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Mindsetting: Rethinking Leadership

EXCERPT FROM *SMART TALK FOR ACHIEVING YOUR POTENTIAL*, BY LOU TICE





— MINDSETTING: RETHINKING LEADERSHIP

The Here and the There

I want to give you all you need to get from where you are now (from *here*, this present moment) to *there* (where you want to go). I want to get you from here to there. To do that, you first need to understand that you're in the belief business.

The Belief Business

What you achieve is largely a matter of what you believe; in fact, you might say: *believe equals achieve*.

In the late 1960's, I was a teacher and football coach at Kennedy High School in Seattle. But what I learned from a brilliant visiting professor at the University of Washington changed my way of thinking, and my life.

The first goal I set for myself was to use the information I'd learned to help people and to improve organizations.

"Oh, so you want to change the system?" was the response.

"Yes, that's right."

"Well, how long have you been a consultant?"

"Never."

"Do you have a doctorate degree or any experience?"

"Nope."

"Where did you do your field work?"

"Nowhere."

"Well, then, what are your qualifications?"

"Quite frankly, none."

So, what made me think I could achieve this goal? My affirmative belief that my current reality was not an accurate reflection of my inherent potential.

Your reality is the same size and shape as the container you hold it in. If you confine your creativity, your imagination, your future to the small container of your current reality, your thinking will be dominated by negative self-talk and your actions will be confined to your current comfort zone.

What if you let your *reality* grow without containment? You may think, “That sounds too simple.” It’s not simple; it takes a firm understanding and application of certain principles. But it’s possible, and worth the effort.

Your current reality is not fixed. You can learn how to see beyond who you are at the present moment and transcend your present circumstances to attain your goals. I don’t mean that you should deny present reality, because recognizing reality is an important step in the process of change. But don’t be *fixed* by your present state. The universe is not fixed. Creation is not fixed. You are not fixed. You can learn how to choose your future, how to create it, how to invent it now.

If you believe that your current reality is fixed, you get trapped in your own mistaken sense of “This is the way it is.” You think, “It’s always been this way, and it will always be this way.” But the present is not permanent.

Remember Sir Isaac Newton? His view was that God created a perfect world with just one exception: *people*. People were considered basically sinful. They were always trying to ruin a good thing. The idea was: “If God created a perfect world, then why are you trying, with all of your imagination and creativity, to *change* it? You’ll screw things up.”

Some of you were raised and conditioned by parents who felt that way. Some work for bosses who think this way. Some have teachers who feel that everything should stay the way it is. “We don’t want any of your bright ideas, thank you. In fact, we discourage any new ideas you have.”

Two centuries later, Alfred North Whitehead, a philosopher and mathematician, saw a dynamic world, not a fixed one. He saw a world in which people are co-creative agents with God. To him, creation is ongoing, as are the lives of human beings. They aren’t fixed, or stuck; they are always in motion.

If you share that view—as I do—then what do you think about people who say, “Well, I’ll lay back and let God, or Fate, or Destiny, or Nature, or the Powers That Be, direct my life for me?” What will their lives be like? “Okay, if I’m a bum, I guess it’s meant to be. If I’m lazy, or can’t control this terrible temper, it isn’t my fault. If I’m wallowing in debt and never pay my bills, that’s just the way it is.”

What a wonderful excuse for not being accountable or responsible for your own life! What a simple way to cement yourself into a fixed reality and never change!

High-performance people live in a Whiteheadian world. For them, present reality is only temporary. Instead of saying, “Well, I guess this is the way it is,” they build a new reality every day. They don’t sit around cursing Fate, or wishing for change, or hoping their lottery number comes up. They create change for *themselves*.

You were probably conditioned to believe that you were either *born with it* or *born without it*. You’ve heard people say, “She’s a born leader” or “He’s a born loser.” In other words, you either “have what it takes,” or you don’t.

