

ENRICHING
Your LIFE

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Your LIFE

PURPOSE • POTENTIAL • POSSIBILITIES

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This book is dedicated to
My daughter Danielle and my niece Azure’.

And to my B.E.S.T.* classmates,
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Introduction

“That in every thing ye are enriched by him,
in all utterance, and in all knowledge,”
(1Corinthians 1:5).

*W*hat do you think of when you hear or see the word enrich? Does it hint at an increase in wealth; or does it suggest possibilities and potential? To enrich is to develop, improve, increase or enhance the quality of something.

Potential also expresses possibilities, the capacity to develop, succeed or become something. It implies having a latent possibility or likelihood of something occurring, or of doing or becoming something. It's abundant with promise and hope for the future in your career, finances, relationships, and health.

Everyone can succeed, but most of us go through life with untapped potential. We go our entire lives, while our God-given gifts and talents lie dormant, unused, untouched, and undeveloped. These unexpressed possibilities eventually go into the grave intact and are no longer available to mankind.

God made you for more, and when there's something you're meant to do, you are not off the hook yet. Are you a person who wants to grow and become better than you are today, and to do what you are meant to do?

The purpose of this book is to encourage and inspire women of all ages to create and enjoy successful and fulfilling lives. If you're reading the introduction to this book, I believe you want to develop your God-given potential and to fulfill your life's purpose. You may have already achieved a certain level of

success, but you have this feeling there's something else for you to do or something more you can do or become. So the question now becomes how do you put to rest this urge to do more? The answer to that question is personal growth.

Today you are a woman entering your mature years, you have built a career, raised a family and reached the goals that define your place in the world, but you have this feeling there's something else for you to do or something more you can do or become.

Or maybe you're a woman in transition due to economic changes, divorce, retirement, or simply a sense that it's time to step into a personal journey that leads to the fulfillment of roles and activities for which you have been preparing for your entire life.

For the young woman no longer distracted by the obstacle that prevents her from working on her most heartfelt desire to give her well-being and her potential to her friends, family, and the world.

Where is the rule book for these women with a wealth of experience behind them? How do they step into the rest of their lives? These women with dreams that have been simmering throughout their lives, waiting for the day they can give them their full attention and the priceless riches of their experiences. The answers to these questions are personal growth and fill the pages of *Enriching Your Life*.

If you are tired of struggling with obstacles that seem to multiply or tired of climbing the success ladder to disappointment, keep reading. If you've fallen, been pushed down, or stumbled a few times because of the choices you've made in life, read on. While you're reading the few chapters of this book, as unintentional as it may be, growth is taking place. Exposure to new possibilities through fresh ideas is an effective incentive for growth and development.

No matter where you are on your journey, this book contains real-life, pertinent, ready-to-use information you can use today. It will help you learn how to grow and develop yourself, so you have the most, or best, chance of becoming all God created you to be.

What do I mean by growth? That will be as unique as you are. The specifics of growth change from person to person, but the principles are the same for everybody. You have to do the work to grow, and growth can take place no matter where you are on your life's journey.

Your progress will not happen on its own because your precise growth process is an individual thing. There are basic guiding principles that apply to every plan for change and progress, and no one improves by accident. You must be deliberate and intentional about developing your potential and discovering your life's purpose; hence, you must have a growth strategy.

Wherever you are in life, this book will prompt you to take a renewed look at yourself and think about the things you were created to do, the people you were meant to affect, and the power that comes from alignment with your purpose.

The information will engage you and move you to take action. In laying the foundation to help you reach your potential, uncover your gift, and discover your life's purpose, I have implemented teaching tools that I call *Action Steps*. What we read stays with us longer when we apply what we have learned. The best application is writing out the answers to the questions. Why? There's power in the written word. You will discover that what you think after you write the answers is different from what you thought when you read the question.

The following Scripture references support this principle: "*All this*", said David, "*the Lord made me understand in writing, by His hand upon me, all the works of these plans,*" (1Chronicles 28:19, (NKJV).

"*All this*," David said, "*I have in writing from the hand of the Lord upon me, and he gave me understanding in all the details of the plan.*" (1 Chronicles 28:19, (NIV).

The *Action Steps* of writing out the answer will help you discover what you know, think, and believe of your potential. Writing down your goals, desires, visions, and dreams for your life are *Action Steps* or exercises. I've included some *Action Steps* throughout a chapter, and other *Action Steps* appear at the end of a chapter.

The objective of the *Action Steps* is intended to be the link between your potential, God-given purpose, and your God-given gift. Far from being a “don’t, can’t, shouldn’t” book, this book will help you make choices that will enrich every area of your life. The information in this book will help you develop the right approach, attitude, and mindset during your unique growth process.

God created you with your very own unique gifts, talents, and abilities to carry out your divinely-inspired purpose. Your potential is waiting to be developed. Your gifts and talents are waiting to be identified, recognized, acknowledged, and branded. Your purpose is waiting to be discovered, and when you understand your God-given purpose you can impact others, so let’s get started.



PART I
PURPOSE



CHAPTER 1

THE POWER of PURPOSE

*I*f you search the Scriptures from cover to cover, looking for the great leaders God chose to carry out His purpose, you will not find youth pastors, worship pastors, college pastors, or executive pastors. What you will find are fishermen, tax collectors, physicians, shepherds, business owners, a tent-maker, and a carpenter. Titles and church vocations do not bind God; He uses ordinary people to do extraordinary acts of faith and service. God designed everything He made to have a purpose. Most of us live our lives wondering what our purpose is.

Identifying your life's purpose is perhaps the most important action successful people take. When you identify your life's purpose, you have a clear sense of direction; and it answers the age-old question of why you were born.

Creation establishes the principle of divine purpose, and the following Scripture answers the question of how we accomplish our purpose: "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, *Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth,*" (Genesis 1:28).

Author Valorie Burton asserts that successful women think differently, make decisions differently, set goals differently, bounce back from failure and adversity differently, and they tap into their innate strengths differently. According to Burton, these women are successful because they are living their lives on purpose.

LIVING LIFE ON PURPOSE

Just what does it mean to live your life on purpose? According to Burton, your purpose in life answers a simple question of how someone's life is better because he or she has crossed your path. Burton goes on to state that living your life on purpose is about making a difference in the lives of others. She emphasizes the point that you cannot live your life's purpose unless you are, in some way, serving others. Some people have an inherent sense of who they are. They know what they were created to do. They know their purpose even before they are performing or functioning in their gift.

Others move into their life's purpose with the skill of a child prodigy, such as an Aretha Franklin, Stevie Wonder or Carole King. These singers instantly connected with their life's purpose.

Needless to say, just as there are many people who know what their divine purpose is, there are more who have no clue as to what their life's purpose is. They have a nagging feeling there's something else they should be doing, but what? That being the case, how does this group of people identify their life's purpose?

CHARTING A NEW COURSE

Most people do not have a clear sense of direction for their lives. They try their hands at different things and, consequentially, they are destined to continue to drift aimlessly through life. Sadly, they don't know who they are.

They need to grow in self-awareness. We are all meant to walk a certain path at a certain time, in a certain direction, for a certain purpose. It would be dreadful to wake up one morning and realize that you've spent years wandering aimlessly in circles because you're unclear about your life's purpose. To move in the right direction, you need to chart a new course for your life. If you don't discover your purpose, you will pursue the roles assigned to you by others.

What are the factors that got you where you are today? In the field of navigation, the term *reckoning*, as in *dead*

reckoning, is the process of calculating where you are: that is, speed, course, and the wind. In her book, *Rising Strong*, Brene Brown says without reckoning, you can't chart a new course for your life until you recognize exactly where you are, get curious about how you got there and decided where you want to go.

Conversely, there are people who know what they would like to do but don't do it. Fear, frustration, or discouragement prevents them from pursuing their passion or their purpose. They need to seek growth opportunities that will help them move closer to what they want to do, or were created to do.

Perhaps women are unique in this regard, as they are sometimes made to feel that if they pursue a career or success outside the home, they are, in some way, neglecting their families. Knowing what you want to do is significant and valuable. You don't want to come to the end of your life regretting not doing what you love, or not pursuing your purpose or your passion.

The successful women like Aretha Franklin and Carole King know who they are, and they know their purpose. They continually seek growth opportunities that help them move into, or closer to, reaching their potential and fulfilling their purpose. These women deliberately and consciously live their lives in a way that enriches and guarantees success.

Action Step 1: List your current roles in your life according to the following:

Work: _____

Enriching Your Life

Interests: _____

Relationships: _____

CLUES TO PURPOSE

You are a student of your deepest passions. There are things you know about yourself, as such, what you love to do, what you dislike and your constant desire to learn. And then, there's that knowing, that sense you have when you know this is the thing you were born to do. Albeit, you like most people will spend your life doing what you are asked to do, or doing what you are trained to do or doing what others need you to do, but never doing what you were created to do.

In the course of serving others, the feeling of fulfillment eludes you. You adjust to your circumstances. Consequently, fear and uncertainty keep you bound to someone else's purpose. We all have access to the same information, but yet some of us never go beyond to do the exceptional..

Action Step 1: What evidence or sign point to your purpose?

CREATIVITY AND PURPOSE

God has equipped us with instincts that draw us to our divine purpose, and we should pursue our purpose with all the might we have. What can you do with the gift you have? Our gifts do not come with a handbook. We have an instinct for our purpose, and we reflect God's creativity. We must accept responsibility for the gift and make the most of our gift. Take inventory of your skills and attributes, including those you take for granted and answer the following question.

Action Step 1: What skills, insights, and experiences can you draw on to launch into a new season of creativity and productivity in your life?

Even though our gift does not come with instructions or a handbook, God has gifted us with varied tools for survival both intellectually and creatively. When a door that was once open suddenly closes, we face a new situation and a different set of circumstances. Be encouraged, mistakes, obstacles, and setbacks can become creative material.

Action Step 2: What chapter or chapters in your life do you need to close?

You can view a setback as an obstacle or an opportunity. You have the gift, talent, ability, and experience necessary to face this new challenge. Seeing this temporary setback as an opportunity, you release your innate creativity, that extra edge, which some of us have and some of us don't, and you open a new door to success. A new idea aligned with purpose is a creative force.

GIFTS, TALENTS, PASSION

Throughout your life's journey, in one way or another, your experiences, education, careers, and interactions have been preparing you for your purpose. Oprah says everything in your life informs you of what that pattern and purpose should be. During this new level of growth, your previous thoughts and ideas may no longer be acceptable. The journey will present you with new challenges that will require new areas of growth.

Many gifted and talented people hunger for something that will get them going; something that will challenge them. So often they look to others for inspiration, approval, or affirmation of what they should do and how they should do it. Unfortunately, they will never achieve the fulfillment of their dreams and visions this way.

Most of us gravitate naturally toward the areas where we excel. If you look back over your life, as far back as you can remember, you've moved steadily toward those areas that attracted you and that held your attention. Allow the thoughts and ideas planted long ago to stir you up and propel you forward.

THE GIFT

We are born with a gift to carry out our Creator's purpose for our lives: your purpose, potential, and destiny are linked firmly to your gift. Throughout your life, a continuous series of events related to, inspired by, or initiated by your gift is revealing your purpose and guiding you to your divine destiny.

Identifying your gift will make it a lot easier to identify your purpose. Understanding your unique gifting and finding the right

arena, or the right vehicle, in which to use that gift is essential to developing your potential and fulfilling your purpose.

The accumulated knowledge from your experiences, observations, likes, and dislikes, by you and others, can be credible indicators that can point you in the direction of your life's purpose. Once your gift becomes clear to you, pray about how you can use your gifting in a way that will benefit others, and subsequently bring you joy and enrich your life.

A genuine gift is something that is transferable or versatile, meaning you can exercise or carry out your gift through different activities. If you can only exercise your gift in one specific way, then it is not transferable, because it does not allow you the flexibility to carry out your gift in different ways, settings or situations. If your gift is singing, you can sing in your church choir, or you can sing jingles to advertise different products or as a backup singer for Aretha Franklin, Carole King or Stevie Wonder.

Once we embrace our gift, we understand why we are so shaped and designed. We realize why we were accepted in some places and rejected in other places. We know and understand why we grew bored in certain jobs and other situations. Now we appreciate and recognize why we continued to search for our place in destiny.

You may have trouble recognizing your gift if you think your gift is your talent or only your passion. People often express gifts and talents as being the same, linked together or used interchangeably, but there is a distinction between the two. Your gift is inherent; your talent is acquired or learned.

Action Step 1: What is the one thing you do with the least amount of effort?

TALENT

Talent is the ability, skill, flair, or knack to do something well. Your talent may reveal your gift, but it is never the gift. A basketball player is not born with a gift to dunk a basketball; it is a talent developed and enhanced with practice. Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, Kobe Bryant, Steph Curry, and many other NBA greats developed their amazing basketball skills through years of practice.

Gifted and talented people look forward to what will challenge them, something special that will make them grow. These talented individuals hunger for that spark that will ignite a fresh passion in them to pursue new paths of excellence that will urge them to think, work, create and develop into something more. A gifted, talented person will always use what they have, to stretch and extend beyond their present capabilities.

It's important not to waste the days we are given doing what we have to do, rather than taking on the challenge and becoming all we were created to be. Others can inspire us, but ultimately the only thing that empowers us is what lies within us and learning how to use our gifts and talents.

PASSION

Your passion is a strong emotion for a liking or fondness for a topic, issue, or something you do, but it is not your gift. Passion is the energy that brings that something extra that set you and your gift apart, but it is not the gift. It's those areas where you feel most alive. Your passion nourishes and ignites your dreams and aspirations.

When you begin to work in areas connected to your purpose, you are using your strengths, and you have a passion for what you are doing. It excites you and motivates you to excel. You will never fulfill your destiny or experience a sense of fulfillment—satisfaction, contentment, joy, pleasure, or happiness—doing work you despise, whether you're a volunteer or an employee. Do what you love to do and if you don't know quite what that is just yet, keep searching; because when you find it, you'll bring that "something" extra to whatever you do.

Action Step1: List the roles you desire and envision for yourself.

Successful people identify and recognize the value of their gifting and connect their gift to their purpose. They change their thinking and begin to redirect their thoughts and actions toward what they want. They take purposefully, specific actions to make changes in their lives because they know instinctively, or from experience, that thinking removed from action is counterproductive.

Your purpose and gifting is not just a call to a pulpit ministry; take Bill Gates and Marc Zuckerberg. Bill Gates simplified the use of the personal computer. The benefits of having a word processor to type the pages of this book are beyond description. Marc Zuckerberg created Facebook, a medium used to communicate and connect with others. They purposely use their gifts, talents, and passions, and fulfilled their purposes in astonishing ways.

Success is making a positive difference in the world and serving in some way is the greatest thing we can do. When we follow our passions, we will find our purpose and, as a result, make an impact on the world.

Mark Twain said the two greatest days in your life are the day you were born, and the day you discovered why. Seek what you were born to do and pursue it with a passion, knowing that your life will give meaning and purpose to everything you do.

You have a purpose you're meant to fulfill, and you have the skills and strengths necessary to achieve so much more than you can imagine. When our thoughts are aligned with our purpose, uncovering our gift, and giving birth to our full potential for personal growth and development is possible if we believe in ourselves.

CHAPTER 2

As a Woman Thinketh

The title of this chapter is a rephrase of Proverbs 23:7, “For as he thinketh in his heart...” According to James Allen, this scripture is so comprehensive that it reaches out to every condition and circumstance of life. The conciseness of the verse embraces the whole of a person’s existence. That is to say, a woman is what she thinks, and her character is the total of all her thoughts.

Our life is what we make it by our thoughts and our deeds. It is our state of mind and attitude which determines whether we are happy or unhappy, strong or weak, sinful or holy, foolish or wise. We are the master of our thoughts, maker, and shaper of our condition, and our destiny.

What we believe about ourselves are learned, internalized thoughts that evolve into behaviors. We develop beliefs about ourselves and our basic qualities that take over how we operate in our daily lives; these beliefs are mindsets. World-renowned Stanford University psychologist Dr. Carol Dweck discovered the idea of mindsets. Dr. Dweck’s research identified two kinds of mindsets: fixed mindsets and growth mindsets.

Limited Thinking: Fixed Mindsets

According to Dr. Dweck, people with a fixed mindset believe their basic qualities, like their intelligence or talents, are fixed traits. They believe talent alone creates success and not one’s

efforts. Effort is looked down on because these people believe if you have to try hard, you must not be that good. As a result, if you fail, you have an excuse because you didn't put forth much effort.

Those with a fixed mindset believe statements like "You are smart, and therefore you will do well in life," or "You are naturally gifted, and that will take you far." A fixed mindset believes that one's natural gifts and abilities determine how far they can go in life, and they believe their different aptitudes, educational and scholastic test scores, and the opinions of others define their intelligence.

For some people, test scores not only become a gauge but sets limits on their potential. If we allow test scores, grades, and performance reviews to limit our potential, they will affect our beliefs in our possibilities. Consequently, a fixed mindset will shy away from challenges and opportunities.

Understandably, this mindset leads you to believe that any corrective feedback or criticism of your capabilities is a criticism of you. As such, people around you, family, friends, and co-workers, will eventually stop giving you helpful feedback. Sooner or later, this self-imposed stumbling block may further isolate you from external influences that could create improvement or change in your life. Constructive, or even negative, feedback is just information that can help you grow and change.

Unlimited Possibilities: A Growth Mindset

On the other hand, people with a growth mindset believe through dedication and hard work, their most basic abilities, intelligence, and talents are just the starting points and stepping-stones. This view creates a love of learning and resilience that is essential for great accomplishments.

The growth mindset offers an approach that melts anxiety and open doors to amazing possibilities. It says your natural traits are more than something you have to live with, but the beginning of what's possible. You can cultivate the qualities needed to succeed through your efforts. A growth mindset

believes you can grow through experience and change substantially through your actions.

Unlike the fixed mindset, individuals with growth mindsets do not disdain effort. They understand they can learn new things and improve in areas that were initially challenging if they put forth the effort. They see their efforts as an opportunity to develop their potential. The person with a growth mindset is not discouraged by failure, but they realize without effort, their potential vanishes into nothing.

If you believe you can improve, you are not intimidated by the idea that your abilities are not currently as great as you would like. In your mind, those abilities will change as you actively learn and grow. Open your mind to the possibility that what you know now as your potential is only a fraction of what is truly possible.

Action Step 1: What ideas speak to you about your potential?

By developing a growth mindset, you begin to recognize that your limitations are not unchangeable, fixed, or genetic. With discipline, your possibilities are truly limitless, and your true potential is yet unknown. The following Scripture provides evidence of a growth mindset: *“And be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:2).*

The renewing of your mind will take place little by little. Don't get discouraged if your progress is slow. For sure, renewing the mind is a lifelong, series of actions, because living things continue to grow and thrive.

The person with a fixed mindset or negative mindset will miss opportunities for growth. These self-imposed obstacles

appear when you accept negative thoughts and limitations about your abilities. People who are afraid of change are afraid of success.

It is difficult to believe in yourself, especially if you believe you don't have what it takes to develop your potential and succeed. If you have developed these beliefs about yourself, you will have a difficult time seeing the best things about you.

Perhaps you think you will not be able to stop the negative thoughts that you have. We all have negative thoughts from time to time, but we can control our thoughts. You may not be able to stop the thoughts from coming, but you can decide how to respond to a negative thought. The renewing of your thought processes is done one step at a time.

When a baby is learning to walk, she falls many times before she enjoys the confidence in walking. However, there's one thing in a baby's favor, and that is the fact that, even though she may cry a while after she has fallen, she always gets right back up and tries again. You can do no less in your efforts toward right thinking.

Action Step 2: Where have you settled in life and decided that something in your life is impossible?

Positive and Negative Thinking

Dr. Dweck's research identified fixed and growth mindsets, but we can develop right and wrong mindsets or positive and negative mindsets. The right mindset benefits us and comes from positive thoughts. Positive thoughts produce positive actions. These actions come from a mind filled with faith, hope, love, and courage. These positive actions foster positive

emotions. When we engage in negative thinking, we expose ourselves to negative influences. Over time, we develop negative behaviors and mindsets. The development of these pessimistic, negative mindsets happens gradually, and the changes in our attitude are imperceptible.

The wrong thinking comes from negative thoughts that hurt us and impede our progress. Negative thinking comes from a mind filled with fear, doubt, anxiety, jealousy, revenge, just to name a few. When we harbor negative thoughts, we produce negative actions. These negative actions eventually manifest themselves in negative emotions.

The Power of Negative Emotions

Dr. Barbara Frederickson, a positive psychology researcher at the University of North Carolina, published a paper that reveals the impact that negative and positive emotions have on our work, health, skills and our lives.

According to Dr. Frederickson, negative emotions are more psychologically powerful than positive emotions. For instance, it takes us longer to recover from a negative experience.

That is to say, when we have a negative experience, it takes more than just one equally positive experience to bounce back. Negative emotions cause powerful physiological changes in the body and mind and reversing these changes require more than an equal dose of positive emotions.

