

FINDING MORE OF YOUR INNER-GREATNESS

**from the book "GAME CHANGERS: THE CIRCUS TRANSFORMATION"
by Jean-François Cousin**

Grow and flow towards your greatness

Extraordinary people visualize not what is possible or probable, but rather what is impossible. And by visualizing the impossible, they begin to see it as possible."

Dr. Chérie Carter-Scott

Let's start to unwrap the gifts of greatness you received, and unfold the most amazing story that may be: yours...

It won't be about you becoming a different person. It will be about you becoming more of who you are, by mobilizing more of your inner greatness.

At a concert I attended, Lady Gaga's first message to her 60,000 'little monsters' was "let go of your fears, your insecurities, [reach for] your hopes, your dreams, your potential, your future!" A mantra she is really serious about, as her life-experience demonstrates its very possibility: within five years, she moved from playing in nondescript underground bars in New-York, to being one of the most successful artists of all time, at just 25 years of age. It wasn't any easy: her first single was rejected by almost 100 music companies before a minor one accepted it...

Asked on Google-talk "how it feels to become a superstar so quickly", she answered: "my ultimate goal was never about fame. I am genuinely a musician, at my core, (striving to make the future of music ... I am here to be a musician, not a superstar."

Questioned further about finding one's purpose, Lady Gaga advised: "I really encourage people to look into places they don't normally look into, to find uniqueness and specialness, because that is where the diamonds are hiding. ... Don't obsess about the things you did not do, or you may not have done to your best, don't perpetuate negativity in your life. Obsess about the future, think endlessly about how you can pull that inner queen or king out of yourself, and let that superstar shine. Always look into yourself for the answers and be the best human being you can be in the future."

Lady Gaga captures a lot in just a few sentences. What are your hopes? Your dreams? Who are you 'at your core'? What is your uniqueness or your specialness?



We are geared to take such exploration further, now that you are wholly healthy and mindful, know who you are and what your values are, and have cleansed your fears and limiting beliefs.

As we press ahead, we will keep in mind the definition of greatness I proposed: "a purposeful way of being, flowing from one's inner-self and propelling positive evolutions in others".

Remove the ultimate barriers

Zooming in on the core of your greatness potential requires you to push aside a few more boundaries, besides your limiting beliefs and your fears -notably of change, failure or success-.

One disingenuous barrier is our natural need for 'others' approval', which stems from our -mostly- desire to belong. Most people choose a mediocre life well tolerated by those around, rather than daring to affirm their difference or uniqueness at the risk of being disliked by some. For the sake of finding out more of your inner greatness, I invite you to heed Lady Gaga's advice instead: "don't ever let a soul in the world tell you that you can't be exactly who you are born to be." Then adjust your expectations and anticipate that being more of who you can be will not win you "approval" from everyone right away. Which is possibly a part of why Lady Gaga said the "best piece of advice" she ever received was: "If you don't have any shadow, you are not standing in the light."

Reaching out to more of your greatness also means to set aside –just for a while- your other 'human basic needs'¹ as Maslow defined them. Don't worry though, we will bring them back in the picture later on, when we establish a *sustainable* way for you to contribute more of your greatness. Should you find out part of your greatness is in your love of and talent at gardening... we will find practical ways to connect that with your current life and career, and you will make both blossom more!

¹ Physiological needs (money provides for them), security (job security included), relationships, self-esteem and self-actualization (personal development)



Find more of your inner greatness

Lady Gaga –yes, again!- said “you dream of your potential, of what you could become, but you really have no idea what’s on the other side of the door.” Do you?

Then let’s push open that door between your current individual success and your potential significance, and look for ‘diamonds’ and your uniqueness.

We will explore from three complementary approaches: what your ‘dreams’ say about your deep aspirations, what the activities you do in ‘flow’ tell about you, and what significance you yearn for –consciously or not-.

