



Evoke Your Full Potential for Leadership and Life

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Introduction

After writing more than [70 newsletters](#) over the past six years, I have combined them into an eBook that is organized by category: Growth and Success, Leadership, Improving Work Relationships, Feedback and Tough Conversations, Stress Management, and Resilience. Each newsletter can be easily found by title and quickly accessed by clicking on the page link. All sources referenced are hyperlinked for easy access as well. My intention is for this to be a convenient and useful resource for enhancing your leadership and living a better life.

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Grow Beyond Your Comfort Zone



Why is it so hard to leave our comfort zone? It's because as humans, we generally like to have things somewhat predictable. We like to have a sense of control, so we usually resist change. However, when we do things that make us uncomfortable or frightened, we become more confident in our ability to deal with the unfamiliar, unknown, and unpredictable. We become the hero in the movie of our own life, and we grow into more self-assured and bold adults.

When was the last time you did something that really scared you? Lisa Nichols, author of the book *You Can Overcome Every Obstacle No Matter What*, says that we should do something

every week that scares us. Many people mistakenly think they have to stop being afraid of something before they can do it, when in fact the opposite is true. Once you do something that scares you, you will no longer be afraid of it. I have experienced this throughout my life, but never as much as I did during the first year of starting my business. In fact, I made a list of over 70 new things I had never done before starting my business. This realization showed me that I grew more in 12 months than I had in the previous 12 years. I did things that I was terrified to do, such as networking with a large group of strangers. Each time I did something that scared me, it made it easier to do it the next time, and this courage transferred over to new things that I had never done before.

Here are 10 ways to stretch outside of your comfort zone:

1. Ask someone to write a recommendation, testimonial, or reference for you.
2. Drive somewhere by yourself that you have never been to before.
3. Attend a networking event such as a "Meet-up Group" and introduce yourself to new people.
4. Take on a project at work that expands your skill set or involves more responsibility or a larger leadership role.
5. Join Toastmasters International.
6. Learn a new skill such as dancing, painting, a foreign language, or playing an instrument.
7. Volunteer your time to a worthwhile cause where you will meet new people and do something new.
8. Visit a foreign country where you do not know the native language.
9. Have a difficult conversation with a family member, friend, boss or co-worker about something they are doing that is bothering you, or something you want to ask forgiveness for.
10. Speak at a conference or an event on a subject that you are passionate about.

Courage simply means that we "[*Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*](#)" according to Susan Jeffers, Ph.D. in her book by the same title. We fear what we think we can't handle. Once we prove to ourselves that we can handle it, then there is no more fear.

"Not only am I going to experience fear whenever I'm on unfamiliar territory, but so is everyone else." – Susan Jeffers, Ph.D.

"Ships in harbor are safe, but that's not what ships are built for." – John Shedd

Want More Energy and Enthusiasm for Work and Life?



Does your career or life feel flat, like something is lacking? Perhaps you aren't being challenged enough. Sure you have goals, but are you playing it safe? How excited are you to achieve those goals? Are you striving for something truly demanding and amazing? As human beings, we are energized by a real challenge. That's what makes work and life fun. That's why we get addicted to the latest and greatest video game, at least until it's no longer a reach for us. Once we figure out how to beat the game or our high score, the thrill is gone, and it's no longer stimulating.

We must continue to challenge ourselves at work and in life in order to grow and feel alive. This doesn't mean taking on a bigger workload of the same type of work we are already doing. Nor does it mean taking on something that is so overwhelming and daunting to us that it causes distress. It means getting inspired to find a new challenge at work or in our personal lives that stretches us to make a bigger impact to our company, our customers, our family, our well-being, our community, or the world. When we are focused on a challenge that motivates us, we lose ourselves in that pursuit. Time seems to fly by, yet we are full of energy and enthusiasm. We feel like we are making a contribution and have a purpose.

According to Brendon Burchard in his book [*The Charge*](#), there are five criteria for challenges that make us feel truly alive:

1. **Singularity of focus** – They require our full, undivided attention and concentration in the moment.
2. **Stretch of effort and capability** – They demand slightly more than the best of our current skills and strengths.
3. **Scoring of performance** – Having the ability to know how we are doing by self-assessing or getting external feedback.
4. **Sense of completion** – There is a deadline or finish line to shoot for.
5. **Sharing of experience and result** – Talking about and celebrating our triumph over our challenge with others who cheered us on.

Challenge yourself by learning a new skill that's fascinating to you, tackling a new and exciting project at work, or taking on a bold physical feat like training for a marathon – something that you've always wanted to learn or do, but didn't think you could. You might just surprise yourself and find your inner spark once again.

"Accept the challenges so that you may feel the exhilaration of victory." – General George S. Patton

"Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all." – Helen Keller

The Key to Success...Being Real



I had the privilege of attending a three-day retreat entitled "*The Drop Dead Honest Organization*" at the [Edward Lowe Foundation](#) with a group of phenomenal women business owners from Orange County California. The Edward Lowe Foundation provides educational programs and support to second-stage entrepreneurs. This outstanding program was developed and facilitated by Dr. Dino Signore, Manager of Entrepreneurial Education, and focused on making your business more effective and profitable through creating an open and honest environment with trusting relationships. I thoroughly enjoyed this fantastic curriculum and participating with this

group of extremely successful CEOs and members of the Women's President Organization (WPO).

Dino's approach as an exceptionally effective and experienced facilitator created a safe environment for this group of women to openly share their insights, challenges, and fears and learn from each other. I was amazed by just how open and real they were, and truly honored by how they welcomed me with open arms into their inner circle having only just met me for the first time. (They have all known each other for some time.) We talked quite a bit about the power of being vulnerable and real as a leader, and how although scary, this is the first step in becoming approachable, developing relationships, and establishing trust with employees.

What touched me the most was when one of the attendees read a text message she received from their limo driver, John, who spent several hours with them while driving from the Chicago airport to Cassopolis, MI. They invited John to have dinner with them, and they took a genuine interest in learning more about him, his interests, and his family. John's text message said that he had never encountered such kind and generous customers in his entire 13-year career of limo driving, and they had made all of those years of driving worth it. They had treated John as a friend and colleague, rather than as just their driver. These women don't just talk about being real; they are real.

Dr. Maya Angelou said, "I've learned that people will forget what you said; people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." I'm sure that John will remember these special women for a very long time. I believe that these women are so successful in their businesses because they are wonderful people who are kind and generous, and they truly care about other people and creating something bigger than themselves. Being a great person is a prerequisite to being a successful business owner and leader, and these women clearly understand and embody this.

Thank you, Dino, for inviting me to participate in this fabulous retreat. I too will remember this incredible experience and these wonderful women for a long time.

"We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give." – Winston Churchill

Great Leaders Take RISKS

I had the opportunity to speak to a leadership class of 60 students at Warren Mott High School about leadership. I shared with them my experiences both as a leader in a formal position with a team that reported to me and as a leader utilizing only influence with no formal authority as a coach and consultant. I told them about my experiences of having both great and poor leaders throughout my career and the impact they had on me. I also gave them an acronym that I believe stands for keys to being a successful and effective leader – taking a **RISK**:



- **R – Role Model** – Great leaders are great role models. They exhibit the very behaviors they expect of others. Leaders are constantly being watched and held to a higher standard. People believe what leaders do, not what they say.
- **I – Interest in others** – Great leaders genuinely care about other people, especially their employees – their most important stakeholders. They truly care about helping others grow and become more successful.
- **S – Stuff that scares them** – Great leaders do things that scare them. They don't let fear stop them from taking action. The very definition of courage is doing something in spite of fear.
- **K – Knowledge** – Great leaders continue to add to their knowledge base. They never stop learning and growing. They continually learn and do new things.

I expressed to these students that the best leaders I have encountered in my career had all of these qualities, and I believe that's what made them so successful and influential. As a coach and consultant, I feel a huge sense of responsibility to practice what I teach and do my best to demonstrate these behaviors in order to have credibility, to improve myself as a leader, and to better serve my clients. Am I perfect at doing these things? Of course not. Do I mess up and make mistakes? Absolutely - all I can do is my very best. I share with my clients what I have put into practice as well as my successes and shortcomings - both are valuable lessons learned.

Lastly, I conveyed to these students that we can all be leaders even if we don't have a formal appointed position. We can lead from wherever we are in our schools, our families, our communities, and our jobs by modeling leadership behaviors and influencing people to follow us. I left them with these two closing questions: **"What kind of leader would others say you are? And what kind of leader will you choose to be?"**

"You don't need a title to be a leader." – Multiple Attributions

"The key to successful leadership today is influence, not authority." – Ken Blanchard

"Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others." – Jack Welch

The Gifts of Imperfection



If you attended my webinar "[Employees – Your Greatest Asset or Biggest Liability?](#)" on February 11, 2014, I apologize for the technical difficulties with the sound resulting in very low volume. The issue was resolved and the sound quality is much improved on the replay. Since attending Brené Brown's online course named after the title of her book: [The Gifts of Imperfection](#), I see this situation with my webinar as an opportunity to put the concepts from this course into practice. My old "perfectionist" self would have gotten very stressed out and upset by the sound issues. Not only that, but there

was a typo in my email address which we didn't catch until the webinar was live.

In the past, this would have totally put me over the edge. I would have been all-consumed with what other people thought of me. Now I am less concerned about what other people think of me and more concerned with what I think of myself and what I tell myself. I still have a lot of work to do, but I am also getting better at letting go of things I can't control. Rather than getting all worked up over something I can't do anything about, I have chosen to not let it get to me or cause me to believe that I am inadequate.

In [The Gifts of Imperfection](#), Brené Brown talks about perfectionism being a self-destructive pattern of pleasing, performing and perfecting. It's self-destructive because it's not attainable. There is no such thing as "perfect." Perfectionism is not about self-improvement; it's about being "perceived as being perfect" and being preoccupied with what other people will think of us. We can overcome perfectionism by being more compassionate with ourselves, embracing our imperfections, and asking how we can improve instead of beating ourselves up for not being perfect. My new "imperfect" self knows that mistakes happen and focuses on what I can do to move forward: apologize, send out the improved replay, and move on instead of dwelling on it.

I have also chosen to focus more on the positive aspects such as accomplishing a feat that I was scared of and thought I could never do. That's a more meaningful victory than a "flawless performance." It's better to get out there and share an imperfect product that people can access and gain value from than to have a perfect product that no one ever sees. I view every challenge as a learning opportunity, and this experience has truly been a "gift of imperfection."

"It is in the process of embracing our imperfections that we find our truest gifts: courage, compassion, and connection." – Brené Brown

"Want to be happy? Stop trying to be perfect." – Brené Brown

Building Better Leaders



In 2014, I conducted a [workshop](#) for the leaders at Casco Contractors, Inc. in Orange County, California. President, Cheryl Osborn is truly “Committed to Building it Better” both for her customers and her leadership team. I consider her a pioneer in the construction business, providing cutting-edge development opportunities for her team of Directors, so they become better leaders and build better teams. During this workshop, we utilized three assessments focused on personality preferences, interpersonal relations, and conflict management to improve team dynamics, communication, effectiveness, and efficiency. These leaders learned about their own and

each other’s personal preferences, strengths and blind spots. We focused on using this information to work better together both collectively as a leadership team and within their sub-teams. This group of leaders clearly saw how to leverage their differences to improve group problem-solving and how to ask questions in a different way to prevent unnecessary conflict and miscommunication. This session resulted in real actions they can put into practice both at work and in their personal lives.

I was truly impressed by the rich and insightful dialogue with this great group of leaders over the two days I spent with them. One of the biggest take-aways from this conversation was to not make assumptions about the behavior of others. We often climb the “Ladder of Inference” by adding our own meaning to what other people say and do without asking about their true intent. Unfortunately a lot of avoidable conflict arises out of false assumptions. According to Stephen M.R. Covey, “We judge ourselves by our intentions and others by their behaviors,” because that is what we see and what impacts us. The only way to really know someone else’s intentions is to ask them about it. Building trusting relationships where open dialogue takes place is the key to effective leadership and building high-performing teams.

Part II of this engagement involved the leadership team participating in [360-degree feedback assessments](#) in which they received feedback from their direct reports, their boss, Cheryl, their customers, and each other as peers. This feedback showed them how their identified personal preferences, strengths and blind spots are perceived by others. Then they identified specific areas where they wanted to improve their leadership abilities and created an action plan. I coached each leader individually for a few months to help them implement their action plans for achieving their goals.

What I truly admire about Cheryl is that she is a role model by demonstrating what she expects from her team. She participated in the [360 assessment](#), and took the feedback to heart to improve herself as a leader, before providing the same developmental opportunity to her leadership team. It was truly an honor to work with this outstanding group of leaders and to be a part of their journey on their path of continued excellence.

“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.” – John F. Kennedy

“It is always better to ask questions than to make an assumption, because assumptions set us up for suffering.” – Don Miguel Ruiz

Who Do You Surround Yourself With?



As a former volunteer mentor with [Winning Futures](#), a Warren, Michigan-based non-profit mentoring and goal-setting program that serves over 600 youth, I spent an hour each week working with high school students to help them develop their five-year strategic plan for the future. I participated as a Winning Futures mentor for two years and found it to be an extremely rewarding experience.

During one session that stands out in my mind, we helped the students identify their most important values. We also talked about the five people who they spend the most time with and who have the most influence in their lives. These were people such as family members, friends, teachers, etc.

The students then conducted an honest evaluation to determine if each person they identified was a positive influence who supported them and tried to build them up, or if they were a negative force who drained them of their energy and tore them down. We are the combined sum of the people we surround ourselves with and spend the majority of our time with. I was truly impressed with the outlook these students had at such an early age. They said that they don't spend time with people who drag them down, and if people don't like them for who they are, then they don't hang around with them.

This led me to think about the people that I choose to surround myself with. I can honestly say that now I have the freedom to choose who I work with and spend my time with. I no longer have anyone in my life that drains my energy and drags me down. I am truly blessed and grateful to have so many fantastic people in my life who are positive, supportive, and who build me up and energize me.

I would invite you to think about who in your life builds you up and who drags you down. What can you do to show the people who build you up how grateful you are to have them in your life? How can you minimize your exposure to people who drag you down and not allow yourself to be negatively affected by them? Remember, it's not what others say or do that matters, it's our response to them that really counts. Also, no one else's opinion of us is as important as what we think of ourselves.

"Surround yourself with only people who are going to lift you higher." – Oprah Winfrey

"Authenticity is the daily practice of letting go of who we think we're supposed to be and embracing who we are." – Brene Brown

Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway



In the summer of 2014, I successfully completed my biggest project to date, entirely on my own. I would never have had the guts to take on a project this complex and daunting all by myself a few years before that. It involved conducting 39 sensing sessions for an organization with over 1000 employees, writing a report of findings and recommendations, and presenting these results to the top leader. So what made this possible? A willingness to continually go outside of my comfort zone by taking on new and bigger challenges, which resulted in increased confidence.

Many people believe that someday they will have the courage to do the things they are afraid of. Unfortunately, we don't magically become braver without taking action. The only way to gain courage is by facing our fears, not running from them. In Susan Jeffers' book [*Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*](#), she talks about how everyone has fear when doing something new. Courage is being willing to feel the fear and do it anyway, instead of allowing the fear to stop us from trying. By doing something that scares us, we subconsciously send the message to ourselves that we can handle whatever comes our way. Then the next time we are faced with a new situation, we are more confident in our ability to deal with the unfamiliar. However, we also send a subconscious message to ourselves by running from a fearful situation which says that we can't handle the unknown.

The next time you are afraid to take on a new challenge, try these steps:

1. Tell yourself that fear is normal and everyone experiences it.
2. Make a list of all of the new experiences you have successfully lived through as evidence that trying something new hasn't killed you yet.
3. Tell yourself that the fear itself is far worse than the experience of actually doing it will be.
4. Tell yourself that pushing through a fear is far less scary than living your life in fear and missing out on all that life has to offer.
5. Just feel the fear and do it anyway!

"Thinking will not overcome fear but action will." – W. Clement Stone

"The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." – Franklin D. Roosevelt

Achieve More Than You Thought Possible



Why do some people seem to achieve so much, while others never reach their full potential? Steven Pressfield, author of [The War of Art](#) says that we have two lives: the life we live and the life we are capable of living. **How different would your life be if you consistently performed at your highest potential?**

The best example I personally know of achieving more than you thought possible is my good friend, Maureen Marshall. She has worked as a high level engineer supporting all of the big three auto companies, at Booz Allen Hamilton, HARMAN International, and is currently the Midwest Regional Director at CALSTART. She also holds an executive MBA, is PMP certified, and has a patent for a heating, ventilation, air conditioner performance test system. In addition, she is a mother of three (two of them are twins), a successful Mary Kay consultant, and a motivational speaker in her free time. If all of this isn't amazing enough, Maureen has cerebral palsy and has endured nine surgeries over the course of her life. Maureen is one of the most hardworking, accomplished, and positive people I know. Even though walking is a daily challenge for her, this has never stopped her from achieving anything she set her mind to. Maureen is a true inspiration and a positive role model for anyone who wants to push beyond their limits and achieve greatness.

I challenge you to achieve more than you thought possible. The book, [The 12 Week Year – Get More Done in 12 Weeks than Others Do in 12 Months](#) by Brian Moran and Michael Lennington shares three principles and five disciplines for doing just that.

Three Principles that determine effectiveness and success:

1. **Accountability** – a willingness to own actions and results, regardless of circumstances.
2. **Commitment** – a personal promise that you make to yourself.
3. **Greatness in the Moment** – the moment you choose to do what is necessary to become great.

Five Execution Disciplines for Greatness:

1. **Vision** – a compelling business vision that aligns with and enables your personal vision.
2. **Planning** – clarifying and focusing on top priority initiatives and actions to achieve your vision.
3. **Process Control** – a set of tools that align your daily actions with the critical actions in your plan.
4. **Measurement** – lead and lag indicators that provide comprehensive feedback necessary for making informed decisions.
5. **Time Use** – using your time with clear intention to achieve results.

See what you can achieve when you set your mind to it and push beyond your limits.

"Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome." – Booker T. Washington

"If we did the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves." – Thomas Edison

Push Beyond Your Limits Without Burning Out



When I wrote this newsletter, I was in the midst of my heaviest workload ever. I conducted eight days of workshops in three different states over a three-week period. One week I was in West Virginia, the next week I was in North Carolina, and the week after that I was back home conducting four consecutive days of workshops with two different clients. I don't normally schedule this many workshops this close together, but demands and schedules required it. Therefore, I needed to be especially diligent about recovery after each session in order to prevent burn out.

The book, [*The Power of Full Engagement*](#) by Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz talks about the key to high performance being to push past our limits (stressing our muscles) and then to engage in a period of recovery, just like athletes do when training. The trouble with working in the business world today is that most of us work at a very high level, pushing beyond our limits over extended periods of time, without sufficient breaks for recovery and restoration.

Recovery and restoration were key for me during this demanding time, especially since I am introverted, and it is very draining for me to be in front of large groups for long periods of time. Recovery for me means having some quiet time for myself after each workshop ends, eating healthy, exercising and ensuring I get enough sleep.

What are some ways that you can build recovery and restoration into your busy schedule so that you can maintain high performance and prevent burn out?

