



THRIVE!

**CREATE WHAT MATTERS MOST —
IN CHALLENGING TIMES AND BEYOND!**

Bruce Elkin

THRIVE

**Create What Matters *Most*
In Challenging Times and Beyond**

**Or
How To Create Resilience, Results and Real Rewards—
With Whatever Life Gives You**

By Bruce Elkin

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**Dedicated to Maia and Kai,
and their children's children.**

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Expert Praise for *Thrive*

THRIVE* shows you how to shift your focus and energy *from* getting rid of what you *don't* like and *don't* want *to* creating what you truly *do* want.** It helps you move *from* a problem-focused stance *to* a results-driven stance. It helps you develop resilience, results and real rewards—in spite of adversity, obstacles and difficult times. It gives you the skills and structure you'll need to create simple yet rich, resilient, free and flourishing lives, work and businesses—with whatever you have to work with.***

"Bruce is one of the most effective coaches I've worked with. In *THRIVE* he gets you excited about pursuing the things that truly matter to you even under adverse conditions, and shows you how to stay the course until you get there. I found myself nodding my head in agreement as I read and thinking, "this just makes so much sense."

–Josh Dorfman, Author/Television Host, *The Lazy Environmentalist*

"Bruce Elkin provides a life-organizing framework with which you can dramatically refocus your life on what matters most. If you read *THRIVE* be prepared to let go of stress and extraneous burdens, and re-energize your life."

–Dr. Paul Stoltz, Author: *Adversity Quotient & The Adversity Challenge*

"THRIVE can help you create an adventurous, fulfilling life. Reading it, I realized how much Bruce's guidance shaped my approach to life, and helped me transform my dreams into reality. He provides a template for engaging the world with wonder and enthusiasm, and changing your inner language from can't to can."

–Sharon Wood, Keynote Speaker, 1st N. American Woman to Summit Mt Everest

"Bruce's approach goes beyond coping with hard times. He helps you embrace life's complexity, and use it as raw material to create results. If life gives you lemons, you don't just make lemonade—you make a delicious lemon soufflé. Your life isn't just less bad or a little better—it's energized in a whole new way. I use some of Bruce's tools and can testify to their power."

–Vicki Robin, Million-Selling Coauthor of *Your Money Or Your Life*

"Bruce Elkin's creative approach inspires us all to question the old ways of the past in a renewed quest to find innovative ways to embrace the exciting challenges of the present."

–John Amatt, Pres, *One Step Beyond WorldWide*

"A great read. I was lost, overconfident and looking for direction. The ideas and practice that Bruce outlines in this book helped me develop a framework for life and work that I use every day."

–Doc Klein, President, *Uncharted Territories*

"Bruce's approach is great for creative people. When I dream up a project, I must not only think through the steps I need to take, but actually take them— even those I dread or resist. I also focus on everyday and work-related communication so that it does what I really want it to do."

–Kathy Page, Author of *Alphabet and The Find*

"This powerful primer raises excellent questions. It gives you tools, models and perspectives to focus on what really matters. Challenging times offer opportunity. Many know that—but still get stuck. This e-book provides practical advice for getting going—and knowing where to go."

–Bob Stilger, President, *Resilient Communities*

For More Expert Praise for *THRIVE*, please scroll to the end of the ebook.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BIG PICTURE

Embrace Messiness; Create What Matters

*"I would not give a fig for the simplicity this side of complexity,
but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity."*

—Oliver Wendell Holmes

Recession. Financial crises. Climate change. Peak oil. Resource wars. Extreme weather. Businesses closing. Job losses. Bailouts. Foreclosures. Neighborhoods abandoned. Nuclear leaks and meltdowns. Uncertainty in life, work and relationships....

These are challenging, even frightening times for many.

They will get likely get worse before they get better. And “better” may look significantly different than the “all new, bigger and better” of modern marketing.

Since the 2008 financial meltdown, many people have struggled to stay afloat. But not always successfully. So they default to problem-solving as their primary tool with which to produce results. Many discover that, when applied to *complex* human challenges, problem-solving fails. *Things get worse.*

"It's all such a huge mess," said Susan, a woman who'd signed up for one of my life coaching packages.

"Work. Life. The nation. The environment. Relationships." she moaned. "Problems, problems, problems. It's so complex. So chaotic. I feel overwhelmed. I'm afraid I can't cope. Can your coaching help me get rid of this mess? Or fix it?"

"Perhaps," I said, "just *fixing* or *getting rid of* problems aren't your only options. Maybe the only way out of such messy complexity is through it."

"I don't get it," said Susan. "What do you mean?"

Complexity, I explained, is part of life. It keeps novels interesting, fine wines enjoyable, airplanes in flight, relationships vital and living systems healthy and resilient. Complexity is part of reality. We do best if we don't exaggerate it. We do best if we view it objectively. Not better, not worse—simply as it is.

When we learn to accept complexity as part of reality, it's easier to work our way through it and create the flourishing simplicity on the other side of complexity. That greatly increases our chances to thrive in the face of challenges.

A Quick Overview

This first chapter is designed to give you the big picture of what's involved in accepting and transcending the complexity and adversity of our confusing times.

It's a kind of overture to the rest of the book. It's an overview of what's involved with learning to create what matters most to you, and developing the grit and resilience to stick with your creation to completion. It sketches out the basics themes that I'll get more specific about as we move through the book.

In **Part One**, I'll show you why problem-solving is a shaky foundation on which to create your future, and how to shift from problem-solving to *creating*.

In **Part Two**, I'll show you why creating is a more solid, powerful platform. And how to make it work for you. I'll show you how to set up and master the *creating approach*, and create the kind and quality of life, work, and relationships you long for, in spite of life's inevitable setbacks and complexity.

In **Part Three**, I'll show you how to be resilient, and to flourish in the face of adversity. I'll also show you how your capacity to create will make you more resilient, and how being resilient increases your capacity to embrace complexity and create what matters most, i.e. to thrive in challenging times.

Working *With* Complexity

As Susan began to work with reality-as-it-is, she learned to describe it objectively—without exaggeration or unnecessary emotion. Doing so simplified her

challenges. It dissolved most of her “problems.” It increased her resilience. Her mess gradually morphed into a series of exciting challenges.

No longer focused on fixing or getting away from messiness, Susan became free to focus on *creating* the life, work and world she *truly* wanted. She let go of her habit of seeing all difficult situations as “problems.” She began to think of herself as a creator first, problem-solver second.

She started by creating small, concrete “practice creations”—things she cared about, but not so much that failure frightened her. She practiced the *creating approach* like a pro practices her sport or a yogi his yoga. She learned. She grew. She stretched.

In time, and with consistent practice, Susan created results she'd deeply longed for: a great job, a sustaining relationship, a room of her own, a new garden and a neighbourhood food security group that added meaning and vitality to her life.

She got strong, fit and back into running. She thrived at work. Her social resilience grew and she flourished in relationships with family and friends. She volunteered at a local food bank. She contributed to co-creating a resilient, self-reliant community.

Susan fully embraced the *creating approach* outlined in this e-book.

She practiced the skills, and integrated them in a dynamic organizing framework.

First, she envisioned desired results. Then she assessed her current reality relative to each results' vision. Holding vision and reality in mind, together, she set up creative tension, which energized and activated her choices. Only then, did she take action.

She evaluated the results of her action, updating current reality. She learned from experience, made adjustments and took new action. Her capacity to create grew. She kept *creating* until she brought her result into being.

Then she created another result. And another, and another...

As she got *competent* at *creating* results—with whatever life threw her—Susan's *confidence* grew. She developed *resilience*: the ability to cope with adversity and bounce back from setbacks.

Increasing her resilience further increased her capacity to create, which increased her resilience. Together, the capacity to create and the ability to deal with adversity enabled Susan to thrive in all kinds of challenging situations and circumstances that had previously left her feeling lost, helpless and overwhelmed.

As she mastered her *creating approach*, Susan gradually uncovered the rich, elegant simplicity on other side of complexity. As she crafted the life, work and relationships she'd longed for, most of her "mess"—and the fear and anxiety she'd felt when she'd imagined “all that mess”—gradually melted away.

She felt better about herself, her life and her future than she had in years.

What she did, you can, too.

Opportunity In Crisis

Messiness does not have to be a problem—in life, or in you.

You don't have to get rid of messy, complexity. You can't solve it. Focusing on it out of fear deflects your focus, depletes your energy and deflates your spirit.

“Let's face it,” said systems expert [Donella Meadows](#), “the universe is messy. That’s what makes the world interesting, that’s what makes it beautiful, and that’s what makes it work.”ⁱ

Fretting about a mess can turn reality-as-it-is into a debilitating crisis. But “crisis” is double-sided. In Chinese, it is written with two characters—one for danger, one for *opportunity*.

Crisis, *improperly perceived*, is about danger, fear and reaction. *Properly perceived*, crisis is an opportunity to change. It’s a strategic moment in which to imagine desired results, embrace reality-as-it-is and take action to bring your results into being.

Adversity, properly perceived becomes, not a mess to stew over, nor a chaotic series of problems to react to. Rather, it becomes a challenge to embrace, and rise to.

So, accept and embrace your "messes" or "problems". Learn to use them as raw material for creating the results you want.

When you do, you'll be able to find the opportunity in crisis, too.

Resilience: Finding Opportunity and Resilience In The Face Of Adversity

My parents survived *World War 2* and *The Great Depression*. Most people over forty survived the crash of 1982, and the bursting of the high-tech bubble. I survived two decades of mostly meaningless, academically-biased public schooling before I dropped out in the 21st grade. :-)

Some, like many of the clients I work with, do *more* than survive. They flourish in the face of adversity; they *thrive* in life, work and relationships.

Consider a local brewery hit by the last recession, and worried about losing share in a shrinking market. Instead of hunkering down and cutting back, they created a new brand of beer, "Bailout Bitter." Sales shot through the roof.

Or take Cathy Cardenas' *Designer Home Tending* business in Utah, USA. As the foreclosure crisis left homes abandoned, suffering neglect and vandalism, prices fell. Enter Cathy. She provides real estate agents with "home tenders," renters looking for cheap housing. They move into a house, clean, furnish, fix it up and give it a cared-for look. Vandalism drops, prices rise, time to sale shortens and home tenders get a nice place to live, with reasonable rent.

Instead of bemoaning difficult times, Cathy saw and seized an opportunity. She created a thriving business for herself, a service for realtors and owners, and affordable housing for many who needed it.

We are resilient. We can and do bounce back from adversity.

A Personal Example of Resilience

In the 1982 recession, I (and a small group of climbers) took over a money-losing YMCA outdoor program and privatized it. In four years, we turned *The Yamnuska Mountain School* into a quarter-million dollar per year mountain skills and leadership school. Over the past 25 years, it grew and changed and, today it thrives as [*Yamnuska Mountain Adventures*](#).ⁱⁱ

Creating *Yamnuska* was a challenge for me. But *Yam* was also an opportunity—a chance to teach myself entrepreneurship, and, rather than toil for wages, to make money on my own terms. When that opportunity arose, I jumped at it.

At first, we weren't clear about *how* to proceed, just *why*. We wanted to get paid for doing what we loved. And we shared a vision of a high level, high quality mountain skills and leadership program. So we dove in.

We made mistakes. We learned. We made adjustments.

At first, for example, we set up a not-for-profit organization, hoping to qualify for provincial leadership grants. But the Mountain Guides lobbied against us, claiming such grants would give us an unfair advantage over them. As businesses, they were not

eligible. The leadership folks rejected our application, saying, "You're too much like a business."

They suggested we apply for the same provincial tourism support the guides received. But, Tourism told us, "You're a non-profit, not a business. You don't qualify."

That bureaucratic Catch-22 set us back, momentarily. But we pulled together and accepted reality-as-it-was. We sucked it up and decided to build our school without government help. And succeeded. Today *Yamnuska* is Canada's premier mountain adventure program, and one of the best in the world.

After *Yam* was stable and running in the black, I was eager for a new challenge. Still in the recession, I piloted an *Executive Seminars Program* for [*One Step Beyond Worldwide*ⁱⁱⁱ](#). I wanted to help leaders build strong, resilient teams that saw the business case for environmental responsibility. In spite of the sluggish economy, my partners and I pulled it off.

I not only survived that recession, I thrived. I learned to embrace challenge, create what mattered to me and flourish. I taught myself how to make my own income, sufficient for my needs. My experience with executives led to a stint as a highly-paid corporate trainer and consultant, and, eventually, when I realized that path lacked heart for me, I focused on creating a personal and professional life coaching practice. Since then, I've helped clients on six-and-a-half continents learn to create and thrive.

Three Key Lessons

Those recession years were tough, but I learned three lessons that have helped me flourish in the face of adversity ever since.

Lesson 1: If You Know *What* and *Why*, You Can Figure Out *How*

To create almost anything, start with a clear, compelling ***what*** (a vision of a result you want to create). Back it up with a solid ***why*** (clear reasons for wanting to create that result.) Then ground your vision in an objective assessment of current reality, the present state of your result, i.e., ***where*** you're starting, and with what.

Once you're clear about ***what*** and ***why*** you want to create, and ***where*** you're starting, you can figure out ***how*** to create your result.

In all acts of *creating*—personal, professional or organizational—you teach yourself how to get from where you are to where you want to be. You make up the path as you go.

As you do, you generate and integrate three powerful sources of energy: *motivation*, *creative tension* and *momentum*.

When you express your *why* (purpose, aspiration, dream, desire) in a clear, compelling vision of a completed result, you generate ***motivation***—the first source of energy used in the *creating approach*.

A clear, purpose-driven *vision* guides and gives meaning to *strategies* and *tactics*. "Make no small goals," urges an old saying, "for they lack the power to stir our souls."

But desire alone is not enough to create successful results.

When you ground your vision in an objective assessment of current reality (the current state of your result), an energizing ***creative tension*** emerges out of the gap between your vision and your current reality. This second source of energy is the workhorse of *creating*. It helps you act and keep acting, even when motivation fades.

Creative tension also sets up a *container for creating*—an organizing framework—that guides your *actions*, and helps you learn from experience. Action in this framework generates learning, increased skill and ***momentum***, the third source of energy.

Integrating these three sources of energy empowers you. It enables you to consistently act in support of your desired results.

Guided by vision, honouring reality-as-it-is, taking focused action and learning from both mistakes and successes, you greatly increase your odds of creating the results you so deeply desire—with whatever you have to start.

Your Highest "Why"

Getting clear about *personal purpose* is a key to thriving. To succeed, you must figure out what you want to create, and *why*.

Whether you want to write a book, change jobs, get into in the green economy, start an eldercare, landscaping or massage business, sell photographs on-line, create an innovative non-profit, organize a local food security group, contribute to a sustainable city, build a Transition Town or whatever... a key challenge is clarifying *what* you want to create, and *why*.

Currently, for example, great opportunities exist in creating ecologically responsible—"green"—products, services, businesses, homes and communities.

For example, I saw a bit on TV about a professor and students who took a costly problem, and saw in it an opportunity to *create*. By figuring out how to recover phosphorus from sewage sludge, they created an award-winning, environmentally friendly fertilizer—[Crystal Green®](#)—that preserves a precious; much needed mineral that is usually wasted.

"Waste is out," say experts. "Entrepreneurship is in. Green is hot. Simplicity has returned."^{iv} Daily, I see people downshifting to simple, focused, and flourishing lives and work. Doing so creates freedom. It enables them to direct their personal, activist and entrepreneurial power to what really matters to them.

Although health care, medical technology, gerontology, senior's care and coaching in all kinds of areas are also hot areas of job growth, "Green," say many, "is the new [plastics](#)."^v

"Sustainability," says consultant David Cooperider, " *is the* business opportunity of the 21st century."

"The green economy," he says, "is primed to be the mother of all markets, something that will fuel innovation. ... (V)irtually everything a business can do to go green today—in any industry—will make it stronger, healthier, more innovative, more competitive, and more inspiring to its customers, people, and partners."^{vi}

The True Joy In Life.

If exploring the green economy is not your highest why, then seek out other opportunities to do what *you* want to—to create what *you* want to create.

"Find something you *really* care about," says [Kate Wolf](#)," and live a life that shows it." Great advice, but not always easy to follow.

Growing up, my mother urged me to be a lawyer. I was good with words and liked verbal sparring. I almost took that route. But my father suggested I'd find my best work where *my* deep desires met *the world's* deep needs.

Urging me to find purpose in serving others and the world, Dad quoted Shaw:

"This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one ... being a force of Nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy."^{vii}

Being a "force of Nature," working to fulfill your deepest desires and highest aspirations—for *yourself*, *others* and *the world*—is where you find your highest *why*. Integrate what you want to create with what you want to *give* to the world.

To do so successfully, as I discovered creating *Yamnuska* and the Executive Program, you'll probably need to develop some new *kinds* of skills.

Lesson 2: Specific Skills and Generic Skills

We're often told, "Give a person a fish, and they eat for today. Teach them to fish, and they'll never go hungry."

Really? Is that still true?

Try telling it to a fisher in Newfoundland or Chile where fish stocks collapsed. Tell it to loggers where the forest industry has disappeared. Tell it to millions of North Americans who lost good-paying jobs to places with lower wages. Tell it to Tower Records, neighborhood bookstores and typewriter companies. Teaching people to fish or to do any *specific* job is no longer *enough* to guarantee that they'll never go hungry.

A second key to success, I learned, is recognizing that challenging times require mastery in both *specific skills* **and** *generic skills*.

Specific skills are specialized skills, particular to specific fields such as *accounting*, *beekeeping*, *writing*, *rock climbing*, *fishing*, *community activism*, *business development*, *web design*, etc...

Most of our education is about field-specific skills. But, while they are still *necessary*, specific skills are no longer *sufficient*. By themselves, they no longer guarantee success in life or work.

To thrive, we need *both* field-specific skills and higher-order *generic* skills.

Generic skills are sometimes referred to as "meta-skills," "character skills," or "learning how (and why) to learn" skills. "Generic" comes from the Latin "genus." It has the same root as "generate."

Generic skills are high-order, transferable skills such as *courage*, *curiosity*, *patience*, *flexibility*, *purpose*, *persistence*, *resilience* and *creating*—skills that apply across *all* specific fields.

Such skills enable us to adapt and apply specific skills. They empower us to generate new skills (and new products, services, relationships, communities, etc...) that help us rise above adversity and flourish.

Few public schools teach generic skills. As a result, many don't develop them. Faced with adversity, they flounder. However, there are those who dig deep and teach themselves the skills they need thrive in the face of change.

A combination of generic and specific skills enabled an out-of-work fisher in Newfoundland to become a self-employed electrician and sell his services to the offshore oil industry.

A laid-off forest worker in Oregon started a mountain guiding service, and sells her adventure programs to wealthy professionals seeking challenge and growth in the wild.

A logger in Squamish, BC turned a rock-climbing hobby into a thriving teaching and guiding business.

A housewife who felt trapped in marriage decided to create independence by turning her photography hobby into a focused small business. When she succeeded, she realized that it had been her lack of creating skills that trapped her, not her relationship. Now she's happily independent within her business and interdependent within her marriage.

Where I live, and in many places around the world, young urban people have taught themselves to grow food, and farm. They are part of an exploding local food movement. And loving it.

These folks, and others like them that you'll meet in this book, learned to create work they love that provides sufficient income, personal meaning and a sense of where they fit in the world. In spite of change and challenge, they're thriving.

Creating Is A Key Generic Skill

"We are what we repeatedly do," said Aristotle. "Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

The *creating habit*—the skills, structure and organizing framework that underlie the *act of creating*—is the most powerful approach we know for clarifying what really matters, and why. And for creating a life, work and relationships that show it.

The *creating approach* comprises a set of generic skills that you can master and apply to crafting almost *any* result. Coupled with specific skills and *resilience*, a

capacity to create enables you to embrace life's complex messes as challenges, not problems.

"Live with vision and purpose," says integrative medicine pioneer Joan Borysenko. "Resilient people don't wait passively for the future to happen to them—they become the future by consciously creating it."^{viii}

Creating or Creativity?

Before we go too much farther, I want to clarify the difference between “creating” and “creativity.” *Creating* is the act of bringing deeply desired results into being. Creators sometimes embrace *creativity* but not always.

The word “create” comes from the Latin *creare*, meaning “to produce, to make.”

My Concise Oxford Dictionary defines “create” as “to bring into being, cause to exist, esp. to produce where nothing was before, ‘to form out of nothing’.”

There is no entry in my 4,000 page Oxford, but Webster’s defines “creative” as “able to create; being inventive and imaginative.”

In none of the dictionaries I searched did I find a definition for “creativity.” Most of the people I ask define it as “doing things differently.”

That’s how many think about *creating*—merely doing things (often the same old things) differently. The word “creativity” refers more to style than substance, as in the case of an advertising account executive complaining, “We need more creativity in this approach.”

What often passes for creativity is just the same old stuff dressed up in a new package. Creativity is often sprinkled on after the fact to “spice up” a product or service. At worst, it’s the same old stuff, in new bottles, spun with “creative” ad copy.

The drive to *create*—the deep, persistent urge to bring into being something that you'd love to see exist—is different from creativity. It sets *creators* apart from individuals who are merely creative.

“The drive to create,” says author and improvisational violinist Stephen Nachmanovitch, “characterizes someone who is driven to do something from the depths, something that he or she feels must be done regardless of whether it's popular or well rewarded by society. This inner compulsion to realize a vision depends on *creating* for its fulfillment, but it is not the same as *creativity*. The inspired poet or musician may in fact be less creative, less clever, adept, or original than the designer of

an advertising campaign, but he is motivated by a life-or-death need to bring the vision into being.”^{ix}

The unusual is not the essence of the creating process.

A creator's end result is usually predictable. A novelist ends up with a novel, a painter with a painting. Architects see buildings take shape as they were envisioned.

Although the path may vary from straight to crooked, from up and down to a rising spiral, the essence of the creating process is that it leads step-by-step to the outcome desired by the creator.

Even those who insist that their creating is unplanned and spontaneous usually end up with predictable results. For example, a poet in a college workshop I did claimed she never wrote with any end in mind. “I can’t,” she told us, “It would stifle my creativity.”

“So how do you create a poem?” someone asked her.

“I just go quiet and it comes to me,” she said. “Then I write it down.”

“But,” I asked, “isn’t it inevitably a poem? Not a novel. Not an essay. Not a ceramic pig or a screenplay. Isn’t it always, predictably, a poem?”

“Yes,” she said cautiously, “but each poem is amazingly different.”

“Fair enough,” I said, “but isn’t a poem the end, the final form, that you have in mind when you write it down?”

“Well, yes,” she reluctantly agreed, “I guess it is.”

“So,” I asked, “would it be fair to say that you intentionally create a space—a framework or a field of possibilities—in which poems can spontaneously come to you?”

“Yes,” she said, “I guess that’s true.”

“And then,” I said, “do you read it over, revise it and craft until the words fully express the emotions that came to you when you were creating.

“Ah,” she said, smiling as if a light had gone on inside her head, “That is exactly what I do.”

So be careful. Don’t confuse *creating* with *creativity*. They both have their place, but when I talk about creating, I’m almost always talking about creating as a *generic* skill. I’m talking about the act of creating *something*—bringing into being results you care deeply about, and want to see exist.

But, you might ask, “What if I don’t know what I want to create?”

Good question. And it leads us to the last lesson I learned, back in the day.

Lesson 3: Clarity About What *Really* Matters *Emerges* From Practicing *Creating*

Learning what to want is key to mastering the creating approach. But it's not easy. "Learning what to want," says Sir Geoffrey Vickers, "is the most radical, the most painful and the most creative art of life." x

Clarifying what matters is more about exploring and experimenting than it is about thinking, getting a big idea and then doing it. It's about trying things, creating results and learning as you go. But the uncertainty in such an approach is frightening to many.

I think it was philosopher Michael Polanyi who said, "We go through life doing what's second, third or tenth most important because we're terrified of failing at what's most important."

Afraid of failing at what matters, many can't (or won't) acknowledge what *is* most important. So, I find it best to approach what really matters obliquely. Instead of tackling it head on, it's best to kind of sneak up on it, slowly.

I help people develop generic *creating* skills by starting small, with concrete, easy-to-succeed-at creations. As an ex-ski and climbing instructor, I'm a firm believer in the African saying that, "Knowledge is just a rumour, until it gets into your muscles."

As clients' skill and confidence gradually increase through creating simple, concrete practice creations, I help them scale up to larger, more complex and meaningful creations.

As they do, they develop *generic* competence and authentic confidence—in themselves, and in the *creating* approach. That confidence enables them to embrace what *truly* matters to them—and to approach it via *creating*.

I Came For Career Help. And You Want Me To Create A Tidy Closet?

An East Coast lawyer hired me to help her get clear about what mattered in work, and to transition to a rewarding career that best expressed her deepest values and highest aspiration.

Janet (not her real name) told me she "hated" being a lawyer. And, she claimed, she "didn't have a clue" what work really mattered to her. She feared she'd never find it.

Early in our coaching process, I suggested she choose something such as "a neat, well-organized, aesthetically pleasing bedroom closet" as a *practice* creation.

Janet rejected that idea, claiming her closet was, "such a huge mess it would take weeks to even clear out the clutter." It seemed such a big chore that she called it, "The Behemoth," and shuddered every time she thought of tackling it.

After we danced around the issue of whether to tackle her "career issue" head on, or learn to create by creating small, concrete practice creations, she chose as her first practice result: "A bedroom with a colorful design that is aesthetically pleasing, comfortable, well-lit, with everything in its place."

That still somewhat-conceptual vision was good enough to get her moving. But Janet was still skeptical.

"I tried creating my dream bedroom several times," she said, "but got frustrated and quit. I hope this doesn't turn out to be another waste of time and energy."

I assured her that, if she applied the skills and structure that I'd coach her in and practiced them consistently, she would succeed. She agreed to try.

As Janet grounded her initial "bedroom" vision in current reality, set up creative tension and took action, she gradually clarified what she really wanted it to look and feel like when completed. As she added details and success criteria, her vision became more engaging and motivating. Here's her final version:

A bedroom with a colorful design that is aesthetically pleasing, comfortable, well-lit, with everything in its place.

