CATALYST

HOW CONFIDENCE REACTS WITH OUR STRENGTHS TO SHAPE WHAT WE ACHIEVE AND WHO WE BECOME

Steven Smith and David Marcum
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How confidence reacts with our strengths to shape what we achieve and who we become.

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A Living Book

*Catalyst* was and is a project with no deadline. No final word count. No last page. *Catalyst* is more of a pursuit than a book.

We’ve studied confidence for eight years. That’s a healthy start. We think we’re finally ahead of the learning curve. But knowing we’re only ahead of the curve and not at the tail end, we decided to release *Catalyst* differently. We were inspired by Harvard Professor Emeritus of Biology and Pulitzer Prize-winner E. O. Wilson.

Reinventing the production of science textbooks, Wilson’s Biodiversity Foundation publishes his beautiful, intelligent *Life on Earth* work as it’s created via Apple’s iBook. Because new discoveries in biology constantly emerge and subjects in science aren’t inseparable, it doesn’t require that every*thing* be written before anything is published. The same applies to social science, and so following Dr. Wilson’s lead we launched a “living” book.

What’s here is what’s finished. More will come, and you’ll be notified when new material is available.
Overview

Everyone wants to know if they are good enough, smart enough, and ambitious enough to achieve great things. Each year millions of people spend intense time and effort discovering their strengths and trying to build those strengths to realize true potential.

What most don’t know, however, is that strengths are shaped by a hidden catalyst that either makes strengths even stronger, or converts them into weak counterfeits – traits that feel deceptively identical, but get radically different results.

That catalyst is confidence.

Because everyone is vulnerable to slight changes in pressure, people, and emotions, the wires of confidence can get tripped and confidence fades when we need it most. Other times confidence surges and we underperform from overconfidence. In either direction, performances loses.

Getting the maximum benefit from strengths requires a precise type and level of confidence.

_Catalyst_ authors Steven Smith and David Marcum conducted an eight-year study of the interplay between human strengths and confidence. Surveying 8,000 people in over 1,200 organizations, their work reveals a unique set of rules for confidence that set top performers apart from everyone else.

As Marcum and Smith uncover the social science that redefines what it means to be truly confident, you will get infinitely more from your strengths in every aspect of your career and life.
Route

There are three parts to Catalyst. Below is a synopsis of each and the currently released chapters:

**Part One**

**Confidence and Strengths**

How confidence and competence work in harmony to maximize, or minimize, human strengths and achievement.

1. *The Catalyst*  

Most people think that competence and confidence are synonymous. They’re not. It’s a common belief that one causes the other. It doesn’t. Confidence and competence need each other to be relevant, but they are built and act differently.

2. *Strengths and Counterfeits*  

Slight shifts in confidence cause strengths to lose power in a way that’s nearly undetectable. Rather than disappear entirely, too much or too little confidence turns individual strengths into nearly identical counterfeits that limit performance and potential.

**Part Two**

**Properties of Pure Confidence**

What pure confidence is made of and how it works.
1. *I’m Brilliant, and I’m Not*  
Adding small amounts of core elements to iron makes steel even stronger. What works in the furnaces of steel mills also works in forging human strengths: adding small doses of complementary traits where we aren’t brilliant to core strengths where we are maximizes performance.

2. *We*  
It’s natural to think that building the right level of self-confidence is a *me*-first pursuit: self-improvement, self-esteem, self-respect, and self-worth. But what’s natural about *me*-first isn’t optimal for the strongest, purest form of confidence that’s needed to achieve what matters most.

*More chapters in this section will release as they are finished. You will be notified when released.*

**Part Three**  
**Early Warning Signs**  
The early warning signs of unhealthy confidence levels.

1. *Defensiveness*  
Our natural inclination when challenged in high-pressure moments is defensiveness. That propensity dilutes pure confidence. Whatever the cause and whether we have too much or too little confidence, defensiveness reduces rationality and elevates emotion.

*More chapters in this section will release as they are finished. You will be notified when released.*
Part 1

Confidence and Strengths
At a time when most sixteen-year-olds focus on junior prom and passing drivers’ education, Nicole, now a twenty-something public relations director, landed her ideal internship with a Fox news affiliate typically reserved for college seniors. It was a rare opportunity that came with money for college, a head start on her dream career in journalism, and a lot of pressure to succeed.

From then on, Nicole grew up in the newsroom, a veteran by the time she graduated college three years later at 20. Naturally directive, ambitious and smart, she was becoming a newsroom prodigy. After living abroad for one year to gain international experience and deepen her media savvy, she confidently rejoined Fox. No longer labeled as an intern, this time she had nothing to prove. But upon returning, the full force of what most people face in the real world of work hit her: political alliances, agendas, and water-cooler complaints about culture and management.

As time went on, Nicole couldn’t tell if she was being used as a pawn by certain people to further their personal agendas or if her alliances were real. To fit in, she mimicked senior producers who were once her mentors. As she tried to keep pace and maneuver the corporate culture, one manager pulled her aside to pass along complaints about Nicole’s style; overreacting, prone to yelling, and too aggressive. Simply doing what she saw done, Nicole was bewildered by the feedback.
Now she questioned her own, post-feedback competence to do the job. She lost confidence, but faked it so that it appeared nothing phased her. She mistrusted her own strengths, which weren't working precisely the same way they once did. She either overcompensated to prove she was talented, or retreated because she wasn’t sure. When the time came for a salary and contract review, Nicole quickly realized it wasn’t a good-faith review. “You are easily replaceable,” her manager said. “You should be grateful to be offered a contract here.” Nicole was shell-shocked.

What had happened to being the beloved, talented young intern? Was she being selfish and entitled? Was this the best contract she could hope for? While her contract negotiations were in process, Nicole kept working. Anxiety from fluctuating confidence led to rookie mistakes, which felt all the more painful knowing she was under scrutiny. It was as if she couldn’t stop the mistakes despite her ability. Feeling out of control, Nicole felt doomed to repeat poor performance until she crashed.

Either out of pure professional pride, self-preservation or desperation, she turned down the contract. Subsequently, she was told that no local stations would hire her. Unfortunately, she believed them. “Looking back, I shouldn’t have believed them. Knowing what I know now, there are things I would have done differently if I wanted to fight for my place there,” said Nicole. “I would have been more thoughtful about my relationships, my words and my actions. But I also wouldn’t have been scared of people who in reality weren’t so different from me. I let titles, age, and reputations cower me into thinking I didn’t have the right to be confident or ask for respect. But I didn’t know then what I know now. I look at my first ‘real’ job experience as a life lesson.” Nicole didn’t lack dedication or drive.
Natural talent and on-the-job expertise were critical, but not enough to help her achieve what mattered.

**Shift**

The good news is that human achievement is not random or magical. It is a predictable outcome of an array of factors, many of which we control. One factor in particular, confidence, is often overlooked yet so crucial it has the potential to change everything. When people don’t measure up to potential, what often looks like talent, motivation or dedication issues on the outside are in reality confidence swings on the inside. But if confidence is truly that sweeping, why do we overlook it? The reason has more to do with the way we see confidence than with how confidence actually works.

In a study of self-perception, the Dove company invited women to participate in an experiment. To begin, Dove asked women to make a new acquaintance in a group of people and get to know her. After socializing, women entered a separate room one by one. As each woman sat by herself on a couch behind a white curtain, FBI-trained forensic sketch artist Gil Zamora sat at a drafting table on the other side of the curtain asking her questions about her appearance: eyes, jaw, forehead, cheekbones, hair, and such. Zamora never saw the woman. He simply sketched according to her self-description. After each sketch, Zamora thanked the woman and she left.

Following each woman’s self-description, the person she met at the beginning of the experiment was invited into the room. Zamora asked each to describe the woman she met. Once again, he sketched according to the verbal description only.
Once finished with his sketches, each woman entered the room alone to see two sketches: her self-described picture, and the one that others described. The two sketches were remarkably different. In each case, the portrayal directed by someone else was not only more beautiful, but far more accurate of each woman’s true physical appearance. The women were in awe of what they saw. Some cried upon seeing the difference, perhaps in reaction to the pain of a false view they had of themselves for so long.

In a related study, Harvard University professor Nancy Etcoff and London School of Economics professor Susie Orbach surveyed thousands of women internationally to find that only four-percent of women think they are beautiful.

“I should be more grateful of my natural beauty,” said Florence, a participant in a post-experiment interview. “It impacts the choices and friends that we make, the jobs we apply for, how we treat our children. It impacts everything. It couldn’t be more critical to your happiness.”

Gratitude for our beauty - physical, intellectual, or emotional - should be deeper and more frequent. We would be stronger for doing so. But should beauty in any form impact anyone’s choices of, or opportunity for, jobs, family and everything? The answer is that it will and does. Our level of beauty, which includes talent and expertise, affects everything from jobs, wealth and influence to partners, promotions and happiness. Our strengths are measured and judged on the bell curve of life, and everyone stands higher or lower on the curve at different places, at different times, for different reasons.
The pivotal question is: If we are not as attractive, smart, strong, wealthy, talented, or experienced as someone else on any particular curve, should confidence fade? Or should confidence rise in comparison to someone else if we have the advantage? If so, then one fractional shift in any factor equally shifts confidence. Moment-by-moment, confidence appears to waver when conditions and comparisons order it to.

The world has a deep inventory of people who are better, faster, smarter or more experienced than us. But despite comparisons and conditions that put us ahead or behind any person or performance curve, life’s variables—emotions, history, power, pressure, politics, prejudice, demands, generation gaps, and the like—appear to have the power to shift confidence enough that our greatest strengths aren’t at full strength.

The variables don’t just bedevil twenty-somethings in their first decade of adult life. A census of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue reveals nearly identical stories.

At a White House press conference on April 13, 2004, Time magazine journalist John Dickerson threw this curveball at President George W. Bush: “You’ve looked back before 9/11 for what mistakes might have been made. After 9/11 what would your biggest mistake be, would you say, and what lessons have you learned from it?”
Bush’s response revealed how hazardous fluctuations of confidence can be, and how distant competence can be as an ally:

I wish you would have given me this written question ahead of time, so I could plan for it. John, I’m sure historians will look back and say, gosh, he could have done it better this way or that way. You know, I just—I’m sure something will pop into my head here in the midst of this press conference with all the pressure of trying to come up with an answer, but it hasn’t yet.

Plunging ahead, Bush scrambled from Afghanistan to Iraq. I hope I—I don’t want to sound like I’ve made no mistakes. I’m confident I have. . . . I just haven’t—you just put me under [sic] the spot here, and maybe I’m not as quick on my feet as I should be in coming up with one.

At a White House correspondents’ dinner one month later, Bush was asked about Dickerson’s question. “It’s an excellent question” Bush admitted. “I guess, looking at it practically, my biggest mistake was calling on John.”

It would be easy to dismiss Bush’s response as incompetence, given his well-earned reputation as a grammar-killer and poor communicator. We only need to remember his response when asked how he could contribute to the Middle East peace process: “I can press when there needs to be pressed. I can hold hands when there needs to be—hold hands.”
But Bush hardly lacked pedigree or credentials. He was a sitting U.S. President, successful businessman, two-term Texas governor, graduate of Harvard and Yale, and the son of a former president. He had experience and the ability to be presidential when circumstances demanded.

Early in his presidency Bush performed superbly under pressure. Nine months after a turbulent, razor-thin electoral victory over Al Gore, eight months into his first term of office, and only three days after the attacks of September 11, 2001, Bush stood atop a pile of smoldering wreckage in lower Manhattan and addressed firefighters searching the ruins of the World Trade Center. With megaphone in hand, Bush looked across the crowd of rescue workers who were shouting that they couldn’t hear him and replied with patriotic power, “I can hear you. The rest of the world hears you. And the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon.” Bush’s greatest strengths were inspiring and on display when America desperately needed it.

The difference between Bush’s 9/11 Manhattan voice and his press-conference voice 942 days later goes beyond competence. In Manhattan, there was no history of being questioned about his presidency or cabinet decisions. The Manhattan voice projected the confidence of Bush’s successful Texas governorship, elite education, pedigree, and tough presidential victory.

With any change in variables, however, confidence can change competence instantly. Consider the internal voice that might have spoken to Bush in the White House East Room versus Manhattan, amplifying media criticism of his ability, presidential image, or political staying power. “Don’t admit mistakes. Sound presidential.”
the inner voice may have whispered. “You’re in charge; don’t let the press get to you. Use the right words. Don’t show weakness. Don’t get exploited. Say enough, but not too much.”

It appears to be the vacillating inner voice of overconfidence and insecurity that burdened Bush to the end of his presidency, and the same unreliable voice Nicole heard during her second-term at Fox: “What do they think of me? How did I come across? Act like you belong. You earned this. Should I take charge? That was good. Was it impressive? I can do better.” The harder Bush tried to be presidential, the more Nicole labored for confidence, the less competent they both were.

Everyone wants to know if they are good enough, smart enough, and ambitious enough to achieve great things. In a lot of cases, the answer is no. Many fall short. They abandon goals not because desire or designs change, but because they can’t bridge the gap between what they want and what they can do. Human beings are capable of brilliance, but sometimes push on for years making little progress, bewildered as to why. That “why” is the big question. Why do some people succeed when others fall short of what they know deep down is possible?

Decades of social science and psychological research show that competence and confidence are tightly connected, symbiotic factors that contribute to maximum achievement.

Imagine competence and confidence on separate but parallel continuums. We’ll start by describing the competence continuum.
Competence

The competence continuum gauges how well your strengths perform. Gallup’s landmark research on human strengths defines a strength as talent combined with expertise to produce consistently great performance.

Talents are innate, productive patterns of feelings, thoughts, or behavior. Expertise is knowledge and skill. The stronger your talent and expertise, the farther right you are on the continuum.

Because competence appears to be the cold, hard process of pushing strengths and performance farther right on the continuum, it gets undivided attention. But despite concentration on maximum competence, people with deep, distinct strengths, unfaltering motivation, and who dedicate themselves tirelessly to reaching their potential, need something more.

For example, Justin Meltzer and Dan Shipper were both University of Pennsylvania college students when they founded Firefly, an innovative tech company that lets a company’s customer service representatives and salespeople seamlessly co-browse web pages with customers. Dan and Justin have been coders since grade school. Like most great coders, solving and creating comes naturally—it’s their talent. Expertise to capitalize on talent and launch a successful startup, however, does not.
“What a lot of people don’t realize is that the uncertainty in your startup isn’t just about whether people want to buy your product. As a young entrepreneur, you also have to deal with a lot of uncertainty about yourself,” said Shipper. “You’ve never sold a product before. You’ve never built a landing page before. You’ve never pitched a product to the CEO of a large company. You’ve never had to write a sales script. You’ve never had to hire someone. And now you have to do all of these things. All at once.” As talented developers but new entrepreneurs, Meltzer and Shipper needed confidence as much as code.

The question we started with—Am I [fill in the blank] enough?—is valid precisely because for many people maximum achievement is the exception, not the rule.

In response to the void when strengths don’t work as expected, feelings of uncertainty about yourself begin to surface, typically followed by a series of questions about how to fill the perceived deficits: More knowledge? One more class? One more degree? One more promotion? One more year of experience? What do I need? What don’t I understand?

In a word, confidence.
Confidence

In shaping what we can achieve and who we can become, competence has gaps that only confidence can bridge. Despite its pivotal role, confidence receives less attention than competence - not because it’s less important but because it’s less tangible. It’s emotional and less measurable. But intangibility aside, pure strength requires pure confidence. For that reason confidence deserves equal attention.

A more precise way of thinking about confidence is to place it on a wide continuum like competence, but with its strongest position anchored at center. Let’s call the center position pure confidence.

Gravitationally pulling at the polar ends of the continuum are confidence extremes that drag us away from center.

When people surge right of center, pure confidence is contaminated in degrees by egotistical behaviors such as overconfidence, arrogance, conceit, and an exaggerated sense of genius. To the right, we don’t doubt ourselves even when we should. We believe confidence gained from a narrow set of strengths and a successful track record owes us a never-ending, universally transferrable supply of relevance and self-assurance.
Drift left and pure confidence is diluted by varying amounts of low self-esteem, paralyzing self-doubt, insecurity, and an exaggerated sense of inability. Wandering left we wonder why we had confidence one moment and not the next, what outside factors allowed us to have it, why we lost it, and how we get full confidence back.

Confidence isn’t controlled with an on-off switch. Instead it’s a constant stream of psychological strength that either sustains you, or is short-circuited by degrees of invincibility or doubt. Because everyone is human, people, places, emotion, time, and culture can trip the wires of confidence and compromise your greatest strengths no matter how powerful those strengths are, how hard you worked to build them, or how driven you are to capitalize on each one.

