie replied, “but it’s still hard to feel like a winner when you’ve been rejected.”

“Look, I have a friend who’s a writer. He told me he used to get really depressed whenever he went to a book signing. Because he’s not – at least not yet, anyway – a household name, most people just walk by his table. He felt like he was being rejected by all of the people who didn’t want his book. But now, he has multiple objectives at each signing. He asks the store manager for tips on how to market his books more effectively. He signs up new subscribers for his newsletter. And when people do stop, he engages them in conversations at a deeper level, asking about what they do and what their problems are. By doing that, he told me, he’s always a winner. In fact, one of his most dismal outings, one where in an entire evening he signed only a few books, turned out to be one of his best because someone who did buy the book ended up hiring him several months later for a big consulting project. And as part of the deal, he bought more than a thousand books for employees of the company!

“And that brings me to the apex of the pyramid,” she said and blocked the word ACTION in the box at the top. “You can have all the beautiful dreams in the world, but they will only come true if you are willing to make the commitments and take the actions necessary to make them come true. The difference between wishful thinking and positive thinking is this: wishful thinking is hoping for something and waiting for it to happen. Positive thinking is *expecting* something and *working* for it to happen.”

Charlie studied the Empowerment Pyramid. It really could, he realized, be a formula for finding out who you are, what you want, and how you’re going to get it. “There’s one more thing,” said Cheryl, “and it’s very important. Once you realize what your dreams

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and vision really are, you have to give yourself permission to follow those dreams, to become the person you were meant-to-be. You have to stop doing what you think the rest of the world expects you to do and trying to be the person everyone else expects you to be. The bigger your dream, and the more it requires you to change, the less likely that other people, including people who love and support you, are going to understand. Above all, you've got to believe in yourself and in your dreams before you can expect anyone else will."

Charlie contemplated what Cheryl had just said. To move from completing the Empowerment Pyramid on paper to making a real, here-and-now commitment, would require extraordinary courage and determination. The after-work crowd was starting to filter into The Patio when Cheryl excused herself for an early evening appointment. Charlie ordered another Coke and started making some notes for his own *Dreamcyclopedia*.