

In Search of Harmony: Becoming Your Own Hero at Work

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Chapter 6

The Power of the Powerless

There must be acceptance and the knowledge that sorrow fully accepted brings its own gifts. For there is an alchemy in sorrow. It can be transmuted into wisdom, which, if it does not bring joy, can yet bring happiness.

—Pearl Buck

Among the ideas of business, “power” rules the roost. It is the invisible demon that gives rise to our motivations and choices. Power stands behind our fear of loss and desire for control; it seems to offer the ultimate rewards.

—James Hillman

Honor is what no man can give you and no one can take away. Honor is a man’s gift to himself.

—Quotation from *Rob Roy*

The ability to perform effectively in the workplace of the next century demands a new way of thinking about our notions about power. No one doubts the incredible power business corporations have over our lives. Collective power failures in all kinds of institutions—in governmental bureaucracies and town halls, in education and politics, in the judicial system and law enforcement, in religion and politics—these power failures tell us how easy it is to lose or misuse our moral compass.

As we gaze into the abyss of human suffering and disillusionment at work and at home, we know that personal recovery and national recovery go hand in hand. Yet, how will we find a way to wake the sleeping giant within ourselves? What ideas are potent enough to stir us from our inertia? What will it take to help us stand up, to reach down and out to discover or recover the purposes of life? How can we live with dignity within a system in the workplace that often serves itself instead of serving people? How can we live in a “society governed by fear that creeps into the cracks and crevices of daily life [that] makes you think twice about everything you say and do?”¹ How can we learn to “light a candle instead of cursing the darkness”?

Pittacus said, “The measure of man is what he does with power.” At the heart of what is driving the spiritual inertia is a lack of clarity about the *powerlessness* it feels. The traditional ways of winning at work aren’t working any more because the lust to dominate each other has gone too far. The competition for excessive power is at the heart of the adversity and abuse we see and the pain we feel. “Absolute power is corrupting absolutely” both victims and victimizers. Likewise, the lack of power in responding to these injustices—our personal weaknesses, our hatred, our intolerance is fueling the violence. It is a love/hate relationship running rampant. We love and hate power for the good it can do and the pain it causes us. We believe we have it when we don’t and vice versa.

Our ideas about what constitutes power are personal and unique: “Information is power”, “money is power”, “knowledge is power”, “recognition is power”, “control is power”, “efficiency is power”, “reputation is power”, “fearsomeness is power”, “position is power.” Ambition drives us to succeed, collecting the trappings of what author Gary Zukav calls “external power,” which is often generated by fear. Personal aspiration leads workers in search of “empowerment” pep rallies, hoping to find more “ammunition” to enter the fray once more in their climb up the ladder of success. We go to learn about the art of the win/win strategy so that *we* can win!

Without a different orientation to deal with the traditional uses of power, for the most part, we’re ill-equipped to understand or deal with the dilemmas and paradoxes it presents to us. We are especially naive about the illusions of external power. No matter how adept we become at collecting the symbols or popular icons of power, in the final analysis they all fade with time. Disenchanted by the lack of fulfillment we expect to come, almost imperceptibly, we are lulled into caring less or pretending that we don’t care at all. Thus, most of us are a little uncomfortable talking about power because we often pretend that either it does not matter to us or we are so street smart we can handle it when used inappropriately on us. We are anxious about power because to address it openly requires admitting the tyrannical implications of it upon our lives. We are uneasy talking about power because of the spiritual implications of it: it’s unpleasant to expose our own selfish

motivations and desires. How can we reconcile obeying holy writ that teaches us that the “meek shall inherit the earth,” when the *road* to work is overrun by road ragers? Instead of meekness and humility in the workplace, the power of Self is paramount. Thus, we sugarcoat the arrogant pursuit of *self*-esteem as the panacea for the populace, becoming increasingly *self*-indulgent, *self*-conscious, and *self*-satisfied. The harder we work on ourselves, the more self-absorbed we become and the less able to realize the real purposes of life, which are revealed to us through selfless acts.

	Self-focus	Selfless focus
Destructive Uses of Power	Self-gratification	Paternalism
Constructive Uses of Power	Stewardship over self	Stewardship over others

Generally speaking, the big box rules. Our intentions about the use of power are crucial to what we want to achieve. If we see power as “external”—acquired by using passive violence or force to get what we want—we will continually be pulled to use power for self-serving purposes; we will often victimize others to achieve our goals. *Selfless* uses of power help to achieve our goals with our character intact (providing we do not get carried away with arrogant attitudes about how great we are!)

Carl Jung said, “Where love reigns, there is no will to power; and where the will to power is paramount, love is lacking.” Despite the painful path of my hero’s journey, my commitment to truth led me to understand that even more important than a commitment to developing more external power is a commitment to *being*—finding new (and perhaps radical) ways of renewing relationships, of building community, of accepting and engendering responsibility and accountability for ourselves and each other. During my own initiation and chastening, I discovered or recovered new sources of *internal* power:

- exercising faith in personal destiny,

- understanding the stages of the journey,
- speaking truth tempered with mercy,
- reconciling sorrow,
- setting healthy boundaries,
- dissenting with discernment,
- sacrificing materialism,
- finding satisfaction in small things,
- knowing my bliss and following my heart's desire,
- appreciating vulnerability and uncertainty,
- forgiving,
- developing my capacity to make principled choices regardless of the consequences,
- learning the lessons God had for me.

Within the context of these new sources of power, I want to build and maintain an authentic life, unfettered by networks of directives for efficiency, chokehold rules and regulations, and the facade of being politically correct. I want to reduce the struggle of maneuvering the complex maze of manipulations inherent in organizational life. I want to help develop ego-shattering elixirs that fulfill the promise of “Whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”

In *The Hero of a Thousand Faces*, the goal of the hero is to return from the supernatural world to the natural world changed, now willing to play the role that destiny assigns:

The meaning is very clear; it is the meaning of all religious practice. The individual, through prolonged psychological disciplines, gives up completely all attachment to his personal limitations, idiosyncrasies, hopes and fears, no longer resists the self-annihilation that is prerequisite to rebirth in the realization of truth, and so becomes ripe, at last, for the great at-one-ment. His personal ambitions being totally dissolved, he no longer tries to live but willingly relaxes to whatever may come to pass in him; he becomes, that is to say, an anonymity. The Law lives in him with his unreserved consent . . . The hero is the champion of things becoming, not of things become, because he *is*.²



*The power of the powerless is to make
principled choices regardless of circumstances*

and to learn the lessons God has for us.

The Power of the Learning Metaphor

As Patocka says, “The real test of a man is not how well he plays the role he has invented for himself, but how well he plays the role that destiny assigned to him.”³ Playing the role destiny assigns, not what we think we need or want, requires a way of viewing this process of continual adjustment and reconciliation. The most useful perspective is to adopt the educational or learning metaphor. The learning metaphor helps us transcend or rise above the politics, the games, the competition, and the calamity of organizational life. Viewing the organization as an opportunity for learning helps us build bridges between our hopes and dreams and the demanding reality of working in the next century. The value of growth and development for ourselves and others provides a new anchor of reality that preserves human dignity and respect in a world that seems to have gone mad.

In “The Learning Metaphor: a Look at Roles in Organizations,” Professor Bonner Ritchie says,

Systems are evil, often not because somebody intends them to be, although that may well be the case occasionally, but because people are playing different roles than somebody else prescribes or expects. Organizations are monstrously evil when one person is looking for love and another is on a power trip. Evil is when somebody exercises unrighteous dominion over a weak individual

It is important that we understand the metaphors of organization that shape our thinking and action. In order to avoid being victimized by our metaphors, we need to put them in perspective and transcend them.⁴

Ritchie’s article deals with the questions “What happens if you’re looking for harmony and somebody else is in a political power game? What happens when you want to learn and grow while somebody else wants to win at any price? What happens when you are looking for love and acceptance and somebody else is most concerned about efficiency? What happens when you plead for forgiveness and another chance when somebody else is intent upon showing you who is boss and instead retaliates with spite and more control?”

Some people and some entire organizations work by the metaphor of “winning is everything.” To them, work is a game to be won at any price, which may mean withholding vital information from others to make themselves look better, spreading rumors to undercut co-workers, and, in general,

pulling out all the stops to get what they want. Other people and organizations use the political metaphor where power and control are prized, or the entertainment metaphor where you play games with people, while others operate under a war metaphor where conquering the enemy is the way work gets done. For example, listen to the language of violence in a recent memo introduced as evidence in a high profile federal lawsuit against a computer software giant: In the memo to other executives outlining corporate strategy to destroy a smaller competitor, the letter said, “If you are going to *kill* someone there isn’t much reason to get all worked up about it and angry—you *just pull the trigger*. Any discussions beforehand are a waste of time. We need to *smile* at (Company name) while we pull the trigger.”⁵ [Emphasis added.]