As we investigated the relationship between confidence and competence, two questions kept us searching for the substance of pure confidence:

1. If pure confidence could be placed under a microscope to discover its molecular structure, what would it be made of and how could it be used?

2. Most moves left or right of center on the confidence continuum aren’t full-speed crashes into the polar dead-end of either side, but rather subtle
shifts. Given the slight movement, are there early warning signs so we can halt shifts in confidence before they damage performance or relationships?

For the last eight years, we worked on these questions in dozens of fields while studying the interplay between the two continuums. “Study” is a word loaded with synonyms like survey, test, question, audit, explore, analyze, sift, weigh, and judge. All apply here. We surveyed nearly 8,000 people in over 1,200 organizations, and taught thousands more in and out of business as we tested theories.

Along the way, it became undeniably clear that talent and achievement, for better or worse, are powerfully and perpetually altered by the catalyst of confidence.

Conquer

Building pure confidence is largely a self-pursuit, one that requires sweat equity, euphoric victories, and staggering defeats. Some private, some public. Notable achievement seems to demand it.

On May 29, 1953 at the age of 33, Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa mountaineer Tenzing Norgay became the first climbers to reach the summit of Mount Everest. Prior to 1953, ten other expeditions over a period of thirty years failed to conquer Everest, with 13 climbers losing their lives, including men on Hillary’s previous expedition.
Prior to his summit, Hillary was asked why he kept trying. “It is not the mountain we conquer,” Hillary replied, “but ourselves.”

The pursuit of maximum human achievement requires conquering ourselves, which includes conquering history. Personal history. Maybe parents or coaches pumped you full of “if you can dream it you can achieve it” positive self-talk, and the speeches distorted reality. Maybe someone’s jealousy or ignorance told you that you can’t. Maybe you’ve lost big. Maybe it was your fault. Maybe it wasn’t. Maybe you always won. Single words can describe a complex history: disillusioned, lonely, popular, broken, admired, successful, failure, talented, ordinary. Maybe you’ve let the words define you. Whatever our history, pure confidence cleans the mental windows from which we look so that we, and everyone else, can see who we are and what we can really achieve.

This is your invitation.

To get a clear view of how confidence acts as a catalyst of talent, it’s worth investigating what happens to individual strengths when confidence is pure, and when we drift from center.
Swings in confidence are often thought of as intense, visibly dramatic changes in how we act or what we feel. In reality, most shifts in confidence aren’t dramatic.

But the consequences are.

In 2006 social psychologists Roy Baumeister and Liqing Zhang conducted an experiment to see how self-confidence affects performance. They created a competition in which students were given $5 and asked to compete in a one-on-one bidding war to win a dollar by spending up to $5 to get it. The goal was to spend as little as possible in the pursuit of victory. Pure logic suggests that the students should spend no more than a buck. However, fluctuations in confidence can overwhelm logic.

The variable in the experiment was introduced by a conversation with each student just before bidding began. One student from each pair was pulled aside for private, one-on-one advice from a researcher. “If you’re the kind of person who usually chokes under pressure, or you don’t think that you have what it takes to win the money,” she would say, “then you might want to play it safe. But it’s up to you.” Baumeister and Zhang called that warning a “threat” to the student’s self-confidence.

With the student advised and ready to win, the researcher released him back to start the competition. As the bidding war progressed, the
“threatened” students let their bids escalate much higher than a dollar in almost every instance. When time expired, the threatened group spent up to $3.71 trying to win one dollar.

Based on pre-experiment assessments of self-confidence completed by all of the students, threatened or not, the higher their score the more cash they lost. When interviewed afterward, the “winning” students felt embarrassed by the money they’d spent to win and even worse about themselves. In other words, “winning” meant losing money and confidence. Students shifted right of center into overconfidence (and winning at all costs) or left of center, where they might have overreacted to compensate for a lack of confidence. Baumeister and Zhang conducted four more such experiments, each time manipulating participants’ self-confidence. In every case behavior changed and performance dropped when self-confidence was challenged.

For all of us, whether it’s an experiment or real-life tests of clashing values, power struggles, job pressures, political agendas or sensitive topics, confidence-shifts change us as subtly but profoundly as the students in the experiments.

**Strengths and Counterfeits**

For this project we meticulously examined how confidence affects strengths. During that investigation an unexpected behavioral pattern emerged that caused us to rethink the way confidence and strengths mix.

Starting out, we expected swings of low confidence to hold people back from discovering their strengths or the tenacity to turn natural
talent into strength, the equivalent of keeping both hands inside the car at all times. On the other end we anticipated overconfidence to recklessly ignore weaknesses and overestimate strengths, leaving strengths trapped in an illusion of greatness. These patterns occurred, but were too extreme to be common. People flirt with excessive arrogance or insecurity every so often, but rarely let either develop into full blown romance. Because the extremes were evident and rare, we grew more curious about exactly how strengths change when confidence shifts only slightly rather than substantially.

Subtle shifts in confidence convert strengths into counterfeits – traits that feel deceptively identical to strengths but get radically different reactions and results. That’s often why we don’t see the conversion in ourselves, but others do.

Below is a partial list of primary strengths when confidence is pure, counterfeits when confidence shifts from center, and related behavior. Some strengths may come naturally, or you’ve worked hard to build them. Others might be traits that aren’t your strong points, but you rely on them in varying degrees at different times. Whether you have to dig deep for a particular trait or it comes naturally as a strength, the risks and rewards are there for each depending on where you stand on the confidence continuum.

- **Strength: Decisive**
  - Doesn’t let over-analysis hurt the momentum of a good idea.
  - Isn’t afraid to move forward without everyone’s agreement.
Takes responsibility for results. Action-oriented. Understands that nothing is perfect and is willing to take calculated risks.

**Counterfeit: Hasty**
Makes decisions too quickly in the name of getting things done. Doesn’t take the time to think thoroughly about ideas. May change directions frequently. Values speed over quality. Excludes important feedback to move ahead. Oversimplifies ideas and strategies; misses details that hurt the decision later.

- **Strength: Passionate**
Work isn’t just a job. Recognizes a deeper purpose or bigger picture. Provides motivation through passionate pursuit of perfection. Doesn’t stop thinking about work at five o’clock. Inspiration seems to come naturally. Entrepreneurial by nature. Often assumes an informal leadership role. An enemy of status quo or “good enough.”

**Counterfeit: Inflexible**
Often dismisses brutal facts and those who bring them up. Poor judge of what will or won’t work. Doesn’t know when to back off and let events run their course. Impatient. Intimidates others or wears them out. Doesn’t create intellectual or emotional reprieve for people to catch their breath. Loses people’s attention and passion after a relatively short period of time.
• **Strength: Persuasive**  
  Paints a compelling vision. Inspires others, attracts talent, and keeps people motivated. Held in high regard. Trend-setter. Able to get people to support ideas, commit capital, and give up old positions.

  **Counterfeit: Manipulative**  
  Inappropriately maneuvers people, information, and perceptions for self-benefit. Makes bad ideas sound good. Resists admitting mistakes. Stays committed to poor decisions, bad strategies, or wrong people until it’s too late. Overlooks substance for style.

• **Strength: Optimistic**  
  Isn’t frozen by the difficulty or complexity of circumstances, especially when they’re negative. Good leadership ability. Helps others see beyond adverse times by sustaining belief in the future. Keeps things in perspective.

  **Counterfeit: Unrealistic**  
  Inaccurately assesses situations. Planning is often inadequate. Believes that a positive mental attitude can overcome anything. Won’t listen to bad news. Doesn’t accept proper accountability for poor results.

• **Strength: Patient**  
  Tolerant in daunting situations. Won’t let time or pressure unduly influence emotions or commitment. Listens thoughtfully. Doesn’t unnecessarily push ahead in the name
of “getting something done.” Handles bureaucracy and maneuvers through red tape exceptionally well.

**Counterfeit: Passive**
Avoids making decisions and fears being wrong. Ignores pressure and substitutes lack of planning and passivity for patience. Too accepting of obstacles as reasons not to move forward. Takes a wait-and-see approach when action is a better option. Working at a slow pace is mistaken for patience.

- **Strength: Candid**
  Clear communicator. Excellent at confronting brutal realities and eliminating guesswork. Earns people's trust due to respect for honesty and frankness. Others know where they stand. Liberating to work with because not afraid to say what’s *really* going on. As a result, reduces politics and endless workarounds.

**Counterfeit: Tactless**
Uses little diplomacy; offends people. Shares opinions prematurely without thought of implications. Creates anxiety in others. May polarize groups. Generates gossip. Causes fear and is often the target of opposition. Seen as a pointless boat-rocker and so is excluded from meetings where sensitive issues are being discussed. Regards own opinions as the sole truth.
• **Strength: Diplomatic**  
Skilled at encouraging others to share diverse points of view. Builds rich dialogue. Good at working with political or sensitive issues. Calms peoples’ emotions and encourages all parties to stay open. Says hard things in a fluent, sensitive way.

**Counterfeit: Political**  
A chameleon who manipulates positions and erodes trust. Can be divisive and influence people for self-benefit. Focuses more on *who* wins rather than letting the best idea win. Uses positional power rather than legitimacy to get things done. Isn’t straightforward about personal positions.

• **Strength: Loyal**  
Devoted to causes bigger than themselves. Unites people in difficult or chaotic circumstances. Trustworthy. Willing to sacrifice personal ambitions for the greater good without undue concern about consequence to self. High level of integrity.

**Counterfeit: Conformist**  
Doesn’t see things objectively. Committed to causes or strategies that are no longer relevant. Ignores the writing on the wall. Can be judgmental and/or exclusionary of those who aren’t perceived as loyal. Discounts legitimate challenges to current ideas or commitments as unnecessary.

See Appendix A for a complete list of strengths and counterfeits.
The metamorphosis from strength to counterfeit is so slight that it’s almost unfair. The less aware we are of being off center, the more conditioned we become to counterfeits. Once acclimated, it’s easy to mistake counterfeits for the original. History is replete with good lives and moderately successful careers blocked from greatness by well-disguised counterfeits.

**Great to Good**

In 1862 revered Civil War General George McClellan let his discipline and superb analytical strength turn into costly counterfeits. During a crucial stretch of the war, Union troops stumbled upon confidential Confederate Army plans wrapped around a cigar package in an abandoned camp. The plans detailed General Robert E. Lee’s plans for battle, along with the condition of his army and their numbers. Upon verifying and studying the plans, McClellan telegraphed Lincoln:

> I have the whole rebel force in front of me, but I am confident, and no time shall be lost. I think Lee has made a gross mistake, and that he will be severely punished for it. I have all the plans of the rebels, and will catch them in their own trap if my men are equal to the emergency. . . . Will send you trophies.

But overconfidence pushed McClellan’s gift for analysis and planning into unqualified hesitation. He arrogantly waited eighteen hours before sending troops into battle, preventing an important strategic attack on the Confederate Army. The result was a modest victory but at the cost of a needlessly extended and bloody war.
McClellan was successful, but not to the extent he could have been. Overconfidence cut his appointment as General-in-Chief to only five months before Lincoln demoted him. His reputation as a staller later haunted him in an unsuccessful bid for the presidency. “McClellan to me,” said Union General Ulysses S. Grant “is one of the mysteries of the war.”

Speaking of the remarkable General Grant, his post-war tenure as President Grant was strained as his hallmark strengths of empathy and loyalty, so invaluable in advancing the rights of African and Native Americans, turned to off-center naïveté and blind commitment in protecting crooked Cabinet appointees. Washington has never had a president with more Congressional investigations and charges of financial corruption than Grant. Almost every ranking of presidential performance includes him in the bottom quartile. He achieved great wartime victories but left so much on the governing table.

In modern politics, what if Vice President Al Gore’s sharp intellect had been driven by on-center confidence and less by off-center arrogance, which made him come off as condescending in election debates with George Bush? What if Gore’s gift for composure had been less off-center lifeless and robotic and more on-center collected and cool?

Looking back on U.S. Presidents who could have been more, it’s easy to see how some of their greatest traits, when off-center, kept them from being great. What if Richard Nixon’s ambition and alert nature had not become overbearing and paranoid? What if Bill Clinton had kept his determination and charisma from converting momentarily to stubbornness and manipulation of the truth? In each instance, how
much stronger could these leaders have been by not being over- or under-confident?

For those of us further down the totem pole of power, counterfeits are rarely stories of disaster. More often they're stories of self-imposed restrictions on our greatest strengths that limited personal achievement. The more life’s variables knock us off center, the more likely we are to carve a groove at a specific distance from center. The deeper the off-center groove becomes, the more counterfeit behaviors become hardened habits.

In our 8,000-person survey that was part of this project, we asked people what percentage of time they see counterfeits overtake strengths. Fifty-eight percent said daily or weekly. It’s easy for people to quickly be pulled off-center into counterfeits, with lasting impacts on progress.

**Gone in Sixty Seconds**

Let’s say you’re in a one-hour meeting. The first 45 minutes of that meeting are productive; people are passionately sharing their ideas, disagreeing but not taking things personally, expressing their views, testing options, etc. Now consider what can happen in sixty seconds. Suppose that at minute 46 of that meeting two or three people’s egos spin slightly out of control. Suddenly critiques of ideas are interpreted
as attacks on individuals. People get defensive. Passion, candor and diplomacy turn into inflexibility, tactlessness and politics. Which minute of the meeting do you think will be remembered most?

What effect do those sixty seconds have on the previous forty-five minutes? At best they’re tainted; at worst they’re erased. And what happens to the next fourteen minutes? They’re worthless. How much time will be wasted after the meeting talking about what happened during those sixty seconds? Too much. That off-center moment represented only 1.6% of the meeting’s time, but that’s all it took for counterfeits to halt progress.

The very nature of counterfeits makes them hard to distinguish from strengths. Because counterfeits are hard to self-detect, we need feedback. The problem with getting feedback is that we take criticism of our greatest strengths differently than critique of strengths we don’t have. Because a counterfeit feels so close to the original, we defend the counterfeit as if it’s undiluted strength. It’s easier to hear that we’re not good at something that is the opposite of our strengths than it is to hear criticism of what we do best.

Early in my marriage I started a new venture with two college friends. As it became clear that the business wasn’t going to survive, my self-worth became increasingly tied to the company’s net worth. Because I didn’t separate my life’s balance sheet from the business version, I spent an insane number of hours at work, which wasn’t the best strategy for strengthening a new marriage.

Very late one night I came home from work to find my wife, Kitty, waiting at the top of the stairs: “Why,” she asked, “are we married?” At one point during the long discussion that followed she said, “I
didn’t know that I married a workaholic.” “You didn’t,” I replied. “You married a dedicated entrepreneur.”

It may be relatively easy, for example, for a dedicated entrepreneur to hear that he’s not very diplomatic. Diplomacy may not be one of an entrepreneur’s greatest strengths, but when his dedication is criticized as being workaholism in disguise, that cuts close to home. Confidence gets contaminated by defensiveness, and feedback is dismissed as the other person’s not understanding what it takes to succeed. At the point of feedback, it’s easy to blame the perception on shifts in the critic’s confidence, not your own.

It shouldn’t come as any surprise then that change isn’t easy. We think we’re on center when really we’re off center, believing that contaminated counterfeits are pure strengths. At other times we may be solidly on center, but from our point of view, someone else isn’t.

**At Full Strength**

Given that no one’s perfect, how do strengths get locked into benefits and avoid counterfeits? By anchoring securely to the properties of pure confidence, and detecting the early warning signs when we drift from center. Being purely confident means knowing why, how, and when to use each property. How far your strengths take you depends on your choices.

Let’s start with the first property of pure confidence, which keeps strengths at full power by adding a small dose of what’s missing.
Part 2

Properties of Pure Confidence
I’m Brilliant, and I’m Not

If your child came home with four A’s, one C and one F, which grade deserves the most attention from you as a parent?

