

Taking A Stand for Your Own Greatness

Bruce Elkin

Fifteen years ago I took a course to certify me to teach Robert Fritz's *Technologies for Creating*® courses.* Despite my initial shyness and inexperience in personal development workshops, I thought the course was extraordinary. We worked long into the evenings then bounced out of bed early to start again. We clarified vision, assessed current reality, and set up creative tension. We watched Martin Luther King's "I have a dream!" speech on TV. And we coached each other in the art and practice of creating what most mattered to us. I loved it all—except for one exercise.

At the end of day two, Kallenn, our facilitator, asked us each to take the portable mike, then stand up and declare to the group (there were 70 people in the course) that, "I take a stand for my own greatness."

"Say it with meaning," he told us, "Say it with conviction." Then he passed the mike to a woman on the end of the front row to his left. She popped up, grabbed the mike, and proudly proclaimed her own greatness. I sat six rows back, sweating, my gut a thick, painful knot.

* Robert Fritz is the author of *The Path of Least Resistance* [DMA, 1984], *Creating* [Fawcett Columbine, 1991], and *The Path of Least Resistance for Managers* [Berrett-Koehler, 1999].

I didn't know why I didn't want to do the exercise. But I didn't. I barely listened as the mike worked its way toward me. When I took it, I hauled my reluctant body off my chair and mumbled, "I take a stand for my own greatness." As I sat down, I felt like a complete fraud, a stranger to my own heart.

Instead of joining the others for dinner, I sat on a bluff and scribbled in my journal. *Why didn't I want to make the declaration? And why did I do it? What does any of this mean?* My answers showed I was confused, angry with myself for not practicing what I preached. An ex-teacher and leadership coach, I'd helped start then directed a mountaineering school in the Canadian Rockies. But the start-up challenge had long passed. I'd drifted through the last two years. On the bluff, I realized that I'd let the flame of my spirit burn too low. Still, I feared that if I admitted to inner greatness I might have to change, to become someone different. Besides, who was I to proclaim greatness?

Writing helped. I went back to the course, aware of my inner contradictions, but somehow okay with them. I applied myself with vigor and vigilance, watching myself struggle to grow. Over the next two days, I felt a shift; something in me opened up, enlarged. I caught glimpses of greatness in myself and others. As my vision became focused, I felt my inner flame sputter back to life. When the course ended, Kallenn asked if anyone wanted to make a closing remark. I took the mike and faced the group, nervous yet excited.

"Two days ago," I said, "I told you that I took a stand for my own greatness. But I lied. I didn't feel that greatness. I just mouthed the words. Since then, I've realized that the potential for greatness is in each of us, but unless we acknowledge it, it will likely die unborn. I can now say honestly and with deep sincerity that, "I *do* take a stand for my own greatness."

I looked out at the group for a few seconds, then sat down. I felt like I'd just mastered a major hurdle on my way toward owning my own heart.

Since then, I've helped thousands of people learn to create what matters. I've worked hard taking a stand for my greatness. And I've learned why we find that so hard, at times, to do.

Many of us fail to stand up for our greatness—for what we *truly* want—for of fear what others might say about our creations, and us. Denying our own hearts, we invest our life's energy in lesser things. But by doing so we withdraw from our own power. This is dangerous. Not offering our gifts to the world is riskier than putting them out into the world and dealing with whatever comes with success. In his inaugural speech, Nelson Mandela quoted Marianne Williamson about withdrawing from our own power:

“Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves ‘who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talent, fabulous?’ Actually who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.”

Accepting our greatness, we can begin to live our way into our own immeasurable power. By honouring the creations we feel passionate about creating, we give the gifts that only we can give. By expressing our greatness in ways that contribute to joy and well-being of the community, our lives become rich and meaningful. And we leave the planet a little better for our having been here.

“There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening,” Martha Graham told a young dancer, “that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all of time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and it will be lost. The world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good it is nor how valuable nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly, to keep the channel open.”

I've not always been able to keep that channel open, to keep my spirit burning brightly. But when the flame flickers, I recall how empowered I felt taking that public stand for my

own greatness. Remembering that my expression of greatness is unique in all the world, I resolve to offer my gifts to the world, and to let whatever happens happen. Doing so opens me, once again, to the world of possibility, that lies always, undiscovered, all around us.