

## Empowering choices for more happiness and fortitude

*"The price of greatness is responsibility."*

*Winston Churchill*

Here we explore and find out your own way to ensure you stay in a positive state of being and soar towards greatness, maintaining the courage to move forward amidst uncertainty and possible adversity on your journey.

That actually can be a tall order. Challenges will arise along your way: people's adverse agendas, accumulations of set-backs, competing priorities, to name just a few.

My experience over the years, as an executive and then as a coach, has led me to realize that making a few conscious choices about what we believe gears us with considerably more fortitude to endure, and -most importantly- more happiness, therefore more energy and productivity. I came to believe that happiness precedes greatness.

Let's go and beat the odds Ernest Hemingway reminded us of, when he wrote "happiness in intelligent people is the rarest thing I know"!

You know that your beliefs shape your perceptions of reality, your moods and your attitudes. True self-empowerment comes from choosing empowering beliefs. I found the greatest leaders I coached had made a few similar deliberate, self-reinforcing choices. Here I wish to share them for your consideration.

### **1. Choose optimism**

*"Pessimists are usually right and optimists are usually wrong, but all the great changes have been accomplished by optimists." Thomas L. Friedman<sup>1</sup>*

Optimism is underrated. I am not talking about naïve idealism or mindless enthusiasm here...

Eric, a former coachee, is a remarkably successful businessman, and his favourite song is 'Puisque tu pars'<sup>2</sup> from French singer Jean-Jacques Goldman. The line that

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<sup>1</sup> American author and journalist (born in 1953)

<sup>2</sup> 'since you are going away'; watch the rendition of this magnificent song by the artist at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dc40M9DEVWU>

inspires Eric the most is "*Cette force de penser que le plus beau reste à venir*" ('that strength to believe the most beautiful is yet to come'). I am always inspired by his ability to rebound from set-backs, and continuously grow his companies against all odds.

Winston Churchill nailed it when he said "I am an optimist; it doesn't seem too much use being anything else".

Could you leave your comfort zone and embrace uncertainty and change without it?

Could you attract and inspire bright, passionate followers you without it?

A more challenging question is... what will you do to nurture your optimism?

Lao Tzu said "Be careful what you water your dreams with. Water them with worry and fear, and you will produce weeds that choke the life from your dreams. Water them with optimism and solutions, and you will cultivate success. Always be on the lookout for ways to turn a problem into an opportunity for success."

These two Chinese characters mean 'crisis' or 'risk':



You can notice the ideogram for "opportunity" is more complex than the one for danger.... And it can be arduous to identify opportunities in crisis! Yet...

**1<sup>st</sup> tip: train your mind at uncovering opportunities in challenges.**

You will find out you can excel at it rather shortly, because the rewards you gain make this practice addictive.

Sheila is the head of Marketing in Japan for a well-known FMCG<sup>3</sup> company. She took the next step and repeatedly questioned her subordinates 'what are three opportunities for us in this problem you brought forward?' They first gave her blank looks, and then produced more and more valuable ideas... A little later, a competitor launched a fierce price-war to gain market-share, and Sheila was delighted to observe her team putting together quickly an enhanced value-proposition for the customers, including bundled sales, at similar costs, that the rival company could not

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<sup>3</sup> Fast Moving Consumer Goods, such as food, home care or personal care products

offer. Sheila's team actually ended growing their market-share by 2% and profit-margin by 3%.

You know the second tip:

2<sup>nd</sup> tip: 'surround yourself with enough positive people', not the blind kind of course, rather the courageous kind.

In addition, you may need to confront naysayers. Avoid to remind them of George Bernard Shaw's sharp remark "a pessimist is a man who thinks everybody is as nasty as himself, and hates them for it." Instead, just invite them to 'create more value' with what they say. I promise that will get them thinking.

Our intelligence drives us to see what can go wrong, we must strengthen our will to drive us to see what can go right.

## **2. Choose to trust others**

Buddha said a lot when he asserted: "Health is the greatest gift, contentment the greatest wealth, *faithfulness the best relationship.*"

At this moment along your journey towards greatness, you trust yourself to be 'good enough' to handle hardships. Therefore you can take the risk to choose to trust others and explore to possible rewards.