That’s the question Gallup asked parents. Nearly eight of ten parents say the “F.” Adults do the same with their own version of report cards. Whether it’s an “F” in one area of a performance review or the critique of a partner at home, bad trumps good. Once good is eclipsed, deficiencies win attention based on flawed beliefs and old habits:

- Deficiencies are easier to see and tackle compared to strengths.
- Converting weaknesses into strengths makes people well-rounded.
- Working on what’s missing looks responsible, is socially acceptable, and is managerially expected.
- Gaps in strengths expose incompetence and imperfections and increase personal vulnerability, so fixing them is a top priority.
- Competitive jealousy or insecurity motivates people to redirect the development of strengths to acquire what’s missing.
- We see little room to grow in our strengths but plenty of room for the strengths we lack, so working on what’s missing appears to yield faster, more noticeable results.
People lean on these beliefs and habits to justify converting weaknesses to strengths, and that’s a critical mistake. Gallup’s forty-year, nine-million-person research on strengths shows that people are six times more likely to be engaged at work, productive, and happy when less time is devoted to fixing weaknesses and more time to building strengths. “You have development needs—areas where you need to grow, areas where you need to get better,” writes strengths expert Marcus Buckingham. “But for you, as for all of us, you will learn the most, grow the most, and develop the most in your areas of greatest strength.”

Everyone’s heard the conventional strengths-and-weaknesses speech: “I’m very creative, but not very good at making decisions” or “I’m great at building systems but not-so-great at building relationships.” Despite social pressure to be well rounded, nature simply doesn’t design us that way. Nature narrows talents to increase the odds of brilliance. Nurture demands focus and specialization to capitalize on nature’s blueprint. But overspecialization has risks.

**Two-Percent**

Occupying too narrow a niche in the natural world makes an organism vulnerable to change. Similarly, specializing in specific strengths to the exclusion of traits outside those strengths leaves us vulnerable to counterfeits and unprepared for change. The answer lies in balance. You can protect strengths from the weaknesses of counterfeits by adding traits that make your greatest strengths more adaptable and resilient. You encounter a parallel of this theory in everyday life: steel.
In forging iron to form steel, iron’s characteristics are changed by small, even microscopic, adjustments. Modifications remove certain impurities or add carbon for strength, manganese for rust protection, chromium for polish, or tungsten for density. Single-digit percentages of an added element—as little as two percent—are the difference between the steel of a butter knife, a surgeon’s scalpel, or the suspension cables that secure the Golden Gate Bridge. In search of stronger, brighter, tougher material, engineers didn’t look for an entirely different core substance from iron. Faced with new demands, science discovered combinations that made steel even stronger.

What works in the furnaces of steel mills also works in forging human strengths: faced with new demands, people need small doses of complementary traits added to core strengths to upgrade their power. The rule that “I’m brilliant, and I’m not” governs microscopic adjustments to fortify our greatest strengths.

The partial list of strengths from Chapter 2 are listed below along with “two-percent” complements. As you read through them, notice how adding a complementary trait helps avoid some of the weaknesses inherent in your strengths -- particularly the counterfeits. “I’m brilliant, and I’m not” is not a sweeping game plan to turn every personal quality into a core strength, but to fortify the strengths you already have.
Strengths and Complements

Be Decisive and Thorough
The explanation du jour of decisiveness: “Analysis paralysis.” That legendary line gives drivers permission to bulldoze methods and details in pursuit of progress. Don’t let missed details cut down great ideas. Details aren’t an enemy to progress, but let fact-checkers mind the minutiae, and don’t dismiss details out of hand as the red tape of bureaucrats.

Have Passion and Compromise
Rarely is passion weakened by conceding on some points. Allow people to draw their own conclusions about what’s worthy of their passion. Don’t assume increases in passion automatically increase persuasion and support; others must see merit in arguments beyond emotion and your own commitment. No one has an unending supply of attention or energy, so allocate passion judiciously and be willing to concede when it makes sense.

Be Persuasive and Grounded
A good argument or presentation suffers when substance isn’t equal to style. So does credibility. Articulation and vision are not substance and direction, so pay close attention to the content that supports an argument or viewpoint. If the ideas of others aren’t attractive at first glance, look for hidden value behind them. Don’t let sheer enthusiasm and momentum confer unearned credibility on ideas.

Be Optimistic and Realistic
The glass isn’t half empty or half full. It’s both. Don’t mistake people who speak out in opposition to an idea, or find flaws in thinking, as
pessimists. There is an unending supply of ideas that will work, so don’t be afraid if reality rips an idea. Obstacles don’t guarantee failure, but ignoring facts in the name of optimism can. Remember this entrepreneurial rule: Any new project or venture usually costs four times as much and takes twice as long as expected. The likelihood and severity of failure increases when optimism goes unchecked by reality.

Be Patient **and Action-Oriented**
Nothing is ever perfect, especially early in a project, so get *something* started. Small adjustments missed early on can almost always be adopted later. Don’t mistake an absence of activity, or putting up with practices and policies that don’t make sense, for patience. Let patience work its magic in the middle of trying to do something great, not in waiting for a great opportunity to appear. Don’t confuse urgency with panic or poor planning. Urgency is different than panic and sometimes necessary.

Practice Candidor **and Diplomacy**
When speaking up, do it tactfully so that what you say is received well rather than resented or resisted. Make sure that your intentions are clear and constructive. Ask for others’ permission to express them, or they may pretend to listen but tune out. How something is said is as important as what is said. Consideration of others’ feelings doesn’t put honesty at risk.

Be Diplomatic **and Direct**
Don’t confuse being nice with silence about negative things. Telling someone the hard truth can be the nicest thing to do. Diplomacy increases the odds that someone will listen to a tough message, but diplomacy shouldn’t obscure the message itself. Be careful not to rob
someone of constructive feedback by hiding behind the old adage, “If you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all.”

Be Loyal and Independent
Loyalty doesn’t require silence when something isn’t right. Remember to stay devoted to progress or a cause, not a specific project, department, or person. Going along with something that doesn’t feel right may be disloyal to principle and purpose. Be willing to stand up for what’s right or a better idea, regardless of where a general loyalty lies.

A complete list of strengths and complements is found in Appendix B.

Back to Center
Leadership mantras like “good to great” and competitive creeds like “Second place is just first loser” make adopting good enough for anything unpopular, but good enough complements are precisely what’s needed for achieving great core strengths.

The power behind I’m brilliant, and I’m not isn’t limited to the effects of adding single-digit complements. I’m brilliant, and I’m not also helps center confidence in a different way. For example, when people get pushed left of center and lose confidence, I’m not gets overemphasized and self-interpreted as I never will be or I’m not enough.

During his first semester in George Washington University’s MBA program, none other than General Colin Powell suffered a “crisis of confidence.” Powell found himself intimidated and the work daunting, especially as the oldest student at age thirty-two among other students apparently more qualified and familiar with the terrain.
“As the professors plunged into courses such as statistical analysis and calculus—I had already flunked the latter at CCNY,” said Powell, “they might as well have been speaking Swahili to me. I began to experience the Imposter Syndrome. What am I doing here? I don’t belong here. They made a mistake in admitting me.”

Powell’s confidence was restored to center not long after his first semester started. While hanging out with other students at the union cafeteria, Powell discovered that not only were his fellow officers as intimidated by school as he was, but most of the business majors also felt just as lost. In those cafeteria conversations he realized that he wasn’t “behind the curve” or “out of his league,” and three months later his first semester’s final grades of straight A’s proved it. Over-focusing on I’m not, which happens to everyone, undercuts the confidence of I’m brilliant.

Everyone begins life, projects, and careers on the not side of I’m brilliant, and I’m not. Being bad at something is the beginning of being good at it, so trust the learning curve. Once at the top of that curve, work as if you’re never quite there. But even when you’ve arrived, there will be times when your brand of brilliance isn’t relevant. That doesn’t always mean check out or hold back. Lack of brilliance in one area may allow a fresh angle to ask questions that knowledge and expertise can crowd out of smart, experienced minds. Being the ordinary one has power because curiosity is your greatest advantage.

When right of center, the most important word in “I’m brilliant, and I’m not” may be the conjunction. People aren’t perfect, even in core strengths. I’m brilliant; and I’m not has the capacity to see that I’m getting close to where I want to be, and I have a long way to go. I am accomplished and unfinished, talented and average, extraordinary and ordinary,
deserving of respect and no more deserving than anyone else. With and in place, no one is painted into a corner of being one thing or another. And also brings us to the second part of the sentence: I'm not. That reality-check injects enough humility to listen, change our mind, or let someone else take the lead without fear that another’s brilliance dilutes or deletes ours.

With I’m brilliant, and I’m not in place, the next property of pure confidence to build maximum competence is adding more we to me.
To stand up or stand out, it’s natural to think that building the right level of self-confidence is a me-first pursuit: self-awareness, self-development, self-esteem, self-respect, and self-fulfillment. But what’s natural about me-first isn’t optimal for the strongest, purest form of confidence. A me-first strategy weakens the symbiotic relationship between competence and confidence.

Confidence and competence live and breathe in a social setting. No one locks herself away in isolation, draws curtains on the outside world, and genuinely strengthens confidence. And it isn’t until competence engages with the needs of the outside world that it converts into relevance.

The interactive, socially-wired world is where confidence and competence connect to produce relevance: where what I can do meets what you need. The tighter the connection, the stronger the relevance. As relevance goes, confidence and competence often follow.

For example, a prescription for repairing a marriage by a technically gifted psychologist hardly matters if she makes a diagnosis without understanding the relationship. Despite unequaled competence, filtering the couple’s needs through a preset agenda weakens her
relevance by leading with *me* (*my* competence) rather than *we* (*your* needs, *then* *my* competence). In turn, the couple loses confidence in the therapist, and perhaps the ability to rebuild their marriage. The natural consequence is an unexpected drop in self-confidence triggered not by flaws in her talent, expertise or desire to make a difference, but by irrelevance.

Reverse the tables of *me-first*, and the couple may focus impractically on what *they* think is best, ignoring the psychologist’s accurate diagnosis and expertise. They may jump from therapist to therapist until someone tells them what they want to hear rather than what’s relevant. *Me-first*, even when well-intended, makes relevance a gamble, competence less trustworthy, and confidence an unreliable power.

A purely confident person has only one policy for her competence: relevance. That policy may require stepping forward or stepping aside, but no level of inclusion or exclusion controls pure confidence. *We* is the linchpin of unshakable confidence when our talent and expertise aren’t the answer, and maximum competence when they are.

Across relationships, professions and politics, the weight of evidence in favor of *we* overpowers *me*.
The Power of We

A landmark study of 3,000 married couples by psychologist John Gottman showed a link between certain everyday behaviors and the likelihood of a couple’s divorcing. After observing a couple talk for only five minutes, Gottman and his team could predict with 91% accuracy whether the couple would stay together.

Gottman’s conclusions are essentially based on one pivotal question: Are the small, everyday behaviors of each partner focused on we or me? For example, when one partner won’t share power, there is an 81% chance that the marriage will self-destruct. Only after divorce do couples usually realize the deep, individual cost of playing me first. Though no application of we may be more important than marriage, the power of we extends beyond home.

Despite a deep inventory of stories on lone geniuses, anyone paying attention knows that the best ideas are almost always born of we. Nineteen individuals won the first fifteen Nobel Prizes in physics, yet the last fifteen prizes have gone to forty-two people. Only three times in the last fifteen years has a single person won. Scott Page, Professor of Complex Systems, Political Science, and Economics at the University of Michigan, was curious to know why.

Page created an experiment in which groups of people were challenged to solve the same complex problem. When participants were isolated to solve the problem, some ranked great, average, and below average. Welcome to the bell curve. Page then divided people into teams with similar problem-solving abilities, ranging from super teams of only the best and brightest to groups composed of the
worst. As expected, the brighter the collective talent, the better their performance. The bell curve worked again.

Next, Page mixed it up. Randomly allocating the best, average, and worst problem-solvers to teams, he assigned another set of complex problems and analyzed performance. The randomly chosen and diverse teams outperformed the superstar teams. Thinking the outcome was an anomaly, he tried the experiment again. And again. Each time diversity defeated single-minded, intellectual horsepower. Of his findings Page wrote:

Our collective ability depends as much on our collective differences as it does on our individual IQ scores. Does this logic imply that we should abandon the meritocracy? That we should remove those “my child is an honor student at Neil Armstrong Junior High” bumper stickers from our mini vans and randomly allocate spots in our top colleges? Of course not. Obviously, ability matters. But here’s the catch: so does diversity. We’re limited in our abilities. Our heads contain only so many neurons and axons. Collectively, we face no such constraint.

Even with limited individual brainpower, a simple me to we shift has a remarkable effect on one person’s creativity. New York University Professor Evan Polman and Kyle Emich of Cornell posed the following challenge to 137 undergraduates: “A prisoner was attempting to escape from a tower. He found a rope in his cell that was half as long enough to permit him to reach the ground safely. He divided the rope in half, tied the two parts together, and escaped. How could he have done this?”
Half the students were asked to imagine themselves as the prisoner locked inside the tower ("prisoner group"). The other half were asked to imagine someone else trapped in the prison ("imaginary group"). Forty-eight percent of those who imagined *themselves* trapped in the tower escaped, while 68 percent of those who imagined *someone else* solved the dilemma (The prisoner unwound the rope and tied the strands together). Three more related experiments in the same study found that participants were more creative or had better solutions when thinking of someone else. The only variable was the switch from *me* to *we*.

That switch has defined historic individuals who solved epic challenges. Abraham Lincoln, Susan B. Anthony, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Florence Nightingale, Nelson Mandela, and recently Aung San Suu Kyi round out a celebrated list of those who received *me*-centered accolades driven by *we*-centered ambitions.

Because of its unequaled power to lift one and everyone, *we* is an inspiring, fashionable word. In times of tragedy or triumph, wedding vows or funerals, the word *we* moves minds and hearts into unity and commitment. But the lasting power of *we*-charged language lies in *we*-centered habits, which are often separated by miles.

Couples pledge *we* in wedding vows but draw fierce battle lines of *me* that divide property and children in divorce. At moments like 9/11
when fear and grief push people to their emotional limits, it isn’t hard to line streets with American flags and declare the power of We. Not much later, however, Rush Limbaugh Americans turn up the volume to drown out Bill Maher Patriots, and Rachel Maddow gets back to work attacking Tea Party activists, who are busy rebelling against every we that isn’t them. The power of we fades fast.

It also starts too late.

**The Momentum of Me**

There is a prevalent belief in a rising societal trend of *me*. The belief isn’t completely without merit. To measure specific levels of *me*, one tool researchers use is the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), comprised of forty paired statements from which participants choose a response. For example, “I insist upon getting the respect that is due me” or “I usually get the respect I deserve.” Scores are based on points attached to specific answers, so in the above example choosing the first statement over the second would add a point. An NPI score of 21 reflects high narcissism and overconfidence.

Fifty-eight percent more college students scored higher on a narcissism scale in 2009 than in 1982. Jean Twenge of San Diego State University and author of *Generation Me* and *The Narcissism Epidemic*, examined the prevalence of *me*-centeredness from the NPI. “I think these analyses end the debate completely,” said Twenge. “Narcissism is rising.” If you now feel justified sentencing the current twenty-somethings to a decadent *me* generation, or feel indicted as a *me*-first twenty-something, hold on.
Psychologists Brent Donnellan and Kali Trzesniewski looked at NPI scores from 1979 to 2007, breaking NPI questions into subsets. Their study concluded that some signs of narcissism have increased while others have decreased, with no major changes overall. Now you’re either confused or relieved, probably driven by how close to “twenty-something” you are.

From our point of view, not all NPI questions reflect true narcissism: “I am assertive” and “I like to take responsibility for making decisions” are indicators used on the NPI, but in reality are much different than “Everybody likes to hear my stories” and “I can make anyone believe anything I want them to.” Many statements on the NPI are simply strengths, with benefits or counterfeits depending on how pure confidence is. An increase in some scores may even be beneficial, contingent on where you stand on the confidence continuum. So the gradual rise in the NPI index may reveal good and bad news.

When you carefully consider the NPI and other generational self-confidence research from multiple angles and psychological points of view, what is clear is that while me-first isn’t dramatically rising in any specific generation, our twenties are always accompanied by ineffectively high doses of me. As early as 1907, nearly each decade has produced front-page articles written by journalists beyond their twenties condemning the current twenty-somethings of me-first behavior. While the specific accusations aren’t entirely untrue, the most revealing cross-generational truth is that we’ve all been twenty-something, and we’re not too far beyond those behaviors ourselves.
Me is a habit that takes too long to wear off for any generation’s own good, and corners each of us into a mentality that carries on for years. The lengthy detox time creates a long span of disruptive and dysfunctional me-first tendencies that leaves generations of talented, undaunted young people miscalculating the right ratio of me-to-we. Why are the twenties so me-centered? Nature and nurture.