The metaphors described may be useful under certain conditions. But, the problem comes when we do not recognize that our personal metaphors are out of sync with those of the company for which we work or when we continue to play the same role after conditions demand playing a different one.

What is your organizational metaphor? What are the metaphors of those with whom you work? Are the roles congruent or are they at odds with each other? Diagnosing role incongruence can be extremely helpful in refocussing our *strategy* by understanding more clearly someone else’s *motive*. Understanding role incongruence is useful for cuing us to change a present course of action that may not be working. In Ritchie’s article, the power of the learning metaphor is captured in a quotation by Merlin, the magician, talking to King Arthur, in *The Once and Future King*:

The best thing for being sad . . . is to learn something. That is the only thing that never fails. You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder of your veins, you may miss your only love, you may see the world about you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your honor trampled in the sewers of baser minds. There is only one thing for it then—to learn. Learn why the world wags and what wags it. That is the only thing which the mind can never exhaust, never alienate, never be tortured by, never fear or distrust, and never dream of regretting. Learning is the thing for you.⁶

The quest for the men and women of corporate America is to come to their full human maturity through their individual responsibility to their basic or essential nature, responding morally and ethically in the everyday events at work. Our personal metaphors act somewhat like a “soul code,” providing a compass to our unique destiny. All meaning is found in *individuals*, not in organizations. Through every act, “the vitalizing image of the universal god-man who is actually immanent and effective in all of us may be somehow made known to consciousness The way to

become human is to learn to recognize the lineaments of God in all of the wonderful modulations of the face of man.”⁷

It is the face of *man* in the organization, not the *organization* itself whereby we learn what we need to learn. This is an important distinction. Max DePree wrote, “Our companies can never be anything that we don’t want ourselves to be.” It is wise to be aware of the subtle and harmful impact of ascribing *human* attributes to organizations through the assignment of motives, values, and goals.



Myth # 13: Organizations have goals.

Despite the strong emphasis today on organizational culture, organizations are the *means* by which we get things done, by which we perform *functions*, but they do not have *purposes*. *People* have goals and purpose. When organizations are thought to have goals and purpose, this myth seems to take on a life of its own and is used as a way to justify or abdicate personal responsibility.

Believing this myth seduces us into believing *organizations* rather than *individuals* have control. Accountability is *out there* somewhere. How do you deal with something so nebulous as an “organization” (typically called “the system” for the lack of a better way to speak about it at all). Becoming blindly obedient to organizational goals, failing to recognize that organizations should also serve the values and beliefs of individuals, threatens human identity and vitality. Staying aware of this subtle but important distinction is important in sorting out our relationship with the organization.

The Power of the Economy

With the worship of the Economy as a national pastime, this threat to human identity and vitality is systematically enticing more and more people to give up their own personal and individual aims of life in lieu of the corporation. Others who live in perpetual anxiety about losing their jobs don’t dare dissent.

Alexander Hamilton understood something of the personal despair created when one’s livelihood is threatened. He said, “In the main it will be found that a power over a man’s support [salary] is a power over his will.” Out of the personal abdication of commitment to what is truly important in

life and the personal despair created by keeping Wall Street happy, we are given opportunities to redefine how we will react to several different kinds of power: efficiency, growth, resistance, tyranny, fearsomeness, control, persuasion, and veto. In *Kinds of Power: A Guide to Its Intelligent Uses*, James Hillman reminds us that the Economy is a fundamental justification for much of what ails us: the unethical, immoral, and illegal acts in business, government, and ever-widening gaps in the social strata:

The Economy differs from other world empires, depending neither on Roman legions nor on British battleships, secret police, or stockpiles of nuclear weapons. Its power, like that of religions, has become interiorized [made part of one's inner self]. It rules by psychological means. The Economy determines who is included and who is marginalized, distributing the rewards and punishments of wealth and poverty, advantage and disadvantage. Because this internalization of its ideas is so unquestioningly and universally accepted, it is the Economy where the contemporary unconscious resides and where psychological analysis is most needed. . . . Economics is our contemporary theology, regardless of how we spend Sunday.⁸

When the purpose of life is centered in acquiring material wealth, is it any wonder we often lose our moral underpinnings? While efficiency and growth in and of themselves are neither inherently good nor bad, they become so when the ends justify the means. They become immoral through a lack of reciprocity in the exchange. Getting the *most* while giving the *least* becomes unfair and abusive when the bottom line is the *only* consideration.



*Deliver a double bottom line:
Profits balanced with caring.*

What is needed is individual and organizational commitment to seek profitability through efficiency and growth without sacrificing the well-being of the employees. Efficiency and growth taken too far lead us away from what really matters most: to improve ourselves as human beings. By being unquestioningly obedient to maintaining the system of efficiency and growth, almost imperceptibly, we gradually lose our focus on the fulfillment of our own freedom, thus surrendering our own identity to that of the company.

In Václav Havel's history-making essay on the totalitarian systems of power, "Power of the Powerless," the president of Czechoslovakia describes the tendency towards the creation, or at least the toleration, of such a system:

The essential aims of life are present naturally in every person. In everyone there is some longing for humanity's rightful dignity, for moral integrity, for free expression of being and a sense of transcendence over the world of existences. Yet, at the same time, each person is capable, to a greater or lesser degree, of coming to terms with living within the lie. Each person somehow succumbs to a profane trivialization of his or her inherent humanity, and to utilitarianism. In everyone there is some willingness to merge with the anonymous crowd and to flow comfortably along with it down the river of pseudo-life

If the main pillar of the system is living a lie, then it is not surprising that the fundamental threat to it is living the truth. This is why it must be suppressed more severely than anything else.⁹

Who dares become a disturber of the peace? Who dares swim against a stream whose currents are so strong we dare not stand up, reach down and out to those affected by the consequences of exploitation and greed? Who dares to threaten their own livelihood or security or to examine their own complicity in perpetuating a system whose concern for the bottom line often trumps almost everything?

The Affliction of Double Binds

There is alchemy in sorrow, especially in the anguish of feeling torn between our values and our livelihood. These crises of conscience and conviction test our moral and ethical bearings in gut-wrenching but self-defining ways. In the everyday stream of our lives, if we respond with courage, humility, and compassion, the ordinary material of ourselves is changed into gold. It's no use ranting, wishing, and waiting for the "world" to behave as we want it to. Joseph Campbell's masterful examination of the mythical hero applies to us today:

The modern hero, the modern individual who dares to heed the call and seek the mansion of that presence with whom it is our whole destiny to be atoned, cannot, indeed must not . . . wait for his community to cast off its slough of pride, fear, rationalized avarice, and sanctified misunderstanding. 'Live,' Nietzsche says, 'as though the day were here.' It is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse. And so everyone of us shares the supreme ordeal—carries the cross of the redeemer—not in the bright moments of his tribe's great victories, but in the silences of his personal despair.¹⁰

Dealing with double binds requires clarity of purpose and values, setting and maintaining well-defined boundaries, taking a stand in respectful, savvy, nonpunishing ways, and holding fast to the belief that the "cream will rise" by making principled choices. The fear of making things worse

is one of the biggest deterrents to working our way through double binds. Our fear holds us hostage as we adopt “survival tactics,” often carried over from childhood. In these tough moments, we “act unlike ourselves.”

One of the best illustrations of some typical responses and scenarios whereby we “sell ourselves short” in a crises of conscience is told by Jerry Harvey who writes about the impact of downsizing as one of the chief contributors to what he calls “anaclitic depression and marasmus.” In this context, he describes how we often participate in the victimization of others by our silent consent. He compares the collaborative role played by the Jewish councils in the liquidation of their own people (including, in the end, themselves) to the collusion required for a successful RIF (reduction in force). Under the Nazi regime, members of the Jewish councils closely cooperated in the destruction of their friends, relatives, and associates by compiling lists for the Nazis of persons to be deported. They secured money from deportees to pay the expenses associated with their own destruction, distributing yellow star badges and arm bands so the Nazis could easily identify their victims. The Jewish councils also collected and turned over the assets of those who were deported. They stood watch during the actual seizure of people and property and helped decide the precious few who were saved.¹¹ In studying Adolph Eichmann’s life, Harvey found not a single recorded instance in Eichmann’s SS career when anyone confronted him directly with the immorality of his actions. He found no record of a co-worker, friend, or family member who reminded Eichmann of his potential choice to behave with moral virtue. Eichmann testified that no one ever reproached him about the performance of his duties. Those around him just carried out their duties in their pre-determined roles without question or challenge.