- Your dreams, hopes and aspirations of achievement

*“If you can dream it, you can achieve it. Never forget this whole thing started with a mouse.”
Walt Disney*

I have come to take ‘dreams’, aspirations and hopes seriously (you will read about a few lines below).

Wilma Rudolph, the Olympic track and field champion of the 1960s, preceded me who said, “never underestimate the power of dreams and the influence of the human spirit. We are all the same in this notion: The potential for greatness lives within each of us.”

Marshall Goldsmith² shared the summary of dying people’s answers to the question “what advice would you have had for yourself” [should you live your life all over again]. Three main themes emerged:

- Reflect upon life to find happiness and meaning *now*
- Be close to your family and your friends
- Go for your dreams

And my own interviews with wise, senior people have recurrently brought up the reflection “I wish I had gone for it; failure is much better than regrets to live with”. Does this ring true for you too? One particularly touching story I gathered was that of a good man, Alfred, who told me he had fallen in love with that so special young lady, Maria, 50 years back in time, but had never dared to tell her. She was ‘best friends’ with him for a couple of years. She then married a handsome quarterback. Her new husband quickly turned into a disrespectful, abusive partner, who made Maria’s life miserable for decades. Alfred and her had not been in contact after Maria’s wedding. They met again 40 years later by chance. Maria told him emotionally her husband had recently died from cirrhosis, as a result of his heavy drinking habit. Alfred empathized. They rekindled their friendship. A few months later, Maria told Alfred she had been waiting for him to propose for two years while they were ‘best friends’ but he would not, so instead she married the quarterback... And both lived to regret not going for what they were both dreaming of, until late in their lives.

² In the concluding ‘coda’ of his book “What got you here won’t get you there’



Following John Maxwell's advice "to be all we can be, we must dream of being more", let's 'go for your dreams' right now, with a pleasing exercise. Remember your most appealing dreams of achievements, from early childhood until now. Visualize them in details. Visualization is a powerful exercise that successful athletes practice a lot. They 'see' their winning moves, then their way up to the podium and the flashes of the photographs, they 'hear' the crowd cheering, they 'feel' the coolness of the silver cup they receive, etc... That powerfully motivates them to go forward.

As you revisit your dreams, I recommend you question their underlying message: what are they telling you about the greatness you aspire to and about your potential?

Maybe you have stopped dreaming about your future and can't remember much of your dreams or hopes or aspirations in the past. Then you can easily re-ignite your imagination by asking yourself some of these questions:

- If I could do only one activity for the rest of my life, which one would I choose? Why?
- If I had won so much money that I wouldn't have financial concerns anymore, which activity would I indulge in? Why?
- If my life would be perfect in 5 years from now, what would I be doing?
- If I knew nothing was impossible, what would I focus on achieving? Why?

Please discard dreams about wealth, status, lifestyle or personal growth, as they are not informing you about your potential for greatness but just about your unmet needs. A dream about 'living in a gorgeous villa in the Caribbean with an infinity pool and a jacuzzi overlooking a turquoise sea' or 'becoming a CEO' or 'travelling the world to learn about Cultures and history' won't help us much in our endeavour here. They might be rewards from your journey to greatness, but not real underlying drivers of it.

My dreams, hopes and aspirations of achievements	What they are telling me about the greatness I aspire to

- The activities you do in 'flow'

Lets' now explore what the activities you do in 'flow' tell you about the greatness you could reach. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi³ describes the mental state of 'flow' as "being completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz. Your whole being is involved, and you're using your skills to the utmost."

You may like to refer back to what you wrote down along the 'self-awareness exercise' under 'the difficult activities I perform with great ease'. Consider as well what the respondents to your 'mini 360° feedback-survey' answered to your question "should there be one or two difficult things you have seen me do with particular ease, what would they be?"

Look also for those moments when you felt most alive - as when falling in love -... Identify those activities you enjoy so much on the job that you would continue to do them for free after retirement... Then single out -amongst them- the activities that are challenging and still get your peak-performance.

It could be such things as

- motivating a group
- writing a strategy
- mentoring others
- public speaking
- crisis management
- ...