Cornered by Me in Our Twenties

It isn’t until our mid-twenties that a vital part of the brain—the frontal lobes—are completely connected. This explains why teenagers are often so infuriatingly me-centered. “You think of them as these surly, rude, selfish people,” said University of Pennsylvania Professor of Neurology Frances Jensen. “Well, actually, that’s the developmental stage they’re at. They aren’t yet at that place where they’re capable of thinking about the effects of their behavior on other people. That requires insight.”

As the frontal lobe connects and awareness of we increases, social conditions that lend themselves to think me intensify. It’s like coming out of a diet detox and someone takes us to McDonalds for our first meal. In our early twenties we’re independent for the first time, and so we establish who I am: my style, my decisions, my major, my grades, my social life, and my persona. Our social circles are mostly people our age. Dating is more recreational than serious and so there isn’t a vested interest in the other because he or she isn’t a significant other.
Jobs don’t typically involve complex relationships with a variety of people, so we’re not pushed beyond our demographic comfort zone. Because we’ve been absorbed in and surrounded by me, there is a tide of neural me wiring and social me conditioning to overcome entering our mid-twenties and exiting our late twenties. Those habits are hard to break, even with fully functioning frontal lobes.

Fortunately, over time, life presents more openings to break those habits and think we. Our thirties are a decade of committing seriously to one partner, starting new families, greater political and social awareness, and launching careers that require interaction with a variety of people and purposes. The forties and fifties bring financial sacrifice for children’s college tuition, blended families, civic involvement, and a personal history of lessons to rely on that give us reason to trust we over me.

And though the opportunities for we increase past our twenties, it’s easy to revert to me, myself and I as a thirty-fourty-fifty something at work. Life after thirty is designed with experiences to extract us from me, but pressures of mortgages to pay, job competition, promotions to campaign for, retirement to think about, performance to maintain and recognition of our own level of success keep me in play. Certain social expectations also come with age. Driving a rusty Honda Civic is perceived okay as a twenty-something college student, but as a forty-something manager the social pressure changes. If not managed wisely, appearances and material accumulation give me excessive power. Because the social reinforcements of me are always there to distract us from we, the long learning curve sets standards for the way people behave organizationally and economically.
“Tribal Leadership” coauthor Dave Logan discovered that 76 percent of company cultures are *me*-centered. The more *me*-centered the culture, the worse the company’s financial performance. Self-centered capitalism undermines the very system that *me*-centric proponents claim individuality, unbridled consumption, and competition bolster. A broader view of *we* could help check the economic instability that rugged capitalists claim to protect.

On June 12, 2009, Bill Moyers interviewed former Clinton administration Secretary of Labor Robert Reich about healthcare reform and the state of the economy.

BILL MOYERS: What has happened to capitalism that has led it to the abyss?

ROBERT REICH: Essentially, capitalism has swamped democracy. You see, there’s no such thing really as pure capitalism without rules and regulations that set limits on profit-making, because otherwise it’s *everybody out for themselves*. Otherwise, nobody can trust anybody. Otherwise, it’s the law of the jungle.

Unless you have a democratic system that allows the rules to be created not by the companies but *by the people* and the people’s representatives reflecting what the public needs, not what the corporations need, you’re going to have a system that is not a democracy, and it’s not democratic capitalism. It’s super capitalism without the democracy.
So why does society tend to work in opposition to *we* if *we* is clearly a superior strategy? Why don’t human beings make stronger moves to get past *me* sooner once the frontal lobes are ready to go? Because psychologically and historically, *me* is a durable way to survive and succeed. Politics and business are competitive and capitalistic. Head-to-head, *me* appears to be the most viable strategy. But perception isn’t reality.

Social science and history expose *me* as a less steady way to survive, and a fragile way to thrive. And when *we* leaves work and goes home, stakes can get even higher. Emotions are closer to the surface. Love is deeper. Commitments are stronger. *Me* collapses entirely as a carryover strategy from boardrooms to living rooms.

### Three Core Ambitions

Despite the case for *we*, and people aren’t always convinced, most still have deep-seated anxiety about how *we* actually works. Because *me* feels instinctive and in my control, natural fear of conceding control, missing out, or being vulnerable makes us uneasy about *we*. The fear arises because *me-first* appears to be the straightest line to success in three core ambitions.

1. **Livelihood and Achievement**
   From the basics to bliss: food, shelter, safety, and money to career, mission, and happiness.
2. Power and Respect
Power and respect boost everything from influence, trust, and talent to social support, health, and a longer life.

3. Choice and Voice
Humans crave freedom to choose. Because everyone has unique identities and priorities, not far behind choice is the desire to be heard.

Because these ambitions are constant and strong, shifting personal habits from me to we demands a straight, rigorous answer to an ironic but vital question: What’s in it for me?

The truth is that fidelity to we is the fastest, surest way to realize each ambition. Living the principle of we creates micro-level success with your clients, co-workers, boss, spouse, and friends. At a macro level it’s easy to feel defeated before you even start to make the shift.

________________________________________
One person’s effort appears inconsequential in comparison with wider social trends. But the beauty of we is that it makes progress on both levels at once, and the only way to effect change on a macro level is to change one person at a time from the bottom up.

________________________________________
The next three sections cover how *we* maximizes the achievement of each ambition.
We
Ambition 1
Livelihood and Achievement

Whether we like it or not, most everything sets up for bell curves: IQ, income, GPA, marital happiness, employee performance, etc. Legendary General Electric CEO Jack Welch graded employee performance by a 20-70-10 rule: “A” players were the top 20 percent; “B” players were the vital middle because they worked hard and performed but weren’t quite “A” players; and the bottom 10 percent were fired every year. It became known as “rank and yank.” While not all organizations are as intense and strict as GE, many practice similar methods of ranking and evaluating employees.

Reacting to competition and bell curves, me-first is a typical strategy to get the limited resources for livelihood and achievement. Deeply held beliefs about me drive the strategy:

- If I don’t focus on my needs, I lose control of what matters to me.

- If I take care of myself, and everyone else does the same, everyone gets what he deserves and the weakest links lose out. What’s wrong with that?

- I paid a price to excel. I’m not going to let strangers who don’t care about what’s important to me or who
aren’t as invested in my career as I am, draft off my hard work or put my ambitions at risk.

A me-first strategy on competitive bell curves leads to hyperventilation about rankings and using tainted personal tactics to jump to the top of the curve. It’s easy to predict the off-center behavior: people are distracted by what others are doing, how they’re doing it, who’s noticing, and attempt to re-adjust who they uniquely are to fit the criteria of a generic curve. Anxiety then replaces confidence, office politics confine competence, and relevance drops. Me is a convoluted way up the curve and a defective method for staying there.

So in a survival-of-the-fittest, forced-rank, bell-curve world where ambitions, dreams, and careers are at stake, how does we help my livelihood and achievement? The answer is counterintuitive: lose yourself. Forget me.

Lose Yourself

Imagine you’re in sales. You could be selling anything: a car, home, idea, or product. In this case, let’s say you work for a company like IBM. It’s approaching the end of Q4 and you’re working on a make-or-break sale. The final client presentation is tomorrow morning. Closing the quota-breaking deal means livelihood and achievement: commission, promotion, reputation, kids’ college tuition, house payments, retirement, cars, clothes and vacations. But if you walk
into the presentation focused on your ambitions, the deal is far less likely to close.

When you’ve made the sale about me, you’re at risk of the worst habits: overselling features, talking too much, rushing through explanations, closing too early, mistaking attention for agreement, and avoiding objections. The me-first approach downgrades the client’s ambitions to second place, and seems to try and take what isn’t yours: the client’s choice. As the client picks up on your intent, they grow suspicious of what you say, guard what they say, and don’t give you access to information or decision-makers. You lose the sale. Your company loses revenue. Even the client loses if your product was in fact better than competitors’. No one wins.

Losing yourself doesn’t mean losing. Whether you’re pitching a new idea, convincing investors for more funding, or making your case for a new job during an interview, losing yourself guarantees the best chance of winning.

Ernesto Sirolli is an Italian-born, internationally-educated economic development expert whose pioneering work has helped a new generation of civic leaders start over 40,000 new businesses in 300 communities around the world. As founder of the widely respected Sirolli Institute, his success began with hard-earned lessons in losing yourself.

By age twenty-seven Sirolli had failed at almost every project he tackled while working for an Italian nonprofit in Africa. At twenty-one he arrived in Africa with Italian produce seeds to help grow food near the Zambezi River, but the indigenous people didn’t seem anxious to help. Instead of asking the locals why they weren’t
interested in agriculture, his team simply thought, “Thank God we’re here. Just in the nick of time to save the Zambian people from starvation!”

After planting seeds and nurturing farms, the land produced magnificent produce, especially Italian tomatoes. As soon as the plump, juicy tomatoes were ripe, hippos came out of the river and ate them all. Sirolli and his team asked the locals, “Why didn’t you tell us?” “You never asked,” the Zambians replied.

In a 2012 TED talk on how to help impoverished people, Sirolli pointed to remarkable failure in aid for countries like Africa because those trying to help neglect to do one simple thing: forget me, shut up and listen. According to him, Western efforts to help Third World nations fall into one of two categories: paternalistic or patronizing. Paternalism treats people in need as children and so doesn’t involve them in the solution. Things are done for them, not with them. Patronizing treats people as servants, subtly keeping them at a distance. After seven years of failure despite his hard work and good intentions, Sirolli changed his point of view:

I decided when I was 27 years old to only respond to people, and I invented a system called Enterprise Facilitation, where you never initiate anything, you never motivate anybody, but you become a servant of the local passion, the servant of local people who have a dream to become better. So what you do—you shut up. You never arrive in a community with any [preconceived] ideas, and you sit with the local people. And we become friends, and we find out what that person wants to do.
Losing yourself requires spending less time with your head inside your plans and more time engaging with others about what’s important to them.

One Level Out

In any venture or relationship, before thinking of me, maximize your relevance by thinking one level out from where you are.

As you think, talk, and decide on a daily basis, ask: What is this about outside of me (me equals the level where you are, not just you personally)? What’s the bigger picture? Who’s the customer? Who has something at stake? Why does that matter, and how do I make sure I understand? If I were them, what would matter most to me?
A few years ago my roof needed to be replaced because of water damage. After a short call to my Allstate agent, the claims adjuster was on his way. My agent told me that the adjuster was notoriously tight-fisted. After hearing that, I began to feel defensive before he even arrived. Then I stepped back and took a deep breath. I moved one circle out to put on my adjuster hat and forgot about me for the moment.

When he arrived, we walked into the backyard to look at the roof. Rather than describe the damage and what I expected, I told him what I would be thinking if I were him, how I would be calculating repair costs and what would make sense. When I was done, he acknowledged that I had missed only one small thing. Then I explained my logic and why more of the roof needed to be replaced than the damaged area only. When we were done talking, I had what I wanted, and so did he. It didn’t take negotiation techniques or subtle argument. It took thinking the next level out.

It’s possible that I caught the adjuster on a good day. It could have been that he had a customer-service rating quota to hit and needed my positive feedback in a follow-up survey to hit his numbers. Even if all of those options are true, we is still the straightest, fastest way to bring our strengths to their side of the table while maximizing the outcome on our own behalf. And if down the road we work together again, which is not the case in this story but is for most relationships, the net effect will be stronger livelihood and achievement on both sides.
We
Ambition 2
Power and Respect

People need power. The control, motivation and autonomy that power provides boosts everything from resources, influence and social support to health and longevity. People who feel powerful are 16 percent happier with life and 26 percent more satisfied at work. But getting the full benefit of power requires respect.

As respect goes, the opportunity to use the power we have typically follows. No matter how powerful we are, the level of respect we get plays a major role in what we can do with that power. That may explain why respect on a job-seeker’s priority list ranks second only to company stability and compensation, and ahead of healthcare benefits and work-life balance.

As interested as we are in power for what it allows us to do, not everyone, however, is equally interested in the same type of power:

1. **Power over**: institutional authority, title, responsibilities, control.
2. **Power to do**: talent and expertise.
3. **Power of who**: integrity and authenticity.

Someone who wields power *over* without respect gets minimal, short-lived compliance. Anyone with a power-hungry, autocratic boss
knows this firsthand. Power to do is limited until people notice and respect your strengths. Anyone new to a job or project where their talent wasn’t valued has been emotionally deflated by being artificially respected and realistically underused. Respect fails the power of who when morals decline and what we say isn’t what we do.

Respect liberates power.

When respect given doesn’t match expectations or isn’t enough to fully use power, people tend to demand respect, chase it even harder, or hold back talent and effort.

**Pursuing Respect**

In an experiment by University of Zurich economists Ernst Fehr and Simon Gachter, two people were told a single sum of money was available to share between them equally, but only one “giver” in the partnership could decide how to split the money. The receiver could approve or kill the deal, but not adjust it. If the receiver accepted the giver’s offer, each got what the giver decided. If the receiver nixed the offer, neither side got a penny. As it turned out, if receivers were offered more than 30 percent of the available sum, they accepted the offer. If they received anything less, they killed the deal despite walking away with nothing. Feeling respected trumped strict rationality.

Similarly, when people push too hard socially to keep or get respect, *me* takes over and delivers the ultimatum at the expense of everyone’s power. Because of what respect means to on-the-job power, the pursuit of respect often leads to over-pursuit and under-respect. New York University and University of California, Berkeley research on
power and status found that when as few as two people on a team are in a status struggle for respect, even when nothing is explicitly said between them, group performance drops and respect for the respect-seekers falls with it. No matter what type of power you hold or the strength of that power, the harder you fight for respect the less you get.

But without flawless judgments and endless time to accurately adjust the respect-to-power ratio, how do you bridge the gap between the requirements of respect and full use of power? Similar to lose yourself for livelihood and achievement, earning the respect your power deserves without chasing it requires a counterintuitive we-first strategy: invest respect first. Respect tends to be reciprocal. You give, you get. You withhold, they withhold.

Reciprocity

In 1971 Cornell University professor Dennis Regan conducted a classic experiment in reciprocity. Giving students the impression they were in an art-appreciation experiment with a partner (secretly Regan’s lab assistant), the partner would leave during a short break during the art exhibition. For the variable group, the assistant returned with a Coke for the student. “I asked the experimenter if it was okay if I bought a Coke,” she would say, “so I bought one for
you too.” For the control group the assistant did nothing except pick up where they left off.

When the “art-appreciation” experiment ended, the assistant told students of both groups that she was in a competition to sell raffle tickets and that whoever sold the most would win a prize. “Any tickets you could buy would help,” she would say. “The more the better.” Students who received the gratis Coke purchased twice the tickets. A follow-up survey with the students found that the Coke made no difference in how much they actually liked the assistant. They bought the tickets strictly to even the exchange. From free samples at Costco leading to cookies in shopping carts or squeegee-wielding strangers randomly washing a driver’s car windshield at a traffic light hoping for a quick buck, we live in a world of reciprocity. Our reactions go beyond social norms. Humans are genetically wired for reciprocity, and this includes reciprocal respect.

**Physiology of Reciprocity**

The brain releases four chemicals related to well-being with varying frequency and intensity based on our choices:

1. **Dopamine**: cognition, reward, behavior change, motor skills, avoidance of punishment, etc.
2. **Endorphins**: exercise, pain management, sex, and food.
3. **Serotonin**: mood, appetite, sleep, memory, and learning.
4. **Oxytocin**: recognition, love, trust, empathy, social distance, cooperation, etc.
The first three chemicals are less socially dependent for release. Because activities like eating, exercise, motor skills, sleep, and learning are fairly independent of social conditions, endorphins, dopamine, and serotonin are available frequently and freely. For example, if you’ve learned something insightful in Catalyst, you’ve had a serotonin hit. You could stop right now, eat chocolate cake, get an endorphin release, and no one else was needed to make it happen (or needs to know).

But as soon as life moves from an isolated, individual setting to a social one, oxytocin is the central chemical that rewards specific behaviors. Oxytocin’s release is conditional on social interaction. Cooperation, trust, love, and respect are to oxytocin what food, exercise, sleep, and sex are to the first three chemicals.

Neurobiological research at the University of Michigan has discovered two key areas of brain circuitry that react chemically to reciprocity: the orbitofrontal cortex, a region in the brain just behind your eyes that involves the process of decision-making; and the ventral striatum, which is strongly associated with your emotions and motivation. Brain responses measured by MRIs under conditions of social reward show that reciprocity robustly engages both areas of the brain, but is absent for people who lack a reputation for reciprocity. “These findings elucidate a fundamental brain mechanism,” wrote University of Wisconsin Emeritus Professor of Molecular Biology Deric Bownds, “by which human cooperative relationships are initiated and sustained.”