"One finds limits by pushing them." – Herbert Simon

"The sky is not my limit...I am." – T.F. Hodge

What is Privilege? Overcoming Bias and Discrimination



There is much talk about certain groups having "privilege" over other groups due to race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. Google defines privilege as "a special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group of people." [The Race of Life](#) video demonstrates this concept. Yes, even in the United States, where I feel privileged to live, certain people have advantages over others. This has been true for as long as the U.S. has been in existence. According to this video on privilege and the unconscious biases that we all have, I would be labeled as "disadvantaged" and would be near the starting line without much of a head start. I am a Hispanic female with what many would consider a "disability." (I was born without my left hand.) I was also raised by my single mother until the age of nine, when she married my adoptive father. I think this video is missing some key points that would serve to empower and elevate those without "privilege."

There are better predictors of future success than attending private school or growing up with a father figure in your home, such as staying in school and waiting to have children until you are prepared for it. Having impulse control and independence (important emotional intelligence competencies) and positive unconscious programming as a young child are also strong predictors of success. Were you told that if you work hard, you can achieve just about anything that you set your mind to, or that you will never be able to get what you want in life because there are too many obstacles holding you back? Were you told that you were smart and had unlimited potential, or were you told that you will never amount to much? As a child, did you have at least one caring adult in your life that loved you, believed in you, and made you believe in yourself? I think this makes all the difference. This is what sets apart those who are held down by the glass ceiling and those who break through it.

Luckily, even though I was born with certain "disadvantages," I was surrounded by people who loved me and sent me positive messages growing up. I never believed that anyone or anything would hold me back. As a result, I never experienced being held back. I always focused on what I could achieve and overcome, so I experienced achieving every goal that I set for myself. Dr. Stephen Covey said, "We see the world not as it is, but as we are." **Do NOT let anyone or anything define who you are, what you can achieve, or what you can have in this life NO MATTER WHAT.**

If your unconscious programming is holding you back, work to unpack negative beliefs and replace them with positive ones. We are our own worst enemy when we believe that we can't do something, or that someone will stop us from getting what we want. We are all running our own race, and we can all successfully cross the finish line regardless of our starting point, as long as we have the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary, or work to acquire them. Race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. have nothing to do with what we can have and achieve. What we believe, we will experience. Change your thoughts, and you will change your actions. Change your actions, and you will change the results that you experience in life.

"I was raised to believe that excellence is the best deterrent to racism and sexism. And that's how I operate my life." – Oprah Winfrey

"The greatest discovery of all time is that a person can change his future by merely changing his attitude." – Oprah Winfrey

Be Your Best Self



Many people have great intentions in setting ambitious goals at the start of each year, but make the mistake of trying to achieve too much all at once. Instead of setting several goals, it's better to set just one and focus on one to three actions that you will execute consistently in order to achieve it. For example, if you want to lose 20 pounds in three months, the actions that will make you successful are eating right, exercising regularly, and drinking plenty of water.

According to the book [*The 12 Week Year – Get More Done in 12 Weeks than Others Do in 12 Months*](#) by Brian Moran and Michael Lennington, you will be more likely to achieve your goal if you measure your execution on these critical actions (leading indicators) than if you simply measure goal progress (lagging indicator): how much weight you have lost. According to Dr. Marshall Goldsmith, author of the book [*Triggers*](#), you will be even more likely to succeed if you ask yourself daily active questions about your execution progress in the form of the following question: "Did I do my best today to..." and rate yourself on a scale of 1 (worst) to 10 (best). Below is an example of the weight loss goal and daily active questions around action execution.

Goal: Lose 20 pounds within 3 months (*Score yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 on the following questions.*)

- **Action #1: Did I do my best today to eat only nutritious food that will promote good health, high energy and weight loss?**
- **Action #2: Did I do my best today to engage in physical exercise for at least 30 minutes?**
- **Action #3: Did I do my best today to drink at least 64 ounces of filtered/purified water?**

Tracking these daily actions will help you stay focused and move toward your goal sooner. Thinking in terms of what you can reasonably accomplish within 3 months and tracking your execution progress in this way will help you achieve more in 12 weeks than most people accomplish within a year. Make this your best year yet and achieve more than you thought possible.

"Adding the words, 'did I do my best' added the element of trying into the equation...We may not hit our goals every time, but there's no excuse for not trying. Anyone can try." – Dr. Marshall Goldsmith – [*Triggers*](#)

"This active process will help anyone get better at almost anything. It only takes a couple of minutes a day. But be warned: it is tough to face the reality of our own behavior – and our own level of effort – every day." – Dr. Marshall Goldsmith – [*Triggers*](#)

Lessons Learned in Life and Leadership



The greatest lessons I have learned have been through my connections with other people. Other people teach us so much about ourselves. Perhaps that is why I have such a passion for [coaching](#) leaders. I get as much out of the process as they do. Through coaching, I have become extremely aware of my own areas for development. I have also learned that being present for another person and truly listening to them so they feel heard is more effective than any tool, technique or practice that I could offer.

Here's what else I have learned from family, friends, colleagues, mentors and coaches:

- **People like to see people with a dream succeed.** I am so grateful to everyone who has supported my dream of starting my own business whether it be to share advice from their experiences, to pass on a good word about me to a potential client, or to simply care enough to ask how things are going and cheer me on. I truly feel as though others want me to succeed, and it helps keep me going.
- **People with an abundance mentality are more successful.** I am truly inspired by the generosity of other coaches and business owners who have offered helpful tips and advice after only knowing me a short time. These are people who believe that there is enough to go around and that what you give and share with others comes back to you. And it does.
- **Former colleagues are more than colleagues, they are true friends.** I am very thankful that I have stayed connected to many of my former co-workers and that they make time to meet me for an occasional lunch in spite of their busy work schedules and lives.
- **People living on purpose with passion are more positive.** I have met so many new business owners over the past few years, it's unbelievable. All of them are excited about what they are doing and very upbeat and positive. They are the kind of people that others want to be around because it's contagious. Being positive is also great for business!
- **You don't have to be perfect before you get started.** There is more to know about being a business owner, coach and consultant than I can ever possibly learn in a lifetime. It's more important to get out there, make connections and take action than it is to have a perfect plan, workshop or presentation.
- **There will always be more to do.** Each day I have more on my "to-do" list than I can possibly complete in a day. I have learned that I don't need to get it all done in a day. I just need to make progress each day toward my goals. Keep moving forward and take it one day at a time, and it's amazing what you can accomplish.

- **Good things happen to good people who have a focused vision.** I am so happy about the successes and joys that my family, friends and colleagues have experienced, whether it be landing their dream jobs or new additions to their family. You know who you are, and I couldn't be happier for you!
- **Support from others is priceless.** Being someone who doesn't like to ask for help, I have found the support of my family, friends and colleagues to be necessary and invaluable. You can't succeed in business or in life by going it alone. I can't thank you enough for all of your support.

I hope that you will take some time to thank those who have had a positive impact on you and let those closest to you know how much they mean to you. There is no greater recipe for happiness and success than expressing gratitude.

"It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself...serve and thou shall be served."
 – Ralph Waldo Emerson

"I don't want to get to the end of my life and find that I lived just the length of it. I want to have lived the width of it as well."
 – Diane Ackerman

"When you realize there is nothing lacking, the whole world belongs to you."
 – Lao Tzu

Where Are You Headed?



Instead of setting several ambitious goals for the year, I'm trying something new. I'm setting 3 to 5 positive intentions for what I want to draw into my life this year. What's the difference between setting a goal and setting an intention? Goal setting involves an analytical process where we identify an end point based on what we "think we should" logically achieve and outline the steps to get there. We control the plan and the actions we will take along the way. Setting an intention involves identifying our true heart's desires, the feelings associated with them, and why they are important to us. We let go of the need to have a specific plan and instead allow the process to emerge. Goals come from the mind and are sometimes forced and difficult to achieve. Intentions come from the heart and are realized with ease and grace.

So why would I choose to go this route being a logical person who has practiced strategic planning for years? Because I have attempted to control nearly everything in my life and follow my "plan" for years, and it didn't work. I'm letting go of what I "think I should accomplish." Instead, I'm following my true heart's desires – what I believe my life's purpose(s) to be. I have faith that I will be happier and more successful using this approach because I'm clear about what I really want and why I want it. What I'm not totally clear about is exactly how I will do it. However, I am open to opportunities and possibilities that show up to move me closer to my desires. I also believe that the heart has the ability to persevere and overcome obstacles that the mind can't think its way out of.

Here are some areas where you might choose to set 3-5 positive intentions for this year:

- **Career** – Do you want to be in a career where you are making a contribution that is aligned with your values, giving you satisfaction, and allowing you to use your greatest talents and realize your highest potential?
- **Financial** – Do you want to regularly save for what you want in the future such as retirement, vacations, college funds, etc.
- **Health** – Do you want to have the physical energy to do what you want in life and feel at your very best every day?
- **Significant other/Romance** – Do you want to be in a committed relationship with a partner that shares your values and interests and supports your dreams and intentions?
- **Family** – Do you want to have better relationships with family members? Do you want to spend more time nurturing these relationships?
- **Social Relationships/Friends** – Do you want to cultivate a network of social relationships with people who share similar interests with you?

- **Personal Growth & Development** – Do you want to become the best person you can possibly be, learning and growing personally, professionally and spiritually as a human being?
- **Fun & Recreation** – Do you want to take more time for yourself, enjoying the present moment and engaging in activities simply for the joy of it?

Intentions from the heart are very powerful because they involve strong positive emotions. The stronger the positive feelings associated with our desires, the more likely we are to take action, and therefore, the more likely we are to attain them. Make this your best year yet by focusing daily on your true heart's desires and taking inspired action to move toward them.

"Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life's coming attractions." – Albert Einstein

"If you can dream it, you can do it." – Walt Disney

5 Leadership Secrets for Motivating Your Team

Are you a leader with team members that display any of the following?

- Just putting in time and doing the bare minimum each day.
- Being more focused on gossip and office politics than on performing.
- Dragging other team members down with negativity and complaining.

Team members who demonstrate these behaviors are considered “disengaged.” They are disconnected, under-utilized, not maximizing their contribution to organization, and therefore not experiencing maximum job satisfaction.



According to an employee engagement study conducted in 2011 by Gallup, 29% of employees are engaged in their work (enthusiastic & productive); 52% are not engaged in their work (just putting in time); and 19% are actively disengaged (unhappy & spreading discontent). This means that leaders are not getting the most potential out of 71% of their workforce. These folks are not using all of their talents, skills and abilities on the job. The more disengaged employees are, the more likely it is that they will leave the organization.

What does this mean to your business and your bottom line?

- 70% of employees say they are looking or plan to look for new opportunities outside of their organization within the next year, a 15% increase over the past three years. (*Blessing White, Employee Engagement Study, 2011*)
- The lost productivity of actively disengaged employees costs the U.S. economy \$370 billion annually. (*Gallup, Employee Engagement Study, 2010*)
- Organizations with engaged employees showed a 19% increase in operating income over a 12-month period, compared to a 34% decrease in companies with disengaged employees. (*Towers Watson, International Survey Research, 2011*)

Most employees do not start out disengaged. Most are productive, energetic and ready to contribute when they first join the organization. Gradually over time, these employees become disenchanted, and therefore disengaged for a few reasons.

1. They do not trust their leader and don't believe that their leader has their best interests at heart.
2. They are not using their creativity and full potential in their job.

3. They are not autonomous in their job and do not have control over their work or how they do their work.
4. The only pay off for working harder is getting more work.
5. They don't see how what they are doing fits into the bigger picture of the organization and makes a difference.

As the leader, you have the ability to influence the quantity and quality of work that your team members do and how they view their jobs and the organization. By utilizing the 5 secrets below, you can motivate even the most disengaged team members to become enthusiastic, productive, and high-performing employees.

5 Leadership Secrets for Motivating Your Team:

1. **Cultivate relationships** – Work to build trusting relationships with your team members. Show an interest in them and demonstrate that you care about them and their success. Follow through on your promises, walk your talk, and be loyal to the absent.
2. **Get their input** – Ask for their ideas and input about how they could do their jobs better, how they could better utilize their talents and strengths in their jobs, how processes could be improved, and how they view changes that are being considered for implementation.
3. **Get out of their way** – Do not be a micro-manager. Tell them what the goal or desired result is to be achieved, and be specific about what is considered a high-level of performance or high-quality product. Then give them the flexibility to figure out how to accomplish it in a way that works best for them.
4. **Reward results** – Reward them for a job well done. This can be done monetarily, but what is usually even more effective is showing a sincere appreciation for what they have accomplished. Thank them or praise them for their hard work. Give them opportunities for growth and development – the chance to learn something new or take on a more significant responsibility. The best way to find out what motivates them is to ask. Then use this information to reward them in a meaningful way.
5. **Connect the dots** – Tell them how their tasks contribute to other tasks, processes, and the overall mission. Explain the importance of the organization's mission and how it benefits society. Explain how what your organization does makes the world a better place.

"Leadership is practiced not so much in words as in attitude and in actions." – Harold S. Geneen

Why Happy Employees are Better Employees*

Why should you care about happiness at work? Because happy employees produce more than unhappy employees over the long term. They routinely show up at work, they're less likely to quit, they go above and beyond the call of duty, and they attract people who are just as committed to the job.

Employees who are not just happy, but **thriving**, are highly energized, deliver results, and find ways to grow.



Two key components of thriving:

- 1) **Vitality** – the sense of being alive, passionate, and excited.
- 2) **Learning** – the growth that comes from gaining new knowledge and skills.

One study found that **thriving employees** had:

- 16% better overall performance (as reported by their managers)
- 125% less burnout (self-reported) than their peers
- 32% more commitment to the organization
- 46% more job satisfaction

They also missed much less work and reported significantly fewer doctor visits, which meant health care savings and less lost time for the company.

How can you help employees thrive at work?

- 1) **Provide decision-making discretion** - Employees with the ability to make decisions that affect their work have a greater sense of control and more opportunities for learning.
- 2) **Share information** - People can contribute more effectively when they understand how their work fits with the organization's mission and strategy.
- 3) **Minimize incivility** - Those who have been the targets of bad behavior are likely to be uncivil themselves and tend to narrow their focus to avoid risks—losing opportunities to learn in the process.
- 4) **Offer performance feedback** - Feedback creates opportunities for learning and keeps people's work-related activities focused on goals. The quicker and more direct the feedback, the more useful it is.

What can you do to enhance your own learning and vitality at work?

- 1) **Take a break** - Breaks and other renewal tactics, no matter how small, can create positive energy.
- 2) **Craft your own work to be more meaningful** - You can't ignore the requirements of your job, but you can watch for opportunities to make it more meaningful.
- 3) **Look for opportunities to innovate and learn** - Breaking out of the status quo can trigger the learning essential to thriving.
- 4) **Invest in relationships that energize you** - Look for opportunities to work closely with colleagues who generate energy and minimize interaction with those who deplete it.
- 5) **Recognize that thriving can spill over outside the office** - People inspired by outside activities—volunteering, training for a race, taking a class—can bring their drive back to the office.

What can you do to increase happiness in your life outside of work?

- **Eat less**
- **Exercise more**
- **Meditate**
- **Get enough sleep**
- **Volunteer** – One of the most selfish things you can do is help others because you are really helping yourself.
- **Nurture your social connections**
- **Practice gratitude** – Twice a week write down three things you are grateful for and tell someone why.
- **Practice presence of mind** – People are much less happy when their minds are wandering than when their minds are focused. A focused mind is a happy mind.

By taking action to boost your level of inner happiness, you increase your productivity and your reserves to deal with everyday pressures. You also **strengthen your resiliency** so you bounce back quicker in a stressful work environment.

*Sources: *Harvard Business Review* - "[Creating Sustainable Performance](#)" by Gretchen Spreitzer and Christine Porath and "[The Science Behind the Smile](#)" *An interview with Daniel Gilbert* by Gardiner Morse

"The cure for unhappiness is happiness, I don't care what anyone says."
– Elizabeth McCracken

"The measure of your life will not be in what you accumulate, but in what you give away."
– Dr. Wayne Dyer

The Strength of Vulnerability



In 2015, a friend and former colleague was promoted to Lt. Col in the U.S. Air Force – quite an impressive accomplishment for a 38-year-old woman. During her promotion ceremony, she gave a very moving speech in which she thanked those who supported her and told them what they taught her and meant to her. What touched me the most was how authentic, real and vulnerable she was. In her words, “I said I wasn’t going to cry and then my daddy gives the opening prayer, so here I go.” She demonstrated courage, compassion and connection beautifully in her speech.

Military ceremonies are always very impactful to me because it’s an opportunity to see leaders be their true, authentic selves. They always get very emotional when thanking their families for their support. Many leaders believe that they should not show emotion and make themselves vulnerable, but that only makes them seem more human and real. In Brene Brown’s TED Talks [The Power of Vulnerability](#) and [Listening to Shame](#), she says that being vulnerable is what connects us to other people. “Connection is why we’re here. It’s what gives purpose and meaning to our lives. In order to feel connection, we must be seen and be vulnerable.” She also asked the audience if they believed that being vulnerable meant showing weakness, and the majority raised their hands. Then she asked when they see other people demonstrate vulnerability, if they view it as courageous, and again the majority of the audience raised their hands.

Isn’t it interesting that the very thing that we believe makes us weak, actually makes us appear courageous to others? It’s counter-intuitive, and for most leaders and people in general, it’s very scary. We don’t want to make ourselves vulnerable because then we could get hurt, but the irony is that people are less likely to hurt us when we are vulnerable. Instead, they are more likely to let down their walls and connect with us on human level.

When you are in a situation as a leader, parent, spouse, friend, etc. in which you don’t know what to say or do, just express what you are really feeling and experiencing to the other person. You can’t go wrong with telling the truth and being authentic and real. It seems like the hardest thing to do, yet it’s so simple.

“Most people believe vulnerability is weakness. But really vulnerability is courage. We must ask ourselves...are we willing to show up and be seen?” – Brene Brown

“Vulnerability is not about fear and grief and disappointment. It is the birthplace of everything we’re hungry for.” – Brene Brown

How to Strengthen Your Leadership Presence



In 2016, I led a table talk discussion on leadership presence at Booz Allen Hamilton, my former employer and client. This talk centered around what it takes to have a strong presence in order to “own the room.” Leadership presence is defined as “the ability to consistently and clearly articulate your value proposition while influencing and connecting with others,” according to Amy Jen Su and Muriel Maignan Wilkins in their book [*Own the Room: Discover Your Signature Voice to Master Your Leadership Presence*](#).

True leaders have a unique presence that is confident, authentic, and compelling – a “signature voice.” They leave a powerful impression on those around them.

Leaders with effective presence strike the right balance between demonstrating their value and uniqueness while connecting and aligning to others. In the coaching work I do with leaders, I help them find this balance and their signature voice either by strengthening their voice for self (*having a stronger voice at the table*), or dialing it down a notch or two (*expanding their perspective to see things from others’ points of view*). If your voice for self is over-powering, then you will tend to come across as aggressive and self-centered, having a “driving voice.” If your voice for self is not strong enough and you often defer to others, then you have more of a “supportive voice,” and you may not be viewed as an influential leader. If your voice for self and others are both weak, then you have a “passive voice” and people may disregard you all together.