The rationale behind such a choice is simply put by Ernest Hemingway: "The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them." I wish to add that the best way to be trusted by somebody is to trust them, and therefore it matters to leaders. Lao Tzu –yes, him again!- said "he who does not trust enough can not be trusted". I am not talking about unconditional trust here, as I wasn't of blind optimism. 'Believe in God and lock your car' would better reflect the approach I suggest to trusting others.

Hence I recommend you give your trust and - at the same time - explain that you choose to anchor your relationships in trust because it is rewarding for all... 95% of the time (thereby implying that you remain aware that 5% of people don't honour your trust back).

It is about choosing to offer your trust in an adult-to-adult relationship, where each party is accountable for their commitments and holds the other one accountable as well. A clear opposite to parent-child relationship where the parent-figure will take full responsibility and won't hold the child-figure responsible.

Neuroscience has shown that people are energized as they gain a degree of autonomy. And you know full well that trust and empowerment motivate people to give their best. In reverse, micromanagement demotivates them drastically.

1<sup>st</sup> tip: grant your trust and explain why you choose to do so.

It is also important that you explain to those around you how integrity is a core-value of yours, and why you don't tolerate any lack of it. Some people may derail and manifest dishonesty... My experience is that it is rarely worthwhile to give them a second chance. After all, the saying goes "once a thief, always a thief". And toxic behaviours tend to spread quickly. That is why we take a rotten apple out from a fruit basket the very moment we spot it. Likewise, it is usually the best choice to remove an untrustworthy employee from their position.

2<sup>nd</sup> tip: don't compromise about integrity.

Choosing to trust is like investing in a –rather untapped- market, where the rewards far outweigh the risks.

### **3. Choose gratitude**

Well-known inspirational speaker Nick Vujicic wrote:

"Whether your life is happy or not is your own choice.  
Many people think I can't live a normal life because  
I don't have arms or legs.  
I could choose to believe that and give up trying.  
I could stay at home and wait for others to take care of me.  
Instead, I choose to believe that I can do anything,  
and I always try to do things my own way.  
I choose to be happy.  
I am happy because I am always thankful."

As a person, you can also choose to be grateful for:

- your health
- your self-awareness and self-acceptance
- the gifts of your talents
- your inner-greatness
- the people you trust and the people who trust you
- the people you love and who love you
- the successes and failures you are learning from
- the opportunities associated with challenges you meet

Empowering choices from the book "GAME CHANGERS AT THE CIRCUS "

<http://www.greatness.coach/book/>



- the hobbies you indulge in
- and so much more...

What difference can it make? It powerfully improves your mental and emotional well-being in the moment. Dr Sonja Lyubomirsky<sup>4</sup> calls gratitude a 'meta-strategy' for achieving happiness. She found out that feelings of gratitude are incompatible with negative emotions such as anger, hatred, bitterness or greed.

I have coached several women who overcame breast cancer, and I marvel at how grateful they are for so many things.

Said Linda: "I woke up this morning as I saw the warm, orange sun-rays pierce through the shutters. I felt so fortunate, first to wake up, and then to live in this home, in the middle of nature. My daughter Sonia came to my bed, with a feverish look and whining that she didn't want to go to school. I guessed she had caught the flu, and I felt happy I could take care of her. Fortunately, my colleagues and I cover tasks for one another when one of us needs to take a leave of absence." I asked Linda what was different from 'before'. And she answered "before my cancer, I would have whined that the sunlight was shortening my sleep, that raising children was such a heavy duty at times, I wouldn't have dared to ask for colleagues' help. I am so grateful that my breast cancer empowered me to fully appreciate the beauty in Life, and let go of so many inhibitions."

As a leader, you can take it further and choose to be grateful for others'

- talents
- differences
- inspiration
- honesty
- support
- accountability
- and so much more...

What difference can it make? Think about the last time someone told you in their own way that you matter to her or him... Remember the latest feedback you received that was heartfelt and specifically acknowledged something you did... Recall the most recent genuine 'thank you' you received... How did you feel? How did it influence the relationship you have to that person?

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<sup>4</sup> of the University of California, Riverside, in her book "The How of Happiness"



Expressing gratitude to others generates positive energy in them, makes them feel valued, and willing to do more good. And neuroscience has demonstrated time and again that it makes you happier and healthier. No wonder Steve Maraboli<sup>5</sup> wrote “those who have the ability to be grateful are the ones who have the ability to achieve greatness.”