Researchers have long known that negative emotions program your brain to take specific actions. For example, you're taking your daily walk, and suddenly a dog breaks free from his master's leash and runs across the street towards you. Immediately, your brain registers a negative emotion, fear.

When the dog runs towards you, you run. The rest of the world doesn't matter because you are focused entirely on the dog, the fear it creates, and how you can get away from the dog. In other words, negative emotions narrow your mind and focus your thoughts. You might have other options available to escape the dog, but at that moment you cannot think of anything, but the dog coming towards you.

The same thing is true about negative emotions when you're in a fight with someone. Your anger and emotions might consume you to the point where you can't think of anything else. During this fight, your brain closes off from the outside world and focuses on the negative emotions of anger and stress. Too many of these negative experiences weaken your ability to deal with stress and adversity.

Action Step 1: What negative emotions are holding you hostage?

The Power of Positive Emotions

We know that exercise and a good diet are essential for good physical health, but research in positive psychology suggests that good health comes with a dose of positive emotions, as well. Dr. Frederickson's research showed that positive emotions have an effect on your mental, physical and emotional well-being. Positive emotions improve health by making people feel more socially connected. When we experience positive emotions like joy, contentment, and love, we see more possibilities in our life.

It stands to reason that positive emotions increase our sense of possibility and open our minds up to more options. One of the best success strategies is to cultivate positive emotions. Love, joy, inspiration, amusement, hope, appreciation, gratitude, happiness, and contentment are positive emotions that will empower you to succeed. The study goes on to suggest this is just the beginning, and the remarkable effect of positive thinking and positive emotions happen later in life.

Positive Emotions and Skill Building

The benefits of positive emotions don't stop after a few minutes of good feelings subside. In fact, Dr. Frederickson's research revealed that the biggest benefit that positive emotions provide is an enhanced ability to build skills and develop resources for use later in life.

For instance, your child or every child, for that matter loves to play. Your child goes out to play, and the first thing she does is swing on the branches of the neighbor's apple tree. The child runs around while playing soccer with friends. All the while your child engages in these athletic activities, she's developing physical skills. Her ability to play with her friends and communicate with a team builds social skills. Your child develops creative skills by exploring and examining the world around her. In this way, the positive emotions of play and joy prompt your child to build skills that are useful and valuable in everyday life.

However, these skills last much longer than the emotions that initiated them. Years later, that foundation of athletic movement might develop into an athletic scholarship, or communication skills may blossom into pursuing a career as a sports commentator. The happiness that promoted the exploration and creation of your child's new skills has long since ended, but the skills themselves remain.

Dr. Fredrickson refers to this as the "broaden and build" theory because positive emotions *broaden* our sense of possibilities and open our mind, which in turn allows us to *build* new skills and resources that can provide value in other areas of our life.

Negative emotions do the opposite. Why? Because building skills for future use are irrelevant when there is an immediate threat or danger, that is, the dog running towards you. This research begs the most important question of all: if positive emotions and positive thinking are so useful for developing valuable skills and appreciating the Big Picture of life, how do you get yourself to be positive? You get there by your thoughts, your actions, and your words. Allow your positive emotions to create good thoughts.

Action Step1: Who or what makes you laugh?

Thoughts and Words

Frequently, the things we think often come out of our mouths. Our thoughts are the forerunner of all our actions and our words. Every act springs forth from our thoughts. Our thoughts are “silent words” that affect our inner man, attitude, and behavior; only you and the Lord can hear these “silent words”.

We are in charge of our thoughts and words. If we can’t control our thoughts, we cannot or will not control our actions or our words. Then, it stands to reason, that if we control our thoughts, we control our actions and our words. “But the tongue can no man tame;” (James 3:8). Nevertheless, we must try to guard our tongues.

The words we speak affect us spiritually, mentally, physically and emotionally. You may not always feel positive, and you may not always want to speak positive words, but these are the times when you cannot give into your feelings. We cannot rely on our feelings to create good thoughts.

If our thoughts become our words, when we think the right thoughts, the right words and actions will follow. Jesus said in Luke 6:45, “... *for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh*”.

Changing negative and wrong thought patterns takes time. It will not be easy, but it is possible, and it will be worth it. As you read, change is taking place. The transformation right now is gradual. Nevertheless, it is taking place.

Anything that can move us to take action is quite powerful and persuasive. If our thoughts can affect our behavior in such

a profound and influential manner, we should make it a priority to think right thoughts.

When you begin to choose right thoughts and reject wrong ones, doubt and fear will try to discourage you, but do not condemn yourself, continue to choose right thoughts.

If you fail, you are not a failure. The results of wrong thinking produce undesirable results, but good thoughts will produce the results you want. We have our strengths and weaknesses, but with patience, practice and persistence in right thinking, we can strengthen our weaknesses. All you achieve or fail to achieve is a direct result of your thoughts. You can rise, fall, conquer, and overcome by lifting up your thoughts and your words.

Successful women do several other things differently than the average woman; they think and act differently in the face of both challenges and opportunities. These women speak differently in everyday exchanges with family and colleagues.

The successful woman's ability presents her ideas differently to the world and her ability to "speak differently" shape her career, her life, and her relationships. Women who are less successful often speak death into their situations, dreams, and relationships. Words sabotage the best talent or boost an average talent. Have you been sabotaging your chances for success with your words? *"Death and life are in the power of the tongue..."* (Proverbs 18:21).

We are bombarded with thousands of thoughts and words every day, and they come wrapped in doubt, deception, discouragement, and fear. These fiery darts tell us to quit, give it up, and stop wasting your time. To combat, ward off and overcome these poison darts of negativity, pessimism, we need a change in perspective. Our perspective now is how we see ourselves and our world. Our world consists of our bad ideas, failures, and mistakes.

Who you are, so is your world. An objective assessment of who you are is necessary for you to start believing in you. If you want to transform your life, you have to change the way you think about yourself and the way you talk to yourself.

Recognizing the need to change how you think about yourself and your limiting, negative thoughts is the first step

in reaching your potential. That first step is just the beginning of what's possible for you. Change alone doesn't bring growth, but you cannot grow without changing.

Change: A New Perspective and a New Direction

If you have gotten used to seeing your world in a certain way, then developing a new perspective of yourself and the world is a move in the right direction. First of all, take stock of all the things you've already accomplished in life. Talk to people who love you and ask them what they think you do well. It's impossible to do your best when you don't know what your best is.

Connect with new people and make new friends. You can make your world small or large. Your world will shrink or increase according to the new ideas, experiences, and people you let in or keep out. The process of expanding one's potential is ongoing, and you need to believe in yourself to continue. Opportunities come and go. What we can do changes as we grow and what we should do so also evolves. We must leave behind some old thing to take on new ones.

Action Step 1: What are some of the things you have already accomplished?

The more you do what you know, the more you discover additional worth and things you can do. Become good at what you know how to do. The will to do springs from the knowledge that you can do. Doubt and fear are enemies of knowledge, and if you encourage them, you will fail.

Take steps to remove the barriers of self-doubts and develop a positive, growth mindset. If you change your thinking, but neglect to take action, nothing changes. The positive steps or actions you take will help you to believe in yourself. Consequently, you will begin to take more positive actions. The challenge for you now becomes to see you and your world in a new way.

Developing a new perspective will move you forward in the direction of your hopes and dreams. You can accelerate and direct the process of change for the better because to think and act is to change.

Action Step 2: What interest or skill have you wanted to pursue?

Action Step 3: If you could not fail, what would you attempt?

CHAPTER 3

The Path to Potential

Perhaps you spend a great deal of time thinking about and executing strategies and schemes you hope will bring you success. You compete and land the next high-level executive or managerial positions in your company. Even though the new position comes with an impressive salary and more responsibilities, you continue to lack a true sense of satisfaction and fulfillment in your new position. At times, you experience deep feelings of dissatisfaction with your career in general and your life in particular.

If you are experiencing regrets and frustrations about the direction your career and your life are taking, or you feel you should have achieved more by now, the question now becomes, “How do I reach my full potential?”

With a question like this, it’s time to listen to what your heart or instincts are telling you and finding the right path to get you there. Family, friends, colleagues, and the latest success best-seller influence many of your career and personal decisions, but managing your career is 100% your responsibility, and you need to act accordingly. There are people who don’t know what their passions, gifts or talents are; they are so focused on the opinions and views of their family and friends that they drift into the wrong career. Taking responsibility for your life and reaching your potential is up to you, and there’s nothing anyone can do to prevent you from achieving your goal.

Some people who want to reach their potential don't know where to begin. Others know where to begin but don't know how to move from there to the place where they are supposed to finish. If you fit in either of these categories, you can learn how to reach your goals and fulfill God's plan for your life.

To reach your potential, you must filter out peer pressure, popular opinion and assess your passions, skills, and convictions, then be courageous enough to act on them. Be wary of conventional wisdom, popular ideas and the latest success seminars and other general widespread beliefs about shortcuts to the top, they are almost always wrong. Hopping on the bandwagon may feel good initially, but often leads to pain and regret sooner or later.

Often employees expect their superiors to steer or shepherd their career development. They want them to mentor, coach, and provide them with opportunities. Such a passive approach is likely to derail you at some point, and that's why you're supposed to play the major role in your career.

Reaching your potential and defining what success means to you requires introspection and certain proactive behaviors. Reexamining your career choices and taking a fresh look at important areas, such as knowing yourself, and demonstrating certain positive or character qualities.

Know Thy Self

Taking responsibility for reaching your potential and enriching your life starts with an accurate assessment of what your dreams and goals are. Do you want to advance in your current career or do you want to change careers and pursue an entrepreneurial dream?

While you probably can detail what you don't like about your career or job, you may struggle to identify what you want to do. Meaningful reflection and self-assessment will help you identify what your career interests are. This exercise almost always requires soliciting the views of other people who know you and will be brutally honest. If you are currently employed, more than likely, you can't count on your manager or supervisor to tell you what you are doing wrong.

Requesting feedback is another step that emphasizes the key role you play in your career development. It's up to you to control this process by asking for specific feedback, seeking a coach and being receptive to input from a variety of people at various levels within your company, organization, and social groups.

This type of initiative takes time, humility and a willingness to confront fears, blind spots and weaknesses that many of us would rather ignore. Getting others to tell us where we are falling short isn't easy. It may be best to have this done in one-on-one conversations.

When your colleagues, peers, or even subordinates see you act on their feedback, they are likely to become more proactive in offering advice, because they know you value their input. You and your peers may be surprised at your ability to change and improve once you recognize your shortcomings. Now that you have a grip on your strong and weak points, you have to figure out what you enjoy doing.

Action Step 1: What is your dream job?

Action Step 2: How does your current job match what you currently do?

Loving what you do gives you strength to weather personal setbacks, overcome adversity, and the ability to work long hours that's usually needed to reach your full potential.

Unfamiliar Territory

When you begin a new course of action, you're entering into unfamiliar territory; and you may think you don't know enough to proceed on your new journey. This anxiety is fleeting, and taking the first step is the most significant because it gets you moving.

If you're like most people who desire to grow and reach their full potential, you may have expectations, assumptions, attitudes, and mistaken beliefs that create gaps, doubts, fears, misgivings and other obstacles that will keep you from reaching your goal. These gaps in your knowledge are temporary because you know more than you think. For example, you may assume you will reach your potential automatically.

When you were a child each year, you automatically grew taller and stronger. The older you got, the more things you were able to do, such as dress yourself, brush your teeth and tie your shoes, but your intellectual, spiritual, and emotional growth did not occur at the same rate. If you gave these areas of growth any thought at all, you took it for granted they would improve on their own. Not so! Eventually, you realized for growth to occur in these areas, you have to put forth a deliberate effort. Personal growth doesn't happen automatically, nor does it improve on its own; and nor does your potential.

Perfectionist or Procrastinator

A perfectionist's fear of making mistakes is a hindrance. The desire to find the "perfect" way to execute your improvement plan, without making mistakes, leads to analysis paralysis. You are stuck and you cannot, or will not, move forward.

Executing a plan from start to finish involves a process and taking the necessary steps, or a course of action, to achieve your goal. If you are waiting for perfect conditions before you

get started, you will miss whatever opportunities are available at the time.

You have to take the first step because there is no way to “discover” the best way to execute your improvement plan. As you continue to move forward, a little more of the “way” unfolds. If you make a mistake, it’s an opportunity to learn at least two things: what you did wrong and the right way to do it.

Procrastinating and being overly cautious can rob you of your inspirations to start, continue, and to finish. These setbacks will cause you to have second thoughts about your decision to pursue a personal growth plan. You begin to doubt yourself and believe it is not such a good idea. It doesn’t matter how large or small your doubts are, and we all have them, we also have faith. Which emotion will you allow to influence you, faith or fear?

There’s an element of excitement and inspiration when changing your mindset or outlook to move to a new level of success: to become the kind of person who can break through fears and navigate obstacles.

You believe it is possible to become the person you were created to be by reaching your potential. Initially, the idea of enriching your life excited and inspired you; and the greatest risk you face now is falling into that, “I’ll do it later” trap. You begin to entertain the thought that you will make your growth a priority later, or pretty soon because this is just not the right time.

These delays are dream assassins and are just a few of the countless obstacles we create that derail our chances of success. Why don’t we take action now? When we don’t take action when we should, we subject ourselves to what Jim Rohn calls the Law of Diminishing Intent. Rohn’s Law of Diminishing Intent states, “The longer you wait to do something you should do now, the greater the odds that you will never actually do it.”

You intend to take action when the idea strikes and you intend to get started when your inspiration is at its zenith, but the unfamiliar is cluttered with uncertainties and can be downright scary. If you don’t turn your intentions into action fairly soon, the urgency to take action begins to diminish. Days pass, and your excitement for the idea wanes. In a few months, the idea may have disappeared altogether. Don’t fall prey to the Law of Diminishing Intent. Take action now!

Action Step 1: In what ways do you procrastinate?

Faith or Fear

The next hurdle that will trip you up is fear. Overcoming fear could be the toughest challenge you face. Fear can be a “dream killer,” and it is carried out by loving family, friends, church members, co-workers, and you. God leads by faith.

Fear reveals itself in ordinary and unusual ways. As soon as you take that first step toward your dreams, feeling anxious and a little scared is natural. When you have identified your most desired goal, yet you find yourself pursuing it indirectly, then you have allowed fear to creep in and lessen, or reduce, your aspirations. Instead of fearlessly pursuing your dreams, you settle for something that is easier; and that requires less commitment and effort.

There are people who dreamed of doing great things but never took the necessary steps. Instead, they settled for working in related fields, robbing themselves of fulfilling their divine purposes.

Action Step 1: How has fear caused you to settle for less?

Lessons Learned

Growing is complex and problematic. The fact that you don't know everything means you will make mistakes and you will fail. If you expect to grow, you need to get over any fear you may have of making mistakes and failing.

Most people see mistakes and failures as signs of weakness, but both are parts of any worthwhile endeavor. There can be no innovation, learning, or creativity without failure. Learning what not to do is just as important as learning what to do.

If we dare enough, we will make mistakes, experience disappointments, and failures. The death of a dream, an idea, or our expectations is painful, and we have the black eyes, skinned knees, broken hearts, and bruised egos to prove it.

Consequently, how you think about failure can tell a great deal about how you will overcome these obstacles and how successful you will become. Successful people see failure as a sign of progress; they know that it is impossible to try without failing sometimes.

Action Step 1: What lesson have you learned from a mistake or failure?

Stumbling Towards Destiny

Failing in pursuit of a dream can lead us to our true destiny. It may take failure to move us in a new direction. There are times when we put our efforts into things that are not what we are destined to do. When we fail, we are forced to try something new. This something new just might be our callings; and, very often, it is the one thing in our lives where our efforts to succeed doesn't feel like effort at all. I know this to be true in my life.

After retiring from public service a few years ago, I decided to resume my real estate career. After a couple of years of having zero success as a part-time real estate sales associate, I left the business. In the meanwhile, I enrolled in a two-year Theology course offered by my church. The initial class assignments of writing an essay and preparing a class presentation renewed my interest in speaking and writing.

While a parishioner at my former church, I volunteered as a staff writer for the Women's Publicity Committee and the Helps Ministry Auxiliaries newsletters. The former served a national and international readership and the latter the congregational audience.

I honed my speaking and writing skills during my public service career as a customer service instructor and public relations specialist. Developing and writing procedural manuals and training materials, conducting customer service training classes, communication workshops and seminars gave me opportunities to continue to improve my speaking and writing skills.

Later, during my assignment in Community Relations, I represented my department at various educational, civic, and community events. I presented information to students during career fairs at local schools and community and civic groups, on behalf of the department's outreach efforts to these organizations. With my renewed interest in speaking and writing, I needed an opportunity or platform to exercise my communication gifts.

Destiny Defined

In 2014, I came across a book in the Sacramento, California airport that provided me with the information and direction I needed. The information confirmed my life's purpose and identified the initial platform I should use.

This book is my initial platform: my life's purpose is to inspire and encourage people, especially women, to live fulfilling lives. Failing in real estate led me back to my true destiny because I am destined to speak and write!

Action Step 1: What door to your destiny do you believe is open to you now?

Bouncing Back: Resilience

Successful people have growth mindsets and are resilient. When they encounter roadblocks or experience failure, they get up, dust themselves off, and take the next step toward their destiny. They bounce back because they are resilient. They use failure as a learning tool, instead of a means to give up.

On the other hand, failure terrifies the person who lacks resilience. The real failure is in not trying. To move to the next level of success, you have to be the kind of person who can overcome obstacles and recover from setbacks, disappointments, and failures. You must be resilient, and you must be able to get up and keep going.

Developing the ability to bounce back from setbacks requires a strategy to overcome the obstacles and setbacks

that you will certainly encounter. Thinking through the risks and potential challenges, then preparing well, so you deal with them is an important strategy. If you know something is coming, you are better prepared to face it, to deal with it, and win these battles.

The resilient person who wants to succeed will develop the inner strengths to face fear, failure, and overcome these adversities and every real battle, large or small. Successful women think differently and are more optimistic; and consequently, they say different things to themselves when facing these challenges.

Some people are naturally more positive and optimistic than others, and they tend to be more resilient; they just have an innate tendency to handle adversities well. If you don't have a very positive or optimistic attitude, you should do all you can to cultivate one.

Our lives are not determined by what happens to us, but how we respond to what happens to us. A positive attitude creates positive thoughts. What we say to ourselves when facing challenges is significant, because when we think differently, we act differently.

CHAPTER 4

Pause, Reflect, Meditate

Today, you are where your thoughts and actions have taken you on your journey to reaching your potential and enriching your life. During your journey, it's important to take time out to evaluate and examine where you are in your growth process. Reaching your potential requires times of introspection. Learning to pause, reflect, and meditate are parts of the process that allows growth to catch up with you. Leadership expert John Maxwell calls this process the Law of Reflection.

Pausing to reflect and meditate on the choices and activities that have led you to where you are now are more valuable than motivation and encouragement. Why? After all, if you're going down the wrong road, you don't need a reason to speed up: you need to stop, check your GPS or map, and change directions.

Effective actions will follow quiet reflection, and from quiet reflection will come even more effective action. There's tremendous power in taking these temporary breaks, introspective periods, and quiet moments of contemplation that can help to hasten your growth process.

Pausing

Most of us live busy lives, and at times, it seems there are not enough hours in the day to get everything done. Living such a hectic life requires some deliberate quiet time or a

“timeout!” Just as it’s important to schedule a regular visit to see your doctor, or get your car serviced, it is equally important to schedule a quiet time to pause, reflect, meditate, or just chill.

Pausing, reflecting, and meditating time requires solitude. Jesus understood and practiced this principle throughout His ministry: we should do no less. How you organize your quiet time is up to you. Distractions and quiet times don’t mix. If it is possible, remove yourself from distractions.

These periods of aloneness are especially important during this time of personal growth. If you don’t take this time to pause, you can miss the significance of the new information you receive, events you attend, and the people you meet that in some way influence your life.

Frequently, these encounters can, or will, identify for us a time of change or a shift in a new direction during our growth process. When we allow growth to catch up with us, we can better understand the significance of what we’ve experienced, and the changes and corrections we need to make.

Intentionally pausing and thinking will expand and enrich your thinking. Your time alone will allow you to put your experiences in perspective and plan for the future. Your continual growth from experiences is only possible when you discover the insights and truths they contain.

Insights and Truths

All truths are easy to understand once we discover them. The point is to discover them, and that takes some analysis or examination. The following four-step approach, **investigation**, **incubation**, **illumination**, and **illustration** will help you discern and uncover these truths and insights.

Investigating requires that we ask questions; asking the right questions demonstrates our desire to grow in our knowledge and understanding on how we can improve ourselves. The thing to remember is where our current choices and activities have taken us.

The investigative process includes asking for specific feedback and being receptive to input from your interactions with a variety of people. Gathering feedback should be an ongoing process, as you continue to grow and face new challenges and demands.

The incubation process is very similar to meditation; it's putting an experience or encounter into the "crock pot or slow cooker of your mind" to simmer for a while. It's the process of developing, nurturing, cultivating or maturing an idea or thought. Incubation is listening, learning, and giving an idea, as long as it needs to give birth to its truths and insights.