The book [*Own the Room*](#) talks about compelling presence requiring simultaneous focus and alignment on three levels: mental (beliefs and assumptions), skill (communication ability) and physical (energy and body language). They call this the “**ACE**” model:

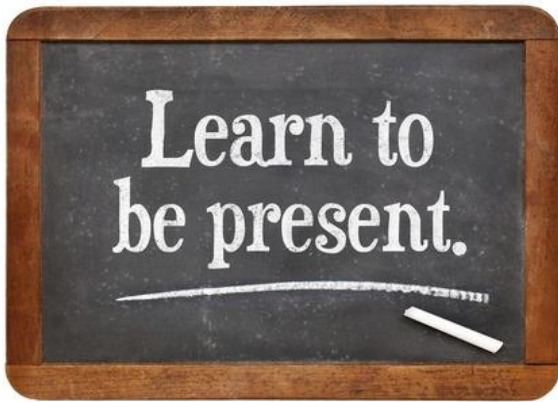
- **A** – The **assumptions** you make and the mind-set you bring to your interactions with others. The assumptions you hold forms your reality: your beliefs about yourself, about others, and about the situations that surround you.
- **C** – **Communication strategies** are the techniques and tools you use to engage, influence and inspire others by saying what you mean with confidence and impact.
- **E** – **Energy** is the physical conditioning that helps you manage the impact of your non-verbal cues and emotions on others.

Effective leadership presence is more than just appearing self-confident. It’s being authentic and ensuring that your thoughts, words, deeds and ways of being are all in alignment and sending a consistent message about the uniqueness you have to offer, while showing that you truly care about others. Being congruent and real are the most important components of presence.

“My presence speaks volumes before I say a word.” – Mos Def

“We convince by our presence.” – Walt Whitman

The Key to Increasing Engagement



In March 2016, I conducted a [workshop](#) on increasing employee engagement with two awesome groups of managers: one at Pratt & Miller Engineering and the other at the National Energy Technology Laboratory. According to Gallup's 2015 study, only 32% of U.S. workers are fully engaged at work, meaning they go above and beyond without being asked. In other words, 68% of U.S. workers are doing the bare minimum to remain employed and using only a small portion of their potential.

The biggest factor that impacts engagement is the type of relationship that employees have with their direct supervisor. Employees do more, perform better, and give more of themselves when they are emotionally committed, and this comes from believing they have a manager that cares about them, appreciates them, and supports their growth and development. The key element in developing this type of commitment is **EMPATHY**, according to the book [Bring Out the Best in Every Employee](#) by Don Brown and Bill Hawkins. Empathy is showing that you understand and care about another person's circumstances.

The key requirement for empathy is being **PRESENT**. We must show up, actively listen and give our full attention without being distracted by emails, texts, and calls on our smart phones. When we aren't fully present and listening to the person right in front of us, it sends a strong message that they are not very important to us, and we don't care about them as much as the message we are getting on our phone. It seems simple, yet we seem to have a very hard time being fully present with all of the distractions that we have around us.

Here are 10 ways to cultivate presence from *Bring Out the Best in Every Employee*:

1. **Activate your five senses.** Look for opportunities to engage your sense of smell, taste, touch, sight or hearing. Purposely engaging any one of your senses brings you into the present.
2. **Audit your continuous partial attention (CPA).** What is your temptation of choice when your mind wanders off from one subject to the next? Our distracters tend to be identifiable and consistent. If you can name it, you can tame it.
3. **Breathe one count in, two counts out.** Deep breathing is a high-value strategy in that it usually engages your senses in some way as well. It also provides an unintended time out for everyone – just a moment or two where the person doing the deep breathing won't be speaking.
4. **Condition your physical being.** Rest, diet, and exercise play more of a part in your ability to effectively interact with others than you might imagine. The less we care for ourselves, the less we are able to care for others.

5. **Dedicate time and attention to those you are with.** This means verbally, overtly, and obviously pledging the moment in time to them. Say to them, "I am trying to do better at paying attention to the people I am with." In dedicating time to someone, everyone wins.
6. **Disconnect from annoying technology.** Designate technology-free zones and technology-free times. Set some rules and follow them. If you care at all about being present, then it's not okay to text, email or surf the web while engaging in a conversation with someone.
7. **Narrow the scope of your intentions.** Research has shown that the number of tasks that we can handle at once, without degradation of effectiveness, is one. We can multitask, but with each additional item added, our performance goes down. Reduce the number of action items to cover, or at a bare minimum, tackle them one at a time.
8. **Reboot your RAM.** When you find yourself overloading on tasks or interaction, reboot. Perhaps put a conversation on hold. Agree to revisit it at a point in the future. Go for a short walk, get a cup of tea, take a few deep breaths – whatever it takes for you to reboot and start up again.
9. **Schedule regular, intentional, daily interaction.** Set aside time for interaction, even if it's just for 15 minutes. Much the way we look forward to a workout or a run, we begin to eagerly anticipate the interpersonal workout as well. Schedule one every day.
10. **Silence the auditory interruptions.** Your auditory interrupters may be the television at home, the radio in the car, the sound of the engines on the airliner. Take steps to find a short, quiet respite from the noise. Earplugs on the plane. Leaving the sound off on the TV. Driving in peace. Give yourself a few minutes of quiet every day. It's even more effective when you aren't forced to do it.

Being present is not only the key to increasing employee engagement and building better relationships both at work and at home, it's also the key to living a happier life. When we live in the present moment, we are more fully engaged. We are free from the worry of the future and regret from the past, and more able to fully enjoy what we are experiencing in the present moment.

"The psychological equivalent of air is to feel understood." – Dr. Steven R. Covey

"If you are not living this moment, you are not really living." – Eckhart Tolle

Why We Resist Change



I've conducted several [workshops](#) on managing change and transitions based upon the work of William Bridges. Nearly all organizations experience and implement significant changes on a regular basis. It's just a part of the world we live in today. Organizations must change and adapt in order to survive. However, this doesn't mean that they do it well, or that it's easy.

The biggest mistake I see organizations and leaders make when implementing change is a lack of effective communication. People really need to understand why the change is necessary and better than the current state in order to fully get on-board with it. There usually has to be some sort of burning platform for change that makes it more uncomfortable to stay where we're at than it is to move toward the change. Why? **Because change is hard. It takes energy, effort, and involves loss – both physically and psychologically.** Many leaders fail to recognize and deal with the losses that changes produce, and this is reason that many change initiatives are ineffective or fail.

According to Williams Bridges and Susan Bridges in [Managing Change and Transitions – Making the Most of Change](#), any time there is a change, there is an ending of something, and we experience a loss. In big organizational changes, there are significant losses that cause people stress, anxiety and even mourning. For example, when organizations undergo restructuring, people may experience a loss of security (what's certain and known), sense of direction (where they are headed), territory (work area or tasks), competence (being the expert in their current role or responsibilities) and relationships (familiar contact with co-workers, customers, or managers). It's not necessarily the changes themselves that people resist; it's the endings and losses. So how can leaders respond to these losses?

1. **Acknowledge the losses openly and sympathetically.** *"I know that you are in a new role that is unfamiliar to you and that you will be losing a sense of competence and certainty and even working with a team that you loved."*
2. **Show empathy by letting people express their frustration and grief, listening to them, and showing them that you care and understand about their situation.** *"How are you feeling about this? (Let them respond and then paraphrase what you heard them say.) So you feel a little overwhelmed and unsure about your new position? I can understand how you would feel that way. I would probably feel the same way if I were suddenly thrust into a new role. Remember that I am here whenever you need some guidance or just need to talk."*
3. **See what you can do to offset the losses.** *"As part of your new role, you will be given...(a better title, bigger office, more resources, etc.)"*

Remember that people want to be treated like human beings and feel understood. In any change, we must deal with the loss that is occurring before people can move forward.

"To my mind, empathy is in itself a healing agent...because it releases, it confirms, it brings even the most frightened person into the human race. If a person is understood, he or she belongs." – Carl Rogers

What Drives You: Significance or Contribution?



In Tony Robbins' book [Money Master the Game](#), he talks about the six drivers we all have as humans: 1) certainty/comfort; 2) variety; 3) significance (importance); 4) love and connection; 5) growth, and 6) contribution (giving to others). He says we get ourselves into trouble when significance becomes our main driver with money - buying things to look and feel important.

I believe anytime significance becomes our biggest driver in any aspect of our lives, we are in danger of losing who we are, living a life of emptiness, and jeopardizing our connection to others. This is especially true for people in positions of leadership whether they carry the title of leader, or simply have influence. They could be managers, teachers, pastors, coaches, trainers, doctors, politicians, or even entertainers. People can sense whether our actions are motivated by the need to make a contribution and help others, or the need to feel important and powerful.

Over a three-year period, I attended over 25 concerts and shows, most of them being very big name entertainers. I can honestly say that one artist stands out the most by far as being the most fun, entertaining, and full of energy of any I have ever seen. For a while, I couldn't quite figure out why, because this artist is not the most talented by any means. Now I understand that it's because this artist is currently driven more by contribution than significance, which may not have been the case in his early years. If you watch him perform, it is very clear that he is all about giving everything he's got to the audience to ensure they are thoroughly entertained and have an awesome experience. It's not about how good he looks or how perfect he sounds. Instead, it's about being real and connecting with the audience, and the audience can feel it. He also gives a considerable portion of the proceeds from his concerts to charity.

When was the last time you stopped to consider what drives your actions? Is it to fulfill the need for significance or the need for contribution? If we all valued contribution over significance, I think the world would be a much better place.

"Only those who have learned the power of sincere and selfless contribution experience life's deepest joy: true fulfillment." – Tony Robbins

"Life is not accumulation, it is about contribution." – Dr. Steven R. Covey

5 Lessons from Beauty and the Beast



In 2017, I saw the live-action version of [*Beauty and the Beast*](#), one of my Disney favorites. This time I watched it from a different perspective rather than simply viewing it as a love story. Here are the leadership and life lessons from this classic tale.

- 1) Narcissism will get you nowhere in winning the affection of those grounded in who they are. Gaston's egocentric self-centeredness was extremely off-putting and unattractive to Belle. She saw past his good looks and realized that he had no admirable qualities on the inside.
- 2) It's okay to be different and hold out for what you really want rather than just settling. Many of the best leaders were trailblazers who did not follow the crowd. Belle is a strong heroine in this story. She is courageous, surefooted, stands up for what she believes in and has deep compassion for others - qualities of a great leader.
- 3) Beauty really is from within - what we project from our hearts, minds, attitudes and in our treatment of others - rather than external appearances. The Beast transformed internally first, and this is what Belle saw and fell in love with before his physical form changed.
- 4) Authentic love, strong character and selflessness are being able to put someone else's values/needs/desires/well-being ahead of your own. Belle became a prisoner in order to save her father. The Beast set Belle free to help her father when she saw him being captured, even though the Beast might miss his chance to break the curse and become human again by doing so.
- 5) Love truly conquers all. Love is the most powerful emotion there is and can transform most any person or situation into someone/something better, more positive and hopeful. Love was the only way to break the curse and make them all human again.

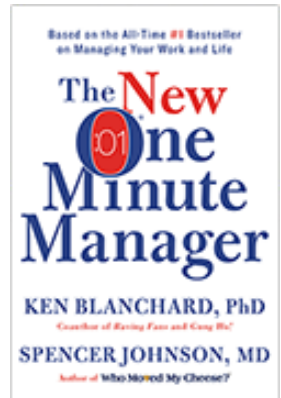
I hope that you see this story with new eyes and enjoy the remake of this wonderful classic with lessons that stand the test of time.

"She warned him not to be deceived by appearances, for beauty is found within." – Beauty and the Beast Narrator

"He's no monster, Gaston; you are!" – Belle

Essential Skills for 4 Core Conversations

In 2017, I facilitated multiple sessions of the Blanchard course [*First-Time Manager Essential Skills*](#) to several groups of engineers and technicians. This training course is based on the book [*The New One Minute Manager®*](#) by Ken Blanchard and Spencer Johnson and teaches the essential skills for the four core conversations that the most effective leaders hold with their employees to help them reach their full potential. These four core conversations are as follows:



1. **Goal Setting** – This conversation lets people know what they should be doing, what the goal is, and why it's important. The most powerful goals are clear (specific) and compelling (meaningful and motivating).
2. **Praise** – This conversation lets people know that they are on track with meeting the goal. The idea is to catch them doing something right so they will repeat it.
3. **Redirecting** – This conversation lets people know when they are off track, the impact, and how to get back on track so they can achieve the goal.
4. **Wrapping Up** – This conversation comes after the completion of a goal, task or project and lets people know what went well and what can be improved upon for next time. It's an opportunity to celebrate success and capture lessons learned.

The essential skills needed to hold these four core conversations successfully are:

- **Listen to Learn** – Actively listen with the intent of being influenced by being focused and fully present.
- **Inquire for Insight** – Ask open-ended questions to draw out ideas from the other person.
- **Tell Your Truth** – Be brave, honest and respectful in sharing relevant information to give feedback and help the other person move forward.
- **Express Confidence** – Highlight skills and successes and offer encouragement to build self-assurance and enthusiasm.

These four core conversations and essential skills are critical to successful performance management and keeping employees motivated and engaged. They are intended to be short, but impactful conversations. This training course offers templates and samples for planning each of these conversations and plenty of skills practice so participants gain experience and become more comfortable holding these conversations. [Please contact me if you would like more information.](#)

"The best minute I spend is the one I invest in people." – Ken Blanchard

"Help people reach their full potential. Catch them doing something right." – Ken Blanchard

Downsizing with Dignity



In 2014, one of my clients (with less than 20 employees) underwent a strategic refocus and restructure of their business, requiring the elimination of a position. Having been an employee in the corporate world for over 16 years and experiencing over a dozen restructures and downsizes in the organizations in which I worked, I have seen it done poorly over and over again. I could not be more proud of my client who had the courage and compassion to do it right. Here's what they did which is effective change management at its best:

1. They explained to the employee whose position was being eliminated the new direction of the business and the reason that the position was being eliminated.
2. They thanked this employee for his contribution and service to their business and offered him a severance package, a letter of recommendation, and other avenues to support him in his search for new employment.
3. They looked this employee in the eye and said how sorry they were about having to let him go and how difficult it was for them, demonstrating and feeling their own vulnerability. (I have rarely seen this important step done. Most people don't like to experience the discomfort of letting someone go, so they remain cold and distant as if it won't hurt as much if they dehumanize the situation. However, I suspect they end up feeling worse for handling it as a transaction rather than treating the employee as a human being. It also causes the employee to leave with a distaste and bad memories of the company and the people working there, feeling like nothing more than a number whose contributions didn't even matter.)
4. They gave the downsized employee the opportunity to say goodbye to his co-workers, and they had a small celebration to thank him for his contributions and to mark this "ending." (This step is also rarely done. Employees are often told to pack up their belongings while security watches and then escorts them out without ever having the opportunity to say goodbye. This strips employees who are "let go" of all dignity and creates a lot of distrust with the remaining employees who wonder when they will be next. Letting employees say goodbye gives everyone the opportunity to have closure and the ability to move on. Without it, employees left behind remain in limbo and their productivity does downhill.)
5. They met with the remaining employees and explained the new direction of the business and the reason that the position was being eliminated. They reassured them that this new direction would make their positions more secure and explained how. They also set in place new processes and procedures to mark this new direction and "new beginning." *(This step is often done in a superficial way, giving false reasons for the downsizing, and employees can see right through this. They always figure out the truth, so it's best to just be honest about the reasons, as my client did.)*

Going through all of these steps, although uncomfortable and time-consuming, ensured that the downsized employee left the company with dignity and felt as though the people working there cared enough to treat him with respect and as a human being. This employee will have good memories of working for this business and will have good things to say about it rather than bad-mouthing it to others. The remaining employees saw how transparent their leaders were in handling this situation and how well it was done, which builds trust and credibility in their eyes.

My client can move forward with their integrity intact because they were open and honest; therefore, no lies are required to cover anything up. I'm not sure why so many employers think this is the more difficult route. It does require a lot of courage, vulnerability and compassion, but in the end, it makes it so much easier for everyone involved to move forward and make a "new beginning."

"Courage is not living without fear. Courage is being scared to death and doing the right thing anyway." – Chae Richardson

"Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage. Truth and courage aren't always comfortable, but they're never weakness." – Brene Brown

"Wisdom, compassion, and courage are the three universally recognized moral qualities of men." – Confucius

Challenges are Opportunities



In 2014, another one of my clients had to make a tough and courageous decision: what to do about the recently hired COO who was using fear tactics to enforce accountability. The CEO assigned the COO with making the workforce more accountable for their results; however, the CEO was not clear about the boundaries and guidelines in carrying out this task. Therefore, the COO used an approach that was familiar and effective for him in his previous positions,

but entirely inappropriate for this organization's culture. Because the CEO had communicated the new direction and need for increased accountability to the workforce, employees assumed that their complaints about the COO would fall on deaf ears. The COO's intimidation and bullying methods continued for several weeks without the CEO's knowledge until one of the Directors finally told the CEO about the COO's behavior and its impact on employee morale.

Without a second thought, the CEO took swift action and promptly terminated the COO for violation of company values and mistreatment of employees. What's even more impressive is what the CEO did next to repair any damage the COO caused to workforce morale. The CEO held a meeting with the Directors and asked why they had not spoken up about the COO's behavior and the harm it was causing and apologized for any actions that may have made the CEO appear unapproachable. The CEO also made it clear that she needs to know the truth no matter how painful it may be to hear. Next, the CEO held a meeting with the entire workforce to communicate the termination of the COO and to reiterate the company values, with an emphasis on "respect" being the highest value that trumps all other company values. In this critically important meeting, the CEO communicated three things:

- 1) The COO was terminated because lack of respect and mistreatment of employees are not tolerated in this company.
- 2) The CEO cares deeply about the employees – they are not expendable as the COO had told them. Employees are in fact the company's most valuable assets.
- 3) The CEO wants to hear the truth even if it's bad news, and appropriate action will be taken without retaliation to employees.

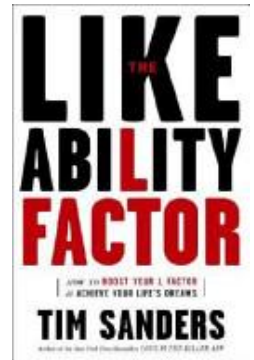
After the meeting, several employees thanked the CEO for restoring their belief and conviction in the company and in her as the leader. Upon reflection after this meeting, the CEO realized that instead of beating herself up for what had happened with the COO, it would be more productive to view this situation as an opportunity. It taught her that she wanted to do some things differently going forward, and it actually resulted in increased employee morale and loyalty because she handled a very difficult challenge with courage, integrity, and heart. I couldn't be more proud to call this CEO my client.

"The first time someone shows you who they are, believe them." – Dr. Maya Angelou

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." – Dr. Maya Angelou

Why Likeability is Critical for Success*

In today's work environment, the most critical element for individual success is not technical competence or intelligence, it's the ability to establish and utilize a network of relationships – emotional intelligence. We can no longer work independently and depend upon ourselves alone. We must work with and through others to create superior products, services and solutions. In order to develop and cultivate these relationships, people must be willing to work with us. Therefore, we must be considered "likeable" to others.