Harvey continues, “A RIF is a step in the direction of a holocaust,” in the sense that we are committing “little organizational murders.” Consenting parties play specific roles in unconscious submission to the wishes of those in authority if employees are to “suffer appropriately.” For example, someone must play the “top management villain,” the person who issues the order to fire people. This person is usually blamed for causing the RIF and plays the role of scapegoat. “Middle management executioners” (blameless middlemen) must execute the policy because they have been ordered to do so, and the “policy implementors” (supervisors) and “policy implementor’s assistants” (personnel departments) actually carry out the firing. Their job is not to question whether the firing is right or wrong, only to facilitate the action with the least amount of pain possible. Other roles are played by early victims (those in the lowest power positions), later victims (those who collude most directly with their victimizers), and final victims, those who are blamed so completely that we never examine our own complicity in the firing.

When faced with tremendous internal pressure to surrender our conscience or moral authority to that of the institution, it seems easier to escape the anxiety of being accountable for our choices. By responding passively to a decision that harms others, whether it is a RIF or some other way to intimidate, manipulate, or oppress others, we prostitute our own souls. We destroy the delicate threads that hold us together. We then develop defensive routines that justify our complicity in the process. (Many of these were detailed in earlier chapters.) We then begin to “live within the lie,” described by Harvey and Havel. (Terry Warner also describes this as “self-betrayal.” Harvey further explains these thought patterns as a means to make life tolerable for those bound together by destructive collusive decisions:

An Encompassing Theory. We develop a rationale to justify what we are doing, such as: To become more competitive in world markets we have to accept higher levels of unemployment to slow inflation. We need to lay people off because of productivity improvement claims. (Enough said about these justifications as reflections of the amount of greed we’ve signed on to.)

Euphemisms. We hide the stark cold reality of our decisions by talking about it in benign terms: firing people becomes “RIFs,” “downsizing,” “outplacement,” “position audits,” “career alteration,” “strategic re-alignment,” “release of resources,” “rightsizing,” “force management program,” “reshaping,” or “elimination of employee security policy.”

Slogans and Clichés. Other trite phrases that conceal truth and that deflect us from practicing true benevolence are “Be a team player,” “When the going gets tough, the tough get going,” “It hurts me to have to do this,” “We just have to “bite the bullet,” or “He/she’s not a good fit,” “We’re getting rid of *dead wood*.” In one company where the senior vice president broke his hand in anger by pounding on the table, the slogans “Respect for the individual,” and “PRIDE” blanketed every department.

Negative fantasies. We imagine disastrous future consequences to convince us we really have no choice but to behave as we do. Most of these fears are not grounded in reality. Research of the holocaust records indicated it was quite easy for members of the extermination squads to opt out without serious consequences. Losing our livelihood by behaving morally or responsibly is rarely the case.

Inner Emigration. This means feeling the same way the person who is dissenting feels, but not letting on. Harvey explains,

It[inner emigration] occurs when we are joined by an emigrant colleague as we leave a staff meeting, and he or she puts an arm around our shoulder and says: “I loved the way you argued with the boss in there. You said just what I wanted to say. I was tempted to help you out, but you said it so well I didn’t think there was any need for me to comment. I want you to know, though, that I was with you all the way despite my silence. Incidentally, I’m sorry about your being fired for raising hell. I hope you find another job soon, and do let me know if you need to talk with someone. I’m an excellent listener.”¹²

The research of Solomon Asch on conformity notes that while single dissenters are often swayed by group opinion, that power is significantly reduced if someone else speaks up. In terms of influence, three dissenters carry as much influence as thirty.¹³

Rules and Regulations. Strict adherence to “bureaucratic buffoonery” imbues “the system” with a life of its own, exerting power over us that prevents us from behaving morally and sensibly. Many workers would like to believe morality equals following the rules of the company. However, research suggests those rules are often deliberately left vague in areas where unethical action could benefit the company and clearly spelled out in ethical dilemmas that undermine corporate performance, such as conflict of interest, or fraud. In areas deliberately left vague, workers are often referred to their bosses for clarification. Since pressure for unethical action often comes from above, this means giving the fox the keys to the henhouse for safekeeping.¹⁴

Selective Memory. Selective forgetfulness is used as a way to escape the painful details of personal and interpersonal betrayal.

I had many experiences in my career with selective memory. The first one was the hardest to accept. Fresh out of graduate school, I did a culture audit of a division of a large corporation—a study identifying many patterns of behavior much like a personality profile. The purpose of the data was to provide feedback to improve performance, which was lagging in the division. The report contained information provided by several dozen managers detailing some of the problems needing correction. My manager put the report aside for weeks, avoiding any discussion or direction concerning the circulation of the report to other key managers. Whenever the report was mentioned, he excused himself, saying he had “forgotten” it. After several months, it became obvious the manager just didn’t want to share the information, some of which could have been interpreted as unfavorable to our department.

Lying. The ability to lie to ourselves and others gradually slips up on us in the guise of survival, slowly dulling our sensibilities to the point that the very life of the organization and the

people who work there *really* becomes jeopardized because the very foundation of the system is based on untruths. When 93 percent of the people admit to lying routinely on the job, it's a miracle anything worthwhile is accomplished.¹⁵

Comparing the Holocaust to the massive “de-jobbing” in America is not intended to trivialize the greatest tragedy of human kind but only to show the similarities in the *processes* involved when one is faced with immoral or unethical acts. But most important, it is to show the other side of this astonishing story, the heroic response of the Danes who resisted the Nazis's attempts to get them to conspire with them to deport Jews from Denmark. Danish resistance virtually defeated the Nazi effort in their country. Every Dane's dissent sent the powerful message, “There are some things worth suffering and fighting for,” even in a situation that appeared hopelessly evil.

Few of us will ever encounter such abuse of power. But, the temptations and tendencies lie lurking within each of us, threatening to pull us from our responsibility to ourselves and to each other. Unwittingly, we often repress our true feelings because of social pressure. At other times, social pressure is so great we don't even know we are doing it. Some organizational demands have minimal effects on the nature of our character: they involve issues of personality, style, history and norms—there are no standards of “right” versus “wrong” here, just differences in preference, familiarity, and comfort.

People tend to *accept* organizational demands which are *comfortable* and *attractive* regardless of the effects those demands have on their character. Consequently both areas of strength and weakness will become stronger.

People tend to *reject* organizational demands which are *uncomfortable* and *unattractive* regardless of the effects those demands have on their character. Thus, legitimate opportunities for growth are often perceived and attacked as though they were coercive demands for compromise.

Integrity requires that comfort and attractiveness take a lower priority to the effects any demand might have on our character. “Seeing the end from the beginning” is very difficult, particularly when the path involves losing some of our favorite vices along the way.

An example of a popular vice of placing personal comfort over personal integrity is the “Abilene Paradox,” a story told by Jerry Harvey about how events frequently gather momentum and take on lives of their own, despite the fact that nobody wants to take part in them. In the story, everyone is

in *unknowing agreement with one another* concerning the organization's problems and the steps necessary to solve them. Yet, because they fail to speak out, they continue on a path no one wants!

It is customary to hide what we really think at work because we are afraid to bring it out into the open. In doing so, organizations continually set themselves up for failure creating cynicism, disillusionment, mistrust, deception, and the inability to take risks. The paradox is that others are *also* hiding the same things we think but don't say! Often the participants really agree with the decisions being made but think since others support the decisions, they must too. Too scared of rejection, the participants just go along against their true wishes or judgment. Thus, in many situations there is *already* agreement about what *really* needs to be done, but it is *hidden*.

Whose responsibility is it to get us out of this mess?! Isn't it the bosses?! Harvey reminds us once again of our complicity in most situations. He asks, "How come every time I get stabbed in the back my fingerprints are on the knife?" Harvey's point is that the power to break the destructive pattern of the paradox comes from *anyone* choosing to take the risk of confronting the situation regardless of their position or authority.¹⁶

Also, the social pressure phenomenon of "groupthink" creates disastrous results. Under these circumstances the group uses self-censorship and mind guards to prevent anyone from considering conflicting points of view. Conflicting information is dismissed or ignored, and the group is amazed when calamity follows. The Bay of Pigs and Watergate are two examples of this kind of group tyranny. The same was true with the *Challenger* disaster wherein seven astronauts died in a fiery explosion while millions of people watched in horror. According to one researcher, several people knew of the cold spots on a booster rocket but failed to communicate the information to the proper authorities. One scientist took the chance and advised against the launch, encouraging a delay until the temperature warmed. According to the scientist, the launch was carried out despite his warning of the risks because of public relations reasons. If the launch were delayed, school would not be in session on a weekend and children would not be able to view the launch. He said one of the space administration's major goal for the *Challenger* mission was to rebuild the declining public support of space exploration by having a schoolteacher on board.