After taking an I.Q. or aptitude test, you were informed, “You aren’t very good at this, and you’re only average at that.” Those notions become beliefs, even though those tests measure only what you *have* learned, not what you *can* learn. They measure what you have been, not what you can be. If you accept the test results as the *truth* about yourself, you tend to act like the person you believe yourself to be. As long as you hold that belief, you remain trapped or limited by it.

You may also be blocked by the beliefs that others have about you—or about your age, skin color, ethnic background, or vocation. If I’m your leader, parent, teacher, coach, or manager and believe that you don’t have what it takes, I’ll set up situations that prevent you from being all that you can be.

When you feel blocked by the beliefs you or others have about you, think of the bumblebee. When aeronautical engineers examine the bumblebee, measure its wing span, compute its body weight, and note its oversized fuselage, they conclude that there is no rational reason why a bumblebee can fly. But the bumblebee doesn’t know this. It doesn’t know that its wing span is too short, or that its fuselage is too heavy to sustain flight. So it flies anyway.

Remember Dick Fosbury, the Olympic high jumper who introduced “The Fosbury Flop”? He was the first international competitor to go over the bar backwards. Back then, coaches told their kids, “Don’t watch this guy. He’s a freak.” These days, everybody goes over backwards. **Remember: if you change the way you think, you change the way you act.** And barriers in your life begin to fall.

Before 1954, everybody knew you couldn’t run a mile in under four minutes. Then Roger Bannister crashed through the barrier. Within the next four years, the four-minute barrier was shattered more than 40 times. Why? Runners now knew that it could be done.

A few years ago, the minimal standard for qualification for the NCAA high jump Nationals was six feet, ten inches. But since too many people qualified, officials raised it to six eleven. The same number qualified. They said, “We have to weed some of them out” —and they raised it to seven feet. The same numbers qualified. They raised it to seven one and then seven two, thinking, “That’ll definitely stop them”—but the same number qualified.

If we change the belief, the performance follows. If you change the belief, you can change the way you run your life; the way you run your company; the way you run your family. You build the barriers. It’s often only the belief that makes something so.

As Shakespeare wrote, “There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.”

See the *why* and *what*. Don't worry now about *how*. Ordinary people do things in ordinary ways. They follow rules; they wait in line; they come and go in well-established patterns; they get stuck in ruts and routines.

One day I decided that ordinary wasn't good enough for me, so I went right after my vision. Based on my current reality, and how far my vision was from that reality, I might have thought, "How can I possibly make an impact?" I didn't know how I would do it; I just knew that I would invent a way to achieve my goal.

You can't cunningly plan yourself into your ideal situations. When you set a goal, you immediately feel compelled to ask, "How do I do it? How can I get it?" And you start planning. But from where I started, there was no plan that could possibly have put me into my present situation. It took something else.

It took a willingness to let myself get off the old track and to leap-frog my present reality. The idea of leap-frogging present reality might seem like magic to you. When you watch a magician do an amazing card trick, you see the end result, not the process. You don't see the magician slide the card up his sleeve. It looks amazing because you can't see the how.

Once when I was a high school teacher and coach, I needed to raise money for the school athletic program. After considering several ideas, I decided to get 20 kids to fight each other in a boxing tournament. I figured that they were going to fight anyway, so why not sell tickets.

Well, I sold most of the tickets, but five days before fight time I still didn't have a boxing ring, boxing gloves, or referee. People were starting to say, "Lou, forget this crazy idea, and give the money back." I couldn't, I'd spent some of it for advertising.

At that time, I was teaching a night class of adults. I mentioned my problem to the class, and one person said, "You know, I used to be a boxer when I was in the army."

I said, "Oh."

He said, "And I've got a friend who runs a boxing club here in Seattle."

I said, "Really. You don't suppose your friend could find me a boxing ring?"