1<sup>st</sup> tip : stop complaining for 24 hours and observe what happens and how your feelings evolve

2<sup>nd</sup> tip: Every morning, before you start your day, allow your thoughts for a few minutes to focus on what and who you can be grateful for<sup>6</sup>

3<sup>rd</sup> tip: say a heartfelt thank you every day to a least 5 people you are grateful to. And tell them exactly what it is you are grateful to them for. Notice the consequences...

Simply put, gratitude enhances your motivation, and that of the do-gooder. And don't forget what Mark Twain said: “the best way to cheer yourself up is to try to cheer somebody else up”...

#### **4. Choose to hear the complete truth**

*“Seek not greatness, but seek truth and you will find both.”*  
*Horace Mann*<sup>7</sup>

Elbert Hubbard<sup>8</sup> wrote “the final proof of greatness lies in being able to endure criticism without resentment”. You have gained self-awareness and self-acceptance. As you see yourself as a work-in-progress, inviting others to tell you the truth –in particular about you- will help. Such a gift from others we need to earn. For they need to be sure we won't reject it, when they expect we won't be happy about it. Therefore, you ensure you sincerely express appreciation when someone risks speaking it out. A simple “thank you” may do. And then, take responsibility and act upon it.

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<sup>5</sup> American writer, in ‘Life, the Truth, and Being Free’

<sup>6</sup> You may search on internet for scripts or audios of meditations on gratitude (such as <http://beforeitsnews.com/alternative/2012/11/a-meditation-on-gratitude-2501414.html>)

<sup>7</sup> American educator (1796-1859)

<sup>8</sup> American writer, 1856-1915



An effective way to solicit truthful feedback is to ask for a given number of observations of both strengths and areas for improvement.

Bee Sin, a R&D Director for an automotive company in China chose this wording: "I am working to improve my listening. Your feedback is important to me. I would be grateful if you could think and let me know of 3 things you see me doing sometimes that demonstrate good listening on my part, and three things you see me doing sometimes which indicate lack of good listening." Bee Sin got a lot of truthful feedback, including –on the 'need for improvement side'- "you interrupt", "your eyes gaze away as if you are thinking about your reply before we are done talking", "sometimes you don't pick up cues about our emotions", "occasionally you are selective about what you hear, you focus on just what pleases you or what frustrates you", "when you are upset, you avoid eye contact and we don't feel heard".

To sum it up:

1<sup>st</sup> tip: feedback is the breakfast of Champions, put it on your daily menu

2<sup>nd</sup> tip: once you hear the truth, express appreciation and do something about it

## **5. Choose to show you genuinely care**

Who would you do *almost anything* for? Think about it for a minute. Apart from your children, wouldn't it be someone who has consistently cared for you, and you are grateful for it?

Peter Drucker said "people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care". Imagine a crisis so severe that even leaders don't know what is the best move to do next? Who will people follow... a self-centred leader or a leader who has consistently demonstrated care for them? I know that is a no-brainer. Yet many of my Clients do care for their people... and are surprised when their 360 feedback survey rates them low on 'caring'. When I ask them 'what *really* matters to their people', they often realize they do not know. Then they go ahead and find out. One easy way is to ask your people 'what was the highlight of their weekend', three Mondays<sup>9</sup> in a row. Geoff, the CEO for a paper company in Brussels, raised that question to Daniel, his VP Sales. The first Monday, Daniel said his 'round on a

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<sup>9</sup> Or Sundays, if your working week starts on Sundays of course

championship golf course, where [he] won over friends with a lot more experience". As the conversation deepened about the topic, Geoff found out Daniel thrived on competition, and his self-esteem got a high from winning. The next Monday, Daniel shared that his best moment was reading a book about 'CEOs' best strategies to win in the market'. And Geoff understood that his subordinate was an eager learner, in addition to being focused on winning. The third Monday, Daniel disclosed that he revelled in a long trek alone in a national park, to let go of the pressure and just enjoy being alone. When I asked Geoff how he would show genuine care about Daniel, going forward, he told me "I will make sure I offer him further opportunities to learn by involving him in additional projects, and give him proper recognition and visibility for his achievements. I will also check how he is handling the pressure, to avoid he burns out. And we will chat about sports when we lunch together!"