"Likeable people win life's popularity contests. The choices *you* make don't shape your life as much as the choices *other people* make about you. Much of your life is spent trying to get other people to pick you, whether for a job, a relationship, a friendship, or to win a contest. Have you been doing everything you can to influence other people's choices about you?"

- Likeable people bring out the best in others.
- Likeable people get recognized.
- Likeable people outperform.
- Likeable people overcome life's challenges.
- Likeable people enjoy better health.

The Four Elements of Likeability (in order of sequence):

1. **Friendliness** – your ability to communicate liking and openness to others. Friendliness creates a positive emotional experience and a positive physical reaction. Whereas unfriendliness increases levels of cortisol prompting the symptoms of stress. When you are friendly, others want to be with you and they want you to succeed.
2. **Relevance** – your capacity to connect with others' interests, wants, and needs. Someone must also be relevant to your life if your relationship is to pass through the next stoplight. Relevance is strongest when a personal value proposition that you offer connects with another person's wants and needs.
3. **Empathy** – your ability to recognize, acknowledge, and experience other people's feelings. Once you've decided that another person is friendly and relevant, you begin to wonder, consciously or unconsciously, if that person understands you. If you are empathetic to others, you are projecting yourself into their hearts, as though you are sensing what it's like to be in their shoes.
4. **Realness** – the integrity that stands behind your likeability and guarantees its authenticity. You can't have a high Likeability-factor unless you possess realness. A real person is genuine, true and authentic. Realness is something you feel when you are in its presence.

*Source: [The Likeability Factor](#) by Tim Sanders

"The end result of kindness is that it draws people to you." – Anita Roddick,
Founder and CEO, The Body Shop

Are You Too High Maintenance?



According to the book, [*The Likeability Factor*](#) by Tim Sanders, we all go through a 3-step process whenever we make choices:

- 1) **Listen** – We listen to something out of the field of opportunities.
- 2) **Believe** – We either believe or do not believe what we have heard.
- 3) **Value** – We place a value on what we have heard.

At the end of this choice process, people will add up what you have to offer and place a value on you. Then based on your value, people will decide whether or not to choose your proposition. As people try to resolve challenges and achieve their goals, they tend to select the people and propositions that add the most value to their lives. It can be summed up by this simple equation:

Your Personal Value to Others = What You Offer minus What You Require

People assign **functional**, **emotional** and **social** costs and benefits to all of their options. Functional value is your ability to do something well. A functional cost would be how much support you require as a friend. Emotional value is your ability to make others feel good. Emotional cost would be making others feel stupid, insecure, or anxious. Social value is how you will reflect on those who choose you. If you tend to complain a lot, or fail to deliver on promises, you may be viewed as more of a liability than an asset.

The bottom line is that in order to be influential, we must add value to others. That value only comes from ensuring that what we offer is consistently more than what we require. Being a high maintenance boss, employee, friend, spouse, sibling, parent, etc. increases our cost to others and decreases our value over time. It truly is better to give than to receive. What we give out will always come back to us.

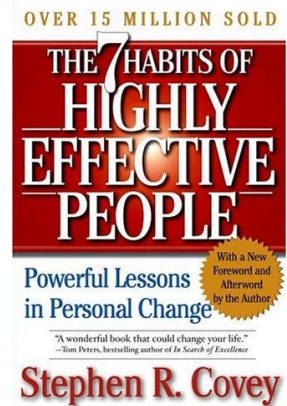
"The key to successful leadership today is influence, not authority." – Ken Blanchard

"I'm a true believer in karma. You get what you give, whether it's bad or good." – Sandra Bullock

Is Your Emotional Bank Account Overdrawn?*

To honor Dr. Stephen R. Covey's memory, this newsletter focuses on his concept of the "Emotional Bank Account" that plays out in all of our lives and relationships each and every day. He truly left a legacy with his many leadership principles that will stand the test of time.

The Emotional Bank Account is a metaphor for the amount of trust that exists in relationships – both personal and professional. Deposits build and repair trust. Withdrawals break down and lessen trust. Everyone is an accountant. We track the deposits and withdrawals that others make with us, and they do the same with us.



Examples of Deposits:

- Seeking first to understand
- Showing kindness, courtesy, and respect
- Keeping promises and commitments
- Being loyal to the absent
- Setting clear expectations
- Apologizing when you make a withdrawal
- Giving feedback – using "I messages" (example: "I was embarrassed by your comment.")
- Forgiving others
- Showing empathy

Examples of Withdrawals:

- Assuming you understand
- Showing unkindness, discourtesy, or disrespect (incivility)
- Breaking promises or commitments
- Being disloyal or bad-mouthing others
- Creating unclear expectations
- Being proud or arrogant
- Giving no feedback or evaluating a person's character – using "you messages" (Example: "You are inconsiderate.")
- Holding grudges
- Showing that you don't understand, or worse, that you don't care

Our accounts with the people we interact with on a regular basis require constant investment. Building and repairing relationships takes time and effort. There are sometimes automatic withdrawals in our daily interactions with others or in their perceptions of us that we aren't even aware of.

The cost of withdrawals is very high and can lead to devastating results:

- Team members become passive aggressive (example: forget to pass on messages or neglect to tell you about important meetings)
- Employees quit their jobs or become ROAD employees (retired on active duty)
- Teenagers stop communicating with their parents

- Friendships are estranged
- Marriages end in divorce

That's why it's so important to make regular deposits with those we care about most – family, friends, team members, etc. If we ensure that our accounts with others are consistently at a surplus, then we avoid being overdrawn in those relationships, and they will be there for us when we need them.

For a strong Emotional Bank Account with others:

- Remember the 5:1 rule: It may take five deposits to make up for one withdrawal.
- Take the time to understand the other person's "currency." What constitutes a deposit to one person may be a withdrawal to another (example: public awards and recognition).
- Practice being sincere and consistent in your deposits. Small deposits over time build large account balances.

*Source: [*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*](#) by Dr. Stephen R. Covey

"We first make our habits, then our habits make us." – Anonymous

"The only way to build trust professionally or personally is by being trustworthy."
– Gerard Arpey, CEO, American Airlines

"If you want to retain those who are present, be loyal to those who are absent."
– Dr. Stephen R. Covey

Words are Gifts



During my final [Winning Futures](#) celebration at Warren Mott High School, we presented the students with awards about their positive qualities and how they have flourished during the program. Winning Futures impresses upon the mentors throughout the program that words are gifts and are more meaningful to the students than any material items we could give them. This couldn't be more true. The students beamed with pride while they were given their awards, and some even had tears in their eyes.

Vice President and Program Facilitator, Laurie Tarter also presented each mentor with a word that represents who they are as a person and explained why she assigned that word to them. Lastly, the students were given the opportunity to say a few words about what the program and their mentors have meant to them. What the students said to the group was absolutely beautiful and left all of the mentors without any doubt that we had made a positive impact in their lives. As a mentor, there is no greater gift than this. This is one of the few opportunities I have experienced where people get to hear good things about themselves and the impact they have had on others. Most of the time, these types of praises are said at funerals after it's too late for people to hear it.

In March of 2014, I threw a "Gratitude and New Beginning" celebration not only to mark to the next phase of my life after my divorce, but also to show gratitude to the people who provided me such tremendous support and kindness during the most difficult time in my life. I said a few words about each attendee in a speech and got very positive feedback from many people about what it meant to be acknowledged. Many of us assume that the people in our lives know what they mean to us and when they are doing a good job. Whether they know it or not, it's still nice to hear it.

Actions may speak louder than words, but words have a very powerful impact. If it's been a while since you've told your family members, friends, or co-workers/employees the impact they have had on you or what they mean to you, take some time now to give them the gift of your words either verbally or in a card or email. We never know what tomorrow holds, so don't wait until it's too late.

"Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless." – Mother Theresa

"Our words have creative power. Whenever we speak something, either good or bad, we give life to what we are saying." – Joel Osteen

Who Will You Choose to Be?



A while back, someone very close to me called to get my opinion on a very hurtful email she received from a friend that she had been working for which basically said that she was fired. The email made several untrue accusations and was very mean-spirited. When asked how to respond to this email, I shared the following questions that I ask myself before giving a knee-jerk response:

1. **What is the outcome I am looking for?** *(Do I want to prove that I am right? Am I looking for an apology? Do I want to end/preserve the relationship?)*
2. **Will my chosen response move me toward or away from my desired outcome?** *(Ultimately, I can't control the other person's response or the outcome I will get. The only thing I can control is my response.)*
3. **Will I feel better or worse after I provide my chosen response?** *(I must choose a response that is in integrity with who I am and that I feel good about. When I am out of integrity with myself, I am betraying myself and that will erode my self-esteem.)*
4. **Who do I choose to be?** *(This person's actions show who she is as a person. How I respond back says who I am as a person.)*

Given all of this, the most important thing to consider in choosing an appropriate response is how you will feel about yourself after you respond, not what the other person will do as a result of your response. Focusing on the other person is a mistake. It's much more important to focus on ourselves. I am the only person that I have control over, and I have to be able to look myself in the mirror and live with myself. I choose to be a person that I am proud to be.

"This above all; to thine own self be true." – William Shakespeare

"If evil be spoken of you and it be true, correct yourself, if it be a lie, laugh at it." – Epictetus

Asking vs. Telling Will Get You Farther



A common theme that keeps coming up with my clients and in my work as a [PeerSpectives®](#) facilitator is the power of asking instead of telling. This is the foundation of coaching and was also the basis of the *Advanced Facilitator Training* that I attended in 2015 at the Edward Lowe Foundation.

When we tell others what we think they should do, they shut down because we are putting ourselves in a position of higher status. We are sending the message that we know more or know better than they do. This makes people defensive and resistant to what we are telling them. People don't like to be told what to do whether they are employees, clients, friends, co-workers, family members, or teenagers.

A more effective technique is to ask questions instead of telling. Ask the other person what they think they should do, or what their options are, or what the impacts of each choice might be. Be curious and ask clarifying questions until you really understand what their issue is. Then you can ask for their permission to share a similar experience you have had and what you did that might be helpful to them, without ever saying "This is what I think you should do..." This is the process used in the [PeerSpectives® roundtable system](#). Participants are given the opportunity to ask questions about a topic that is presented and then share their experiences, but no one is allowed to give advice. This creates an open environment of equals where people feel empowered to make their own decisions based upon ideas they get from reflecting on good questions and hearing about others' experiences.

If you find yourself wondering why your employees or family members don't seem motivated to do what you want them to do, ask yourself if you are asking them the right questions instead of telling them what to do. Asking will take you a lot farther in the relationship than telling, and will get better results in the end.

"Telling puts the other person down." – Edgar Schein

"I never learn anything by talking. I only learn things when I ask questions" – Lou Holtz

The Key Element to Managing Conflict Effectively



Managing conflict continues to be a hot topic with several of my clients. Conflict is defined as situations in which the concerns of two people appear to be incompatible according to the [Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument™](#) (TKI). Conflict isn't necessarily bad, but it is an inevitable and sometimes stressful part of life, both at work and at home. As long as we have to interact with other people, we will have conflict because we all have different thoughts, opinions, needs, concerns and desires.

For many people, the first instinct when faced with a conflict at work or home is to defend themselves by fighting back verbally in attempt to make themselves right and the other person wrong. (*Examples: "That's not what I said." or "You took that the wrong way."*) This actually makes the conflict worse by escalating it. When we fight back and defend ourselves, the other person must then fight back harder in order to defend themselves, and the conflict just heightens and continues.

Instead, the best thing to do when someone initiates a conflict is to just listen to what they are saying and paraphrase back what you heard them say and how you think they feel. (*Example: "So what you are saying is that because I came home 45 minutes late you had to miss your appointment and you are really frustrated about that?"*) This is Dr. Stephen Covey's concept of seeking first to understand. It's difficult to do without some practice, but it will diffuse the conflict, reduce strong emotions, and make it easier to deal with the real issue.

"Peace is not absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means." – Ronald Reagan

"Where all think alike, no one thinks very much." – Walter Lippmann

If it is simply a topic issue, then it can be resolved by understanding what the other person's real needs, concerns or desires are and finding a solution that will best meet both of your needs. If it is a relationship issue, then it may require much more effort. It may be necessary to apologize or to engage in behavior that will put deposits into the other person's "emotional bank account," a term coined by Dr. Stephen Covey. The key again here is to really understand the other person's needs, concerns or desires and determine if you are willing to meet them in order to preserve the relationship.

It may not be easy to sift out whether it is just a topic issue or if there is really an underlying relationship issue unless you truly listen and seek to understand what the other person is experiencing and feeling by paraphrasing what you have heard and asking clarifying questions. In relationships that matter to you, ask yourself, "Is more important to be right or to preserve the relationship?"

"The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't being said. The art of reading between the lines is a life-long quest of the wise." – Shannon L. Alder

Healthy vs. Destructive Conflict

Right after the election in November 2016, I conducted a two-day conflict management [workshop](#) with a group of U.S. Army government civilian and military leaders. (Talk about timing!) We discussed the different conflict modes according to the [Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument™](#) (TKI): competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding and accommodating. We also talked about the costs and benefits of each mode and how each mode is appropriate in certain situations. However, it can be problematic if we are attached to one particular mode and use it in all situations. Flexibility is the key.



We also talked about how conflict within a team is good when it's healthy conflict where people are debating ideas, concepts and solutions to problems. Conflict is destructive when it is a personal, mean-spirited attack, becomes personality-focused, or involves interpersonal politics. Teams that avoid productive conflict to prevent hurt feelings actually do more damage by encouraging dangerous tension resulting in covert personal attacks, which are far more toxic than any open, heated debate over issues according to Patrick Lencioni author of the [Five Dysfunctions of a Team](#).

I also shared Patrick Lencioni's conflict resolution model, which shows different obstacles that get in the way of resolving a conflict, the most difficult ones being those related to individual values, styles, experiences, etc. The model also illustrates how conflict happens most often when emphasis is placed on our differences. When we focus on what we have in common rather than our differences, relationships run more smoothly and conflict is minimized. As Dr. Rick Brinkman and Dr. Rick Kirschner authors of [Dealing With People You Can't Stand](#) brilliantly stated, **"United we stand, divided we can't stand each other."** My hope is that we can come together as a nation because we are far stronger united than we are divided.

"Peace is not absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means." – Ronald Reagan

"When there is trust, conflict becomes nothing but the pursuit of truth, an attempt to find the best possible answer." – Patrick Lencioni

5 Tips for Improving Relationships at Work and at Home

Effective relationships at work and at home are the key to a happy and fulfilling career and life. However, this seems to be one of the biggest challenges for many people. I listen to many leaders talk about the issues they experience regularly in dealing with people at work and family members. Here are 5 tips for improving these important relationships.



- 1) **Focus on the positive** – Many of us tend to dwell on the negative aspects of our interactions with others and others' negative qualities – the things that get under our skin – rather than the positive aspects. We can't change other people, so it's better to focus on what we like about other people and their strengths rather than zero in on the negative qualities that we don't like. What we focus on expands, so it's better to focus on the positive.
- 2) **Show appreciation and gratitude** – Sometimes we take the positive for granted and assume that others know that we appreciate them. Whether they know it or not, it's nice to hear it. We need to continually show others appreciation and gratitude for their positive qualities and what they bring to the team, relationship, etc. if we want them to continue to strengthen and demonstrate these positive qualities and behaviors.
- 3) **Ask for what you need** – We can't assume that others know what we expect from them, and we can't get upset when they don't give us what we want if we didn't ask for it. We sometimes assume that other people who know us well can read our minds and automatically know what we want and expect. This is not the case. We must communicate our wants and needs in order for other people to meet them.
- 4) **Give effective feedback** – When others do something that we like or don't like, we need to communicate this in order to get the type of behavior that we want in the future. When others do something that we like, we need to say, "Thank you" and let them know the impact of their behavior. Similarly, when others do something that we don't like, we need to let them know the impact and ask for what we would like instead in the future and get their agreement on it.
- 5) **Ask for feedback** – Many times we are so focused on what we want from others that we don't give much thought to what they may need from us. It's important to take time to ask others what they need from us and how we can be a better boss, spouse, parent, friend, sibling, etc.

We can't control or change others, but we can influence the quality of our relationships by engaging in these behaviors. By following these tips, others will see positive changes in us, and may in turn positively alter their behavior in response to us. If nothing else, we will be viewed in a more positive light by others.

"You must be the change you wish to see in the world." – Mahatma Gandhi

"Be thankful for what you have; you'll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don't have, you will never, ever have enough." – Oprah Winfrey

Do Nice People Finish Last or Best?



In the business world, does it pay to lift people up or hold people down? [Christine Porath presented a TED talk](#) on this topic, which I will summarize in this newsletter. I have witnessed managers being rewarded for holding people down by being promoted or given greater responsibility. However, research from the Center for Creative Leadership has shown that the number one reason for executive failure is an abrasive or bullying style. There will always be people who succeed in spite of incivility, but most end up sabotaging their success. This often happens during a time of crisis when they need something and others won't help them.

Incivility is defined as rudeness and disrespect (examples: mocking, belittling, texting while someone is talking, etc.) and is extremely costly to organizations. When people feel disrespected, it causes a lot of stress and negative emotions. Their motivation, performance, and commitment begin to decline. One study found that of those treated badly on the job, 66% cut back their efforts, 80% missed work, and 12% left their job. Another study showed that of those who observed others being treated badly, 25% performed worse and 45% had fewer ideas. In one example, a medical team administered an incorrect dosage of medication to their patient right after a doctor shouted at them. This resulted in that patient's death because the team lacked the attention to read what was right in front of them on the chart. Studies have shown that medical teams exposed to rudeness perform worse in all procedures because they stop sharing information and stop seeking help from team mates. This is true in all industries, not just in medicine.

If the costs are so high, then why do we see so much incivility in the workplace? Two reasons: 1) stress – people feel overwhelmed; and therefore, have shorter fuses and 2) people believe that nice guys finish last, which is a myth. In reality, those viewed as civil are twice as likely to be viewed as leaders, and they perform significantly better (13% higher performance).

When you are civil and lift people up, you are viewed as warm/friendly and competent/smart. In addition, what employees want most from their leaders is **RESPECT**. Being treated with respect is more important than useful feedback, recognition and appreciation, and opportunities for learning. This doesn't mean that you can't disagree or give constructive feedback, but it does mean doing it respectfully. People who feel respected are healthier, more focused, more likely to stay with their organization, and more engaged in their work.

Bottom line: incivility hurts everyone. While civility, makes you and others more effective and more successful. It doesn't take a lot of effort to choose kindness over incivility. Small things make a big impact. Smiling at others, saying thank you, sharing credit, listening attentively (putting the Smart phone away), asking sincere questions, and acknowledging others are great ways to demonstrate respect and lift people up.

"Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see." – Mark Twain

How to Be an Asset, Not a Liability

Incivility in the workplace is costly to the recipients, the offenders, and their organizations. **STRESS** is the main cause of incivility. It makes us have shorter fuses and react harshly to others, especially when we are overwhelmed or feel verbally attacked. However, when we do this, it hurts us just as much as the other person. According to scientific research, the negative emotions we experience when under stress actually change our blood chemistry and cause disease. During an outburst, we are viewed negatively in the eyes of the other person and anyone who witnessed our behavior. Unfortunately, in the business world, what people think and say about us impact us more than the results we deliver. If we are perceived as aggressive and hot-headed by others, that can derail our careers.