Please write-down their short-list, and reflect about what it is deep inside of you that has geared you with the motivation and the talent necessary to 'flow'.

The difficult activities I do in 'flow', at peak-performance	What that is telling me about the nature of my motivation and the talents I have developed

By the way, you may like to just ask yourself: 'could I do more of these activities immediately?' and find or create avenues in your Life where you could 'flow' some more!

³ In his book "Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience", 1990



As an illustration of how the activities we do in 'flow' can connect to our greatness potential, here is a part of Kathy's story.

Kathy graduated from an Ivy League school. She aspired to work in business development and became an investment banker in the US for the first 20 years of her career. She was highly successful at her job all along. Then, she felt the urge to pause for a year and travel around the World with the idea to discover people, their cultures and nature... Interestingly, she told me -a few years later- that she had found - in hindsight - that her round-the-world trip was really but a quest to find herself and new meaning to her life.

The moment she returned to the US, she was assaulted with job offers. A good friend of hers working for an Investment Fund offered her to head the operations of a world-wide Language School in Asia. His fund had just bought a majority-stake in it. Kathy followed her intuition and accepted almost right-away, to the surprise of her former colleagues who expected her to return to investment banking.

That is when we had a chance to work together. I supported her along her first 90 days, and then we embarked on a longer-term coaching relationship for her continuous growth as a leader.

One day, Kathy candidly shared with me that she remained surprised by two things: (1) how she had accepted the job offer in a heart-beat, given she had been a very cautious decision-maker in her first 20 years of employment, and (2) how well she was doing relative to her expectations at developing the business. We attempted to make sense of those two observations, and -at one point- we did the exercise I described above.

What Kathy found up is that she was 'in flow' when she was

- crafting long-term, strategic plans for business development, and
- figuring out the simplicity behind complexity

She talked with passion about how she would work overnight devising a strategy that would place her company ahead of trends and beat the market, strengthening her scenarios so they become robust enough to embrace uncertainty, looking for additional sources of competitive advantage, anticipating competitors' possible responses, building necessary organizational capability, etc...

Kathy also shared about how she was exulting when seeing the forest for the tree, or reaching deeper foresights about consumers' needs, or singling out areas of her business which were structurally under-performing and could tank the business...

Kathy was obviously using talents she had developed at university and across her career, and also her intuition, which had proven to be outstandingly reliable -and more and more so over time as her experience grew-.

I invited her to reflect about her intuition to take on a role at the helm of Asian operations for a Language School rather than go back to investment banking. She smiled and sighed. A couple of minutes later, she shared

- I think it was about seizing the opportunity to have more control over the definition and the implementation of growth-strategies, and challenging myself in a geography and a business model I did not know... Going back to what I had done before -with a lot more limitations to my freedom- was definitely not a match.
- I heard "freedom, growth, challenge, control"... Anything else at stake?

- Actually... yes: make a positive difference to the future of the lives and careers of our students through the mastery of foreign languages. The beauty of that became compelling during my one-year break around the World.
- From that motivation, which other shores could you allow your 'flow' to touch?
- I could spend more time coaching my Country Managers on their growth-strategies. In my firm, I could contribute beyond Asia. I could also teach strategy in a university or two, and get in the groove with students on the case studies I'd give them.
- And what would be the significance of that all?
- Well, I have to repeat 'make a positive difference to the future of the lives and careers' of more people
- How do you feel about that?
- Simply great!

- What significance you aspire to

And Kathy's words lead us to our third bridge between your individual success and the significance you yearn for –consciously or not-

This is a moment to reflect about what you want to be remembered for, about the achievements you are proud to look back at, and then find out what they mean to you.

You may start with reading your notes at the beginning of Chapter 2 about the 'activities that provide [you] with the greatest sense of accomplishment'. What difference do they make in your life? In others' lives?

