

Living a More Powerful Life

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My topic today is living a more powerful life. How many of you are struggling to live powerfully in more or more aspects of your life and would like some ideas about how to improve your performance in that area? And how many feel like you have most areas of your life pretty much handled and you're here looking for strategies to up your game?

As a child I never thought much about power, except to the degree that I felt I lacked it. As one of four children born to two highly educated and extremely busy professionals, I spent my early years competing for their attention and seeking their approval.

The upshot of this was that I excelled in a number of disciplines, particularly in literature, the humanities, and music, which was a great passion of my father's. After all, how else was I going to win his praise and the attention that I craved?

It was many years later, in my 30s, when I finally realized that success achieved to win someone else's approval is hollow and meaningless. Far from making me feel accomplished or successful, I was living my life at the effect of those around me, giving up my personal power to the people I most wanted to impress. In the eyes of the world, I might have been competent and talented, but in reality I felt weak and out of control. I lived every day in fear of failure and the rejection that I thought that would bring.

Today I understand that true success comes from living a life driven by passion and purpose. I recognize that my inevitable failures are but stepping stones in my journey of personal growth. And while I will always enjoy the approval of others, I gain far more satisfaction and fulfillment from pursuing my personal passions and working in areas where my goals and mission are closely aligned with those of my colleagues and peers. Only then can I ensure that the work I undertake and the contribution I make to the world is in integrity with who I am as a person and therefore something I can do powerfully.

In my work as a leadership trainer and executive coach, my overriding passion is to help my clients connect more deeply with their personal power so that they can live lives of joy and fulfillment while maximizing the results they can achieve, both for themselves and others.

So how does one live powerfully, and who can we look to as possible role models? One of my favorite examples of a truly powerful person is Nelson Mandela. He never set out to be South Africa's first democratically elected president or to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, or even to become a household name all over the world. In his personal biography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela talks about the fact that he was driven to act because he couldn't stand the injustices of the apartheid regime. This was a man who simply wanted to make a difference for his fellow black South Africans and who took the actions available to him that were consistent with his beliefs and values.

This is important. To be powerful we must first be authentic. We must live consistent with our own beliefs, values, and rules. A couple of years ago, I received a lovely viral email that I will always remember because it said, "Be yourself: Everyone else is already taken."

Often in life we see other people we want to be like, to have what they have—their position or power or status or wealth—and that's fine. But far too often we make the mistake of thinking that in order to achieve that, we have to think and act exactly like them. And that's not true. Each one of you is unique, with your own particular blend of gifts, talents, intellect, and other qualities, all of which combine to give you a unique perspective that no one else in the world has. The contribution you have to make in this life is one that no one else can make. So rather than wasting your time trying to be like someone else, why not take the effort to discover all that you are, and then share that powerfully with the world. That is your best opportunity for success and fulfillment.

If you take all the major religions and boil them down to their core premise, you'll find that they all teach the same essential message: that you should do those things that make you stronger and avoid anything that weakens or disempowers you.

In a nutshell, every religion calls you to live powerfully and make your life a worthwhile contribution to the world. Not that I'm here to push any form of religion but rather simply to highlight that as humans we have a spiritual calling or requirement to make our lives have meaning and purpose.

So if we want to live powerfully—and you've assured me that you do—then what are the strategies and tools we can apply to empower ourselves and others?

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines power as the ability to act, that is, it is our capacity to impact our world through our words and deeds.

So let's start with your word.

The Power of Integrity

The great twentieth-century philosopher, inventor, and futurist, Buckminster Fuller, famously said, "Integrity is the essence of everything successful." By this he meant that integrity must be central to anything that we want to do well, for without integrity, our endeavors and initiatives will lack substance and direction. Unless we have a deeper purpose to what we do, we won't have the commitment to push through any obstacles or barriers that might confront us but will give up at the first hurdle.

Think of a time in your life when you promised someone you would do something for her or him, but then you failed to follow through. What happened? Did you really give that request your best effort, your focused attention? Did you make it a priority? Or were other things, other commitments, other people more important to you, and this promise just fell through the cracks?