Here are 10 steps for controlling emotions and reactions when feeling verbally attacked:

1. Instead of defending, arguing, or blaming... STOP and take a few deep breaths.
2. Remind yourself that it's NOT personal.
3. Actively listen to understand what the person meant by the comment.
4. Paraphrase what you think the other person is saying. (*"You are angry about the comments I made in the meeting."*)
5. Or ask for clarification. (*"Say more about that."* or *"What do you mean by...?"*)
6. Look for the hidden need. What does this person really want? (*"What is important to you about this? Help me understand what you need."*)
7. Offer options to meet the need or resolve the issue.
8. Come to an agreement.
9. Summarize actions to be taken.
10. Take a break. Go take a short walk to discharge your stress.

Jack Canfield's equation **E (Environment) + R (Response) = O (Outcome)** says that if we want a different outcome, and we can't change the environment (the situation or the other person), the only variable we can change in this equation is our response. Many people spend a lot of time and energy trying to change other people and getting frustrated about situations they can't control. The only thing **we can control** in any situation is ourselves – **our thoughts, beliefs, feelings and actions**. By changing our response, we get a different outcome as a result.

In order to be an asset and not a liability to others, we must be mindful of our emotions and carefully choose our responses. We are constantly either making deposits or withdrawals in other people's emotional bank accounts (*a term coined by Dr. Stephen Covey*). We want to be at a surplus with others, and not at a deficit because people will always make it even in the end. (*They will get even with us.*) Give people reasons to help you, not hurt you. That means being the kind of co-worker, boss, parent, spouse, or friend that you want to have. Bottom line: just **BE KIND**.

"Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible." – Dalai Lama

Choose to Be Kind Over Being Right

The movie [Wonder](#) is about the difficulties a boy with facial deformities encounters as he enters public school for the first time in fifth grade, after being home schooled by his mother up until this point. On a daily basis, Auggie deals with humiliation in the form of stares, whispers, verbal and physical abuse, simply because he looks different. This story is both heart-wrenching and beautiful at the same time, with many life lessons and a happy ending. (It's really a great movie!)



The theme throughout is to choose kindness because we don't know the personal struggles that others are going through. Although Auggie's struggles are more severe than the average kid, this movie shows the perspectives and hardships of some of the other characters in the movie – each fighting their own battle.

I believe that "wonders" like Auggie are opportunities for us to learn who we are and who we choose to be by our responses to them. Do we choose to be kind or to hurt? Hurt people hurt others; loved people love others. With so much violence and bullying occurring in our society today, it tells me that a lot of people are hurting. It's time for more kindness. Despite our struggles, how we may feel, or how we may be treated by others, we always have the ability to choose our response and to be kind.

My wish is for this to be a year of renewed hope, unity, acceptance and kindness. May we all choose kindness even during our most difficult struggles, and may we shine light where there is darkness. May we all make this our best year yet by giving out what we all want to receive back – acceptance and kindness.

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." – Dr. Maya Angelou

"Choose being kind over being right and you'll be right every time." – Richard Carlson

Handling a Boss that's a Bully

A while back, a good friend called me in distress because her new boss had just humiliated her in a meeting in front of her employees. She described the pattern of him demeaning and putting her down in front of other people over the course of a few weeks. She could no longer write it off as "he's just having a bad day," and she couldn't tolerate it anymore because it was starting to affect her motivation and performance. Not only that, but the longer she put up with it, the worse she felt about herself.



I was totally shocked by her boss's behavior toward her because she is a former employee of mine from a previous job, and she is one of the most intelligent, high-performing, and hard-working people I know. I told her that he is a bully, and we talked a bit about how this was affecting her, how she felt about it, who she is as a person, and what she could do that would preserve her integrity with herself.

She decided her best option was to address it with her boss head on, and if that didn't work, she would go to her boss's boss. So we prepared for the conversation using the **Situation – Behavior – Impact – Request** (SBIR) feedback model from the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) that I use with my clients.

Here's what she did:

1. She scheduled a meeting with her boss a couple of days away to give herself time to cool down and gather her thoughts about what she wanted to say.
2. She met with him privately and told him specifically what the situation was (in the project team meeting), what he did (the specific demeaning comments), the impact it had on her (embarrassed and discredited her in front of her team) and her request going forward (respectfully disagree; make it about the issue, not a personal attack; criticize in private, not in front of others).
3. She also took it a step further in assertiveness since he had been so aggressive previously and told him that what he said and how he treated her was disrespectful and unacceptable to her. She expressed that she treats everyone with courtesy and respect and she expects to receive the same treatment – *very brave on her part!*

To her surprise, they ended up having a good conversation about moving the project forward and the experiences she brings to the team, and he thanked her for bringing all of this to his attention. He was much less confrontational than she expected in this one-on-one dialogue. I suspect either because he didn't realize the negative impact of his behavior or because he was shocked that she had the guts to call him on it. Many people who behave this way have been getting away with it for years, and in his case, rewarded for it through promotions to leadership positions. Time will tell if he actually changes his behavior, but this was a victory for her regardless. By standing up for herself, she felt more empowered because she did

something that she was afraid to do, demonstrating and experiencing tremendous courage, and because she subconsciously sent the message to herself that she is worth fighting for.

In my experience, unless her boss's boss addresses his bullying behavior, it will continue. He will move on to other victims if the organization sends the message that it's acceptable behavior simply by doing nothing about it and allowing it to continue. Although, I predict that he will no longer bully my friend because she established a boundary by making it clear that it is not acceptable and that she will not tolerate it.

Bullies tend to take the path of least resistance. It takes less effort to move on to easier targets than to bully someone who's going to put up a respectful fight. **People learn how to treat us by how we allow ourselves to be treated.** I am so proud of my friend for having the courage to teach her boss how she expects to be treated in a constructive and transparent way, having compassion both for herself and her boss. This is only one of her many brave acts that I have witnessed since I've known her, and I'm honored to call her my friend.

"Worthiness is my birthright." — Brene Brown

"Show me how big your brave is. Say what you wanna say and let the words fall out. Honestly I wanna see you be brave." – Sara Bareilles – [Brave](#)

Holding Tough Conversations – Part 1



A common theme that regularly comes up with my clients is around holding tough conversations. Whether they are with employees, family members, a significant other, or friends, most of us find tough conversations quite uncomfortable for a variety of reasons. Often times we don't know exactly what to say, how to start the conversation, or when it is most appropriate to hold the conversation. In addition, we usually make up stories about what will happen when we talk to the other person. We may imagine that he or she will get angry or defensive, file a

complaint, quit their job, end the relationship, or simply not like us anymore. These things rarely happen when people utilize some simple steps when holding these types of conversations.

This newsletter focuses on the most fundamental step, which is deciding whether or not to hold the conversation. We often hope that the issue or problem will just go away on its own without having to address it with the other person. Sometimes it does go away by itself, but more often than not the problem doesn't get better with time. The very first question to ask yourself is what will happen if this issue continues and is not resolved? If the consequences to you, your company, your employees, your family, your friends, or someone else are severe, then it should be pretty clear that the issue must be addressed.

Here is a series of questions that you can ask yourself to help determine the pros and cons of holding the tough conversation and whether the consequences of delaying are more costly than taking the plunge and addressing the issue head on.

- **What will happen if you have this conversation now?**
- **What will happen if you don't have this conversation now and the issue continues?**
- **What won't happen if you have this conversation now?**
- **What won't happen if you don't have this conversation now and the issue continues?**

"The only way to get rid of the fear of doing something is to go out and do it." – Susan Jeffers, Ph.D. – [Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway](#)

"Pushing through fear is less frightening than living with the underlying fear that comes from a feeling of helplessness." – Susan Jeffers, Ph.D. – [Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway](#)

Holding Tough Conversations – Part 2



The most fundamental step for holding tough conversations is deciding whether or not to have the conversation in the first place. This can be determined by asking "*what will happen if this issue continues and is not resolved?*" If the consequences are severe, then it's time to start preparing for holding a tough conversation.

The next step is to identify your intent and desired results. What is your purpose for having this conversation? Is it to improve the relationship, improve performance, stop an unwanted

behavior, etc.? The purpose should never be to blame or shame another person, as that usually backfires and results in damaging (or further damaging) the relationship. If the intent is to be helpful, then both parties should walk away with the relationship intact or in a better state than before they engaged in the tough conversation. What do you hope to accomplish by holding this dialogue? In other words, what do you specifically want to be different as a result of this conversation – what will the other person be doing or not doing as a result?

We tend to get what we expect. Therefore, by being clear on your intent and desired results, you set yourself up for a greater chance of success, and you will be better prepared for what to say when you actually have the tough conversation.

"We judge ourselves by our intentions and others by their behavior." – Stephen M.R. Covey – [*The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything*](#)

"Begin with the end in mind." – Dr. Stephen R. Covey

Holding Tough Conversations – Part 3



Step 2 for holding tough conversations is to identify your intent and desired results. Is your purpose to improve the relationship, improve performance, stop an unwanted behavior, etc.?

Step 3 involves preparing and writing down what you will actually say during this conversation. This can be broken down into three parts:

- A. Be prepared to share your intent that you identified in Step 2 with the other person.
- B. Use the **Situation – Behavior – Impact – Request** (SBIR) feedback model from the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) to give feedback to the other person about the specific troublesome **Situation**, his/her specific **Behavior** that is causing the issue for you, the **Impact** that his/her behavior is having on you, the team or another individual, and your **Request** for what you would like this person to do differently in the future.
- C. Invite the other person to respond by saying, "Help me understand what's going on from your perspective."

"One important key to success is self-confidence. An important key to self-confidence is preparation." – Arthur Ashe

"We all need people who will give us feedback. That's how we improve." – Bill Gates

Holding Tough Conversations – Part 4



Step 3 for holding tough conversations involves preparing and writing down what you will actually say during this conversation.

Step 4 involves getting grounded before holding the conversation once you have scheduled/selected a time to have it. This is one of the most important steps in the process because how we show up to others has a big impact on how they will respond to us and ultimately the results we will get.

There are a few ways you can ground yourself a few minutes beforehand so you have a calm and centered presence going into the dialogue:

- Use square breathing which involves breathing in for four counts, holding it for four counts, breathing out for four counts, holding it for four counts and repeating this for a couple of minutes. This lowers your heart rate and offsets the stress response related to anxiety.
- Use positive affirmations such as *"I choose to easily and confidently handle anything that comes my way"* or *"I choose to remain centered and balanced regardless of how others respond to me."* Having negative self-talk only serves to increase your anxiety. We also tend to bring to ourselves what we expect to get, so expect positive results to increase your chances of a positive outcome.
- Visual a positive outcome. See yourself having a successful conversation that results in a positive conclusion for you and the other person and strengthens your relationship. This is another way to help you feel more relaxed and centered.

"When adversity strikes, that's when you have to be the most calm. Take a step back, stay strong, stay grounded and press on." – LL Cool J

"Presence is more than just being there." – Malcolm Forbes

Holding Tough Conversations – Part 5

Step 4 for holding tough conversations involves one of the most important steps in the process: getting grounded a few minutes before holding the conversation, so you have a calm and centered presence going into the dialogue.

Once you hold the actual conversation using what you prepared in Step 3, it's important to clarify and come to an agreement about what each of you will do going forward.

You can do this by asking the following questions:

- ***"What are you willing to do?"***
- ***"By when?"***
- ***"What do you need from me?" or "What do you need me to do?"***

Be sure that both of you are clear about what each of you will do and agree to it. Then determine a date to have a follow up conversation to give feedback on whether or not the agreement is being upheld. The follow up is critical. Agreements mean nothing if they are not upheld and there is no further dialogue about it.

When you hold the follow up conversation, mention specific examples of when the agreement was upheld or not upheld. If it's being upheld, thank the other person for following through on the commitment. If it's not being upheld, ask the other person what's preventing him/her from following through on the commitment, and then renegotiate if necessary by asking the other person what he/she is willing to commit to (using the questions listed above). Clarify the new agreement and set another date for a follow up conversation.

If you have adequately prepared what you plan to say in Step 3 by writing it down and rehearsing it a few times, the conversation will be much easier when it comes time to have it. **Planning, preparation, and presence** are the key ingredients for successfully holding tough conversations.



"Failing to plan is planning to fail." – Alan Lakein

"Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now."
– Alan Lakein

Why Won't the Other Person Take Initiative?

I once had a [coaching](#) client tell me that he just can't understand why one of his employees won't take the initiative to follow through on tasks. You could fill in the blank with "*Why won't my [employees/kids/spouse, etc.] take initiative?*" and the answer will still be the same. There are a few things to consider if you are experiencing this situation at work or at home.



1. Have you clearly explained your expectations (*what you expect them to do, by when and what a good job looks like*) and gotten confirmation that they understand and agree to do it?
2. Have you made it clear that you would like them to come to you for help or questions about completing the task?
3. What has your response been when they have come to you for help or questions? (*Did you make them feel stupid or seem as if they were bothering you?*)
4. What has been your response when they took the initiative to do something on their own? (*Did you tell them they shouldn't have done that or that they didn't do it right?*)
5. Have you asked them about their seemingly lack of initiative? (*"You didn't follow through on completing the [task], help me understand what that's about. Is there something you need from me in order to be able to complete it?"*)

We can make assumptions about others' behavior, but we will never know what's really going on with them unless we ask in a non-threatening way that doesn't make them feel defensive. Often times, we have contributed to their behavior by our responses to their actions. Before getting frustrated by others' lack of initiative, take a look at how you are responding/treating them by using the questions above. We can't control others' behavior, but we can certainly control our own behavior and how we treat others, which impact and influence the responses we get from them.

"When you are offended at any man's fault, turn to yourself and study your own failings. Then you will forget your anger." – Epictetus

"Men are disturbed not by things, but by the view which they take of them." – Epictetus

Handling the Sting of Harsh Feedback



A while back, someone very close to me received some rather harsh feedback from a long-time friend, and she asked me what to do about it. When asked why she had been distant and seemingly avoidant over the past two years, her friend told her that she is an uncaring, self-centered person who doesn't listen. She then provided some examples to illustrate her point.

It's a shame her friend waited so long to give her this feedback, denying her the opportunity to change her behavior and improve their relationship. Getting feedback is an opportunity to learn how we are perceived by others. Most of us are well-intentioned and do not realize how we come across to others. Unfortunately we often do not communicate

our intentions. Therefore we are judged by our behaviors (what other people see) and not by our intentions, which are kept to ourselves. Interestingly, *"We judge ourselves by our intentions and others by their behaviors,"* as Dr. Stephen M.R. Covey has stated.

Here's what I suggested to her about what to do with the feedback:

- 1) **Separate the behaviors** (making the conversation all about her, doing more talking than listening, etc.) **from the judgments** about the behaviors (being an uncaring and self-centered person).
- 2) **Focus on changing the behaviors.** You can work on changing and improving your behavior. Your own behavior is something that you can control.
- 3) **Ignore the judgments about the behaviors.** The judgments are hurtful and not helpful. You can't change other people's assessments and opinions, so don't bother trying.

If you receive harsh feedback given in the form of judgments (*you are uncaring & self-centered*), here's what you can do in the moment: ask, *"What behaviors have I demonstrated that cause you to say that I am (uncaring & self-centered)? Can you please give me some specific examples of what I have done?"*

Being told you are self-centered can mean many things, and you won't know what to change if you don't know what behaviors they are referring to. Shifting the focus from judgments to behaviors makes the feedback more helpful and less hurtful. You have the power to make that shift by asking for specific feedback about your behavior.

"Feedback is the breakfast of champions." – Ken Blanchard

"Cruelty is cheap, easy, and chicken-shit." – Brene Brown

Giving the Gift of Effective Feedback

This newsletter focuses on how to give feedback in way that effectively communicates what you would like the other person to do or change, while preserving the relationship.

Here are some tips for giving **kind and effective feedback** to friends, family members and employees/co-workers:



1. Make it your intention to help, not to hurt and share your intention with the other person.
2. Make it timely – as soon after the behavior occurs as possible. If someone crosses a boundary with you, it is important to speak up about it the very first time it occurs, otherwise you send the inadvertent message that it's okay with you. I've had to learn this the hard way.
3. Be specific about what the other person did (describe the behavior you observed), the impact that it had on you or others (how you/others felt) and what you would like the other person to do going forward (your request for future behavior).
4. Stay away from making judgements about the other person's behavior or character (avoid statements such as "you are ____," instead describe what they did).
5. Ask them to agree to make the behavior changes you requested. *(If they don't agree, then you have some decisions to make about the relationship going forward.)*
6. Give them follow-up feedback on how they are doing. Tell them when you observe them engaging in the behavior you requested and when they don't exhibit that behavior.

By providing feedback according to the tips above, it gives the other person an opportunity to see how their behavior impacts others and to change their behavior, while preserving their dignity and the relationship. Remember that feedback is a gift that should be given with kindness.

"Criticism, like rain, should be gentle enough to nourish a man's growth without destroying his roots." – Frank A. Clark

"Make feedback normal. Not a performance review." – Ed Batista

What Got You Here Won't Get You There



I had the honor and privilege of hearing Dr. Marshall Goldsmith, author of the books [*What Got You Here Won't Get You There*](#) and [*Triggers*](#), speak at the International Coach Federation (ICF) Midwest Regional Conference in Indianapolis in June 2016. His speech was 90 minutes long and probably the best I have ever heard. He covered many topics in the areas of leadership and coaching, but one exercise he had us do impacted me the most. He asked us to send a text message to our significant other, right then and there in the middle of his speech, and ask, *"What can I do to be a better partner in our relationship?"* There was a lot of laughter and a lot of audible dings at the text replies in response to this question. Some of the replies were rather funny and some were shocked and wondered if something was wrong and why they were being asked this question. His point was that we often ask our customers what we can do to be better, but how often do we ask our employees, our spouse, our children, our parents, our friends – the people who mean the most to us?

Who is the one person you should be asking this question to?

He also talked about taking this feedback as a gift, without shooting the messenger, and just saying, "Thank you." He said to pick one action you can take to be better and follow up with that person in a month. Follow-up is the key to changing behavior, and frequency is more important than duration. So follow-up often and stick with it. He also said that it's more difficult to change perceptions than it is to change behavior because we don't see what's there, we see what we think is there. It doesn't matter what we say; it's what they hear.

Lastly, he asked us to visualize ourselves at 95 years old and he asked us, "What would that 95-year-old person say to the current you right now?" He also said, "Be happy now, instead of being happy when... (fill in the blank). Focus on what you have, not on what you don't. Follow your dreams now. Life is short; have fun now. We always regret the risks that we fail to take. And do whatever you can to help people because the 95-year-old you will be proud that you did."

"Treat every piece of advice as a gift or a compliment and simply say, 'Thank you.'" – Dr. Marshall Goldsmith

"The only way to find happiness is to understand that happiness is not out there. It's in here. And happiness is not next week. It's now." – Dr. Marshall Goldsmith

Are You Derailing Your Career Without Knowing It?