Nonconformity is essential to making good decisions and perfecting our souls. Emerson said,

Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind A man is to carry himself in the presence of all opposition as if every thing were titular and

ephemeral but he. I am ashamed to think how easily we capitulate to badges and names, to large societies and dead institutions.¹⁷

Regardless of where we are in the hierarchy, our salvation comes from how we respond in the thousands of personal interactions with others, especially to those who are subordinated to us either in spirit or by position. We recognize that the worlds of the powerful and the powerless are profoundly connected, rendering us cynical or savvy in the ways of wisdom at work. Havel expresses his deep understanding and appreciation for the “power of the powerless” as a reflection of what is going on “below”:

I have never fixed my hopes there; [at the top from Gorbachev or those from above in power]. I’ve always been more interested in what was happening “below,” in what could be expected from “below,” what could be won there, and what defended. All power is power over someone, and it always somehow responds, usually unwittingly rather than deliberately, to the state of mind and the behavior of those it rules over. One can always find in the behavior of power a reflection of what is going on “below.” None can govern in a vacuum. The exercise of power is determined by thousands of interactions between the world of the powerful and that of the powerless, all the more so because these worlds are never divided by a sharp line; everyone has a small part of himself in both.¹⁸

Those in power always respond to the state of mind of those ruled over more than we are accustomed to thinking. Understanding this “connectedness” helps us redefine the traditional ways of viewing and exercising our personal powers.

Taking a Stand

In *Death of Outrage*, William Bennett reminds us of our moral responsibility to speak out against things we think are wrong. He says, “In a self-governing and law-abiding nation, we must never allow ourselves to be lulled into passive disgust or indifference, the civic equivalent of a shrug of the shoulders. We must never lose our sense, when appropriate, of outrage.”¹⁹ “*When appropriate*” are the operative words to which I might add “*respectful*” outrage (if that’s not a contradiction in terms). Truth is always appropriate; it is best within the parameters of compassion.



Speak the truth tempered with mercy.

Personally and organizationally we are dead without the truth clothed in kindness. It is not helpful to anyone to “turn the other cheek” until we have turned our heads backward! By protecting, denying, ignoring, withholding, lying, hiding, and being politically correct, we become partners in the adversity, perpetuating situations which need to stop—not just for our own sake or for the good of the company, but also for the welfare of the one who is involved in the misdeed. It’s interpersonal suicide to lie and withhold information. Likewise being “brutally” honest and personally “ruthless” create defensiveness and destroy trust. The use of sarcasm, complaint, anger, and self-righteous indignation make bad situations worse. As Maya Angelou puts it, “Whining is not only graceless, but can be dangerous. It can alert a brute that a victim is in the neighborhood.”²⁰



Differ with Discernment.

Taking a stand should be done with deliberation and *reasonable* insight and understanding about the goals, costs, and benefits. It is enormously challenging to maintain the delicate balance of merging personal opinions and identity with those of the organization. If we spoke out on everything we felt, issues both great and small, we would be viewed as such a threat to the organization we would never be trusted with important assignments. The boundaries of dissonance and dissent vary widely in organizations collectively and individually. Our tolerance for differences and disagreement are as personal and individual as are our abilities to respond with wise judgment and interpersonal skill. By thinking about and coming to terms with our own *tolerance quotient* help to anticipate and prevent problems.

The movement toward openness and communicating *feelings* is also not without pitfalls. For example, in the same way withholding information is detrimental, so is indiscriminate openness and trust.



*Myth #14: By sharing my true feelings with someone,
he or she will respond to my needs.*

Maybe, maybe not. The proliferation of self-help material and pop psychology has made many workers sitting ducks in the pitiful pool of “I messages!” The assumptions underlying the value of telling others how you feel is that they *want to know* what you feel, that they will *care* how you feel if they know, and they will *change* what they are doing if it is *hurtful* to you. Relying upon psychological or rational solutions in abusive situations at work (or elsewhere) in fact often *enables* manipulative and insincere co-workers to not only continue but to intensify their destructive behavior. *The very nature of a psychological remedy presumes open, honest communication and a dedication to truth, which almost always is lacking when abuse is present.* Speaking up for what we believe in, reclaiming our dignity and self-respect, defining for ourselves and others the parameters within which we wish to be treated and how we will treat others may work out well, but it might not. Defining the bottom line (or drawing an imaginary line in the sand) creates a controlled crisis from which positive change *may* occur. It may also make things worse in the short run. Havel reminds us there are no guarantees:

When a person tries to act in accordance with his conscience, when he tries to speak the truth, when he tries to behave like a citizen, even in conditions where citizenship is degraded, it won't necessarily lead any where, but it *might*. [Emphasis added.] There's one thing, however, that will never lead anywhere, and that is speculating that such behavior will lead somewhere.²¹

It's a pig in a poke. You could wind up a hero or be perceived as a troublemaker. The threat to our livelihood—of making things worse—is one of the biggest things that holds us back. If you fail to speak up and it's discovered later you should have, you only delay the inevitable, usually at a higher price. Yet, if the basic aim of being a “dissident” is to serve the truth and the real purposes of life, the reward is in the “dissent” itself. The gratification of living an independent life of integrity makes up for a world of what on the surface may appear to be losses. Living true to your own values and beliefs is its own reward. Sometimes, there is virtue in *losing*. Nevertheless, savvy workers make a concerted effort to develop the skills needed to feel secure in this arena.

Defining Boundaries/Managing Boundary Violations

Robert Frost said, “Good fences make good neighbors.” Establishing boundaries act as guideposts along the hero's path. Boundaries define the limits of our emotional, physical, spiritual, or sexual relationships with each other—they tell us that certain behavior is unsuitable in the context of certain relationships. A boundary violation occurs when someone knowingly or

unknowingly crosses the line of what we feel is acceptable. It may be both deliberate or accidental. It can be innocently committed out of kindness or maliciously committed out of animosity.

More often than not, personal boundaries have been violated when there's adversity at work. Managing our boundaries at work is difficult because these "unwritten rules" vary from person to person, situation to situation, and culture to culture, thus making us feel like we're shooting at a moving target! Our ability to set and respect appropriate boundaries begins in infancy. In a healthy family we learn to respect the rights and feelings of others, what is appropriate in our interactions with each other. As we know, in an unhealthy family the reverse is also true. People learn these subtle clues about boundary management mostly by observing others' actions, both good and bad, in the give and take, the ebb and flow of human interactions.

The goal is to form boundaries that are appropriate to the situation—some that have flexibility, some that are rigid. Boundaries should be distinct enough to preserve our individuality yet open enough to admit new ideas and perspectives. They should be firm enough to keep our values clear, but open enough to allow for differences with others. They should be closed enough to withstand invasion from the crude, the rude, and unrighteous domination.

Many people at work know very little about "fence building and maintenance," especially if their family of origin was dysfunctional in some way. And whose wasn't? I've made my share of mistakes in taking a stand and setting boundaries.

In one situation, my manager had the habit of ridiculing me and his other subordinates in the weekly staff meeting. He was a large man, about 6 feet 4 inches tall and was intimidating by his very presence (especially since I am barely five feet tall and weigh a little over a hundred pounds). The company was experiencing a major downturn in sales, and the president and CEO of the company never missed an opportunity to tell all of us what losers we were. My boss accelerated his tendency to do the same.

It was an unusually stressful time for me. I worked 12 to 14-hour days, commuted more than an hour and a half each way, and struggled with the challenge of blending two families in a second marriage. On several occasions I used my best communication skills to no avail to try to reason with my boss. Quite foolishly one day, following one of his tirades, I jumped to my feet and saluted him saying, "*Yes suh, Massuh, anything you say, Massuh!*" I rejoiced in my courageous attempt to reclaim my self-respect. But, a short time later, my "heroic" stand invoked the Law of the Hog when management "right-sized" the company by laying off more than 300 people. The Hog ate

me and dozens of other good people who had made politically incorrect choices, including the only employee so technically indispensable that the company carried a life insurance policy on him! People rarely get fired for such impulsiveness as mine, especially if they're good workers. However, a reduction in workforce provides a politically correct opportunity to get revenge.