Getting respect requires giving it, and someone has to invest first. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. As with investing, there’s a risk-reward ratio. You can invest in a three-year CD with a guaranteed but
microscopic rate of return, or you can accept more risk for greater return. The key to a high ROI using reciprocity is knowing how, when and with whom to invest respect. It begins with equality.

Equality

From the moment we meet anyone we may have no idea the level of respect they deserve or what power type(s) they have, given a very individual and unequal history of advantages and disadvantages. We are not equally free, smart, safe, healthy, connected, or recognized. Nature and nurture designed us differently enough that two people rarely see or do things precisely the same way every time. Even people of similar backgrounds who gather for similar reasons with similar passions are never identical, except at a twin festival. (Yes, there is one. It's in August). We face different challenges, are presented with diverse opportunities, and are treated with different prejudices and preferences by different people.

On any given bell curve, we are either ahead of or behind each other. A single change in time, place, or circumstance can instantly shift individual value and performance. So considering that we are all different nearly all of the time in thousands of ways, what makes us equal and why does it matter to respect?

One thing we have in common, ironically, is individuality. Whether we come from poverty or privilege, high school or grad school, health or handicap, life designed us with unique origins, stations and destinations. As distinctive, unequal and even unfair as those designs may appear to be,
everyone is, however, equally capable of achieving
the potential they do have in their own circle of
opportunity and influence.

We can at least trust that their experiences are different than ours and respect the price they paid to become who they are, know what they know, and achieve what they have. Without equality, respect has no trustworthy foundation upon which to build. Any given change in circumstance or simple misperception would constantly alter levels of respect, leaving guessing and judgment as the most common strategies for investing respect. Diversity is the constant truth of equality and the foundation for respect.

By definition then, stereotypes homogenize individuality. Applied to us or by us, stereotypes give a false sense of superiority or inferiority that marginalize respect, limit power and deplete human achievement. Whether stereotypes are as narrow as beliefs about one person or as wide as an entire nation, they surface more subtly and influence us more frequently than you might think.

**Breaking Stereotypes**

Princeton social psychologists in 1999 conducted a stereotype experiment. They invited a group of white students with reasonable athletic ability to play a ten-hole miniature golf course. Then a second group of students were invited to play the identical course, but were told before playing that the course measured athletic aptitude based on an imaginary “Michigan Athletic Aptitude Test.” Scores for the second group were three strokes worse than for those told nothing.
White students suffered from a silent stereotype: white guys aren’t as athletic as black guys.

In a follow-up experiment black Princeton students played the same course, scoring equally well whether they had been told about the fake athletic aptitude test or not. Because, you know, all black guys are athletic. Then the experimenters added a variable: pre-course instructions included that the golf scores measured “sports strategic intelligence” to see whether black students could fend off the stereotype that black men have inferior intelligence. The results were similar: black students scored four strokes worse.

In his book Whistling Vivaldi, Columbia University provost Claude Steele’s remarkable research on stereotypes shows that they float above us in the air like a cloud, needlessly and adversely changing our attitudes and behaviors in an attempt to prove our way out from under the cloud, or make others prove theirs. Steele wrote:

At first glance, one might dismiss the importance of something “in the air” like stereotype threat. At second glance, however, it’s clear that this threat can be a tenacious force in our lives. White athletes have to contend with it in each competition, especially against black athletes. Think of the white athlete in a sport with heavy black competition. To reach a high level of performance, say, to make it into the National Basketball Association, which is dominated by black players, the white athlete would have to survive and prosper against a lifelong gauntlet of performance situations loaded with this extra race-linked threat. No single good athletic performance would put the
stereotype to rest. The effort to disprove it would be Sisyphean, reemergent at each important new performance.

Because stereotypical gauntlets can reemerge at any time for anyone, crushing stereotypes in favor of truth requires analyzing the beliefs behind them. Studying the history of the group about which you have predetermined ideas, or getting to know the person you may have boxed and labeled, is a start.


Liberating power through respect hinges on how loyally we live by the self-evident truth of equality. There is no stereotype so severe that it can’t be crushed by a single act of equality. And if after stripping away stereotypes we find honest disagreement or even come face to face with humanity’s ugly side, then at least truth is facing truth, not stereotype facing stereotype. As equality liberates us from stereotypes, our ability to invest respect increases.
Just Want It

As a social investment, equality works like earnest money for respect until talent and track record justify more. Respect is founded on equality, and squared by merit. But whether respect given is granted on equality or earned by merit, investing respect means showing it. If based on merit, respect may be deferring to another for more time talking, setting direction, or leadership. Other than those basic moves, respect for both merit and equality are similar and unsurprising: listen, collaborate, trust, love, forgive, apologize, pay attention, and be fair. The truth is that you’ve heard them. So did people thousands of years ago. The rules aren’t new.

But because the rules of respect are harder emotionally to live than they are academically to understand, the pivotal question then is how much you want to live them. For example, listening is a sign of respect. It isn’t complicated, though there are dozens of books on the subject. Listening is mostly desire. When we’re aware of the why behind the rules, in this case listening to liberate power through respect, desire is stronger and technique easier. After which the only thing left that stands between us and living it is commitment.

Smart Social Investing

Even when fully committed and perfectly executed though, agency is always a social variable. Which means respect isn’t always reciprocated. One in six people are inclined to play by me-only rules, so investing respect wisely requires knowing when to shift strategies.
In another social experiment on playing by *me* versus *we*, Fehr and Gintis gave people in groups equal amounts of money they could invest. The rules were set up so that group investing was encouraged, but yielded only a modest return compared to what participants could get by investing alone. Isolated investing hurt everyone’s returns except the individual who went solo. Through the first ten investment rounds, group cooperation decreased, as expected. There was no monetary incentive to do otherwise.

Then Fehr and Gintis changed one variable in the final ten rounds: participants could punish non-cooperative behavior. People could assign negative points to selfish “free riders” who were simply out for their own gain. Each point assigned to a free-rider decreased the free-rider’s return by 10 percent, and the person “punishing” also took a hit, just not as much.

With a *me*-first punishment in place, behavior converged to nearly full cooperation. The closer the experiment neared the final round, the more solo investments vanished. When the final round was at hand, even those who had the strongest history of *me*, and nothing to lose because they knew the game would be over after round twenty, still played by *we*. Fehr and Gintis called the social punishment “strong reciprocity,” or using social rewards and punishments to change behavior.

Social pressure used the right way changes how 40 to 67 percent of *me-first* people trade respect. What that also means is that some people don’t change, even when you apply strong reciprocity. As in investing, there are no fast tracks or guaranteed dividends of mutual respect, only better or worse odds of return. That requires being
prepared for bear market people who aren’t playing to mutual benefit, or letting due respect put due power into play.

Social Consequences

It would be nice if me’s were aware of or cared about the natural consequences of the way they trade respect, but they often aren’t unless they lose respect for playing me-first. Social consequences are necessary when long-term, natural consequences aren’t obvious or quick enough to make the necessary exchange of respect fair.

For example, if children refuse to study in school, passionate parental lectures of natural consequences—e.g., “You’re limiting your future, not to mention your choice of colleges”—aren’t usually enough to change attitudes. Social consequences like peer pressure and school discipline operate to change behavior before natural consequences are all kids have left, by which time it’s too late anyway. Social consequences aren’t always logical or connected to what’s natural, but they serve notice to a person as an early warning sign that behavior needs to change or he won’t win, now or later.

Delivering social consequences of respect is for the good of both sides: they’re losing power by me-first behavior, and so are you. Nobody’s winning. If someone offers less respect than what’s deserved or needed (and that’s always a judgment call best made when you’re on-center with pure confidence), withdraw respect as a social consequence by educating the other person on what happens next if the exchange doesn’t level up.

For example, I once was negotiating a contract after we closed a big sale. The client’s procurement people insisted that we use their
contract. We received the contract and made sixteen changes to protect our business. After they received our revisions, they set up a call to talk through the changes. After introductions, the client’s first words were: “We received the contract with your proposed changes. We say no to all of them. We will only agree to two changes, so choose carefully. The rest we won’t consider.”

I was stunned. If everyone did business that way, we would be left with only people who take advantage of others and those willing to be run over. They were playing *me-first* and with a low level of respect. Withdrawing respect by showing them what would happen next is the *we-first* investment tool I used in response.

“Let me ask a question,” I said. “If I take the approach you’re taking with me, where will we end up? If I said the same to you, how would you respond? From my perspective it seems as though we’re done right now. I’d like to work together if there’s a way. If not, I’m okay with that as well. We agreed to use your contract knowing that you wrote it to protect your interests. That makes good business sense and I respect the position. At the same time we can’t agree to language that puts our business at risk. The changes we submitted protect our interests equally. In the spirit of partnership I wouldn’t want you to agree to points that hurt you. I ask the same. If there’s a way for us to move forward with confidence that neither of us is at risk, let’s do so. If not, we can both walk away. What would you like to do?” In short, we completed the deal with mutual respect. We’ve now done business together for more than four years. Every discussion since has been fair and open because *we* re-established the rules of respect.
More broadly, solving society’s most pressing problems calls for unprecedented power of every type. And while power can always be strengthened and perfected, there is no stronger way to unleash the power we have now than elevating respect.

Now to the third ambition, choice and voice. Humans crave freedom to choose. Not far behind is freedom of expression. We elevates both.
We
Ambition 3
Choice and Voice

One of the fears about *we-first* is that it may deprive us of choice, pressuring us to acquiesce in the name of *we* when we don’t want to or know better. People also want their identity left intact, even when they’re committed to a cause. No one wants his voice silenced in the name of “we” by an invitation to be a team player, disguised to mean shut up and conform.

Contrary to the hesitation about *we* reinforced by lazy but popular teamwork clichés, there is an *I* in team. By definition *we* includes *me*. *We* isn’t generic, watered-down individuality. But for *we* to preserve choice and strengthen voice, it must be clear when *me* comes first, second, or last. The answer is when *my* competence and being first are driven by devotion to progress.

Stepping Up

The first year that NBA superstars LeBron James, Dwayne Wade, and Chris Bosh played together on the Miami Heat ended with the Dallas Mavericks celebrating a world championship on Miami’s home court. In the ensuing off-season, James said that he looked in the mirror and realized that he had to grow both on and off the court. Ironically, James had been too *we*-focused and needed *me* to play a more prominent role. In other words, the best *we* plan was for James to increase his individual role.
Wade, former “alpha dog” of the Heat, said that he had to let James make the team his own. Coach Erik Spoelstra commented that Wade stepped down from his number-one role and led with his voice, heart, and emotions. The Heat won the NBA championship in 2012 in large part because their historically number-one player placed himself as number two. Chris Bosh also stated that he had to do less of what he could do individually and more as a team player. Bosh still made the All-Star Team, and he’s still All-NBA, even though he didn’t score as many points as Wade or James. Learning to strike the right balance of me as an ingredient of we was the difference between runners-up and champions.

A friend who teaches high-school English had a colleague who stole a good idea of his and represented it as her own. He didn’t want to appear selfish or grandstand his talent. His response was, “Let her have it. She can steal the idea but not my ability. More ideas will come, probably better ones.” The comment sounds noble, even we-centered, but what if his colleague got recognized and promoted for the idea? How would that help the high school? Her track record showed that she didn’t have the ability to produce more ideas at that level. My friend’s stepping back and “taking one for the team” could actually hurt the school and at the same time curb his career.

Stepping aside in the name of we often damages we in the worst way. We does not mean giving due individual credit to everyone else and blending in or fading out. Sometimes the strongest we move is an honest, bold claim for me.
Take a performance or project review, for instance. If I felt honestly and strongly that I was one of the best people on the project, or the best person for the job, why wouldn’t I say so, as long as I’m devoted to progress and not me? The answer is obvious. What’s not obvious is how to say it so that progress, not career-boosting, is the clear motive.

Let’s say you finished a project that went so well that the executives took notice. Because the results were strong and captured people’s attention, a high-profile project is open for a new leader and team. If you felt that you were the best candidate to lead the project, what would you say if the execs asked, or even if they didn’t? It’s hard for most people to speak up about themselves without worrying about the perception of being me-centered.

On any project it’s not easy to determine precisely who did what and who mattered most. Sometimes the person who came up with the answer would never have considered that solution without the right question. And maybe the right question was sparked by someone’s being willing to speak up about a typically unmentionable or politically-charged topic. That doesn’t mean that giving voice to why you’re the best person to lead the next project is me-first. If your intention is pure relevance, then pure confidence speaks up.

Make a case for your strengths and performance. Staying me-centered, point out where others are better than you. Your only goal is to make a case why your competence is relevant. If not, make an equally compelling case for someone else. It’s about what’s best for the need at hand, not your ego.
Beware of artificial commitment to *we*, however. Without true devotion to progress behind the blend of *me* and *we*, the substance of the choice is weakened by a robotic, even random, commitment to either. Continuing with the hoops theme, NBA Hall of Famer Wilt Chamberlain suffered from a fabricated method for *we*. ESPN writer Bill Simmons said of Chamberlain:

After briefly embracing controversial things like “teamwork” and “unselfishness” and defeating [Bill] Russell’s Celtics and winning his first championship in 1967, he couldn’t maintain the momentum. He measured his own worth by numbers, not team success. The following year Wilt went overboard with the “unselfish” gimmick, desperately tried to lead the league in assists (he did), then mysteriously stopped shooting in the second half of an eventual Game 7 loss to Boston. They traded him to Los Angeles a few months later. So much for Wilt “getting it.”

If devotion to progress doesn’t underpin *we*, the results may look statistically good but are realistically hollow.

**When Me Doesn’t Matter**

With the emphasis up to this point on how *we* benefits *me*, it’s important to note that certain causes and times deserve nothing but *we* with no thought of *me. We* isn’t always about optimizing both. *We* can be sacrifice. Doing good for good’s sake matters. Your world, community, neighborhood, family, and relationships need devotion with no thought of a return.
In Nepal, when a parent is sent to prison and no guardian or government housing is available, children go to prison with their parents. Pushpa Basnet, a Nepalese woman, couldn’t bear the practice any longer. With no thought of me, Basnet started her Early Childhood Development Center, caring for children and keeping them from behind bars. She provides food, water, shelter, and medical care so that children can live healthier, more hopeful lives. “These children have done nothing wrong,” Basnet said. “They are simply caught in something they do not understand. We want to work with the government to bring them all out from . . . prison.” Since 2005 Basnet has helped over 140 children. She was named CNN’s 2012 Hero of the Year.

In Chicago, 2012 ended with 506 homicides, and the 2013 trend didn’t look any better. Of one dangerous Chicago neighborhood, Roseland, U.S. President and former resident Barack Obama wrote:

The decaying storefronts, the aging church rolls, kids from unknown families who swaggered down the streets—loud congregations of teenage boys, teenage girls feeding potato chips to crying toddlers, the discarded wrappers tumbling down the block—all of it whispered painful truths.

In the face of stark Roseland realities and daily gang violence, Diane Latiker decided to do what she could to change the situation. “We are losing a generation to violence,” said Latiker, who started Kids Off the Block in 2003 from her living room. “It’s easy to get caught up in everything that’s going on around here,” commented Tito Keenan, one of Latiker’s kids. “It’s harder to find your way out.” Today thirty
to fifty young people arrive each day at KOB for tutoring, counseling, and talent-building activities to find a way out.

Economically speaking, a stronger version of capitalism may require, ironically, less indulgence and more sacrifice. For example, it is harder to forego income to pay down an oppressive national debt when there’s no realistic reason to believe that my generation will get a maximum return on the investment. This isn’t a political ad. It’s a plea for more community concern and less individual complacency. More service, less line-drawing. More collaboration, less contention.

The current trends of me over we are helping no one achieve potential or pure confidence. Me is an inferior, less relevant way to live and work, and with less of an upside personally, politically, or professionally. It’s time to shift, and the science and strategies are there to make we work.
Part 3

Early Warning Signs
A Few Degrees

If your flight from JFK to LAX was five degrees off course on takeoff, your plane would be 200 miles off course by the time you reached the west coast. A few more degrees and your seat would be a flotation device. Without a gauge, you wouldn’t notice until it was time to land. The same applies to confidence.

A few degrees left or right of center on the confidence continuum aren’t full-speed crashes into the extremes of either side, but rather subtle shifts that put us off course. Without a gauge, we won’t notice.

Early warning signs that we’re off center are harder to detect but easier to correct. As behavior and attitudes move further away from pure confidence, they become easier to identify but harder to repair. Those shifts from center convert strengths to counterfeits, damage performance, and hurt relationships. Early detection is the key to prevention.