*Red, king-size comforter. My colorful paintings hang on the walls. Warm light illuminates the room. There are lamps on either side of the bed and on the opposite wall. Green bamboo stalks decorate the walls on either side of the bed and our brightly-painted nightstands are in front of them. Bookcase full of books and my writing desk are on either side of my bureau. Plush and supportive cushioning and ample light to sit up and read in bed. The bureau-tops and corners of the room are clear. Drawers contain useful clothing and other items that are easy to access. My closet is neat, organized by type of clothing, with items stored visibly and neatly in the bottom of it. A small rug on my side of the bed. **I feel relaxed and happy when I'm in the room.***

Using the *creating approach*, Janet then mapped out an *organizing framework* comprising vision, current reality and action steps for the bedroom. She also mapped out similar frameworks for the sub-results, and sub-sub results that she discovered she'd have to create as part of crafting her dream bedroom.

Doing what, at first, may seem like painstaking work to you, Janet realized why previous attempts to create her dream bedroom failed. The sub-results and sub-sub-results involved over 100 action steps, most of which she hadn't even imagined, let alone put on a "to do" list.

In those previous attempts, lacking a clear framework to guide her, she'd got stuck, overwhelmed by details and frustrated. She told herself "it's too hard." Then, in the face of what seemed like overwhelming complexity, she gave up.

But, this time, working on her bedroom within the *creating framework*, she was able to embrace that complexity as part of current reality. She used the energy of creative tension to take action, learn from her results, make adjustments and teach herself how to create her envisioned bedroom in just over four weeks.

She sent me photos of it on Friday afternoon. It was stunning. And almost totally true to her vision. I was impressed. Then, on Sunday afternoon, she sent me photos of her, "Neat, well-organized and aesthetically pleasing bedroom closet."

"What the...?" I thought.

"After finishing the bedroom," Janet said in an accompanying email, "I had so much momentum working for me that I even vanquished "The Behemoth" this weekend. Turns out it was a mess for 1/2 a day and then felt SO good to get everything put back together exactly as I envisioned it."

With those successful results under her belt, Janet scaled up to another creation: a 10-minute DVD to celebrate her grandmother's 85th birthday. She described it as, "A retrospective of Memere's life shown through home videos, still photographs, and audio and video interviews with family members."

More complex than the bedroom, or the closet, the DVD would be made on her new iMac, with software that she was just learning to use. She had to enlist family members to find old photos, film and videos. She also needed them to record video or voice-over felicitations for Memere, and get it all back to her in time. In spite of the increased complexity of this creation, she completed the DVD in time to show at her grandmother's birthday party.

Memere was thrilled. Her family was blown away. The photo Janet sent of her open-mouthed, totally-focused family watching the video was priceless. Another successful creation. And Janet's competence and confidence took another jump upward.

Next, emboldened by her growing confidence and competence in creating, she set out to create a "\$100,000 fund-raising program to help pay for a friend's medical treatments."

With this result Janet drew on skills and principles learned in the first three practice creations. And on the confidence she'd developed in herself, and in the approach.

As she worked on these various creations, Janet realized two key things.

First, she didn't really "hate" her job as a lawyer. She disliked some aspects of it, which, after carefully assessing her current reality, she thought she'd be able to change. She also realized there was much about her job that she liked.

Second, she began to see her job (and her considerable salary) as a way to finance a transition to a new, more meaningful career. Moreover, as she created her practice creations, a vision of that new career gradually began to take shape in her mind.

Applying the *creating approach*, Janet sketched out a rough five-year vision of what her career would look like if she created it. She grounded her vision in reality, set up creative tension and began to map the organizing framework. She took baby steps. She created mini-results that accumulated into the foundation for her large, complex new career creation. Gradually, a clearer vision of a meaningful career emerged.

By this point, Janet had dropped her problem-solving habit. She fully understood the skills and framework of creating—in her heads, hands and heart. She'd developed a *capacity* to create, and confidence in that capacity.

What started, as a "job problem" and angst about "not having a clue" became a clear, compelling vision of a challenging new coaching career. And the competence and confidence to begin laying down the foundation on which to create that vision.

Janet was well on her way to creating the life and work she most wanted. And, not only enjoying the process, and learning from it, she was loving it.

"This whole adventure of creating," says Nachmanovitch, "is about joy and love."

Janet's Update

Just after I'd published the first online version of this ebook, Janet emailed me.

"A lot has changed since we worked together last year," she said. "I am no longer a practicing attorney. I am building my coaching practice and developing other workshop and speaking 'things'.

"It's all good stuff, and I couldn't be happier as to how things have progressed.

"I went back and read my chart that I worked on during our coaching. I created many things on the chart and am continuing to develop others. Such a helpful concept to vision and plan in that way.

"I also did a chart for my website when I was designing and writing it earlier this summer, and I accomplished the vision to a T. I was very excited about that.

“So, as you can see, I am still putting my creative power and techniques I learned with you to good use.”

Where We’re Going In This E-Book

I want to show you how to let go of faulty problem-solving habits, develop solid creating habits, build resilience, create what matters most and thrive in good times or bad. We'll bounce around a bit, because I like to introduce a concept briefly, and then elaborate on it later. So here's a map of where we're going.

Chapter 2: From Solving Problems To *Creating* Results briefly introduces the ideas I'll develop throughout the book. I'll show why *relief-driven* problem-solving is not a solid platform on which to create results. I'll also give you an overview of the *skills* and *structure* you'll need to clarify, create and sustain results that matter to you.

Chapter 3: The Limits of Problem-Solving introduces the difference between "convergent" problems that have simple solutions, and "divergent" challenges that become more complex as you try to "solve" them. I show how to embrace divergent challenges with the *creating approach*. I also describe six flaws that emerge when you apply convergent problem-solving to divergent challenges, and which make problem-solving a shaky platform on which to create results that truly matter.

Chapter 4: What Matters Most? Shows how three novice creators *created* what mattered most to them—in spite of challenging circumstances.

Chapter 5: The Structure of Creating more thoroughly outlines the organizing framework common to all *acts of creating*. It shows how such a "container for creating" integrates skills, action and learning, and enables you to create results—*independent of adversity*.

Chapter 6: Setting Up Your Creating Framework shows you how to craft powerful *visions* of results, ground them in *current reality* and use *creative tension* to energize *choices* and *actions*. It also shows you how to integrate these three skills into a dynamic *structure* for creating almost *anything*.

Chapter 7: Working Within The Structure shows you how to make good choices and take effective *action*. How to break large results into *sub-results*, and *sub-sub-results* so you start with small tasks (*hows*) that have a high likelihood of success. You'll learn to build *momentum* that enables you to stretch for larger results. I'll show you how to tap the power of practice and persistence, and how "*the learning curve*" really works.

Chapter 8: Creating Resilience and Flourishing In the Face of Adversity shows you how to bounce back from setbacks. I describe four CORE skills that help you develop a sense of control over, and ownership for the results you want. And how, together, resilience and a capacity to create give you the power to thrive in the face of any challenge.

Chapter 9: Putting It All Together stresses the experiential nature of creating, and the importance of practice and perseverance in creating highly desired results. It also suggests ways to get support for your creating practice, which can make the difference between dabbling in creating and mastering its skills and structure—and creating what truly matters to you.

If this sounds like an interesting journey, I invite you to join me as we explore the limits of problem solving, discover the power in creating and learn to create the skills, structure and results that matter most to you. I hope that doing so will enable and empower you to live a rich, free and flourishing life, and thrive in challenging times.

Part One

Beyond Problem-Solving: *Creating Deeply Desired Results*

“The fundamental difference between creating and problem solving is simple. In problem solving we seek to make something we do not like go away. In creating, we seek to make what we truly care about exist.”

– Peter M. Senge

CHAPTER TWO

FROM SOLVING PROBLEMS TO *CREATING* RESULTS

"The best way to predict the future is to invent it."
– Alan Kay

Alan Kay is a fellow at Apple. His work inspired the Macintosh computer. Kay is adamant the Mac was not a solution to a problem.^{xi} The Mac was a *creation*.

Like other inventions of the 20th century—copiers, pocket calculators, electric bread-makers, the Miata, the iPod and the personal computer itself—the Mac didn't just fill a need; it created one.

Driven by Steve Job's *vision* of ubiquitous computing, the Mac, iPhone and iPad are examples of shifting primary focus from solving problems to creating outstanding, functional and aesthetically pleasing results. And they've changed our society.

They validate Kay's belief that "the best way to predict the future is to invent it."

As you'll see shortly, problem-solving does have a place in creating, and on it's own. No doubt the Apple creators grappled with many technical problems as they created their world-changing creations.

But problems did not drive their actions.

A powerful vision of the kind and quality of result they wanted to create drove their actions.

As we continue to explore, you'll see how you can integrate creating and problem-solving to create the results you most want to create.

First, let's take a look at the difference between the two approaches.

Solving Problems? Or *Creating* Desired Results?

Every day, I hear from more people who feel like the client who was "overwhelmed by her "huge mess." Every day, I hear disturbing news about one or more of the **Big Three Crunches** that threaten us, our well-being and, possibly, our survival.

The **economic situation** is deteriorating. The **climate** isn't settling down and throws increasingly weird weather at us. And the US Army has accepted **Peak Oil**, the notion that oil production has peaked. They see the need to make the transition to clean energy as quickly as possible.

Life seems to be getting more complex. Daily hassles increase and upset us as much or more than big global problems. It's easy to see why many might conclude that the whole thing is a "huge mess."

But, if you choose to see your life, work and world as an endless list of problems to solve, obstacles to overcome, or clutter to get rid of, it will become an energy-sapping struggle. It will lack meaning and purpose. It will frustrate you. It will wear you down.

Dedicating precious life energy to meaningless, misplaced problem-solving is boring, pointless, ineffective and, depressing. You lose vitality, and flounder.

To "flounder" is, "to struggle awkwardly, to move, as in deep mud or snow; plunge about in a stumbling manner." It can lead you to feel helpless, even hopeless in the face of change and challenge.

On the other hand, if you choose to see your life, work and world as a series of opportunities to create what truly matters, yours can be an exciting, meaningful and productive adventure.

You can learn to embrace and transcend problems, and to create what really matters. You can flourish in the face of adversity. You can give your gifts to the world. You can thrive.

To "flourish" is, "to grow vigorously; succeed; thrive; prosper; to be at the peak of development, activity, influence, production, etc.; be in one's prime."

Which state would you prefer to spend your time in?

Floundering in problem-solving? Or *flourishing* in creating?

Shifting Focus

I'm going to assume you picked *creating*.

To start *creating*, focus on clarifying and *creating* what you truly **do** want. Make your desired results primary. Put them first. Then your visions of those results you want to create—for yourself, and for your world—will drive your action

Don't ignore problems or adversity. Acknowledge them. Embrace their messiness as part of your current reality, and the current reality of your desired results.

As you shift to *creating* as your primary stance, most of your problems will dissolve. They'll gradually fade away as you focus your energy on creating the results that truly matter to you.

So make your desired result *primary*. Then, if you encounter solvable problems, make problem-solving *secondary*. See it as a supporting action that acknowledges reality-as-it-is and supports your desired results.

Then, problems will no longer drive your actions, or your life. Results will.

"But, Bruce," you may be thinking, "I'm a great problem solver. I've been successfully solving problems for years."

You probably have. And, if you're anything like the thousands of clients I've worked with you've probably been creating results, too, and didn't recognize it.

Before we learn how to consciously create desired results, most of us tend to mix up problem solving and creating, and call it *all* problem solving. But, when we see the difference between these different skill sets and learn to consciously create highly-desired results, we increase our effectiveness. We greatly up our chances of *creating* what we most deeply want to create.

Then, most of our so-called "problems" just fade away. They dissolve in the face of what Carl Jung called "a higher life urge."

My "Weight Problem" Dissolved.

I, for example, once had a hefty weight problem.

I'd diet, lose the "problem weight," celebrate and then slowly slip back into my weight-gaining ways. My weight problem returned.

Again, I'd diet, lose weight, celebrate and then slip back into old habits. I'd repeat the process over and over in what nutritionists call "[the yo-yo syndrome](#)."

Then, I discovered the [Honolulu Marathon Clinic](#) and took up road running. In running, I discovered a joyful and challenging passion. I signed up, started training and took part in short races back home. I loved it.

Although injury *sidelined* me before race day in Hawaii, I've kept up a vigorous aerobic exercise habit ever since, switching to walking, hiking and cycling, as I got older.

When I focused on creating a strong, fit, healthy runner's body and doing what it took to create it, my weight "problem" dissolved. It faded away, and stayed away. When I was training hard for an upcoming race, I almost couldn't eat enough food.

Later, after fully grasping the difference between problem-solving and creating, I began to apply to the *creating* stance to all areas of my life. Although I still have lots to learn, most of the messy "problems" I encounter either fade away, or are dealt with as action steps in my *creating* process. I'm more likely to flow than flounder.

For many, though, problem-solving is a deeply-rooted habit. They default to it as their primary results-producing strategy. For some, it's their *only* option.

But, when applied to most human "problems," problem-solving contains serious flaws. Relying on it can prevent you from creating desired results, and lead to frustration, anxiety and depression. You'll likely flounder, and even fail.

We'll discuss those flaws in detail in Chapter 2. For now, let's briefly look at one example in which problem-solving fails to produce real and lasting result.

Relief, Not Results

Most problem-solving focuses more on *relief* than it does on *results*.

Problems make us feel bad. And we don't usually take action until the bad feelings become intense. Then, we try to reduce (or get rid of) the *intensity*—the pain, frustration, anxiety and other bad feelings—associated with the problem.

Taking aspirin to relieve a stress headache relieves pain, but when it wears off, you're back where you started, possibly with intestinal bleeding. Aspirin doesn't leave you consistently feeling at ease, or pain-free. It doesn't change what caused your pain. It just let's you keep doing what caused it. Eventually, your headache comes back.

This pattern of, "relieve intensity, feel better for a while, and then the problem and intensity return" is common. Believe it or not, the automobile was introduced to Victorian Europe as, "The solution to pollution."

True, the horseless carriage brought relief from the stench produced by the droppings of the millions of horses that lived and worked within European cities. But cars and trucks now spew noxious fumes that not only kill millions each year, but also, through global climate change, might alter life on Earth as we know it.

The headache came back, big time.

Fighting Fire With Fire

Because, at some level, we realize problem-focused actions don't work well, we often try to force ourselves into action by *increasing* a problem's intensity.

We leave tasks until the last minute, and then use the fear of the consequences of not doing them to frighten ourselves into action. Taxes, for many, are an example. Monthly reports. Presentation notes. Calling someone for a date. Cold-calling. Putting together a disaster pack for you and your family.... The list goes on.

Well-meaning activists, concerned for the planet's health, tell us to stop doing this or that or we're all doomed. Sometimes, trying to scare us into action works, but often it doesn't. It turns us off. We get frightened, depressed and fly off to a spa for a week to recover.

Or we throw up our hands in despair, say, "What's the point?" and decide, as the bumper sticker says, to "spend our children's inheritance."

In most cases, fighting fire with fire doesn't work. And constantly floundering around in problem-solving can be stressful, and depressing.

Misplaced problem-solving is ubiquitous. Even in life or death situations, *intensity* often drives our actions.

Would You Bet Your Life On Odds Of 9 to 1 Against?

[Research on post-surgery cardiac patients](#) shows that, although *all* fear a recurrence of their heart problems—even *death*—up to 90% of patients fail to sustain their healthy, physician-ordered lifestyle changes beyond a year or so. ^{xii}

When surgery and [statins](#) relieve the fear and pain, nine out of ten patients stop taking their drugs. They slip back into unhealthy eating habits. Their arteries gunk up. Blood flow to the heart slows. Within three or four years, most are back under the knife. Or dead. "*9 out of 10.*" Not very good odds on which to bet your life.

For this, and *most* complex human challenges, the *structure* of intensity-driven problem-solving too often merely leads to *relief*, not to real and lasting results.

You don't, as I showed above, convince people to live simple, rich and sustainable lives only by scaring them with climate change horror stories. In fact, doing so is more like to *increase* their fear. And their sense of helplessness and overwhelm.

While it can motivate in the short run, fear inhibits us in the long run. Neurobiologist David Ingvar says when we can't anticipate a positive future, parts of our brain shut down. Fear causes us to downshift to survival mode (fight or flight).^{xiii}

In survival mode, we (especially men) stop cooperating.^{xiv}

We narrow our focus to looking out for #1. We act the opposite to the way activists hope we will. Scare us *too* much, and we throw up our arms in despair. "Why do anything?" we say. "We're doomed."

Call up the travel agent and book another flight to that spa in Banff or Aspen. Or shuffle off to a bar or the mall, seeking cheaper relief.

So how best can we stay hopeful, focus on what matters most and thrive in challenging times?

Embrace Reality; *Create* What Matters Most.

"All the greatest and most important problems of life are fundamentally insoluble," said Carl Jung. "They can never be solved, but only outgrown."

Describing his clinical experience, Jung said, "Some higher or wider interest appeared on the patient's horizon, and through this broadening of his or her outlook the insoluble problem lost its urgency."

The problems were not solved logically, in their own terms "but," Jung said, "faded when confronted with a new and stronger life urge."

Love and Joy Are Better Motivators Than Problems or Fear.

The ten percent of post-cardiac surgery patients who do sustain healthy changes are motivated, not by fear, but by a hopeful, optimistic vision of an engaged, joyful life.

They envision taking long walks with breath to spare, scampering up stairs with ease, making love without discomfort and being around long enough to enjoy their grandchildren.

Love and joy are powerful motivators.

A collective example of a realistically optimistic and joy-driven approach to change is [The Transition Town Movement](#). In *The Transition Town Handbook*, Rob Hopkins describes the daunting environmental, economic, and social *reality* we face from dwindling oil supplies *and* a positive *vision* of what a successful world-without-oil could look like—with practical steps for creating such a world, one town at a time.^{xv}

The Transition Initiative is *creating*-based. *Transitonistas* simultaneously hold in mind a motivating *vision* of a preferred future *and* an objective assessment of *current reality*. The *creative tension* that arises out of the vision/reality gap generates energy for action. It empowers them to create results with less stress, and more fun.

In his *Foreword* to *The Transition Handbook*, [Richard Hienberg](#) describes Transition's approach as "more like a party than a protest march."

The Urge to Create

Albert Einstein said we couldn't resolve problems at the same level of consciousness that created them. To succeed, he said, we'd have to shift to a higher order stance, or perspective.

Creating is a higher order stance than problem-solving. It is driven by a stronger life urge. By shifting our individual and collective consciousness to *creating*, we can increase our odds of transcending problems and creating results that are currently beyond our capacity.

In *creating*, we acknowledge circumstances, but, because deeply desired results drive our actions, the power is in our hands, not in the circumstances.

Action—killing negative feelings are replaced by engaging, positive feelings that open us to creative and integrative thinking—and to more possibility.

Tipping Into A "Flourishing" Life.

Positive psychologist [Barbara Fredrickson](#) says "when we experience positive emotions in at least a 3-to-1 ratio with negative emotions, we cross a psychological tipping point on the other side of which we function at our very best."^{xvi}

On the other side of that tipping point, you'll be happier, more creative and resilient. "Once your ratio enters this bouyant, flourishing territory," says Fredrickson, "you'll be prepared to make the positive contributions that this world sorely needs."

Shifting your primary results-producing stance from problem-solving to creating will decrease negative feelings and increase your positive feelings, moving you in the direction of Fredrickson's "bouyant, flourishing territory."

To start that shift, ask yourself these kinds of questions. Don't worry about getting quick answers. As Rilke said, live your way into the answers. They'll come.

What future do you want to create?

What gifts do you want to give to the world?

What changes do you need to make in order to act as you'd love to act, and create what you most want to create?

We will look deeper into the flaws that cause problem-solving to fail in complex human challenges in the next chapter. But, before we do, I thought it would help to give you a brief look at the seven key skills that comprise the *creating* approach.

Seven Skills for *Creating* Almost Anything.

"Deep within humans," said motivational writer Orison Marden, "dwell slumbering powers that would astonish them, that they never dreamed of possessing; forces that would revolutionize their lives if aroused and put into action."

The capacity to create, for most of us, is such a slumbering power. We need to awaken it, and develop it so that we can consciously create what matters most.

Creating is driven by vision, grounded in reality and focused on action that both honours reality and moves you toward your desired result.

Creating is an *action/learning* process in which you explore, experiment, try things out and learn from your own experience. It comprises seven skills with which, when mastered, you can create almost anything.

Skill 1: Craft A Clear, Compelling Vision Of Your Desired End Results

A *vision* is a clear, engaging mental picture of a result you'd love to bring into being. It needn't be perfect—just clear enough that you'd recognize it if you created it.

"A career" is not a vision; it's a concept. Concepts are a good place to start. Conceiving is fun. But concepts are too broad, too general. They lack power. To give your vision power, focus your concept into a specific, recognizable result. Specify the details that differentiate *your* career from others.

"A career as a writer, specializing in non-fiction that helps people organize their lives, work and world around what truly matters to them," is better. Add some details such as, "Writing books and e-books for publication, writing for magazines such as *Ode, Yes!* and *The Walrus*, and consistently making \$75,000 a year," and you're good.

A vision does **not** have to be realistic. It has to be something you care about, even love. You want what you want—even if it's not realistic, and even if you don't, yet, know how to do it. But, at first, don't worry about those things.

Vision is best crafted independent of current reality. Later, I'll show you how to ground vision in reality, and then teach yourself how to create it, step by step.

You can have a vision of almost anything: A career. A sufficient income. A vacation. A novel. A website. A cottage by the beach. A flourishing relationship. A happy family. A home business. A personal coaching service. A circle of friends. A just, sustainable and healthy family, neighborhood or city.

A clear, compelling *vision* does three things:

- 1) It clarifies what you want to create, and specifies "success criteria" for that result,
- 2) It generates the powerful "launch" energy of motivation, and
- 3) It provides a beacon to guide your actions toward your desired result.

Creating clear, compelling personal visions increases your capacity to co-create shared visions with others. Learning to co-create is a huge step toward creating the kind and quality of business, community and social change many of us long for.

Skill 2: Ground Your Vision In Current Reality

Vision *not* grounded in reality is merely daydreaming. And vision-crafting as part of a problem-focused approach often only provides relief from a problem's intensity.

So, when the vision of a result you want to create is clear enough that you would recognize it if you created it, your next step is to ground that vision in an accurate, objective assessment of *current reality* (the current state of your envisioned result).

As well as knowing where you want to end up, it's important to know where you're starting, and what you have to work with.

This step is often left out of goal-setting and motivational approaches, and, thus, decreases their effectiveness. Being unclear about current reality is like wanting to go somewhere and not knowing where you are. Or driving to an envisioned destination with your eyes closed, counting on "holding the vision" to get you there. Like, that's gonna work.

An *objective* appraisal of your result's current state shows you where you are, what you have to work with and what you lack. If you do it right, it also removes the emotional charge from reality. We want all the emotion, all the passion in vision, not in current reality. So, ***describe reality; don't judge it.***

Don't say, "My life (or world) is a *mess*." Such judgments generate negative emotions, and prevent action. Instead, assess reality accurately, objectively. Describe what you observe. Leave out your opinions and judgments. Be specific:

"Don't say, "I *can't* do that." Say, "I can't do that, *YET*."

Say, "We lose habitat at "x" hectares a year," *not*, "Grizzlies are doomed."

Say, "The market is down 550 points on the day," *not*, "The sky is falling."

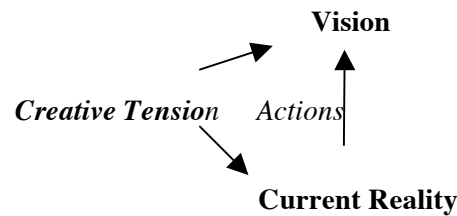
Emphasize strengths, assets, resources and what's already in place. Describe what works, not *just* problems and obstacles. Doing so builds instant momentum, and increases energy for action.

Skill 3: Set Up and Use Creative Tension

Simultaneously holding vision and reality in mind allows a useful *creative tension* to emerge out of the gap between them. One of the definitions of *tension* is "a force that pulls." Creative tension sets up a pull that generates energy for action. It also dissolves emotional tension. It can integrate intuition and rationality. And it provides a solid framework for feedback-driven action-learning.

Motivation is an important source of energy, but it's fickle. It fades your as moods and circumstances shift. Creative tension is stable. It's the workhorse of creating. Creative tension enables you to take action even when you don't *feel* motivated, even when you don't feel like taking action toward your desired result.

As well, creative tension sets up a *container for creating*—a framework that guides your trials and errors toward your end result. Working within this framework helps you experiment, explore, learn from your experience and gradually move from where you are to where you want to be.



Creating is a higher-order approach because it can embrace problems as part of current reality and then transcend them through vision-driven action and learning.

In creating, it's best to see actions as *experiments*.

Just as artists teach themselves to draw by repeatedly sketching a scene, you can teach yourself to bridge the gap between vision and reality by taking lots of little actions, learning from your results, then taking bigger actions.

Create and adjust, create and adjust.... Grow your capacity. Stretch.

Skill 4: Choice Activates the Creating Process

"We become truly human," said Paul Tillich, "only at the moment of decision."

From big choices about values and purpose, to strategic choices about results and tactical choices about steps to support those results, choice enlivens *creating*.

It's one thing to visualize a result and hope the Universe (or UPS) delivers it to you. It's another altogether to choose that result, and then choose to act to create it.

Creating requires commitment.

In *creating*, commitment doesn't mean forcing yourself. It means making choices and following through. Choosing makes difficult tasks easy by linking them to desired results. Seen by itself, jogging 5 miles can be a chore. But jogging 5 miles to support a vision of completing the Honolulu Marathon becomes an engaging challenge.

Skill 5: Create and Adjust ...

Creating involves a lot of trial and error, but it's not random. Experiments are *contained* by creative tension. In creating, failure is useful feedback. Learn from mistakes, adjust your actions and try again. Be alert for opportunities. Be open to connections. It'll be easier to tap into your intuition. 0

Skill 6: Build Momentum

By using feedback to improve results, you can build *competence* and *confidence* in yourself, *and* in your *capacity to create*. Competence and confidence combine to produce ***momentum***—*the power to move forward at an ever-growing pace*.