1<sup>st</sup> tip: find out what really matters to your people (e.g. ask them the highlights of their weekends)

2<sup>nd</sup> tip: care genuinely and discreetly, yet in a way which people appreciate

## 6. **Choose forgiveness**

You and I aren't perfect, and it is healthy we have abandoned that delusion, if we ever had it. Others aren't perfect either. And they will upset you time and again. 'To forgive or not to forgive?' could be a prior question to 'to be or not to be?', for how can we fully *be* if we are hurt, burdened by resentment or animated by revenge? Mahatma Gandhi said "the greatness of humanity is not in being human, but in being humane" and he added "the weak can never forgive; forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." We know he could have held a grudge towards many people, but then wouldn't have achieved greatness in his lifetime.

Of course, forgiving does not necessarily imply forgetting. But it sets you free to move on. The may beneficiary is you. Oscar Wilde certainly wouldn't disagree who wittily wrote "Always forgive your enemies; nothing annoys them so much"!

How do you forgive then? To get real closure, you need to see the person...

1<sup>st</sup> tip: forgive face-to-face

Your wording needs at least to address the issue, mention your feelings about it and stipulate that you are moving on.



Elizabeth, a CFO for an oil & gas company in Venezuela, chose to 'forgive' her CEO, Ronaldo, for never thanking her about the efforts she was investing in delivering completely reliable statements, despite enormous challenges. She had grown considerable resentment against Ronaldo for this, to the point of loathing meeting him. Elizabeth and I brainstormed about her healthiest way forward, and she decided to tell him: "Ronaldo, I want to share with you I have been accustomed over the years to being acknowledged for my work. At first it worried me that you did not praise anything I did so far, and then it kind of hurt me. That may have impacted my responses to your requests at time. Then I reminded myself that we are all different and have distinct ways of relating to others. Now I am OK with that and it helps me move forward to have spelled this out with you. Thank you for having listened to me."

Elizabeth walked the talk. Ronaldo did not answer a word. He simply nodded. Although the apology she had secretly expected did not come, she left the meeting deeply relieved. That was the whole point. In that case, there was an added bonus though: the next time they met, Ronaldo mumbled a shy 'thank you', and –overtime– came to utter more words of appreciation once in a while, to Elizabeth and others.

2<sup>nd</sup> tip: when you forgive, address the issue, your feelings about it and assert that you are moving on

## **7. Choose a mindset of abundance**

We choose how we see the World. You can choose to view it as a place where capabilities improve and can make things better, faster, easier or cheaper, or as a place where everything needed for future survival is getting scarce or running out. Neither view is right or wrong of course, it's more complicated than that. Yet we tend to lean closer to one of those two view-points most of the time.

An abundance mindset (sustained by the belief that there is more than enough of everything to go around - for everyone) will alter life prospects, promote giving rather than just taking, and allow oneself to be excited by possibilities (rather than obsessed by limitations), see failure as a learning, etc... It will also help you to unlock limiting beliefs and values.

How can you cultivate an abundance mindset? Here are a few ideas (all counter-intuitive):



- Give some of your time away. Should you be short of time, give some to help others anyway. You will find others will help you in return
- Give something you want more of to someone, and monitor the consequences
- Love, and you will be loved
- Listen, and you will be listened to
- Help, and you will be helped
- Give credit, offer appreciation, and you will get credit and be appreciated

Here also, I am not talking about blindly choosing a mindset of abundance, irrespective of your needs, even though neuroscience has proven we are happier giving than receiving. I am merely suggesting you consciously shift your mindset from scarcity to abundance where you feel it makes sense.

It's all about ensuring your happiness supports your greatness

Happiness is an 'emotional state. We can choose how we feel at any moment in time. As I mentioned earlier, all conscious choices I advocated are simply helping you to be content and to bolster your happiness and fortitude.

The Dalai Lama reminded us that "happiness is not something ready-made. It comes from your own actions."

1<sup>st</sup> tip: once a week, ask yourself 'what actions am I taking to bolster my happiness?' and add some if you can!