The following chapters explore each early warning sign in depth.
Early Warning Sign
Defensiveness

On May 1, 1969, in an atmosphere roiling from the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, political unrest and the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, Fred Rogers sat down at a table before the United States Senate and prepared to bargain for the future of PBS.

After taking the Presidential oath of office in 1969, Richard Nixon turned his attention to the economy and Vietnam. In his new budget Nixon proposed a package to cut government funding for National Educational Television by more than half, a cut that would undermine the Public Broadcasting System.

At the invitation of PBS executives, Mr. Rogers (yes, that one) was invited to speak and submit a paper of protest at a hearing chaired by Senator John Pastore of Rhode Island. Pastore’s reputation preceded him: he was smart, ambitious, direct, stubborn, and egotistical. Rogers and his PBS colleagues had approximately fifteen minutes to make their case to a committee that had already decided to cut PBS funding.

For Rogers, a budget cut meant jeopardizing a daily opportunity to teach children across the country. For PBS, restoring the funding meant viability and a future.
Upon concluding his introductory comments, the lead PBS executive slid the microphone across the table to Rogers.

Senator Pastore: Alright Rogers, you've got the floor.

Mr. Rogers: [He held a document that he had been asked to submit prior to the meeting.] Senator Pastore, this is a philosophical statement and would take about ten minutes to read, so I'll not do that. One of the first things that a child learns in a healthy family is trust, and I trust what you've said—that you will read this. It’s very important to me. I care deeply about children. My first. . . .

Senator Pastore: Will it make you happy if you read it? [This was said in a condescending tone, at which the audience and members of the press laughed nervously.]

Tension, already high, intensified. A right-of-center Pastore had made his decision as committee chair and was annoyed by the waste of time. Rogers was visibly stunned by the interruption and sarcasm, but for now he was hanging on to center.

It doesn’t take a rude senator to throw someone off. We asked several hundred people for tense moments in their lives when what they heard made them defensive. Here’s a sample:

- My girlfriend confronted me about my ability to provide for a family.
• I was accused of being a terrible mother, and my daughter hated me.
• I was told by my boss that I wasn’t ready or old enough to take on more responsibility.
• My performance evaluation completed by my manager said that I wasn’t leadership material.
• My child told me that I was a dream-crusher.
• Although I knew I was a bit overweight, someone actually told me I was.
• An employee in an exit interview said that I as a boss was a complete jerk.
• My manager said that I had a squeaky voice and that it affected my credibility.
• My wife told me she wanted a divorce after twenty-four years of marriage because I wasn’t as in love with her as I was my work.

The natural inclination in high-pressure moments is defensiveness. That propensity pushes us off-center on the confidence continuum. To the right we’re defensive because we don’t think we deserve to be challenged, critiqued, or judged. Overconfidence sparks defensiveness because of a tightly held, carefully formed self-image. When challenged, we don’t want anyone to think differently about us than the image we’ve created. Or maybe we’ve been told how great we are and can’t realistically imagine that something negative about us is true.

Left-of-center defensiveness happens because of momentary insecurity. Because of lost confidence, or confidence that was never there, we become defensive. Maybe a gap in our competence is exposed. Maybe we weren’t prepared for resistance to what we want.
Whatever the cause, defensiveness reduces rationality and elevates emotion.

**The Elephant and the Rider**

University of Virginia psychologist Jonathan Haidt describes human emotion as an elephant and the rational brain as the rider on the elephant. Perched atop the elephant, the rider holds the reins and appears to lead, but the rider’s control is precarious because he’s nothing compared to the elephant. Any time the four-ton elephant and the rider disagree, the rider is overmatched.

Human beings are coded to act impulsively under attack. Within two heartbeats the response becomes physiological. Adrenalin is secreted; the heart races; arteries constrict; blood is drawn into the center of the body; perspiration increases. None of that is a problem if we’re running from a predator or toward a finish line, but we’re not. We’re in a conversation.

Reacting biologically in fight, flight, or freeze mode, the rider loses control of the elephant. That’s why the most defensive person in a conversation has the least amount of control and doesn’t think as clearly or creatively. For example, have you ever been in an argument and much later, perhaps on the drive home, thought of the perfect comeback to something someone said? That’s because you’ve calmed down, and the rider is back in control.

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Defensiveness triggers the same fight, flight, or freeze mechanism psychologically. We argue (fight), avoid discussions (flight), or get stuck with
nothing intelligent to say (freeze). People defend themselves with increasing intensity as challenges or feedback moves from the objective to the subjective.

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**Ego Trip**

For example, let’s say you’re going on a long-awaited road trip. You’ve taken three weeks off work, excitement is high, and you’ve carefully mapped the sights you want to see. Before leaving, you stop to get gas. As you’re filling up, someone walks up and says, “I’m not sure, but I think your engine is leaking something.” What would your reaction be? Certainly disappointment and anxiety, but probably interest and appreciation as well. “Really?” you reply. “Where? Is it leaking a lot? Thanks for pointing that out.”

If on closer inspection you discover that your car isn’t really leaking, are you still appreciative? Of course. If there had been a leak, you would be glad that someone pointed it out, and relieved that you didn’t discover it later in the middle of nowhere. Besides, you didn’t design or build the car anyway. The car isn’t your creation, so there’s little reason to take the problem personally.

As you pass the person in the convenience store of the gas station on your way out, you mention that, thankfully, it was water from a puddle that splashed onto your car as you pulled into the station. During the small talk that follows, the same person asks where you’re going on vacation. As you describe your plans and route, he says, “I lived in that area for five years. You’ll have a great time, but you might not want to take I-5.” What’s your reaction now? Again,
probably gratitude, but maybe with some slight hesitation. The car
was one thing, but where you’re going and how you get there are a
little more personal. If the stranger knew something that saved you
time, great. If not, defenses go up.

What if the person then starts critiquing how you tied your luggage to
the roof of your car? Are you still as grateful as you were for the
previous advice? What if he worked for UPS as a professional
shipping manager and saw something that concerned him? Even
though he’s trying to be helpful, it would be easy to get defensive
because his comments have moved from something as objective as a
car to topics as subjective as where you’re going, how you plan to get
there, and how you packed.

That same progression of defensiveness may be more dramatic at
work. Let’s say you and your team worked hard on a new strategy
and someone finds a “leak” in it during your presentation of the
strategy to decision-makers. As opposed to the leak in your car,
you’re tempted to respond differently because you don’t take it as a
helpful observation. The “leak” appears to reflect poorly on who we
are. But if we don’t take it personally when our engine is leaking, why
do we take it personally when our strategy is? Part of the reason is
that we don’t control what happens to our car. Anything can happen
at any time.

______________________________

In a work setting, however, we’re supposed to be
competent and in control. In a relationship we’re
supposed to be worthy of love, trust, and respect.
If someone points out a weakness, it seems like
something we should have controlled, done, or
been. The leak appears to bring our value in our current role (e.g., father, mother, coworker, leader, partner) into question.

Identity versus Ideas

Whether it’s a car, a strategy, or parental competence, defensiveness increases as we move from who we are and what we believe (identity) to purpose, direction, and tactical details (ideas).

Forty-one percent of people say that, when ideas are challenged at work, the person whose idea it was takes it personally. In the PBS hearings, Pastore interrupted at precisely the moment Rogers shared a value about which he cared deeply (children). Had Pastore attacked
the time slot of his show, his interruption wouldn’t have cut so deeply. In this case, whether Pastore was aware of it or not, it was a move to spook the elephant and put the rider out of control. The further off-center we are, the less perceived separation there is between identity and ideas, and the more the elephant rules the rider. That is why people can be five feet away from each other in a conversation but stand five miles apart emotionally.

Whether the attack on you or your ideas is intentional and direct, deliberate or accidental, spoken or insinuated, the only way to take control of the elephant and reduce conversational distance is to give up the thoughts and feelings that accompany defensiveness. It will take time to build the emotional discipline required, but the payoff is healthier relationships and vital feedback that could help you for years to come. Most importantly, you’ll stay closer to center in pure confidence, which means talent at full strength.

Defensiveness can be triggered by anything ranging from feeling overloaded and under pressure to being judged and wanting to prevent it. Sometimes we’re not aware of why we’re being defensive. Even if we are, it may not matter. Whether we feel embarrassed by what we don’t know, devalued by an unfair performance review, or had an evil stepmother who always questioned our intelligence, the problem remains. We all have our issues. The following points can help you get control of the elephant.

**Signs and Solutions**

Listed below are signs of defensiveness, questions to challenge the way you’re thinking that’s triggering the signs, and advice to help examine behavior or beliefs to keep defensiveness from driving you
off-center. Following the list are ten emotions or attitudes of defensiveness.

**Sign:** You’re avoiding questions on your point of view.

**Challenging Questions:** If you’re right, does listening jeopardize the strength of your point of view? If your position is valid, won’t it hold up anyway?

**Advice:** Separate your identity from your ideas. Your point of view doesn’t mean that it’s beyond question. Listening to feedback isn’t complicated. Listening is mostly a function of desire. Changing your mind and agreeing with someone else doesn’t mean you’ve caved in or become a pushover.

**Sign:** You’re holding a fixed position.

**Challenging Question:** Do you believe strongly in your position because it’s right or because it’s yours?

**Advice:** Don’t confuse listening and understanding with agreement. Everyone has been wrong at least once, so what’s the harm in an honest double-check?

**Sign:** You’re preparing responses instead of listening.

**Challenging Question:** What will you lose by temporarily suspending what you have to say to listen?
**Advice:** Your points will be more relevant and intelligent if you stop preparing responses and start considering other people’s ideas.

**Sign:** You’re making a disagreement a moral issue.

**Challenging Question:** Is it a moral issue, or is it easier to make it a moral issue in order to claim irreconcilable differences and avoid the hard emotional work of exploring a different point of view?

**Advice:** Someone else may be wrong about one thing, but that doesn’t mean they’re wrong about everything. Don’t be intellectually lazy by over relying on your morality or authority to disregard other’s ideas. How quickly during a discussion or disagreement are you using “morals” as the exclusive basis of your argument? If a personal ethic or moral position is your only basis, it may be a weak argument. The sooner you bring in morality, the more likely it is that you’re over relying on it.

**Sign:** You don’t believe that your idea needs defending.

**Challenging Question:** Are you mistaking a good idea for a great one?

**Advice:** Good ideas are often mistaken from the outset as great ideas, crowding out alternatives. The truly great idea may emerge when you debate a good idea. At some point
your argument will need to be defended—if not in a conference room, then in application or the market, and that’s when most realize that the conference room would have been much easier. Fail often with your ideas in order to succeed sooner. If you’re the only one supporting an idea, ask yourself why.

Sign: You’re offended.

Challenging Questions: If what is said is true, can’t you improve? If it’s not true, why take offense?

Advice: The more personal “territory” you have to protect, the more points of defense you have to cover. Usually the person who is offended uses more energy thinking about the offense than the offending person does in delivering it. If it truly matters, talk to him. If not, forgive and move on. Chances are you’ve done the same and didn’t know it, so extend the benefit of the doubt.

Emotional or attitudinal signs of being defensively off-center:

1. Judgmental
2. Jealous
3. Unforgiving
4. Justified
5. Indignant
6. Accusing
7. Cynical
8. Resentful
Let's now return to the 1969 PBS hearings to see how Mr. Rogers fought off defensiveness.

Mr. Rogers: ... Senator Pastore, this is a philosophical statement and would take about ten minutes to read, so I'll not do that. One of the first things that a child learns in a healthy family is trust, and I trust what you've said—that you will read this. It's very important to me. I care deeply about children. My first. . . .

Senator Pastore: Will it make you happy if you read it? [This was said in a condescending tone, at which the audience and members of the press laughed nervously.]

Rogers: I'd just like to talk about it if it's alright. . . .

Pastore: [Interrupting again.] Alright, sir. Okay.

Rogers then discussed the role that television violence plays in undermining a child’s emotional and mental development. Within minutes Pastore asked questions about Rogers’ program.

Rogers: This is what I give. I give an expression of care every day to each child to help him realize that he
is unique. I end the program by saying, “You’ve made this day a special day by just your being you. There’s no person in the whole world like you, and I like you just the way you are.” And I feel that if we in public television can only make it clear that feelings are mentionable and manageable, we will have done a great service for mental health. I think it’s much more dramatic to see that two men could be working out their feelings of anger—much more dramatic—than showing something of gunfire. I’m constantly concerned about what our children are seeing. And for fifteen years I have tried in this country and Canada to provide what I feel is a meaningful expression of care.

Pastore: Do you narrate it?

Rogers: I’m the host, yes. And I do all the puppets, and I write all the music, and I write all the scripts . . .

Pastore: [Interrupting.] Well, I’m supposed to be a pretty tough guy, and this is the first time I’ve had goose bumps for the last two days.

Rogers: Well, I’m grateful, not only for your goose bumps but also for your interest in our kind of communication. Could I tell you the words to one of the songs I feel is very important?
Pastore: [With a noticeable change in attitude, tone of voice, and position on the confidence continuum.]
Yes.

Mr. Rogers: This has to do with that good feeling of control which I feel children need to know is there. And it starts out, “What do you do with the mad that you feel?” and that first line came straight from a child. I work with children doing puppets in very personal communication with small groups.

“What do you do with the mad that you feel?
When you feel so mad you could bite?
When the whole wide world
Seems oh so wrong
And nothing you do seems very right?
What do you do? Do you punch a bag?
Do you pound some clay or some dough?
Do you round up friends for a game of tag?
Or see how fast you go?
It’s great to be able to stop
When you’ve planned a thing that’s wrong,
And be able to do something else instead
And think this song:
I can stop when I want to,
Can stop when I wish,
Can stop, stop, stop anytime.
And what a good feeling to feel like this,
And know that the feeling is really mine.
Know that there’s something deep inside
That helps us become what we can,
For a girl can be someday a lady
And a boy can be someday a man.”

Senator Pastore: I think it’s wonderful. I think it’s wonderful. [Pauses as he looks down the line at his fellow Senators.] Looks like you just earned the twenty million dollars.

Despite Pastore’s early contempt, threatening Rogers’ identity didn’t shake the PBS host from powerfully expressing his ideas. Rogers stayed anchored at center by relying on elements of equality and respect. By doing so, he was able to use the power of his expertise and talent to persuade Pastore.

Everyone gets pressured off-center. Getting nudged away from center can happen at any time. We can’t control that. What we can control is how far we go off-center and how long we stay there. Pure confidence is the fastest way to regain emotional control, rational thought, and social influence in moments of pressure.
Notes

The Catalyst

1. **In a study on self-perception**: See “Real Beauty Sketches” (Dove, 2013), http://realbeautysketches.dove.us/

2. “**You’ve looked back before 9/11 for what mistakes might have been made**”: See “President Addresses the Nation in Prime Time Press Conference” (The White House, Press Conference of the President, The East Room, President George W. Bush, April 13, 2004), 1.

3. **It’s an excellent question**: See Mike Allen’s “Next Question Please” (*Washington Post*, December 1, 2004), C01.


6. **I understand the job of the President**: See Dan Balz and Bob Woodward’s “A Presidency Defined in One Speech: Bush Saw Address as Both Reassurance and Resolve to a Troubled Nation” (*Washington Post*,}

7. **Gallup does ground-breaking research identifying human strengths:** See Gallup’s “What is the difference between a talent and a strength?” (Gallup, *Strengths*, 2013), http://strengths.gallup.com/help/general/125543/difference-talent-strength.aspx

8. **It is not the mountain that we conquer:** See http://www.siredmundhillary.com/hillary.htm

*Strengths and Counterfeits*


2. **I have the whole rebel force in front of me:** See Donald R. Jerman’s *Antietam: The Lost Order* (Cambridge: Pelican Publishing, 2006), p. 156

3. **McClellan, to me, is one of the mysteries of the war:** See Thomas J. Rowland’s *George B. McClellan and Civil War History: In the
Shadow of Grant and Sherman (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2008), p. 166.