Momentum enables you to keep going when motivation fades, when you don't *feel/like* creating. It helps you get up when you're down, to push on and follow through to results. The energy of completion enables you to start your next creation.

Skill 7: Follow-through To Completion. Finish Fully. Celebrate.

Integrating the three energies of creating—*motivation*, *creative tension* and *momentum*—gives *creating* awesome power, even in the face of adversity.

By careful use of each kind of energy at appropriate times, you can follow-through on your desires and, step-by-step, craft the result you envisioned.

It's important to finish fully, because doing so generates the energy of completion. That enables you to start your next creation. So, as Seth Godin advises, "Ship it."

Finish your creation fully, and give it to the world.

Then pat yourself on the back, drink a beer or coke and get back to work.

Developing your *capacity to create* helps you unleash your "slumbering powers" with which you can invent the future you most want. That capacity empowers you to thrive in the face of change and flourish in the face of challenge.

If *Creating* Is So Great, Why Don't We All Do It?

Like other unfamiliar things, most people don't develop their capacity to create because they're afraid to fail at it. Or they're afraid it'll take too much work, and they'll feel uncomfortable.

Sometimes, they're afraid that they will succeed, and success will lead to changes they can't predict. That possibility frightens them. So they stay where they are, floundering, flailing away with their problem-solving hammers and failing to even try.

Another reason we don't create is because we don't know *what* we want to create.

We're so busy trying to solve problems and get rid of what we *don't* like and *don't* want that we don't pay as much attention to clarifying what we *DO* want as we might.

Thinking about what you most want is hard. It can be painful. *Why?*

Because it's new. No one ever taught us to clarify what matters most because they were stuck in problem-solving, too. So we default to problem solving as our habitual method for producing results.

Besides, it's not that we don't know how to create; we do. But our ability is mostly intuitive. We don't consciously know *how* we do it. So we mix up problem-solving and creating, call it *all* problem-solving and generate the emotional tension that hijacks our energy and prevents us from focusing on what we really want to create.

A key step in becoming fluent in *creating* is differentiating *creating* from *problem-solving*, and then developing your *creating* skills through practice and experience.

So, now that you have an overview of the creating approach, let's go back and take a closer look at problem-solving, and the structure and limits that prevent it from providing you a solid results-creating platform.

CHAPTER THREE

The *Limits* Of Problem-Solving

*Why Problem-Solving Makes a Shaky Foundation
On Which To Create Real and Lasting Results*

"(Life)... is an action to be performed without rehearsal or respite ... It is a mystery, not indeed to be solved, but to be restated according to some vision, however imperfect."

– Jacques Barzun

Do you ever wake up, your mind swarming with problems you feel you *must* solve? Does a *voice of judgment* threaten dire consequences if you *don't* reduce the chaos swirling around you. Do you feel guilty or hopeless about what you're *not* able to do? Do you ever just feel down, like your body has the blues, and nothing much matters?

This is how problem-focused clients tell me they often feel.

But they mistakenly try to fight fire with fire. To motivate themselves, they conjure up frightening visions of what might happen if they *don't* fix the problem, now. Then, out of self-created fear, they *react*, jumping to frightening conclusions:

"If I don't get that report done tonight, I'll get fired."

"My spouse will hate me if I don't clean out the garage."

"If I don't lose 20 pounds before the reunion, everyone will laugh at me."

"If we don't solve our economic and environmental problems, now, we're doomed."

Trying to frighten themselves into action, they focus precious life energy on what they ***don't*** like and ***don't*** want. They waste time and effort trying to get rid of (or relief from) the fear, anxiety, anger and depression *they caused* by focusing on problems.

Is it any wonder they feel anxious, overwhelmed, and depressed—like they're living lives of quiet desperation?

Why, then, do so many view life as an endless parade of problems they must solve?

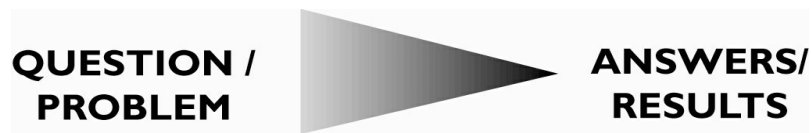
Convergent Problems; Divergent Challenges

"To a person with a hammer," cautions an old saying, "everything looks like a nail."

Similarly, those who rely on problem-solving see every difficulty as a problem. Problem-solving is their default habit.

*But most of what we call "problems" are **not** problems, and **not** solvable.* E.F. Schumacher pointed out two fundamentally different kinds of difficulties.^{xvii}

The first—**convergent problems**—narrow down to simple, *single* solutions.



A convergent problem *is* solvable. The more intelligently you study it, the more the answers converge around a solution. Ask thirty experts what the solution is to a broken tibia or malfunctioning dishwasher, and they will all give you much the same answer.

But ask thirty experts, "What's the best way to raise children, run a business, create a stable, equitable economy, or craft a rich, yet simple, free and flourishing life?" and you'll likely get thirty *different* answers.

Such questions describe **divergent challenges**. Open-ended, complex and messy, the more you try to *solve* them, the more your answers *diverge* from each other.



Divergent challenges don't have a "correct" answer or simple "solution."

Trying too hard to solve them, we can end up with *dichotomies of desire* such as Life vs. Work, Dependence vs. Independence, Jobs vs. Environment, and Simplicity vs. Success.

Although it is important to recognize these pairs of opposites, our logical mind doesn't like them. It prefers simplistic yes/no logic. So it's easy for us to shift from one side of the pair to the other. Downshifters upshift. Simplifiers become upscale consumers. Free-enterprisers (Wall Street bankers and GM executives) are, suddenly, all for government intervention.

Each time we oscillate, it feels as if we're making up our minds anew. At other times, our mind becomes rigid and lifeless, fixed on one pole, thinking that the problem is solved. Either way, our "solutions" merely produce partial, temporary results.

Most "problems" we face in life and work are *not* convergent. They are messy, *divergent* challenges. Rather than flail away at them with problem-solving hammers, we'd do better to employ a *higher* level of thinking than that which created them.

Embracing Dichotomies of Desire

Divergent challenges put *tension* into the world, and into our lives. Our logical minds want to resolve tension. But when you *solve* the tension by coming down on *one* side, the *other* side cries for resolution. Tension is not resolved, merely shifted. Action in such structures *oscillates* between the poles. We fail to produce lasting results.

Is there a way out of this dilemma? Yes.

Instead of focusing on either pole of a dilemma such as "life vs. work", or trying to balance them, we do best to embrace and transcend the dilemma by shifting to a higher level. Schumacher's pairs of opposites "cease to be opposites," he says, "at the higher level, the really human level, where self-awareness plays its proper role."

Take the French Revolution's slogan: "*Liberté, Egalité et Fraternité.*" To the pair of opposites, *Liberté* (Freedom) vs. *Egalité* (Equality), which is resistant to resolution in ordinary logic, the French added a higher-order value—(Brotherliness; Compassion; Human Caring).

Too much *freedom* allows the strong to overpower the weak. Enforcing *equality* restricts freedom. The values conflict, until transcended by the higher force of *human*

caring. While freedom and equality can be legislated, *caring* comes from individuals activating their own higher forces and faculties, and creating what they truly value.

By making compassion primary, the French were able to use it to embrace and transcend the conflict between the pair of secondary values.

The higher-order value—*Fraternité*—guides the application and unfolding of the other two lower-order values.

Imagine a society (or an organization, or business) in which *freedom* is pursued with compassion and care for others.

Imagine achieving *equality* without deadening freedom, and doing so with compassion for those who want to live and work on their own terms.

Some Structures Support Results; Some Don't

When we opt for one side or the other of conflicting desires such as *simplicity* vs. *success*, or *life* vs. *work*, we set up *oscillating structures*. In such structures, energy and action tend to flow back and forth between the competing desires.

The word *structure* puts some people off. But it needn't.

A ladder's structure enables us to climb a wall. A bicycle's structure enables us to go places. *Structure* is simply the way the pieces and parts of anything are put together. Skip Ikea's assembly instructions, and, if you can get it together, your new desk may look more like an Art Deco playpen.

Structure gives rise to behavior.

Rocking chairs are structured to rock back and forth. Bicycles are structured to take you from here to there. Like a streambed guides the flow of water, structure guides the flow of energy in a system. Putting energy into a rocking chair generates vastly different behaviour, and results than putting energy into a bike.

The *relationship* between parts creates a whole.

A pile of bicycle parts is not a bike until properly put together—i.e. *structured*. Unconnected, the pile is a mess. Properly arranged, the mess becomes a bike.

Similarly, the structure of our lives and work depend on how we arrange our values, aspirations, desires, beliefs, fears and assessments of day-to-day reality. Life

structures form the *streambeds* of our lives and work. Our energy and actions flow along the path of least resistance created by those streambed structures.

If we arrange our values in *either/or* structures, our energy and actions oscillate. They flow back and forth. Such structures do not produce lasting results. They waste energy and lead to frustration. Our lives can become a mess. We flounder.

Put First Things First

To transcend conflicting values, it's best to align them in a [*hierarchy of value*](#). As in Schumacher's French example, put the most important value first. Then strive to achieve the lesser values in ways that also support the primary value.

Choosing which value is primary enables you, for example, to rise above an oscillating *Family vs. Work* structure. If you put family first, you not only make it easier to succeed in family life. You can also make it easier to succeed at work if you see its primary purpose as taking care of your family. Or, put work first, and then consciously create a successful family life that supports you in doing well at work.

Change your streambed, and your actions and energy flow toward what matters.

Jobs vs. Environment Resolved?

We need jobs, true. But if we destroy our resource base, the jobs move elsewhere. Similarly, if we try to absolutely protect the resource base, it won't support many jobs.

We must look beyond the *jobs vs. environment* dilemma.

By going to the higher-order value *sustainability—acting in ways that respect the resource base, and the natural systems that underlie all health, wealth, well being and jobs*—we can create "green jobs" that allow workers to earn a reasonable wage, return profit to owners and do little or no harm to the environment. *Or even make it better than when we started.*

Such was the vision of the late Ray Anderson of [*Interface Corp*](#), the world's largest producer of indoor floor coverings. Anderson not only wanted to make *Interface* the world's first "truly sustainable" company, he wanted to make it "the world's first *restorative* company." He wanted to give back to the Earth *more* than *Interface* took out in energy, resources and ecological integrity.^{xviii}

Companies such as *Patagonia*, *SIGG*, *Ann Sacks*, *Gazelle*, *Eco-Products*, *Mercury Solar Systems* and *New Belgium Brewery* also "do well by doing good." They all embrace visions of creating green jobs that make money, are good for the environment and meaningful to employees.

These companies, Interface and many others are shifting their business model from problem-based to creation-based, and thriving because of doing so. Companies that are still stuck in a problem-solving model often fail, and fall by the wayside.

Six More Flaws In The Problem Solving Platform

Applying *convergent* problem-solving to *divergent* challenges is fruitless. But there are six more flaws that combine it to prevent problem-solving from being a solid foundation on which to create the life, work or world you long for. Here's a brief look at each. If you want a more in-depth analysis of these flaws and their effects on results, please see my ebook [*Creating Sustainable Success*](#).

Flaw #1: The Illusion of Success

"When you have a nice juicy problem to work on," says Robert Fritz, "you do not have to think. You can obsess ... Problem-solving can be very distracting while at the same time giving you the illusion you are doing something important and needed."^{xix}

At first, back-and-forthing feels like progress. Talking, researching, processing information and circling around decisions without taking focused action can feel good. But it can also deceive you into thinking you're creating something when you're not.

Millions of hours, dollars and ounces of sweat, for example, go into solving the "overweight" problem through dieting. But, over the last 25 years, nutritionists tell us the net effect of all that effort has been an overall weight gain amongst dieters.

Because problem-solving distracts, it also disempowers. When you *react* to problems, the power is in circumstances, not your hands. It's easy to feel overwhelmed.

Flaw #2: Focusing On Problems *Depresses* People

To *feel* the difference between problem-solving and *creating*, try this exercise.

First, think of something in your personal or interpersonal life that you *don't* like, *don't* want, and want to get rid of. Close your eyes and focus on that "problem." Imagine what might happen if you don't or can't solve it. Then note how you feel—*emotionally* and *physically*. Jot down a quick description of *both* before reading on.

Next, shift your focus to a result you'd love to create, but haven't yet. For now, imagine that creating it is possible, and you already have brought it into your life. Then jot down how you feel, emotionally and physically.

Was there a physical and emotional difference when you shifted focus?

Ninety-seven percent of my clients report that when they focus on *problems* they feel “depressed,” “anxious,” “overwhelmed,” “frustrated,” “hopeless” and even “doomed.” Even those who prize their technical problem-solving skills report feeling this way when focusing on personal and interpersonal problems.

However, when they focus on desired results, 100 percent report feeling “up,” “energized,” “hopeful,” “excited,” “inspired,” and “ready to get at it.”

In which stance would you prefer to spend your days—and your life?

What Works In Life Also Works In Organizations.

When I outline problem-solving's flaws in my *Organizational Design* workshops, leaders often stare skeptically. But, they lean forward with interest when I describe [Ronald Lippitt's](#) work. A key finding of his research showed that, *“listing and solving problems depresses groups.”*^{xx}

As team members listed issues, Lippitt was appalled to hear them use words such as “hopeless,” “frustrating,” and “impotent.”^{xxi} He also saw that much of their focus was *seeking relief from the anxiety caused by focusing on their problems.*

Many individuals, professionals and leaders are so attached to their problem-solving hammers that they have yet to grasp Lippitt's' key finding: *focusing on problems and issues depresses people.*

So, what to do?

Once he recognized the negative effects of problem-focused strategies, Lippitt shifted his client's focus to “images of potential”—*envisioning what could be.*

Working with systems expert [Edward Lindaman](#), director of NASA's Apollo moon mission planning, Lippitt showed that visions of “preferred futures” motivated more than problems. When people plan actions by working backwards from what they truly *desire*, he found they develop energy, enthusiasm and commitment to their challenge.

[Jim Collins](#), author of *Good to Great* also touts the power of vision-driven creating. “A true **BHAG** (Big Hairy Audacious Goal) is clear and compelling and serves as a

unifying focal point of effort ... A BHAG engages people—it reaches out and grabs them in the gut. It is tangible, energizing, highly focused."

Referring to the moon mission, he said, "The goal itself—the mountain to climb, was so easy to grasp, so compelling in its own right, that it could be ... easily understood by everyone."^{xxii}

Still, many in business, NGOs and community groups continue to flail away at problems without producing real or lasting results. They, too, often become depressed, listless, even despairing and burned out.

Flaw #3: The Energy It Takes To Pout Is *Not* Available To *Create* Results

It *is* depressing to focus on "problems." It is *doubly* depressing to realize that *solving* problems rarely produces desired results. Many become sullen and withdrawn, blaming others, and outside forces. They see themselves as victims, and *pout*.

Pouting is an expression of displeasure, often used to manipulate others into helping you solve your problems. But pouting wastes energy that could go into *creating*.

Duke Ellington captured the essence of the shift from problem-solving to *creating* when he said, "I merely took the energy it takes to pout, and wrote blues tunes with it."

The Duke's tunes were *not* solutions to problems. They were expressions of his spirit, acts of creation performed in spite of his pain. Ellington's courageous stance acknowledged problems, embraced their energy and transcended his pain by creating songs of great power. True creations, his tunes are Ellington's great gifts to the world.

All of us have the potential, through *creating*, to transcend and simplify challenging times such as we now face. All of us can "take the energy it takes to pout," and use it to create results we care about.

Flaw #4: Most Problem-Solving Is Focused On *Relief* Not *Results*

We've all experienced an annoying but bearable sore tooth that we put off fixing because we lack time or money. Or fear dentists.

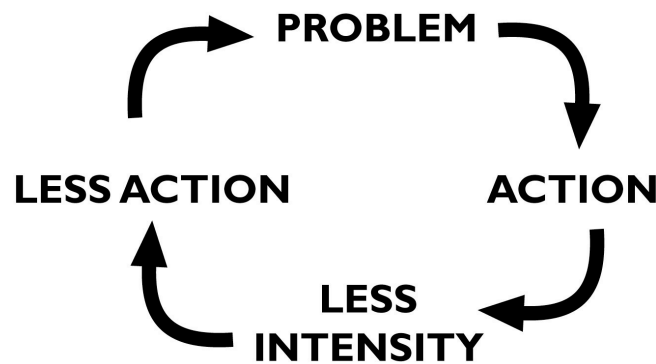
Or we've been frustrated by clutter creep that threatens to drown us in stuff but isn't bad enough, yet, to spur reorganization.

Many silently suffer a job/career that is tolerable, but neither fun nor fulfilling.

When *intensity* rises to a point where pain, clutter or unhappiness is no longer bearable, many *react*. Emergency dentistry. A weekend madly clearing clutter. A job quit in a huff. A relationship abandoned. Anything to reduce the intensity, *now*.

Such actions can reduce *intensity*—temporarily. But they rarely lead to long-term results. The "problem" comes back, or gets worse. Remember the aspirin and dieting examples. And the auto.

When we reduce intensity, there's less impetus to act. When nine out of ten cardiac patients felt better, they quit their drugs. Their arteries clogged again. Then back under the knife they went. It's a vicious circle. And stressful.



But even trying to "solve" *stress* yields this same pattern.

Research shows "stress management" programs can turn chronic *burnout* into acute *breakdown*.^{xxiii} By teaching people to *cope* with stress, they take on more of it until they reach their limits—and break.

Flaw #5. The Cure Is Often *Worse* Than The Disease

Problem-solving not only fails to fix most "problems," it can intensify them. The cure can become worse than the disease.

Over-sanitizing hands and homes lead to drug-resistant "superbugs." The MSRA bug now kills twice as many people in the US as AIDS.

British researchers studying traffic congestion found that, by making it easier to drive, building new motorways leads to *more* drivers, and *worse* congestion.

A [Rand Institute](#) report concluded, "The ultimate activity" of the US Drug Enforcement Agency's war on drugs, "was to *increase* the profit margin on cocaine, *increase* the incentive for dealers and thereby *increase* rather than decrease the traffic in crack."^{xxiv}

Systems experts call such confounding results the “counter-intuitive effects of naïve intervention.” Naïvely applying convergent techniques to divergent challenges often confounds us.

Seeking relief from stress, for example, by naïvely over-simplifying life and work can lead to a lack of challenge, boredom and a renewed longing for comforts and conveniences.

Naïve urban simplifiers reactively move to the country, only to find their dream solution becomes a perplexing *problem*. "It's boring in the country," one such naïf told me. "I mean, how much can you really say about corn?"

I've worked with folks who tried to "solve" a *loneliness* problem by rushing into a new relationship. "Filling the hole in my heart," one called it. But, when the excitement (and oxytocin) wore off, "Fix the relationship." went to the top of their "To-do" list.

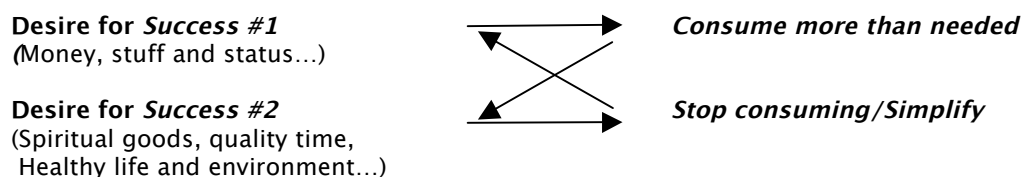
Flaw #6. Problem-Solving *Oscillates* Between Better, Then Worse, Then Better...

Recall that Oliver Wendell Holmes said he didn't give a fig for the simplicity on this side of complexity. Yet, he was willing to give everything for the simplicity on the other side of complexity.

During my workshops, frustrated simplifiers often discover that they oscillate between competing desires. They want money and material success and they want thriving, meaningful *simplicity*. But the conflict between their values prevents them from fully achieving either.

"It's like we have two versions of success," said one client, after returning from a reactive move to the country. "Satisfying one version increases our desire for the other. Satisfying the other leaves us longing for what we miss from the first."

Holding competing values sets up a *structural conflict*.^{xxv}



Energy and action follow a *path of least resistance*^{xxvi} described by the arrows above.

Consuming satisfies a desire for material success (Success #1). But as it does, its energetic pull lessens. The desire for simple, non-material success (#2) increases.

So, you shift your focus.

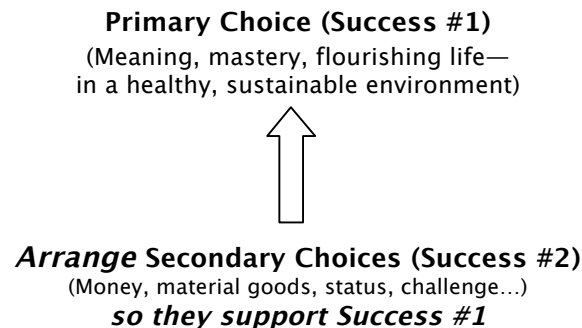
You cut back on consuming. You simplify and seek meaning. It works, for a while. But, as desire #2 is satisfied, desire #1 kicks in again. Again, you shift focus.

You cannot “solve” this conflict by deleting either value. You want what you want. Pretending you don’t leads to the compromise simplicity found on *this* side of complexity. When the value you deleted resurfaces, the back-and-forth begins again.

By shifting to a senior (higher-order) structure—the *structure of creating*—you can embrace and transcend this conflict. The *creating structure* is senior to *convergent* problem-solving because:

- 1) It embraces *divergent* challenges as part of reality—as-it-is, objectively describes them, and dissolves unnecessary emotion that prevents action.
- 2) It activates the power of *caring* and *love* in visions of deeply desired results.
- 3) It provides a solid platform—an *organizing framework*—for taking action, learning from experience, and gradually crafting desired result.

In a *creating structure*, you change the *relationship* between the competing desires. You make your most important value/desire your **primary** choice. Then you arrange other values as **secondary**, or *supporting* choices. The result is an *integrated* structure in which satisfying secondary values also supports your primary choice.



In this example, clients pursue material success in a way that supports a rich, simple and flourishing life. Instead of material and monetary abundance, they seek sufficiency: the capacity to create results—with "just enough" money and material to achieve their true desires.^{xxvii}

Such a *structural shift* allows them to transcend the conflict, create both results and bring into being the rich, elegant simplicity on the other side of complexity

“We were problem-focused,” my naive simplifier told me. “We fought what we didn't want. We rarely acted on what truly mattered. But really getting this structure stuff led to big changes. Life and work are much simpler and way more enjoyable now.”

The End Of Problem-Solving

“We have reached the end of problem-solving,” says David Cooperider.^{xxviii} Problem-solving, he says, “is not a mode of inquiry capable of inspiring, mobilizing, and sustaining human system change.”

The future, he asserts, belongs to those with a capacity to create what matters. We create our future—moment to moment—by what we envision, choose and do. The time has come to shift to *creating* as our primary tool for producing results.

Thriving requires that you focus on what matters, accept what is, and then align your energy and action so day-to-day choices and actions support the results you most want to create.

Mastering the *skills and structure of creating*, and applying them as I've described will greatly increase your chances of creating the simplicity on the other side of complexity—bringing into being the rich, free, flourishing and rewarding lives and work we so deeply long for.

In the next chapter, we'll look at some real life stories of people who did just that.

Part Two:

THE *CREATING APPROACH*:

Skills and Structure For Creating What Matters

– With Whatever Life Throws You.

"The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths to it are not found but made, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination."

–John Schaar

CHAPTER FOUR

What Matters *Most*?

*Clarifying the Kind and Quality
Of Lives, Work, and Relationships We Truly Want*

*"Those who do not create the future they want
must endure the future they get."*

—Draper L. Kaufman, Jr.

In challenging times, many of us sit beside the stream of life, gazing wishfully upstream. We wait, passively, wondering what the future might bring. But, by the time the future reaches us, we're often unable to embrace it. It passes us by.

Others look downstream. They imagine the future they want to create, and then plunge in and go after it. They believe the way to predict their future is to invent it. Future-focused *creators* use generic skills such as *resilience* and *creating* to navigate the dangers in crisis, and capitalize on opportunities.

You, too, can learn to navigate the rapids of change and challenge. You can learn to create the future you want. Through *creating*, you can rise above adversity, and bring into being the *authentic* success you most deeply long for—with *whatever you have*.

But, be careful—yesterday's success may not be what you *really* want.

Authentic Success: *Simple, Integral, Rich, Sustainable and Free*

Why single out these five criteria for success?

My clients want to create a variety of *specific* results. But, when they dig beneath superficial versions of success, when they strip away the "shoulds," "oughts," and "have tos", these are the values (success criteria) around which most of them say they'd like to organize their lives, work and communities are *simple, integral, rich, sustainable and free*.

These criteria might seem odd at first. Fair enough. They weren't the criteria most of my clients started with, either. They emerged as my clients mastered their own *creating process*.

So what do these criteria mean? Maybe they're closer to your values than you think.

Simple is defined by *The Oxford Dictionary* as, "easily understood or done; not compound; consisting of only one element or operation."

To simplify is to make things easy to understand or do; to be able do more with less by organizing parts into wholes. The simplicity my clients seek is not problem-focused. It's not overly frugal, or austere. It embraces life's messiness, and transcends it in favour of the rich, flourishing simplicity found on the other side of complexity.

Such simplicity empowers them to step off the work-and-spend treadmill. It frees their time and energy to *do* what they truly want to do. It allows them to just *be*—alone, with friends and family, and, for an increasing number, with Spirit. It allows them to experience life as an integrated whole.

In business and organizations, simplicity means processes, services and results that are passion-driven, elegant, focused, functional and environmentally harmonious. Simplifying reduces waste and saves money. It lets you do less and achieve more. It helps you rise above BS (Bureaucratic Silliness), and streamline your services, production processes and delivery.

"Simplicity is the new competitive advantage," says consultant Bill Jensen. It is, he says, "the art of making the complex clear ... the power to get stuff done ... to leverage the untapped energy, innovation, creativity, and ideas that already exist in our organizations."^{xxix}

Put simply, simplicity is the power to do more of what matters, and the courage to do less of what doesn't.

"Simplicity," asserted Leonardo de Vinci, "is the ultimate form of sophistication."