Now think of another commitment that you made, perhaps to your partner, your children, or someone else who was really important to you. And this commitment you did complete because not to do so would have been inconceivable. What was it about this promise that made it so critical that you completed it? What was the underlying sense of purpose that called you into action and made sure you did everything that was required to achieve a successful outcome? And when you encountered challenges or obstacles, didn't you do whatever you had to in order to overcome them? Now that's a position of integrity.

Integrity is a measure of your ability to live your word, to do what you say you will. And every time you maintain your integrity by following through on what you've said, you become stronger. But every time you break your word or don't act out of integrity, you become weaker.

Living powerfully sometimes means saying no to something you're not really committed to because of the negative impact on you of a broken promise. Unless you resolve any internal or unconscious conflict about why you failed to deliver on that promise, it actually reduces your ability to keep your word in the future. It impacts your level of integrity and your access to your personal power. If you're not committed to doing something, just say no. There's much more integrity in that position of saying no than in saying yes and then failing to follow through. And the other person also knows exactly where she or he stands and can act

accordingly, rather than being let down when you fail to deliver. Only make agreements that you're willing to keep.

Nelson Mandela is a man who has always understood the power of his word, even as a young man. After his father died, when Mandela was just nine years old, he was adopted by the local regent and became the first child in his family to attend school and later university. However, when his adoptive father arranged a marriage for him with a girl he didn't love, Mandela chose to leave the family home rather than enter into a loveless marriage or continue receiving financial support from a man whom he was not willing to obey as a dutiful son.

Years later, when the South African government took Mandela and his fellow members of the African National Congress to court for acting against apartheid, Mandela shocked them by freely acknowledging where he had breached the current laws of the apartheid regime, and using the court case as an opportunity to challenge the government and its unfair policies. And even after being incarcerated for 27 years for his political beliefs, he emerged from prison as committed as ever to leading South Africa out of apartheid. He didn't seek vengeance: He sought peaceful negotiations toward a democracy in which South Africans of all colors were treated equally. This is a man of great integrity.

In my work with business owners and executives, I use a psychometric profiling tool that accurately measures the integrity of both individuals and leadership teams. Extensive research carried out in Australia by a company called Integrity and Values found that the key values that contribute to a person's integrity are their ability to:

- Be truthful
- Take responsibility for her or his actions
- Hold others accountable for the commitments they have made
- Be loyal to an organization
- Have a level of self-awareness

Also critical is the degree to which individuals need the approval of others since this will impact their ability to maintain their position in the face of opposition or disagreement. The data the tool gives me about their integrity and other values it measures provide a useful entrée for powerful coaching conversations.

Individuals' willingness to recognize both their capacity to act and where they have chosen to limit that in the past can open the door to new behaviors and outcomes for the future. An early conversation I will always have with clients will be around building greater awareness and intentionality into their behavioral choices, which has an immediate impact on their level of integrity.

Let me demonstrate with this chart. [visual] When I first saw this simple tool many years ago, I understood—perhaps for the first time—the degree to which I had been abdicating responsibility for taking certain actions in my life. And today this tool, more than any other that I teach, is the one that impacts my life on a daily and even an hourly basis.

This horizontal line I call the line of integrity. In order to stay above the line and operate from a position of integrity, I must take *ownership* of my life. So what does that mean? Well, for me it means that I maintain healthy boundaries, recognize the areas of life that are mine to control, and act appropriately and powerfully in those areas while recognizing and respecting the rights and boundaries of others. Next, I must take responsibility for my actions, both in taking the actions necessary to achieve my goals and be a powerful contribution in my community, as well as accepting the positive or negative consequences of my actions, and being responsible about cleaning up any mess or upset that I might inadvertently have caused. Equally, I must be willing to hold others *accountable* for the commitments they have made to me and take the necessary steps to challenge inappropriate behavior or any failure to take action by them.

The alternative to living above the line is to go below, or out of *integrity*, and to get into BED with *blame, excuses or justifications, and denial*. And these represent the STORY I tell myself about why I don't seem to have everything I want in life and why things aren't working, and why my bank balance doesn't look exactly like I want it to look.