I’m Brilliant, and I’m Not

1. If you take nothing else away from this book, take this: See Marcus Buckingham’s Go Put Your Strengths to Work: 6 Powerful Steps to Achieve Outstanding Performance (New York: Free Press, 2007), p. 55


We


4. Fifty-eight percent more college students scored higher on a narcissism scale in 2009 than in 1982: See Elspeth Reeve’s “Every Generation Has Been the Me Me Me Generation” (*The Atlantic Wire*, May 9, 2013), http://www.theatlanticwire.com/national/2013/05/me-generation-time/65054/


6. For example, psychologists Brent Donnellan and Kali Trzesniewski looked at NPI scores from 1979 to 2007: See Kali H. Trzesniewski and M. Brent Donnellan’s “Rethinking “Generation Me”: A Study of
Cohort Effects From 1976–2006” (APS, 2010), Perspectives on Psychological Science, 5 (1) 58–75

7. Memory lapses concerning a greater we also have economic implications: See Bill Moyer’s interview with Clinton Secretary of Labor Robert Reich (PBS, June 12, 2009), http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/06122009/transcript1.html


9. Seventy-six percent of cultures are me-centered: See Dave Logan, John King, and Halee Fischer-Wright’s Tribal Leadership: Leveraging Natural Groups to Build a Thriving Organization (New York: Little, Collins, 2008), p. 256.


11. Because power boosts everything from influence, resources, and social support to health and longer life: See “Power Helps You Live the Good Life by Bringing You Closer to Your True Self”
(Association for Psychological Science, 2013),

12. **Not surprisingly, respect is high on the people’s list when seeking a new job**: See Meghan Casserly’s “The Top Five Reasons Employees Will Quit In 2013” (*Forbes*, January 2, 2013),
http://www.forbes.com/sites/meghancasserly/2013/01/02/the-top-five-reasons-employees-will-quit-in-2013/

13. **In an experiment by University of Zurich economists Ernst Fehr and Simon Gachter, two people were told a single sum of money was available to share between them equally**: See Ernst Fehr and Simon Gaechter’s “Fairness and Retaliation: The Economics of Reciprocity” (*Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 14.3, Summer 2000), pp. 159-181.

14. **New York University and Cal-Berkeley research on power and status found that when as few as two people on a team are in a status struggle for respect**: See Gavin Kilduff, Cameron Anderson, and Robb Willer’s “Consensus and Contribution: Shared Status Hierarchies Promote Group Success” (Department of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley, 2013), pp. 10-14.

15. **Even with limited and ambiguous social cues, people make eleven major decisions about one another in the first seven**
seconds of meeting: See Elizabeth Phelps, Daniela Schiller, Jonathan Freeman, James Mitchell, and James Uleman’s “A Neural Mechanism of First Impressions” (Nature Neuroscience, March 8, 2009), pp. 508-514.


17. Neurobiological research at the University of Michigan has discovered two key areas of brain circuitry: See K. L. Phan, C. S. Sripada, M. Angstadt, and K. McCabe’s “Reputation for Reciprocity Engages the Brain Reward Center” (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 107.29, July 2010), p. 104.


19. At first glance one might dismiss the importance of something “in the air” like stereotype threat: See Claude M. Steel’s Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), p. 8.
20. In another social experiment, Fehr and Gintis gave people in groups equal amounts of money they could invest for a social experiment on playing by me versus we: See Ernst Fehr and Herbert Gintis’s “Human Motivation and Social Cooperation: Experimental and Analytical Foundations” (Institute for Empirical Research in Economics, University of Zurich, 2007), pp. 5-7.


23. In Nepal, when a parent is sent to prison and no guardian or government housing is available, children go to prison with their parents: See Kathleen Toner’s “Pulling Children Out of Nepal's Prisons” (CNN, March 16, 2012), http://www.cnn.com/2012/03/15/world/cnnheroes-basnet-nepal-prisons.
24. **In Chicago, 2012 ended with 506 homicides, and the 2013 trend doesn’t look any better:** See Aamer Madhani’s “Violence Plagues Chicago Area That Shaped Obama’s Views” (*USA Today*, February 8, 2013),

**Defensiveness**

1. **Alright, Rogers, you’ve got the floor:** See 1969 National Educational Television Hearings. U. S. Senate, May 1, 1969, transcript. The updated lyrics of Fred Rogers’ song are also found in *The World According to Mister Rogers* (New York: Hyperion, 2004).

Appendix A
Strengths and Counterfeits

1. Strength: **Directive**
   Sets clear direction and gets things done. Closes the deal. Trailblazer. Brings clarity to roles and responsibilities. Assignments and metrics of accountability are clearly understood ahead of time. Good in delegating. Expects others to contribute to overall goals. Motivates to do great work. Strong views on which goals take priority in a team’s accomplishing them.

   **Counterfeit: Pressuring**
   Infringes on others’ freedom to choose or forces buy-in to ideas. Opinionated about how things should be done. Tendency to micromanage unnecessary details. Creates unexpressed, but not unfelt, resistance when acting as “the boss” and disregarding people’s maturity, experience, and intelligence. Assumes that people want his opinion. Metrics become immovable even when measures don’t make sense.

2. Strength: **Strong-Willed**
   Moxie. Doesn’t allow setbacks to excuse defeat. Gives hope that things will get better and that goals will be accomplished, even in the face of obstacles. Doesn’t allow difficulty to be used as an excuse. Works very hard and long hours.

   **Counterfeit: Opinionated**
   Won’t give up even when quitting is the right decision. Resists feedback if the topic matters a great deal. Takes defeat too personally.
Won’t accept legitimate reasons to change or excuses when they make sense. Inflexible and stubborn. Workaholic.

3. Strength: **Ambitious**
Accomplishment-oriented. Doesn’t wait to be told what to do and isn’t content with what’s already been done. Isn’t easily intimidated or slowed by politics or others’ egos. Sets and achieves high goals. Overcomes challenging obstacles. Easy to follow when acting as leader.

Counterfeit: **Overbearing**
Pushy. Runs over others. Causes people to be closed-minded and self-centered. Isn’t diplomatic. Sacrifices long-term relationships for short-term gain. Mistakes accomplishing tasks for productivity. Infringes on people’s territory. Impatient. Resists feedback that might improve results long-term when the project is personal.

4. Strength: **Decisive**
Doesn’t let over-analysis hurt the momentum of a good idea. Isn’t afraid to move forward without everyone’s agreement. Takes responsibility for results. Action-oriented. Understands that nothing is perfect and is willing to take calculated risks.

Counterfeit: **Hasty**
Makes decisions too quickly in the name of getting things done. Doesn’t take the time to think thoroughly about ideas. May change directions frequently. Values speed over quality. Excludes important feedback to move ahead. Oversimplifies ideas and strategies; misses details that hurt the decision later.
5. **Strength: Pioneering**  
Constructively discontent. Always looking for new ways of doing things—markets, products, projects, ideas, strategies, etc. Initiates conversations that lead to new insights. Intensely curious and visionary. Focused on what’s next versus what’s been accomplished. Drives growth.

**Counterfeit: Idealistic**  
Mistakes new or different for progress. Breaks what works simply for the sake of doing something new. Creates anxiety by constantly challenging things that still work. Underestimates details of execution. Creates confusion by jumping from one idea or strategy to the next. Initiates unnecessary change in the name of innovation. Loses interest quickly.

6. **Strength: Passionate**  
Work isn’t just a job. Recognizes a deeper purpose or bigger picture. Provides motivation through passionate pursuit of perfection. Doesn’t stop thinking about work at five o’clock. Inspiration seems to come naturally. Entrepreneurial by nature. Often assumes an informal leadership role. An enemy of status quo or “good enough.”

**Counterfeit: Inflexible**  
Often dismisses brutal facts and those who bring them up. Poor judge of what will or won’t work. Doesn’t know when to back off and let events run their course. Impatient. Intimidates others or wears them out. Doesn’t create intellectual or emotional reprieve for people to catch their breath. Loses people’s attention and passion after a relatively short period of time.
7. **Strength: Alert**
Spots early trends or emerging patterns of everything from relationships to markets and corporate culture. Quick to notice new ideas or theories that would promote progress, even in stagnant areas. Very proactive. Doesn’t wait for warning signs to wake up people or an organization. Information-hungry.

**Counterfeit: Anxious**

8. **Strength: Sharp**
Sees beyond the obvious—i.e., new ideas and connections. Cuts to the heart of difficult matters. Challenges status quo, history, sacred cows, etc. Good at problem-solving. Builds group trust by improving logical support for decisions.

**Counterfeit: Condescending**
Doesn’t listen to different or conflicting points of view. Intimidates. Can demean others with lesser IQs. Smothers collaboration and intellectual diversity. Creates distance between self and everyone else. Overvalues his own talents and contribution while undervaluing others’. Know-it-all

9. **Strength: Persuasive**
Paints a compelling vision. Inspires others, attracts talent, keeps people motivated. Held in high regard. Trend-setter. Able to get people to support ideas, commit capital, and give up old positions.
Counterfeit: **Manipulative**
Manipulates people, information, and perceptions for self-benefit. Makes bad ideas sound good. Resists admitting mistakes. Stays committed to poor decisions, bad strategies, or wrong people until it's too late. Overlooks substance for style.

10. **Strength: Adaptable**
Sees more than one way to get something done. Adapts to change without disrupting productivity. Focuses on outcomes rather than procedures or policies. Sees change as an opportunity and creatively takes advantage of it. Isn’t encumbered by old ways of doing things. Introduces new, innovative approaches to solve problems.

Counterfeit: **Ambivalent**
Includes too many opinions, especially when the time for opinions is over. Execution is inconsistent. Crisis often drives work, not planning or clear strategy. Changes course when obstacles arise. Abandons vision prematurely. Creates chaos and erodes trust due to constant flip-flopping. Loses discipline. Doesn’t bring enough definition and direction to work. Difficulty with making a final decision and going forward.

11. **Strength: Optimistic**
Isn’t frozen by the difficulty or complexity of circumstances, especially when they’re negative. Good leadership ability. Helps others see beyond adverse times by sustaining belief in the future. Keeps things in perspective.
Counterfeit: **Unrealistic**
Inaccurately assesses situations. Planning is often inadequate. Believes that a positive mental attitude can overcome anything. Won’t listen to bad news. Doesn’t accept proper accountability for poor results.

12. **Strength: Open-Minded**

Counterfeit: **Indecisive**
Everyone’s “right.” Has difficulty making decisions, slow in moving forward. Conversely, may abandon good decisions on impulse. Has a hard time discerning the “one best way” to do something. Listens too long and in the process loses time to accomplish what’s necessary. Has difficulty in reducing the options and making a final decision. Doesn’t have strong opinions or communicate strongly enough when needed.

13. **Strength: Courageous**
Is a catalyst for removing fear of the unknown when trying new strategies or changing direction. Doesn’t let tradition or the fear of failure limit possibilities or opportunities. Doesn’t allow politics, positions, or policies to hinder honest conversation or the freedom to attempt bold, new things. Inspires others.

Counterfeit: **Reckless**
Can be seen as aggressive, pushy, and threatening. Loses necessary caution. Candor comes without enough respect and consideration.
Divisive. Reality ignored in the name of blind ambition. Takes unnecessary risks instead of prioritizing where risks should be taken. Sees others as weak or uncommitted. Values results over relationships.

14. Strength: **Trusting**
Assumes positive intentions on the part of others. Open and easygoing in style. Others don’t feel obligated to prove trustworthiness and act accordingly. Helps others feel more valuable and willing to work harder and sacrifice. Builds strong relationships.

**Counterfeit: Naïve**
Hasty in making decisions. Doesn’t ask enough questions about details. Trusts too quickly or assigns qualities to people without enough information. Favors people on the basis of character and honesty to the exclusion of competence. Expects performance from people but without needed direction. Doesn’t require enough proof before assigning a task or investing time or money in an opportunity.

15. Strength: **Convincing**
Decisive in the midst of complexity. Calm and courageous in the face of difficulty. Unshaken by challenges and can’t be bullied. Influenced appropriately by balancing input. Not too full of themselves. Unencumbered by excessive comparison or competition.

**Counterfeit: Dominating**
Tends to overreach. Mistakes dominating a conversation or meeting for confidence and creating value. Isn’t aware of personal weaknesses that create risk for projects or investments. Crowds others out, preempting discussions of dialogue. Can lose advantageous position due to contentment brought on by overconfidence.
16. **Strength: Accommodating**
Inclusive. Makes people feel like part of a team. Doesn’t see things as black or white, “my way or the highway.” Gives people the latitude to work on projects that matter to them. Facilitates cross-collaboration and breaks down barriers between people and opposing ideas.
Effective mediator and negotiator.

**Counterfeit: Indiscriminate**
Keeps multiple projects funded for the sake of giving everyone something to do. Has a hard time making tough decisions. Too many pet projects and unrealistic hopes for people. Gives in too quickly on important points when differences of opinion are expressed. Candid feedback is avoided in the name of “relationship.”

17. **Strength: Enthusiastic**
Isn’t dragged down by negative thoughts, people, or setbacks. Keeps things in perspective. Sustains creativity when obstacles seem overwhelming. Eases tense moments and frees conversations that get stuck by putting things in perspective when needed. Light-hearted. Doesn’t take things too seriously.

**Counterfeit: Overbearing**
Has a hard time knowing when things, or situations, deserve to be taken seriously enough. Lacks the ability or willingness to recognize major obstacles. Uncomfortable with difficult or sensitive discussions. Avoids candid conversations that aren’t seen as positive. When uncomfortable, uses humor at the wrong time.

18. **Strength: Patient**
Tolerant in daunting situations. Won’t let time or pressure unduly influence emotions or commitment. Listens thoughtfully. Doesn’t
unnecessarily push ahead in the name of “getting something done.” Handles bureaucracy and maneuvers through red tape exceptionally well.

Counterfeit: **Passive**
Avoids making decisions and fears being wrong. Ignores pressure and substitutes lack of planning and passivity for patience. Too accepting of obstacles as reasons not to move forward. Takes a wait-and-see approach when action is a better option. Working at a slow pace is mistaken for patience.

19. Strength: **Analytical**
Thinks through ideas systematically. Dispassionate when considering ideas. Doesn’t allow the urgency of a moment to overwhelm the logic or arguments behind ideas. Breaks things down to isolated variables that could accelerate progress or prevent failure.

Counterfeit: **Quarrelsome**
Looks for the negative. Critiques new ideas too early and too often. Diminishes positives. Too often becomes a barrier to progress. Unable to make many decisions, especially difficult decisions with complex variables. Frustrating to work with. Dampens hope and enthusiasm.

20. Strength: **Pragmatic**
Grounded. Connects ideas (products, policies, procedures, etc.) to reality. Makes sure that ideas are relevant and that there is a practical way to implement them. Keeps meetings and conversations productive and pushes for measured results. Pays attention to details.
Counterfeit: **Unimaginative**
Gets caught in the “that’s the way things are done” trap. Doesn’t allow enough free time for open-ended discussion or innovation. Too rigid and methodical. Heavy on process and rules, to the neglect of interaction and change. Routine and mechanical. Predictable and maybe even boring.

21. **Strength: Independent**
Doesn’t need to be told what to do. Effort and performance don’t hinge on whether others do their job or not. No excuses. Excitement comes from freedom to perform, not from others’ acclaim. Shuns bureaucracy. Willing to defend beliefs regardless of popularity or alignment with others. Doesn’t need the encouragement of others to accomplish tasks or others’ endorsement to feel good about accomplishments. Brings a nontraditional perspective to discussions.

Counterfeit: **Detached**
Detached, careless, or unaware of others. Isolated by others. Doesn’t allow others to influence them. Undervalues the progress that comes only from collaboration. Rebels against norms, rules, ideas, or trends for the sake of rebellion. “Rebel without a cause.” Can be overly negative and removed from the consensual thought that comes from debate and the esteem that comes from appropriate praise by others.

22. **Strength: Composed**
Even-tempered. Keeps cool under pressure. Doesn’t let emotional outbursts or the passionate views of others knock them off their game. Ability to "slow down" in a meeting or discussion to bring down emotional intensity to an appropriate level.

Counterfeit: **Lifeless**
Unemotional. “Mr. Spock” type. Mistakes being silently stubborn and avoiding confrontation for composure. Will be dishonest in terms of feelings to maintain peace. Won’t spark disagreement to get opposing points of view.

23. Strength: **Candid**
Clear communicator. Excellent at confronting brutal realities and eliminating guesswork. Earns people’s trust due to respect for honesty and frankness. Others know where they stand. Liberating to work with because not afraid to say what’s really going on. As a result, reduces politics and endless workarounds.

Counterfeit: **Tactless**
Uses little tact; offends people. Shares opinions prematurely without thought of implications. Creates anxiety in others. May polarize groups. Generates gossip. Causes fear and is often the target of opposition. Seen as a boat-rouker and so is excluded from meetings where sensitive issues are being discussed. Regards own opinions as the sole truth.

24. Strength: **Disciplined**
Unafraid of paying the price to accomplish goals. Isn’t easily discouraged. Sacrifices short-term satisfaction for long-term performance. Doesn’t get distracted by deceptive shortcuts. Keeps things under control when chaos could push efforts or energy off track and distract people. Good at holding self and others accountable.