French poet Guillaume Apollinaire wrote: "Now and then, it's good to pause in our pursuit of happiness and just be happy."

2<sup>nd</sup> tip: regularly pause and just BE happy!

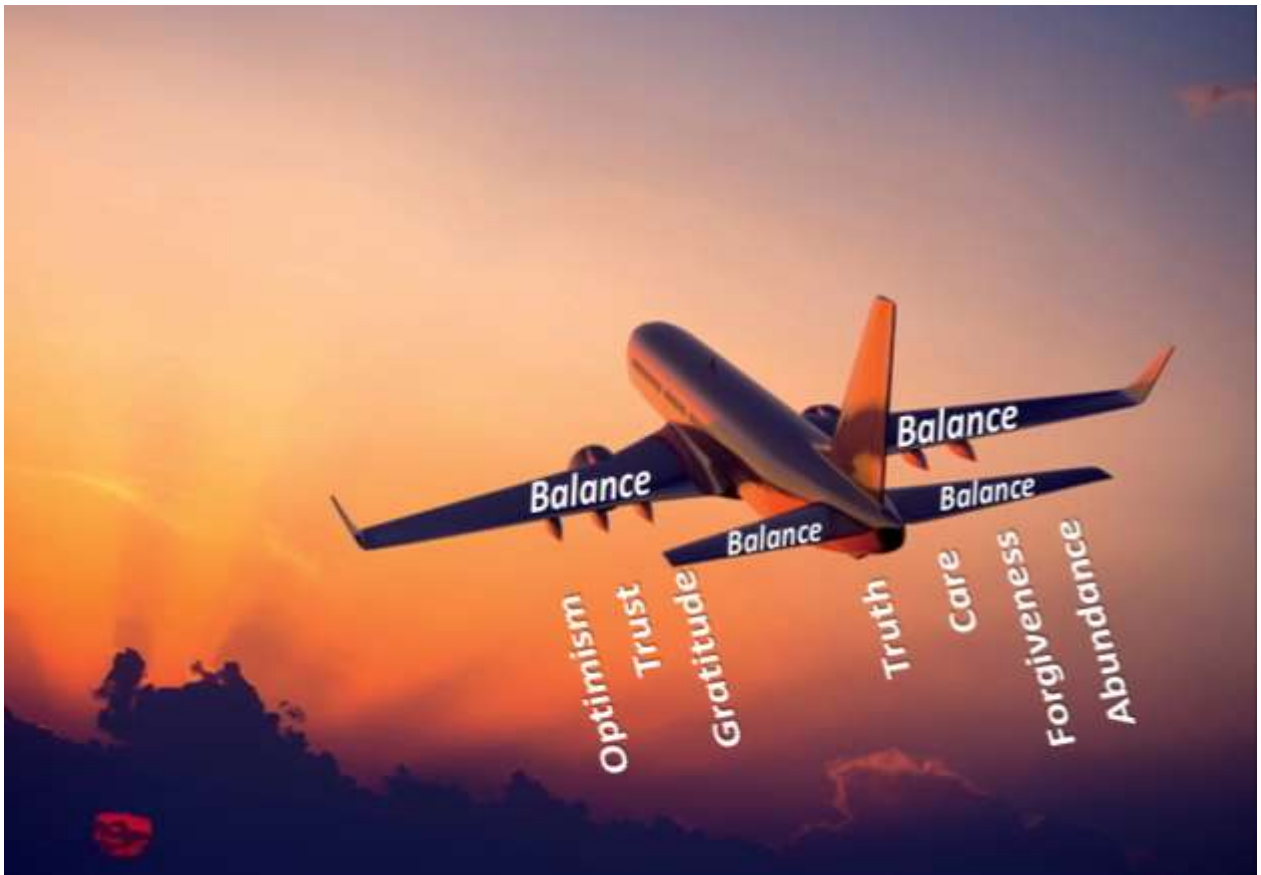
Here are additional 'greatness busters and boosters'. I invite you to monitor once in a while where you are standing between the two poles.

If you were an airplane, the seven conscious choices of optimism, gratitude, trust, truth, care, forgiveness and abundance would be like additional engines to thrust your way towards greatness.

You will need to maintain an even course through turbulences, and for that we shall gear you with the equivalent of wings and stabilizers...

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