To set a more effective boundary with my boss, I should have chosen a time out of the heat of the moment to say something like "I can see from your response to me yesterday, that you are very upset with my performance. I didn't intend to disappoint you, and I'm very sorry. I am committed to giving you and (name of company) my very best. I am trying very hard to meet your expectations. But, when you raise your voice and put me down, I find it very difficult to stay motivated or focused on my work and also to respect you. Please speak to me in a calm tone and in a respectful way to help me understand what you want. "

Another mistake we often make in organizations is inappropriately taking a stand on behalf of someone else. Instead of helping the mistreated person improve the situation for him or herself, the "rescuer" often becomes the victim. People who feel victimized often engage others to "do their anger" for them by appealing to co-workers' sense of fair play. A compassionate intent to help rectify injustice can easily turn into a death sentence for unsuspecting good people at work.

Laura's Story

Laura worked with Alan, a vice president in a small entrepreneurial firm that produced commercials for radio and television. He was quite successful in his field, but was frequently embroiled in controversy. He often felt slighted or mistreated by his co-workers and management and confided in Laura, a new employee in the company. He also shared with her stories about the difficulties which he had encountered being raised in an alcoholic home. Feeling compassion for him, Laura sided with Alan in the controversy and when the opportunity presented itself, she also voiced her disapproval to her boss about the way Alan was being mistreated.

She soon began expecting the same mistreatment to happen to her, and she now included herself in the indictments against the company when she shared her disappointments with her boss. As a new employee in the company, taking sides and complaining influenced people to question her intent and she was quickly labeled "hard to get along with." Her co-workers became suspicious of her intentions and soon complained about her to her boss.

Realizing the detrimental effects these conversations were having on her own attitude and morale, Laura approached Alan to discuss the problem. She said, "Alan, I know that you're having a hard time right now, and I truly wish I could help you. But, I'm finding that by 'confessing the sins of others' here, I'm undermining my own career. I think it's best not to discuss this with you anymore, not because I don't care about you, but to prevent myself from feeling so negative about my job."

Alan felt hurt and betrayed. He withdrew from Laura and added her name to the list of those he didn't care for in the company. Laura had victimized herself to the point her career went nowhere and eventually had to look for another job.

The best way to help someone who is being mistreated is to listen with empathy, to help them sort out their options, *without* taking sides in a dispute. Taking sides often leads to gossip and duplicity, thus damaging the relationship with the offender and other co-workers. Once one is embroiled in the controversy, it can be extremely difficult to withdraw without being charged with betrayal by one or both parties. The task is to help ourselves and others to become their *own* heroes, not become a hero *for* them.²²

Think about the problems you are facing currently at work. What kinds of boundaries are being violated? Describe specifically whether the boundary violations are too intrusive—taking too much liberty, or too distant—not close enough. Pay attention to the feelings which come up as you consider these violations. An awareness of these feelings connects us to the *meaning* necessary to take a stand to restore appropriate decorum and obligation. You can trust your feelings to tell you that *action needs to be taken* though not necessarily *what* that action is. It is very easy to get sidetracked and deceived by applying *motive* to what we think are another's *intentions* and to respond to our *perceptions* of the violation. Remember to pay attention to and set aside “accusing emotions.” Make a *reasonable* effort to understand why something is or is not happening. But, when adversity steps over the line to abuse, take action.

Perhaps some of you are in serious personal distress, needing some kind of immediate remedy and relief. It is my hope that after completing the book you will be more prepared to take appropriate action. However, for those who find themselves in need of immediate assistance, please consider the follow actions:

- 1. Document everything.** If you aren't already doing so, begin now. Keep a journal of daily events, copies of performance reviews, commendations or reprimands, salary history, violations of public policy, breaches of implied contracts, breaches of good faith and fair dealing practices, illegal discrimination, etc. Establish a paper trail and preserve supporting documents of these events and witnesses if possible.
- 2. Learn about your rights.** Many companies have policies to protect employees from abusive work practices. Learn what they are. If what you're dealing with is egregious enough to violate the law and can find no relief from management, contact the labor relations board in your area

to discuss state and or federal protection. Find out if there is an appeals process in your company.

3. **Consider the consequences.** What do you think will happen if you go public with what is happening? Decide if the negative consequences outweigh present circumstances. Have discussions with family, friends, and others with similar experiences. Legal counsel may also be useful.
4. **Explore other job options.** Knowing you do not have to stay in the present job helps take off some of the pressure and strengthens your position to negotiate a more suitable situation. If you find you must leave, getting another job is much easier if you already have one.
5. **Tell someone; bring it out into the open.** If the offensive situation continues and a decision is made to confront the behavior directly, you should tell the offender what your observations are in a direct, specific, and nonpunishing way. For example, say, "I've noticed you stand very close to me, call me "sweetie," and complain about your wife. It feels as if you are coming on to me. Is this what you intend?" Tell the offender you find the behavior inappropriate and would like it to stop. Tell him or her that you don't want to report it to management but are prepared to do so if necessary. If the behavior persists, shift the responsibility to management. Make the complaint in writing to the company's highest ranking executive, with a copy to your immediate supervisor.
6. **Ask for mediation.** Convey your goals to resolve the situation without escalating the conflict and commit to working with a neutral third party. Mediation demonstrates good faith toward an equitable and fair resolution to the problem and helps alleviate defensiveness. If you decide that litigation is the only remedy satisfactory to you, be realistic about what the costs are to you and your family. Get *expert* legal advice, someone who has a winning track record who can accurately assess your particular situation and advise you honestly. If it's worth spending several years in litigation, make sure you have a winnable case. The majority of lawsuits do not meet the burden of proof required under current statutes. Also, rulings are very inconsistent from case to case.
7. **Use your support system.** Elected officials, professional organizations, church groups, family, and others can provide support and encouragement that help alleviate stress during what is often a long drawn-out process. Resist the temptation to talk about it at work. Remember, there are no secrets in organizations and people are going to talk about it no matter

what you do or don't do. It is much safer to keep quiet and work within the system to resolve the conflict.

8. **Don't be afraid to retreat.** Going public with a complaint is often debilitating. Only you know when enough is enough. Knowing when to walk away can prevent considerable heartache.
9. **Grieve your losses.** It takes time to heal. Survivors of workplace abuse typically recover through five stages of grief—denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. For people who have histories of abuse elsewhere in their lives, abuse at work is usually more difficult to handle and may require professional help.²³

Remember the Law of the Hog and also Myth # 4: ***You can control people through intimidation and fear.*** The power of the payback creates only the *illusion* of control not *real* control. During hard times when we are stretched to the max, it is crucial to maintain civility and respect. We do not help our cause by beating people up or exposing their weaknesses publicly.

How may we know that our dissent will make any difference? How may we know the risk is worth it? Many things are so complex, it seems hopeless to do anything about our problems. Anything we could do would be a “drop in the ocean.”

Our doubt has been answered best by Mother Theresa who said: “But without that drop, the ocean would not be full.” The accumulation of little things brings subtle pressure on the powerful. *These “little ‘drops in the ocean” are the power of the powerless.*

The pathway of the impossible task of improving ourselves in a world of enmity is lit by the heroic Danes and other heroes who have traveled before us. Despite the power from “above” of a totalitarian communist regime, poet and playwright Václav Havel, with the help of the “little people” from “below” peacefully created Charter 77, a covenantal call for civil and human rights in Czechoslovakia. His and others' prophetic words inspired not only the opposition movement but also Solidarity activists in Poland and dissidents in other neighboring countries. He was named Czechoslovakia's president just four months later. The “drops in the ocean” of Abraham Lincoln, who risked everything by speaking out against slavery, sent out ripples that, after numerous defeats, became currents strong enough to reunite a nation; of Martin Luther, whose simple act of nailing his dissent to the church door led to a restoration of religious freedom; of Gandhi, whose passive

resistance saved a nation from bondage; of Martin Luther King, whose word pictures of his dream of racial equality and justice for all people rallied a nation.

And Linda, who stood up for the Boy Scout program:

Linda's Story

When I worked for the Boy Scout office, I had a very difficult time with the way the Eagle Scout program was being run. After sharing my concerns with the leadership, they said, "We don't want you working with the Eagle Scout program any more," and assigned me elsewhere. I knew they were violating the way they were supposed to run the program and the whole thing hurt me. I thought about it for a couple of days and said to myself, "I don't have to work here and accept this thing I feel is wrong," and resigned the next day.