Integral means "of a whole," "made up of parts which together constitute a unity." An integral life is an undivided life—a life in which key parts align in support of a simple, coherent focus. An integral life has unity—oneness.

Many clients assume they need balance in life. But, in living systems, balance is difficult if not impossible to achieve. Recall balancing a seesaw when you were a kid? Any slight disturbance threw it out of balance. Lives are more complex than seesaws, and much harder to balance. In my *Concise Oxford*, the second definition of *balance* is "to cancel out."

When I ask clients what "balance" means to them, they describe lives that are simple, coherent, harmonious and integral. They want their diverse interests and desires *integrated* around a meaningful focus and a clear, coherent purpose.

Many business owners, too, seek a purpose-focused, integral approach. They want their businesses to support their highest values, and to serve others with joy, functionality and meaning—often, in environmentally harmonious ways.

At [Patagonia](#), for example, financial and environmental philosophies interact. But owner [Yvon Chouinard](#) is clear about what comes first. "Fundamentally," he says, "businesses are responsible to their resource bases. Without a healthy environment, there are no shareholders, no employees, no customers and no business."^{xxx}

Chouinard summed up his integrated approach at a conference in Banff, Canada. Questioned if making environmentally friendly products and letting employees go surfing wasn't frivolous, Chouinard replied, "No. Every time we do the right thing, profits increase significantly."

Most of those profits go to environmental groups through [direct grants](#), and [1% for the Planet](#), a non-profit that Chouinard co-founded. Through it, companies give one-percent (or more) of gross (pre-tax) earnings to approved charities.

Another definition of *integral* is, "the capacity to walk your talk."

Chouinard, Ray Anderson at *Interface* and a rapidly increasing [cadre of owners](#) show how to operate successful, values-driven businesses that integrate diverse aspects of life. Leading edge nonprofits and NGO's are taking note. They, too, are structuring values-driven organizations. *Walking your talk is good business, even for NGO's.*

Rich isn't all about money, or an abundance of material things. By *rich*, my clients mean full, flourishing and fulfilling lives and work.

As Thoreau said, we are rich in proportion to the number of things we can afford to let alone. Although everyone I work with wants a [sufficient](#) income with which to build a rich life, they recognize that, beyond a certain point, more money and stuff does not mean more satisfaction, health, happiness or genuine wealth.^{xxxi}

Rich, they realize, is going beyond *material* (stuff) to *mastery* and *meaning*.

They want to master things such as yoga, rock climbing, scrapbooking, home renos, organic gardening, aikido, second languages and choral singing. They want meaningful work and volunteer opportunities. They want their actions and results to count. They want to be a "force of nature," part of a purpose greater than themselves.

I'm told a follow-up study of the Harvard Business School's class of '45 found that those who focused on making a million dollars before they were forty did not. But those who created businesses they loved and that expressed their highest values did. They said money was not the point. Doing what they loved was the point; money was a bonus. Even if the story is apocryphal, it rings true to business leaders I've worked with.

My clients long to be excellent at what matters. They want to master things they love, things that bring meaning, purpose and flow to their lives. Today, this means an increasing number of clients also want their results to be environmentally *sustainable*.

Sustainable has two meanings. The first is *lasting*. My clients want to create results that stand the test of time; results that persist in spite of changing conditions.

Sustainable also means acting in harmony with the natural systems on which all life—and all health, wealth and well-being—depend. Protecting the resource base.

Sustainable means giving back to Life in equal measure to what we take from it. It means living and doing business in ways that aid and restore our ecological systems.

My clients use both meanings. They want to create lasting results, in harmony with the systems of life on which they depend. How to do so becomes part of their creating challenge. Those who succeed are on the leading edge of personal and business change in America, Europe, and around the world.

In [*Simplicity and Success: Creating the Life You Long For*](#)^{xxxii}, I describe a number of individuals and couples who created low-footprint, sustainable lives. I've also worked with Fortune 500 giants such as ALCAN and Motorola to help them include sustainability in their strategic design and planning. Most wouldn't have considered such values "actionable" until they adopted a *creating approach* to business planning.

Ray Anderson is a sustainability leader. "I challenged the people of *Interface*," he says, "to make our company ... environmentally sustainable, and then to become restorative ... to put back more than we take, and to do good to the Earth, not just no harm."^{xxxiii} Since Anderson made that challenge, Interface made significant progress toward sustainability, and increased both profits and wages.

Simple, integral, rich and sustainable lives and work are possible. And rewarding.

What about *free*? We'll get to that after we look at a few examples.

STORIES FROM THE EDGE: TOWARD FLOURISHING LIVES AND WORK

The following stories highlight ordinary people who created simple, integral, rich and sustainable lives and work—in *spite of adversity and challenge*.

Dawna and Richard

Dawna and Richard were a young, well-off urban couple. She managed a regional branch of a national bank. He trained public and private educators. Together they made \$270,000 a year—and *spent it all*.

They lived in a 5-bedroom, waterfront townhouse. They accessed a cabin on a coastal island via a power yacht. Dawna drove a European sports car. Richard prized the high-end SUV he claimed was for "off-road," but rarely saw mud or dust. Both traveled for business, and took frequent vacations to the Caribbean, Europe and South-East Asia.

To family, friends and colleagues, they appeared successful and happy. But beneath their surface contentment lurked deep resentments, unfulfilled longings and a growing sense of desperation.

"We can't keep up this pace," Richard said when he first contacted me.

In an early coaching session, both said they worked too much, were apart too often and no longer felt connected. They wanted kids, but couldn't see how to fit them in.

They enjoyed urban life, but longed to slow down, simplify and maybe live in the country. Both wanted to work less, and enjoy life and each other more.

"We also want to be environmentally responsible," Dawna said. "We'd like to live more locally, be less dependent on oil and resources transported long distances." But, their "problem" was, they said, "we don't do anything to make that happen.

"We feel stuck," added Richard, "And frustrated by our stuckness."

"We're mired in mortgages," Dawna added. "We're trapped by jobs and obligations. We're held back by our and others' expectations. We try to do too much and end up scattered and frustrated. We're afraid to stay the same, and afraid to change. We've lost track of who we are. We're not sure *what* to do."

Both were astute enough to realize that simplifying their outer life without restructuring their inner life would not produce the results they *most* wanted. They knew merely clearing clutter, selling off excess and moving to their isolated island wouldn't produce the life they longed for. *But what would?*

What did the future they wanted look like? How could they bring it into being?

Dawna and Richard examined those questions during a *Creating What Matters* workshop, followed by a four-month coaching program, and a year (with occasional coaching) spent mastering the skills and structure of *creating* and *co-creating* results.

As they worked within the structure of *creating*, clarity about what they *truly* wanted began to emerge. They crafted and shared personal visions, found common ground and co-created a shared vision of the life they both wanted. With that as a guide, they began to bring the elements of that life into being, creation by creation.

They started by creating small results, alone and together. Small successes built momentum, competence and the confidence to stretch for larger results. "I *can't*..." became "I can't...yet," and later, "*I did*." After a series of such "I did's," a deeper, generalized sense of "I *can do*," began to emerge. Along with it came authentic—mastery-based—confidence in themselves, their *creating* process and each other.

With practice, they developed emotional mastery and resilience. They shifted their language, and changed their stories. Problems, issues and obstacles became *challenges* instead of *threats*. Pessimism about the future, and fear about their inability to create it, gave way to realistic optimism, and a growing sense of adventure and experimentation.

Today, Dawna, Richard, daughter Ashlee, and son Robert live on a small acreage in a rural valley close to a small but cosmopolitan city. They sold their condo, cabin and yacht. They traded the sports car and SUV for a Japanese Hybrid. They bought a roomy cottage with land on which to grow a garden. They joined a local *Transition Initiative* and began "reskilling"—picking up skills common in previous generations, but lost to theirs. Together with transition friends, they retrofitted their cottage with solar panels, a wind generator, composting toilets, roof top water collection and grey water systems. They planted a large garden that feeds them, and a couple of neighboring families. They converted risky investments into lower yield, but safer Canadian savings bonds.

Now, each works 50 to 100 days a year, teleconsulting with former employers, and new clients. They continue to cut back work. They earn less, but lifestyle changes lowered costs. They have time and energy for each other, their kids and working on transition initiatives in their community. Richard writes for magazines and blogs, and hopes to make a sufficient living from it. Dawna makes pottery, and sells it in a craft market during the summer. Both sing in a local choir.

Their new life, they told me, is simpler, yet richer and more authentic than their old one. It's becoming integrated. More resilient. Thriving. Adopting such a life insulated them from the worst of the recent financial meltdown.

Dawna summed up, saying, "We feel free now, really true to ourselves and what matters. No longer scattered, our lives are rich, happy and healthy. We live in harmony with our community, and, increasingly, with the environment that makes it all—us—possible. We feel so blessed. We've created a whole new kind of success for us."

Peggy

Peggy's story is different than Dawna and Richard's. Yet, it is similar in the kind and quality of outcomes, and rewards.

In the mid-1980s, Peggy was a single mom on welfare. Times were tough. Her husband lost everything but the house. When he took solace in the arms of a younger woman, Peggy moved her kids and herself into a shabby, but cheap apartment.

With no support but a welfare cheque, Peggy struggled to provide for her family. It was never enough. Her pre-teen and two older kids dabbled in gangs and drugs. She felt overwhelmed. "Cornered by a shitty life," she said, "with nowhere good to go."

A friend of Peggy's brought her to a free "Intro" session promoting my coaching approach. "It was just something to do," Peggy told me later. "I couldn't afford help, but my friend wanted to go, so I said, 'Why not?'"

Peggy learned fast. She used what she learned at the intro to get clear about what she wanted: a job, ownership of the house, and a solid, stable, loving family environment. While her mind said, "No way," her heart told her she should hire me. A couple of days after the Intro, she called, and negotiated a deal. After she turned down my offer to coach her for free, I agreed to take a series of post-dated cheques for \$25 each.

Within six months, Peggy secured sole ownership of the house in lieu of child support. As soon as she had title, she sold it, and bought a smaller one. She used her profit to pay off bills and to let her kids fix up a basement rec room and decorate their own rooms to their own taste. Doing so, the kids developed ownership, personal responsibility and pulled together as a family.

Peggy's middle son got excited about a school sponsored YMCA [Earth Education](#) program. His contagious enthusiasm convinced the family to take part in a "1-Tonne Challenge" to reduce consumption, waste and emissions.

Working on a shared project brought the family closer. The kids took on responsibilities they'd previously shunned. They saved energy, and money. As part of their challenge, they gradually shifted their diet to fresh, natural food, purchased from a [Community Supported Agriculture](#) program. Peggy began growing some of her own food. She got off welfare, waited tables and took classes in accounting and bookkeeping, and eventually set herself up as professional bookkeeper.

"I've had ups and downs," Peggy told me during a follow-up session a couple of years later. "But since I shifted my focus to the *creating approach*, the trend has been more up. We don't make a lot, and don't spend a lot. What we spend goes toward what we *really* want. We're pretty happy, and content. A lot healthier. All the parts feel connected now.

"Most important, as we pulled together as a family, the kids' interest in gangs just kinda dropped away. They got involved with the Y leadership programs and summer camp. They get great lessons in resilience and responsibility there. I love it."

Daniel

Daniel, a conflicted physician, did a year of coaching with me. For his first *creating* project he chose (in spite of my reservations) a Porsche convertible. However, when this didn't work for him, I asked him why he wanted the Porsche. After all, a car wasn't something he'd really create; he'd just save money, and buy it.

After blustering about performance criteria and handling, Dan confessed the Porsche was really a fancy symbol to park outside his house and show his friends and mother-in-law that, "Dr. D. is doing okay." When I asked if he *was* doing okay, he shook his head and said, "No, I'm a mess; my life is a mess. I feel like quitting it all."

Dan's marriage was failing. He hated his work, yet had to work hard to make the money he (and his wife) thought they needed to maintain a professional lifestyle. In high school, he'd wanted to be a naturalist. But his mother pressured him to be a doctor like his father and grandfather. He did well in medical school but now felt trapped. He felt sick, tired, out of spirit, and worried he had Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. He also feared that falling stock prices were eroding his retirement portfolio, and his future.

During our year of coaching, Dan ended his marriage. He reinvented his practice as wellness counseling, and built a new client list—and a new life. He felt alive again; healthy, and full of energy. He bought a low mileage, second-hand VW Golf, with a performance-handling package. He spent his Porsche money on a mountain cabin where he retreated on weekends to explore the natural world he loved. He shifted stocks into secure holdings and bonds, which, he said, "lifted a ton of worry off my shoulders."

When I last saw him, Dan said, "I'm finally creating the successful practice and meaningful business that fits for me. Almost all that I do lines up with what I care about and want to create. I hope to nudge the rest into line soon."

As we were about to part, he added, "Oh, yeah, I started leading hikes for *The Nature Conservancy*, and once a month, I spend a weekend working on *Habitat for Humanity* housing projects. It's very rewarding. Very. And, hey, I met someone."

What Does It Mean To Thrive?

While others succumbed to difficult times, losing homes and businesses, Dawna, Richard, Peggy and Daniel thrived. Each got deeply engaged with their own lives and work. Each created meaningful results that went beyond conventional, material success. Each achieved dreams that, until they learned to *create*, they hadn't felt free to pursue. Each grew in positive emotions and realistic optimism. All experienced deeper and more

satisfying relationships with family, friends, neighbours and colleagues. All sustained their results over time—and, increasingly, did so in harmony with the environment that sustains them, and their families.

[Martin Seligman](#), the Godfather of the [Positive Psychology](#) movement suggests that to increase our happiness and well-being and to *flourish* there are five key elements, or skills we must learn and practice. To flourish, we must increase our levels of *positivity, engagement, positive relationships, meaning* and *achievement*^{xxxiv}.

By these standards, each of the individuals described above flourishes in the face of the inevitable adversity and challenges they face, and that we all face, all the time. And, by clarifying what they really want, and living a life that shows it, they thrive in challenging times.

Each also discovered a profound and gratifying sense of *freedom*.

Getting Unstuck, On Track and On The Freedom Trail

When they come to me, almost all of my coaching clients are successful in some ways—some very successful. Most are also in some sort of *transition*, or face *adversity* they can't yet cope with. They feel stuck, trapped or overwhelmed in some areas of life and work.

They long to rise above their current situations and create what matters, but, often, can't articulate *what* matters. And, even if they did, they tell me, they'd still feel stuck, because they don't know *how* to create those results.

A thirty-something executive, for example, told me that his life, which revolved around a fast-track career, felt like an out-of-control freight train.

"I'm hurtling toward I-don't-know-where," he said. "And I'm scared that when I get there, I won't like it. Sure, I make big bucks, and that's nice. But I know there's more to success than promotions and salary increases while I'm stuck in a job that sucks."

In another instance, a Hollywood director told me he worked for big TV networks to earn money to fund his own films. Stressed to the breaking point by the insanities of network TV, and stuck on the work-and-spend treadmill, he felt trapped, unable to return to the independent filmmaking he loved.

Still another professional, with 20 years experience, told me she was “terminally bored.” She summed up the common dilemma many share, saying, “I feel trapped in a job chosen for me by a naïve 18-year-old.”

This trapped feeling—not able to imagine what matters, or create it—arises for two reasons. First, people over-rely on problem-solving as a way of producing results. When it doesn't produce the results they want, they feel frustrated, and trapped.

Second, many people think of freedom *only* as the absence of restraints, or as *relief* from negative feelings associated with problems.

However, there are two kinds of freedom: “*freedom from...*” and “*freedom to...*”

Embracing both was a necessary step that each of my clients took on their way to creating results that truly mattered to them.

Creating *Freedom From...* and *Freedom To...*

When people think of freedom, they often think about what they want to be **free from**: mortgages, dead end jobs, bossy superiors, bad habits, 20 ugly pounds, failing relationships, and obligations and restrictions that they think limit them.

Their choices and actions are designed to get rid of, or get relief from those things. Sometimes, this stance is appropriate. But focusing *just on freedom from* puts them smack in the middle of problem-solving, flailing away with inadequate tools.

Being *free from* restraints, restrictions and difficulties is necessary, but not sufficient. To create what matters, we also need *freedom to...*

Freedom to involves the complex of skills, knowledge, abilities, and tools that a person needs to *do* something. Without the ability to act—to *create what matters*—freedom *from* restrictions means little. *Freedom to* is the version of *freedom* The Oxford defines as, “the power of self-determination; independence of fate or necessity.”

To see the difference, imagine that you’re standing at the top of a high cliff. No walls, fences, guards or other constraints prevent you from jumping. You are *free from* restrictions. But, unless you're equipped with parasailing or base-jumping mastery, experience and equipment—i.e. *capacity*—you’re not *free to* jump (without killing or maiming yourself).

Freedom to comes from having a well-developed capacity to create what matters—*independent of current problems, circumstances and adversity*. It arises out of *self-mastery* in the *creating approach* and all aspects of one's life.

Mastering the skills and structure of *creating* is an excellent way to increase both *freedom from* and *freedom to*. Doing so increases your capacity for self-determination. It increases your sense of control and autonomy. It helps you take ownership for the results you want to create. It increases ability to take charge of your fate. If you get knocked down, it makes it easier for you to get up, and stay up. A well-developed *capacity to create* empowers you to flourish in the face of adversity and to thrive in challenging times.

Oh, yeah, the 30-something hotshot quit his high-paid finance job and moved to one of *Inc.* magazines Top 100 Green Companies, where he applies his skills with mastery and purpose. The Hollywood director I worked with just launched *KaboingTV*, an [all-cartoon channel](#) on the Internet. The professional with 20 years of experience went to work with a local non-profit environmental group and soon became its CEO.

All feel that they've achieved both freedom from limitations and the freedom to create what truly matters to them.

What, then, are the skills and structures of creating?

And how do we develop and apply them to creating the kind and quality of lives, work and world we *most* want?

CHAPTER FIVE

The *Structure* of Creating

***How to Organize Your Life, Work and World
Around What You Most Want***

"By accurately representing the world of today while stubbornly holding out a genuine vision of a better future, we generate the field of creative energy that is implied in that famous quote from Goethe:

***"Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it."***

– Christopher Childs

When they fail, most lives (and organizations) fail, not for lack of time, energy or effort, but for lack of a tried and true *organizing system* with which to shape time, energy and effort into deeply desired results.

Although there are thousands of self-help, organizational and community improvement *programs*, most lack a dynamic *organizing framework*—a *form*, or *structure*—for managing choices and actions, learning from experience and generating the energy needed to follow through to completion.

The *creating approach* employs such a structure. Driven by vision, grounded in reality and focused on choices and actions that honour both vision and reality, the *creating structure* makes it likely that your energy and action consistently flow toward your desired results.

Before I describe the *creating* skills in detail, I want to give you a quick overview of the *structure* of creating—the *framework* that connects those skills, and gives them a power greater than the sum of their parts.

Skills And Structure For Creating *Almost* Anything

Structure, you'll recall, refers to the arrangement of a system's parts.

Structure is about relationships—the connections between parts—that give rise to our surface behavior. Changing the underlying structures of our lives, work and relationships changes our behavior, and our results.

The skills and structure of creating are not a *formula* for success. A formula is rigid and prescriptive. Rather, they comprise a *form* that contains and guides your choices and actions. Just as musicians improvise within the structure of a *jazz* or *blues* form, you can set up a *creating structure*, and then make up plans and actions as you go.

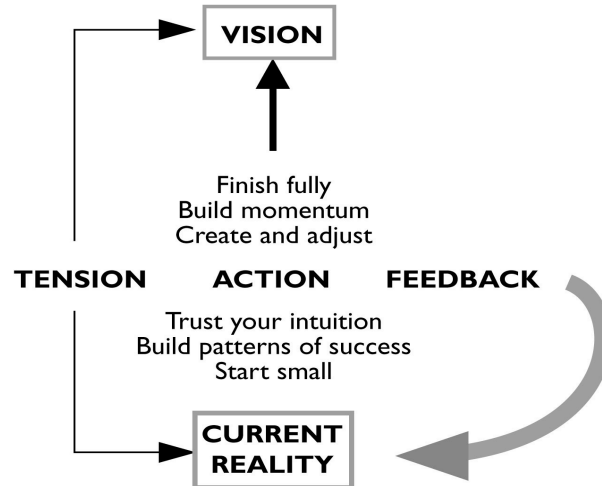
Working within such a framework simplifies the *act of creating*. It enables you to do more with less. It empowers you to stretch for results that matter—in spite of problems and adversity. It allows you to open to novelty, surprise and emergence. It helps you integrate rationality and intuition, and learn what you need as you create.

To recap, the **seven skills** that comprise the *form* or *framework of creating* are:

- **Vision:** *a clear, compelling mental **image** of a desired result.*
- **Current Reality:** *an objective, accurate, emotionally neutral **description** of the current state of the result.*
- **Creative Tension:** ***energy** arising out of the gap between vision and reality.*
- **Action:** ***Choices** and **steps** that move you from Reality to Vision.*
- **Evaluation, Feedback and Learning:** *Guided trial and error that lets you learn as you go.*
- **Momentum:** ***Generating energy at an ever-growing pace** through action, learning and increased competence and confidence.*
- **Following Through to Completion:** ***Finishing fully** and using the momentum and energy of completion to begin your next creation.*

In the diagram below, you can see how these skills are integrated and aligned to from the powerfully effective structure of *creating*.

THE FRAMEWORK OF CREATING

**The *Creating* Structure: A Container For Learning and Creating**

The *creating structure* is driven by *vision*, grounded in *reality* and powered by *creative tension*. It's focused on *actions* that lead to learning, increased capacity and desired *results*.

The *creating structure* is iterative; it repeats at different levels. Large results emerge from creating many sub-results and sub-sub-results and connecting them together. All of the sub-results are created using the structure above.

The *creating structure* is dynamic. Vision grows in the doing. Current reality gets clearer. So do actions and plans. The wiggly line in the diagram above indicates learning from experience—create and adjust—and making up the path as you go.

The *creating structure* provides a *container for creating*—a possibility field—in which you can explore, experiment, innovate, try things, tap into intuition and teach yourself how to create a desired result. Trial and error is not random. Actions are *contained* and *guided* by the structure. *Create and adjust, create and adjust....*

Finally, the *creating structure* generates three powerful energy sources: *motivation*, *creative tension* and *momentum*. Integrating these energy sources empowers you to consistently create results—even *when you don't feel like it*.

The Path of Least Resistance Revisited

We saw above that energy in a *creating* framework seeks the path of least resistance.^{xxxv} In the creating framework, energy and action flow along the path—the streambed—that you lay out between current reality and your vision.

In this context, the path of least resistance does not mean compromising or “taking the easy way out.” It means choosing the easiest, most effective and, hopefully, enjoyable way to bring your desired result into being.

When [Sharon Wood](#) (the first person to call me “Coach”) became the first North American woman to stand on top of Mount Everest, her path of least resistance was to do a difficult and dangerous route on the isolate Chinese side of Everest, in a small, self-sufficient team. Once on that route, she and team sought what we normally think of as the path of least resistance, the easiest way from top to bottom, and back down alive.

We are all, always—consciously, *or unconsciously*—following the path of least resistance set up by the structures underlying our lives.

This explains why many attempts to change fail to produce real and lasting results. Most diets, quit-smoking plans and motivational programs are built on structures that oscillate. You start, make progress for a while and then quit.

Back and forth you go, feeling frustrated because you can't produce lasting results. Eventually, you give up, feeling there is something flawed in you. But it's not you that's flawed. It's your structures.

To change your behaviour—and your results—change your structures.

A Tight/Loose Structure

Again, don't be put off by the word “structure”.

The creating framework is ***tight***—contained and focused by creative tension. But the process you follow can be ***loose***—open, playful, exploratory, intuitive and experimental. “Invention,” says Robert Fritz, “takes precedence over convention.”

*You do **not** have to know all the steps in advance.*

The creating structure enabled Richard and Dawna, Peggy, Daniel and thousands of others to embrace challenge, transcend complexity and create success—with whatever they had to work with.

You can do the same.

Embracing the *whole* structure—*vision, reality, creative tension, action learning, momentum and completion*—simplifies the act of creating. Because the structure embraces and transcends problems as part of current reality, it enables you to create what you truly want *with reality-as-it-you-find-it*.

In the next chapter, we'll zero in on the three elements (skills) that, when integrated, set up the framework: ***vision, current reality*** and ***creative tension***.

Then, in Chapter 7, I'll show you how to *take action, learn from experience, build momentum* and *follow through to completion*.

CHAPTER SIX

Setting Up The *Creating Structure*

Three Skills That Form Your Container For Creating

*"True happiness comes from the joy of deeds well done,
the zest of creating things new."*

— **Antoine de Saint-Exupéry**

Creating—the act of "*creating things new*"—involves thinking, doing, and learning from your doing. In many ways, the *creating structure* is an organizing framework for learning from your own experience.

Driven by vision, grounded in reality and focused on actions that move you from where you are to where you want to be, this framework greatly increases your chances of consistently creating your desired results.

The three main skills that make up the *creating framework* are:

1. Creating a clear, compelling **vision** of your desired result;
2. Assessing the **current reality** of that result, accurately and objectively;
3. Setting up and holding **creative tension** as a container for action-learning.

Holding vision and current reality in mind at the same time establishes the structure *and* energy of creative tension. Creative tension empowers you to take action and craft results, *with whatever you have to work with*.

The order in which the three key skills are deployed is very important. *It's critical that vision drives your action, not current reality.*

If, for example, you start the process with #2: *Assess Current Reality* (as do most conventional planning processes) you'll likely set up a problem-driven structure, with all the flaws inherent in misplaced problem-solving.

Another mistake is arranging goals (vision) and reality in a **"Yeah, but..."** structure."

In such a structure, the "Yeah." generates desire, excitement and motivation. Then the "but" negates it—and its energy.

"Yeah, I want to create "x," but I don't have the time, money, talent, skills, contacts, etc...." Or, *"Yeah. I want to create "y," but I don't know how."*

Because a *"Yeah, but ..."* structure generates little or no energy, it mostly leads to frustration and disappointment, not desired results. In it, actions are rarely taken. Excuses—"but's"—predominate. Most attempts to act are quickly aborted as the *negative* power of the "but" overwhelms you.