Illumination is that sudden realization or the "light bulb" moments in your life when you experience unexpected, intuitive understanding, revelation, or insight. You will usually experience moments of enlightenment after you spend time investigating an idea, and then allowing it to incubate for a period. These moments of discovery are the rewards for dedicating time and effort to pausing and reflecting.

Finally, illustrations are examples or comparisons that help to clarify or explain something. Illustrations give life to an otherwise dull speech or book. What would this book be without good stories and insightful quotes? Had that not been the case, you probably would have put this book down long ago, or returned it to get a refund.

Furthermore, illustrations make something easier for us to understand, and they give essential meaning to our new ideas. This four-step process is invaluable in the writing of this book, and I am looking forward to new insights and truths as I continue to apply these techniques.

Action Step 1: What have you learned today that will help you to grow?

Reflective Thinking

What is reflective thinking? You think reflectively all the time; you just don't realize you're doing it. Have you ever been late for an appointment and then thought next time, I'll leave home earlier? You thought about, or reflected, on this experience and decided to learn from it and do something different the next time.

Reflection is self-awareness: thinking of yourself, your experiences, and your view of the world. Its self-improvement: learning from experiences and wanting to improve some area of your life and its empowerment: putting yourself in control of making changes and behaving differently.

Most people would rather act than think. The pace of our society does not encourage reflective thinking. Reflective thinking encourages us to go back and spend time pondering what we have done and what we have seen.

Your purpose for engaging in this process is to reflect, so you might learn from your successes and mistakes, discover what you should try to repeat, and determine what you should change or discard. By mentally revisiting past situations, you can think and act with greater understanding.

Reflective thinking takes a good experience and makes it a valuable and significant experience, and turns the experience into insight. An experience becomes valuable when it informs or equips us to meet new challenges. You can gain a new appreciation for the things that before went unnoticed. It does little good to learn something new without taking the time to think about it; it does no good to hear something new without applying it.

Reflective thinking and self-examination don't come naturally for some people; it can be very uncomfortable. You may have a hard time staying focused, or you don't want to spend time thinking about unpleasant experiences. Reflective thinking allows us to separate ourselves from the memory of distasteful and unpleasant experiences.

The Benefits of Reflective Thinking

We may find the process of reflective thinking dull, but there are additional benefits to reflective thinking. This time of introspection gives you a true perspective and enables you to distance ourselves from the intense emotions of a particular good or bad experience and see them with fresh eyes.

Most of us who enjoy the thrill of an experience try to go back and capture it without first trying to evaluate it. Likewise, those who survive a traumatic experience usually avoid similar situations at all costs.

With reflective thinking, we can see past thrills in the light of emotional maturity and examine tragedies in the light of truth and logic. Reflecting can help a person stop carrying around a bunch of negative emotional baggage.

How do you usually respond to bad experiences? Do you explode in anger? Do you shrink into yourself emotionally? Each time we encounter a painful or bad experience, we get an opportunity to know ourselves better. Bad experiences are painful, and can stop us dead in our tracks, or can cause us to make decisions we would like to put off, deal with issues we would rather not face and make changes that make us feel uncomfortable.

Purposeful Reflection

These times of discomfort prompts us to face who we are and where we are. What we do with these experiences define who we become. Like most people who survive bad situations or even tragedy, we deal with it as best as we can.

The experience can be unfair, unreasonable, and impossible, but we still have to work through it because we still have responsibilities to family, and others. Life may pause, for a while, but it doesn't stop.

Each new experience, good or bad, becomes an opportunity for personal growth. These experiences can force you to examine who you are, face yourself in ways that you never have before.

What separates people who thrive from those who merely survive? They use mistakes, problems, and bad experiences as stepping stones. They deal with these experiences in a way that helps them, rather than hurt them.

Everybody has ups and downs, and nobody escapes the bad experiences. We can do everything in our power to avoid mistakes and misfortune, but they have a way of coming into our lives.

Misfortune is just a fact of life, no matter who you are, where you live, or how wealthy or poor you are. We all have to deal with these unpleasant, difficult, troublesome, occurrences in our lives.

Reflection: the Change Agent

The difficulties we encounter in life do not allow us to stay the same. They move us. They change us. The questions become, in which direction will we move or how will we change? Do we become better or bitter? Will this unfortunate, unhappy, incident cause us to grow or will it stop us?

If we dedicate ourselves to growth, then we will become committed to managing our bad experience. Most successful people will point to the hard times in their lives as key points in their journey of development. Growth is the best possible outcome for any negative experience and can be the catalyst for our development.

Managing these painful and disappointing experiences has a lot to do with our attitudes and the expectations that we hold about ourselves and other people. If we maintain a positive attitude and a positive outlook on life, we put ourselves in the best position to manage a bad experience and turn them into positive growth.

We can look back and derive useful lessons from past errors for the purpose of profiting from these experiences, and we can gain a new appreciation and recognize the sacrifice of others when we walk in their shoes.

When we seek to understand ourselves and our experiences through introspection, it is with the purpose or desire to better ourselves so we can better serve others.

Questions: The Keys to Growth

As you continue to pursue areas of personal growth to enrich your life and develop your potential, take the time to pause and reflect and ask yourself questions. Questions are keys that unlock and demonstrate your desire to grow. Whenever you feel like you've hit a roadblock or a brick wall during your introspective time, ask yourself questions.

The value we receive from these questions help to shape who we are, that is, if we internalize the answers and apply them in a constructive way. Consequently, there is no limitation on our capacity to grow and be better when we ask the right questions. If we do not get the answers we expect, perhaps we did not ask the right questions. Good questions produce good answers.

When I attend a conference or seminar I get fresh, new, creative ideas and concepts and I may receive a momentary surge of inspiration and motivation. If I don't do anything with the information, I lose the benefits offered from attending this event. We must not lose the value these experiences represent. These are opportunities to review our notes, reflect on our contacts and put them into action.

Writing down the thoughts that come out of your reflective thinking has value, but nothing helps you grow like putting your thoughts into action. We lose the benefits from things we do if we ignore insights and truths during reflective thinking.

Action Step 1: What did you discover today that you need to give more attention to?

Reflective Thinking and the Big Picture

Reflective thinking clarifies the big picture. It puts ideas and experiences in a more accurate context, and it encourages you to go back and spend time pondering what you have done and what you have seen. For instance, reflecting on the loss of a job, or a relationship, you may see a pattern of events that led to your dismissal or the end of the relationship.

You will better understand the, *why* and *what* of the things you were responsible for that contributed to the loss of the job and the relationship. Reflecting on the incidents afterward, you may realize that in the larger scheme of things, you may be better off with a new job that is a better fit for your skills and the end of that relationship. Without reflection, it can be very difficult to see the big picture.

Big picture thinking can benefit any person in any profession. For instance, when the manager tells the employees that the ongoing relationship with the customer is more important than the sale of an individual product, the manager is reminding the employees of the big picture.

The big picture is the process of expanding not only what the employees can see, but what they can do. Big picture thinking brings wholeness and maturity to the person's thinking, and it brings perspective. When you become a big picture thinker, you are never satisfied. You are always exploring, investigating, studying ways to grow and improve.

Reflection Tools: a Calendar or Journal

Calendars and journals are hardly ever used as reflective thinking tools. However, these are excellent tools for that purpose. Calendars and journals remind you of how you've spent your time, show you whether your activities match your priorities and help you see whether you're making progress. They can help you review where you have been and what you have done.

Using your calendar or journal as a reflective tool is an opportunity to recall activities you may not have considered, or

you might not have had time to reflect on previously. You lose some of your most valuable thoughts if you do not give yourself the reflection time you need.

Journaling is beneficial for people who write to figure out what they are thinking and feeling. However, using a calendar or journal as a reflective tool, the opposite exercise is most effective. You figure out what you're thinking and feeling, and then write down your significant thoughts and action points.

Ultimately, reflective thinking has three main values; it gives perspective; it allows you to connect continually with your journey, and it provides counsel and direction concerning your future. It is a very effective and valuable technique. Few things can help you learn and improve the way reflecting thinking can.

Action Step1: How do you plan to use your calendar or journal as a reflective tool?

Meditation: Inner Rest

Think of meditation as “downtime,” a sort of vacation for your mind. With the stress many of us experience, even for those of us who try our best to avoid it, the mind is constantly working. Aren't you always thinking about something? At any one time, you have several things going on at once: from family to work to OGKWE (Only God Knows What Else)! Your mind hardly ever, if ever, gets a break while you are awake.

During the 1970s, along with a Big Mac hamburger and fries, McDonald's slogan, “You deserve a break today” was very popular. People used the slogan to encourage each other,

reminding friends, family, coworkers, or whoever to take a break. I wonder what effect the slogan would have on today's society? Your mind does deserve a break, and the reward is peace of mind.

The goal of meditation is to relax the mind; thereby releasing energy and creativity that can be hindered by stress and tension. Meditation allows us to get more in tune with ourselves. An article by the Mayo Clinic suggests that meditation can give you a sense of calm, peace, and balance that benefits both your emotional well-being and your overall health. The article goes on to say these benefits don't end when your meditation session ends but continues throughout your day. Meditation can carry you more calmly through your day and may improve certain medical conditions.

Meditation and Positive Emotions

There are three ideas about meditation for you to consider from research by Dr. Barbara Lee Fredrickson, a social psychologist who conducts research in emotions and positive psychology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Dr. Fredrickson's research on meditation has revealed that people who meditate daily display more positive emotions than those who do not. As expected, people who meditated also built valuable long-term skills. For example, three months after the experiment was over, the people who meditated daily continued to display increased mindfulness, purpose in life, social support, and decreased illness symptoms.

You can liken meditation to the "flip side" of prayer, and that is when you pray, you're talking to God and when you meditate, you're listening to God. Listen for answers to your prayers during your meditation time. The answer may not come all at once, but the answer will come. When you block out distractions and eliminate outside noise, you can give full attention to your inner voice.

Divine Messaging

Our inner voice, instinct or intuition has similar connotations in that they describe similar reactions or responses. These reactions or responses describe a perception, insight, sixth sense, awareness, a hunch, an urge, a feeling, inkling, a gut feeling, or something told me!

Quite often, or more often than we should, we ignore our instincts, intuitions, and our inner voice, only to kick ourselves later for not following them. Why do we ignore these conduits of divine wisdom? Is it because divine wisdom is difficult to explain, or is it because we don't trust ourselves?

Facts, statistics, and surveys we understand. The information we receive from our intuition, instincts or inner voice we question, simply because we cannot explain them. Our inner voice, intuition, or instinct: the voice that tells us when to do or not to do something, how to do it or for whom to do it for usually comes from God. Sometimes this divine wisdom leads us into situations where we end up meeting people who, in one way or another, contribute to the development of our potential. When we begin to trust our inner voice, we begin to trust God.

Destiny Decisions

Our core beliefs govern and shape our decision-making. Our decision-making will function in agreement with our values and beliefs until challenged by factors such as positive or negative emotions, the questions you choose to ask, your environment and your experiences. These beliefs are the anchor points, and if our core beliefs are flawed, our decision-making will be flawed, and so will the results.

To embark on this journey of self-improvement and self-discovery began with a decision. Meditation and reflective thinking increase our confidence in making decisions. Have you ever made a snap judgment or decision, and later wondered if you did the right thing? I think most of us have; reflective thinking and meditation can help to diffuse doubts associated with your decisions.

Good decisions come from minds that are free from fear, doubt, and uncertainty. These are decisions made from a position of strength. Minds hindered by negative emotions do not make decisions from positions of strength.

We are best able to make life-impacting decisions when we are in tune with our inner voice, and when we are open to listening. Making the right decision does not leave us with doubts and uneasiness. Making a decision is not necessarily easy, but it means that you made the decision based on the available information, and for the right reasons.

However, there is an important principle that one must be aware of in making decisions and that is the decision itself and the outcome of the decision. You make a good decision with all the relevant information available at the time. However, this does not necessarily say anything about the outcome of the decision, which you cannot control.


Finally, the value we receive from pausing, reflecting, and meditating depends on the kind of questions we ask ourselves. When we are learning something new, or when we want to delve deeper into an area so we can grow, we ask questions.

If our questions are focused, they will stimulate creative thinking. Why? A well thought-out and a well-worded question get to the heart of the matter and triggers new ideas, truths, and insights.

Action Step 1: What have you learned today that will help you to grow?

CHAPTER 5

Character and Success

 Our purpose in pursuing personal growth is to reach our full potential and enrich our lives. By asking the right questions, we can find ways to improve ourselves. When undertaking a personal growth program, it is important to know the *what, when, how, and why* we want to grow.

To some extent, this book answers the *when* question. The remaining steps of knowing *what, how, and why* you want to improve are vital for continual consistency during your growth journey. Each step is a part of the journey and will only take you so far. Inspiration got you started, but discipline, self-control, and consistency keep you going.

It doesn't matter how talented you are, or how many opportunities knock on your door; you need discipline, self-control, and consistency to reach your goals. If you already possess these attributes, you are ahead of the game; if not, decide to make these traits a daily habit, that is, if you want to succeed.

What Should You Improve?

Planning your life is about finding yourself. Knowing who you are, and customizing a design for your growth. Once you draw the blueprint for your life, then you can apply it to your career.

Quite often, the situation you are in will determine *what* you need to improve. An accurate assessment of your current skills is

a good place to start. Suggestions and ideas on areas for improvement may develop by looking at your current job, experiences, education, and discussions with friends, family, and coworkers.

After exploring these different avenues, it is still up to you to determine the specific areas you need to improve. Remember, gathering feedback needs to be an ongoing process because of the new challenges you will face.

Tapping into *what* you need to improve is consistent with laying the foundation for any improvement project. What should you improve first? Where should you start? A good foundation provides the underpinning or support for the construction of a building and a personal improvement project.

Most people want to begin by improving their professional capacities and competencies. Improving your proficiency in these areas are worthwhile endeavors; however, if the primary goal of your self-improvement plan is to reach your full potential, then your character is the essential building block for this area of personal growth.

Action Step 1: What is your definition of character?

Character Matters

It's normal for us to be concerned about how we look on the outside, and there's nothing wrong with that. What can get us in trouble is worrying more about how we look on the outside than about how we are on the inside.

Your character may seemingly be something hard to define; nevertheless, it is the foundation for all true success. A person may have money, position, and power, but unless the person has "good" character, he or she is not considered to be truly

successful. Are there any so-called crime figures that are considered successful? Like it or not, our reputation comes from what others believe about us. Many professional athletes who displayed good character throughout their collegiate and professional careers are still highly regarded due to this fact.

Legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden says character counts, and without it, even the most talented individual is a potential danger to the team. Coach Wooden says this holds true whether it's the owner, the leader, the coach, or any member of the group. Whatever falls from grace a person experiences, it is more often than not connected to the individual's character. Intelligence, money, fame, and talent are not enough; in the end, your character matters.

The right motions outwardly with wrong motives inwardly will not bring lasting progress. Right outward talking with wrong inward thinking will not bring lasting success. Expressions of care on the outside with a heart of hatred or contempt on the inside will not bring lasting peace.

Perhaps you know people who seemed to be doing all the right things on the outside, yet they are not experiencing success. When that happens, usually that's an indication, there's something wrong on the inside that needs to change. Our character is something that we create within ourselves and must take responsibility for changing.

On a more immediate and practical level, our character is what determines our success in every area of life. It guides our responses to any situation or circumstance in our lives. It is *why* we do the things we do, and it is the *way* we do the things we do. Our character determines how we respond to the various challenges we encounter.

Action Step 1: Why do you think character matters?

Honesty is at the core of the good character, and it consists of many more basic qualities, such as truthfulness, candor, accuracy, faithfulness, loyalty, fidelity, reliability, integrity, honor, dependability, persistence, and diligence, and the list goes on.

When we fail to make the right character choices within us, we will not end up in a good place. How can we ever reach our potential and become the person we can be if we make the wrong choices?

If you need to work on your character, the first place to look is at the patterns of your actions. Are your words and behavior consistent with one another? Perhaps this is a good place to start working. Once we recognize inconsistency in what we do and what we say, we can begin to improve our character. Consistency is the key.

Developing Consistency

Consistency is the difference between success and failure. Your growth requires a track record of success. You can't establish a track record or build a good reputation if you are constantly shifting gears or trying new tactics. Your efforts will fail, not because your tactic was flawed or your goals weren't clear, but simply because you didn't stay the course to achieve the objective. Consistency establishes your reputation.

When you develop a personal growth plan, build consistency into your plan. You can't decide if something new works or not until you have tried it for a period and in a consistent manner. How do you measure effectiveness if what you are measuring isn't performed consistently? Consistency allows for measurement. Measurement provides a way to determine what you accomplish. Consistency is a must if you are to continue to grow and reach your destiny.

Accountability is another aspect of consistency and whether or not you are accountable depends on your character. A person of character is accountable and takes responsibility for mistakes and failures.

If you want to succeed, you must learn to be consistent day in and day out, week in and week out, year in and year out.

Creating and using a system is the secret to developing consistency. With a system, you develop the discipline to follow through daily. Most of your daily efforts may turn out to be dull and routine, but you will develop consistency.

A system is a course of action, approach, procedure, plan or program, and it is a great tool for personal growth. Systems are practical, and they work regardless of your profession or level of experience. If something doesn't work, it's usually due to a lack of consistency in some area.

Without systems in place in your life, you have to face every task and challenge from scratch. The best personal growth improvement plan will fail without a dedication to consistency. While writing this book, I've established procedures and systems to help me achieve my goal of publishing this book.

Inconsistency

Inconsistency is a terrible attribute that far too many people possess. Inconsistency is a factor in personal relationships and business. If your words and actions are jumping all over the place, how do you think that will affect a person's perception of you?

It gives the impression that you are not trustworthy. Who wants to pursue a relationship with a person they can't trust? Trust is, in one way or another, built upon the foundation of consistency. If you can't count on someone to be there for you because their behaviors are inconsistent, you learn you cannot always trust them.

Our ethics and character are supposed to shape our lives, but if our actions appear superficial, we must have some logical reason for our behavior. How can you ever be true to your word if your actions are constantly inconsistent? You can't!

As we work on strengthening and improving specific good character qualities, our overall character is improved. Character growth determines the height of our growth, and without it, we will not reach our full potential.

How do We Improve?

Our desire to find out how to improve requires exposure to a higher level of excellence and special skills. To reach this higher level requires additional knowledge, teaching, experience, understanding, practice, know-how, training, instruction, and preparation by others who are where we want to be.

The journey to our destiny is usually a long one, and we need the motivation to give us the determination and perseverance to keep moving forward, even when it seems like we are making very little progress.

It is difficult to remain engaged or motivated in any self-improvement project if we do not understand the importance of the process. How will you determine what makes a complex individual as you behave in certain ways? Not everyone is inspired or motivated by the same things.

What additional knowledge, experience, and coaching will you need to help you understand what motivates you? Understanding your personality makeup can help you understand who you are, what motivates you, and what keeps you from throwing in the towel. In other words, you need to know what makes you tick and what your character strengths are.

Strength of Character

Your character strengths are the traits you frequently use. They are innate, and they energize you. Not only are you energized by your strengths, but others feel valuable when they experience you using your strengths. Are you overlooking your strengths?

Action Step 1: What is your greatest strength?

Taking character strength assessment tests may help you accurately assess your strengths. In addition to these assessments, ask for specific feedback from others who benefit most from the use of your strengths and who will be brutally honest.

Character strength assessments tests and the feedback from others raise your awareness about your strengths by suggesting how to use them and pointing out conditions under which they flourish. Among the many tools I used in writing this book, I took two character strength assessments.

Most of us are unaware how often we use our strengths because they occur so naturally and they often impact others in ways that are deeply and sincerely profound. While our purpose in life is about making a difference in the lives of others, our strengths are significant in how we accomplish this goal.

The Internet is an excellent source of personality profile surveys, tests, and character assessments. These personality profile resources offer in-depth knowledge about us: our different personality types, careers, relationships, core values, strengths, and motivations.

By discovering our strengths, we can plan a life that sets us up for success. We get the crucial information we need to make the most of our potential.

Weaknesses: Falling Short

People who are unaware of their strengths are also unaware of their weaknesses. While most of us can list our strengths, we often struggle to identify our weaknesses. Admiring or praising our strengths while ignoring our weaknesses can be a hindrance to our growth.

On the other hand, many people are aware of their weaknesses and how they are holding them back, a fact that can be a source of discouragement. Focusing on your weaknesses while ignoring your strengths can be detrimental. Only when we give equal weight to our strong points and our faults can we realize our full potential.

Exactly what are your weaknesses? You can probably make a list as long as your arm where you fall short. Acknowledging

weaknesses isn't about healing yourself, and don't waste time obsessing over all the things you think are wrong with you. Instead, build on what's right, and I'm sure there's plenty right with you. It's far better to use our strengths to compensate for our weaknesses. Therefore, we need to pinpoint our weaknesses and overcome or manage them.

Action Step 1: How do you manage a weakness?

Accepting and benefiting from your strengths does not necessarily mean you should pretend your weaknesses don't exist. Quite the contrary, it is your awareness that your weaknesses exist that helps you determine how best to use your strengths.