Most of us have no idea how we come across to others or what people think of us. Why? Because most people won't tell us. Instead they talk behind our backs. Have you ever had a friend drift away without any explanation, or not gotten a promotion and not told why? Did you ask what happened, or did you make some assumptions? (Shari Harley explains this phenomenon in her book [How to Say Anything to Anyone](#) and what to do about it.)



In the business world, what people think and say about us impact us more than the results we deliver. Our opinions about ourselves won't get us promoted or get us more business. What really matters is other people's perceptions of us. We could be derailing our careers and not even know it. According to the Center for Creative Leadership, "75% of careers are derailed for reasons related to emotional competencies, including inability to handle interpersonal problems."

Often times our intentions do not match our behaviors. We judge ourselves on our intentions, but other people judge us by our behaviors according to Stephen M. R. Covey. We may think we are coming across in a certain way because we have a positive intention, but we may not be perceived in the way we intended. This is because our delivery or behavior did not match our intention, or because of the other person's filters (emotions, senses, experiences, beliefs, values, biases, etc.). We all have filters and perceptions that affect what we are able to see, hear and experience. Dr. Stephen Covey said, "We see the world not as it is, but as we are." Therefore, we will never know how we are perceived if we don't get feedback from others.

So how can you get meaningful feedback? Ask a few trusted folks who care about you if you can buy them coffee and get their input. Promise you will say "thank you" no matter what they may say. Then ask these questions suggested by authors Shari Harley (#1-5) and Dr. Marshall Goldsmith (#6).

- 1. What is the first impression I create?**
- 2. What am I/was I like to work with, or what do you think I would be like to work with?**
- 3. If my co-workers were asked to talk about me when I wasn't there, what would they say?**
- 4. How have I exceeded your expectations?**
- 5. How have I disappointed you?**
- 6. What can I do to be a better (co-worker, boss, parent, spouse, friend, etc.)?**

The answers may be difficult to hear, but valuable nonetheless. Remember to say "thank you" to whatever they may say. Feedback is truly a gift. Without it, we can never really know how we come across to others, or see our blind spots. We can't change what we don't know, and we can't grow and improve unless we are willing to act on feedback. From the feedback you gather, pick one action you will take to be better, and follow up with that person in a month.

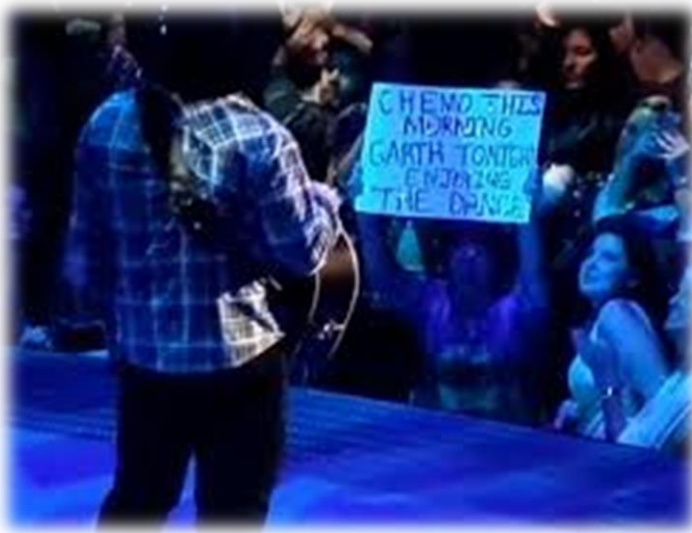
According to Dr. Marshall Goldsmith, it's more difficult to change perceptions than it is to change behavior because people don't see what's there; they see what they think is there due to their filters. It doesn't matter what we say; it's what they hear. Keep showing that you are working at it by checking in, and over time, perceptions will shift.

Please note: My work and expertise are [coaching](#) and [training](#) leaders and technical experts to increase their emotional intelligence. If you have technically smart employees who are struggling with interpersonal relationships, please act now before they derail their careers. [Contact me to find out how I can help before it's too late.](#)

"While perceptions may not be the ultimate truth, they are what people use to make decisions." – Ann Morrison, Breaking the Glass Ceiling

"Ask more. Assume Less." – Shari Harley

What is Your Impact?



In the video [Garth Brooks – The Dance – Kick Cancer’s Ass!](#), he spots a woman in the audience holding a sign that says, “Chemo this morning. Garth tonight. Enjoying the dance.” What he does next is extremely touching. He made a huge impact on this woman, but I think her impact on him and the rest of the audience may have been even bigger.

It’s unfortunate that often the nicest things people say about others is at their funerals where they talk about the kind of people they were and the impact they had. Why do we so often fail to tell people when they are right in front of us?

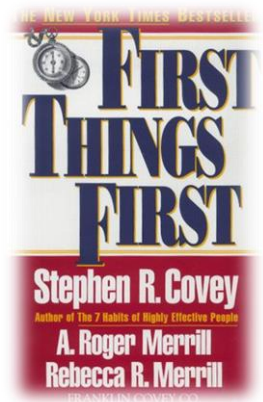
Here’s a challenge for you that will make you feel great and really make a difference to others. Think of the top ten people who have impacted your life in a positive way, and tell them how they have impacted you either in a letter, email, phone call or in person. Besides immediate family members, it can be someone who helped you during a difficult time, offered support or words of encouragement, or someone who was a role model by showing you what was possible.

Next, do this for yourself. People may not tell you the influence you had on them. So think of the top ten people that you believe you have had a positive impact on, and write or type out what you did that you think made a difference to them. Keep this document or journal entry for yourself. Whenever you doubt yourself or wonder if you are living your life on purpose, read what you have written. You don’t have to be a famous entertainer, motivational speaker, or even in a helping profession to have a positive effect on others. We all impact others and others impact us in small ways each day that make up a lifetime of lessons and experiences, which is the ultimate journey.

“Sometimes people come into your life for a moment, a day or a lifetime. It matters not the time they spent with you but how they impacted your life in that time.” – Unknown

Are You Addicted to Urgency?*

Do you constantly rush from one thing to the next and feel as though your schedule is at the mercy of others – your boss, your team, your customers, your kids, etc.? Do you often multi-task and feel as though there is never enough time to get everything done? Can't go more than an hour without checking your smart phone? If so, you may have an addiction to urgency.



Urgency addiction is a concept from Dr. Stephen R. Covey that refers to the drive to do anything urgent, just to stay in motion. We experience a temporary high from solving urgent crises and actually become physiologically addicted to the adrenaline rush. Our society values being busy and overworked; therefore, the busier we are, the more important we appear to be. When we fall into a pattern of routinely putting what's urgent ahead of what's important, it results in a vicious do-loop that we can't seem to get out of. If we constantly fall prey to what's urgent, then we don't have the time to do what matters most in our lives and at work – the things that are meaningful and create opportunities for the future.

All of this depletes our energy and contributes to our stress level. If we neglect important things long enough, they will one day become urgent crises requiring our immediate attention. For example, practicing stress management techniques is important, but not urgent. It can be put off until tomorrow, until eventually stress leads to a life-threatening illness which requires urgent stress management action. The way out of this cycle is to put what's most important ahead of what's urgent.

Examples of what's important:

- Activities that give meaning to your life and energize you
- Goals that move you toward your vision of the future (professional and personal)
- Practices that contribute to your physical health and well-being
- Actions that add to your financial security
- Engaging in fulfilling relationships with others (family, friends, team members, etc.)
- Learning, growing, and acquiring new skills

It takes thought, time, and discipline to identify what's most important and then plan and take action that moves us closer to these goals. But how much richer and more fulfilling would our lives and careers be if we made the effort? By being clear about what's most important, we are better able to identify the things that are simply "urgent" and not adding value. Then we can say "no" to them, or at least put them behind the things that are most important.

When we make time for what's most important, we are living our lives on purpose rather than on auto-pilot, and we have more energy to do the things we want to do. Life is too short to put off what's most important until tomorrow because tomorrow may never come.

*Source: [*First Things First*](#) by Dr. Stephen R. Covey

"Doing more things faster is no substitute for doing the right things." – Dr. Stephen R. Covey

Are You Doing Too Much?



Finding enough time to meet all of the demands of work and family life is a challenge for most of us. If only there were more than 24 hours in a day, maybe we could get it all done. Or could we, really? Is time really the issue, or is it more about our focus and beliefs?

Successful people place the greatest priority on activities and actions that move them closer to their professional and personal goals. They let the rest take a backseat until later, or they delegate it, or they say "no" to it all together.

So how do you keep your head above water? Start saying "no" to things that don't move you closer to your goals. Consciously ask yourself before taking on a task, *"If I do this, will I be a step closer to achieving my goals?"* If the answer is "no," then don't do it. This sounds simple, but many people find it difficult to say "no" especially to customers, friends, family and co-workers. Think about it in these terms: Saying "no" to _____ means saying "yes" to _____. Saying "yes" to _____ means saying "no" to _____.

Be clear about the things that only you can do, and find a way to delegate or outsource the rest. Delegating effectively requires not only trusting others, but also trusting ourselves to do it effectively and to be able to let go of control. This is scary for most of us. Others may not complete the task in exactly the same manner that we would do it, but if it gets done to the level of satisfaction that we requested, then it's a job well done.

To delegate effectively we must be clear about:

- What we want done
- To what level of satisfaction
- Who should do it and who's accountable for it
- What's needed to complete the task
- What happens if it doesn't get done
- The deadline for completion
- Our expectations for how often they should check in with us on the status of their progress

Delegation takes time upfront, but it pays off big time in the long run. By taking the time to teach others to take on some of our duties, we free ourselves up for more of the things that move us closer to our goals and prevent ourselves from drowning in tasks. We also give others an opportunity to grow. Being successful and effective does not mean we have to do everything ourselves.

"Deciding what not to do is as important as deciding what to do." – Jessica Jackley

Are You Over-Committed?



In my conversations with clients, friends and colleagues, I find that many people are over-committed both at work and at home. They have trouble finding enough time to get everything done that they have committed themselves to. These same folks tend to have a strong sense of responsibility, wanting to do their very best in everything and help out whenever asked both in their jobs and in their family lives. In other words, they often have difficulty saying “no.” This could be because they don’t want to disappoint others, seem unhelpful, or risk being “unlikeable.” If this sounds like you, there are a couple of questions you

can ask yourself to avoid falling into the trap of saying “yes” to every request.

The first question is *“Am I really the best person to do this?”* If the answer is “no” either because of your current workload or because the request does not align with your roles and goals, then you might suggest that another person do it who is better suited for the task. The next question to ask yourself is *“Do I have the time required to fulfill this task to my best ability?”* If the answer is “no,” you have a couple of options beyond simply saying “no” to the request.

Many people think there are only two possible responses to a request: either yes or no. However, there are actually four available responses to any request according to Kim H. Krisco’s book [*Leadership & the Art of Conversation – Conversation as a Management Tool*](#): **1) accept, 2) decline, 3) counter-offer, and 4) promise to reply later.** Accepting the request is saying that you will do the task to the level of satisfaction requested within the required timeframe. Declining is simply saying that you will not do the task. A counter offer is saying what you will do instead of what was requested. An example of a counter offer would be saying *“I can’t get you that report by the end of today, but I can get it to you by noon tomorrow.”* A promise to reply is giving your answer at a later time, such as saying, *“Let me check my calendar, and I’ll get back to you with a reply before noon today.”*

Counter offers and promises to reply later are very effective methods for preventing over-commitment. They buy you time and give you the space to consider what you can realistically handle and add to your already full plate. This will help you feel more in control, reducing your stress level. It will also help ensure that you can fulfill what you take on to the best of your ability. This will increase your self-esteem because you will remain in integrity with yourself. Lastly, by consciously choosing what you will agree to do instead of saying “yes” to everything, you send the subconscious message to yourself that your needs are important and that ultimately you are important. We must take care of ourselves if we are to serve others to the best of our ability. We won’t be around for the long-term for our families, co-workers, and others if we don’t make taking care of ourselves a priority.

“Most of us spend too much time on what is urgent and not enough time on what is important.” – Dr. Stephen R. Covey

The Impact of the Invisible Workload on Men and Women



The article entitled “[*The Invisible Workload that Drags Women Down*](#)” by Lisa Wade says that in two-career marriages, women do most of the household chores, while men spend more time at work – making the amount of combined paid and un-paid work nearly equal. However, women tend to expend more mental and emotional energy on childcare and household upkeep than men do. In other words, women’s minds are constantly consumed either at work or at home.

By the same token, Josh Levs wrote an article called "[*There's an Invisible Workload that Drags Men Down, Too*](#)" which talks about the impact that stress is having on men. "More than 6 million men in the U.S. suffer from depression...Men die by suicide 3½ times as often as women – more than 90 men a day." Men may think less about household needs, but are slightly more stressed than women about work and money.

What does this mean? 1) Men and women are more stressed out than ever before, and the very obstacles that prevent women from advancing in the workplace are also making it harder for men to spend as much time with their families as they would like. Men who take leave or seek flexible work schedules are often demoted or fired due to backward beliefs about the roles of men and women. 2) Men tend to suffer in silence and do not seek help and support as often as women.

As a leadership coach, I find that [coaching](#) is often the only outlet that professional men and women have to talk about the stresses that weigh them down and how to find relief. I think there is a stigma, especially for men, around seeking support. Many people believe it is a sign of weakness, when it is in fact a sign of strength. It takes courage and strength to admit that you need help.

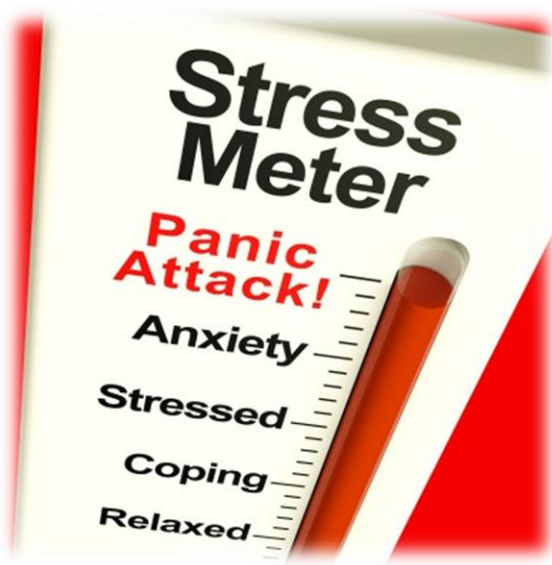
In my experience as a coach, I have found that everyone has challenges, and we all need support in order to make it in the tough and demanding world we live in. We may believe that we are all alone in our struggles. However, the truth is, we all want the same things and deal with similar challenges. We have much more in common as human beings than we have differences, and we are never alone. There is always someone to reach out to whether it be a friend, family member, minister, teacher, therapist or coach.

"The difficult thing is that vulnerability is the first thing I look for in you and the last thing I'm willing to show you. In you, it's courage and daring. In me, it's weakness." – Brene Brown

"Men walk this tightrope where any sign of weakness elicits shame, and so they're afraid to make themselves vulnerable for fear of looking weak." – Brene Brown

"Vulnerability is not weakness. And that myth is profoundly dangerous." – Brene Brown

Do You Feel Like You Have No Control Over Your Life?



Most people want to be in the driver's seat of their lives. Yet many of us feel that we somehow have little control over what happens in our lives and over our time and schedules in meeting all of the necessary demands of work and family life.

Things happen in life that we can't control such as a serious illness, death of a loved one, or having a job down-sized. However, there are many things in life that we can control. We can decide whether or not to take on additional change of our choosing. For example if you recently lost a loved one or went through a divorce and moved into a new home, you may want to choose to wait to change jobs. Taking on too many big changes at once causes a lot of stress and can result in health problems.

We can also choose our attitude about what happens to us in our lives. We can focus on the negative and choose to feel bad about our situation and what we don't have, or we can focus on the positive and be grateful for all of the blessings in our lives. Having gone through a year-long, drawn out divorce from a 17-year marriage back in 2013, I can speak from my own personal experience. Although I experienced a life-changing loss during that time, I chose to be grateful for all of things that I had in my life: support and closer relationships with my family and friends, my growing business, personal growth, new experiences, and more. What we focus on expands in our lives, so we must choose to focus on the positive. Attitude really is everything.

Lastly, we can choose how we spend our time. Sure, there are things that we must do every day to meet our responsibilities and obligations, but we can also choose to make taking care of ourselves a priority. This means not only eating right, exercising, and getting enough sleep, but also taking time to rejuvenate and renew ourselves mentally and spiritually. We can do this in many different ways such as yoga, meditation, deep breathing exercises, reading, listening to motivational audio books, getting support from others, community affiliation, fun and laughter, and so on.

I talk to many people on a daily basis who make taking care of themselves their last priority. We need to make taking care of ourselves our top priority. If we don't take care of ourselves, who will? Our family members and our jobs that we are placing ahead of ourselves are counting on us to be there. There's a reason they say on every airplane flight to put on your own oxygen mask before assisting others. We must first help ourselves before we can truly help others.

"Heroism is the triumph of spirit over circumstance." – Neil A. Stroul, Ph.D.

"A moment of self-compassion can change your entire day. A string of such moments can change the course of your life." – Christopher K. Germer

Stop Stress and Worry from Killing You



I don't know about you, but I am guilty of spending a good portion of my life worrying about things that haven't happened yet and probably will never happen. I have worked diligently over the past few years to stop this bad habit because it's not only unproductive, but it's unhealthy.

It's not the situations that cause us stress. It's what we think about and tell ourselves about these situations that cause us stress and worry. Some of us may even be addicted to worrying because we think

that we can somehow control the outcomes of situations if we worry about them and prepare ourselves. But in reality, worrying doesn't result in positive outcomes.

Instead it results in many negative symptoms and health problems such as:

- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Sleeplessness
- Sinus issues
- Neck & Backaches
- Digestive issues/stomachaches
- Suppressed immune system
- Memory loss and destroyed brain cells
- Weight gain
- Hypertension/heart disease
- Other disease such as cancer

So how do we stop this self-defeating behavior? First, we must become aware of when we are worrying about something. Once we realize that we are worrying, we need to ask ourselves if we have some control or influence over the situation. If we do, then we should take action to do something about it. Action reduces fear and worry because it shifts our focus away from our thoughts to what we are doing in the moment. If we have no control or influence over the situation, then we must recognize that the situation is out of our hands, and there is really nothing we can do about it. When this is the case, we must tell ourselves that worrying will not do any good. Then we need to make a conscious choice to put our thoughts on something that brings us positive feelings. It could be something we are grateful for, a person that we love, our favorite vacation memory – anything that makes us feel good in this moment – and focus on that feeling for 15-20 seconds. This will counteract the negative effects of stress and worry and put us in a better state of mind.

If we continue to practice this whenever we catch ourselves worrying needlessly, it will soon become a positive habit. It will not only prevent harmful stress symptoms, but we will become much happier. Most of our unhappiness comes from thinking about our regrets from the past and our worries about the future. These both rob us of our present moment. We spend so

much time thinking about what went wrong during the day or what we have to do next that we don't pay much attention to what we are doing in the present moment. We go through much of our lives on auto-pilot. How can we possibly be happy now when we aren't even present to enjoy it?