I looked for a job for weeks. You know it isn't easy finding a job when you're middle-aged. Then something spoke to me inside, saying, "This will all work to your benefit." The same day I received a call from my bishop [church leader] asking me to come in to talk to him about my employment. While I was sitting in his office, the phone rang, informing us of a new job opening at one of the church offices. I got the job, and I couldn't ask for a better place to work.

More often than not, the lonely life on the lily pad is replaced by a place to call home.

If we are to have a resurrection of hope and redemption for the men and women of the workplace, we will come to understand that without each person's drop, the ocean will not be full. In Havel's words, "It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out." He adds,

Hope, this deep and powerful sense, is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early success, *but, rather, an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed.* The more unpropitious the situation in which we demonstrate hope, the deeper that hope is. Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. *It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.* [Italics added.] ²⁴

See good, do good, be good, regardless.



*Making consistent, unapologetic principled
choices is the basis of success.*

Emerson said, “Nothing can bring you peace but yourself; nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles.” Some people have that incredible ability to continue to rise above the fray, who continue to do well in spite of the competition and chaos of organizational life. They are their own heroes—they create their own meaning through strong commitment to moral and ethical principles that provide strong motivation to endure well no matter what happens externally. And they have the skills to match their principles. Even when their job security is threatened, when they face adversity and uncertainty at every corner, their responses are altruistic and unselfish. They are committed to a larger purpose, to respond well to what life *demand*s of us instead of what life *owes* us:

Mark’s Story

Mark’s career was very important to him. He worked very hard and was careful to keep himself out of political battles that would damage his career in any way. He was successful in avoiding political quagmires and wanted to keep it that way. His political neutrality and successful work resulted in considerable credibility and influence in his organization. His boss treated him well and gave him large year-end bonuses which he anticipated.

Mark believed strongly in being loyal to one’s boss. He had a practice of disagreeing with his boss only behind closed doors and supported her in the company of others. He could be quite vocal about his perspectives, but once she made the decision, he felt it was his job to implement it. Unfortunately, his belief in loyalty was challenged by an even stronger value, that of honesty.

While working with his boss on a project he experienced, unexpectedly, a behavior that disturbed him. What she said behind closed doors was noticeably different from what she said publicly. For instance, with up-coming changes she announced to a group of employees that there would be no chance that employees would lose their jobs. However, in a previous meeting she spoke of planning for a layoff. For Mark, representing his boss became difficult. Although *he* wasn’t lying, he *knew* that it was a lie and felt when people saw him with her, they would view him as part of the lie. Mark concluded that he had to say something.

Mark entered his manager’s office and explained that he was uncomfortable when she said one thing and did another. Her immediate reaction was calm but afterwards he was ostracized from any future meetings and communications on the project. For him, it seemed his career was over. He struggled with keeping the value of

supporting his manager and what he was currently experiencing. He decided against running to other leaders in the organization to vent and to build a coalition against her. He continued to focus on his work although the situation was very disturbing to him.

Soon the leaders noticed Mark's absence from the meetings and asked him what was happening. It was clear that a "falling-out" had occurred. To Mark's relief, he found that many leaders that were peers to his boss came to his support. The support was so strong that his boss offered him a significant promotion.

People like Mark have taken the time to get really clear about who they are, what is important, what brings them real satisfaction. They demonstrate hope, an orientation of the spirit, supported by faith that all things work toward good for those who go to the end of the light, "leaning not to thine own understanding." They trust in that true source from "elsewhere" spoken of by Havel— a force that not only keeps us above water but inspires us to live creatively even under difficult circumstances.

Within this spiritual orientation, the power of the powerless is knowing that what on first glance looks like *descent* is actually *ascent*.

Yet, many workers betray themselves by buying into another myth:



*Myth #15: If I don't go along with those in authority,
I'll lose my job.*

Maybe, maybe *not*. But, if you do, better your job than your soul.

For the journey is not for us alone. When we make meaningful departures from the beaten path to the hero's path, we find there is an "element of universality" to the experience that *connects* us to a larger community. If something isn't good for others, it stands to reason it isn't good for us either. We carry our responsibility with us everywhere and must accept it here and now in whatever circumstances we find ourselves.²⁵

Deepening one's responsibility to and for the whole community is the journey of the hero. The primary purpose is not to impact the *power structure*, but through independent action to indirectly

impact *society*. By taking a stand or asking the hard questions, we tap into the “hidden sphere” of the larger community of men and women at work who feel the same as we do, who are also committed to the moral and ethical issues concerning how to get work done with our souls intact. If we do not go quietly into the night, we become the force for those who are either too afraid or too demoralized to speak what is really true.



*The power of the powerless is to raise the hope
and confidence of our fellow man.*

Our independent initiatives address the hidden sphere of possibilities to reveal the true nature of power; our individual actions “unmask” the deception of the powerful who seek to impose their wishes upon the weak in order to get gain. Our personal challenge is to live with an attitude of abundance and trust, letting go of the fear that pushes us to control others:



*The power of the powerless is letting go of the need
to control people and outcomes.*

The principles and strategies of control are redirected to *self*-control and *self*-discipline. If we’re “lucky,” we come to this conclusion by being tested against other people’s ideas of what is “good” for us. Sometimes we become broken and stay broken by the process. By submitting to sanctions for going against “the system,” we develop a disciplined identity which can withstand adversity, allowing us to tolerate more and more disharmony. The pain forces us to *know what we really believe*. When we are called upon to hang over the edge of a precipice, we know the rope will hold us because it has been tested. This chastening process, the process of becoming *savvy* (if not so severe that it breaks our spirits) allows us to *rise above*, not just stay within a set of rules as defined by someone else.

In an attempt to “succeed” at work, we implement systems that try to manipulate and direct nearly every aspect of people’s lives. Professor Bonner Ritchie describes a predictable phenomenon in

organizations as a “tendency towards conservative convergence.” He pictures this occurring as movement toward the point of a cone whereby “we get more and more control over less and less until finally we have perfect control over nothing. That is the fate of most organizations. That is where systems find themselves as they attempt to run every aspect of the lives of people, as they attempt to dictate all policies, as they become weighted down by bureaucratic rules, with more and more tests of obedience, loyalty, and conformity.”²⁶



We try to impose our solutions to problems that people don't even know they have! Ritchie says, “There is something pernicious about convincing someone he or she has a problem in order to implement your solution.”²⁷ In Ritchie's words, we must go *down the cone* before we can go *outside the cone*. We must *converge* if we are to *diverge*. It is in this process (usually filled with great doubt and discouragement) that gives birth to new convictions; new hope is born from what initially seems absurd. On the surface, it seems useless to try to teach a pig to sing; it wastes your time and annoys the pig.

The Power of Reframing

The chastening process can be dealt with better, once again, by redefining or reframing. James Hillman redefines this growth as a kind of power in the more enlightened terms of *deepening*, *intensification*, *shedding*, *repetition*, and *emptying*.

Deepening: Developing more staying power. It implies no avoidance, no escape. In a sense it is true that regardless of where we work, we will come up against the same problems to a greater or lesser degree. Bloom where you're planted. Clean up the mess as best you can. Hillman says,

Deepening forces an organization, like marriage, to go into itself to get to the bottom of its troubles. Going to the bottom does not stop at the bottom line, but goes into

those supporting myths and philosophies on which an organization —again, like a marriage—rests. What will be sacrificed to achieve its aims and to whose cost? What corners is it willing to cut? What deceptions does it practice? Can it ever be content, or must it be perpetually under pressure for ever more growth, called success?