The first step to overcoming any weakness is to become aware of it. We can detect character flaws that are hiding in the background by monitoring our negative emotions. Are you angry, vengeful, resentful, manipulative, dishonest, jealous, envious, ungrateful, arrogant, gullible, and insecure? This short list all points to weakness.

Focusing on weaknesses is a much less effective tool than focusing on strengths, but ignoring performance and opportunities for growth altogether is also destructive. For example, students who do not get feedback show virtually no improvement over time and often decline in their academic performances. Helping students overcome weaknesses and build on their strengths will undoubtedly produce improvement in their grades.

It is a weakness to allow those close to us, our inner circle of family, friends, trusted employees, and advisors to use our weaknesses to their advantage. These are the people that

know what buttons to push or the triggers that cause us to react to their destructive stimuli, and it is always to motivate us to carry out their cowardly agendas.

Our actions may result in us showing meanness or cruelty to people who are weaker or unable to defend themselves and fear of those who are stronger or in positions of authority. We are the confirming witness to the truth or validity of what, when, why, and how we respond to the information we receive. It is our responsibility to prayerfully evaluate the negative feedback we receive from others and how we can use the information to build up and not tear down a person.

It is a sign of strength to be weak, to know it and to manage it. It is a sign of weakness to be unaware of our faults and mistakenly believe we are strong. It takes a great deal of humility to confront our weaknesses. We do have the capacity to change and improve once we recognize our shortcomings, as well as our strengths, but most people would rather ignore them. We should regularly come back to the weaknesses we cannot fix; for what we can't do today, we may be able to do tomorrow.

Shadow Strengths and Shields

Character strengths have a “shadow” side and every weakness a shield. A shadow is a person's negative portrayal of strength. It occurs when a strength that works to your advantages gets overused to the point that it becomes a weakness or a flaw.

We all have a shadow side: it is the side of us that we try to ignore and don't want to acknowledge. As a result, it often gets us into trouble with others and can severely compromise our influence, if not destroy it altogether. Deep influence is, after all, gained the hard way. Unfortunately, it is easily compromised or destroyed if we don't practice the discipline of managing our shadow side. The greater the strength, the “longer” the shadow side.

It is easy to spot the shadow side in others. They are those behaviors that disempowered others, cause us frustration or anger. Unfortunately for us, they are not alone. Our issues

may be different, but each of us has a shadow side that regularly threatens to lessen our influence and detract from the impact that God desires for us to have. The strength we possess comes with a requisite downside, a liability. When we exercise our strengths, we live in our sweet spot.

Connie White-Maximizer

Connie White is an organizational leader, and her signature strength is that she is a “maximizer.” As a maximizer, Connie makes the most of any opportunity that’s available for the organization. Maximizing is a great strength to have, and it has had a positive impact on the methodology of the organization.

As a maximizer, Connie always makes the most of an organizational opportunity and leave nothing on the table. She will question why they do the things the way they do them and always push for the most effective strategy to maximize results with the people, resources, and opportunities they have. Connie takes full advantage of her signature strength, as a maximizer.

However, there is a downside as well. Connie can easily become impatient with strategies that do addition rather than multiplication. It is not the impatience that is a bad thing; it is that her impatience causes her to be less diplomatic, respond harshly, and in some way devalue others who don’t yet “get it.” When that happens, her signature strength has gone to its “shadow side.”

I’m sure there are those who have viewed her over the years as insensitive and uncaring in situations where she did not adequately manage the shadow side of this otherwise great strength.

Eventually, Connie has learned the hard way over the years that process and time are factors that move people and organizations in a more effective direction. Also, she has learned the necessity of simply being patient in situations where in the past she would have been far less patient.

Knowing the shadow side of her strengths allows Connie to manage or compensate for this weakness in ways that

prevent the strength from becoming a liability. She has learned in the case of her strength to press more gently, and dialogue more, and to help others understand that they can move toward greater effectiveness if they think multiplication rather than addition.

Amanda: a One Woman-Show

Connie's colleague and friend, Amanda, is the ultimate relationship person. Connie believes if Amanda were to take a strength assessment test her friend's number one strength would be "woo" which means she influences others by bringing them into her orbit with the force of her charismatic personality. Amanda also has a gift for talking which most highly relational folks do. Everyone in the organization loves her. She's charming, encouraging, and everyone feels connected to her.

There no manipulation involved, it is who she is. Much of what Amanda has accomplished as a leader in the organization comes back to her winsome, relational style. It is a huge strength, and Connie has watched it for years.

However, this great strength also has its liabilities, a shadow side. Amanda has found over the years that she can "wing it" and get by with her relational skills, rather than doing her homework on critical issues. That works for a while but not forever, and staff and organizational leaders often feel that they have been shortchanged by a lack of discipline in decision making because Amanda has learned to "wing it" rather than work through or with the team. She simply uses the force of her personality and convinces others that her way is the right way.

Amanda is the ultimate debater who can dominate any conversation and meeting. She is hard to disagree with and usually leave others feeling like they cannot win and their opinion is not important. Because she is likable, Amanda often gets away with it, but it is not without cost.

The cost is a bad feeling of being used, not being heard, and a sense of being devalued in the process. Amanda's team meetings are not about mutual dialogue but about her expounding. Her lengthy dialogues have led to tension with

her team and her board who feel that it is a one-woman show. At one point of tension, Connie's friend almost lost her job because of the shadow side of her relational strength.

As in the case with Amanda, when used rigidly, regardless of context, at the wrong time, or perhaps with the wrong person, a trait that is a strength, can cause harm rather than, good bring sorrow, rather than any sense of well-being, both to ourselves and others.

For example, the character strength of judgment, which involves thinking things through, weighing everything, as well, as being able to change one's mind, may become a burden if one can never arrive, at or stick to a decision.

Likewise, honesty can become rudeness when not combined with one of the temperance strengths. For each shadow side, the antidote lies within a compatible strength, like courage combined with prudence, judgment combined with courage, or perhaps love combined with perspective.

Take a person that is too empathetic and spend all her time worrying about others. The shadow side of this may indicate the person lacks objectivity because she's focused on peoples' personal lives. Alone, this may seem likely, but it also misses out on a person's combination of strengths and abilities to care about others.

We all have stumbling blocks to overcome about who we are, how we handle things and our view of the world. Eventually, we build up shields or protective behaviors to protect us from these weaknesses. For instance, a shy person will avoid being the center of attention. Which can sometimes be to their detriment.

Our strength brings with it a liability, our shadow side and unless our shadow side is recognized and managed, it will compromise our strength. Unchecked, our strengths can become the very means of our loss of influence and effectiveness, thus sabotaging our successful growth. It is on these shallow banks that many brilliant men and woman have lost their influence.

Action Step1: What protective behaviors have you built up over time to deal with issues?

A Reason to Improve

The *why* is what keeps us motivated long after the first rush of inspiration and enthusiasm disappears. The *why* gives us the reason, the purpose, or the cause that is at the core of the things we do in life.

Our personality profile, character assessments, and feedback from family, friends, and colleagues provide important insight into identifying and appreciating our strengths and weaknesses. Understanding and acknowledging what we love and enjoy doing is our new challenge.

Loving what we do gives us the strength during those difficult times when we face adversities. A well-defined, personal mission statement will give purpose and meaning to everything we do. Such a statement is an ever-present reminder of *why we do what we do*.



PART II

POTENTIAL



CHAPTER 6

MY MISSION

*D*o you have a passion for a special cause? If so, how can you have a direct impact on this special cause that resonates with you? How will you educate yourself about that special cause? The answer to those questions is a personal mission statement.

Purpose, mission, and vision statements are often confused with each other, but they serve complimentary purposes. It can even be confusing to understand why each word: purpose, mission, vision is relevant and how each component relates to one another. Then you ask, how does my purpose differ from my mission and my vision or what is the difference between my purpose, mission, and vision? Your purpose is the foundation of your mission and your vision.

Purpose

Our purpose is why we are here; it's why we exist; it is why we do what we do. It's why we serve a Higher Purpose or a cause, and it is to this end that our purpose guides us. Our purpose provides the message or mission by which we live out our gifts and talents. Our life's purpose is not our mission nor is it our vision.

Mission

Our mission is what we do to accomplish our purpose. It is what drives us every day to fulfill our purpose. It's the strategy that delivers results and impacts the world to make a difference. It's what we do, the decisions we make to get to our destination. Our mission is our vision in action; a direct path to our vision, our ultimate destination.

Vision

Your vision is your destination; it's where you aspire to be in the near or distant future. Your vision keeps you on course, to fulfill your purpose.

Mission Statements

Companies have developed mission statements for years. It helps guide them by defining who they are and why they do what they do. Coca-Cola's mission statement, for example, is "To refresh the world. To inspire moments of optimism and happiness. To create value and make a difference." For Google, it's "to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful." Microsoft's original mission statement, "A computer on every desk and in every home."

A mission statement describes what we want to do *now*, and talks about the present leading to our future. It expresses our purpose, primary objectives, principles, values and how we live our life.

A stated mission makes it easier to evaluate everything we choose to do in our life. Decisions become easier to make. It will help us determine if certain relationships or social situations contribute to the fulfillment of our purpose. Any bad situation quickly becomes more obvious, and this allows us to decide if it's necessary that we try to fix the situation or let it go.

Our mission statement gives a sense of direction for our life. It incorporates our dreams and directs us toward the true

desires of our heart. Ultimately, our mission describes how our life impacts those whom we encounter.

A personal mission and vision statement give you something to strive for at every stage of your journey and serve as “inner beacons” that tell us whether we’re on the right path. Even if we work for companies our entire life, we are in the process of building our own “personal brand” complete with core values, dreams, and financial goals.

Successful people know this, and they establish mission and vision statements throughout their professional lives. These statements act as recognition that each of us, in the end, is the real nurturer and driver of our lives.

Examples: Mission Statements

TED: Spreading Ideas. (2 words) TED-Technology
Entertainment Design

Wounded Warrior Project: To honor and empower wounded warriors. (6 words)

USO lifts the spirits of America’s troops and their families. (9 words)

Oxfam: To create lasting solutions to poverty, hunger, and social injustice. (10 words)

Habitat for Humanity International: Seeking to put God’s love into action, Habitat for Humanity brings people together to build homes, communities, and hope. (16 words)

In Touch Ministries: To lead people worldwide into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and to strengthen the local church. (17 words)

Creating Your Mission Statement

The mission statement is a single sentence that is comprehensive enough to include your work and personal life and defines the essential purpose in all you do.

By following a few simple guidelines, you can create a personal mission statement of your own. Start with what you

want to accomplish through your everyday activities. The word “through” is important, because you should accomplish your mission through many different activities. It should be transferable from one job, project, responsibility or activity to another.

If I tell you, my mission is to promote to personnel director on my job within the next five years, this statement is a wonderful goal, but as a mission it is inadequate. It is not transferable because I have to perform my assignment as a personnel director in the company that hired me. This statement does not explain how my mission will benefit anyone else. My job description as a personnel director describes my job duties for the company. Take a look at my mission statement and discover how it is transferable to all areas of my life.

“To create and enjoy a rewarding, successful, and charitable life and to inspire others to do the same.”

First, my mission is action-oriented, and the three verbs; create, enjoy, and inspire, describe the action I will take to carry out my mission. I can do all three of these things, create, enjoy, and inspire in various areas of my life, through my entrepreneurial endeavors, writing, speaking engagements, and one-on-one with family, friends, clients, standing in the checkout line at Costco and people that I don’t even know.

My primary concerns are to create a life that is rewarding, successful and charitable; to enjoy the life that I create for myself; and last but not least, to inspire others to live similarly. I can live my mission by pursuing my dreams and using the gift of communication to inspire others to pursue theirs and then joy the rich rewards that come from living the lives they truly want.

Your mission statement should be short, to the point, action-oriented, and entirely your own. You cannot live out the mission someone else thinks you should have for yourself; it must be yours. Your mission will fit you like a glove. Living you mission gives you joy. In fact, you are probably living your mission, at least to some degree, right now. You just haven’t pinpointed it in writing.

Creating a mission statement for your life will serve to answer the following questions: what do you do today, for

whom you do it, what is the benefit and most importantly, *why* you do what you do. The following mission statement format is only a suggestion. Compose and arrange your mission statement, so it speaks to you and outlines your mission.

Action Step 1

Begin with active verbs that describe what you want to do through your life. Use one or three verbs. The verbs for my mission are: **create**, **enjoy** and **inspire**. Consider the following verbs or any others that fit your mission:

Accomplish, Affect, Affirm, Appreciate, Build, Choose, Communicate, Compete, Complete, Complement, Continue, Counsel, Create, Cultivate, Defend, Deliver, Demonstrate, Discover, Discuss, Educate, Encourage, Enhance, Enjoy, Enlighten, Enrich, Entertain, Explore, Express, Facilitate, Finance, Generate, Give, Heal, Identify, Impact, Implement, Improve, Inspire, Invest, Lead, Live, Love, Measure, Mold, Motivate, Nurture, Open, Organize, Perform, Practice, Praise, Promote, Provide, Pursue, Receive, Renew, Respect, Satisfy, Save, Sell, Serve, Share, Speak, support, Sustain, Touch, Travel, Understand, Use, Value, Volunteer, Win, Work, Write.

Action Step 1: Identify three verbs that describe the action of your mission. My personal mission is to:

_____, _____,
_____.

Action Step 2

Action Step two of your mission statement deals with the purpose, philosophy, cause, principle, or value that is most important to you. Create an appropriate, suitable or fitting word or phrase for your mission. The appropriate phrase for my mission is: **to create a life that is rewarding, successful, and charitable**. Add adjectives to describe the word or phrase, if

it will make the mission statement clearer for you. Write the phrase here:

Action Step 3

In Action Step three, choose the group or cause you want to impact. The group I want to affect: ***I want to inspire others to create and enjoy, rewarding, successful, and charitable lives.***

Write the group you want to affect here: _____

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Step 1: _____

Step 2: _____

Step 3: _____

Your Personal Mission Statement

Rearrange you your mission statement so that it communicates your mission in the clearest way possible and make sure that your mission statement includes all three parts and remains to the point.

Place your mission statement in a place where you can read it every day. Your mission statement provides you with clarity on where you are right now and over time it may change, but it should still connect to your gift, purpose, and vision.

CHAPTER 7

IGNITING YOUR POTENTIAL

*D*esire and hope are the starting points for reaching your potential. These power twins accurately describe the commencement of your journey to reaching your goal. A genuine desire gets you moving in the right direction, and it requires some introspection. What do I mean by this? Some desires are bogus and not based on your true feelings.

Have you ever purchased something you thought you wanted, and now it's collecting dust in the basement? This situation may represent buying something, or the attainment of a desire that did not resonate with your true feelings. Often, the excitement wears off quickly, and this item becomes something that takes up space in your home.

The hope that kindles the dreams and desires you want more than anything else are the ones you will pursue. These dreams are not bogus, and they are not some nebulous, vague and undefined thoughts. Hence, you must be clear about what you want and where you are going.

The journey to your destiny and dreams can be a long, rough road, and you need a burning desire and hope to provide you with an ample supply of inspiration, motivation, determination, passion, and perseverance to keep you moving.

The Passion of Hope

“We continually remember before God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”
(1Thessalonians 1:3, NIV).

Hope is not a flickering ash. It is a spark that ignites an exciting journey to the fulfillment of your dreams. Hope is too dynamic to be passive. Hope believes boldly, decides daringly, speaks firmly and perseveres passionately. There is no passivity or inaction with hope. The power and passion that hope stirs up or even provokes in us is not something we wait to feel; it is something we decide to have.

Hope is doing what that spark has ignited in your heart. As you are reading this chapter, hope is building in your heart and is moving you to take action.

Action Step 1: What do you have a burning desire to do or obtain?

Action Step 2: What will you sacrifice virtually all else to get it?

Only the desires you want more than anything else are the ones you should pursue. You need hope to give you a passionate expectation of success, even when it seems like you are standing still.

Hope: The Seed of Expectation

“Wait and hope and expect the Lord; be brave and of good courage and let your heart be stout and enduring. Yes, wait for and hope for and expect the Lord.” (Psalm 27:14, AMP).

Hope holds the seeds of expectation for your dreams and desires. These seeds will grow, flourish and produce the desired fruit when planted in the right environment and given the proper attention. Have you lowered your expectations and no longer have a clear vision of your dreams and goals? If that’s true, then you are slowly extinguishing your hope of accomplishing your heart’s desires.

Hope stimulates, inspires, and ignites your pursuit in obtaining your desired goal of reaching your full potential. It is the genesis of your growth process to develop your God-given potential. Whatever challenges or opportunities lie before you, with the right thoughts, actions, and relationships, your dreams of enriching your life are possible.

Lowering your expectations can have a significant impact on you. You run the risk of developing a habit of not expecting a positive outcome, which will eventually manifest itself in low self-esteem.

The energy, inspiration, and motivation that come from hope breathe life into your dreams and aspirations. You may not always get what you hope for right now, but if you stop hoping altogether, you cease to take the actions that will help you accomplish your goal.

The impact of hope on one's dreams and aspirations reminds me of President Barack Obama's campaign for president. In his message of hope, he found a way to energize, motivate, and connect with Americans who went to the polls and elected him as America's Forty-fourth President.

Stop hoping, and you settle for less than what life has to offer. Hope is at the core of confidence, courage, and endurance: all of which you need if you are going to stretch beyond your current life, and develop your potential and enrich your life. Now is the time to start dreaming again.

Your life will only go as high as you expect it to go. Your expectations don't change your environment or circumstances around you, but your expectations change the way you react to that environment and those circumstances. Positive expectations are closely related to faith.

Action Step 1: What dreams inspire you?

Hope: The Foundation of Faith

Hope is at the heart of optimism and is the foundation of faith. If you've given up on your dreams and desires, now you are settling for a life far below what God has for you. If you're not hoping for anything, then you don't need faith.

Throughout Jesus' ministry, we see examples of how He was moved with compassion to heal the sick, because of the faith and expectation of those that sought Him. There's the story of blind Bartimaeus, Mark 10:46-52. Matthew 8:5-8 records the account of the Centurion, who came to Jesus to get help for one of his servants. In Mark 5:22-24, Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, sought Jesus' help for his daughter. My absolute

favorite account of Jesus' healing ministry is the woman with the issue of blood in Mark 5:25-34. This woman's hope is bold and strong, and she expected to receive her healing by simply touching the hem of Jesus' garment. Refuse to give up hope.

Hope: An Opportunity

Hope doesn't show up in our lives on its own. It is a spiritual seed that is planted, nourished, and watered with our faith. Hope brings with it the possibility and the opportunity to make a difference right here and right now.

Some people try to have faith, but they don't have hope. Hope precedes and connects with our faith. We cannot have one without the other. If we don't have a positive expectation that something good is going to happen to us or for us, then our faith stands alone.

Hope is that happy, confident, anticipation, and expectation of good; the inspirational spark that lifts our spirits, while our faith dares us to believe. Nevertheless, no matter who we are or where we are, we all need faith and hope.

I'm not talking about taking pleasure in phony or false expectations that set you up for heartache and disappointment. I'm talking about renewing, rekindling, and stirring up the desires buried under a mountain of fear, failures, mistakes, disappointments, missed opportunities, and unbelief.

Life brings with it disappointments, difficulties, and obstacles, and it can be tempting to stop hoping and give up on the things you truly want when you encounter life's challenges. Nothing is more important to achieving success than the ability to overcome these setbacks and disappointments, and the determination to continue.

Author Joyce Meyer believes God wants us to be stable and enjoy life, no matter what is going on around us. She goes on to say that He wants us to be anchored in Him, and to be hopeful at all times.

Hope: The Anchor

“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”
(Hebrews 6:19, NIV).

An anchor is a device, normally made of metal, used to connect a vessel, a boat or a ship to the bed of a body of water to prevent the craft from drifting due to wind, storms or current. Anchors can either be temporary or permanent.

Prepared for a Purpose is Antoinette Tuff’s inspiring story of how hope anchored her in a win-or-lose situation one day that prevented a potential tragedy in an Atlanta, Georgia elementary school. Tuesday, August 20, 2013, is the day a young man, armed with an AK-47 rifle, came into an Atlanta elementary school and threatened to kill everyone.

Antoinette’s story tells how her grace and faith, anchored in hope, allowed her to empathize with a desperate, hurting young man and gave her the courage to reach out and love him back from the brink of going through with his initial threat.

Antoinette believes her life experiences, the good and the bad, prepared her for that moment of divine purpose. Every tear she ever shed and all the pain she ever felt, and all the times she felt worthless was all preparation for her divine assignment that day.

All of Antoinette’s past hurts, disappointments and an uncertain future could have been a source of discouragement and fear, but with faith and hope anchored firmly in God and His Word, she chose compassion, love, and courage over fear.

Just as a metal anchor prevent vessels in water and on land from being tossed to and fro by storms, winds or water, our hope stabilizes our frantic thoughts and emotions when we encounter dangerous and threatening situations, initiated by Mother Nature or man.

Hope: Calms the Storm

Hope calms us down, cheers us up and keeps us in a place of peace. On that day in August, Annette found that place of

peace and safety in a storm that arose in the person of a desperate young man with a gun.