Practicing mindfulness is another great way to reduce stress and worry. If we are focused on what we are doing in the present moment instead of letting our minds wander to our worries of the future, we will be much better off. So what does this mean? It means that if we are going for a jog outside, instead of being in our heads with our thoughts, we choose to be in our bodies and notice what it feels like when our feet hit the ground and our hearts beat faster. It means that we take in and notice the sights and sounds of the blue sky, the flowers blooming, and the birds chirping. Right now is the only time that we have, so right now is the time to experience life rather than just thinking about it.

"Your unhappiness ultimately arises not from the circumstances of your life but from the conditioning of your mind." – Eckhart Tolle – [Stillness Speaks](#)

Worry: A Useless and Deadly Emotion

I work with many leaders on reducing stress and worry. This not only makes them more productive, but also helps improve their overall health. Worry is a completely useless and wasted emotion because it never causes a situation to result in a positive outcome.

Instead, it creates deadly symptoms and health problems such as:

- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Digestive issues
- Memory loss and destroyed brain cells
- Increased abdominal fat
- Other disease such as cancer



I have spent a good portion of my life worrying about things that haven't happened yet and situations I have absolutely no control over. However, I have gotten much better at stopping this bad habit because I have come to realize not only that it is a complete waste of time, but it is a harmful way to expend my energy. How have I been able to do this?

Here are a few tips that I use and share with my clients:

1. Notice when you are worrying.
2. Ask yourself if you have some control or influence over the situation.
3. If you have some control or influence, then take action to do something about it.
4. Argue with yourself by asking what proof you have that this negative event will happen.
5. Identify alternative possibilities besides the negative outcome you think may happen.
6. Realize that the negative outcome is only one possibility and has a low probability of actually occurring.
7. Tell yourself that worrying will do no good and say the Serenity Prayer (*see quote below*).
8. Put your thoughts and energy on something that brings positive feelings: someone you love, a favorite memory, etc. and focus on that feeling for 15-20 seconds.

By taking these steps each time you catch yourself worrying needlessly, it will counteract the negative effects of stress and worry and put you in a better state of mind. Soon it will become a positive habit that prevents harmful stress symptoms and makes you feel much happier.

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." – Reinhold Niebuhr

Are Your Beliefs Causing You Unnecessary Stress?

I thought I would share one of the concepts from my stress management [workshop](#) that people find most helpful: the ABC model from [Stress Management for Dummies](#) by Allen Elkin.

ABC Model:

A = Activating event (stressful situation)

B = Beliefs about stressful situation

C = Consequence (stress resulting from beliefs about stressful situation)



Notice in this model, it's not the situation itself that causes stress, it's the **BELIEFS** about the situation that causes us to experience stress. The same situation can cause two different people to have very different experiences. To many people, the thought of giving an impromptu speech to a large audience is terrifying. They think, *"What will I say? I am going to look like a fool. What if I pass out on stage, etc.?"* Their stress level skyrockets, and they experience the typical fight or flight response with cortisol coursing through their bodies. To experienced speakers, however, this would be a breeze. They think, *"What a great opportunity to get in front of a large group. I have several canned speeches that I can use. This will be fun."* They experience very low stress, or a positive rush of adrenaline.

When you find yourself in a stressful situation, check your beliefs and what you are saying to yourself. Ask yourself, **"Is that really true? What proof do I have that it's really true? What is another possibility here? What's the worst thing that could happen?"** For example, the busy working mom that tells herself, *"I have a million things to get done today. I'm never going to be able to get it all done. If I'm late to my daughter's practice, I'm going to let her down and look like a careless parent,"* just adds even more stress to her already busy day. Instead she can use the questions above to lower her stress level by realizing that the world won't end if everything doesn't get done today. It will still be there tomorrow. In many cases, we place unrealistic expectations on ourselves and cause ourselves a lot of unnecessary stress that only exists in our minds.

"The last of the human freedoms is to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances." – Victor Frankl

Why Stress Makes Us Stupid



Have you ever been caught off guard or put on the spot and wondered why you couldn't think straight or come up with a response that you thought of later? It's because stress literally makes us stupid. When we perceive a threat, real or imagined, the part of our brain that is responsible for logical thinking (neo cortex) shuts down, and the emotional part of our brain (amygdala) takes over, throwing us into fight or flight mode. This is known as the amygdala hijack.

When we respond during a hijack, we usually say or do something that we later regret. After a full-blown attack, it takes a full 18 minutes for the neo cortex to start working again and process the situation logically. Over time, our brain neurons start to erode. Chronic stress causes memory loss and kills brain cells.

So what can we do to offset the effects of an amygdala hijack? If at all possible, the best thing to do is remove ourselves from a situation we perceive to be threatening. If you are at work, say that you need to excuse yourself and then take a walk or go into the restroom where you can get away from everyone. This helps in two ways. First, it gets us out of an immediate situation where we might say something that we may regret later. Second, it gives us time for our neo cortex to start working again so we can respond logically rather than emotionally.

If that's not possible, here are some tips to stop an amygdala hijack, which come from Deepak Chopra citing The Dalai Lama:

- **S** – Stop.
- **T** – Take some deep breaths and smile in your whole body. (Visualize this.)
- **O** – Observe your whole body. (How are you feeling physically? What is happening in your body? Pay attention to your heart rate and your breath.)
- **P** – Proceed with compassion. (Choose your response intentionally instead of reacting out of emotion.)

"It isn't life's events, but one's reactions to them that activate stress." – David Hawkins – [Power Versus Force](#)

"External circumstances are not what draw us into suffering. Suffering is caused and permitted by an untamed mind." – The Dalai Lama

Increase Your Positivity to Live a Longer Life*

If you want to reshape your life for the better, increase your quantity of positivity over time. Aim for a positivity ratio of 3:1 – for every heart-wrenching negative emotional experience you endure, you experience at least three heartfelt positive emotional experiences that uplift you. This 3:1 ratio is the tipping point that predicts whether people languish or flourish.

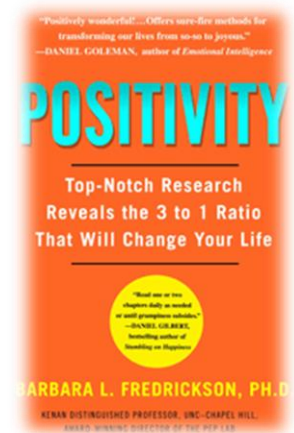
10 Forms of Positivity:

1. **Joy** – What brings you joy?
2. **Gratitude** – What are you grateful for?
3. **Serenity** – When was the last time you savored a moment?
4. **Interest** – When did interest last draw you in?
5. **Hope** – What possibilities do you believe exist?
6. **Pride** – What makes you proud?
7. **Amusement** – When was the last time you laughed?
8. **Inspiration** – When were you inspired to do your best?
9. **Awe** – When have you felt overwhelmed by greatness?
10. **Love** – When have you felt love surge within you?

So how can you experience more positivity in your life? Give more of your attention and focus to things that are positive and less to things that are negative. Start looking for what's good, uplifting, and positive instead of what's bad, depleting, and negative.

Decrease negativity:

- **Dispute negative thinking** – Check your negative thoughts against reality by looking at the facts.
- **Break the grip of rumination** – Become aware of when you are stuck in a cycle of rehashing negative thoughts and emotions that lead you nowhere good (needless negativity). Engage in a positive activity (exercise, meditation, yoga, etc.) that takes your mind off your troubles and lifts your emotions.
- **Become more mindful** – Pay attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally. With practice, you can learn to observe the contents of your mind calmly, in a nonreactive way.
- **Diffuse negativity land mines** – Reflect on your typical daily routine and ask yourself which circumstances fuel the most needless negativity. 1) Modify the situation; 2) Attend to different aspects of the situation, or 3) change its meaning.
- **Assess your media diet** – Pay close attention to how you feel during and after taking in media. How could you alter your media diet to cut out needless negativity?
- **Find substitutes for gossip and sarcasm** – When talking about others, highlight their positive qualities and good fortunes, not their weaknesses and mishaps.



Increase Positivity:

- **Open your heart** – To truly benefit from gestures of positivity, (a smile, embrace, etc.) you must slow down and take in what the gesture means. Make it heartfelt.
- **Find positive meaning** – When you reframe unpleasant circumstances in a positive way, you boost the odds that positive emotions, like hope, will flow forth.
- **Savor goodness** – Willfully generate, intensify, and prolong your heartfelt enjoyment of good events by slowing down and taking the time to appreciate all the good aspects of them.
- **Count your blessings** – Recast aspects of your daily life that seem mundane or hidden from view as gifts to be cherished, such as appreciating how others have been kind to you.
- **Express kindness** – Maintain typical expressions of kindness on typical days, but choose a particular day to step up your kindness to a much higher level to get a boost of positivity.
- **Follow your passions** – Find activities that allow you to enter flow states where you become fully absorbed.
- **Dream about your future** – Conjure up the best possible outcomes for yourself, and visualize your future successes in great detail.
- **Apply your strengths** – Find new ways to apply your strengths to get a boost in positivity that is significant and lasting.
- **Connect with others** – People who flourish spend more time each day with the people they are close to and less time alone. So connect with others every day, no matter what.
- **Connect with nature** – Go outside. Being outside allows you to see farther, and seeing farther may be all it takes to expand your thinking and give you more to feel good about.
- **Open your mind** – Positivity and openness feed on each other, each triggering and reinforcing the other. Positivity opens your mind naturally. Be open, and positivity will follow.

Positive emotions open our hearts and minds and allow us to discover and build new skills, new ties, new knowledge, and new ways of being. Positivity broadens and builds. It transforms people and helps them become their best. And when at their best, people live longer.

*Source: [Positivity](#) by Barbara L. Fredrickson, Ph.D.

"Know that joy is rarer, more difficult, and more beautiful than sadness. Once you make this all-important discovery, you must embrace joy as a moral obligation." – Andre Gide

"People think angels fly because they have wings. Angels fly because they take themselves lightly." – Anonymous

"When they tell you to grow up, they mean stop growing." – Tom Robbins

Why Focus on the Positive?



Negative images affect our energy level and our mood. Scientific research has proven that negative emotions actually change our blood chemistry and cause disease. ([The Healing Field: Exploring Energy and Consciousness](#) explains this phenomenon and ways to reverse it.) I stopped watching the news over 5 years ago because it is mostly negative, and it creates anxiety and anger within me. I replaced it with more positive activities like reading helpful books and articles, listening to inspiring podcasts, watching motivational TED talks, and listening to uplifting music. I have also opted to watch movies and TV shows that are positive and uplifting over those that depict violence.

In a time when we need all of the positive reserves available to overcome stress and difficulties, it's critical to fuel ourselves with as much positive energy as we can, and avoid negative energy whenever possible. We are hard-wired to see the negative more easily than the positive. We have to train ourselves to focus on the positive and to shift our focus when

we start expending energy on negative emotions. We can do this by noticing when we are experiencing stress, anger, fear or any negative emotion. Then switch our focus to something that makes us feel good such as a loved one or a favorite memory – anything that creates a sense of peace, love and gratitude within us. By doing this, we undo the harmful effects of the negative feelings that we experience.

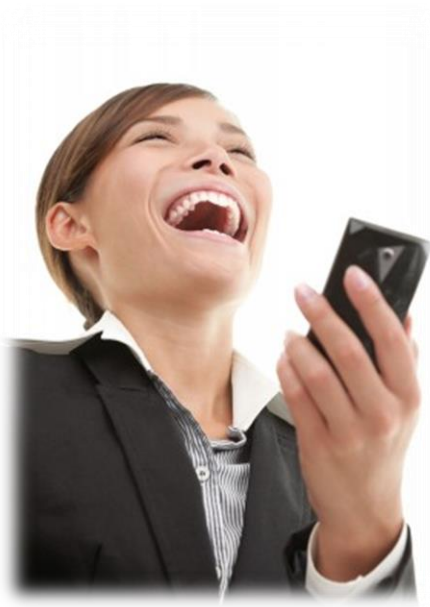
One of most positive, uplifting, and energizing movies I have seen in a long time is [The Greatest Showman](#). It's about inclusion, acceptance, living your dreams, and appreciating what you have. These messages are delivered through beautiful and powerful musical performances. It played in movie theaters for over 17 weeks. The soundtrack hit #1 on Billboard Top 200, and I listen to it regularly to put myself in a positive emotional state. The song, "[This is Me](#)" won a Golden Globe award, was nominated for an Oscar, and has become the anthem for anyone who has ever been bullied, put down, or felt like they weren't enough. If you haven't seen this incredible movie yet, give yourself and your kids this gift of positive energy and pure joy.

"Come alive. Come alive. Go and ride your light. Let it burn so bright. Reaching up to the sky, and it's open wide. You're electrified. When the world becomes a fantasy and you're more than you could ever be. 'Cause you're dreaming with your eyes wide open." – Hugh Jackman, [Come Alive](#) from *The Greatest Showman*

"When the sharpest words wanna cut me down, I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown them out. I am brave. I am bruised. I am who I'm meant to be. This is me. Look out 'cause here I come, and I'm marching on to the beat I drum. I'm not scared to be seen. I make no apologies. This is me." – Keala Settle, [This is Me](#) from *The Greatest Showman*

"I think of what the world could be - a vision of the one I see. A million dreams is all it's gonna take - a million dreams for the world we're gonna make." – Hugh Jackman, [A Million Dreams](#) from *The Greatest Showman*

Use this Ultimate Stress Buster



When we are under chronic stress, even low levels, it affects our ability to be effective leaders, parents, partners and human beings in general. Stress brings out the worst in us. We become emotionally charged and it rubs off on our subordinates, co-workers, and family members, thus causing them stress. We don't perform at our best under stress, resulting in the potential loss of customers, business and relationships.

So what is the ultimate way to beat stress each day?

Laughter – laugh as much as possible each day. This used to be so natural to us when we were children. When did we become so serious? The average 4-year-old laughs 300 times a day, while the average 40-year-old laughs only 4 times a day according to an article in Psychology Today. Laughter really is good medicine. It releases endorphins, improves blood flow, relaxes us, and just makes us feel good.

Here are 10 ways to incorporate more laughter into your life:

1. Listen to comedy CDs or funny morning shows on the radio during your morning commute.
2. Keep a joke-a-day calendar on your desk at work.
3. Take mini-breaks at work to watch funny videos on the internet.
4. Watch funny sitcoms or "America's Funniest Home Videos."
5. Read humorous books or magazines.
6. Surround yourself with people who make you laugh.
7. Take time to see the humor in situations that may appear to be dreadful mistakes or embarrassing mishaps. They are usually pretty funny after the fact.
8. At dinner, ask each family member to describe the funniest thing that happened during the day and share a laugh.
9. Go see comedies at the movie theater or go a comedy show.
10. Practice being present with your children or pets. Their innocence and joy provide endless opportunities for laughter.

As Benjamin Zander states in the book [*The Art of Possibility*](#), **"Always remember Rule #6: don't take yourself so seriously."** When we take ourselves too seriously, life feels very heavy and burdensome. Lighten it up with laughter. You will truly not only feel better, but you will decrease your stress level and improve your overall health as well.

"You don't stop laughing because you grow old, you grow old because you stop laughing."
– Michael Pritchard

The Secrets to Happiness



The movie [About Time](#) is one of the best movies I have ever seen. It is full of hilarious British humor, and it's about the secrets of living a happy and fulfilling life: love, gratitude, and presence (which are also the keys to stress reduction). I have never seen this message more beautifully or powerfully portrayed on film. And it couldn't have come at a better time for me personally, since I was undergoing the most dramatic growth and transformation I had ever experienced in my entire life when I first saw this movie.

I was in the midst of a divorce proceeding from January 2013 until October 2013, when it finally resulted in a favorable settlement due to the superior talents and expertise of divorce attorney David Dawson and CPA and attorney Joseph Cunningham (expert witness), and I will be forever grateful to them for their outstanding efforts and support.

The year 2013 was full of incredible sadness and loss, but also great joy and wonderful new experiences. It gave me a new appreciation for my family and friends, who provided me with amazing support and helped me through some very rough patches. It also made me grateful for all of the blessings in my life, and I gained strength by focusing on these blessings rather than the loss. Lastly, I have become much more present in my everyday life. Prior to all of this, I was focused on getting to the next thing, the next accomplishment, and the next phase of my life, rather than really paying attention to and treasuring what I was experiencing in the present moment. I kept thinking that I will be happy when... (*fill in the blank*) instead of choosing to find things to be happy about now.

Even amidst all of the hurt, pain and sorrow, I found that I was happier than I had been in a very long time because I was choosing to live my life on purpose, in a conscious way, and that is incredibly empowering and rewarding.

Give yourself the gift of gratitude and watch [About Time](#) if you haven't seen it. It will make you see the everyday moments in life in a new light - making the ordinary, extraordinary. This movie will truly make your heart soar.

"Love is the greatest power on earth. It conquers all things." – Peace Pilgram

"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart." – Helen Keller

Happiness in Practice

The secrets of living a happy and fulfilling life are love, gratitude, and presence, which were beautifully portrayed in the movie [About Time](#). These concepts become more meaningful and important around the holidays when we have more quality time to spend with loved ones and reflect on how we spent our time during the year and what it has meant. Here are 10 ways to put these concepts into everyday practice, which I have found helpful to reduce stress.



1. Spend time having fun and laughing with family, friends and co-workers engaging in good conversation and fun activities.
2. Start every day and end every day thinking about all of the things you love and are grateful to have in your life – everything from big wins to the simple things we take for granted like the ability to use our 5 senses. There is no greater recipe for happiness and success than expressing gratitude.
3. Write down 5 new things you are grateful for every day.
4. Spend 10-15 minutes every day in meditation or just being quiet and still.
5. Spend 10-15 minutes each day doing something that you love to do that fills you with joy, whether it be a hobby you enjoy, playing with your kids, or petting your dog or cat.
6. Listen to music that uplifts you and puts you in a good mood; pay attention to the lyrics and the sound of the music.
7. Treat yourself to your favorite food that you absolutely love. Eat it slowly, focusing only on the taste of it without distractions that take your focus away from the experience.
8. Engage in physical exercise (walking, running, weight lifting, yoga, etc.) and focus only on doing the activity without reading, watching TV, or listening to music.
9. Get a massage and focus totally on the experience by being present in your body rather than in your head thinking about being somewhere else.
10. Do your best to practice mindfulness throughout the day by paying attention to whatever you are doing and the experience of it – how it looks, feels, sounds, etc. instead of thinking about other things. Make noticing a regular practice.

Enjoy every minute. Now is the only time we have. Make each and every day count.

"The power of Now is none other than the power of your presence, your consciousness liberated from thought forms." – Eckhart Tolle

"Give attention to the present; give attention to your behavior, to your reactions, moods, thoughts, emotions, fears, and desires as they occur in the present." – Eckhart Tolle

The Gift of Presence



The movie [Arrival](#) has two very strong messages: 1) the need for humanity to unite in order to survive and 2) this question: If you knew ahead of time that an experience/relationship/journey would end in an unbearably tragic loss, would you embark on it anyway?

Prior to 2013, I would never have embarked on such a journey for two reasons: my paralyzing fear of loss and my single focus on outcomes. Because of this, I missed out on many opportunities, experiences, and ultimately the happiness that comes from living in

the present. I was more focused on fast-forwarding to the end result than enjoying the process of getting there. Therefore, I would have avoided any known, unpleasant outcomes at all costs.