He gave me the guy's phone number, and I called it when I got home about 10:00 that night. The man said, "I'm sorry, I can't help you, but my friend has a boxing club, and he rents his ring out." I called that guy next, and he said, "Yes, I'll rent it to you, for \$50."

I said, "I'll take it, but don't bring the boxing ring if you can't find me a referee."

He said, "Okay, I'll referee the fights."

I said, "For the same price?"

He said, "Yep."

I said, "Well, there's no sense in bringing the boxing ring or coming to referee if you don't know where I can get some boxing gloves."

And the guy said, "What do you have?"

I said, "I have the tickets sold and the kids ready to fight. By the way, if you have any headgear and drinking bottles and a bell, you'd better bring those things, too."

I had no idea where I would find a boxing ring and referee when I set the goal and sold tickets. Many people need to know where the resources are at the time they set the vision or goal, and that's why they achieve so little in life.

Don't be too concerned with how you're going to be what you want to be in the future; you'll learn how to create and invent the process along the way. You're creative, intuitive, and powerful inside—you're a creative genius. But you've got to allow yourself to get off the old track.

Right now, I want you to be more concerned with *why* and with *what*. If you get that right, you will invent the *how*.



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The best way to control your future is to invent it.

How do high-performance people invent their future? How do they get off the old track? How do they leap-frog their current reality and drop themselves into their vision? By fixing on the vision, the mission, the affirmation, and initially ignoring the how.

To transcend current reality, you can't be too concerned with the how. Otherwise, you'll shrink your vision. If you can't logically, realistically tell yourself how to reach your goal based on what you think you can do at the moment, you will deny what you're capable of doing in the future because it seems unrealistic. "Oh, it's just a pie-in-the-sky dream anyway." "Where will the customers come from?" "Where will I get the money?" "Who will help me?" "I'm not qualified. I need a degree first." You will invent a hundred rationalizations to keep you from doing what you want to do. You will tell yourself that your goal is out of reach, and then you'll back it up to where it seems more realistic, more attainable, more comfortable. Even then you might take years to achieve that goal—and you might never use your vast creative potential to make a better life.

Don't be a linear thinker.

If you remain a logical, linear thinker, you'll buy one of those planners or organizers, and then you'll plan the next three months based on how capable and creative you are at the present moment. That's old thinking. The old linear, cause-and-effect thinking, the old method-orientation, is outdated. You need to go on hunches and follow a direction that, at first, may seem impractical and insensible. You need to take giant leaps, not baby steps. At first, don't worry about how. Don't worry about an efficient, straight-line, mistake-free course of action. You'll invent it along the way.

For example, one time when Diane and I still lived in our first house, we were driving in the car with our children from the Oregon coast to Seattle. Diane and I had just come out of teaching high school, and we didn't have much money. But we let the kids think about what they wanted in their ideal home.

They wrote down 170 things on a list. They listed everything from ice cream makers to eagles to sunken garbage cans so they didn't need to pick up the garbage every time the dog knocked it over. They listed a jukebox, a slot machine, a swimming pool, their own bedrooms, etc. We wrote all the items down and visualized the place.

Now, we weren't very affluent at the time, but within a few months, we found a home with 66 of the features on our list, including the ice cream maker, the jukebox, and the pool table. And then we put the list away.

Ten years later, Diane found it and was surprised to see that all 170 things now appeared because we had built a ranch. The kids had wanted horses, cows, chickens, and other things we couldn't have in the city, but with our ranch, we had completed the list without ever referring to it. We had programmed our minds with such clarity that we didn't need to constantly focus on our dream list. By visualizing and assimilating those things we wanted in our minds, we eventually made it happen in a very natural way.

I'm convinced we can be and do and have what we really want in life. It's just a matter of deciding what we really want. In fact, I think that it's easier for us to obtain what we really want than to settle for compromise. That is because we won't go after what we casually want with nearly as much energy, drive, and excitement as we will muster to pursue something that we really want.

Start with the end result. To be a high-performance person, you must first decide what end results you want.