Eventually, deepening gets down to bedrock ideas and the moral grounds which, like marriage, make partnership in the organization possible. Does this organization have a fundamental vision which I can share; does it desire the same goals; do we practice similar principles? What truly, realistically, are its principles—and what are mine? Are we joined in a marriage for money? Is our partnership a utilitarian relationship—that is, are we useful to each other, and therefore do I use the business as it uses me? The more I stick with these issues and the more the organization can stay with its own self-questioning depths, the more both I and it may be actually growing (in the sense of growth as evolving and maturing.) This growth could be called growth of soul. As in a garden or a marriage, deepening brings ugly twisted things out of the soil. It's a work in the dirt.²⁸

Intensification. Rather than squeezing more return from each hour of labor or crowding more out of each unit, benchmarks of another kind are prized, such as creating *long-lasting value* that comes from an emphasis on *quality* instead of efficiency. The focus is on the *beauty* and *loveliness* of the performance. Hillman says,

(But) nothing intensifies more than being in love—the love brought to the art of your work and the love in which the work is done. Nothing makes one leaner either, for the whole psyche is concentrated upon the object of desire. Lean, yes, but not mean.²⁹

Shedding. We're all too familiar with the hollow traditions of cutting the pork (pardon the pun) at work. Hillman suggests a more radical shedding, the kind that usually comes as a result of crises that move us to take stock of what is really important and essential. Radical shedding forces us to imagine the worst, to take imaginative risks described by Robert Jay Lifton, the psychologist who studied catastrophes and holocausts. The task is to project in the mind the possible scenarios of what life would be like without whatever we are attached to and “letting go of all security structures, comforting identities, realized achievements, forward planning. See what remains, for only what remains can be truly relied on for growth.”³⁰

Repetition. Think of routine and often monotonous activities as rituals that show “the soul's pleasure in practice, in polishing, in precision.” Doing something over and over not for the sake of trying to get it right or over with, but as a way to make things beautiful.³¹

Emptying. There is power in the void. “This idea claims that emptiness has an invisible power that plays a determining role in what appears. Patterns emerge and grow out of the empty, much as

the potter's jar forms itself around the active presence of a hollow. . . or the toneless pause between notes makes rhythm and melody possible."³²



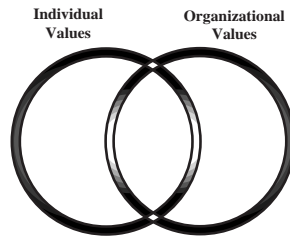
The power of the powerless is finding peace in empty spaces.

Your Values Will Carry You Through

Most of us know that our values will carry us through but still struggle with a continual evaluation of our goals, priorities, talents, roles, and responsibilities. It's an important journey deserving much of our energy and attention. The clarity and commitment around our life's purpose make it possible for us to work and live with integrity. We "begin with the end in mind." Being clear about who and what we are and how we fit in an organization provides a higher sense of personal freedom to take a stand when confronted with the complexity of organizational life. To reexamine what we value most means coming to terms once more with life's questions:

- Who am I?
- What do I want from my life?
- What do I prize above all else?
- What are my gifts?
- When my life is over, how will I want to be remembered?

Some workers spend their entire lives climbing the ladder of success only to find the ladder leaning against not just the wrong wall, against the wrong house. It's hard to predict the events of our lives that provoke us to reexamine what is important to us. Too often it takes a tragedy to bring our priorities to the surface. Suppose you were told you have a terminal illness and have only six months to live. How would you spend your time? What would you do differently than you are doing right now? Answer the question, "Is *having* it all at the expense of *being* it all worth the price?" Perhaps making peanut butter sandwiches is more fulfilling than making a killing. Do your company's values fit your own? The greater the difference between individual and organizational values, the greater difficulty you might expect. Shared values should look like this:



How many of us have become slaves to maintaining our physical needs at the sacrifice of our souls? How many yearn to throw in the towel and start over again? It is within our power to recognize our individual “bliss” and to rid ourselves of the fear to follow it to the best of our ability. In today’s workplace, it is the norm for people to change their careers often—some experts say an average of eight times in their lifetime and their jobs many more times. However, many believe that once a career choice is made they have too much invested to try something else. Perhaps what you have chosen is too small for the giant spirit which lies sleeping within you. The big question is: *are you up to your destiny?*



Follow your heart’s desire: You can trust your destiny.

In James Hillman’s book *The Soul’s Code: In Search of Character and Calling*³³, Hillman’s unique and compelling “acorn theory” presents the view that each life is formed by a particular image. The image is the essence of that life and calls it to a destiny, just as the mighty oak’s destiny is written in the tiny acorn. His theory focuses our attention upon a dedication to what is truly innate, what makes each of us unique, instead of how we got this way or where we are going. We are called to embrace every aspect of life as a necessity, to look at our troublesome symptoms as clues to what the soul demands. His theory offers yet another explanation for what we all know deep inside: there is more to life—to each individual—than can be explained by the visible and tangible world of genetics or environment. When we reexamine our childhood tendencies, patterns and themes, impulses, fantasies, and catastrophes, we rediscover the soul’s blueprint that gives focus and direction to our lives. Carl Jung said, “In the final analysis, we count for something only because of the essential we embody, and if we do not embody that, life is wasted.” Pablo Picasso said, “I don’t develop; I am.”



Rediscovering the essential we embody
—the unique “I am”—
is the power of the powerless.

Doing what comes naturally at work replaces the lonely life of the lily pad with reflecting pools of the angel or genius within each of us. Seeing the full picture of who and what we really are is rediscovered by a dynamic prompting about purpose, discarding what seems important but isn't, and embracing the significant as essential. To follow your bliss is to follow the inner whisperings of the soul to whatever is necessary—despite logical explanations, the pull of doubt, historical influences, or psychological or social labels. In spite of (and *because* of) the twists and turns in the road—the disappointments, the unexpected, the failures—when we answer the call of our unique destiny we develop the hero within. Then, the plaintive fantasy about how wonderful life could be, *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*, is replaced by a the purposeful, authentic life of character and calling.

What is your bliss? What brings you the greatest feeling of fulfillment or achievement? What literally “takes your breath away” in excitement? What are you passionate about? Be careful that your answers are your own, not what someone else felt was success. What are your earliest memories of a sense of achievement? What has been lost of your intrinsic self?

Oprah Winfrey's blueprint of her biography was evident early in childhood when she preached sermons to whoever would listen. Judy Garland knew at the age of two she wanted to sing on stage alone. (Hillman provides dozens of examples in his book.) My oldest son was totally fascinated with doing things with dirt from the time he was two years old. He wanted every Tonka truck made that moved dirt. When he saw road construction, he wanted to know everything about it. His hobby was map-making, spending hour upon hour entranced in the detail of elaborate drawings of highways. At the age of 9, he charted a 3,000 mile journey cross-country, taking his younger brother and me to scenic vistas not to be seen on the “real roads” of the ordinary routes. He had a passion for details about everything and read encyclopedias by the hour. Yet, this brilliant boy despised school, breaking my and his teachers' hearts with his refusal to conform. Dropping out of high school one semester short of graduating, he took the GED and scored the highest of any

person taking the test in ten years! After serving a church mission in Ecuador for two years, he enrolled in college where he found his niche. He loved college, graduating with a 3.7 GPA in—you guessed it—civil engineering, earning a masters’ degree in geotechnical civil engineering with a 4.0 GPA. Geotechnical civil engineers are soil experts in making dams, roads, and waterways. In spite of the labels from teachers, doctors, and counselors who sought to put him (and me) in a tidy little box of environmental explanations, most of which were negative, my son miraculously stayed true to his innate gifts. Looking back, I can see the “deviancy” in his behavior was nothing more than a soul struggling to express itself in a system (family and otherwise) that was out of sync with the flow of his life.



To understand the flow of our lives and the fulfillment of what we were meant to be is the hero’s journey. The life unexamined is a life misunderstood.

A helpful exercise in discovering your bliss is to seek to know your true nature or true identity—to know yourself as God knows you. Through prayer, meditation, or whatever means you use to understand truth, imagine your best nature—your best self—untainted, unspoiled by the trials of living on earth. In a quiet space, go to a safe place in your mind and invite your true nature to come to you. What characteristics define you? The following words may give you some clarity to your “soul’s code”:

Patience	Initiating	Memorizing	Imagining
Designing	Collecting	Unifying	Winning
Risking	Troubleshooting	Training	Teaching
Passion	Communicating	Mentoring	Evaluating
Persistence	Guiding	Modeling	Arranging
Resilience	Fixing	Amusing	Classifying
Adaptive	Questioning	Planning	Composing
Controlling	Inspiring	Problem Solving	Directing
Thinking	Interpreting	Playing	Perfecting
Persuading	Intuiting	Producing	Emphasizing
Helping	Analyzing	Protecting	Mediating
Organizing	Learning	Managing	Testing