Since learning the lessons that 2013 taught me, I have lived my life very differently.

Here are the lessons:

- The journey is more significant and enjoyable than the destination if you allow yourself to experience it in the moment.
- You can't control many of the events that happen in life, so stop trying and stop worrying because neither will change anything. You can only control how you respond to what comes your way.
- You find out how strong and who you really are by how you respond to adversity.
- You don't always arrive at your intended destination.
- Sometimes you take an unexpected turn and experience an adventure beyond your wildest dreams that far exceeds the destination you intended.

Today, I would gladly take the journey regardless of the outcome because the journey is all there really is and all that really matters. We never know for sure how anything will turn out because things can happen that are beyond our control. The only destination that we are certain of is that one day our lives will end. If we live for outcomes at the expense of the present journey, then we ultimately miss out on living our lives in the moment and experiencing the gifts that each new day brings. I wish you the gift of presence. May you delight in every moment spent with family, friends, and loved ones.

"Living in the moment means letting go of the past and not waiting for the future. It means living your life consciously, aware that each moment you breathe is a gift." – Oprah Winfrey

"We always regret the risks that we fail to take." – Dr. Marshall Goldsmith

"Don't fear death, fear the un-lived life." – Natalie Babbitt

The Power of Gratitude

Practicing gratitude for all the positive things we have instead of dwelling on the negative is the key to happiness. Here are 10 things I am most grateful for. I invite you to make your list and share it with those you are grateful to have in your life.



1. My health above all else – without it, I can't experience and enjoy what life has to offer, and I can't help others. We must take care of ourselves first in order to be there for others.
2. My loved ones – my fiancé, my family, and my friends are what make life worth living. An unshared life is an unshared life.
3. My dogs – they are my babies. See statement above.
4. My clients – they are what give meaning and purpose to my life's work.
5. My business – it is the vehicle for providing my services to clients and the means for being able to support myself financially.
6. My marbles – without my mental faculties, I could not perform the work I do and get the most out of life.
7. My capacity for learning and growing – this ensures that I continue to evolve in my work and as a human being. Tony Robbins and others have said, *"If we are not growing, we are dying."*
8. My freedom – this is the realm of possibility. Freedom ensures that we can BE, DO and HAVE whatever we imagine.
9. My capacity for love and gratitude – these are the most powerful emotions there are. They fuel our connection to spirit and the ability to create and attract what we desire into our lives.
10. My capacity to control my thoughts and emotions. We can't control what may happen in our lives, but we can always control our THOUGHTS, EMOTIONS and RESPONSES to what happens.

May you be your very best self and live each and every day with gratitude and presence.

"Life is a gift, and it offers us the privilege, opportunity, and responsibility to give something back by becoming more." – Tony Robbins

Thanksgiving & Lessons Learned

I am truly grateful for all of the blessings in my life: a supportive family, caring friends, amazing clients, loving and adorable dogs, and especially the love of my life, Jerry, who has taught me so many life lessons since meeting him in March 2014.



Here are 12 lessons I learned in 2014:

1. Love and gratitude are the most powerful emotions there are.
2. Make the most of today because tomorrow is not guaranteed.
3. It's never too late to find love and happiness.
4. I can learn to trust again despite past hurt and betrayal.
5. I can choose to be spontaneous even though it's not my natural preference.
6. Trying new things is a blast. (160 of them in 2014)
7. Worry is a wasted and useless emotion.
8. I'm more productive by doing less and being more.
9. Keeping weekends sacred for fun motivates me to work harder during the week and helps me perform better because I have more balance in my life.
10. Exercising a little everyday makes a big difference.
11. Good nutrition is everything; it's the fuel for maximizing the human machine.
12. Nothing's more important than good health; without a healthy body it's difficult to experience and enjoy all that life has to offer.

"I don't have to chase extraordinary moments to find happiness. It's right in front of me if I'm paying attention and practicing gratitude." – Brene Brown

"Hope when the moment comes, you'll say I did it all. I owned every second that this world could give. I saw so many places; the things that I did. Yeah, with every broken bone I swear I lived." – One Republic – [I Lived](#)

Increase Resilience and Performance



In a teleclass presented by the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) on resilience and brain science, they talked about stress as being the health epidemic of this century and many of the negative effects of stress on our brains and performance. On the up-side, they shared that we can be trained to change our brains and learn to become more resilient through brain practices. They also provided information on several resilience behaviors to help counteract the negative effects of stress, which I teach in my ["Conquer Stress" workshop](#). They mentioned that research has shown one aspect to be the single most important factor in increasing resilience, performance and overall health – **sleep**.

Most of us need 7-8 hours of sleep to perform at our best; some need more and some need less. Most of us are not getting the amount of sleep that we require each night due to stress, exposure to "screen time" too close to bedtime, and mental rumination. Sleep deprivation negatively affects our concentration, reaction time, memory, motivation, decision-making, creativity and emotional regulation.

One way to get more sleep is a concept CCL presented as "smart sleep" – getting just 20 more minutes of sleep. This can be done by getting to sleep 10 minutes earlier and sleeping 10 minutes later, or by taking short naps in the afternoon (even 10-12 minutes of quiet time is beneficial). If we got 20 more minutes of sleep just 3 times per week, that would equal an additional 52 hours of sleep a year.

Here are some tips for better sleep from CCL:

- Drink earlier – drink an hour earlier; stop drinking all fluids, especially alcohol, at least 2 hours before going to bed. Alcohol is the #1 sleep aid. It helps you fall asleep, but negatively impacts the quality of your sleep.
- Eat earlier. Stop eating at least an hour before going to bed.
- Institute bedtime rituals – start winding down an hour before going to sleep by taking a bath, reading a book, or doing some meditation/relaxation exercises. Our brains like consistency and predictability.
- Turn off electronic devices (phones, PCs, tablets, TVs, etc.) an hour before going to sleep.
- Lavender contributes to sleep.
- Dim the lights in your house 2-3 hours before going to bed. Make your bedroom as dark as possible by covering up displays (clocks) or wear a mask to bed. The lights tell your brain that it's time to wake up which prohibits restful sleep.
- Don't consume caffeine after noon.
- Exercise at least 3-4 hours before going to bed.
- Use a fan, white noise machine, or ear plugs to drown out noise.
- Stop smoking.
- Keep your children and pets out of your bed.
- Use caution with sleeping pills. They can prevent sound sleep, become habit-forming, and cause other side effects.
- See your doctor for causes of sleeplessness lasting more than a month.

"For every hour of sleep we lose, we are also losing an IQ point, and those points can only be replenished through sleep." – Stanley Coren, University of British Columbia

"Whether you realize it or not, how you sleep each night probably has a bigger impact on your life than what you decide to eat, how much money you make, or where you live." – David K. Randall – [*Dreamland: Adventures in the Strange Science of Sleep*](#)

Increase Your Resiliency to Stress and Change



In 2016, I experienced some very big changes in my life. My parents moved from Southwestern Michigan, a couple of hours away to Arizona - across the country, after living in the same state as me for nearly my entire life. I also bought a new house in a new area with my significant other and sold my condo that I lived in for nine years.

These changes were exciting, a little stressful, and bittersweet all at the same time. They were definitely milestones that signified a new phase of my life.

Some concepts I teach in my stress management class are to minimize the number of big changes that you have going on in your life at the same time if you can, and to take care of yourself during stressful times. It served me well to take my own advice and practice what I teach during this transition.

Two other concepts that really help me personally with resiliency to stress and change are focusing on what I have rather than what I don't, and practicing gratitude. I have mentioned the power of gratitude in past newsletters, and it really is the key to happiness and stress reduction. As Tony Robbins mentioned in his morning ritual video [Gratitude is the Antidote](#), it's hard to feel grateful and angry or fearful at the same time.

Although I continue to miss seeing my parents regularly, I am grateful for the time we were able to spend together for so many years and for the opportunity to travel to a new place to visit them. I am also extremely grateful for my beautiful home and being able to share it with the man I love. I look forward to all of the memories that we will make there.

I hope that if you are undergoing stressful change in your life, you will be able to utilize these concepts to make it an easier and less stressful transition.

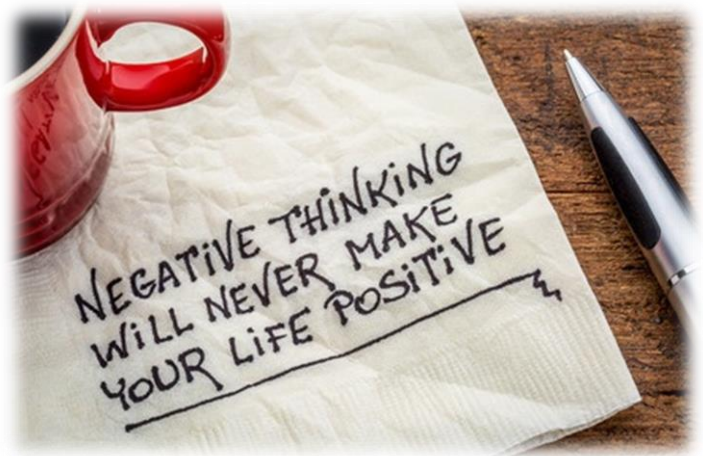
"Surrender to what is. Let go of what was. Have faith in what will be." – Sonia Ricotti

"It is impossible to feel grateful and depressed in the same moment." – Naomi Williams

Keep Your Sanity During Crazy Times

I've had many conversations with clients, friends, colleagues, and family members about all the massive negativity that we are regularly flooded with in the media. We all agree: **it's NOT helpful**. It only serves to perpetuate fear, anger and a doom and gloom attitude.

Therefore, I have instituted the following tips to maintain my sanity and positive attitude amidst the negativity.



- Minimize exposure to the media, especially media with extreme and slanted views.
- Minimize exposure to social media where folks share political opinions and re-post political articles, videos, etc. I use social media to stay connected with others, not to hear political rhetoric.
- Refrain from commenting on, sharing, or (re)posting political opinions and political articles, videos, etc.
- Check credible sources and get the real facts on news stories before panicking. What the executive orders really contain vs. what others say they will result in.
- Unfollow folks who constantly share and repost negative articles, many of which have not been confirmed as fact.
- For the time being, replace the time usually spent on listening/reading news/social media with something more positive such as reading a productive book/article or listening to an uplifting podcast.

Hopefully, by continuing to practice these tips, I will remain a positive force in a crazy world and not be negatively impacted by what's being said around me. As they say daily in [Winning Futures](#), "Attitude is everything." Make it a great day and live an even better life.

"You cannot have a positive life and a negative mind." – Joyce Meyer

"Once you replace negative thoughts with positive ones, you'll start having positive results." – Willie Nelson

"Pessimism leads to weakness, optimism to power." – William James

Increasing Resilience in the Four Domains

A while back, I taught a [class](#) on stress management and resilience to a group of 26 Senior Service College Fellows (GS-14 and GS-15 Army civilians) who started a very intensive and demanding 10-month training program to prepare them for future senior leadership roles. This class is based on the effects of stress on our four domains: mind, body, emotion and spirit, as well as resilience techniques for each of these domains.



Effects of Stress in the 4 Domains:

- **Mind** – When we experience stress, it is because of what we are telling ourselves about the situation that we perceive as stressful. (*"I'm not going to be able to get all of this done on time, I'm letting my team down, I'm not going to get that promotion, etc."*)
- **Emotion** – When we say these things to ourselves, it increases our stress level and we experience heightened anxiety, fear, sadness, anger, etc.
- **Physical** – These intense emotions are experienced physically in the form of headaches, stomach aches, sleeplessness, and possibly illness and even severe disease (cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, etc.).
- **Spirit** – Spirit is what gives meaning to our lives. We are not at our best when we are under chronic stress or distress. We lose our sense of purpose and act out of fear and protection rather than from a place of confidence and power. This can also impact our other three domains, as they are all interconnected.

Resilience Techniques in the 4 Domains:

- **Mind** – Be mindful of what you say to yourself. Is it increasing your stress level or decreasing it? Is it really true? Is there another possibility? What's another alternative?
- **Emotion** – Work to increase your emotional awareness and regulation. When you find yourself feeling stressed, fearful, anxious, or angry, focus on something that you are grateful for that makes you feel good (child, loved one, pet, etc.). Feel this sense of gratitude and love as intensely as you can while breathing deeply. This positive emotional shift will lower your heart rate and decrease the negative effects of stress.
- **Physical** – Take care of your body by eating healthy, exercising regularly, and most importantly getting enough sleep. We are more resilient and better equipped to handle stress when we are in better physical shape.
- **Spirit** – Nourish your spirit by engaging in activities that you enjoy such as taking a walk in nature, playing a musical instrument, painting, etc. You can also try yoga, meditation and other mindfulness activities where you simply focus on the activity that you are

engaging in and are just present in the moment.

According to the Center for Creative Leadership, mindfulness helps in coping with depression, anxiety, and chronic pain. It decreases blood pressure, hypertension, and stress levels, and increases energy, immune system, happiness, well-being and enjoyment.

"Mindfulness improves social relationships, resiliency and task performance and is associated with learning, memory, emotional processing and regulation, perspective taking, self-regulation, and attention." – The Center for Creative Leadership

"Resilience is the ability to recover from setbacks, adapt well to change, and keep going in the face of adversity" – HBR – [What Resilience Means, and Why it Matters](#) by Andrea Ovans

Stress Resilience through Mindfulness



When we experience stress, it is because of what we are telling ourselves about the situation that we perceive as stressful. (*"I'm not going to be able to get all of this done on time, I'm letting my team down, I'm not going to get that promotion, etc."*) When we say these things to ourselves, it increases our stress level and we experience heightened anxiety, fear, sadness, anger, etc.

Most of our stress is self-inflicted by our beliefs about our situation. It's not the situation itself that causes our stress, but rather what we tell

ourselves about it. For example, skydiving may be perceived as extremely stressful and terrifying to one person, and yet another person may find it exhilarating and exciting. It all depends on our perspective and what we tell ourselves about it. (*"I'm going to die!"* vs *"This is going to be amazing!"*)

Our thoughts drive our emotions and the stress that we experience. We actually become addicted to the stress hormones that our bodies produce, so we self-induce our stress level by thinking thoughts that cause fear, anxiety, stress, anger, sadness, etc. in order to experience the rush from these hormones.

Be mindful of what you say to yourself. Catch yourself when you have thoughts that start producing negative emotions. Our minds are extremely powerful, and we believe what we tell ourselves, often without checking to see if it's a factual belief. Ask yourself, ***"Is this belief increasing or decreasing my stress level? Is it really true? What proof do I have that it's really true? Is there another possibility? What's another alternative?"*** Asking yourself these questions will help you be more rational and lower your stress level.

The Center for Creative Leadership has found that women tend to ruminate and replay negative thoughts and experiences more than men. However, women tend to have greater emotional self-awareness than men. Working to increase your emotional awareness and regulation will increase your stress resiliency.

When you find yourself feeling stressed, fearful, anxious, or angry, focus on something that you are grateful for that makes you feel good (child, loved one, pet, etc.). Feel this sense of gratitude and love as intensely as you can while breathing deeply. This positive emotional shift will lower your heart rate and decrease the negative effects of stress.

"Mindfulness means being awake. It means knowing what you are doing." – Jon Kabat-Zinn

"The present moment is the only time over which we have dominion." – Thich Nhat Hanh

Relieve Stress and Increase Happiness by Doing This



In January 2018, I gave a talk on stress resilience to a group of young dentists in which I shared several methods for managing stress and increasing effectiveness. Dr. Brynn Jezdimir of [LakePointe Orthodontics](#) organized the event, and shared her experience of giving back to the community as a way of reducing stress and increasing happiness and overall well-being.

Helping others counteracts stress because it shifts our focus from our own worries to making other people happy. It creates positive feelings when we help others, and it's impossible to feel stressed and happy at the same time.

Emotional regulation is a key to stress management. Taking action that moves you from negative emotions of anger, fear and worry to positive emotions of love, happiness and gratitude does wonders to lower your stress level.

Dr. Brynn also invited two speakers who are doing outstanding work in the community to talk about their non-profit organizations. Diane Soulliere started [Operation Love Our Homeless](#) to battle the problem of homelessness in the city of Detroit and surrounding areas. Her organization focuses on community driven food preparation, clothing collection, basic needs distribution and resources for homeless people living on the street and in shelters and warming centers.

Chris Lambert founded [Life Remodeled](#) to bridge people across divides in order to help transform each other's lives. They make lasting impacts in Detroit neighborhoods by partnering with local residents and businesses to remodel community assets, repair owner-occupied homes, and mobilize 10,000 volunteers to beautify 300 city blocks in six days. Together they remove blight and create safe, inspirational pathways to schools and homes. [This short video shows the incredible impact they are making to transform neighborhoods in Detroit.](#)

You can get involved in these great causes by making a donation or by volunteering your time. Your support can make a big difference in the lives of others, and by doing so, you also help yourself. The gift of giving is really a gift to yourself.

"Those who are happiest are those who do the most for others." – Booker T. Washington

"There is no exercise better for the heart than reaching down and lifting people up." – John Holmes

About the Author



Melissa Kessler is a leadership coach, trainer, facilitator, consultant, speaker and author. She is the President and owner of Evoke Potential, LLC and has over 20 years of experience training, consulting, and coaching leaders within industry and government. She holds a Professional Certified Coach (PCC) accreditation from the International Coach Federation (ICF) and received her leadership coaching certificate from Georgetown University. She earned a Master of Arts degree in Organizational Behavior Management and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology, both from Western Michigan University.

Melissa has coached over 100 leaders at all organizational levels resulting in the achievement of their personal and professional goals including promotion to the next level of leadership. She also provides [leadership training courses](#), team building sessions, and consulting services to increase effectiveness and productivity, improve communication, and reduce conflict within teams. She is certified to administer a number of [assessments](#) for leadership and team development including the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i 2.0®), Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument™ (TKI), Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation-Behavior™ (FIRO-B®), Change Style Indicator®, Situational Leadership®, The Center for Creative Leadership's suite of 360-degree feedback assessments, Team Management Systems® (TMS) work-based assessments & feedback instruments, and the AcuMax Index®. Some of her training courses include the Conflict Management, Team Performance Concepts, Increasing Employee Engagement, Conquer Stress, Change and Transition Management, Manager Essential Skills, Giving Effective Feedback, Coaching Essentials, and Situational Leadership.

Melissa believes that [coaching](#) is fundamental to the growth and development of outstanding leaders and ultimately top-notch organizations. She coaches business leaders to unleash the potential of employees and utilize their full capabilities to drive outstanding results and lasting success. Her passion is partnering with business owners and executives to develop their smartest technically competent experts into strong influential leaders. Her greatest strengths include seeing and drawing out the best in her clients, inspiring them to take action, and expanding their emotional intelligence to transform from technical experts into exceptional leaders.

Melissa is a native of Michigan and currently resides there. She is a member of the International Coach Federation (ICF), ICF Michigan Charter Chapter, ICF Los Angeles Charter Chapter, Sterling Heights Regional Chamber of Commerce, Michigan Business & Professional Association. She also served as a mentor with Winning Futures for two years.

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