Most of my clients come to me with a mix of "Yeah, but..." and "Yes, and..." structures. But most are also unaware of the difference between the two. So they can't understand why sometimes they succeed at creating results, and, at other times, they don't.

Before you can shift to a **"Yes, and..."** structure, you'll need to recognize your own *"Yeah, but..."* So it's worth taking a moment to jot down any examples that come to mind. Try it.

A "Yes, and...Framework" Generates Energy, Action and Results

The *creating structure* is a **"Yes, AND..."** structure.

If you take the same elements as above and change the conjunction from "but" to "and," you will change your structure and your results.

"Yes, I want to create...x, **and** I don't (yet) have the time, money, etc."

"Yeah. I want to create "y," **and** I don't (yet) know how."

Note that the addition of the word "yet" changes the current reality part of the structure from an absolute judgment to a description of the reality as it is at the moment.

The "and" connects desire (vision) and reality so you maintain the Yes-generated motivational energy, even in the face of a challenging reality. Doing so also helps you set up creative tension and consistent energy for action.

Applying the first three skills in the order listed, automatically puts you in a "Yes, and..." structure. Energized by vision and grounded in reality, you then ask, "What should I do? How should I proceed?"

Answering the question puts you action steps, and the create-and-adjust phase of *creating*.

Shifting from "*Yeah, but...*" structures to "*Yes, and...*" structures is a critical step in your creating process. It can make a seemingly impossible reality look like an exciting challenge. And generate the energy to tackle that challenge effectively.

In this chapter, we'll look the key skills that set up the "Yes, and..." creating framework: **vision**, **current reality** and **creative tension**.

Skill One: Imagine Clear, Compelling *Visions* of Desired Results

Creators focus on what they *love* and truly want to see exist.

Independent of problems, issues and adversity, they *envision* deeply desired results, as they'd love to see them exist in their lives, work and/or world.

"All things are created twice, said Picasso. " There's a mental or first creation, and a physical or second creation of all things."

That mental creation—your "vision"—motivates you to start, drives your action and provides a kind of beacon to guide those actions as you craft the second—actual—creation.

A *vision* is a clear, compelling mental picture of a result you want to create.

As you'll see, a vision doesn't usually appear full blown. But it gets clearer and more compelling as you work with it. To start, your vision just needs to be clear enough that you would recognize the result if you created it.

A clear, compelling vision attracts you. It motivates you. It focuses your energy. It acts as a beacon, guiding actions toward results. And, held together with current reality, it sets up the framework and energy of creative tension—the container for action and learning.

The following tips can help you craft a clear and compelling vision of almost any result.

Tips For Crafting Effective End Results

1: Shift Your Focus From Problems To Desired Results

Crafting visions of desired results requires that you shift your focus from solving problems to *creating* results.

When you do, a problem-driven *process* such as, "Lose those 20 ugly pounds," becomes a *result* such as, "A strong, fit, healthy body that fits into size "x" jeans."

"Quit smoking," becomes, "*Clean, strong, fit and healthy lungs. Fresh breath.*"

"Solving pollution," becomes, "*Clean, healthy streams, rivers, air, and watersheds.*"

"Fixing the economic crisis," becomes, "*A just and sustainably robust economic system that provides for our needs, and for those of future generations—and honours the resource base upon which all our health, wealth and well-being are based.*"

As you read these examples notice whether you feel a difference in power and energy as you shift from a problem-focused statement to a results-focused one.

Also notice if your body feels any different as you shift.

Most people say that making that shift feels energizing and empowering.

2: Separate Vision From Reality

When you begin a new result/creation, it's best to temporarily *separate* vision from reality. To ensure that vision *drives* your actions, disconnect what you want from what you believe is realistic or possible.

Don't worry whether your vision is realistic, or even doable. You won't know that until you actually create it. Sharon Wood didn't know if her vision of climbing Everest was doable until she stood on the summit, and got back safely to base camp.

Don't worry, at first, whether you have what it takes—time, money, energy, talent, discipline, resources, etc...). Trust me, when you learn to assess current reality (Skill Two) you'll discover that you have a lot more to start with than you thought. And the rest you'll figure out as you go.

Please don't worry about *failing*. Don't worry about looking stupid, or being laughed at. That's other people's business, not yours. Your business is to create what you love. And that's not always easy. You'll make mistakes. You'll do dumb stuff.

You'll fail. Count on it. But, in *creating*, failure is just feedback.

"Fail fast, learn fast, learn lots." say creators of all stripes.

Create partial results, update current reality, adjust your actions and try again. Create and adjust, create and adjust... until done. Make up your path as you go.

This learn-as-you-go aspect gives *creating* great power. But it can be frightening.

For most people, fear of failure and looking stupid is one of their greatest fears. But sometimes their greater fear is the fear of *succeeding*—and *being different* or *being seen to be different*.

We fear success because we imagine we'll be accused of excessive pride, or arrogance. "Who are you to write an ebook on Thriving? What do you know about it?"

"Fear of hubris," Seth Godin calls it. "In Australia," he says, "they call it 'the tall poppy problem. Don't stand up, and stand out, or you'll get cut down.'"^{xxxvi}

We fear success because we imagine, that success will set us apart from the crowd, the gang, the tribe. And we're hardwired to feel part of that tribe. Plunging into the unknown, and leaving that comfortable sense of inclusion, terrifies many of us.

We forget that true friends will be happy for our success, and that we can belong to more than one tribe. Sure some friends may be jealous. But that's their business, not yours. Some won't; they'll be proud of you, and inspired by your success to create what matters to them.

Marianne Williamson refers to the fear of success when she says, "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, "Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?"^{xxxvii}

Have you asked yourself that question?

I have, and it scared the crap out of me until I read the rest of the quote.

"Actually," Williamson continues, "Who are you not to be. You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to

shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

Stretching for what matters, creating what you truly want is not hubris, it's our true way of being—choosing, initiating, creating. That's what makes us truly human.

I've worked with clients who limited themselves, at first, to small, flat-sounding visions because they didn't want to sound egotistical. They didn't want to look like they were rising above their station in life. But, after working with the creating framework, and reflecting on what they truly wanted, most came to terms with wanting to create something bigger, powerful and more deeply meaningful to them.

When they crafted a visions that expressed these bigger ideas (and accepted their natural fears and doubts as part of current reality) their energy soared. Their actions and results surprised even them.

But be authentic. Some folks craft big, powerful-sounding visions that they *don't* really want. When I first crafted a vision about being a writer, it was, "A famous, best-selling writer, travelling around North American doing talks and book signings, and making appearances on major TV programs such as *Oprah*, *The View* and *Strombo*."

But when I tried to teach myself this vision by imagining it vividly, I felt conflicted. It seemed to come more from my ego than my heart. I felt guilty that travelling so much would violate my environmental values. I feared it would suck up time and energy, and derail the simple life I loved and wanted to sustain.

I struggled with this conflict until I realized that I actually wanted to be, "A *slightly famous* author with a strong local and regional following, selling enough books, getting enough coaching clients and doing enough workshops to create a sufficient income, and a time-rich, simple, yet flourishing and environmentally harmonious life."

That vision felt authentic. Powerful. It's heartfelt. It aligns with my highest values. It continues to guide my actions to this day.

Finally, at the beginning, you do *not* need to know *how* to bring your vision into being. You don't need an elaborate plan. You don't need to know how you're going to create your result. You do not need the time, money and resources and whatever else you might have stuck unto your, "Yeah, but..." Those will come in the doing.

At first, you just need to know that you *truly* do want to create the result as you envision it. Later, you'll set up a powerful planning framework that will enable you to figure out the best ways to bridge the gap between your vision and your current reality.

So, acknowledge fears, doubts and uncertainty. Feel them. Name them. And, in spite of them, choose to create your results. Deal with unknown as it comes.

Create and adjust....

3: Focus: Make the General Specific

Vision needn't be perfect; just clear enough so you can assess where you are and what you have to work with, and then start experimenting with action steps.

It's fine to start with concepts such as "health," "financial independence," "a good job," "a great relationship," "a simple, rich and flourishing life," "a successful business" or "a healthy, resilient community."

But, key to crafting truly effective visions is *specifying* the details that *show* what your result would look (and feel) when fully completed. Specify success criteria and standards of measurement. These specifics will help you compare vision to reality, generate creative tension and, later, recognize when you're done.

Take a look at these visions of results crafted by my clients:

"A fit, healthy, flexible, and energetic body. Able to ski black diamond runs all day and dance all night—even at 80. Able to cycle 50 kilometres to the next town and back, with ease. Normal resting heart rate 60 bpm. Waking heart rate 50 bpm."

"Financially independent. Debt free. Own my house outright. Savings cushion of \$100K. Consistent income: \$10K/month, from multiple passive streams. Free to write about what truly matters to me."

"A wonderful, mutually caring relationship with someone I can also be friends with and create a loving family together."

"A home-based, on-line business, selling fair trade, organic food, clothing, and household products, that generates a comfortable yet sufficient income of \$4000/month, from customers all over the world."

"Full-time children's book writer and story-teller, living simply, making a comfortable living (\$50K/year) doing what I love. 70% writing; 30% performing."

"A 2000 square foot store in NYC, with high quality ecological and organic sourced clothes, accessories, and products. Monthly gross \$50,000. Take home \$7,500."

"An organic fruit and vegetable market garden, providing food for 500 local families and earning \$50K a year, after taxes."

"My dream job, teaching elementary school kids in a small mountain town."

Although some of these visions are clearer than others, they're all clear enough that their creators would recognize them if they created them. And all got clearer and more compelling—and more powerful as the creators worked on them.

A clear, compelling vision gives you *focus*. Focus generates energy for action.

With focus, for example, the **concept**, "A new car," becomes a **vision** of, "A 2-door, candy-apple red, Honda Jazz Hybrid, which gets 70 mpg, has a navy blue, natural fiber interior, and a 4 speaker BOSE CD system, with iPod dock."

Which has the most power to move you to action—the *concept* or the *vision*?

4: Make Your Visions Heartfelt

"Your vision will become clear," said Carl Jung, "only when you can look into your own heart." A vision has power if it reflects what you *truly* want.

The heart wants what the heart wants. So, make your visions deeply heartfelt.

Scientific studies show that positive desires that are *not* felt—that do not register in your heart or your body—are empty.^{xxxviii} They won't motivate you. Nor will they help you set up creative tension.

So honour your heart's desires. Stretch. Envision what you *truly* want to create. See it as if you already completed it. Imagine it existing in your life. Feel it deeply.

It can be difficult to stretch—to honour your highest aspirations. But it's important. Recall what Jim Collins said about *Big Hairy Audacious Goals*: A clear and compelling BHAG serves as a unifying focal point a catalyst for action in life and in business.

The key to creating desired results, says strategy guru Gary Hamel, is to set up "a chasm between ambition and resources." A chasm. Not a nice, comfortable fit.

"The challenge," Hamel tells organizational leaders, *"is to improve ... and to do so radically—500 percent or 1000 percent, not 10 percent or 20 percent."*^{xxxix}

Creating *stretch* between resources and aspirations, Hamel contends, is the single most important task leaders face. Stretch sets up greater creative tension, and increases employee's energy to act. It can do the same in your own life and work.

Make sure that your BHAGs, stretch goals and big visions come from your heart, not from your ego. Heartfelt visions have much more staying power—especially during challenging times.

Practice making your visions heartfelt. Write them out. And don't just think about them or read them and repeat empty words. Let yourself feel them deeply. Work on them until they grab your heart, as well as your head.

"Knowledge is just a rumour," says an African proverb, "until you get it into your muscles."

Before I commit to them, I give my visions **"the goose bumps test."**

I stand up and read the vision out loud. Standing up makes it easier to imagine the vision as fully completed and to feel it in my body. If, when I read my vision, it gives me goose bumps, chokes me up a little or makes me want to pump my fist and say, "Yes." I know it's good enough.

If not, I sit down and revise it. Create and adjust....

5: Visions Grow In The Doing

Success criteria and standards of measurement get clearer as you ground them in current reality. Learning from experience helps you flesh out visions, making them clearer, more compelling and more energizing.

Don't assume, for example, that just because you imagine a "best-selling book" that you have a clear vision of what it would look like when created. *Write it out.* Clarify what your book would look like when you've brought it into being.

As you work on it, your concept of a "best-selling book" will become best-selling book *about* something—something you care deeply about. *"A New York Times bestseller,"* perhaps, *"about the lives of orphan families in Kenya, and how to improve them."* Or, *"An Outside magazine bestseller about mixed climbing in the Canadian Rockies in winter."* Or about whatever you want it to be about.

A vision might be a paragraph or two (or more), or an introductory sentence followed by a list of bullet points. It might include sketches or diagrams showing how

the pieces and parts connect to make the whole. Picasso made numerous rough sketches to help him get a clear sense of the relationship between key elements in his big paintings. Many folks create [vision boards](#) to help them focus on the result(s) they truly want, the key elements in that result and criteria for success.^{xi}

Short or long? It depends on your vision.

Serious writers, for example, start with a sketchy vision similar to the ones above and then expand it into a “book proposal.” A book proposal is a ten to sixty-page document that is so clear and engaging it gives editors goose bumps, and makes them want to buy and publish your book. It also gives them confidence that you’re the one to write that book.

Business visions are a bit like book proposals. The easiest way to create one that I know is Paul Hawken’s idea of writing a letter to a friend, describing the business you want to create, casually but with as much detail as you think the friend will need to get a clear sense of what you want to do. He describes this method in his delightful 1988 book [Growing A Business](#).^{xii}

A more elaborate example of a business vision is Pixar’s “tent-pole” process. Instead of trying to explain the premise of a new film to potential investors, Pixar creates a 20-minute film that “shows” the concept, including characters, sets, costume design, music, etc.... This way, everyone has the same vision in mind.

When high tech companies or architects want to create something that no one’s seen before, a model or even a video of the result can get everyone on the same page.

A story works well as a compelling vision. As well as crafting engaging word pictures of their results, I ask executives to write a two to five-page short story describing how they see the ways customers or clients will access their product or service, and how employees will interact with customers, each other, and management.

It’s amazing how often the stories differ; sometimes dramatically. So, then, I help team members find common ground, co-create a shared vision, test it and revise it until they all agree on the same picture, the same story.

Often they find that practicing on smaller, concrete visions such as, “A company picnic and BBQ” helps them build their vision crafting chops quicker than trying to create the big, 5-year vision first time around.

6: Big Visions Emerge From Creating Smaller Visions

In the creating process, there will be difficult times. There will be times when you're not sure *what* you want, and times when you get stuck, and don't know how to proceed.

But don't give up. Teaching yourself what you *truly* want to create *is* one the most radical, painful, creative and results-producing things you'll do. So don't assume that you can just jump in and, instantly, create effective visions of what matters most.

In 25 years of coaching people and organizations, I've learned that it's best to start learning the *creating* process by crafting and working on small, concrete, "practice" results.

Small practice results quickly give you a feel for how the *creating skills* interact to set up the *creating framework*. They quickly get you into action so you get a feel for the dynamics of the creating process. They build *capacity*: the competence and confidence in creating and in yourself that lets you scale up to larger, more complex results.

So start small, create lots of little creations and learn from your experience. Recall the success of the East Coast lawyer who is scaling up into to a new career this way.

Another client wanted to become a producer of major motion pictures. After working with her (and her husband) for six months, she'd created a series of increasingly complex results related to her home office and the house itself. Then I moved away, and lost track of her.

Four years later, I was back in town, and bumped into her on the street. She told me that her first feature film had just opened on 50 screens across Canada and the US.

When I asked her how she did it, she laughed and said, "You know. Just like you taught me with my first practice creation, that little work nook I created off of my kitchen: "Vision, current reality, creative tension, create and adjust. Repeat until done."

"After the work nook, my husband and I created the home office you helped us with. It was fun and improved our relationship so much, we created a new guest room. Remember?"

I said I did, and recalled that her husband rose rapidly to a supervisory position in his industry.

"Yeah." she continued, "So using the *creating approach*, we eventually renovated the whole house and added so much value to that house that we sold it. We made a bundle and used it to design and build our dream home. It was great. Just a bigger vision, but

the same process as before. I did the same thing with my films, gradually making my creations bigger and more elaborate.

"Even today, each time we start a new creation, at home or work, we say, "Vision, current reality, creative tension, create and adjust. Repeat until done."

"It's so simple. Ha. But, really, if you take it step by step, it works. I know. Now, thanks to using the creating stuff you taught us, I'm doing what, in my heart, I've always longed to do."

7: Put Your Vision In the Present Tense

Finally, to generate maximum *creating* power, envision your desired result as if you've *already* created it. Put it in the present tense—even though you're envisioning a future result.

Say, "I am..." rather than "I will be...". Say, "It is..." instead of, "I want it to be...". Putting your visions in present tense makes them more believable, and energizing.

Here's an example of a clear, compelling vision crafted by Jill, a 38-year-old client of mine (in January 2004, 17 months before she actually completed it). In it she applies all of the above tips to create a clear, compelling vision, and put it into present tense:

Vision: A Lean, Fit, and Healthy Me:

It is May 31, 2005. I'm 40. My body is lean, fit and strong. I'm 5'3". I weigh 115 pounds, and fit size 2 jeans. My BMI is 20. I can do 50 real push-ups, 100 lunges and 20 pull-ups. I can run 6 miles (10K) in 35 minutes. My resting pulse is 60 beats per minute, and after hard exercise (150+ bpm), it only takes 2 minutes to drop back to 60. I'm energetic and enthusiastic. I hike or X-C-ski all day without stiffness the next day. I do all the intermediate routes at the climbing gym, and some of the advanced. I feel healthy in body, mind and soul, and people tell me how healthy and vital I look.

Notice the clarity of Jill's *success criteria*. This is *not* positive thinking. Nor affirmation. Jill is not telling herself she *will* get what she wants. She is not affirming that she *already* has it. She is imagining it *as if* she already had it. Still, to bring it into being, she has to *commit* to the vision, ground it in current reality and *take action*.

I think of visualizing as a form of mental rehearsal—Picasso's "first creation." You're rehearsing in your mind in preparation for actually creating your result.

Finally, a vision is not *just* a picture of what could be; it is an appeal to your better self. It is a call to become something more. So look into your heart. Let your aspirations soar. Be visionary. Go for what truly matters to you.

Here's a great quote, by short story writer Katherine Mansfield that sums up the challenge of creating: "Risk. Risk anything. Care no more for the opinions of others, for those voices. Do the hardest thing on earth for you. Act for yourself. Face the truth."

Once you've crafted your vision, facing the truth and grounding your vision in reality is the next step.

Skill Two: Assess Current Reality Accurately and Objectively

Vision *not* grounded in reality is wishful thinking, mere daydreaming.

To create anything, you have start where you are, with what you have.

To go someplace, you must know your destination (vision) *and* your starting point (current reality). Say you want to go to Kansas City and are in Boston, you'll head westward. But, if you're *really* in Los Angeles, and just think you're in Boston, a plan to head west will get you all wet.

To consistently create results, you have to be clear about *both* Vision and Current reality. To ensure you have a solid platform for action, you must carefully assess the current state of your creation.

To create a platform for acting on her health/fitness vision (above), Jill grounded it in an accurate, objective description of current reality. She described the present state of her health and fitness.

Here's where she was when she started to create her result:

My Current State: Jan 2, 2004. I'm 38 and a half. I weigh 140 pounds, and fit size 8 jeans. My BMI is 24.9 (.1 from "overweight"), I can do 8 real push-ups, 10 lunges, and 0 pull-ups. I can run/walk 6 miles (10K) in about 50 minutes. My resting pulse is 70 beats per minute, and after hard exercise, i.e. 190 bpm, it takes nearly 30 minutes to drop to 70 bpm. I'm often low on energy and lack enthusiasm. I used to be able to hike or X-C-ski all day without stiffness the next day, but, now, even a half-day makes my legs stiffen badly. I want to sport climb, but I struggle with the beginner routes at the climbing gym, and feel embarrassed.

"I judge that I am fat, ugly, and weak, and imagine people snickering at me behind my back. I don't actually believe this, but it is a story I fall into when I feel down. Also, I

have fears and doubt that I can't do this. Yet. ☺ But I am excited about trying this new approach. I think it'll work better than previous tries—if I practice. I just bought some new nice-fitting workout clothes, and a membership at the Y. I'm good to go.

Jill accurately and objectively *describes* where she is and what she has in relationship to her vision. The numbers in vision and current reality help her ensure accuracy.

Also, note that she *objectifies* judgments, fears and doubts.

She says, "I judge..." flagging what follows as judgment, *not* fact.

She says, "I have fears..." rather than "I am afraid of..." indicating she's aware that much fear is self-created. Objectifying fears takes off the emotional charge. It makes fears easier to examine for accuracy and fact.

Being accurate and objective ensures that Jill sets up a solid platform for action. Her emotionally neutral description of current reality ensures that it doesn't act as her motivating force. Her emotion is in vision, making it the motivating force. Current reality is just Jill's starting point; her raw material for creating what she wants.

Describing reality objectively is so important that I examine it further, below. Then, in *Skills Three and Four* we'll see how Jill put her vision and current reality together to set up creative tension, and take action.

Describe Reality; Don't Judge It

Many clients initially misrepresent current reality, or distort it in various ways. Instead of *describing* reality, they *judge* it.

They say, "*Everything* in my life sucks." when only a part of work or life might not be working. Just as bad, some say, "*Everything* is great," when it isn't.

A woman I knew used affirmations to convince herself that, merely by visualizing money, she could *manifest* it. But, instead, she went bankrupt. She lost her house, car and pension funds (which she'd borrowed against) because she did not ground her financial aspirations in an accurate, objective assessment of the current state of her income, investments and savings.

She made reality out to be *better* than it was, much better. She made her assessment of reality what she wanted it to be, not what it actually was. This Pollyanna approach proved disastrous for her, and for her family.

Another client suffered depression because he was so harsh on himself. Believing "anything less than 100 percent is zero," he regularly told himself he was a failure—in spite of performing well. He made reality out to be *worse* than it was.

As imagined failures became his primary focus, his work *did* slump; a self-fulfilling prophecy came true.

The key to assessing current reality is, "*Describe it; don't judge it.*"

Describing reality takes away any emotional charge, making it easier to see it as it is. To see the effect of *judging* reality try this short exercise.

First, think of something that's difficult for you to do, or create. Something you would love to be able to do, but can't. Say, "It's hard," and notice how you feel.

Next, think about your challenge, and say, "It's *sooo* hard," and notice your feelings.

Finally, say, "It's *too* hard," and notice your feelings.

All three statements are *judgments* about reality. They are not objective descriptions of your challenge. They are opinions about the difficulty of the task in front of you.

The first judgment distorts reality because it judges the task as *hard*. Imagine doing it with your best friend and cold beer (or beverage of choice). Do your feelings change?

"Hard" is a judgment, an opinion. "*Too hard*" is a stronger opinion. It has such a strong emotional charge that it could prevent you from acting. After judging the task to be *too* hard, you might even conclude that, "It's *impossible*; I could *never* do that."

Is such a statement going to move you closer to or farther away from the result you want to create? The stronger your judgment, the harder it is to create what you want.

Many of us have an antagonistic relationship with reality. Positive Psychologists describe such a relationship as a "[pessimistic explanatory style](#)."^{xlii} All of us are hardwired with a negativity bias that keeps alert for danger, but some of us are more negative than others. We're pessimistic, and tend to judge reality to be worse than it is.

But, you can change your relationship with reality. You can develop a *realistically optimistic* style. In Chapter 9 of [Simplicity and Success](#), I outline nine keys to make your descriptions of current reality accurate, objective and emotionally neutral:

1. Be honest with yourself. Tell yourself the truth about reality.
2. Describe reality, don't judge it. Just the facts; no editorials.

3. Look beyond your "concept" of reality. Examine your opinions and stories, as well as your judgments about your reality.
4. Include, but don't exaggerate the positive aspects of your reality.
5. Include, but don't exaggerate the negative aspects of your reality.
6. Stay away from absolutes such as "totally, always, never, every, etc..."
7. Beware the verb "to be." "I am lazy," is different than, "I sometimes act lazily."
8. Never underestimate the power of "yet." "I can't do this." *or* "I can't do it yet."
9. Keep current reality *current*. Update as you change reality in favour of vision.

Some find it easy to make reality objective. Others struggle to do so. They are overwhelmed by their moods. They can create when they *feel* like it, but not when they don't feel like it. When they're down, sad, angry, irritated, upset, frustrated, etc..., they let their mood dictate their actions. Or lack of action.

To create, you must be able to rise above moods. You must be able to create, even when you don't feel like it. So develop a realistically optimistic approach to life, work and the world, and you'll not only get better at creating what matters. You'll also get emotionally and physically healthier.

Realistic optimism can help you thrive. It can help you flourish in the face of adversity.

[Research](#) shows, for example, that optimism has been linked to an array of positive health outcomes such as lowered stress levels, lower blood pressure and greater longevity. It even lowers the risk of stroke in adults over the age of 50 years.^{xliii}

The mood-managing skills I describe in my e-book [Emotional Mastery: Manage Your Moods and Create What Matters—With Whatever Life Gives You](#).^{xliv} can help you ground visions in accurate, objective assessments of reality. For a shorter take on this matter of mood, see my article, ["Creative Block? Manage Your Mood To Create Success In Just About Anything."](#)

When you're clear about your vision and solidly ground it in an objective assessment of your current reality, it is easier to embrace the gap between vision and reality, and set up *creative tension*.

Skill Three: Creative Tension: The Engine *and* Container for Creating

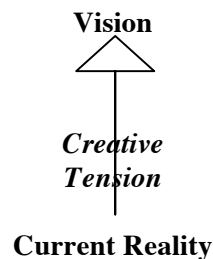
To successfully create results you care about, you need to hold vision and reality in dynamic *tension*. Tension sets up a tendency towards movement. It creates energy.

If you've ever been glued to a mystery novel that you couldn't put down, and felt pulled to finish it, you've experienced creative tension.

If you've been hiking and felt pulled to scramble up a ridge to see what was on the other side, you've experienced creative tension.