Activities that provide me with the greatest sense of accomplishment	Their significance (difference they make in my life and in others')

If you are in the mood to stretch yourself further, bravely attempt to define yourself in a few words: "At my core, I am...", and I am here to [do]..., and the difference I make to those around me is...", just as Lady Gaga said "I am genuinely a musician, at my core, (striving to) make the future of music ... I am here to be a musician, not a superstar." If you give this arduous exercise a try, allow yourself a good quarter of an hour to come up with a first draft, and then revisit your findings time and again over the next days –ideally with a few meditation sessions in between!-

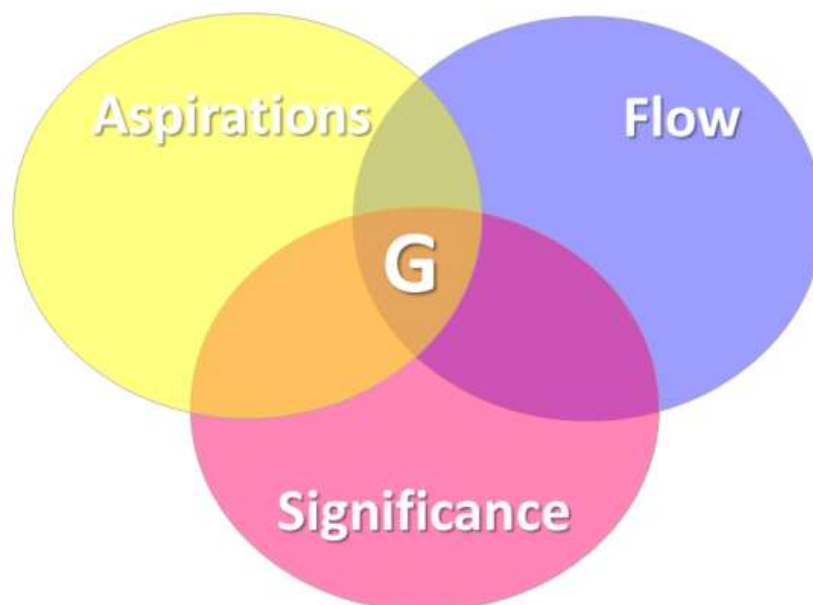
- At my core, I am...
- I am here to [do]...
- And the difference I want to make to those around me is...

The difference you wish to make could be about helping others, bringing more justice, harmony, growth, freedom, beauty for example.

You need to slow down to find it. And then it will simplify your life. It matters deeply, and neuroscience has proven that we are happier giving than receiving.

- Towards the core of your greatness

As you reflected about your dreams and aspirations, the activities you do in 'flow' and those which have significance to you and others, you started to find more of the components of your inner greatness. Most likely, the very core of your greatness potential lies at the intersection of those three groups. May I invite you to copy your previous notes around this picture?



For Kathy -based on the part of her story I shared above-, the outcome looks like:



At the heart of the picture, Kathy's greatness potential is "develop business in a way that makes a positive difference to the lives and careers of people, completely leveraging her talents at long-term, strategic planning and at figuring out the simplicity behind complexity". And that can be a part of her life purpose.

Keep in mind that not all of what you wrote under 'aspirations', 'flow' and 'significance' belong together. Just connect the triads that constitute a 'whole' and a seed of your greatness!

Billy Cox asserted "you were created to make a difference and there's a difference in this world that only you can make." I do hope this exercise helped you zoom-in on it.

Connect your greatness potential with your life and career, and build an action plan

As you remember, we had set aside your 'human basic needs' for the sake of the previous workout. It is time to bring them back in the picture, so as to establish a *sustainable* way for you to contribute more of your greatness.

I recommend you complete a safety / reality check by answering those questions:

How much more of your greatness potential can you unleash whilst:

- preserving a healthy work-life balance
- meeting your financial needs
- maintaining your job-security –if that is something you wish or need to do-
- protecting the quality of your family life and of your relationships with people who matter most to you
- keeping the status you need for advancing your other endeavours
- continuing to increase your "value" as a professional
- uphold the degree of 'freedom' you need to be happy
- living according to your values

Inner Greatness / from the book "GAME CHANGERS: THE CIRCUS TRANSFORMATION"

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

If nothing holds you back, luck is with you! It is time to simply plan how you will invest more of your greatness into your life and career.