Hope, love, compassion, and courage are powerful emotions that affect the atmosphere. They emanate from within the heart of the carrier and messenger and will affect those within the sphere of influence of these powerful emotions.

Annette remained calm in the storm she faced. She remained calm because hope brings a level of peace and composure to those who hope. She did not ignore the storm or pretend it did not exist; she just refused to be a part of it. Just as Jesus spoke to the storm in Matthew 8:26, Annette spoke to the storm she faced, and today we read about her victory.

Life without hope isn't much of a life at all. Always hope for the best. Annette's history is not her destiny, nor should you assume where you are now is your destiny.

Hopeful Future

“There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off.” (Proverbs 23:18, NIV).

Do you want to give up hoping and look back on your life with regrets because you played it safe or allowed fear to paralyze you? It isn't the things I did that I regret the most; it's the things I didn't do. If you stop and think about who you used to be and how far you've come, you can get excited thinking how much progress you've made.

Action Step 1: What is at least one thing you regret not doing?

There are a lot of things that can crush our hopes and our dreams if we look at our lives through the 3D lens of despair, disappointment, and desperation. On the other hand, each day we are presented with the opportunity to look at our circumstances and situations through the lens of hope, just as Antoinette did on that August morning. We make mistakes, and yes, there are unfair and unjust things that happen to us, but we can't allow them to hold us back.

When we face these challenges, we can wallow in the muck and mire of self-pity. We can indulge in the belief that our life is harder and sadder than everyone else's. We can develop a defeatist attitude and expect failure at every turn. We can continue to struggle with this low-level of life, or we can embrace the exciting life that is available for us if we dare to hope.

Negative expectations always lead to negative outcomes. Positive expectations allow you to perform at your best and grow positively. Your expectations can override everyone else's negative expectations about you. You can create your expectations about yourself, regardless, of all the negativity that's around you.

Words of Hope

What we say does make a difference. Overcoming the negative traps in our life is possible, and a good place to start is by changing the way we talk about our situations. It is very easy to focus on and talk about what's going wrong, but we must put forth the effort to speak positive words in our circumstances. We need to replace hopeless words with hopeful words.

When we talk about situations negatively, we give them power. We can take our power back when we speak positive words of hope and optimism. Have you considered you might be making the problem worse by what you are saying?

Action Step 1: List two or more things that went right in your life today.

Action Step 2: What good things are you expecting to happen for you today?

We need to hope all the time and take action to support our hope. Every day is not a perfect day, but we can make it a good day. It's important to be hopeful in the midst of a difficult situation. As long as we have hope, it is possible for us to turn our life around.

Enriching your life requires a basic change in where you look for hope. There's no victory for you in focusing on things you've lost or don't have or can't change. Please don't continue to waste your precious energy, time and effort complaining about things you cannot change.

The words we speak affect us spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically. Instead of putting your energy into complaining and speaking negative words, speak positively about

whatever you're facing at the moment. If you cannot think of anything positive to say, pause, relax and reflect on a positive outcome. Eventually, this exercise will shed a brighter light on the situations.

The most important things you can do for yourself when you are hurting or in a stressful situation is to speak positive words to yourself. You need to feed yourself power thoughts and words filled with hope.

Do what is right and don't wait for your circumstances to change before you speak words of hope. Choose your words carefully, and you can change your circumstances. When people are full of hope, they're expecting something good to happen, and they're fun to be around because hope is contagious. You can tell that by the things they say.

What you say today goes a long way in determining the life you are going to live tomorrow. Every word you speak affects you. Let your words pave the way for you to walk through difficulties. You have to keep moving; there's no hope of change if you are standing still.

Expect Success

It's important to expect success, but it is equally important not to set your expectations so high that you do not have a real chance of achieving them. Dream big and give yourself a realistic timeline for your dreams to manifest. Give yourself time and space to succeed and measure your success by your definition, not someone else's. The best we can hope to do in this life is to make the most of our gifts and talents and develop our full potential, and we do that by investing in ourselves. The more we have to work with, the greater our potential and the further we can go in life.

Exceptional individuals will take the necessary actions to accomplish a dream. Despite what challenges and obstacles they encounter, they stay hopeful, faithful, no matter how long it takes for them to see their dreams fulfilled.

If you are starting a new career, an opportunity to use your gifts and talents, talk to people who are currently on that career

path. Ask them what you can do to prepare to work in this new field. If need be, take classes to broaden your knowledge that will benefit you in your new career.

You must be selective when it comes to choosing a mentor or someone to follow. How much we benefit from an experience and the level of success we achieve is directly linked to those we choose to follow. It's hard to improve when you have no one to follow.

Hope is exciting because you have a part to play in your success. You don't have to sit back and wait for something to happen. You have God's guidance, wisdom, and direction, and you can take real practical steps towards achieving your goals.

Hope and Change

Do not be afraid to quit and change directions to place yourself in alignment with your hopes and dreams. We do not have an unlimited amount of time, so the sooner we put our lives on the right path, the faster we can get to where we want to be.

Change isn't easy, and it requires time to adjust to the new changes. You are not just changing your mind; you are changing your heart, and maybe your nature. Maybe you got a late start in life, and now you think it's impossible to pursue your dream at your age. Let's go to the Answer Book to address your "late start."

God covered every eventuality in His Word that we might encounter, even our age. "They shall bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing." (Psalm 92:2).

"They will still bear fruit in old age; they will stay fresh and green." (Psalms 92.2, NIV). That's two "witnesses" that take care of that "old age" excuse.

The only place your dream becomes impossible is in your thinking. You could accomplish more if you did not think it was impossible. Be patient with yourself, if you are still here, you can still pursue your dream. After all, you are entering uncharted territory, and you will need all the endurance, staying power, persistence, prayer, and perseverance, you can muster on this new journey.

Exercising patience and waiting is never easy, but it's something we all have to do. Waiting is a fact of life that we all must deal with, but our hope will sustain us while we wait. Relax and embrace the new things God want you to do, the new opportunity that's before you, the new person God has destined you to become.

An attitude of expectancy and anticipation or a season of waiting can be a great time in your life. Surround yourself with people, events, and activities that foster hope. Don't allow your thinking to become a hindrance to the things you can accomplish in life.

Finally, be an answer to someone else's prayer. If you want to experience hope and happiness in your life, the best thing you can do is help someone else. When you look for ways to bless others, it takes your mind off your problems. Give hope and encouragement to others through words, acts of kindness, and service; you will receive the harvest from everything you give.

Hope removes the limits from your expectations. Why can't you make a difference in the lives of those around you? It's time to start living with a new level of hopeful *expectation*.

Perhaps W. Somerset Maugham said it best, "It's a funny thing about life—if you refuse to accept anything but the best—you very often get it."

Action Step 1: In what area or areas of your life have you been accepting less than the best?

CHAPTER 8

VISION

“Where there is no vision, the people perish:”

Proverbs 29:18

Today, as I write this chapter, athletes from all over the world are competing in the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil. The athletes who made the team have one goal in mind, and that is winning the gold in their particular sport. Weeks, months, and even years of preparation got the athletes to this moment, and each athlete is motivated and inspired by a single vision: standing on the top podium and receiving a gold medal.

Our goal of reaching and fulfilling our potential also begins with a vision: it guides our lives and provides the direction necessary to chart the course of our days and the choices we make about our future. It empowers us to carry out our mission. While our mission explains “why” we should do what we do, our vision explains “how.”

Our vision is the destination of our life’s journey. It is a clear, vibrant image of the desired outcome that inspires, energizes, and help us create a mental picture of our target, perhaps an Olympic gold medal. Our imagination is the parent of our vision. We cannot become or achieve what we don’t see.

Do you have a vision for your life? If so, how does your ideal life look? Your vision is an aspect of your life that must be clear,

specific, and compelling. It must be convincing, powerful, and exciting enough that you will do your utmost to attain it.

Action Step 1: What prompts you to see a positives vision for your life?

Creating a Vision Statement

Your vision statement is a present-tense statement of what your life will be at a given date in the future. When you state your vision, you state it as though it has already happened, as if you are living it now! It must be convincing, exciting, and powerful: a weak vision does not inspire!

Write your vision statement as you envision life in your iideal world; the statement should include the various activities involved in your vision. Do not leave anything out, if it is part of what you envision. Write everything that you visualize in the present tense.

Don't rely on your memory. The statement describes, in writing, the vision you have in mind. Include a timeframe and a detailed description. The more detailed your vision, the more real it becomes to you. When you vividly describe your vision, it excites your mind so much that you can almost feel it, taste it, hear it, and you can see it! The purpose of your vision statement is to open your eyes to what is possible, so it becomes real to you.

Once something becomes real to you, you believe that you can have it. In fact, you can; it's yours for the taking. All you

have to do is take the right steps down the path that leads to your vision. When you get off track or make a wrong turn, your vision statement will be your GPS that guides you back to the right path.

Create an Unforgettable Phrase

Capture the essence of your vision using a memorable phrase in the first paragraph of your vision statement. Summarizing your vision using a powerful phrase can greatly enhance the effectiveness of your vision statement; this phrase activates the rest of the vision in the mind of everyone that reads it.

Unlike your mission statement, your vision statement should not consist of one brief, concise sentence. Vision statements can be much longer than mission statements. The purpose is to create a mental picture, charged with emotion that can serve to energize and inspire you. Take as much space as you need to accomplish this goal.

Base your vision statement on the best possible outcome. In fact, envision something better than what you consider being the best possible outcome. Remember that the purpose of the vision statement is to inspire, energize, motivate, and stimulate your creativity, not to serve as a measuring stick for success.

The quality of your vision affects the creativity and originality of your ideas and results. A powerful vision statement should stretch your expectations and aspirations, and move you out of your comfort zone.

The following are my mission and vision statements. My vision statement illustrates how I carry out my mission on a day-to-day basis.

My Mission Statement

To create and enjoy a rewarding, successful, and charitable life and to inspire others to do the same.

My Vision Statement

My vision statement includes living a daily life of having a positive impact as a speaker, author, and personal coach by inspiring, educating, and leading people to take action and make changes in their lives. I will live my life as a perpetual student, forever learning and forever growing.

Valuing and caring for my spirit, soul, and body by living a life dedicated to integrity, trust, honesty, and benevolence towards others, and being firmly grounded in faith in God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Appreciating, caring for, and loving my family and close friends with goodness, kindness, and being an ever-present help for them at all times. Positioning myself financially to spend money on who, what, when, and how I want to.

Engaging my social self and well-being by traveling the world to experience as much of what the world has to offer. Attending plays, musicals, movies, sports events, listening to music, taking daily walks, and reading John Grisham, Mary Higgins Clark, and James Patterson mystery novels.

Writing Your Vision Statement

“And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain...” (Habakkuk 2:2).

Imagine for a moment that everything that you see in your vision for the future is taking place right now!

Action Step 1: Describe what your day-to-day life looks like over the course of a typical week. Use additional paper as needed.

This is your preliminary vision statement:

Does your initial vision statement carry out your purpose and your mission? Your mission must complement your vision, and vice versa, in every area of your life, career, personal, and spiritual. If it does not, re-examine your mission and ask yourself the following questions:

Is my mission authentic, genuine, accurate, real, and valid? Is my mission based on my heartfelt desires? If you are certain your mission is authentic, go back over your vision statement and answer the following questions:

Action Step 2: What do you find in your initial vision statement that does not match up with your stated mission?

Action Step 3: How could you improve your initial vision statement so that it complements your mission statement?

Notice how my vision spells out the specifics of how my mission is to be carried out. Look at your preliminary vision statement again; could it be more specific? See if you can improve your preliminary vision statement.

Action Step 4: Write your revised statement here.

Enriching Your Life

The purpose of your vision statement is to inspire, energize, and stimulate your creativity. It is not to gauge or measure your success; that's the role of your goals and objectives. What will you do to make your vision become a reality?

CHAPTER 9

Big Dreams, Little Steps

*I*t's easy to focus on big steps, but small steps get you moving. Big steps get you excited, but small steps with consistency get you to your destination.

Entering a new season, you turn to dreams you have been put off as you raised a family or cultivated a career. Now you take the time to rediscover your most deeply held dreams and envision how you want to spend your energy and resources to bring them to fruition.

If you have a big dream, the very thought of accomplishing your dream can be overwhelming. Where do you start? More importantly, have you written your dream down? If your dream is not written down, then it is just a fleeting thought. Daydreaming might make you feel good, but it does not get you moving. Writing down your dreams is the first step towards the new life you want for yourself.

Action Step 1: What excuses have you made for why you cannot have your dream?

Enriching Your Life

If you had unlimited resources to make your dreams come true, how would the following areas of your life look? How could you make a difference in the lives of others?

Action Step 2: Create dreams for the following areas of your life: career, finances, relationships, and health. Think big!

Career _____

Finances _____

Relationships _____

Health _____

Dream Book or Vision Board

How will you keep your dreams in the forefront of you thinking? Comedian and motivational speaker Steve Harvey suggests creating a vision board. He states a vision board is a tangible reminder of all you believe for in your life. You may like the idea of creating a dream book instead of a vision board or create both: they describe your dreams and the life you want in visual terms. These are also visible records of the continuing journey of the life you desire. They should focus on at least three of the four areas covered in Action Step 1.

Creating a dream book or vision board

You will need the following items to create your vision board:

- A poster board
- Magazines
- Scissors
- Glue or paste

Step 1: Go through your magazines and cut out pictures, images, and phrases to paste on your vision board or in your dream book. You can also choose words to represent what you want. Each image, phrase or word represents an aspect of yourself and your ideal life.

Step 2: Divide your poster board into four squares or sections. It should look like a plus sign. Each square or section represents at least the following four areas of your life in Action Step one:

- Career
- Relationships
- Health
- Finances

Label the sections as follows: top left section, Career/Finances; bottom left section, Relationships; top right section, Health; and bottom right section, Finances.

Step 3: Paste the pictures, images, and phrases in the four corresponding sections on your board.

Step 4: Look through your dream book every day. Hang or place your vision board in a place where you will see it every day. Take a picture of your vision board and put it on your wall, cell phone, and screen saver on your computer, refrigerator, and the dashboard of your car. Your vision board is a constant reminder of where you are going.

Setting Goals

Now that you've written down your dreams and created your vision board or dream book, you have clear targets. When you get clear on where you are now, it is easier to believe that you can achieve your goals.

You will use your strengths insights, and knowledge to enrich the world by achieving your goals. When making decisions about achieving new goals, you must juggle many things and look at all angles.

Action Step 1: What's the one thing that's important right now?

Setting goals requires honing in on your deepest motivations and passions and following through with real world plans for how to turn them into a new way of life.

There are two ways to describe a goal, toward something you want, or away from something you don't want. Sometimes you'll find it is easier to think about what you don't want rather than what you do want.

Your vision board and dream book give you clear targets. Your goal for each area should, not only be clear, but it must be specific. It's important to be specific about what you want. If you are not specific, you may find yourself putting time and energy into something you do not want. When you get more specific, the details of your action plan become clear.

Dr. Maxwell Maltz, the author of the classic *Psycho-Cybernetics*, said that human beings have a built-in, goal-seeking "success mechanism" that is part of the subconscious mind.

This success mechanism is constantly searching for ways to help us reach our targets and find answers to our problems.

According to Dr. Maltz, we work and feel better when our success mechanism is fully engaged and going after clear targets.

To activate this mechanism, we need to give it a specific target or a goal. Without a target, this success-seeking mechanism lies dormant, or worse, pursues targets we didn't consciously choose. When our target is vague, ambiguous, or non-existent, our success-seeking instrument can become confused, and either shut down or go after the wrong target.

S.M.A.R.T. Goals

Perhaps you've heard of or have seen the acronym SMART. It is a practical, useful, and effective way for setting goals. It is applicable mostly to your smaller, intermediate goals rather than your large, distant dreams and vision.

In his paper entitled, "The S.M.A.R.T. Way to Write Management Goals and Objectives", George T. Doran introduced the S.M.A.R.T. method for creating goals. Doran, a consultant and former Director of Corporate Planning for Washington Power Company in Spokane, Washington, published his paper in November 1981. The paper discussed the importance of objectives and the difficulty in setting them. He outlined the following criteria for creating good goals:

- *Specific* – target a specific area for improvement.
- *Measurable* – quantify, or at least suggest, an indicator of progress.
- *Assignable* – specify who will do it.
- *Realistic* – state what results can realistically be achieved, given available resources.
- *Time-related* – specify completion time of results.

Doran pointed out that not all objectives or goals must be measured. Instead, the most important thing you should focus on is the goal and its action plan.

The SMART acronym is used to describe what experts consider to be "good" goal statements because they contain most of the essential elements of getting you where you want to go.

More SMART Goals

The SMART acronym has several different variations, depending on who you ask. However, I think it is useful to look at an enhanced clarification of the SMART elements because it provides additional criteria for creating good goals.

S-Specific & Significant

M- Measurable, motivational, methodical, & meaningful

A -Action-oriented & achievable

R -Realistic & relevant

T- Time-bound & tangible

Specific: if you are going to start shooting toward something, you must have a clear target. That's what goals will help you do; it's taking your dreams and vision, and giving it the plans to make them happen. The more specific your goals, the more obvious and specific your next action steps become. Vague goals lead to vague steps or no steps at all.

Significant: significant goals are the ones that will make positive differences in your life and the lives of others. If a goal is not important to you, why are you even giving it any thought?

Measurable: making your goal measurable helps you see your progress, evaluate your results, identify any problems, and recognize if you are moving in the right direction and how far you still need to go. Some types of goals are easy to measure, like saving a certain amount of money each month, or reading a book each month, while other goals aren't directly measurable.

For example, if your goal is to improve your relationship with your teenager, how do you measure it?

One option is to use some rating system. For instance, you say your relationship with your teenager is 5, and your goal is to make it a 7.

The problem is, these types of ratings are very subjective and can change from day to day, especially dealing with a teenager, because it doesn't give very good feedback.

A better option is to focus your goal on specific actions you can take that will help you achieve your overall objective. You might practice the “3 small steps to a better relationship approach,” every day. The three steps are goals you can easily measure.

One component of my vision is to write best-selling books. However, to measure my progress, I set a goal to write every day.

Motivational: The real purpose of a goal is to inspire you to move forward toward the life that you want and to help you grow into the person, you need to be to live that life. Goals need to inspire you to take action and make progress. One of the best ways to make goals motivational is to ask yourself *why* you want to achieve these goals.

Methodical: means you need to develop a strategy for how you are going to accomplish your goals.

Meaningful: make sure they are your goals. You’ll be more motivated to achieve goals that are truly yours, rather than goals imposed on you by someone else.

Action-Oriented: your goal should focus on actions you can take that are in your direct control. Be clear about the actions you need to take to do your part in the process.

Achievable: your goal should be achievable. It may not be easy; just that you can have a reasonable expectation of achieving it.

Realistic: realistic is another word for achievable. The actions associated with your goals are things that you can do.

Relevant: good goals are relevant to you and your life. Again, they are meaningful and significant to your life, the lives of others.

Time-Bound: establishing a clear deadline for your goals adds a sense of urgency and motivation.

Trackable: tracking your goals helps you determine if you are going in the right direction. It prompts you to make any necessary adjustments along the way.

Long and Short-term Goals

The best SMART goals are focused, specific, short-term targets that involve things that are under your direct control. Goals are powerful achievement tools.

Your longer-term vision and dreams keep you from losing sight of the big picture. These long-term goals give you overall direction, motivation, and guidance. When you combine your short-term SMART goals with your long-term goals, you can make tremendous progress.

Setting goals and planning bridges the gap between your dreams and desires. Your purpose and mission inspire you to take steps towards your vision and dreams every day. Taking small steps consistently every day gets you moving forward, and you will eventually arrive at your destination.

Finally, your goals need to be defined by you in a way that is consistent with your vision, dream, aspirations, values, and resources. What can you do during the next two weeks that can move you toward your dreams?

Action Step 1: Set SMART goals for one of the targets on your vision board or in your dream book for the next month.

Action Step 2: What sacrifice or sacrifices are you willing to make to accomplish your goals?

Setting goals to achieve your dreams keep you on the path to your destiny. Your immediate goals focus on a predetermined target. You are clear about where you want to go and how you're going to get there. Accomplishing these immediate goals is a part of your ongoing growth process to reach your full potential and enrich your life. Your goals are one more part of your journey to move you toward your vision, and closer to fulfilling your dreams.

Armed with clear-cut strategies for turning dreams into reality, you embark on your journey. You forge ahead to deliver the books you need to write, the classes you need to attend, the songs you need to write, the relationships you need to terminate, the cakes you need to bake, and the lives you need to impact.

Know from the outset that dreams do not come cheaply. It will take some or even substantial sacrifices of time, effort, and financial resources. The risk that is required to realize your dream might frighten you, but this is an opportunity to find the time and resources you'll need.

The most important element of goal setting is commitment. If you do not commit to your goals, you are unlikely to reach them, and your journey comes to a dead end.