And stories feel familiar and they feel safe, and we carry them around with us and share them whenever we feel the need to explain our lack of results. And when we're hurting, we cozy up to them and take them to bed with us and repeat them over and over again until we think they're gospel truth. And if someone challenges our story, then we go to battle and we defend it and use it as a weapon. And when it comes to stories, any story you fight for you get to keep.

But let me tell you: Your story will keep you stuck and your story will keep you small and it will take away your power. Because every story you carry around to justify yourself will have a life of its own and that demands your energy, and any energy you give to that story is energy that is not available for your life.

Stories are dangerous, but we all have them. I have loads—I have a great one about a really negative interaction that I had with my mother about money when I was just five. I went to a shop with my brother and spent all my pocket money on lollies—candy. My mum got really angry when she found out, and she dragged me round to that shop by my ear and told the shopkeeper in no uncertain terms that he was not to sell anything to me ever again. Or that's how I remember it. But I was five, so who knows. I was scared and upset and angry at being treated that way, and I made it mean all sorts of things about what money was and how I couldn't manage it. Those beliefs dictated the way I acted around money for most of my life.

It's a great story, but for as long as I hung onto it, then, it was in control, and not me. It had all the power, and I was the victim. Because down here, below the line, there is no power for you. The power is all in the story and the denial and the blaming other people for your situation: There is no opportunity to you to act powerfully when you're operating below the line.

If you want to live powerfully in any area of your life—or why not in every area of your life—then you must move above the line and stay there as much as possible. If you're having a challenge in your relationships, your business success, or your finances—hopefully not finances in *this* room—or whatever that area of challenge is for you, then you need to look at where you're not owning the situation, where you're not taking responsibility or acting powerfully, or where you've held back from challenging other people's lack of responsibility and holding them accountable for their actions. This is where you get to be powerful and make changes.

So let's do a quick exercise to really ground this for you. Take a minute right now to identify an area of your life where you haven't achieved the results you want, and be really honest with yourself. How are you responsible for that? What's the story you've been telling yourself to make it okay or to let yourself off the hook? Where have you been in denial? Where have you been blaming other people for your lack of results?

And recognize that, even now, part of you is going to want to keep justifying and saying things like, “But it's not my fault, I couldn't change it.” Please don't fall into that trap. Make the powerful choice and really own what has happened in the past, and set an intention that you will act differently in the future. It would be easy for me to keep blaming my mother for screwing up my beliefs around money, but there's no power in that for me. And once I become aware of a belief that's affecting me in a negative way, I have the ability to make a different choice, and that means I can change my behavior and the results that I achieve.

Living above the line is a moment by moment choice, and I often catch myself down there. What matters not that I go there, but what I do then to move back above the line. Because up here I can be powerful. Here I have the capacity to take action and influence other people in a positive way. Here I am proactive and causing things to happen instead of being a victim living at the effect of the world with no ability to change my circumstances.

So once you've identified why it is you've been struggling in that area of your life, make a decision right now about what you're going to change. How will you take responsibility, who do you need to hold accountable, or what do you need to clean up or do differently? Write down something right now that you can do within 24 hours, because research shows that when we take immediate action toward our goals, we are more likely to follow through and achieve the outcomes we seek.

The Power of Intention

A powerful life is a life of intention and discipline, and yes, I know some people think that's a dirty word, but in a room full of high achievers like yourselves, I'm going to assume that you understand the importance of discipline and that you already appreciate that anyone who is successful uses discipline as a powerful ally to achieve results.

So what kind of disciplines do I believe will best support you to live more powerfully?

First, you need a vision for your life. You need to know where you're going or you'll have no chance of getting there. As the Cheshire Cat said to Alice in *Alice in Wonderland* when she asked him which way she ought to go:

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.

“I don't much care where—,” said Alice.

“Then it doesn't matter which way you go,” said the Cat.

“—so long as I get *somewhere*,” Alice added as an explanation.

“Oh, you're sure to do that,” said the Cat, “if you only walk long enough.”

You see, as long as you're moving, you're going to arrive somewhere. The problem is, most people I know want to get somewhere in particular. And if that's the case, then just being in motion is not enough—you

need to make sure that you're heading in the right direction and you have the right strategy. After all, if I try to walk or even drive home after this conference, I don't like my chances of getting there, given that my home is in Sydney, Australia, so there'd better be an airplane somewhere in my strategy or I'm not going to make it.