If you envision a result and, though far from completion, feel a strong desire to move from where you are to where you want to be, you're experiencing creative tension.

Creative tension is like a big rubber band stretched between vision and reality. It creates energy to power actions. It helps you direct them toward desired results. It drives out negative (emotional) tension. It is, as I said earlier, the engine of creating.



To set up creative tension, hold a clear picture of an envisioned result in mind.

Add a clear picture of the current state of the result.

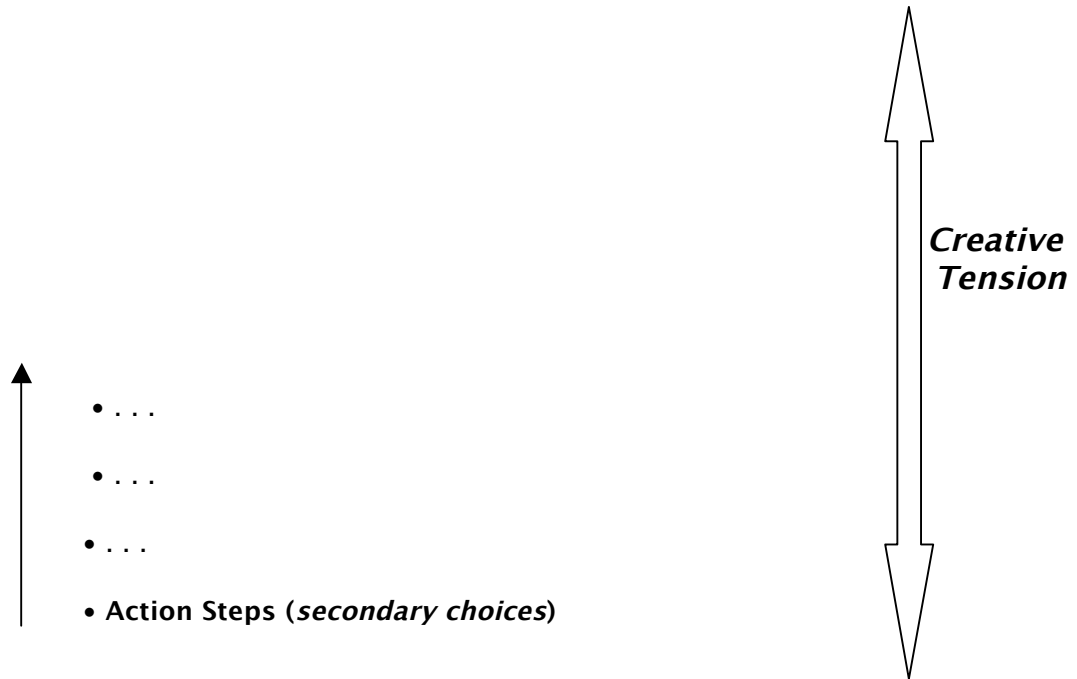
Hold vision and reality in mind together, as if you saw them on a split screen.

Leave a big white space for action steps—and to set up the tension-creating gap between vision and reality out of which creative tension arises.

On the following page, we'll see how Jill held her vision and current reality together to set up creative tension—and to create a results-focused container for creating.

Vision: Fit, Healthy, Energetic and Vital Body/Mind/Soul:

*It is **May 31, 2005**. I'm 40. My body is lean, fit and strong. I weigh 115 pounds, and fit size 2 jeans. My BMI is 20. I can do 50 real push-ups, 100 lunges and 20 pull-ups. I can run 6 miles (10K) in under 35 minutes. My resting pulse is 60 beats per minute, and after hard exercise (190 bpm), it only takes 1 minute to drop to 60 bpm. I'm energetic and enthusiastic. I hike or X-C-ski all day without stiffness the next day. I can do all the intermediate routes at the climbing gym, and some of the advanced. I feel healthy in body, mind and soul, and people tell me how healthy and vital I look.*



Current Reality: Jan 2, 2004.

I'm 38. I weigh 140 pounds, and fit size 8 jeans. My BMI is 24.9, .1 from "overweight." I can do 8 real push-ups, 10 lunges, and 0 pull-ups. I can run/walk 6 miles (10K) in about 50 minutes. My resting pulse is 70 beats per minute, and after hard exercise (190 bpm), it takes nearly 30 minutes to drop to 70 bpm.

I'm often low on energy and lack enthusiasm. I used to be able to hike or X-C-ski all day without stiffness the next day, but, now, even a half-day makes my legs stiffen badly. I want to sport climb, but I struggle with the beginner routes at the climbing gym, and feel embarrassed.

I judge that I am fat, ugly and weak, and I imagine people snickering at me behind my back. I don't actually believe this, but it is a story I fall into when I feel down. Also, I have some fears and doubt that I can't do this. Yet. ☺ But I am excited about trying this approach. I think it'll work better than previous tries. I'm eager to start experimenting with actions.

To grasp how creative tension works, imagine the large arrow in the diagram above is that big rubber band stretched between *Vision* and *Current Reality*. The tension in the band wants to resolve. It wants to move, to go somewhere. **There are *only three ways* it can do so. You can:**

1. Let go of your vision, and give up your goals.

Quit. Give up. Drop your vision. Tension resolves toward current reality, the status quo. You're back reacting or responding to circumstances, solving problems, and trying to avoid negative emotions.

2. Move part way toward vision, but stop if it gets uncomfortable.

Compromise. Take *some* action, but settle for less than you truly want. Because compromise is not satisfying, the tension weakens. Again, it resolves to current reality. You're back reacting to what happens, not creating what you truly want.

3. Commit to vision, honour current reality, and take consistent action.

Let the energy of creative tension *empower* you to make choices. Take actions that support your vision, and learn from your experience. Adjust your actions, based on what you learn. Try, try, try, gradually crafting reality until it matches your vision.

Only the third approach—creating—produces real and lasting results.

But there's more to the *act of creating* than just these three skills.

In the next chapter, you'll see how to *activate* the creating process.

You'll see how to *make choices, take actions, learn from your results and your mistakes, build momentum and follow through to the real and lasting results you desire.*

CHAPTER SEVEN

Action In the *Creating* Process

*Making Choices, Taking Action, Learning From Experience,
And Following Through to Completion*

*"Vision without action is merely a dream.
Action without vision just passes time.
Vision with action can change the world."
—Joel A. Barker*

When Jill held her "Fit and healthy" vision and current reality in mind together, she set up creative tension. Working within creative tension made it easier for her to make good choices. The energy it generated helped her consistently do (or not do) what was needed to get lean, fit, energetic and healthy—in spite of her moods or circumstances.

As she practiced *creating* and brought her health and fitness result into being, Jill's confidence in the *creating approach*—and her ability to apply it—*increased*. Feeling empowered, she chose to stretch, to scale up to larger, more complex results

Choice is an essential part of creating results, and of our humanness. Moments of decision, Tillich said, are when we become most fully human, most fully ourselves.

Skill 4: Commitment: *Choice* Activates Your Creating Process

Commitment means, "to pledge, involve, or bind (oneself) to a certain course."

In *creating*, we commit to a course by *choosing* the results we want, and then *choosing* actions that we think best support those results.

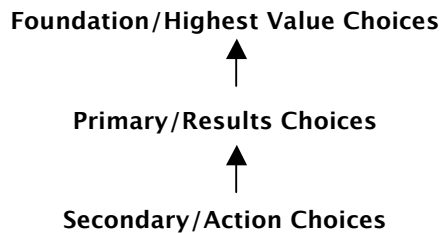
Creators make three kinds of choices: *foundation choices*, *primary choices* and *secondary choices*.

Foundation Choices

Foundation choices are higher-order choices about core values and principles such as *health, wholeness, freedom, faith, compassion, authenticity*, and, for some, *living in harmony with the Earth's ecological systems*.

Making such choices is basic to creating a *hierarchy of values* that guides all of our other choices. Such a hierarchy provides a foundation upon which to make primary choices and secondary choices.

When you're stuck about what choice to make, it helps to go up to the next higher level of the hierarchy. If you're not sure what action to take, clarify your primary choice. If you're not sure what result to create, examine your foundation choices.



As well as the choices listed above, my clients make foundation choices such as *to live in peace, be authentically successful, work for the enlightenment of all beings*, and *to live by the values and tenets of their faith*. Jill's choices included, *"Healthy in body/mind/soul."*

Many people I've worked tell me they've taken action until they're exhausted, yet failed to create real and lasting results. Probing a little, I discover, for example, that some go to the gym, change their diet, and take vitamins but don't consciously choose to be healthy.

Others work hard at their writing, their business, their relationships, but fail to choose to be successful. Others long to live in peace but only hope it'll come to them. They don't make the fundamental choice to be peaceful.

When my clients learn to regularly make foundations choice, they more easily create what matters. Those who choose to be healthy (rather than fight disease) become healthy, and find the process easier, more engaging and rewarding. Those who choose to be peaceful, find it easier to create peace around them.

Each of us chooses and commits to the foundation choices *we* want to make, to the values that we want to express in our visions and actions.

Eventually, all successful creators consciously choose to *be a creator*. If you want to create results, I invite you to make this foundation choice, too—to *be the predominant creative force in your own life*.

A Compass

You don't act *directly* on foundation choices. Rather, they create a context for other choices; an orientation. They help set up the deep riverbed of your life. They establish *an internal compass* that helps you align results and action choices with what matters most to you.

When clients report that they are stalled or backsliding in their *creating practice*, I always ask, "Are you making your foundation choices? Do you have them printed out and tacked up somewhere prominent?"

The answer is usually "no."

So I suggest they start conscientiously making those choices again. That's often all it takes to get them unstuck, on track, and moving toward their desired results. With a compass of clear foundation choices, they're better able to make good primary (results) choices and effective secondary (action) choices that support their desired results.

Their energy and action flow along the path of least resistance set up by the alignment of their foundation, primary and secondary choices.

Primary (Results) Choices

Jill, too, found that integrating foundation choices with primary and secondary choices helped her create results.

"Before I worked with you," she told me, "I'd tried to get fit many times. But all of those attempts were driven by problems like "being out of shape, or "overweight. They'd kinda work, but I'd always slip back to where I'd started."

Never before had she *consciously* chosen to be "Healthy in body, mind and soul." When she did, she also created her, "Fit, HEALTHY, Energetic and Vital Body/Mind/Soul" primary choice. *Nor* had she seen previously seen how a secondary choice such as, "An exercise program that fits for me," could act as a stepping-stone to her higher results.

"Once I got all my goals and actions integrated around my highest values and desires," Jill said. "Everything just kinda fell into place. It wasn't always easy, but, if I worked at it, it was much easier than before."

Without a clear hierarchy of value in mind, or tacked up on your computer or fridge, it's easy to get overwhelmed by the countless choices you could make, the numerous results you might create.

I have files *full* of ideas I want to write about. It's impossible to work on them all at once, so I elevate one or two ideas to *primary choices*. Usually, one project gets my main focus. Then, I try to make my newsletter, blog posts and articles support that one, too.

Author Henry Miller's "[Commandments for Daily Work](#)," includes: "Commandment #1: *Work on one thing at a time until finished.*" And Commandment #10: "*Forget the books you want to write. Think only of the book you "are" writing.*"^{xlv}

Miller understood the power of making a desired result a *primary choice*.

You can do the same thing.

Try this: think of a result you'd like to create, and say, "I *wish* I had it," "I *hope* I get it." Then notice how you feel. Now *commit* to that result. Say, "I *choose* to create [insert result], and notice the change. *Which has greater power? Wishing, hoping or choosing?*

The Power of *Commitment*

Scottish mountaineer W.H. Murray highlighted the power of choice when he recounted a strategic moment in the 1950 Scottish Himalayan Expedition.^{xlvi}

Before they left Scotland, the expedition encountered difficulties and setbacks. Uncertainty surrounded it. Go? Or stay? Thoughts of chickening out, and giving up crept in. Yet, in the face of that doubt and uncertainty, they made Everest a *primary choice*.

"We put down our passage money," said Murray, describing the moment of choice, *"and booked a passage to Bombay."*

"This may sound too simple," he wrote, *"but it is great in consequence. Until one is committed there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness."*

Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would come his way. I have learned a deep respect for one of Goethe's couplets:

***"Whatever you can do, or dream you can begin it.
Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it."***

By committing, you do not *force* yourself to take action. Rather, committing involves choosing to create a result, and then choosing actions that support the result.

Action—energized by a clear, compelling vision and creative tension—flows from your choice and enables you to craft your result with greater ease and less stress.

Secondary (*Action*) Choices

Having committed—chosen to attempt Everest—the Scottish expedition members then made a series of *secondary choices* to support that choice.

They ordered supplies. They developed climbing strategies based on reports from previous expeditions. They arranged overland transportation in India and Nepal. They began training to get fit for the challenge ahead. Later, on the mountain, they made many more secondary choices—day to day, and moment to moment—all flowing from their original decision to commit to a successful Everest attempt.

Secondary choices are action steps, taken to support your primary choice—to bring into being your creation. Thus, secondary choices are always made so they align with and support primary choices.

Making good secondary choices moves you off the "*should, must and have-to*" stance. It puts you into the "*want to*" stance, where life is more enjoyable and effective.

A painter experiments with colour because she wants to capture the subtlety of her vision. Athletes get up at 5:00 AM to train because they want to win a gold medal. Supporters of sustainability buy organic cotton clothes, grow organic vegetables and recycle because they want a sustainable life and community.

Business owners such as *Patagonia's* Chouinard make product development, marketing, sales and service choices that support their primary choices to be profitable *and* operate in alignment with their social and environmental philosophies.

Some of Jill's secondary choices looked like this:

[Create this diagram, if needed?]

Vision: Fit, Healthy, Energetic and Vital In Body/Mind/Soul

-
- *(blank bullets indicate more actions to come)*
-
-
- *exercise 6 days a week, regardless of weather*
- *create a system to help me stay hydrated all day, every day*
- *increase aerobic exercise by 5 minutes/week*
- *ask Lisa to help me at the climbing gym*
- *interim goal of 5 pull-ups in 2 weeks*
- *increase push ups and crunches 1/week*
- *enroll in the Sun Run Prep Program*
- *join the YWCA and sign up for stretch'n strength class*

Current Reality: (for "Fit, Healthy, Energetic and Vital Body/Mind/Soul" vision)

As I write this, I'm clear about the result I want to create—"An internationally successful, 130–page e–book that helps people thrive in challenging times by developing resilience and the capacity to create, and helps me attract new clients to my coaching business." In that context, I, too, make a series of *secondary choices*.

On a typical "To Do" list, "Write for three hours each morning," wouldn't have much power. But seeing it as a secondary *choice* that supports a successful e–book turns that task from a burdensome chore into an engaging challenge.

"Write for three hours" is something I *choose* to do to move toward my desired result. And I *really* want that result.

Understanding this relationship between choices and results helps me manage my time by managing my priorities. When I notice myself procrastinating, I ask, "*Why* am I doing this? What foundation and primary choices does this action serve?"

If my action (secondary choice) doesn't serve a primary choice, I can choose to shift my focus to something that does. I don't have to *force* myself. When I clarify the connection between my primary and secondary choices, nine times out of ten the choice makes itself.

The one other time? I slack off a little, give myself a break and hope it leads to a little serendipitous discovery. Sometimes, it does.

Tip: if you use this approach, change the heading on your "To Do" list to "Secondary Choices." It'll make a big difference in your energy and action.

Moments of Decision

Throughout each day, we often face competing, even conflicting choices.

*Go for latte with friends? **Or** save money and get fitter by going for a run?*

*Write, even though I don't feel like it? **Or** check my Facebook page?*

Such moments are strategic because, properly perceived, they offer decision points in which envisioned results can become actual. These moments shape the lives, families, relationships, work, and world we most want. They are Tillich's moments of decision in which we become most fully human.

Moments of decision can happen so fast there isn't time for formal choice making. Having foundation choices in mind as guides to primary and secondary choices is key. Such a *hierarchy of value* informs your strategic and tactical choices. It enables you to align secondary, primary and foundation choices, quickly, easily and effectively.

Aligning Choices

Aligning *foundation*, *primary*, and *secondary* choices ensures that you almost always work from choice. Being motivated by choice empowers and guides you.

"I used to avoid exercise when it rained, " Jill told me, "because I hated feeling uncomfortable. I'd blow off exercise and do something else. Now that I'm aware of my choices, I find it easier to choose short-term discomfort to gain the long-term health and fitness I truly want.

"Also, I made a secondary choice to get good rain gear. That minimized discomfort, and made running in the rain fun. I exercise regularly now, regardless of most weather. And I feel just a tiny bit superior to those sitting on their couch, wishing it were sunny."

Acting from choice frees you *from* the tyranny of circumstances. It empowers you *to* follow your desires. Aligning choices enables your energy to flow along a self-constructed riverbed toward your desired result—*independent of circumstances and problems you encounter.*

Rituals

It helps to create a *ritual* for making foundation and other choice making. A ritual is a simple, easy-to-do action that directs and commits you toward the results you want.

Almost every morning, walking along a path overlooking the ocean, I make the foundation choices to be: *free, whole, healthy, compassionate and true to myself.*

I also choose to be *the predominant creative force in my own life—living a simple, sufficient and flourishing writing life, in harmony with the systems of life on which all of my health, wealth and well-being depend.*

With this *morning ritual*, I set my compass heading for the day—and *for my life.*

"It's vital to establish rituals—automatic but decisive patterns of behavior—at the beginning of the creative process, " says choreographer Twyla Tharp," when you are most at peril of turning back, chickening out, giving up, or going the wrong way." ^{xlvii}

Her key ritual takes place in a cab, when she simply gives the driver the address of the gym in which she works out in before starting work with her dancers. "The ritual," she says, is not the stretching and weight training I put my body through ... the ritual is the cab. The moment I tell the driver where to go I have completed the ritual."

That choice preempts all other choices, such as going to a patisserie for coffee and a croissant. The ritual supports her fundamental choice to be fit, healthy and energetic, and a model for her dancers. The ritual is simple, easy to do and effective.

Making my choices each morning preempts my own inevitable thoughts of chickening out and giving up. I note distracting thoughts as part of current reality, and then choose my primary choice (at this moment, a successful e-book).

Energized by that choice, and working with creative tension, I find it easier to follow through and make the secondary choices and take the actions that move my primary choice toward completion.

Skill Five—Action: *Start Small. Create and Adjust.... Learn As You Go.*

"The sooner you make your first 5000 mistakes," wrote drawing teacher Nicolaiades, "the sooner you'll learn to draw."^{xlviii}

"If you want to be a writer," advised best-selling writer Ray Bradbury, "write a million words. And then write a million more."^{xlix}

Between choosing to become a writer and selling his first short story, Bradbury wrote 3,000,000 words. He wrote a story almost every week for 8 years. All rejected. But he persisted. He kept writing stories, and went on to achieve international acclaim for

novels such as *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Martian Chronicles*, *Dandelion Wine*, and *Something Wicked This way Comes*.

Bradbury believes that *quantity* leads to *quality*; that quality emerges out of deep experience. "Michelangelo's, da Vinci's, Tintoretto's billion sketches, the *quantitative*," he says, "prepared them for the *qualitative*, single sketches further down the line, single portraits, single landscapes of incredible control and beauty."

It's not just in the arts that learning from experience leads to success. "Fail fast; fail lots," advise innovation experts, "Learn quickly." Take "massive action" say Internet gurus. *Rapid prototyping* in software development is like writing story drafts or making sketches.

Create partial results. Learn what works, and what doesn't. Keep what works and scrap the rest. Create and adjust *Quality* results emerge from *quantity*.

In a ski instructor's clinic I took, a young Level 1 instructor asked, "What's the best way to get really good, really fast?" Our Level 4 Examiner answered, "Miles."

Ski a lot. Write a lot. Code a lot. Take tons of photos. Create a lot of creations. *Quality emerges from quantity*—even in health and fitness.

"It's amazing," my client Jill told me. "At the climbing gym, I can struggle with a route for hours, trying it over and over, and not get up it. Then, two days later, I try it again and I ace it first time. It's like magic."

It's the magic of practice and persistence powered by creative tension. The sooner you make your first 5000 mistakes, the sooner you will learn *anything*.

See All Actions As Experiments

Many of us are afraid to fail once, let alone 5000 times. Demanding that first steps be perfect prevents many would-be creators from getting started. If you desire high levels of success, but are afraid to fail, fear cancels the energy of your desire. Because you fear failure, you don't try. But, by not trying, you fail anyway.

A key to learning anything is to start small, create and adjust and learn from your experience—mistakes and successes—as you go. See failure as feedback. Learn from it, make adjustments and try, try again.

It helps to see your actions as *experiments* that teach you what to do next. Seeing actions as experiments, rather than performances, takes pressure off you. You don't have to get it right the first time. You can learn; you can create and adjust.

"Experiment" comes from the same root as "experience"— *prier*, "to try."

If you don't like a result, adjust your action, and try again. If you make a wrong decision, make another. In creating, there is no failure, only *feedback*.

Starting small helps you get started. Small successes form *patterns of success* that build confidence. Over time, "I *did* it," becomes, "I *can do*."

As you build from first steps and easy sub-results to completed larger results, you start to feel *generally* competent, *and* confident enough to stretch for larger challenges and successes. Momentum builds.

Starting small also helps you get over the *threshold of effort*—the inertia that plagues so many initial efforts, and leads to aborted projects.

Overcoming The Threshold Of Effort

To reduce the threshold of effort, it helps to break large, complex potentially "overwhelming" creations into smaller, sub-creations (and sub-sub-creations), each with their own vision, current reality and small, easy-to-do action steps.

This threshold-lowering process is *fractal*. That is, you repeat the *creating framework* with smaller and smaller results—each with their own vision, current reality and actions laid out. Eventually, you work your way down to the essential but easy, baby steps that get you moving, build momentum and get you over the threshold of effort.

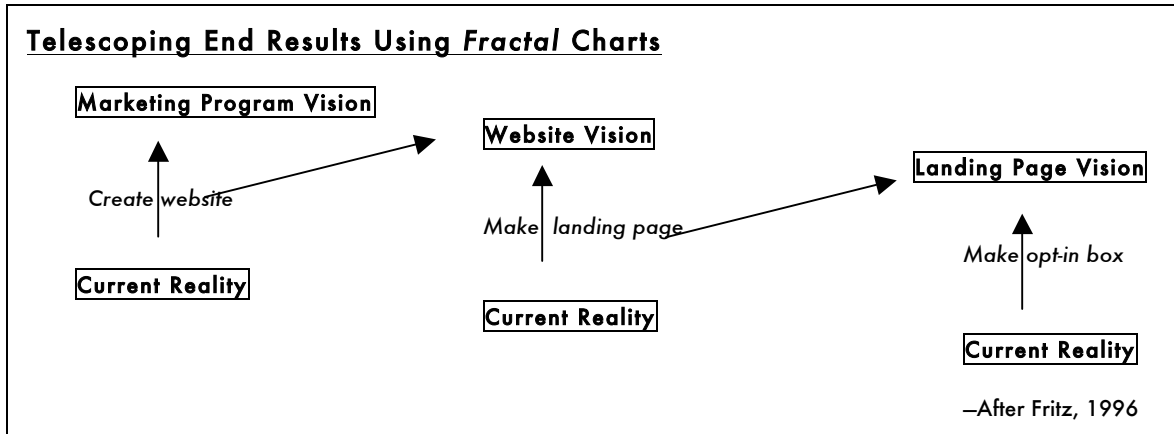
David Allen of *Getting Things Done!* fame would call this "getting granular." Get down to the essential, easy-to-take first steps. Then take them.

Starting a home-based Internet business, for example, could feel "overwhelming." You could easily slip into a "Yeah, but..." framework and never get around to it. But in a "Yes, and..." *creating framework*, you break that big result down into its key sub-results—*products, services, marketing, technology, finances, record keeping, etc....*

View each component, each *sub-result*, as a smaller creation. In the home-based business example, view "A Marketing Program," as sub-result with its own vision, current reality and actions. Then take it even further.

Transpose large action steps such as "Create a website" and "Make a landing page," into sub-sub results such as, "*An attractive, easy-to-navigate and impactful website,*" and "*A killer Landing Page with an opt-in box to sign up subscribers to my newsletter.*"

Repeat the vision, current reality, action *form* with these sub-sub-results.



At first this may seem complicated and look like a lot of extra work, but it's not, really. It's thinking and organizing that you'll have to do sometime, and it's a lot easier to rough out these "navigational charts" up front than to think this through on the fly.

In fact, using this mapping process greatly simplifies the creating process. *Why?*

Complexity *Plus* Complexity *Equals* Simplicity

We almost always *underestimate* the complexity of the things we want to create.

Results take longer than we think to create. They are more difficult that we first imagined. And, as good old Murphy remarked, "If anything can go wrong, it will."

Recall that my lawyer client took over 100 action steps to create her bedroom. A home-based Internet business might have as many as a 1000 action steps.

Very complex. Potentially overwhelming. *Unless ...?*

Make your organizing system complex enough to match the complexity of the challenge. *Then, complexity plus complexity equals simplicity.*

Don't mistake complex for complicated. They're two different things. *Complex* refers to "a whole composed of various interrelated parts." Complicate means "make or become difficult, confused."

Early one summer, I worked with a client who wanted to sell a book he'd written. He crafted a vision of "A published book, selling well, generating passive income..." He grounded it in current reality and then laid out strategic action steps. But he balked at zooming in to smaller sub-results. "That's way too much work," he insisted.

Instead, he "nuanced the action steps." He broke each action down into sub-actions and those into sub-sub-actions, and so on. He sent me 10-pages of these "nuanced" action steps, and asked, "What do you think? Isn't this a lot simpler?"

"Not really," I said. "It looks like a 10-page 'to do' list. Just skimming the nearly 200 actions, I felt overwhelmed. Does it work for you?"

"Well," he said, "it is kinda overwhelming. In fact, after I'd done it, I figured out the time it would take me to do each action, and came up with 52 weeks. So I shelved it. It'll have to wait until I can save up enough to take a year's sabbatical."

I persuaded him to try "telescoping" again.

That week, I received 12 pages of fleshed out charts that mapped vision, current reality and actions for his primary results, and for the sub-results and sub-sub-results that comprised it. He was bubbling with excitement when he next called me.