Counterfeit: **Rigid**
Lacks spontaneity. Too locked into routines. Task-oriented to the exclusion of working on the right goals. Sees change as disruptive.
Unresponsive to changes in market or culture that need to be addressed in the name of “focus.” Too harsh in judging others. Uncomfortable and impatient with even temporary ambiguity. Deadlines rule when they don’t need to.

25. Strength: **Deliberate**
Measured. Doesn’t jump on the bandwagon simply for the sake of being on board. Thinks ideas through methodically and thoroughly. Carefully weighs possible consequences of decisions, preventing unnecessary failure. Doesn’t get caught up in premature solutions.

Counterfeit: **Stubborn**
Can over-think ideas to their eventual death. Avoids healthy risk-taking and entrepreneurial thinking. Avoiding failure is seen as ultimate measure of success. Drags brainstorming sessions and out-of-the-box thinking to a standstill. Undervalues intuition.

26. Strength: **Diplomatic**
Skilled at encouraging others to share diverse points of view. Builds rich dialogue. Good at working with political or sensitive issues. Calms peoples’ emotions and encourages all parties to stay open. Says hard things in a fluent, sensitive way.

Counterfeit: **Political**
A chameleon who manipulates positions and erodes trust. Can be divisive and influence people for self-benefit. Focuses more on who wins rather than letting the best idea win. Uses positional power rather than legitimacy to get things done. Isn’t straightforward about personal positions.
27. Strength: **Empathic**
Can see another’s point of view with clarity. Identifies with newcomers. Sees differences of opinion as valuable. Ties together, or unfreezes, otherwise fixed positions. Quickly relates to other people. Builds rapport quickly. Trusted by others, especially with sensitive information.

Counterfeit: **Soft**
Doesn’t speak confidently, candidly or boldly at critical times. Mistakes camaraderie for collaboration and a listening ear for progress. Withholds moving forward until every person agrees. Uncomfortable with healthy conflict. Needs to “fix” everything before moving on.

28. Strength: **Respectful**
Brings civility to relationships. Honors and taps into the experience and wisdom of others. Encourages coworkers to express opinions and ideas. Gives credit to others when their ideas are adopted and implemented. Doesn’t criticize, belittle, demean, or patronize.

Counterfeit: **Pushover**
Too deferential. Can’t or won’t move forward with ideas without universal buy-in. Doesn’t criticize clearly or strongly enough when needed. Has difficulty with prioritizing focus and saying “No” to losing ideas once decisions have been made. Pet projects go on too long under their leadership.

29. Strength: **Dedicated**
Doesn’t make excuses. Finds a way to get things done despite obstacles. Willing to sacrifice short-term comfort for long-term gain. Consistent performer. Good at building loyalty in others.
Counterfeit: **Inflexible**
Laser focus tends to neglect alternatives. Resistant to change, even when change may yield a better outcome. Won’t “abandon ship” even when it’s sinking. Overcommitted, often to the exclusion of other important goals. Cliquish and protective.

30. Strength: **Loyal**
Devoted to causes bigger than themselves. Unites people in difficult or chaotic circumstances. Trustworthy. Willing to sacrifice personal ambitions for the greater good without undue concern about consequence to self. High level of integrity.

Counterfeit: **Conformist**
Doesn’t see things objectively. Committed to causes or strategies that are no longer relevant. Ignores the writing on the wall. Can be judgmental and/or exclusionary of those who aren’t perceived as loyal. Discounts legitimate challenges to current ideas or commitments as unnecessary.

31. Strength: **Perceptive**
Reads people and situations well. Observant. Notices subtle changes in conversations or in a culture that reveal undercurrents. Focuses on the intent behind a discussion or idea, not just the words or the idea itself. People-oriented.

Counterfeit: **Judgmental**
Sees life and work through the lens of absolutes, rights and wrongs. Judges too quickly without enough, or correct, information. Over-reads or misinterprets situations based on what they personally are experiencing. Self-righteous.
32. **Strength: Modest**
Open-minded about differences of opinion. Doesn’t allow personal motives to supersede what’s best for the greater good. Stays calm, cool, and collected in otherwise heated or tense situations. Doesn’t get intimidated by egotistical people. Makes points confidently without being overbearing or grandstanding. Separates ideas from self-worth and identity.

**Counterfeit: Self-Deprecating**
Becomes unassuming and subservient. Lacks passion and intensity when needed. Confuses healthy debate for unhealthy argument. Won’t take individual credit or speak on behalf of self when deserved. Mistakes talking about own talents and contributions as selfish, resulting in the organization’s missing the benefit of talents.
Appendix B
Strengths and Complements

1. Directive and Adaptable
   Strategies are intellectually simple, but execution never is. Adjust to change without anxiety that control is slipping away or that strategy is being diluted. Before taking control, ask why control is needed, who should take control, and for what purpose. Forced agendas driven by unilateral control usually come at the cost of the effort, talent, and interest of others. Share control and voice. Being effective with people is different than being efficient with things. Control doesn’t equate with no changes of plan or a single voice of decision.

2. Assertive and Relaxed
   Not everything that appears urgent really is. Assertiveness alone can turn people off to the point that they may intentionally, even subversively, undermine effort. Manage stress and the pace of work to recharge mentally and emotionally. Relentless intensity, even with worthy causes, wears out quickly. Call it a day once in a while.

3. Strong-Willed and Open-Minded
   Don’t confuse tenacity with rightness, or passion for a topic with certainty of conviction. Invite differences of opinion, especially when unsure about a viewpoint. Encourage the clash of ideas and let the best ideas win. When people challenge goals, or the best way to reach those goals, don’t take it personally and let ego shut challenges down.
4. Ambitious and Patient
Contrary to the hope and relentless efforts of impatient people, progress and exceptional work take time. Don't allow addiction to the artificial urgency of deadlines, or tasks checked off on a to-do list, to interfere with doing work that matters. One person's ambition may be another person's distraction, so respect individual timetables. One more hour, day, week, month, or year may be the difference between ambition that leads to success or a mediocre performance caused by impatience.

5. Decisive and Thorough
The explanation du jour of decisiveness “Analysis paralysis.” That legendary line gives drivers permission to bulldoze methods and details in pursuit of progress. Don’t let missed details cut down great ideas. Details aren’t an enemy to progress, but let fact-checkers mind the minutiae, and don’t dismiss details out of hand as the red tape of bureaucrats.

6. Pioneering and Tolerant
Not everyone embraces change or new ideas. Like it or not, innovators live in a world made mostly of people who wait for everyone else to try something first. Be tolerant of what can’t change and use that energy to get stronger support for things that can change. A healthy understanding of barriers to change, and why people resist it, will improve the likelihood of change.

7. Passion and Compromise
Rarely is passion weakened by conceding on some points. Allow people to draw their own conclusions about what’s worthy of their passion. Don't assume increases in passion automatically increase persuasion and support; others must see merit in arguments beyond
emotion and your own commitment. No one has an unending supply of attention or energy, so allocate passion judiciously and be willing to concede when it makes sense.

8. Alert and Relaxed
Being hyper-alert about too many things creates confusion about the priority of what deserves attention. Not all variables of complex issues are equally important or urgent. Calmness doesn’t mean that people are less aware, alert, smart, or committed. Keen awareness doesn’t require hypertension. Having acute awareness for and concern about every detail is usually unnecessary and taxes energy.

9. Smart and Respectful
Personal IQ isn’t everything. People are diversely talented. Pure IQ and professional expertise aren’t the only resources for doing great work. Give people credit for what they’ve accomplished. It’s only possible to know people under a limited set of conditions, so recognize that the skill set and experience of others are broader than typically supposed. Give people the floor. Don’t always set the agenda, and monitor the ratio of time spent talking versus listening.

10. Persuasive and Grounded
A good argument or presentation suffers when substance isn’t equal to style. So does credibility. Articulation and vision are not substance and direction, so pay close attention to the content that supports an argument or viewpoint. If the ideas of others aren’t attractive at first glance, look for hidden value behind them. Don’t let sheer enthusiasm and momentum confer unearned credibility on ideas.
11. Adaptable and Decisive
Don’t mistake universal buy-in for a decision’s rightness. Many deadlines are artificial, but some matter. Set smart limits on how far and long flexibility is effective. Not every point that can be made is worth the time it takes to discuss it in depth. Perpetual consideration of opinions and last-minute changes dilute the power of a decision and erode leadership.

12. Optimistic and Realistic
The glass isn’t half empty or half full. It’s both. Don’t mistake people who speak out in opposition to an idea, or find flaws in thinking, as pessimists. There is an unending supply of ideas that will work, so don’t be afraid if reality rips an idea. Obstacles don’t guarantee failure, but ignoring facts in the name of optimism can. Remember this entrepreneurial rule: Any new project or venture usually costs four times as much and takes twice as long as expected. The likelihood and severity of failure increases when optimism goes unchecked by reality.

13. Open-minded and Discerning
Just because most people think something is a good idea doesn’t mean it is. Not all good ideas are popular. Be vigorous in checking the validity of ideas. While good ideas can come from anywhere, not all ideas are equal in quality. Balance free thinking with critical thinking. Rejecting ideas intelligently isn’t tantamount to a closed mind. It’s possible to judge ideas without being judgmental.

14. Courage and Caution
Caution isn’t always the enemy of courage or an indication of fear. Nothing worthwhile is ever easy. Caution offers the time to think things through carefully, reducing the number of devastating
Surprises that even courage can’t conquer. Don’t confuse speed and recklessness with courage. Small amounts of time allocated to intensive thinking don’t automatically translate into missed deadlines or opportunities. Courage isn’t a value in and of itself. It has to be weighed against purpose and risk.

15. Trust and Vigilance
Trust has to be earned, and not everyone deserves an unconditional benefit of the doubt. Character and competence are equally important in building trust. Being vigilant isn’t a sign of distrust, just of being smart. Trustworthy people invite vigilance, and untrustworthy people use trust as an excuse to ignore vigilance. People can be trusted but not loved, and loved but not trusted. Don’t confuse affection and trust, or the desire to trust someone, with trustworthiness.

16. Convincing and Influenceable
A key to being convincing is the willingness to be convinced. Wait to make a case for an idea until you can argue for another idea as powerfully as your own. Keep trying to understand others’ points of view until they agree that their points are understood. Let others talk first. Ask more open-ended than leading questions, and allow others to draw their own conclusion. Invite people to share flaws they see in your thinking, and don’t stop asking until they share at least one. As a test of commitment to being influenceable, when’s the last time someone changed your mind?

17. Enthusiasm and Calmness
Calmness isn’t lack of enthusiasm. Calmness soothes frayed nerves when fatigue and confusion fuel anxiety and deplete early enthusiasm. A more relaxed approach allows people who are less enthusiastic
initially to feel included and safer with new ideas for change. Calmness reduces suspicion for people who are more analytical and risk-averse.

18. Patient and Action-Oriented
Nothing is ever perfect, especially early in a project, so get something started. Small adjustments missed early on can almost always be adopted later. Don’t mistake an absence of activity, or putting up with practices and policies that don’t make sense, for patience. Let patience work its magic in the middle of trying to do something great, not in waiting for a great opportunity to appear. Don’t confuse urgency with panic or poor planning. Urgency is different than panic and sometimes necessary.

19. Analytical and Optimistic
Because something can be scrutinized for faults doesn’t mean it’s worth tearing down entirely. Don’t let the critical analysis of ideas lead to a pervasive pessimism about them. Apply strong analytical thinking to making something work, not only to the reasons it won’t. Direct critiques of ideas toward preventing fatal flaws, not condemning projects to the scrap heap because of them. Make the intentions of analysis clear so that people don’t equate analysis with lack of support. Don’t judge ideas quickly or assign value prematurely. Before getting caught in the loop of examining why something won’t work, first explain why it could.

20. Pragmatic and Enterprising
Challenge the current way of doing things. If something sounds slightly impractical, do it anyway and see what happens. Give time to look outside current processes for the intent and purpose behind the rules and regulations. Don’t dismiss out-of-the-ordinary ideas as
crazy or impossible. Look for ways in which ideas could make sense, although not all of them will. Remember that what is pragmatic now was once a new, maybe even crazy, idea.

21. Independent **and Collaborative**
Teamwork doesn’t nullify freedom. Personal fear of vulnerability isolates people from the talent and experience of others. Don’t label someone a blind follower because she believes in something popular that you don’t. Defying authority simply to show you can doesn’t promote progress. Don’t withhold ideas. Let the value of independent thinking benefit everyone. Sometimes it requires more inner strength to join others in supporting an idea than to be defiantly independent, even when you’re convinced you’re right. Speaking up doesn’t mean impending conflict. Unless you speak up, decisions made may impose limits on your control and freedom.

22. Composure **and Verve**
People want to know if you’re engaged, and they can only judge commitment by the expression of it. People may interpret absence of involvement or passion as disinterest, apathy, or disapproval. Take measured personal risks to let people know your thoughts, feelings, and passion.

23. Candor **and Diplomacy**
When speaking up, do it tactfully so that what you say is received well rather than resented or resisted. Make sure that your intentions are clear and constructive. Ask for others’ permission to express them, or they may pretend to listen but tune out. How something is said is as important as what is said. Consideration of others’ feelings doesn’t put honesty at risk.
24. Disciplined and Adaptable
Discipline is a means to an end. The effort behind any goal is to actually achieve it, not to always adhere to the original rules that were set up to get there. Strategies are intellectually simple, but their execution never is, so adapt to change without anxiety that control is slipping away or that results are in jeopardy. Discipline doesn’t equal zero changes to plan, and adaptation doesn’t negate a previously good decision.

25. Deliberative and Creative
Intellect alone doesn’t usually deliver the best ideas. Deliberation is an important part of innovation, but the creative phase of innovation is hurt by deliberation. Don’t be afraid to express ideas spontaneously. A bad idea isn’t a reflection on one’s IQ. Temporary chaos in generating ideas can be constructive. To create something truly unique, be willing to ignore patterns, logic, and trends.

26. Diplomatic and Direct
Don’t confuse being nice with silence about negative things. Telling someone the hard truth can be the nicest thing to do. Diplomacy increases the odds that someone will listen to a tough message, but diplomacy shouldn’t obscure the message itself. Be careful not to rob someone of constructive feedback by hiding behind the old adage, “If you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all.”

27. Empathic and Judicious
Don’t take ownership and responsibility away from people for fixing their own problems, even though they may expect you to do so because empathy provided clear understanding and personal connection. People are responsible to behave their way out of problems they behaved their way into. Mistaking empathy for
agreement or sympathy may skew judgment about the importance and urgency of solutions. Empathy doesn't qualify you, or require you, to fix another person's dilemma. People may not want a problem fixed but simply someone to listen. Carefully assess how much people want or require help.

28. Respectful and Up-Front
Disagreeing with someone’s point of view isn’t disrespectful or a sign that someone isn’t a team player. You can respect a person’s title and experience while still not seeing eye to eye with him. High-ranking titles or positions don’t make someone invincible or always right. Promotions don’t suddenly make someone smarter than they were the day before. If something important needs to be said, speaking up is a strong sign of respect for what’s in everyone’s best interest.

29. Dedicated and Relaxed
A long-term view of progress puts short-term lapses in dedication into perspective. Don’t get obsessed by the microscopic or less relevant details of what isn’t done. An “achieve at all costs” mentality wears people out, isn’t sustainable, and hurts performance. Take one step at a time instead of tackling everything at once. Giving up, or giving in, isn’t always a sign of weakness.

30. Loyal and Independent
Loyalty doesn’t require silence when something isn’t right. Remember to stay devoted to progress or a cause, not a specific project, department, or person. Going along with something that doesn’t feel right may be disloyal to principle and purpose. Be willing to stand up for what’s right or what you think is a better idea, regardless of where a general loyalty lies.
31. Perceptive and Non-Judgmental
People judge others primarily by their actions and themselves by their intentions. Judgments about motives often say more about the judge than the judged. Give people’s intentions the benefit of the doubt. The fewer the conclusions drawn about people, especially early on, the more it’s possible to learn from and about them. Not everyone shares the same values, priorities, or commitments. Any value can be interpreted differently when a context changes.

32. Modest and Bold
Humility may be admired but doesn’t have enough power by itself to change things, take charge, or earn due respect. Don’t lose passion and intensity for fear of being immodest. Excessive modesty diminishes the credibility of strong ideas, or of those who advanced them, which in turn does a disservice to the intrinsic power of ideas.
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