A clear vision and goals are the essential tools of powerful people because they allow you to set your direction and measure your progress toward it. Not only that, truly powerful people are also influential and able to articulate their vision in a way that engages and inspires others to join them. Success today is rarely an individual endeavor but usually involves a team that is committed to a shared vision and whose values are aligned toward the desired outcomes. Oprah Winfrey may have been the highly visible face of her television show and other enterprises, but she has always relied on a dedicated team of talented and hardworking people who share her vision to educate and inspire the world. In your own businesses, you will know the importance of ensuring that your teams are aligned with your own culture and values, or risk facing the conflict and division that happens when people want to push their own agenda.

The Power of Communication

I want to touch on communication because, as leaders, the way we communicate is really important. Our ability to influence depends on our ability to communicate persuasively and convincingly. This is a massive topic and something we spend literally days on in our leadership training. But there are a few points I really want to make.

Some people in business confuse the ability to be aggressive and throw their weight around with being powerful. It's not. You will never get the best work out of people who feel bullied or pushed around, especially in today's economy where so many roles require people to demonstrate creativity and innovation—functions that do not operate well when people are under stress.

The best way to influence people is through their values and by building a strong sense of safety, trust, and rapport. So what do I mean when I say to influence someone through their values?

Everything you do, every moment of every day, you do because of your values. If you have a strong value for family, then you are less likely to work late in the evenings and on weekends because that would be

inconsistent with your values structure. However, someone with a top value of financial success will make opposite choices around how they spend their time.

Neither approach is right or wrong—it's just a matter of personal programming and choice. However, knowing another person's values structure gives you a powerful way to align with and influence her or him in the direction you want.

If you're willing to invest a little thought, it's pretty easy to identify people's top values. Here are some key things to consider:

- How do they spend their time?
- How do they invest their money?
- What do they talk about?
- What do they fill their space with, or what do they surround themselves with in their environment?
- What do they give energy to?

Once you've answered these questions, you'll have a good idea of what's most important to them. If you want to engage their commitment and energy for a particular project or initiative of yours, simply show them how participating in that project will help them to meet their top values.

I'm going to play a video clip from one of my favorite movies, called *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, which demonstrates really well how you can use another person's values to influence her or him. [video clip]

Of course, fundamental to achieving any level of influence with people is to begin from a position of respect for them and their beliefs, regardless of whether you happen to agree with them. Any time you label people or judge them, you quickly lose any ability to influence or persuade them.

The Power of Self-Awareness

Powerful people take the time to reflect on their actions and the impact they have on other people. They are on a never-ending journey of personal growth, always seeking to influence others in a way that inspires and empowers them to act.

The wisest people through the ages have upheld the value of self-awareness.

If you visit the Oracle at Delphi in ancient Greece, you will see the inscription “Know thyself” at the entrance to the temple. In the inner sanctum of the old Egyptian temple was the proverb “Man, know thyself . . . and thou shalt know the gods.” Of course, this is easier said than done, as attested by Benjamin Franklin in his *Poor Richard’s Almanack* when he wrote, “There are three Things extremely hard, Steel, a Diamond, and to know one’s self.”

So yes, it takes work to plumb the depths of your consciousness and really understand the forces that drive your actions and choices. However, without this knowledge, you risk simply running the patterns of your childhood and perpetuating old behaviors that might not enable you to achieve your goals. It was hard work for me to dig deep into my dim, dark past to identify that early event that so strongly shaped my beliefs and values around money. But once I had that understanding, I was able to change my financial destiny.

You will be as powerful and will move as fast as you show yourself willing to explore your own hidden depths and identify the impacts of your own attitudes and beliefs. Of course, as a coach myself, I strongly believe that anyone who wants to operate powerfully in the world will benefit from working with a coach or mentor to challenge your assumptions and provide an objective view to your attitudes and behaviors. No athlete would consider competing at a high level without a coach, and the same goes for anyone in any kind of leadership role.