"I can't believe the difference," he said. "It's amazing. I came up with way better actions. And way less. When I tallied the time to do them, it seems it'll only take six weeks."

"That's great," I said.

"Yes." he said, "what's really great is that I have four weeks of vacation and sick leave due, and there are two long-weekends in the next couple of months. So I might be able to complete this by the fall."

In October, he emailed me to say he'd sold the book, and in the negotiations, he'd mentioned that he had another book idea, and the publisher bought it, too.

"Bruce," he wrote in an email, "without my work with you, learning to break down (desired results) by current reality, vision and action steps, I don't really think I could have done it. This is a big boost for me, one that has opened up my career in an exciting new direction. I want to thank you for that."

In another conversation he said, "At, first, I really thought the telescoping process was too complicated. But practicing it and getting good at it turned out to make creating my book and other results much simpler. It's like learning to snowboard. The first

couple of times, it felt so awkward, and there were so many things to remember, that I almost quit. Now, the board feels like part of my body.

"The more I practice this creating approach, the more natural and easy *it* feels."

"Good Enough" Works Better than Perfect

When you get down to actually taking the actions you've mapped out, they don't have to be perfect. Perfection gets in the way of good enough. Don't buy into nonsense beliefs such as "anything less than 100% is zero." That's not true.

When elite sprinters are asked to "give 100-percent," they tense up, tightening their muscles. Running against their muscle resistance, they produce slower times. When asked to "give it 85-90 percent," they relax, and post faster times.

Most of the time, good enough works better than perfect.

Many psychologists now advocate a "[good enough](#)" approach to parenting. Trying to be good enough, rather than perfect, helps harried parents lower the demands they put on themselves. When they take that pressure off, and relax, they increase their effectiveness. It's counter-intuitive, but it works

Zen Buddhists say, "Perfection is 85 percent." Muttering this mantra to myself prevents me pushing too hard and creating resistance. It helps me relax, get into flow and use the momentum that comes from working *with* the path of least resistance.

Jill liked this approach, too. "When I'm climbing," she told me, "if I push too hard, I burn out fast, and get frustrated, or fall. But if I take it easier, learn the moves, and practice, eventually I flow up the route. Sometimes, it feels almost effortless."

Do You Maximize, or Satisfice?

Back in the '50s [Nobel](#) prize-winning^{li} economist [Herbert Simon](#) differentiated between two strategies: "maximizing," and "satisficing".

If you seek and accept *only* the best, you "maximize."

If you settle for "good enough," based on *self-set standards*, you "satisfice."

"Satisficers," Simon (and later researchers) showed, "outperform and out-achieve maximizers in most ways." They also have higher well-being than maximizers.

Satisficers go for the best they can, given their own vision and standards. They search for and/or craft a result until it fits their success criteria, and then they stop. They proclaim their creation—the book they're writing, the deal they're doing or the house they're renovating—"good enough."

A satisficer walks into a mall, goes to a jeans store, tries on two or three pairs, picks the one s/he likes best and is out of there in under twenty minutes. A maximizer spends hours going to a dozen stores, trying on scores of jeans and leaves frustrated that s/he couldn't find the right pair. Or if s/he does find a pair, she worries it wasn't the best.

Maximizers spend far more time than satisficers researching choices, but are rarely satisfied with their results. They constantly compare their desires to other desires. Their standards for "best" are unclear. Even when they make a choice, they are often plagued by doubts that they overlooked something, or that something better has come along since they made their choice. They torture themselves with "woulda, coulda, shoulda" and "if only" thinking. "If only I'd gone to one more store, tried on one more pair...."

Sociologist [Barry Schwartz](#)ⁱⁱⁱ, says, "I believe that the goal of maximizing is a source of great dissatisfaction, that it can make people miserable—especially in a world that insists on providing an overwhelming number of choices, both trivial and not so trivial."

So, consider "good enough." Set specific criteria for what you want to create. Use those criteria and standards to measure them to guide your actions. Stop when your creation matches your criteria. Use the energy of completion to start another creation.

Skill Six: Build *Momentum*: Turn Problems into Opportunities

Momentum—"impetus gained by movement"—gets you through times of no motivation better than motivation gets you through times of no momentum. It arises out of action, and generates the third energy source for creating.

Momentum builds when you act. You experience an "I did it." A series of small "I did it's" leads to a pattern of success, and to a *generic* sense that "I can do." Such competence and confidence enables you to take larger steps.

Momentum is key to creating results. Watch tennis players waiting to receive a serve. Their feet, arms and body move, building momentum, getting them ready to respond quickly, wherever the shot goes.

Even going the wrong way generates momentum. It is easier to change direction when you're moving, than when you're stopped. Think about a car stuck in mud or snow. You rock it backwards; building momentum that helps you push it forward.

Momentum can help you turn crisis into opportunity. Any time something goes wrong can be a momentum-building opportunity. It's a strategic moment, a chance to clarify vision and reality, reestablish creative tension, take action and build momentum in the direction of your desired result.

This **6-step Momentum Building Technique** helps you use mistakes and unwanted circumstances as opportunities to build momentum—and *resilience*.

When things don't go the way you'd like them to:

- 1. Notice what happened *and* what you say about it.** Also notice what you say about yourself and any others involved.
- 2. Ask yourself, "Is what I say *true*?"** "*Really true? Don't judge. Just describe reality accurately and objectively. Drop the drama. Make your thoughts and story emotionally neutral. "The facts, ma'am; just the facts."*
- 3. Ask, "Is what I say consistent with what I *truly* want?"** Does my story support my vision of results? Do my thoughts energize me? Or de-energize me? How would I feel if my story *were* honest, accurate, objective and neutral?
- 4. When clear that your story about current reality is objective and emotionally neutral, ask, "What *do* I want to create?"** Envision the result you want, fully completed, and then hold it in creative tension with its current state.
- 5. Formally choose (own) your result** by saying, "I choose...." *Owning your results is key to both creating results and becoming resilient.*
- 6. Act.** Take whatever *next step* occurs to you. Work on your result. Make notes or sketches. Go for a walk. Garden. Juggle. Let your next step occur to you. Then, seeing it as an experiment, do it.

Repeat this process every time something goes wrong. Over time, it'll become second nature.

Doing this *Momentum Building Technique* can quickly get you unstuck, on track and moving toward results. It shifts your focus from problem-solving to creating. It changes your mood from overwhelmed to energetic. Together, the competence and confidence that come from this technique generate the energy to stretch for larger results.

"But, What If I Get *Too* Upset To Think This Way"

"What if I'm just *too* depressed," Jill asked, after a week when she'd backslid on her fitness program. "Or I just feel too upset about something to do this exercise? What if I can't even think straight? What then?"

In such situations, neurophysiologist [Candace Pert](#) advises a brisk ten-minute walk—brisk enough to break a light sweat.^{liii}

Why? Because, when stress hormones hijack your thinking, locking you into "fight or flight," you *can't* think straight. Exercise clears stress hormones, and replaces them with feel-good endorphins, serotonin and dopamine. You feel good, think clearly and act effectively—which makes you feel *even* better.

My New York lawyer client often finds her job stressful. She also finds it difficult to take a brisk ten-minute walk. So she goes to the washroom, fires up her iPod and dances around the big open space. When she returns to her desk, she's relaxed, revitalized and can often see what, before, she couldn't.

It helps to write out your answers to the *Momentum Building Technique*. When you do, let it all come, uncensored, just like you're thinking and saying to yourself.

Go over what you wrote. Ask the questions in steps 1 and 2 above. It's easier to do this on paper or on a computer screen than in your head. In your head, your thinking is likely to spin round and round, confusing you, and making you more uptight.

So, if you can't settle your mind to ask the questions and write out your answers, do something to relax yourself. Take a walk. Juggle. Do a little gardening. When you're relaxed, and thinking more clearly, write out what's upsetting you. Ask the questions.

You'll end up with a clearer, objective and less stressful story. It'll be easier to choose actions that support results.

If it doesn't come easily, practice until it does. Regular, persistent practice is the best way to build the momentum that leads to outstanding results in life, work or whatever.

The Power of Persistent Practice

"I read *Simplicity and Success* and all your e-books," a client complained to me. "I get your *Simply Success* e-Newsletter and read every one. I know this stuff. I think about it *all* the time. *But why can't I do it when I need it?*"

"You know *about* it from reading, I replied, "but you don't know how to *do* it, yet."

Quoting an African proverb, I said, "Knowledge is just a rumour until it gets into your muscles." Then, I started to add, "And the only way to get it into your muscles is to..."

"Oh, no." she said, "Not the *"P"* words, again."

That's a succinct summary of what I call *the academic fallacy*—the notion that insight and understanding *should* be enough for you to create desired results. But few of us can create results *without* the "P" words—*patience, practice* and *persistence*.

Practice might not make you perfect, but it does make you better. And the road to *good enough* always runs through *better*.

Alisha, for example, wanted to play jazz guitar. But, her perfectionist tendencies prevented her from practicing. She was put off that jazz was more complex than she'd imagined. She tried, but wasn't good. She didn't like *not* being good, so she didn't play.

One day, a friend showed her how to play an easy three-chord folk tune. After a little practice, Alisha could play a passable version. She wasn't good, but she was *better*. Success excited her. Momentum built. She got her friend to show her more tunes, *and* practiced them.

As she picked up folk basics, she kept her vision of playing jazz. She accepted she wasn't good enough to play jazz, yet. So she focused on improving her fingering techniques. The creative tension and momentum she created let her have "bad" days, and still keep moving toward her result. Soon, she played well enough to jam with her friend. Eventually, she eased into more complex jazz arrangements.

Creating is a step-by-step process of patience, practice and persistence. Trying to make success an all-or-nothing leap can leave you with nothing.

Grit: Practice *Times* Persistence Leads to Mastery

"Mastery," says George Leonard, "is that mysterious process during which what is at first difficult becomes progressively easier and more pleasurable through practice."

So, how do you develop mastery? How do you get really good at creating results?

It might help to know that the Beatles performed 12,000 hours live before their first appearance on the Ed Sullivan show? Or that Bill Gates and Steve Jobs had more than 10,000 hours of programming experience before they dropped out of university? Or those Buddhist monks who tested off the scale for compassion sat in meditation for over 10,000 hours?

Ten thousand hours. Why?

There is awesome power in practice and persistence, because “effort” (focused practice) doesn’t just add to your innate skill and talent; it *multiplies* it. And it multiplies your effectiveness.

“Achievement = Skill X Effort.”^{liv}

[Research in music, chess, sports](#) and other fields^{lv} shows that mastery requires “*grit*” — a combination of very high levels of persistence and a passionate desire for a result. And your practice must be deep and deliberate. You must practice the right stuff in the right way to ensure you get it right.

Getting Gritty

Each summer, the U.S. Army puts recruits through a brutal training program. It's so arduous, it used to be called "The Beast Barracks." Many don't survive the grueling physical, emotional and psychological test. Exhausted, dispirited and out of gas, they quit.

Before and after the training, the Army conducts a mountain of tests designed to predict who will stick it out—and who will achieve long-term success. They assess I.Q., E.Q., GPA, SAT, Optimism, Tenacity, etc.... One factor out-predicts all the others combined.

Grit, defined as, "perseverance and passion for long term goals," not only accurately predicts who will do well in the Army. It also predicts who'll excel at the Scripps National Spelling Bee, who'll top UPenn's psychology grad program, and who'll stick with U.S. Special Forces' training.

Grit is important because it's not an inborn personality trait. It is a character trait. You can develop it, and apply it to creating results that matter.

Grit In Real Life

Thomas Edison's reply to critics who asked him what it was like to fail so many times showed his grit. "I didn't fail," he said. "I learned 100 ways not to make a light bulb."

Sports are full of stories of grit.

Since watching the 1980 "Miracle On Ice," Tim Thomas wanted to be a pro hockey goalie. Drafted in 1994, he couldn't make the National Hockey League. He bounced around minor and European leagues until 2006. Then, the Boston Bruins, beleaguered

by injured goalies, gave Tim a chance. At 31, he became a starter. In 2009, he won the Vezina trophy for best NHL goalie, and in 2011 he won a Stanley Cup ring.

Where most players would have quit, Thomas kept his eyes on the prize he so passionately desired, played wherever could and, when he got his chance, followed through to success.

The arts are also full of grittiness.

Among his many accomplishments, Michelangelo laboured on The Pope's Tomb for 40 years. It took him four years to paint the frescos in the Sistine Chapel. The Medici family funerary chapel in the Basilica of San Lorenzo occupied him for much of the 1520s and 1530s.

J.K. Rowling toiled at *The Philosopher's Stone* between 1990 to 1996, in spite of job changes, moving, marriage, a baby and difficult bouts of self-doubting. But, passionate about it, she persisted, writing whenever she could find a few free moments. The rest is history.

To write about medieval cathedral builders, Ken Follet spent vacations in Europe for nearly 20 years, studying the great cathedrals and developing a "vocabulary of architecture." Published in 1989, *Pillars of the Earth* was an instant best seller, staying on the New York Times best-seller list for over 18 months, and on the German list for six years. Follet still sells 100,000 copies a year.

Business success is powered by grit.

Famous business successes such as Walt Disney, Henry Ford, the Body Shop's Anita Roddick, and Apple's Steve Jobs and thousands of others like them suffered adversity, financial difficulties, getting fired and other set-backs before they became the big successes we know. They were gritty. They had passion for their results. They practiced, learned and persevered through tough times.

What about you?

Grit will help you follow through to success in your career. It'll help you complete that book you've been working on. It'll help you start and succeed in a business you'd love to create. It'll help you complete that stalled home reno.

But to do create such results, you'll have to work hard. You'll have to persist in the face of setbacks and adversity. You'll have to sustain a deep, abiding passion for your

result. You'll have to put in long hours of deliberate practice, feedback and stretching beyond your current capacity.

As guitarist Dave Navarro said, "It takes twenty years of hard work to become an overnight sensation."

Not all of us want to get to the top of the biggest leagues. But to get to the top of whatever league you choose to master, it will take practice—and sustaining practice requires grit.

You probably won't put in ten thousand hours, but anything worth doing or creating *will* take regular, consistent practice. So if you want to create high-level results, you'll have to show some grit.

Babe Didrikson Zaharias had grit. When she won the British woman's golf championship, people assumed she was a natural athlete. But for thirteen years, Babe had hit as many as 1,000 balls each afternoon, getting feedback about her stance, swing and other skills.

Powered by passion, persistent and deliberate practice, Babe, The Beatles, Bill Gates, J.K. Rowling and a handful of Buddhist Monks, eased their way along the *learning curve* until they hit that sweet spot where the curve starts to rise sharply, and results come easily.

Staying On the Curve

The "Learning Curve" clearly demonstrates how practice and experience build momentum. Unfortunately, many people misunderstand learning curve dynamics.

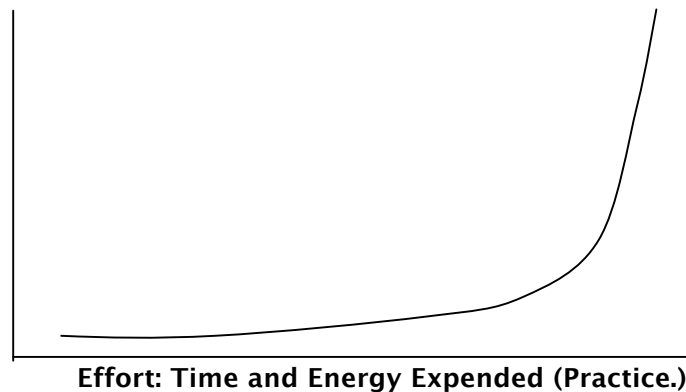
I often hear people complain that they're on a "steep" learning curve when they are actually on the flat part. They describe the learning curve as if it were a steep and difficult mountain they have to climb. But it's not.

The Learning Curve is based on [*Pareto's Principle*](#)^{vi} (sometimes called "the 80/20 rule"). The difficult part of the curve is the long, flat part. The first 80% of your effort only produces 20% of your results.

As the curve steepens, results come easier. On a learning curve, "steep" means accelerating returns, exponential increases in learning, and a high ratio of results to effort.

On learning curves, "steep" is good.

The last 20% of your effort produces 80% of your results.

The Learning Curve:**Results**

If they don't understand these dynamics, people slogging along on the flat part of the curve, or who think they're climbing a steep, difficult slope can easily get frustrated and quit—often just before the curve begins its sweet, upward sweep.

How sad. And, imagine how frustrating this must be for perfectionists and maximizers. No wonder so many quit in frustration. Or don't even start.

The key is staying on the curve until it steepens, and mastery emerges. Woody Allen captured the essence of this phenomena when he quipped, “85% of success comes from just showing up each day.”

Creators understand the power of showing up every day. Writers go to a room and write. Painters and sculptors go to their studios. I used to live with young guys who wanted to be musicians. Even as they wandered around our big house, or sat, yakking, they played their unplugged Stratocasters and Gibsons—*putting in their miles*.

Although it can sometimes be a struggle, creators know that it's the first 80% of effort that makes the last 20% easy—and rewarding. So don't scoff at the "P" words.

Jill, for example, ran about 3000 miles, did 18,000 pushups, 10,000 pull-ups, and 45,000 lunges in the eighteen months between the start of her "Fit, healthy, body" result and when she pronounced it "good enough" on her fortieth birthday. She'd truly learned how to stay on the curve, build momentum and turn it into results.

Eventually, even my skeptical, academically-inclined client learned how to embrace the "P" words: *passion*, *practice* and *persistence*. In no time, she was producing results that she'd previously judged to be "impossible." She began to get gritty.

Grit Doesn't Mean Forcing Yourself

Developing grit and creating results you're passionate about doesn't mean you have to clench your jaw and force yourself to practice. It doesn't. Successful creators, as we've seen, consciously (or intuitively) set up a *creating* framework that generates three powerful sources of energy.

By holding a clear, compelling vision of a highly desired result, you can create motivation. Motivation is your launch energy. But it's fickle, often disappearing when the going gets tough.

So, by holding a vision of your result in mind, together with its current state, you set up "creative tension." This workhorse energy empowers you to act, even when you don't feel motivated.

Finally, you learn by doing. Starting small, taking doable actions, creating multiple small successes, you build momentum—the energy to follow through to completion.

By integrating these three sources, you set up an energy streambed—a path of least resistance—in which energy and action flow from where you are to where you want to be.

The framework empowers you to maintain the energy needed to hold your vision, deal with adversity and to persist and practice over long periods, until vision becomes reality. This grit-developing framework is surely the "hidden scaffolding" of greatness.

Skill Seven: Know When You Reach Your Goal. Finish Fully. Celebrate.

Without clear criteria for recognizing results as complete, you're like a dog chasing its tail. You don't know when to *stop*. You can't enjoy your completed creation, or move on to your next. You may even continue past a point where you begin to lose interest in the result, and shift to a different one. You may maximize rather than satisfice.

To access the full power of *creating*, you must invent your own *standards of measurement*. You must, as Jill did, lay out success criteria with which to measure progress, and recognize your creation as complete.

As well as *visionary* goals such as, "A best-selling book and appearances on the The View," or "a Gold medal in the 10K at the Masters Running Championships," creators also set *realistic* goals as part of their action steps.

Writers, for example, set work standards such as 1000 words a day, or three hours each morning. Runners strive for 50 miles a week. A life coach I know says he'd recognize success if he earned \$50K working three days a week, ten months of the year.

Being able to assess your results against your standards helps you know where you are relative to your vision. Without a way of recognizing completion, you can waste time trying to improve or change (maximize) something that is already good enough.

Completing a creation, living with it and savouring it generates new energy, which you can use to take on new creations. When Picasso, for example, was asked what his favourite painting was, he answered, "My next one."

So, focus on what you *truly* want to create. And start. As Goethe urged, "*What ever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.*"

But, just in case the magic of boldness is not enough to create and sustain results, successful creators back it up with *resilience*—the capacity to thrive in tough times, and to flourish in the face of difficult circumstances, problems and adversity.

In the last chapter we'll look at how to build the resilience that enables you to bounce back from setbacks and create what matters with whatever life throws at you.

Part Three

CREATING RESILIENCE

*"When we are no longer able to change a situation,
we are challenged to change ourselves."*

– Victor Frankl

CHAPTER SEVEN

CREATING RESILIENCE

*How To Overcome Adversity and
Create Outstanding Results In Life And Work.*

"All of us get knocked down, but it's resiliency that really matters. All of us do well when things are going well, but the thing that distinguishes greatness is the ability to do well in times of great stress, urgency and pressure."

—Roger Staubach

Resilience is the ability to deal with adversity—to withstand sudden shocks, bounce back when you're knocked down and recover quickly from setbacks.

Resilience includes flexibility (elasticity), strength and generativity. If you're resilient, you might bend, but you won't break. You'll be able to generate results—even *when the going is tough*.

After just one day of resilience training, for example, elite US collegiate swimmers improved both their ability to bounce back from setbacks, and swim faster. After similar training, realtors increased their sales by 250% to 320%. Insurance sales people doubled their effectiveness.^{lvii}

The couples and team members I work with who practice adversity coping skills report better communication and cooperation, better results and more fun creating them.

Clearly, resilience gives you an edge in challenging times.

So, besides learning to create what matters to you, how do you get that edge?

Staying Resilient In The Face Of Adversity

A poll of 20,000 people worldwide revealed that 98% predict a more difficult, changing, even chaotic future.^{lviii}

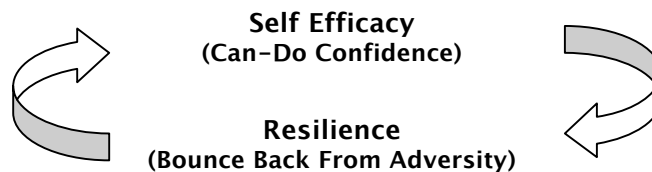
We face three major, interrelated challenges: economic uncertainty, global climate change and extreme weather events. And we're fast running out of oil. "The Three Crunches," as author and positive change specialist [Chris Johnstone](#) calls these global adversities^{lix}, will affect everyone, especially those who are not resilient and prepared for them, individually and collectively. That's the bad news.

The good news is the human spirit is naturally resilient. But, if we don't exercise it, we lose it. We need to work on and increase our resilience in order to deal with the coming crunches. We need to get out of our comfort zones and practice things that make us resilience.

Resilience pioneer [Albert Bandura](#) found that, "In order to succeed, people need a sense of *self-efficacy*, strung together with resilience to meet the inevitable obstacles and inequities of life."^{lx}

Self-efficacy is your belief in your ability to create results. It's a fancy word for the *confidence* or the "can do" attitude that comes from creating actual results, and from demonstrating that *competence*. It's *feeling* good about *doing* well.

Self-efficacy and resilience are linked in a positive feedback loop. Increasing capacity in one area increases it in the other.



Now, and in our almost certainly changing future, learning to deal with sudden change and setbacks is key to building resilience, and creating desired results.

While you might do well facing a single adversity, multiple adversities can stack up and overpower you, rendering you rigid and inflexible. So becoming deeply resilient is a key factor in developing the ability to thrive in challenging times—and beyond.

"Resilience," says Paul Stoltz, "is the single greatest factor driving change, improvement, and results."^{ixi} It's also a key factor that will separate those who flourish from those who flounder in the face of increasing change.

Stoltz, one of my mentors, and author of [Adversity Quotient](#), says the key skills underlying resilience are **CORE skills: Control, Ownership, Reach and Endurance**. Practicing these skills—along with skills for creating results and managing emotions—increases resilience, helps you make good decisions and helps you back up your choices with solid action, learning and results.

CONTROL: Learning From Failure; Building Efficacy

"Suppose you have tried and failed again and again," said actress Mary Pickford. "You may have a fresh start any moment you choose, for this thing that we call failure is not the falling down, but the staying down."

Pickford makes a key distinction between the *act* of failing and *conclusions* we draw from that act. Those who stay down *judge* they have failed. They often generalize from their act of "failing" to the illogical conclusion, "I *am* a failure."

Worse, they may generalize further to, "I *always* fail." Therefore, they assume there is no point in getting up. They see themselves as *victims* of circumstances over which they have no control. So failing to act, they fail to learn from their mistakes.

Creators learn by making many small mistakes—and correcting them. Using feedback to adjust actions moves you closer to a result. It increases your sense of *control*, and self-efficacy. As you demonstrate competence in *creating*, you feel authentically confident about dealing with life's inequities and obstacles.

We know Edison failed hundreds, even thousands of times, before he found a reliable filament for light bulbs. But did you know that giants such as Henry Ford and Walt Disney suffered multiple bankruptcies before they achieved lasting success?

Paralyzed from the waist down in a car accident, the "Man In Motion" Rick Hansen wheeled around the globe, raising millions for spinal cord research. Lance Armstrong overcame major, mid-career cancer to win Le Tour de France seven times. Aimee Mullins had both legs amputated on her first birthday. Today, she's an athlete, actor and activist, inspiring people with her amazing [story](#) of resilience and success.

Millions of ordinary people get back up after being knocked down. As tragic, sad and potentially overwhelming as was the triple disaster suffered in Japan, not everyone was overwhelmed. Many individuals and groups just took what happened to them, and carried on, doing their best with whatever they had. Unwilling to adopt a victim story, they took power from circumstances and put it back into their own hands, increasing their "sense of control."

As I watch the dignified way these survivors rise above their tragedies, take control and rebuild their homes, towns and lives, I see them as models of for the rest of us.

As well as generating *self-control* in your life, work and relationships, Stoltz also advises that you take *ownership* of the results you want to produce.

OWNERSHIP: Choose Your Results. Then choose Actions that Support Them

Faced with adversity, don't blame yourself, circumstances or others. Learn from what has happened to you. The *origin* of adversity is not as important as *owning* the results you want—in spite of whatever caused the difficulty.

Young Rory McIlroy, the Irish golf phenom, led the field going into the last round of the 2010 Master's, only to shoot the worst round in history by any professional golfer leading after the third round. He finished tied for 15th place.

Many lesser players would have been devastated, his/her confidence irreparably damaged. But when asked about his day, McIlroy admitted he was upset, but also said, "I'll get over it. I led this golf tournament for 63 holes. Hopefully it will build a little character in me as well."