Creating
Acquiring
Systematizing

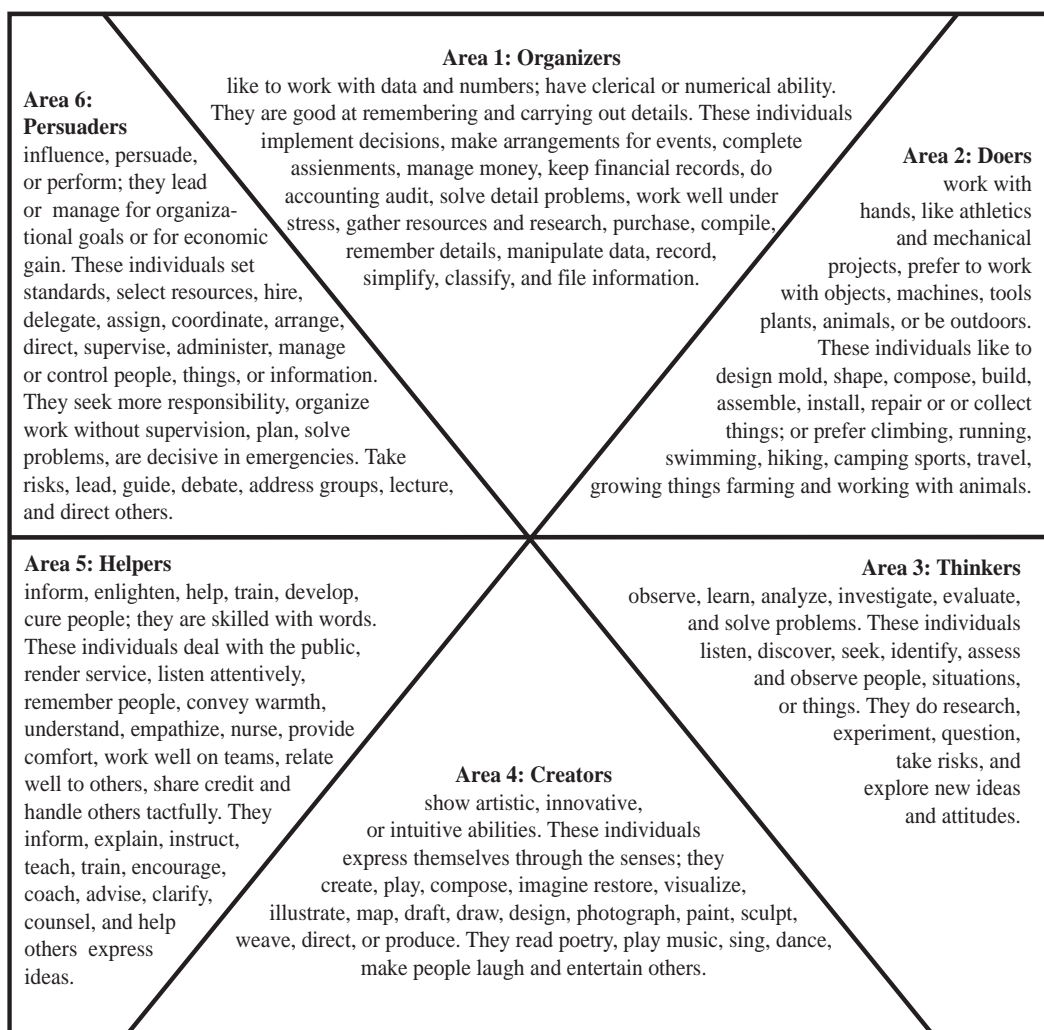
Judging
Making

Symbolizing
Synthesizing

Dramatizing
Manipulating

Does your current job support this new vision? Can you become your own hero at work doing what you're doing? If not, are you willing to change your course? Must you choose another adventure?

To go a step further, you may want to categorize various responsibilities into six general categories:³⁴





*The answers are within, not without.
You already have everything you need to fulfill your
destiny. It's more about recovery than discovery.*

As the poet e.e. Cummings wrote, “To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else—means to fight the hardest battle any human can fight, and never stop fighting.” When we try to be someone or something we are not, we fail in the first responsibility from which all other genuine responsibilities follow. Those who are not true to themselves become incapable of being true to anyone or anything else. The admonition becomes: Keep your aspirations within the possibilities of your own nature. To desire to be more than a human being is to become less, for such desires eventually betray your humanity and blind your mind to the nature of your true self. Follow your inner voice so that you may develop moral integrity and become real. Do not let distractions such as fame and fortune divert you from your personal destiny—to become what you are.³⁵

For many who live in a world of illusion about who we really are, a crisis causes us to stumble upon our power, to become aware of our wholeness, our uniqueness. Through crisis, slowly but surely the “real me” wakes up to the call of *our* soul’s desire; we reject what we and others have tried to “fix” us into.

In *Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories That Heal*, Dr. Rachel Remen’s story of a young resident psychiatrist’s experience vividly illustrates this principle:

Some years ago a young resident psychiatrist from Langley Porter Institute at the UCSF Medical Center who wanted to learn more about people at the edge of life was observing one of my sessions. A former gang member whose hands were covered with tattoos was speaking of the deep love he now felt for his young wife who was dying of cancer, the ways in which this capacity to love had caught him unawares and so had healed him. As he shared insights about himself and experiences of intense intimacy and tenderness with his wife, I glanced over at the young Freudian psychiatrist. He had stopped taking notes. His eyes were filled with tears. After this patient left, I asked him if he had learned anything useful from the session. He smiled ruefully. “We are all more than we seem,” he said.

Actually, we are all more than we know. Wholeness is never lost, it is only forgotten. Integrity rarely means that we need to add something to ourselves: it is more an undoing than a doing, a freeing ourselves from beliefs we have about who we are and ways we have been persuaded to “fix” ourselves to know who we genuinely are. Even after many years of seeing, thinking, and living one way, we are able to reach past all that to claim our integrity and live in a way we may never have expected to live. Being with people at such times is like watching them pat their pockets, trying to remember where they have put their soul

Often in reclaiming the freedom to be who we are, we remember some basic human quality, an unexpected capacity for love or compassion or some other part of our common birthright as human beings. What we find is almost always a surprise but it is also familiar; like something we have put in the back of a drawer long ago, once we see it we know it as our own.³⁶

Dr. Remen’s own personal story of recovering her true destiny also illustrates the power of the soul’s code to find expression. As a member of the Stanford Medical School faculty for several years, Dr. Remen became increasingly restless with the limitations of her profession’s attention to the larger issues of holistic healing rather than treating disease. She wanted to know how people’s beliefs about themselves impacted their ability to get well. How viable was personal intuition about the direction of their healing? How did the personal relationship between the physician and patient influence recovery? Her interests turned toward unorthodox healing practices that went beyond the traditional methods of using the intellect as the primary tool for healing.

When Dr. Remen saw an illustration in Khalil Gibran’s *The Prophet*—a picture of a hand with a “gentle and compassionate human eye in its palm”—she was fascinated with the drawing, feeling the picture was strangely familiar. She learned the picture was a traditional Hindu symbol for the healer, the emblems connecting the hand and the heart, a direct contrast to the scientific focus of medicine. She was captivated by the idea of being able to “see” with her hands. Confessing she was embarrassed to hang the picture in her office at Stanford, she hung the drawing over her desk at home.

A crisis of conscience unfolded concerning the direction of her profession following an unexpected and significant faculty promotion. Instead of being thrilled with the opportunity she had spent a lifetime working toward, she was troubled and uneasy. The traditional path led to recognition, security, and professional success. Yet, she could not bring herself to accept the appointment. With a heavy heart, she escaped to the Florida sunshine and the comfort of her parents’ home to think things through.

Sitting with her mother on a park bench, they noticed a little girl drawing little faces on the tips of her fingers with a felt-tip pen. The little girl and her mother were pretending the faces on her fingers were people and laughed happily together. Dr. Remen's mother said, "Some things never change." Her mother then recounted how her daughter used to take her daddy's fountain pen and draw eyes in the palms of her own hand. Her mother told Dr. Remen that as a little child of four, she would hold her hands up on each side of the face and say, "*Now*, I can see you," and giggle. Her mother said, "Such a funny thing. Sometimes you would not let us wash your hands for days. . . . Do you remember now?"

Dr. Remen writes, "On an average day in the pediatric clinics, I washed my hands thirty or forty times. Perhaps over the years, I had washed away my eyes. About two weeks later, I resigned from Stanford and began searching for my lost eyes."³⁷

Dr. Remen is one of the earliest pioneers in the mind/body health field, developing innovative approaches to help people with life-threatening illnesses. She is co-founder and Medical Director of the Commonweal Cancer Help Program, and is a Clinical Professor at the University of California San Francisco School of Medicine.

Remember, if you follow the familiar feelings, *your* lost eyes may rediscover the power of your soul's desire. Remember, you create your own future. What you see is what you get. In the words of Joseph Campbell,

If you follow your bliss, you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living. Wherever you are—if you are following your bliss, you are enjoying that refreshment, that life within you, all the time.³⁸

And you are not alone; all the heroes have gone before you, and the path is clearly known. Your teacher or guide will be there if you answer the call to embrace your destiny. You can trust your feelings, you can trust your destiny as we continue on our journey.

Endnotes

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