Start your action plan with the end in mind: if you contribute more of your greatness, what will your life look like five years from today?

Then craft specific goals must you achieve to fulfil that vision.

Goal 1 / overall time-line	Goal 2 / overall time-line	Goal 3 / overall time-line

Which 'SMART'⁴ actions will you take to reach each goal?

Goal / Actions	Time line

⁴ Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound



Which behaviours will you adopt?

-
-
-
-
-

Conversely, should you find that some of your needs prevent you to fully unleash your greatness potential at this time, you may start by unleashing it in your professional and personal lives bit by bit. You can first do some things differently, from a different mindset, rather than do different things.

For a bit of fun, let's imagine again that part of your greatness lies in your love of and talent at gardening, and the significance of it for you is making your garden more robust, balanced and beautiful. Yet you are a senior leader for whom becoming a full-time gardener isn't a viable option... How can you transfer part of your greatness as a gardener into your professional life?

You may like to apply the power of metaphors to do that... Envision your Company as your garden, trees, shrubs and plants as your employees, and birds as your Clients... Then seek an adaptation in your work-environment of the tasks you love to do in your garden. It could look something like this:

Gardening tasks I love	Equivalent in my professional life as a senior leader
Fertilizing shrubs and trees	Provide professional development to my employees
Plant seeds	Bring in new ideas to inspire my staff
Prune the roses to make them stronger	Focus our employees' energy on what matters most; remove distractions
Watch for harmful insects and pests, and drive them out	Regularly identify and remove the critical weaknesses in our business
Pull out the weeds before they flower and go to seed	Handle 'toxic' employees decisively
Test soil for pH	Regularly take the 'pulse' of my organization
Clean out birdhouses	Ensure our Clients feel welcome and that their loyalty builds up from flawless service
Ensure the shades of the trees don't hamper the growth of the plants underneath	Ensure managers don't over-shadow their direct reports or have unhealthy paternalistic management style
Build up a palisade against cold winds	Fortify barriers to entry in our business, to repel competitors
...	...



Your clarity about your greatness potential helps you make congruent choices to unleash more of it, and uphold the integrity and the courage to do the right things, for yourself and for others.

Seneca said “there is no favourable wind to the person who does not know where he wants to go”. Conversely, now that your destination towards more of your greatness is clear, the universe might well conspire to blow your sails, and those of people around you!

The gifts of your greatness to others

Not everyone might initially ‘approve’ of your ‘greatness-choice’. Still, as you grow and flow towards more of your greatness, the positive ripples on most people around you shall include:

- the positive difference your greatness makes in their lives, of course, and also
- inspiration, from of the choice you made about what you want to contribute
- admiration for the talents you have activated
- an encouragement in pursuing their own growth and dreams

Key takeaways

You have taken the chance to

- remove the barrier of the need for the ‘approval from others’
- unwrap the gifts of greatness you received, by finding what messages
 - your aspirations, dreams and hopes of achievements
 - the activities you do in ‘flow’ and
 - the significance you aspire todeliver about your potential for greatness
- identify what the core of your greatness-potential is
- connect it with your life and career
- design an action plan to *be* more of who you are
- uphold the integrity and the courage to do the right things, for yourself and for others

I invite you to go for all of that, without waiting to ‘feel’ fully ready. You will succeed sooner in this matter with a ‘ready-fire-aim’ attitude rather than with a ‘ready-aim-aim-aim...’ approach!

You have adopted “a purposeful way of being, flowing from your inner-self and propelling positive evolutions in others”. Robert Byrne⁵ said, “The purpose of life is a life of purpose”. And isn’t unleashing more of your greatness a worthy purpose?!

⁵ Contemporary American Author