It apparently did. Rory bounced back. When he again led going into the last day during the 2011 US Open, he was quietly confident. He played exceptionally well, kept his focus and won, breaking numerous records in the process.

When asked about mental scars from the Master's loss and how he got over them, McIlroy replied, "I was very honest with myself and I knew what I needed to do differently. And that was the thing. I had a clear picture in my mind of what I needed to do and where my focus needed to be when I got myself in that position again."^{ixii}

Talk about owning your results.

Experience is not what happens to you, it is what you *do* with what happens to you.

If you suffer a loss—physically, emotionally, or financially—you naturally want to acknowledge and update current reality, note mistakes you made and make adjustments to your actions. But focusing too much on how or why the adversity happened, or who was to blame makes it hard to get beyond it and create results.

If you lose a job, don't focus on injustice. Focus on finding the job you want. If you lose a friend or lover, don't just grieve. Focus on improving other friendships. If you suffer a business loss, focus on increasing your effectiveness.

You won't get over a loss instantly. Even a minor loss such as lost keys, provokes a temporary sense of *helplessness*. But with practice, you can shorten the helpless period. You can learn to grieve appropriately, accept the new reality and move on.

My Resilience Challenged

Before I learned to own my results, I was often vulnerable to adversity. When difficulties arose, I tended to get frustrated, angry, and quit in huff.

But learning to own my results, and to choose actions that supported them, made it easier for me to relax and focus on creating what truly mattered to me.

Once, back in the eighties, as I was about to deliver a 90-minute keynote presentation to 1000 people at a prestigious international conference, three difficulties threatened to emotionally overwhelm me, and derail my strategy for success.

First, the agenda drifted off schedule. Three times, organizers asked me to shorten my talk: first to 60 minutes, then 45, then 30. The kitchen, they told me, locked the dining room doors at 12:15. So my talk had to end sharp at noon.

I agreed to adjust my talk, but with each change I grew more edgy.

When I took the stage, my podium was on the side, bolted to the floor. But my [overhead projector](#) was in the middle, 25 feet away. To talk *and* show my transparencies (a kind of flimsy, letter-sized slide), I had to unfasten the tightly-fastened microphone (and cord), stretch it as far as I could, then speak from beside the projector, juggling transparencies in one hand, and the mic in the other. Not only did the situation frustrate me, it cut deeper into my time.

Then, when I started to speak, the sound system didn't work. Each time I started to speak, no sound. Each time I looked up at the booth for help, the techs gave me a frustrated thumbs-up sign. I tried again, but still, no sound. I was confused, and angry.

My 30-minute session had now shrunk to 20 minutes. A big part of me wanted to throw up my hands and say, "What's the point?" and then stomp off the stage.

Instead, I envisioned the results I wanted: *a professional approach, a strong talk, an impressed audience, happy organizers, a reputation for being resilient and my \$1000 fee*. I choose the results I wanted and then shouted an abridged version of my talk. When the organizers announced lunch, I offered to stay and take questions. About half the audience crowded around the front of the stage, and we had a great Q&A session.

In the end, the audience was happy, the organizers delighted and I got paid. The techs apologized because they hadn't realized a TV crew had unplugged the feed to the auditorium. I got loads of compliments about how well I'd handled a difficult situation, and was offered two new speaking gigs.

Had I focused on what happened, why, and who was to blame, I would have flipped off the techs and fled the stage—and suffered the consequences. Instead, I owned my results. I took control of what I could, and acted professionally, in spite of adversity.

Choice Empowers

Choice is key to "ownership." It is critical in dealing with adversity. Choosing empowers you to create results—with whatever you have to work with.

You *always* have a choice, if only to choose how you think about an adversity, yourself and any others involved in it.

Shakespeare was right: "Nothing is either good nor bad, but thinking makes it so."

Psychologist Carol Dweck urges us to adopt [a growth mindset](#), similar to what I have been describing in this e-book. A *fixed* mindset, in which you believe that your talents and abilities are set in stone, is the path to stagnation. A *growth* mindset, in which you know that talents can be developed and great ability is built over time, is the path of opportunity—and success.

Dweck's research shows that the view you choose for yourself affects the way you lead your life. "It can, she says, "determine whether you become the person you want to be and whether you accomplish the things you value."^{ixiii}

You choose the mindset you want to develop. Often unconsciously.

Choice empowers. It enables you to move beyond merely reacting to adversity and to own your results. When you “choose” to create results, you generate the power to take control of the outcomes you want.

In exercises comparing wishing and hoping to choosing, most people report that choosing *empowers* them. It gives them a clear sense of direction, and a commitment to their result that leads to action—and results.

Even in your darkest moments, you still have what Victor Frankl called “the last of the great freedoms.” You have the capacity to choose your attitude, your orientation in any given set of circumstances.^{lxiv}

That capacity is key to the other two CORE Skills: Reach and Endurance.

REACH: Limiting the Effects of Adversity

If you have a bad day at work, and *generalize* by judging that, “*Everything* is screwed up,” your bad feelings might bleed into other parts of your life.

Upset, frustrated and frightened, you might go home and take it out on the dog, the kids and/or your spouse. Unless you consciously control it, the adversity at work could easily *reach* into your home.

But is the statement, “Everything is screwed up” true?

Probably not. It’s a generalization, and a faulty one, triggered by the absolute word “everything.” By avoiding such generalizations, you contain the *reach* of adversity.

Some generalizations catastrophize simple events. A critical word from a boss becomes “a failed career.” A fight with a spouse becomes “a ruined marriage.” A bad month in business becomes “financial chaos.”

When clients tell me that something “devastated” them, I always ask (with a twinkle in my eye) if they were devastated like Haiti was devastated in the big earthquake? Or like the Fukushima area of Japan? Or was it something smaller?

Usually, they get the point and let go of catastrophic judgments such as “devastated.” When they do it is much easier for them to see reality—as-it is, make good decisions and create the results they truly want.

Back to the bad day at work. Instead of catastrophizing by saying, "*Everything* is screwed up," you could change your self-talk to, "X went wrong at work today, but I've noted it, and I will work on it tomorrow. Tonight, I want to enjoy my family."

Doing so helps you contain adversity's reach. You refresh yourself and your sense of control and ownership by creating a pleasant evening with your family. Then, the next day, you're energized and ready to right whatever went wrong the day before

ENDURANCE

Another common *self-talk* mistake people make in difficult situations is exaggerating how long the adversity will last. Stoltz calls this aspect of the CORE skills ***endurance***.

Think of a difficult situation or circumstances that you currently face and say:

This is never gonna change. It's always like this, and always will be.

I can't change these kinds of things. I'll never learn to get good at this.

I'm no good with stuff like this. Nothing I do works.

I'm a loser. My business is doomed. I'm doomed.

These statements *feel* bad because they imply *permanence*. They create fear that things won't ever change. Words such as "*ever, never, always, can't, no good, loser, nothing, doomed, totally...*" add little meaning, but they carry a heavy emotional charge. They set up inertia. They make you feel helpless in the face of change.

If you make a call, for example, to enroll someone in a project or a sale or an organization, and are rejected, you might say something like this: "I blew it. I suck at this stuff. I'll *never* get it right. I'll *always* be like this. What's the point?"

Such self-talk decreases your energy, erodes your sense of efficacy and control and makes the next call more difficult. But it's faulty thinking.

The statement, "I *suck* at this," is a *judgment* about you, not a *description* of your current ability. Also, "I'll *never* get it right," implies that the adversity will last *forever*. Such generalizations impair your confidence, and get in the way of developing competence.

Instead, you might say, "Okay, that didn't go the way I wanted. *Next time*, I'll take time to listen before I describe my product (or service, or request)."

Such realistically optimistic statements are more objective, and hopeful. They are more likely to lead to action. If you practice your pitch, you'll get fewer rejections.

Through practice you can reduce how long the adversity will endure. And you can teach yourself that, whatever it is, it *will* pass.

A powerful resilience-building mantra I use is, "This too shall pass."

Watch Your Self-Talk

To increase your fluency in the CORE skills, be very aware of your *self-talk*—that continuous stream of chatter running through your mind. Although we often don't know we're doing it, that chatter has a dramatic effect on our experience, action and results.

At one point during my truncated presentation, I caught myself spinning an injustice story, "This isn't fair," I told myself. "It *shouldn't* be happening. I'm the keynote. My talk *should* stay intact; the others *should* shorten theirs."

My story had some logic to it, but it flew in the face of reality. The organizers *hadn't* shortened their opening remarks, or those of the other speakers. When they realized they were off track, they only thought to shorten my talk, so they could honour the kitchen's deadline. Although logical, my story and self-talk included *judgments* about what happened—about what I thought *shoulda*, *coulda* or *hadta* happen.

Believing such thoughts can get us into trouble. Much of the nonsense we create comes from using the word "should." Or "must," "ought to," and "have to..."

These are *obligation* words, not *choice* words.

We use them to impose *demands* on ourselves, others and reality itself. But imposing demands on reality isn't rational. Reality is what it is, no matter what we say it *should* be. We do best when we accept reality, other people and ourselves, just as we are.

When I caught myself "shoulding" on the conference organizers, and shifted to thoughts about results I wanted, my anxiety dropped. My energy came up, I did what I could with what I had and I performed well in spite of the difficulties.

So don't "should" on yourself, other people or the situations you find yourself in.

Such judgmental self-talk affects your moods and emotions, which affect your choices and actions. “Emote” means “to move.” Unmonitored, self-talk and the emotions it generates can move you in ways you don’t want to go.

Changing your self-talk changes your actions—and your results.^{lxv} It will increase your sense of control. It will help you own your results. It'll help you reduce the reach of the adversity you face. And it will help you reduce the time that the adversity endures.

Practicing these CORE skills will increase your ability to learn and grow. It'll strengthen your resilience. And it'll help you create results—independent of the adversity you face.

Strengthening your CORE skills will help you embrace messiness. It'll help you transcend complexity by focusing on and creating what matters. Doing so will make you flexible, resilient and able to take advantage of the opportunities in crises.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Putting It All Together

“We are called to be architects of the future, not its victims.”
– Buckminster Fuller

Don’t be a victim. Be a creator—*the architect of your own future*. It’s more fun.

As I’ve stressed throughout the ebook, reality is not your enemy. Messiness, complexity and challenging situations are not problems, and can’t be solved. Approaching them as problems will bring you frustration, wasted energy and negative feelings.

Trying to solve divergent challenges with convergent problem-solving makes many individuals, groups, organizations and businesses feel like victims.

As I told, Susan, my frustrated client who wanted help getting rid of the “huge mess” that she thought threatened to overwhelm her, don’t fight life’s messiness; embrace it. Then transcend it by focusing on and creating desired results.

Doing so will make you flexible, resilient and able to take advantage of the opportunities that accompany the circumstances you face.

I'll say it again, reality is not a problem (most of the time). It just is. You'll do a lot better in life, work, relationships and business if you learn to embrace your reality as the raw material with which to start creating the results that matter most to you.

Embrace Reality As-It-Is; Create What Matters Most.

Acknowledge but don't dwell on the bad things that might happen as a result of day-to-day hassles and adversity or even the big crunches such as the economic crisis, climate change and Peak Oil.

Don't fight to get rid of, or relief from the things you *don't* like and *don't* want. Instead, focus on what you truly **do** want—and take action to bring it into being.

Ann and Gord Baird are a Victoria-based couple who, concerned with how "civilized society" treated the earth and each other, chose to create a different path. As Ann put it, they chose, "to live a reasonable life where our home is an extension of nature, where the systems incorporate biomimicry for both function and beauty."

To make that vision a reality, they decided to build [a cob home](#) in which, "all systems work with nature to create a space that is safe and provide for our needs sustainably without compromising the needs of future generations."^{ixvi}

"We built our practice building first," Ann said, "our little load bearing cob woodworking shop. We lived in our old 27 foot trailer for 2.5 years with two kids and a puppy."

Then, taking what they learned from building their shop, they built their ["Eco-Sense" home](#). It became the first load-bearing code-approved cob dwelling in North America. This creative and beautiful building provided a safe and healthy space for their extended family. It also allowed them to teach others the principles and practices of sustainable building and living, and make a reasonable living doing so.

In October of 2010, *Eco-Sense* was named the "greenest modern home in the world" by the *Cascadia Green Building Council*.

The Baird's story is illustrative of the great things that are possible when people shift from focusing on what they *don't* want to what they truly *do* want—and then teaching themselves how to create it.

Resilient businesses, too, find creative ways to capitalize on challenging times, and to get their people and customers feeling up, and thriving. Remember the local brewery worried about losing customer share that created "Bailout Bitter." Great for morale.

Shoe company *Etnies* initiated another crafty action. When they heard that Adidas was canceling employee Christmas parties, the Etnies folks invited Adidas workers to join them for a party in a Portland pub. Suddenly, Etnies was all over the nightly news, and the Internet, getting millions of dollars worth of publicity for about \$1000 worth of beer. Great value.

Starbucks' founding president Howard Behar advises that, "You can't retreat to success. You can't retrench to success. You need to reach toward success, which means the honoring of people who will take you there, treating them not as assets but as creative human beings. You can learn to treat yourself as a creator. ... With creativity and purpose you can focus wholeheartedly on your contribution and the success of the organization."^{lxvii}

In challenging times, *creating* is a far more powerful strategy than problem-solving.

Creating energizes you. It lifts your spirits. It provides a structure for action and learning that consistently leads to successful results. And not just for you, but also for your business, or your community organization, or your neighborhood or town.

Author and activist Rob Hopkins, founder of the [Transition Towns Movement](#) asks, for example, "What might environmental campaigning look like if it strove to generate a sense of elation, rather than the guilt, anger and horror that most campaigning invokes? What might it look like if it strove to inspire, enthuse, and focus on possibilities rather than probabilities?"^{lxviii}

Imagine, environmentalists as architects of the future they most want, not mere problem solvers, flailing away with useless hammers. Imagine yourself making that same shift, becoming a creator, an architect of the future *you* most want.

Instead of worrying about, and trying to solve all your "problems", you'd do better to focus on creating results such as a flexible career, and a strong, supportive and resilient community. Focus on creating a rich yet simple, resilient and low-footprint life or business. Focus on creating novel ways to make a sufficient income. Focus on taking whatever life gives you, and using it as the raw material with which to create what matters to you. Focus on flourishing in the face of adversity.

And, if you get knocked down, get back up, own you results and try again.

Don't be afraid to ask for help, or give it to others who ask for yours. One of the most powerful sources of resilience is a supportive community, or group of friends and colleagues. Take pains to put this kind of support in place for yourself, and those you care about. It'll make falling down less painful, and getting back up much easier.

Developing Social Resilience

While the focus in this ebook has been mostly on personal resilience, group and social resilience—the ability to interact well with others, and to collectively deal with difficult change and challenges—is also an important element in thriving.

As mammals, we are hard wired for belongingness. Isolated individuals who lack a supportive group of friends or family or associates live shorter lives than connected individuals. Connected people are healthier, happier and flourish more in the face of adversity.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, for example, many men felt adrift. They lost their sense of place, of belonging, of mattering, of being needed and relevant to their families and to their society. The same thing happened in Rwanda, after the genocide. Women farm, feed the children and care for the household. Unemployed men sit idle, still in a kind of post-traumatic shock, with nothing to do, nowhere to go, no meaning.

In both post-Soviet Russia and Rwanda, the life expectancy of men plummeted. In Russia, it dropped by nearly 10 years. These are extreme cases, but in our societies, as the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, and more people find themselves out of work, with nothing to do and no community support heart attacks and cancer rates increase. So do alcoholism, drug use, depression and suicide. We need connection. We need support. We need structure to help us guide our days.

So as well as working on your self, I encourage you to also work on your group. Connect with others. Help others. Be a part of your team or tribe. Give your gifts to your community. You'll feel better and your personal resilience will increase.

As Ann Baird, co-creator of the Eco-House, says, "We can only be as prepared for disaster/adversity as our neighbours ... if no one else has prepared for rising energy costs or climate change related weather events we are no better off than others. They will take what we have. Our goal is to help to teach others how to live well with less. We also believe in preparing ourselves with the skills needed in the future ... is this any different than all of our ancestors? We believe in a local economy, for economic

reasons, for climate related reasons, but most of all, because it makes friggin sense to interact more in our community.”

If you don’t have a team, tribe, group, church or association, join one. Or create one. Start a food security group in your neighbourhood. Organize a [transition street](#), and work with your immediate neighbours to prepare for a changing and challenging and flourishing future.

Do anything that builds community. Grab a few buddies and start a running group or a book club. Help out at Habitat for Humanity or one of your local food banks. It doesn’t matter what you do, as long as you do it with others. Connection counts.

Connection that helps you and I and our neighbours become resilient and able to create great results with whatever we have to work with will be one of the most important challenges we’ll all face as the you-know-what really hits the fan.

**Flourishing In The Face Of Adversity:
*Creating Real and Lasting Success With Whatever Life Gives You.***

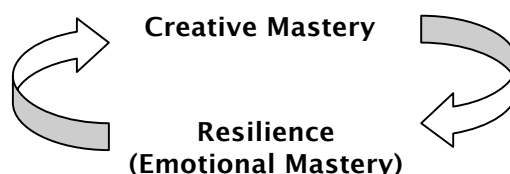
Real success—*thriving*—is about getting up, and keeping going. It’s about flourishing in spite of challenges and difficulties, by yourself and in meaningful groups.

Don’t try to avoid trouble or challenge, seek it out.

"If I had a formula for bypassing trouble, I would not pass it round," wrote Oliver Wendell Holmes. "Trouble creates a capacity to handle it. ... I say meet it as a friend, for you'll see a lot of it and had better be on speaking terms with it."

Learning from failure, owning results, and making your self-talk support your results increases your control and self-efficacy. The mastery you develop puts you on good terms with adversity. It takes power from circumstances and puts it in your hands. Adversity ceases to be your enemy; it becomes just reality-as-is, for now.

The combination of a well-developed **capacity to create** strengthens your **CORE** skills. Strong CORE skills help you *create* the results you most want—regardless of the reality you face. And creating what you want in the face of the adversity makes you even more resilient, and better equipped to thrive in challenging times.



Together, resilience and creating reinforce each other, build on each other and lead to the capacity to thrive in challenging times—*with whatever life throws at you*.

The Awesome Power of Practice and Persistence.

"Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence," said U.S. President Calvin Coolidge. "Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. "

Although, most of my clients produce significant results by applying the skills and structure of creating and resilience to what matters to them, not all produce—or sustain—such great results as did Jill, Richard and Dawna, Peggy, and Daniel. Not all produce the kind of results the successful creators I described in [*Simplicity and Success: Creating the Life You Long For*](#), or in [Success Stories](#) on my website.

Why do *these* successes stand out among my successful clients?

They stand out because these clients were patient, persistent and practiced consistently. Although they were smart and developed their inherent talents, they were not necessarily "the smartest" or "the most talented" people I've worked with. But they all showed high levels of grit. They worked the hardest of all the clients I've seen. When faced with difficulties or set-backs, they didn't give up.

Passionate about the results they wanted to create—and *passionate about mastering the creating approach*—they persisted, pumped up their practice and pressed on.

By carefully setting up and working with the structure of creating, they generated *motivation, creative tension* and *momentum*. They created the energy that got them going and kept them going, even when the going got tough.

Along the way, they learned to love their practice. Learning from their own experience that the dynamics of the learning curve informed each creating project, they connected long, plateau-like periods of practice and growth with the eventual surge of results that came as the curve steepened sharply. They loved that steep part of the curve, and, as they say in the martial arts, they learned "to love the plateau."

So, even on the flat, often tedious plateaus, they worked with zest and gusto, with love, excitement and fun. Or, sometimes, with their eyes firmly on the prize, it was just dogged determination.

They didn't rely on motivation alone. They set up and held creative tension to power their actions. They developed momentum that carried them through tough times and set-backs. As their competence in *creating* grew, so too did their confidence in themselves and in the **creating approach**. And, they learned to love it all.

As a result, they felt more at ease with life. Their problems melted away in face of the enthusiasm generated by their successes and their passion. Those who did the best understood that emotional mastery is a subset of creative mastery. They realized that successfully managing their moods increased their ability to create success in whatever they turned their attention to.

That insight spurred them to practice their creating, resilience and emotional mastery skills as a yogi practices yoga, or a professional practices golf. And, not only did they create outstanding results, they experienced the true happiness that Saint-Exupéry says, "comes from the joy of deeds well done, the zest of creating things new."

So can you.

Getting Support for Practice

Research shows that while 85% of people who read books or attend seminars understand the skills and principles, only 10 to 15% can apply them on their own. With coaching help, almost 100% of people learn to apply the skills and principles.^{lxix}

I recommend that you adopt *creating* as a daily discipline—just like practicing yoga, *Pilates* or playing the cello or meditating. Develop a daily "creating practice" and invest time and energy into mastering the seven creating skills. It doesn't take a lot of time or energy. I find that 15 to 30 minutes, five days a week will generate great results.

And if you fall off your practice program, don't get bummed and quit. Get back on it.

Try, try again.

I always get a motivating chuckle when I read Commandments 4 and 9 of Henry Miller's *Work Schedule*.^{lxx} "Commandment 4: *Work according to the Program and not according to mood.* Commandment 9: *"Discard the Program when you feel like it—but go back to it the very next day."*

Miller understood that practice doesn't have to be perfect, but it does have to be consistent. Consistency and learning from experience move you across the flat slog of

the learning curve and reward you with the steep, exhilarating up-slope where results suddenly appear, far out of proportion to time and effort.

It helps to practice creating results in all areas of your life and work—independent of circumstances, problems and adversity. Start small. Take lots of baby steps and gradually scale up to the results that truly matter to you.

Mastering the skills and practices of *creating* and the **CORE** skills of resilience can help you invent your unique ways to realize your deepest desires and highest aspirations. It can help you express your deepest longings. It can spur you to create—and *live*—the life you most want to live, and do the work you most want to do.

Most important, it can help you "become the person you glimpse," as Maslow says, "in your most perfect moments."

Peer Support And Coaching Can Make Big Differences.

If you have trouble practicing alone, it may help to form a peer support group with two or three others, using the book as a guide. Or work with your partner or spouse.

When I work with couples, I find that they both produce higher-level results, quicker and with more ease than most individuals. Their success, I believe, lies in coaching each other to practice and apply what they are learning.

I offer special rates to groups of 4 to 8 friends and associates who want to learn these skills together. We usually start with a 2-day workshop, and then follow up with 6 weeks of individual coaching in the basics of creating what matters. One group had such a good time with this approach, they called their workshop "A Purpose Party."

Some groups find that just the workshop, by itself is enough to get them moving, and then peer-coaching each other keeps them practicing, and learning from their own experience.

So share the e-book with friends, colleagues and family members. Coach each other. It's fun, and it will lead to better and longer lasting results.

If you get stuck, stalled, or start to drift, and need more help, contact me for a [free introductory session](#). In it, I can help you clarify what results you want to create, identify any problems or barriers that get in your way, and help you see if there is a good fit between what you need and desire and what I can help you with.

The key is to get started. Learn from your experience. Get help when you're stuck. Build momentum, and follow through to completion. Let's give the last word to Mark Twain, who said, "Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."

You'll be glad you did. All the best.

Bruce Elkin, Victoria, BC, Canada, 2011

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Every writer stands on the shoulders of others.

I stand on the shoulders of Robert Fritz, author of *The Path of Least Resistance* and *Creating Your Life As Art*. I trained and worked with Robert for nine years. And over the last twenty some years, I've tried my best to interpret his and similar life/work design/creating ideas, and share them with clients in my own words. If I got it right, the credit goes to the originators. If I didn't, the fault is mine.

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If I forgot anyone, please forgive me. ***Thank you, all.***

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5. Anything else you can think of, as long as it includes the link.

Thanks so much for your help. Much appreciated.

Bruce Elkin

More Expert Praise for Thrive.

"I'm impressed. Most of the books I'm asked to review rehash old ideas, often taking away rather than adding value. Your book is a shining exception to that rule. I honestly don't know how you packed so much solid value in such a tiny package.

"This book deserves to be read and re-read. What I love most is that you don't oversimplify the skills and attitudes it takes to create results in life. At the same time, you make those skills and attitudes appealing and accessible. I'm honored to know you, my friend."

—Molly Gordon, Marketing Coach for Accidental Entrepreneurs

"This highly praised and well-written book shows how to shift focus and energy from getting rid of what you don't like and don't want to creating—bringing into being—what you truly do want. Bruce provides the skills and structure to create rich, yet simple and flourishing lives, work, and businesses—with whatever you have to work with. He provides a template for engaging the world with wonder and enthusiasm, and changing your inner language from "can't" to "can."

—Rey Carr, Editor, "Peer Bulletin"

"A fantastic read. Being present in your life and authentic in your interactions helps you to create a life defined by you. Bruce provides us with the tools to help achieve the life we want to live - genuinely and thoughtfully. Staying Up is a great resource and a must read."

—Laura Marriott, former global President, Mobile Marketing Association

"I really love this book – it's about how real people can deal with the mess and complexity of real life. It is about resilience and helping you to reframe things so that you can do something about them. It gives practical examples, simple models and is written in an easy, comfortable style. It is written from the appreciative perspective – What is good about me? What do I do well? What gives me joy? What really matters to me?

"Bruce introduces the skill set you need to develop in order to be resilient, he talks about how you deal with 'wicked' problems (those messy, complex, bug-bear problems we all face occasionally). He helps you to set up a structure that enables you to create your way out of the wicked problem and through to resilience. He provides case studies that show you how others have done this. These help you to see how you can do it too. Bruce is an accomplished coach and this comes across in his writing. His 'why' is enabling others to bloom. **Read it and enjoy!**

—Patricia Lustig, Consultant, LASA Development UK Ltd <http://www.lasadev.com/index.htm>



Bruce Elkin is a Personal Life Coach, Change Coach and Success Coach with over 25 years experience, and successful clients on 6.5 continents. He works with competent individuals and professionals who are temporarily stuck, stalled, or drifting. His firm, structured coaching approach helps them get clear about what they *truly* care about—and create lives and work that show it. He is author of *Simplicity and Success: Creating the Life You Long For*, and the e-Books *Emotional Mastery*, and *Creating Sustainable Success*.

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