PART III
POSSIBILITIES



CHAPTER 10

JOURNEY TO DESTINY

*D*reamers determine their destinies. We know where we are going because we can see our destination before we get there. We have a powerful vision and dreams that are exciting, and we've set goals to get us there. One of the most significant factors in pursuing and achieving our goals is commitment.

A commitment is a lot more than assenting or confirming that we have a vision and a dream and plans to pursue them. A commitment is covenantal, and by that I mean, in our heart there's a promise, pledge, or vow, we've made to pursue the Divinely-inspired purpose, vision, and dreams we believe God has given us. We accepted this as a responsibility, and we've dedicated ourselves to its fulfillment. In so doing, we are faithfully pursuing every available avenue to get us there.

Achieving your goals requires a significant investment of time, effort, focus, emotional exertion and personal sacrifice. As you embark on this leg of your journey, have you considered what you need to bring your vision and dreams to fruition? Most people underestimate the enormous resources they need to reach their destination. If you misjudge the amount of energy, spiritual strength, emotional support, education, knowledge, and financial resources you need, you may soon end up stranded on some desolate stretch of highway.

A Call to New Things

To recognize that you are truly entering a phase of your journey that requires new expectations, new priorities, new road maps, you must step into this new path and walk the walk and talk the talk. Truly you are a woman destined to transition into new roles that reflect your deepening priorities.

You may be anxiously looking forward to moving on to the next phase of your life, and you envision new motivating, stimulating growth experiences on the horizon. Your overlapping work experiences and personal development in other areas of interest is moving you towards a long succession of future events, people, and places. Surely, you begin to understand more and more why you exist, why you serve a Higher Purpose, and how enriching your life, will enrich the lives of others.

Be it, your innocence or mature awareness of this segment of your journey, you reevaluate your current goals, attributes, interests, and passions, and you understand what to build upon and what to discard. Your respect for the gifts that you bring and listening carefully to your desires re-energizes you. This surge of inspiration prompts you to develop brand new goals; goals that will define your life as you venture forward.

As a woman on her way to her destiny, you are “sensible,” and you think and act with awareness. You are determined, experienced, and filled with the knowledge that comes from living with eyes, heart, and hands wide open. These are the qualities that help you reach in new directions, make wiser choices, and evaluate your priorities. The choices you’ve made thus far may not be the ones you make as you work with new goals on the road to a new and exciting territory.

This time of transition is a time to pause, reassess your abilities, the new people, and new places that await your arrival. The place of discovery, transformation, and greatness that awaits you requires the wisdom of reflection and ignites your determination to move ahead into this new season of opportunity.

Embracing Transitions

You reflect on how to bring forth all your skills and experiences into a new role you may not have considered before. Discovering new roles and creating new goals is not ego-driven, but a process of unfolding parts of your life for development. Some of your best work can only happen in your more mature years after you have developed the experience, skills, and insights that you'll need to get you there.

I believe our strongest desires come from a divine place, which gives us extraordinary energy and fills us with a sense of purpose. By spending quality time reflecting on what brings us joy and meaning, we are working on one more important part of fulfilling our destiny.

Action Step 1: List the new role or roles you desire and envision for yourself?

When you receive a divine assignment or new marching orders, you have to zero in on your mission. You can have it all, but not all at once. Patience is an important lesson in the transitional, goal-setting stage of the journey. Writing down who you envision yourself to be and exactly what you need to get you there makes this exercise a defining activity during this time of transition.

Action Step 2: What actions do you need to complete to develop the new role or roles you have listed?

The belief that you hold about where you are on your journey either opens your life up to infinite possibilities or hinders you from manifesting your true potential. You cannot permit yourself to fall into a rut, and you must continue to aspire to something greater.

Our strengths, skills, and intelligence allow us to reorient ourselves to new roles and master the work to fulfill these new roles. The days, months, and years that lie behind us were rich with experience, learning, confidence-building, family making, personal discovery, and opportunities, that led us to this moment. It all comes together to guide us on a new journey whose time has come.

Mature focused women on the journey to their destiny, and are ready to apply their intelligence to a strategy for this new season. To realize a critical truth and act on it is to make a choice that is deemed a destiny decision.

Perhaps you instinctively or intuitively know that you have completed your duties, assignments, and mission for the previous leg of your journey. You know when it's time to leave, when to close some chapters in your life, and when it's time to tie up loose ends so you can leave those things graciously in the past. It's the only way to enter the new seasonal part of your journey and move ahead, that is, to begin in the best possible manner. You have to take action and let go of some deep-set ideas about success, people, burdens, hindrances, and other impediments that are familiar red flags that continually wave for your attention.

Then there are the signposts that seem to appear in your path with ever-increasing frequency. You can no longer continue to reopen or keep your foot in a door that now needs to be permanently shut. Moving forward is impossible while looking backward.

Action Step 3: Have you considered what you need to discard that is hindering your progress?

Even though our journey from birth to now is a continuous progression of events, each leg of our journey comes with its unique challenges, opportunities, and rewards. As we move towards our dreams, we need to educate ourselves continually. If we don't put ourselves in positions to learn, we run the risk of having to postpone or, worse yet, abandon our dreams because we lack the know-how or wherewithal required to accomplish our goals.

Specific Instructions

There's knowledge we can harness and actions we can take to get us successfully to our destination. Acquiring the knowledge we need comes in different forms. To reach our goals, we may need training and knowledge that comes by getting a formal education at a college or university. There's vocational training available to equip us with the training and expertise we may need. Libraries, bookstores, and the Internet have a myriad of books on subjects too numerous to mention to educate us. Finally, there are conferences, seminars, and workshops that offer a seemingly infinite number of topics.

Author and life coach Lisa Nichols says she attended the same conference forty-two times, and it still did not give her everything she needed to know, but it was a great start. There's a powerful and persuasive message in Lisa's perseverance. Her dauntless resolve, diligence, tenacity, dedication, endurance, and devotion to get the skills, knowledge, and help she needed settles any arguments and dispels all doubts about the type of commitment she made to achieve her goals.

Your new roles and activities in this new season of your life are achieved by plotting out a specific, real life plan of action and finding a mentor or a coach to introduce you to new territory. Perhaps there's someone in your life who can or does act as a model that you can reflect on her unshakeable self-assuredness. This person displayed the confidence, skills, experience and the divine guidance to support her work. That's the attitude you need to take for yourself.

Mentors can be very critical in your life, and you are probably blessed to have wise women around you to guide you and inspire you. Tap into those wells of wisdom that surround you. You need mentoring that recognizes your gifts as an experienced, intelligent, ambitious individual. By now you have identified your gift and your passion, and you are looking for the right platform.

Coaching and Mentoring: The Difference

We all need help along the way, and mentoring and coaching are additional forms of education that can assist us on our journey. We can work with a coach like Lisa Nichols who can walk through the process with us and helps us design and implement useful approaches for accomplishing our goals. Mentors and other motivational allies are important for us during these transitionally periods in our life. Finding a mentor and actively seeking out someone who has unique insights into a role or your passion that will help you in your new role is important.

The terms coaching and mentoring are not interchangeable. They are similar but are not the same. While similar in their support of someone's development, they are very different in practices and duration. Mentoring is a long-term relationship where the focus is on supporting the growth and development of the mentee. The mentor is a source of wisdom, teaching, and support, but not someone who observes and advises on specific actions or behavioral changes in daily work.

Coaching is typically a relationship of finite duration where the focus is on strengthening or eliminating specific behaviors in the here and now. Coaches are engaged to help professionals' correct behaviors that detract from their performance or to strengthen those that support stronger performance around a set of activities.

Both mentoring and coaching are incredibly valuable in providing developmental support, however, one offers a high-level guidance for the long-term development, and the other helps

you improve immediately. There are significant differences between coaching and mentoring, and they are:

Difference #1

Coaching is task oriented: The focus is on concrete issues, such as managing more effectively, speaking more articulately, and learning how to think strategically. These skills require a content expert (coach) who is capable of teaching the person how to develop these skills.

Mentoring is relationship oriented: Mentors in either a formal mentoring program or informal relationship focus on the person, their career, and support for individual growth and maturity, while the coach is job focused and performance oriented. A mentor is not a coach.

The mentor seeks to provide a safe environment where the mentee shares whatever issues affect her professional and personal success. Although specific learning goals provides a basis for creating the relationship, its focus includes things, such as balancing work, self-confidence, and how the personal influences the professional.

Difference #2

Coaching is short term: A coach can successfully coach with a person for a short period, maybe even just a few sessions. The coaching lasts for as long as is needed, depending on the purpose of the coaching relationship.

Mentoring is long term: to be successful, requires time in which both partners can get to know one another and build a climate of trust. Mentoring relationships can last nine months to a year.

Difference #3

Coaching improves performance: The purpose of coaching is to improve the individual’s performance on the job. Coaching involves either enhancing current skills or acquiring new skills. Once the individual successfully acquires the skills, the coach is no longer needed.

Mentoring is development driven: Its purpose is to develop the individual not only for the current job but also for the future. This distinction differentiates the role of the immediate supervisor and the mentor. It also reduces the possibility of creating conflict between the employee’s supervisor and the mentor. A mentor is typically not an advocate of yours in the work environment: A mentor is not there to support you on short-term problems, and a mentor is not a counselor.

Difference #4

Coaching is results oriented: Coaching can be conducted almost immediately on any given topic. A coach observes and advises on specific actions or behavior. A coach is trying to direct a person to some result. A coach monitors the progress and gives advice for effectiveness.

Mentoring is destination oriented: Mentors help you see the destination. They take a long-range view on your growth and development. They do not give you a map to get there. A mentor can be a sounding board and give advice, but they do not give you “how to” advice.

Action Step 1: List one or two skills that a coach can help you with?

Choosing a Mentor

You must be selective in who you choose as a mentor or a role model. You should develop criteria to determine the “worthiness” of a model for you to follow. The following steps are suggestions for developing criteria for choosing a mentor or role model:

1. A good mentor must not only display professional excellence and possess skills sets from which you can learn from, but they must also demonstrate character worthy of emulating.
2. A good mentor is a worthy example. We become like the people we admire. For that reason, we should take great care when determining who we ask to mentor us. When you look for mentors scrutinize their personal lives as carefully as their public performance. They influence your values.
3. A good mentor requires access and availability. You must have time with a mentor to ask questions and learn from their answers. You should be in a position to observe them up close and personal.
4. When you're starting out in a new job, or project, nearly all your questions can be answered by someone two or three levels ahead of you. Find new mentors for your new level of growth as you progress in your development.
5. A good mentor provides friendship and support, unselfishly working to help you reach your potential. Who wants someone to guide them who is only interested in themselves and who is not interested in you? On the other hand, you will find that a wise leader and a positive friend will speed you on your journey.
6. A good mentor possesses wisdom. Their experience, understanding, and knowledge help you to solve problems. We can sabotage our lives, our careers due to lack of experience, flaws, imperfections, and shortcomings.

Take advantage of what they know. These people have great insights and wisdom to share. Be open to constructive

criticism and feedback. Coaches and mentors are usually willing to answer questions. When you meet with them, ask insightful questions such as:

- What is the one thing you wish you'd known when you started?
- When you face disappointment, what do you do?
- How do you recover from a setback?
- What is the wisest step I could take in my career right now?

Role Models

There are role models that stand as a beacon for contemporary women like you and me, who seek to grow into our highest potential. Look around you and tap into those successful people around you, in the workplace, at your church, your government officials, and other community leaders.

You are an astute, intelligent, woman of integrity, and action. Draw on the priceless, skills, insights and experiences from the first half of your journey. Allow the new season of creativity and productivity to move you closer to your destiny.

Surround yourself with people who have something to teach you. If your goal is to share your expertise and experience as a public speaker, spend time observing other professionals on YouTube, Internet sites, public television, DVDs.

Action Step 1: Who are your role models?

Reaching Out

Writing a letter to someone who resonates strongly with you is an excellent way to introduce yourself to a subject matter expert. Tell her how you selected her and why you think she is an important source on your journey to redo your life. Be bold! You're carving out a new life, and you have every right to aim for the top to get advice and inspiration. Make use of the social and business connections you have developed over the years.

Where you are, is where you are. Where you want to be is significantly more important. To get where you want to be, you will need to be more knowledgeable or more skilled than you are already. If your dream is to be a professional musician, you will need musical training to reach a level of proficiency of a professional.

As human beings, the student and the teacher are equal. As it pertains to the knowledge and training you seek, you are not equal. The teacher obviously has more experience and knowledge. Make yourself a sponge and aim to soak up all the knowledge teachers impart to you. This step tends to test your resolve. It is not unusual for individuals to question their dreams or give up all together at this point. Maybe there are aspects of the training you do not like, and sometimes you have to take additional courses that do not interest you, but they are part of the required curriculum.

Applying what you Learn

The completion of your training is only the beginning or the starting point toward your "greatness." The next move in the attainment of your dreams involves the application of your knowledge and training. If you do not apply your knowledge, there is a two-fold loss, firstly, you cannot reap the fruits of your skills and knowledge, and secondly, the rest of the world loses the opportunity to partake of what you have to offer.

There's no limit to what you can become, and this learning process moves continuously in a cycle over the course of your life. So let's apply these steps to an example. Suppose your

dream is to be a makeup artist for the entertainment industry, but this may not be your present occupation. However, this desire burns within the very core of your being. Your faith moves you to begin this journey to achieve your desire to become a makeup artist. You will certainly achieve your desire or better; this is faith at its highest level.

Next, you write your dream in your dream book or create a vision board. In setting up your visual road maps, you give your dream book and vision board as many details as possible. You might include makeup for television or a big budget movie production, popular glamor magazines, actors and pop stars. The more details you give your dream, the greater the clarity of your vision of becoming a makeup artist.

The next step is to begin your research. What kind of training is necessary to be a makeup artist in Hollywood? The Internet is an excellent source of information. Are there special schools that provide this kind of training? If so, seek the best that's available. Is there a campus close to you? What about financial aid? These are the kind of questions you will ask and answer with your research. Document your findings in your dream book and on your vision board.

Enroll in the school as soon as possible and begin your training and studies. Attending classes is one of the hardest parts of the journey but commit to giving it 100% at this stage.

Your partnership with God is without limits. Now when you perform your skill as a makeup artist, there's something special about what you do and when you do it. You and God are sharing the same vision, and you express God's love in your new career. You realize your dream and the world has another beautiful face.

Strange Teachers

Life sometimes presents us with strange teachers; this is the knowledge that comes from failing, making mistakes, and falling flat on our faces. These "educators" are the struggles, hurts, and disappointments we experience that test our faith in God and courage in ourselves. How solid is my resolve? Can

I bounce back, or should I just throw in the towel? Or will I get up, dust off my resilience, and take another step toward my dreams? Successful people are often those who can see the good, even when things go badly.

We have dreams, and we aspire to a higher level of living; the lessons we learn and the experiences we gain at each juncture of our journey prepare us for what's ahead. Getting to our destinations only matter if the educational investment we've made in ourselves enables us to maintain and withstand the fiery missiles from that virulent adversary on the mountaintop. What we learn and observe, while getting to the mountaintop, will sustain us for future growth and success.

Each of these modes of learning is valuable, but what does education look like to you? When you look at the goals you've set for yourself, now you understand more about the journey to achieving your goals.

Action Step 1: In the previous chapter, you set goals for one of the targets on your vision board, what do you need to learn to accomplish this goal?

Navigating the Journey

If we fail to appreciate the significance of what it will take for us to rally all the resources we need for our journey, we could find ourselves in one of the following predicaments:

- 1) Our personal and current career responsibilities may make unexpected and greater demands on our resources.

- 2) We are unprepared for the negativity, or the lack of moral support, from the people in our lives. The negative energy created by criticism and complaints is harmful and damaging. It is subtle and should be averted, stopped, and avoided at all cost because it is contagious. If there are negative people in your life, discuss it with them. Be honest, and let them know how you feel and how their negative talk affects you.
- 3) Spend more time with positive people: it takes more time, energy, and effort to overcome the deleterious effects of negative situations.
- 4) We get busy pursuing our goals, and we neglect our spiritual lives, specifically our prayer and meditation time with the Lord. Now we face a challenge, and we need God's divine guidance to deal with it.

Staying plugged into God's guidance is our most important source and resource to help us navigate this journey and overcome the challenges we encounter. Placing this essential step at the top of our daily to-do lists, agendas, or calendars will not stop the challenges from coming, but we will be better prepared to deal with them.

Your Path to Success

The choices and quality of the decisions we make along the way will impact our progress. Most people do not succeed on this journey because they are unable to find the right path tailored to their personalities, aspirations, personal situations, strengths, weaknesses, and, worst yet, lack of correct information.

Steering your journey to success requires self-awareness: and knowing yourself is the result of many successes, failures, twists, and turns, and identifying your likes and dislikes. These events created situations that caused you to change and develop a new sense of awareness of your unique design.

Strengths, Passions, and People

Recognizing your unique pattern for success, and using your strengths and passion, will be well worth learning as you prepare for what's ahead on your journey. Your distinctive blueprint will help you accomplish the ultimate payoff: successfully achieving your vision and dreams beyond your expectations.

The value of your strengths, passions, and relationships are important because they are at the very heart of all you do to succeed. Knowing what you want and what you're great at is more than half the battle.

Allowing your strengths, passions, and people to pull you in a better direction activates that part of your success mechanism that you prefer; the greatest asset on your journey is people.

In *The 5 Patterns of Extraordinary Careers*, authors James Citrin and Richard Smith describes how Howard Schultz, former chairman and CEO of Starbucks, leveraged the three elements of strengths, passions, and people to build the highly successful Starbucks Enterprise. Finding the right fit for his strengths, passions, and people set Schultz on a path destined for greatness.

Pay, Prestige, and Purpose

Madelyn, a sharp, hardworking young woman, found the right fit for her strengths, passions, and work with people that she admired and respected in the Renewable Energy and Green Jobs section of the company. She was promoted early and often in the company, and eventually landed in a position to use her gifts and talents as an environmental specialist in the company.

As she began to settle into her position, an opportunity appeared that promised to accelerate the rate at which Madelyn achieved her goal of becoming a director in the company. Even though marketing was not one of her strengths or passions, the position came with perks, prestige, pay, peer influence, and, unbeknownst to Madelyn, pitfalls as well. The timing seemed perfect since she had gotten impatient with the pace of her

journey, and occasionally frustrated. This opportunity promised to solve this problem.

Prestige, compensation, peer influence emerged as powerful factors in evaluating this opportunity and clouded Madelyn's judgment. Her decisions were only as good as the information she received. God gives us signposts along the way to help us evaluate opportunities that come our way.

One of the signposts Madelyn ignored in evaluating this opportunity was the fact this opportunity did not help her carry out her mission of mentoring young women and girls at her church and the local community center. God's information is always flawless, failsafe, and will shine the light on the pitfalls and potholes.

The seductive influence of money, prestige, and peer pressure led Madelyn to evaluate this opportunity based on the wrong criteria. In so doing, she forgot or ignored her purpose, strengths, passions, and personal mission. The major pitfall of this opportunity was it would influence Madelyn to delay or abandon her life's purpose and personal mission altogether.

Eventually, Madelyn realized these pitfalls were taking her further away from her true desires. Frustration sets in, along with anger, self-pity, and its other kinfolk who are too numerous to mention. Allowing frustration to push her in a new direction that's failed to take Madelyn toward her goals is a dream-stealer and a vision-killer.

Unless Madelyn seeks God's wisdom to get herself back on track, she may never recover enough to successfully redirect her efforts towards her purpose, mission, vision, and dreams. After all, God wants her to succeed because there's something He needs her to do. He did not change His mind because she took a wrong turn.

Unlike Madelyn, Howard Schultz left behind pay and prestige of a promising career at Xerox to pursue his passion; he believed that true success results from finding a career track that is personally rewarding. Schultz found the right fit for his strengths, passions, and people, and combined his deepest desires with his strongest skills; and that allowed him to reach extraordinary success. God allows us to meet the right people

at the right time, situations orchestrated by Him, that give us the best opportunities to use the gifts and talents He gives us.

The 'right fit' allows us to step up and contribute something startling and significant to society.

Action Step 1: What opportunity have you allowed to take you off the path to your dreams?

Action Step 2: What steps did you take to get back on track?

CHAPTER 11

DOORS OF OPPORTUNITIES

The growth you've experienced up to now is invaluable in preparing you for the changes, hard work, and the opportunities that lie ahead. Your awareness of your strengths, passions, interest, purpose, and decision-making style are the assets you will use to explore, evaluate, and create new opportunities.

Achieving your goals is as much about the process as the destination and the process is not always in a straight line. At times, it may appear to be a maze or detours will appear that require alternate routes. We all get impatient and want to get to the top of the mountain or our next "waypoint" yesterday, but each goal we set to get us to our destination comes with new challenges.

Our lives go through different cycles, and we transition into a new phase with novel approaches to territory we mastered before, such as learning, integrating, building and sharing our gifts and talents with others. The work we have done up until now has borne much fruit, but our new season, our wisdom, and our experience will take us to another level. We move up to a new level with new opportunities, new missions, new roles, new passions, new priorities, and new goals with more resources at our disposal.