Exactly what do you want for yourself? What career? What income? What community? What home? What spiritual life? What relationships? You must create a vivid mental picture of the end results you want. Once you imprint that vision in your mind, you will become very creative to find information that you can use to help achieve it.

Your vision must be more than just a vague desire, such as, “I want to do good for mankind.” There are thousands of ways to do good. You must focus vividly on something specific. Ordinary people just wish for things. They never focus their desires into specific visions and missions. I encourage you to discard wishes; they’re destructive. Nobody’s rushing to grant your wishes. You need to make things happen for yourself.

The end result needs to be developed in your mind so what you say is, “I’ve got an idea.” That’s all. “I’ve got an idea.” “I’ve got an idea of how I want my family to be. I’ve got an idea of what I want my income to be. I’ve got an idea of the home I want. I’ve got an idea of the cake I want to bake. I’ve got an idea of what I want the party to look like. I’ve got an idea.”

You’ve got to have an idea or ideal, vision or mission. It’s just a matter of making constructive use of your imagination. It’s all in your mind, in your imagination. You construct a future in your mind before it ever occurs. For example, you have an idea of a future dinner, movie, or party. Or, you imagine the product you’re going to make, the organization you’re going to build, the trip you’re going to take. It’s as simple as that.

Open up your secret garden. I’m now giving you permission to dream and to open up this secret life inside your head. I’m telling you: “What you imagine is something you could make happen in the real world.” You don’t have to get real any more. You don’t have to be bound by practicalities; you can have these dreams.

You may feel both excited and filled with anxiety at this prospect. I know because I’ve felt that way many times. Many of the challenges that I face produce feelings of anxiety, but it says to me, “Well, that’s okay, that’s normal.”

You should be feeling that way. That’s a positive sign. You don’t have to listen to those voices that say, “Don’t try; go back.”

Remember: Who you are and where you’re going in life are dynamic, not static. Right now you may know more of what you don’t want; for example, you may know that you don’t want to be poor, sick, or stupid. But ask yourself another question: “What do I want? If I don’t like who I am, what I do, or what I have, how do I want it?” That’s a positive way to focus your goals for the future.

When people say to me, “yes, but,” I’m reminded of a guy named Johnny Harris. Johnny was four years on death row. At one time, he was only nine days away from hanging. While in prison, he hated other people so much that he put nine people at the same time in the infirmary with broken jaws. However, his life sentence was cut because of a self-defense judgment, and he was released on a technicality.

Two years later, after going through our program, he won the “God Speaking Through Man” Award of the National Unity Church of Truth, with Dr. Carl Menninger of the Menninger Foundation as a co-recipient for humanitarian acts.

So don’t tell me you’ve got a tough case. You are so capable with not nearly as many blocks to your success as people like Johnny Harris.

The only thing that’s going to stop you is your lack of vision, lack of mission, old patterns, old habits, old excuses and beliefs that are inappropriate.

Look, if a high school teacher with a bunch of kids to feed can quit his job and, by vow of being authentic and progressive and effective and being mission driven, growth driven, and goal directed, do what Diane and I have done, what’s your excuse? I’m nothing exceptional. I see myself as ordinary, just an ordinary person doing extraordinary things.

Think in Terms of Ideals

Each one of us must think and work in ideals. What's an ideal? It's an image, picture, or vision that exists presently only in your mind. An ideal is very simple, not complex. You look at current reality, the way things actually are at the present moment—the way you live now, the way you dress, your work, your health, your community, and the state of the world. You look at current reality, and you say to yourself, “What would be the ideal for me? What would be the ideal way to treat my spouse and children? What would be the ideal work for me? What would be the ideal month, week, day?”

Let yourself be free of reality for a moment. Let yourself picture this ideal without worrying whether you know how to get there or how to do it or even know what it entails. Just draw a beautiful, simple picture of how it might be, and then keep that picture in mind.