Powerful people also understand the need to manage their resources effectively. This doesn’t just mean money but also people, time, and energy. I’m going to be really blunt for a moment—if you want to live powerfully and you don’t manage your diet effectively in terms of eating healthy, or you’re not exercising regularly, then you’re kidding yourself. Eating fast food or loading up with sugar every day is not going to give you the energy you need to achieve your goals. More than that, it will shorten your life span, and that’s really going to get in the way of your doing what you want to do. The same goes for anyone who smokes, abuses drugs, or drinks too much alcohol. Our bodies are not designed for lots of sugar or fat or drugs of any kind, other than medicine, of course. Remember what we started with? Do the things that make you stronger and avoid what makes you weak.

I’m not going to labor this point because we’re all adults and the research available is compelling. But if you’re in denial about the negative consequences of what you’re putting in your body, it’s time to get responsible about supporting your physical structure and energy levels. And if that’s not you, then you can

sit there and feel smug right now—I'm cool with that. But it needs to be said because most of us come from developed nations, and the biggest health issues affecting those countries are things like obesity, alcohol abuse, and drug abuse. Enough said. Just make sure that you are above the line on this one and that you're supporting your wonderful goals and dreams with a body that is healthy and fit enough to enable you to achieve them.

Even when he was in prison, Nelson Mandela exercised every day. He knew how important it was for him to maintain his health and energy levels, even in the face of deprivation and hard physical labor for many years, if he wanted to have a chance at leading change when he was finally released.

The Power of Leverage

Let's look briefly at the power of leverage. Operationally, leverage is the ability to influence a system or an environment in a way that multiplies the outcome of your efforts without a corresponding increase in the consumption of resources. In other words, leverage is where a relatively small amount of cost yields a much higher level of return than you could have achieved through your own efforts alone. In business we often leverage other people's money, resources, or expertise through outsourcing, through partnering, or by employing staff to enhance our results.

Leverage is a critical element of living powerfully because it allows you to maximize the return on your investment of time, energy, or resources to increase the impact or contribution you can make. Our friend Bucky understood this principle well. In 1972 Bucky was quoted as saying:

Something hit me very hard once, thinking about what one little man could do. Think of the *Queen Mary*—the whole ship goes by and then comes the rudder. And there's a tiny thing at the edge of the rudder called a trim tab. It's a miniature rudder. Just moving the little trim tab builds a low pressure that pulls the rudder around. Takes almost no effort at all. So I said that the little individual can be a trim tab. Society thinks it's going right by you, that it's left you altogether. But if you're doing dynamic things mentally, the fact is that you can just put your foot out like that and the whole big ship of state is going to go. So I said, call me Trim Tab.

And, in fact, those words—"call me Trim Tab"—were inscribed on the headstone of Buckminster Fuller's grave after he died in 1983. He was the recipient of numerous honorary doctorates and awards, including the

Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian award. And, as an interesting side note, that interview with Bucky was published in the February 1972 issue of *Playboy* magazine, so maybe some of the people who say they read *Playboy* for the articles are actually telling the truth. Maybe . . .

The challenge for us today is to explore all the different ways we can create leverage to enable us to achieve our goals faster and operate more powerfully in the world.

Make Magic

Throughout my presentation today I've talked extensively about the importance of taking action. For powerful people, this will also mean taking calculated risks.

There's an oft-used saying that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. Similarly, Einstein once said, "The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them."

The message is clear: In order to achieve different outcomes, you must act and think differently. That means getting out of your comfort zone and trying something different or new. Because the reality is, your comfort zone is comfortable to you because it's a known quantity. You know how it feels, you know how to act, and you know what the outcome is going to be. The downside is, you will never learn anything new about yourself or what's possible for you in your comfort zone.

So take a risk—go out on a limb and see what else is possible. Your comfort zone is really small, and while it feels safe and secure, you're not going anywhere new as long as you act from there. But if you challenge yourself, you just might discover that there's more to you than you realized . . . and that's when you experience the magic. And I promise there is definitely magic out there for you to experience.

During those years in prison, Nelson Mandela could not have known that he was going to be South Africa's first black president. He just stuck to his convictions and acted accordingly, continually pushing and challenging himself and others to step up and make more powerful choices. And the rest is history.

Your future is entirely up to you. Make your endeavors worthy of your life.