The same goal we achieved yesterday now requires a different set of skills, resources, and timing. So there's a time when we need to pace ourselves on our way to achieving the

next goal. The goals we've achieved come with a bigger part of our dream, but the challenges are more daunting; when we accomplish one goal, it gives way to a new opportunity, and suddenly our next challenge is before us.

Evaluating Opportunities

“For a wide door of opportunity for effectual [Service] has opened to me [there, a great and promising one], and [there are] many adversaries.” (1 Corinthians 16:9, AMP).

Establishing criteria for evaluating the opportunities you will accept is an essential part of this process. You should know which opportunities to embrace and which ones to avoid, because not every opportunity is for you. You should ignore opportunities that are outside of your purpose, interests, passions, and strengths.

The criteria you establish for accepting and rejecting opportunities is an important step to keep you moving forward. Opportunities not related to achieving your goals steal your time and resources, and make it harder for you to focus on your vision. Evaluate and establish criteria for your opportunities prayerfully. Farnsworth and Lawhead suggest that the quality of a decision depends on the information you plan to use, but the information does not necessarily say anything about the outcome.

The evaluation process involves specifying the objectives of our goals and mission and identifying the internal and external factors that are favorable or unfavorable to achieving the objectives.

The effort and energy expended exploring opportunities is an important part of the evaluation process. The additional cost includes more than dollars and cents; it includes your intangible assets, such as your personal, emotional, and physical efforts. These are very important areas to be considered in the evaluation process. Too often, without an evaluation process, we misjudge the importance of various aspects of an opportunity that we failed to consider.

Action Step 1: How do you evaluate the opportunities that come your way?

Timing and Opportunities

Occasionally opportunities come our way and, on the face of them, they don't appear to be related to our purpose or mission. Such an opportunity came to me in 2015. My neighbor wanted to donate some personal items to charity, and I offered to take them to a local mission.

After accessing the organization's website to get the address and donation instructions, I scrolled through the services offered by the mission, and I was especially interested in the career services department. I called and left a message regarding my interest in volunteering as an instructor for one of the workshops.

When I spoke with the career services administrator, he informed me there were no workshop instructor positions available. I requested a tour of the facility, and during the tour, I decided to volunteer to assist with their administrative duties. Approximately nine months later, in 2016, one of the workshop instructors resigned, and I was asked to fill the position.

An essential component of my daily agenda is asking God to place people in my pathway to bring facts and information into my life to help me fulfill my purpose. Volunteering at the mission is an answer to prayer.

Without question, while writing this book, I'm exercising my writing gift; in the meanwhile, the speaking gift is lying dormant, and on the verge of becoming atrophied due to lack of use. Today, I'm exercising both gifts and making a difference in the lives of the participants in the workshops.

As you move forward on your journey, be aware of signals, signposts, and flares along the way: all three communicate information in some form or another. For instance, a flare is a flammable object that emits a bright light that you can see from far away. These flares are used by motorists and highway safety personnel as signals to indicate distress, danger, difficulty, or trouble ahead. For you, the flare is that “light bulb” or “aha” moment that hints at or indicates a future opportunity or trouble.

While evaluating an opportunity, you recognize the possibility of a future opportunity. Can this beacon be pointing you towards a new and bigger future opportunity?

I received such a “light bulb” moment related to volunteering at the mission. During my public service career, I volunteered as a trainer with the City Personnel department’s Cadre of Trainers. These trainers are a group of highly skilled employees who offer their expertise to train other employees as part of the personnel department’s Career Development Program.

I saw an opportunity to share my expertise with the mission as a volunteer workshop instructor. Volunteering at the mission, I can assist men and women who are in the process or redirecting their lives. Focusing on my purpose means I’m investing my time, resources, and efforts pursuing opportunities that cross my path.

With new opportunities, you are influenced not only by where you’re going, but where you’ve been. The danger in this approach is that new opportunities don’t change the old you. You cannot function on past glory.

Whenever we get an opportunity, no matter the arena, we are expected to produce some level of increase. With every new opportunity is the chance to harness our abilities along with our creativity, thereby, opening the door to more opportunities. The next time you get an opportunity, it could be the gateway to the next level that gets you closer to your destiny. The opportunity is a chance not only to succeed but advance.

Opposition, Obstacles, and Opportunities

Maybe you are one of those people who thrive and grow under opposition. Or you may be a woman who is at your best when faced with challenges, obstacle, and tough decisions. Challenges, opposition, and obstacles test our purpose, strengths, and passions, but they make us stronger.

The next time you're in the midst of a challenge or a difficult situation, remind yourself here's an opportunity to change and grow. No matter what you have gone through in your life-- or what you are currently going through-- you have an opportunity to grow from it.

It can sometimes be difficult to see the opportunity in the midst of your unhappy, unpleasant, and painful experience, but the opportunity is there. You must be willing to look for it and pursue it.

Confronting problems as opportunities for growth is one of the great lessons, and it is part of the journey toward our destiny. The wisdom that we gain from each difficulty is an invaluable part of our growth. You may trip, stumble, and fail, but it's not how many times you fall that matters; it's what you learn each time you get up because each failure is a lesson in disguise and is a clue to your future success.

People waste all kinds of opportunities because they allow fear to block the path to achieving their dreams. When encountering these road blocks, it may seem like you are unable to get beyond these temporary barriers to find a new route to get you back on the main highway.

We cannot allow fear or a familiar challenge donned in a different garment to deceive or deter us. For instance, take the new phenomenon associated with electronic devices, known by the acronym FOMO.

Opportunity Addiction: FOMO

Fear of missing out, (FOMO), has recently become a popular concept. FOMO is a modern day anxiety characterized by fearing social and professional exclusion. Much like gambling,

FOMO is a form of addiction to perceived opportunity. Think about it; compulsively checking your phone, Facebook page, or email is more of an addiction than a fear response.

There are ways opportunity addictions can negatively affect your life, relationships, and your career:

- Getting involved in too many projects.
- Checking emails, text messages too often; not paying attention to your spouse.

The thought of missing out on an opportunity may limit your actions toward an actual opportunity. Opportunity addiction distracts you from doing the things that matter by allowing you to take an easy way out or causing you to miss out altogether.

Action Step 1: Why do you think we grow more from struggles and challenges?

Your intelligence and experience gives you the ability to embrace hardship as an opportunity and not a reason to faint, quit or throw in the towel. As you continue to move into this new stretch of your journey, you recognize the valuable lessons hiding within every challenge.

When we emerge from these “waypoints of learning,” there will be a Helping Hand to lead us or to pick us up. Even though we may have to return to one particular lesson time after time, but from each revisit, we will become stronger and more compassionate along the way.

Undaunted, you see problems as opportunities to learn, develop, and stretch beyond your current boundaries of knowledge, experience, and Faith, knowing that every challenge is there for your ultimate good. Obstacles and hard times are calls

to action. As we listen to the urge to move on, we do our homework about new directions that ignites the most passion, and we step into the new path. The first step is a risk, but it's a risk worth taking because there are wonders further on up the road.

Occasionally, the greatest insights emerge from mistakes made and wasted opportunities. Identifying opportunities for success, in the context of obstacles, can clarify directions and choices. The surrounding conditions, circumstances, or events that form the environments within which the obstacles exist or take place can simplify decisions, choices, and changes. Is it possible that opposition and opportunities alike challenge us to draw from our inventory that which we might have overlooked or ignored?

Creating Opportunities

Embracing and developing your creativity during these testing and unpleasant times is another opportunity to grow. Disappointments, setbacks, and unfortunate experiences give us an opportunity to turn our pain into gain. The people who look at their unpleasant, experiences creatively open themselves up to more opportunities that move them closer to their destination.

If you trace or look for the value in a bad experience, you will always be able to learn something from it. Understandingly, it's difficult to see something positive or creatively while you're in the middle of a negative experience, but pause, reflect, meditate, and give the insight time to come forth.

Action Step 1: In the past how have you used an unpleasant or difficult experience as a springboard for using your creativity?

As we continue to gain exposure to a variety of events related to our visions and purpose, more doors of opportunity open for us. One of the unique opportunities and responsibilities we have is to be lights in our world: and we begin this process by looking for opportunities that exist in unmet, ignored, overlooked, or unnoticed needs.

Ultimately, our purpose in life is to make a difference in the lives of others. Using our gifts, talents, abilities, and experiences to solve a problem or meet a need may open the door to an opportunity, which is obscured or hidden by the problem or need. Looking at our gifts and talents more creatively to solve the problems and meet needs will lead to additional opportunities, and increase our influences as leaders.

Successful leaders are constantly looking for an edge, and they do not limit their opportunities by ignoring unique or unusual environments. The marketplace is an ideal location to explore potential sources of untapped opportunities. There are opportunities that give us advantages in the marketplace, and there are some that may cause us to fall flat on our faces.

Action Step1: What types of obstacles are prevalent in the marketplace that can undermine your goals and mission?

Ambitious people seek out different environments and learn whatever they can to gain new insights, hear fresh perspectives, and uncover new opportunities. There are leaders with wisdom to share and peers who have great insight from their experiences in exploring new marketplaces. Successful people take advantage of what these people know. To not prepare for the new marketplace is almost disrespectful of the opportunity.

We should appreciate and surround ourselves with people who have something to teach us. Intentionally seeking wisdom

and insight from others, we learn and continue to grow, and we begin to see opportunities we would have otherwise missed.

Turning Points and Intersections

One day, you realize you are not looking forward to new goals or new challenges, and you feel you are no longer in a place that's conducive to your growth. Perhaps this sense of dissatisfaction with your current surroundings is a nudge from the Lord that it's time to move on. Even though today's favorite methods of communications are text messages and emails, God is still speaking to us in a still, small voice.

Further analysis of your current surrounding leads you to identify the positive and negative sides of your present circumstances. You have a strong sense to pursue your dreams and vision more directly, but that requires exploring new settings and different locations.

As you prayerfully consider the concept of exploring opportunities in a new environment, the feeling of dissatisfaction begins to dissipate: and it is possible your gifts, talents, and experiences have equipped you to solve a problem in a nearby community, across town, or the nation.

Arriving at this crossroad, you now have to decide on what direction to take: should you go straight, turn left, turn right, or, God forbid, turn back or park. Too often, people complicate things because they can't decide which way to go. Learning to manage choices and decision-making are important skills, no matter where you are in life.

Choices, Alternatives, and Changes

Decision-making involves several steps, investigations, analyses, and making conscious choices among two or more alternatives. Your goals are an outgrowth of your dreams, missions, and visions and these goals provide the basis for making decisions.

Once you identify the problem or opportunity you are facing, you are in a better position to make a decision. The problem

may be the difference between what exists in your current situation and what may exist in another situation. Is it time for a change?

Sometimes it takes an unpleasant or bad experience for us to face the changes we need to make in our lives. These difficulties make us face the fact that we need to change. Maybe this is an opportunity to turn our life around. Unfortunately, we don't usually think our way to positive change; change requires more than mental assent, it requires action. Difficulties influence our thoughts and can help us see the truth about our behavior, our circumstances, and why we need to change.

Change is an inescapable part of life, but what are some of the forces that require change? Some forces can lead to significant changes in your journey. Some forces consist of internal and external pressures or opportunities, which influence change.

Problems and opportunities surface in various ways, and they do not appear in convenient forms. For instance, you receive information about a critical need in a neighboring community that can use your expertise, or a key member of your team suddenly resigns, or a customer cancels an important contract that affects the funding for a project. These situations may be considered a problem or perceived as an opportunity.

For instance, some years ago Donald G. Fisher, a San Francisco real estate businessman, purchased a pair of Levi cords and found they were the wrong size. He asked his wife to exchange them for a pair in the same style and his size. His wife could not find them in his size and the same style. Fisher perceived an opportunity, and he opened a store that carried every size and style of cords that Levis Strauss made: and that store became known as the Gap.

In arriving at a decision, you search for alternatives; first by looking at familiar choices in previous situations. If these alternatives are unsuitable, you explore less familiar possibilities, which may require creative thinking.

During your search for solutions, you may face certain constraints that limit your area of influence. These constraints are barriers that preclude certain choices that might otherwise

be possible. The two most common constraints involve time and money.

You need to decide by a certain date, and unlimited funds are not available. This situation imposes constraints on an otherwise desirable alternative, and the local government imposed other constraints and regulations.

Another choice may have an impact on your family and may trigger the need for the family to become involved in the decision. This decision-making process leads to the logical choice and the implementation of one of the alternatives; moving to a new location.

One of the advantages of being in a new environment is finding and creating opportunities to grow. Such favorable conditions will help you solve an existing problem, or meet a critical need.

If you decide to change your environment, should this include changing yourself? Do you risk taking old thought patterns, mindsets, and experiences into the new environment? Knowing what to discard and what to retain are important decisions. If you leave one of these factors out of the process, growth will be slow. Putting both your growth and the environment together at the same time could accelerate and increase your chance for success.

When you are in the right place at the right time, and most importantly in God's timing, you can gain access to the kinds of opportunities that matter. Successful careers are not the result of a lucky break, but from a consistent series of opportunities, hard work, and God's favor. Successful experiences in one situation may expose you to opportunities in a new environment.

CHAPTER 12

NEW PLACES AND NEW FACES

*T*here's much to learn when you go into a new environment, and that requires some basic research and investigating. Scanning your new surroundings is an effective way to gather information about the conditions, inhabitants, and the new marketplace. Getting an accurate sense of your new surroundings and the people will not be easy. Your most reliable compass at this point is the data you gather by your observations and your interactions with the inhabitants.

General and Specific Environments

The general environment is accessible to everyone. All organizations and organized groups share a common environment, consisting of the economic and governmental sectors. The events that occur in the general environment affect all organizations and groups in the specific environment. Specific environments include customers, members, parishioners, technology, competitors, and regulatory agencies: all of which are directly affected or influenced by these events.

After gathering information, your objective now is to decide how to use the facts and data to adapt to your new environment. Recognizing the boundaries in this environment is a good place to start, and you can accomplish this by asking questions. The environment in which we spend the majority of our time can have a profound influence on our values and actions. Most

people adapt to a new environment more quickly than they should. They adjust themselves to the situation, rather than adjusting the situation to their purpose and mission for being in a new place.

Moreover, it's an ideal time to review or establish your boundaries and develop principles that you will live by in this new environment; if you don't, you may unknowingly compromise your values and venture down a slippery slope. People seek to fit in without considering the power they have, or the power they give up. These same people are surprised to find they have accepted and adapted to be less than what they are capable of, just to fit in.

Never lose sight of your vision, stay focused on your purpose, and remain true to yourself. Your strengths are your uniqueness, and if you lose or lay aside who you are just to get along with others, then you have nothing original to offer this new world of possibilities. Consequently, you will lose the success afforded by the new opportunities if you lay aside or forget your priorities, purpose, mission, and preferences. Don't wait until you compromise your values to learn how important they are to you.

Action Step 1: What boundaries have you set for yourself?

The Challenge

The challenge you face in the new environment is to carry out your mission without compromising who you are. Your presence changes the new environment, for better or for worst, and in the process of adjusting there will be conflicts. You will inherit and create enemies, encounter bullies: and all are set to sabotage your success in ways that are mind-boggling. There

are predators all around you who only show themselves behind your back or at night.

The new possibilities are exciting but do not get so overjoyed about the prospects that lie ahead that you fail to assess what your arrival means to the inhabitants in the new environment. Your research and observations reveal that you have stumbled upon an area rife with opportunities, but unbeknownst to you, the opportunities come with an equivalent number of hidden dangers or threats. If you are naive or unaware of the threats and dangers that exist in your new surroundings, your failure in this new and hostile environment is guaranteed.

A SWOT Analysis

A SWOT Analysis is a tool that can answer two important questions for you about the environment you are about to enter:

1. What opportunities can you capitalize on in this new environment?
2. What threat is here that can undermine your goals and mission?

The SWOT Analysis was developed originally for business and industry but can be carried out for a company, product, place, or a person. It involves specifying the objective of the business venture or project and identifying the internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable to achieve the objective.

A SWOT analysis explores two types of environments: the internal environment, which focuses on strengths and weaknesses; and the external environment, which focuses on opportunities and threats.

The elements of the SWOT acronym stand for:

1. Strengths
2. Weaknesses
3. Opportunities
4. Threats

Strengths identify the characteristics of the business, project, or personal growth plan that gives it an advantage over others. Weaknesses identify the characteristics that place the business, project or personal growth plan at a disadvantage. Opportunities identify the elements that the business or project could exploit to its advantage. Threats identify the elements in the environment that could cause trouble for the business, a project, or your growth plan.

The origin of SWOT remains obscure; Albert Humphrey is credited by some to have created SWOT, but he never claimed credit for creating SWOT. Humphrey, who led a convention at the Stanford Research Institute (Now SRI International) in the 1960s and 1970s, is said to have used data from Fortune 500 companies to create the SWOT method.

Threats and the New Environment

A SWOT analysis deals with the real and positive forces that work together and potential problems that need to be addressed or at least recognized. Examples of external threats include new and existing regulations, competitors, unstable political and legal systems in foreign and domestic markets and economic downturns. New technologies may make your products or services obsolete.

Action Step1: What kinds of threats are you facing that can undermine your goals?

Sometimes you can turn a threat into an opportunity, such as a new technology that may displace one of your key products,

but also provides an opportunity for new products. If you can think far enough ahead, you may even be able to create some opportunities or to develop new products from emerging technology. Prime examples of this type of foresight are the social media giants Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Homesnap.

Cultures, Beliefs, and Values

There's a culture that exists in a new environment that you should get to know. Why? Because where there are people, there are opportunities and where there are opportunities, there are threats. A new opportunity might open up wider avenues, while a new threat could close a path that once existed. Developing a full awareness of your situation can help with both planning and decision-making as you interact with a different culture.

Not in My Backyard (NIMBY)

Success breeds envy and competition. The inhabitants in the new environment live in a culture of shared beliefs, values, customs, practices, and social behavior. Thus, they have their native tongue, and rigorously enforce the slang or acronym NIMBY (Not In My Backyard)! All communities come with backyards that are similar to jungles, replete with predators of all sizes, shapes, and stripes set to defend and protect their turf. So beware!

When you arrive at the new place, the welcoming committee will come out to greet you. The greeting party is the recruiters, inspectors, and exterminators, and there may be a strong expectation for you to conform to the prevailing, cultural values and traditions.

What this means to you may not be clear at the moment, but smiling faces give no hint of what's lurking therein. Familiarize yourself with the lay of the land before you attempt to go through it and when you do, proceed with caution. If you can get to the heart of what kind of people thrive in this culture, it will help you decide whether or not it's a good place for you.

Cultural Shock

Cultures maintain unwritten codes of conduct that guide its inhabitants; you can learn these codes when you're in the new environment. It doesn't matter if the new environment is a church or a Fortune 500 company; there's fierce competitiveness that occurs in all groups of two or more people.

Just below the surface of any organized entity, there exists a harsh struggle for survival: very much like the real jungles home to real lions, tigers, coyotes, and snakes. Cultures are different forms of organizations: and yet this is a group of people whose shared beliefs and practices identify a particular place, class, or time to which they belong.

In the new environment, you may experience what anthropologists describe as a cultural shock. Cultural shock is an experience a person may have when one moves to a cultural environment, which is markedly different from one's own. It is also the personal disorientation a person may feel when experiencing an unfamiliar way of life, or when a person immigrates or visits a new country or move between social environments, or transition to another type of lifestyle.

Action Step 1: In what new environment have you experienced cultural shock?

Starbucks: A Culture of Success

Organizations that go to great lengths to create a culture of success benefit from exceptional productivity, innovation, and performance from their workforce: apparently attracting the right people is one of the most important considerations in building a top management team and establishing the culture

of a company. When Harold Schultz built the business we have come to know as Starbucks; he paid a great deal of attention to the type of people he wanted to recruit in building the company. First, he wanted people who would be attracted to his company.

Schultz believed the best way to build a company is to have a group of people with shared values; highly complementary skills in an environment of trust and respect. By establishing a culture this way, people can fit in based on their hearts, passions, and their strengths. Why is this important? This approach gives the company a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

To build a successful company, Schultz put himself in a position to play to his strengths, passions, and cultural fit. Consequently, he built a company based on empathy, people, and finding the right fit.

According to authors Citrin and Smith in *The 5 Patterns of Extraordinary Careers*, companies like General Electric, Shell Oil, Proctor, and Gamble demonstrate the five patterns of success they discuss in their book. These companies develop a culture of career knowledge and empowerment that gives them a competitive advantage. According to the authors, Microsoft is the best example of the five patterns in action; Microsoft achieves a complete advantage because of the people in the organization.

Over the years, Microsoft has been highly successful in attracting, developing, and retaining intellectually and interpersonally-gifted employees. The primary attraction factor has been Microsoft's strong complete culture, its promote-from-within approach, and stock options. Getting their people to work together takes advantage of their greatest skills, and allows Microsoft to grow and put the best products on the market.

Successful women and men are attracted to new environments that offer a competitive advantage. They honestly evaluate the risks, their strengths, passions, and preferences for people and environments. They recognize that knowledge and talent are not enough to navigate through a new environment. Consequently, they look for environments that value their strengths and where opportunities exist. They proactively seek careers, positions, and opportunities that are best suited for them, what they want to achieve, and in what timeframe.