I know that's difficult in day-to-day life, hanging on to your ideal and not getting pulled back into the reality of the moment. But don't get trapped by how much money you have or how effective or ineffective you are, or how powerful or powerless you are at the moment. In one sense, it doesn't make any difference. You must think in ideals first.

Thinking in terms of ideals may be new for many of you, because you're trapped in your present reality and can't get out. You're trapped in a mental prison of your own making. And when you're immersed in a present reality, you tend to think you know the truth about it. But someone coming in from the outside can better think in ideals because they're not caught up in the realities of your life.

In my current roles as a consultant, coach, mentor, speaker, husband, father, grandfather, and business owner, I'm often coming into other people's lives and organizations from the outside. I'm not experiencing all of what they are experiencing, and so it's relatively easy for me to think in ideals, to inspire them to think in ideals, and to provide them with a process to reach the ideal.

I advise them: “Think in ideals, even when all about you is insanity and denial.”

Some people reply, “You don't know me. You come here talking fantasy, with no foundation in reality. Why think in ideals? Nothing in my life is ideal. Why set myself up for disappointment?” I respond: “I'm just asking you to have an idea of what could be. I'm inviting you to work in ideals and to be courageous and confident enough to believe you can pull it off. Establish what you want at the moment. I don't care what you want. Figure out what you want. Your wants will change down the road. But if you can focus on what you want now, and know why you want it, you will likely achieve it.”

I then invite them to affirm: “I know what I want. I know why I want it. I listen to people who have helpful information, and apply it to something that's real to me.”

You want to reach for something. You want to grow as a person, as a family, as a company. You want to become more. More of what? That's what I keep asking myself: "What do I want to become? What do I want to do?" Often it's no big deal—something simple for my family or for my business associates or for myself.

My ideals have taken me around the world. In Spain, I visited the home of Miguel Cervantes who wrote *Don Quixote de la Mancha*. One theme of that book is the conflict between the real and the ideal. Our dreams, ideals, and quests give us a sense of what we might become. But after Quixote embarked on his quest, some thought him to be a maniac. Likewise, we might appear to others to be crazy—and that perception becomes reality, to them.

To make the ideal real, you've got to pick out something in your mind that you want to reach for—your impossible dream. What do you want for yourself and others? What do you want for your community, your family, your friends?

Many of us are taught to have a realistic point of view. Our friends might tell us, "Forget your ideal. Not everyone will like you. You'll have your critics and enemies. You'll never achieve what you imagine." And if you are weak, you might accept their negative affirmations as reality.

I have a more positive philosophy in my life. My own self-talk is the most powerful affirmation. My intent is to positively talk to myself and influence the talk around me. I find that to be very hard. It's hard to keep from being pulled down with all the negative talk around me and to help people become more positive without being perceived as someone who doesn't understand what reality is. Because that's what I get when I try to turn things around to a positive way. People say, "He's living in a dream world" or "He doesn't understand what it's really like." That's not true. I do understand, but to them I sound like a dreamer, an idealist, a Quixote.

Your quest will take some form of commitment on your part. Others will challenge you when you share your ideals. They might say, "Since so many people and things in this life are unfair and unjust, why try? Why believe? Why hope and dream?"

I can't talk to you in terms of my ideals. You must identify your ideals, starting from where you are. And as you grow, your there will keep getting bigger and better and greater. That's the natural process—the journey of getting there from here.

Three years from now, at another starting point, you might say, "I want to get there." You have to determine the new there and use the same process. The there may be the new marriage, a new family, expanded business, a new home, increased income, or improved health and fitness.

This book is simply a guide to get you from here to there. I hope to inspire you to have a bigger there. The there that you think of today will be small compared to the there that you'll think of 10 years from now, if you apply what you learn daily to develop yourself. By applying the principles and action process in this book, you'll get there, and beyond.

“All meaningful and lasting change starts first on the inside, then works its way out.”

— LOU TICE



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