When evaluating the elements of risks, the question for these gifted women becomes, does the culture tend to encourage or stifle the success of the individual? The answer highlights opportunities that may or may not exist in the company. All successful people tend to find it so much more satisfying and invigorating to have risked a new endeavor and failed than to sit on the sidelines and play it safe.

Listen and Learn

The sooner you master the unwritten rules about the how the people in a new environment or culture operate, the more likely you are to be effective. Do not rush into alliances without thinking through the implications. Many people will want to use you, use your mouth, or your talents to convey their message: don't let them. Take your time and get your bearings. Observe how the inhabitants communicate and interact with each other and different individuals. Listen intensely to both the words they use and the underlying messages.

These behavior patterns are learned from others and are transmitted socially. A poor people fit can destroy even great opportunities in the new environment that are not a good fit for your skills. On the other hand, a great people fit can overcome major gaps in experiences and skills. Can you imagine developing strong relationships in this new place?

CHAPTER 13

THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS

Everything in life that's valuable or worthwhile requires gifts and talents beyond our own, because success is rarely, if ever, a solo undertaking. If your dreams include starting a company, putting a team together, or if you are a business owner, you need a diverse group of relationships to help you succeed. Thus, there is no self-made woman.

God blesses us with relationships that play important roles in our lives and the lives of other people. The people in these relationships are positioned at strategic points along the way and come into our lives just when we need them. Therefore, building relationships are essential to God's plans and purposes for our lives.

Building Authentic Relationships

Developing, cultivating, and building relationships begin with understanding the importance, significance, worth, and value of people. Some people have natural gifts for appreciating people, which is advantageous when it comes to building relationships.

Building authentic relationships requires a certain amount of vulnerability. However, most of us are not open to exposing our flaws, admitting mistakes, and facing our shortcomings. Could it be that's why there are so many pseudo-relationships,

friendships, and courtships masquerading as honest-to-goodness relationships?

Opening ourselves up in a relationship is risky. We can shield ourselves and never get hurt, but then we will never share a close relationship that enriches our lives and the lives of others. It may be a mistake to open up in a relationship, and you have to decide if this is a risk worth taking.

People who succeed are those most willing to take risks. Risk-takers are not necessarily comfortable with failure, but they know it comes with the territory. You can minimize risks by developing criteria to evaluate potential relationships.

When evaluating a potential relationship, there is at least one reasonable and sincere question you should ask, and that is: what is the advantage and disadvantage of developing this relationship? The answer should give you an indication if this is a relationship worth pursuing.

During the early stages of a relationship-building process, find out what others stand for and try to meet where you share the same standards or common ground. It is difficult to associate with others very long if your values don't align.

Relationships provide access to many new avenues and opportunities, and accelerate the rate to reaching our goals. The introductory phase of building relationships requires the ability to communicate well with people.

Communicating in Relationships

Good communication is of the highest importance in all relationships, and it is one of the most important factors in building relationships. Effective communication must be open, honest, and ongoing. Open and honest communication eliminates speculation, opinions, and preconceived ideas, based on incomplete and inaccurate facts, information, conclusions, reasoning, prejudices, and self-serving motives.

Opinions, speculation, and preconceived ideas lead to wrong assumptions and snap judgments. These beliefs undermine, erode, and weaken any chance of establishing and maintaining successful relationships. I wonder how many people

come into our lives for a specific purpose but never get the chance to play that pivotal role in our lives because of the aforementioned self-imposed barriers.

Connecting on Various Levels

Our ability to connect with others on various levels is another element in building relationships. Valuing people and establishing trust are skills that are conducive to connecting with others. When we attempt to relate or connect with someone, it's never about us, but about the importance, we place on the other person. If people believe you care about them and believe you are there for them, you establish trust.

During America's 2016 Presidential campaign, presidential candidate Donald J. Trump connected with and established trust with voters in America, and they elected Mr. Trump as our nation's Forty-fifth President.

Do you ignore or overlook people if they are not important to your cause or your agenda? Do you interact with people only when you need or want something? If so, people probably see your true colors shining through a mile away.

The desire or need to connect with others is played out in every society, where two or more people come together. The initial connections occur on either or all of the following levels: one-on-one, in a group, and with an audience.

Connecting One-on-one

People, who are most important to us, friends, family, and co-workers, are the people we usually connect with one-on-one. Even though we already have a certain amount of influence with this group, we can strengthen these bonds by talking more about them and less about ourselves.

Changing how you communicate one-on-one with those close to you will likely create a certain amount of skepticism associated with your new approach, but don't allow that to deter you; keep it up. Eventually, your one-on-one connections will begin to enjoy the new you.

If you aspire to a higher level of excellence professionally or desire a special skill, connecting one-on-one with a role model, mentor, or a business partner is an occasion to learn from others who are at a higher level than you.

These connections may occur during a social or business event. Nevertheless, it is an opportunity to converse with someone whose experience could prove invaluable, and an occasion to ask important questions, such as:

- What are the best and worst decisions you ever made?
- How did they impact your life?

Action Step 2: Who are your mentors in the following areas of your life?

Relationships _____

Career _____

Finances _____

Spirituality _____

Health _____

A Group Connection

A group consists of two or more people, and it can be a formal or informal group. These are like-minded people who are on the same wavelength and tend to share the same or similar views, opinions, tastes, values, or outlooks. This connection can serve as a quasi-support group. We're all looking

for someone to walk with us along our paths, to steady us when we stumble and offer a wise voice of reason in a time of uncertainty. Being around other like-minded dreamers and creating authentic support systems, or being a part of a support group, is important. It is in times of challenge that our relationships lend us a listening ear and strengthen our resolve to overcome.

Today's technology provides us with easy access to stay connected. Regular ongoing, and even daily, social interactions are essential to our well-being and are as close as our cell phones. A sigh for comfort or a word of encouragement is as close as the keyboard on your electronic device. However, there is no substitute for the human touch or a smile; a selfie just cannot compete in this arena.

Action Step 1: Who are the people that empower you to be at your best and how do they empower you?

The Audience Connection

Through the influential medium of television, our mobile devices, other media, and a variety of public and private events, we have access to great speakers. They inspire and encourage us, and there's a lot to learn from great speakers. With today's technology, learning from great speakers can take place in the comfort of our homes, while taking our daily walks, or eating our lunch. By adopting their best practices, gleaning tips from their anecdotes, learning from their successes and failures, we, too, can improve in our abilities to connect and communicate with an audience.

Action Step 1: Name five people who inspire you.

The Messenger and the Message

The defining feature of any connection is the quality of the message. The messenger is not merely delivering words or conveying information: the messenger is connecting and communicating visually, intellectually, emotionally, and verbally with the listener. The messenger is the message she delivers.

We remember eighty-five to ninety percent of what we see and less than fifteen percent of what we hear. Consequently, the messenger will call forth the particular image, emotion, or attitude the message requires.

To accomplish this, the messenger must use language that is appropriate in sound and sense; that is, the messenger describes in details so the listener can “see” what the messenger is describing or experience through one of the other senses. People may not always remember what you said, but they will always remember the impression and impact you and your message made, and how you made them feel.

As the author of this book, I, too, must be the messenger representing the message in this book. Consequently, I must know myself and the subject matter, and this book must deliver on its promise to enrich and transform your life.

What we say and how we say something communicates a lot and will enhance our abilities to connect verbally and emotionally. Charismatic people connect with others on a very high emotional and personal level; their magnetism or “presence” draws people to them. Connecting on an emotional level is tantamount to winning or losing people’s hearts. When you win or lose a person’s heart, you either establish or break a connection.

Power Relationships

As we move closer to our destinations, our influences and our roles as leaders expand. All leadership interactions and experiences affect people, because leadership is active and dynamic. It is never inactive or static. According to leadership expert John Maxwell, leadership is not a position: it is a process, a series of actions or steps. If leaders want to be successful at having a positive effect on others, they must relate well to people.

Some of our interactions will not have the desired outcomes that we expected. There's something to learn from every interaction because there are no missteps on any part of our journey.

Toxic Relationships

In our efforts to build healthy, authentic relationships, we will encounter many different types of people. As much as we might like to strive for the ideal, that is, to be at peace with everyone, according to Scripture that may not be possible. *“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” (Romans 12:18)*. “If” suggests doubt, uncertainty, or to gamble.

Through no fault of our own, some relationships become toxic and harmful. We may encounter these toxic relationships at different times and with different people, and wisdom dictates we educate ourselves on how to deal with these challenges.

Toxic relationships develop when someone or something is interfering with the ability to maintain a healthy and productive relationship. The most obvious types of toxic relationships are those that involve any physical, emotional, economic or psychological abuse. Toxic relationships can develop in the home, at work, and in the church. Yes, sad to say, there are pastors and leaders in the church; men and women, who are verbally and emotionally abusive.

An organization's leadership and its culture, directly and indirectly, influence each other. Leaders and the culture in

organizations affect the behavior of its members, and may ultimately serve to promote toxic behavior.

God never intended for anyone, pastors in particular and church leaders in general, to misuse their positions, or His Word, to attack, manipulate, control and abuse people. A church leaders may excel in teaching and preaching but lack emotional development. Some spiritual leaders promote a “male privilege theology” and unknowingly or knowingly giving immature male church leaders and a husband license to abuse. Unfortunately, the congregation and their families become the objects of their unresolved pain and issues.

The Toxic Personality

Toxic people’s actions are irrational and unpredictable, and it points to an individual who lacks emotional maturity. The toxic personality is usually a chronic complainer. They take everything personally and feel they are always the victims. Unfortunately, the toxic person is usually motivated by envy and jealousy and needs constant attention, reassurance, and validation.

These behaviors contribute to and, in most cases, fuel their irrational and off-base behavior. Identifying a toxic person will equip you to think rationally about when and where you have to put up with them, and when and where you don’t. We cannot control the toxicity of other people, but we can control how we respond to them. Recognizing and understanding toxicity enables us to develop effective strategies to thwart future toxic interactions. Prayer is an important part of your strategy.

Establish boundaries consciously and proactively. If you let things happen naturally, you may find yourself constantly embroiled in difficult conversations or situations with these toxic individuals. If you set boundaries and decide when, where, and if you engage a difficult person, you can control much of the chaos and unruliness that surrounds the person. Stick to your guns and keep boundaries in place when the person tries to cross them because the person will surely try.

Friendship

The term friend is used quite loosely these days. We need to get clear about who our real friends are and cut off those toxic “friendships” that drain our spirits and our energies. Stressful relationships are detrimental to our well-being.

“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.” (Ephesians 4:29).

Our choice of friends is a major decision on our path to success. If we associate with people who complain, belittle, gossip, and slander others, it will affect us because attitudes are contagious. The effects negative talk may not be immediately apparent, but words have such creative power; the fruit will come.

“Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Weighing yourself down with commitments and relationships that do not contribute to your purpose, dreams, and goals are potentially harmful. We need to take care of ourselves by being just as intentional about friendships and relationships as we are about what we eat or drink.

Striving to reach your potential and enrich your life will separate you from friends who have no desire to grow. As you develop new friendships, you’ll learn to build relationships with growing people who want to take the journey with you.

Evaluating and establishing personal criteria for developing a friendship, whether good or bad, is a very good idea. Asking yourself the right questions will help you define what you want in a friendship.

Trust and Respect

Trust and respect are required to build and develop authentic relationships. Integrity is a very important component in relationship-building; without it, what do you have? It's much easier to build relationships with people who share the same values with you. It is impossible to relate to people you don't trust or respect.

It takes time to build a strong relationship, but if you do something to break trust, or when respect in a relationship diminishes, the relationship is weakened, or severely damaged or destroyed in an instant. We need people around us we trust and respect and who will tell us the truth.

Nurturing Relationships

People are naturally attracted to people who give them confidence and make them feel good about themselves. When you nurture relationships, you encourage people to grow, thrive, develop, and become successful.

The habit of nurturing relationships and reaching out fosters resilience. Surround yourself with people who are going places. When you surround yourself with positive people, you develop mutually beneficial relationships that allow you to learn from each other.

Resilient women initiate friendships and relationships and intentionally nurture them. They reach out not just when they need help, but all the time. By reaching out, they get advice, encouragement, support, gain perspective and they don't go it alone. When people feel cared for, included, valued and trusted they work well together and it starts with making authentic connections. A Destiny Circle is such a connection.

CHAPTER 14

THE DESTINY CIRCLE

The journey we travel to move productively into each new season of life is not a solitary path. At the same time that our actions lead us into new areas of growth, work, and expression, we come together with each other to bring our soul work into a community.

The final step in mapping out your new season is designing a new way to celebrate and be celebrated; to nurture and be nurtured. Women need times when they can come together with a group of kindred spirits, to share each other's wisdom, to invigorate, to nourish, to touch, to enlighten, and to celebrate. Women of destiny can share these times in a Destiny Circle.

A Destiny Circle is a private group that gathers for mentoring, collaborating, sustaining, validating, celebrating, and encouraging each other. A Destiny Circle is a carefully established safe forum for being authentic, enthusiastic, and generous. It is not therapy or a place to vent complaints. Only here can you benefit from others who share a commitment to building new goals in this stage of her life; only here can you find a wealth of insight and experience free from the limitations of other organizations.

A Safe Place

Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook started Destiny Circle nearly twenty years ago after the death of a friend's mother. While

having lunch with a friend, Dr. Johnson, fondly referred to as Dr. Sujay, told her about the death of a friend's mother, "My friend's mother just died, and she needs someone. Let's invite some people to breakfast."

In preparation, Dr. Sujay and her friend called up about a dozen women, aged thirty-five to seventy-five, from various professions and scheduled a get-together for an early Friday morning breakfast.

When Dr. Sujay called the women, she told them that they were just going to tell their stories. Each person would get her chance to share three things: she would introduce herself, tell the group about one thing she wants prayer for, and one thing she wants to celebrate.

The women had been waiting for a moment like this for years. Up until this time, there had been no place for these women to celebrate their accomplishments or confide about their needs. Thus, Destiny Circle was born. Later, many of the women said that no one had ever celebrated them.

The Destiny Circle meets on a regular basis, and each member is allowed to invite someone who can benefit from the Destiny Circle. One woman in the first group needed anonymity about some of her deepest concerns and the Destiny Circle is a safe place for sharing important concerns, issues, and experiences. To make sure the new person is a good fit, someone who will keep the confidentiality of the group; Dr. Sujay and the other founding member meet with her first.

The agenda in the Destiny Circle is flexible and unique to each group, honoring the intellectual, spiritual, and social aspects of a life lived as a woman of destiny.

Action Step 1: Do you have a place to celebrate your accomplishments? If so, where and how do you celebrate them?

The group grew to about 30 members, and usually, about 12 members attended the meetings. Women with common issues find out about each other, particularly the cancer survivors. Since then, one survivor created a ministry to help women who are going through radiation and chemo. When she was going through treatment she liked to take baths with lavender soap, so now she sends baskets of lavender soap to cancer patients for free.

Dr. Sujay eventually named the group the Isis Circle after the Egyptian queen who called on her sisters to help her gather up all the pieces of her dead husband. For Queen Isis, the Nile River was her safe place; the collection point for her tears. The Isis Circle is still going strong today, and when they meet, they pick up the broken parts of their lives.

Action Step 2: Where is your safe place for sharing important issues and experiences?

The group now has a retreat in the summer, and they can bring other women. They still have not decided if they want to make the Isis Circle bigger or allow younger women under 30 to join the group. Some of the older women are concerned about that; they don't think they would be comfortable sharing in front of her daughter's best friend.

Soul Nurturing

The soul nourishing, heart-opening experiences of the Isis Circle had such a profound effect on the women that Dr. Sujay began to use groups in her ministry. She believes that creating Circles for the women who gravitated toward certain types of work in the church would facilitate the flow, so she came up

with three circles that centered on cooking, audiovisual, and altar work.

Each group was assigned to name itself after an African-American hero or biblical woman, research her story, and share the information with everyone. When the women chose their Circle, it didn't matter if they didn't know the person sitting next to them at first; they had a similar interest. The group added a new dynamic to the church and made everyone's experience richer. Women who joined the church quickly found a sense of community by fitting into one of the Circles. Dr. Sujay utilized the Circle experience at one of her annual women's conferences.

Setting Up a Destiny Circle

MEMBERS: The longing you feel to connect with other women who are transitioning to a new season of life will guide you to members of your Destiny Circle. You probably already have one woman in mind, and aligning with her is the first step. . Write down the purpose of your Destiny Circle so that each potential member will understand. Dr. Sujay, recommends limiting the group to twelve or less so that each person will have an opportunity to talk at each meeting.

TIME AND PLACE: While speaking to your potential members take notes, and ask about the most convenient time for a one to one and a half hour meeting. When you complete your list of members, find the common time frame that works for them.

Next, decide how often you want to meet. Once a month is a good start and keeps the meetings far enough apart so that everyone will have new material to share. The confidential nature of the topics you will discuss calls for a private, comfortable space in which everyone can see each other, so hold your Circle in someone's home.

STRUCTURE: Designate a timekeeper who will keep the flow going by keeping everyone to her allotted time. The amount

of time will depend on the number in your group. Ten minutes each may not sound like much, but if you have twelve members, ten minutes a piece will consume two hours. Start out with five-or-six minute timings. If you have a small group, you could do two rounds.

Schedule the session so that there are fifteen minutes to settle in with refreshments before the meeting starts. Mark the opening of the Circle with a moment of silence, prayer, or reading a poem or other text that you have chosen to represent the journey that brought you together. You may decide to be specific about what each person should share, such as a conflict that is challenging her new priorities or keep it open to any insights or concerns about her journey.

Establish the ground rules: no politics, no current events, or town gossip. The Circle is life journey time. After everyone has had their turn, if there's time, the Circle can break into a discussion on a topic everyone agrees upon.

PRIVACY: Building trust and community requires that everything said in the Destiny Circle is confidential. Make that clear at the first meeting and with new members. Type up a sheet with everyone's email and other contact information and distribute it at the first meeting, (or collect the information at the first meeting and distribute afterward). You may want to make a rule about emails about "inspiration" subjects, for example.

CONTINUITY: Schedule your next meeting at the end of each gathering or map out the next six months at the end of the first meeting.

Forming Your Destiny Circle

- Team up with one friend to launch your Destiny Circle and make a list of potential members.
- Create a mission statement for the circle.
- Invite potential members and describe the group according to the mission statement.

Enriching Your Life

- Schedule the first Destiny Circle and choose a way to open each meeting with a moment of silence, a line from a poem, prayer, etc...
- Print out a contact list of members and distribute.
- Announce ground rules at the first meeting, including the number of minutes for each person to speak, email rules (if any), and confidentiality.

It is in the context of relationships that we serve and find meaningful and joyful experiences in our achievements. When God is going to do something significant in our lives and the lives of others, He uses people.

CONCLUSION

Enriching our lives is a life-long journey. While the word enriching is full of meaning and significance, yet it is also one of the most inspiring and comprehensive words that describe the nature of a life filled with purpose, potential, and possibilities. The concepts presented in this book point toward a path of purpose and possibilities, and the ideas hint at looking at your potential with fresh eyes.

It is an exciting time for you when you know your purpose, and you have a dream, mission, and a vision to propel you forward. There is a reason why you are still here. If you have a purpose to fulfill, a mission to accomplish, and lives to impact, where are the people? Are they standing in the checkout line with you at Costco or Starbucks, or sitting next to you during the Sunday church service? The connection can occur anytime and anyplace; be ready and live expectantly!

You evaluate your gifts, talents, and passions with an eye toward service; a new perspective emerges. A different perception may reveal important facets of your gifts that are undervalued or at the very least unrecognized. What additional seeds are lying dormant in your gift? After all, when you plant an apple seed, it produces more than one apple.

The idea that more is possible inspires and encourages you to drop the artificial limits created by a fixed mindset that has held you hostage to fear, failure, mistakes, age, gender, and the opinion of others. It's a new day! Fear of failure and making mistakes are no longer your constant companions, but acknowledge them for what they are; lessons learned.

Today, as you reflect on your dreams of yesteryear, you get your second wind. Like the marathon runner, out of breath and tired, you suddenly find the strength to press on to finish the race. Today with renewed hope and inspiration, you can design a new future of dreams, and create a clear vision to put you on a new path of personal growth to enrich your life and the lives of others.

The investment of your time and energy in reading this book is tantamount to purchasing stock in your future; it will pay off in future dividends. The ideas and suggestions presented in this book are tiny steps in preparation for the big steps ahead of you. This short journey of information is all for naught if you do not continue to explore, evaluate, and embrace new opportunities, environments, and relationships.

Recognizing and dealing with obstacles, setbacks, hostile environments, and haters to your progress are parts of the journey. You have the “weapons” to deal with these threats and win every battle, because to be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Exposure to new concepts and ideas will always bring about some measure of growth, either by questioning or accepting the validity of the message. Either way, Ralph Waldo Emerson reminds us that, “*The mind once stretched by a new idea, never returns to its original dimensions.*” See you at the top!

About the author

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