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MANIFESTING POSSIBILITY

In the universe of possibility, you set the context
and let life unfold.

—*The Art of Possibility*, Rosamund Stone Zander
and Benjamin Zander, p. 21.

Imagine going for a hike in the woods. No marked trails guide you, but you have a map, a compass, and a notion of where you want the hike to end. As you set out, you move to the left of that tree and to the right of the big one over there. Hopping over small streams, rocks, and tree trunks, you inch toward your final destination. With each step, you shape your direction and manifest possibility. As you move forward, some possibilities close out—but new ones emerge. Your compass allows you to navigate in broad swaths and keeps you from getting lost. Even with the compass, though, you cannot predict exactly where you will end.

Some decisions lead you into a section of the woods too thick with branches to be passable. You must backtrack to get moving forward again. Other fortuitous decisions make your journey easier or more interesting. You can see clearly a couple of hundred feet in front of you and try to strategize your moves to reach interim targets of trees, openings, and rocks. Looking at the sun's position and your compass confirms you are walking in the right direction. With every step you manifest one possibility and open yourself up to many more.

Take a hike! Exploring your life and work goals is much like the hypothetical hike that I described. You have navigational tools that are approximate and imperfect. Each decision and action nudges

you forward and presents a unique set of possibilities that you can manifest. You can shape your experience and results through recognizing the myriad possibilities in play and making choices that seem directionally aligned with your goals. Each day you manifest possibilities—none purely right or wrong, but some will better serve your goals and catalyze breakthroughs.

A possibility is something that could exist, a potential alternative, a prospect, or a theory. Possibilities include potential outcomes, paths, flavors, efforts, paces, resources needed, experiences, and relationships:

- I will earn a Master's degree in the next two years.
- Bob's business will begin offering a new line of productivity products that launch in 2007.
- I can focus and be productive today.
- Sally will spend more time on high-impact projects and less time on routine tasks and meetings.
- The product development process will decrease to less than eighteen months.
- Maggie will fall in love and marry.
- The work environment will feel more invigorating and employee engagement will improve.
- Jack will shift from being a micromanager to one who empowers and engages his team.
- Art will partner with ten colleagues to create a project.
- We can achieve the goal with a \$10,000 investment.
- Team members will build strong working relationships with one another.
- A new competitor will challenge your business.

These are all possibilities. At any given moment, including this instant, you have many possibilities that you can explore and manifest. You are probably unaware of most of these possibilities.

When you manifest a possibility, you reveal it and then make it real. To *manifest* means to make visible, and this can apply to tangible outcomes or intangible emotions and ideas. Here are a few descriptions of possibilities manifested:

- Harry was at peace for the first time in his life.
- As she collected her degree, she was flooded with emotion.
- Twelve months of hard work came together in victory as the new machine roared to life.
- Kelly was unable to outrun the police and was arrested for robbing the local mini-mart.
- Lisa's book achieved a top 10 ranking on Amazon.com on July 12th.
- Scott's e-mail, conversations, and tenacity paid off. After just two weeks he received fifty-five new orders.

Manifestations can be broad, large, narrow, or small. A friend of mine recently took over as president of a small company. At the time he accepted the job, many possibilities existed. He could play it small or lead full out. He could let his fears rule (this was a sizable promotion and he had doubts about his ability) or head into the role with a lion's confidence. The result? He has created a reality more powerful than he could have imagined. Not only is he an amazing president, he is perhaps one of the best in his industry. Possibilities existed that he could not see until he tuned his mind-set for greatness. But when he did—*pow*—magic!

Sometimes a country manifests a possibility. On September 12, 1962, President John F. Kennedy declared that the United States would land on the moon within ten years. Here's a quote from his speech:

We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and

measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too.

It is for these reasons that I regard the decision last year to shift our efforts in space from low to high gear as among the most important decisions that will be made during my incumbency in the office of the Presidency.

Being the first to land on the moon was a possibility manifested by thousands of passionate and dedicated people. And at each step along the journey to the moon, project team members worked with determination and focus to make millions of individual decisions and actions come together for success.

The mountainous kingdom of Bhutan, sandwiched between India and Tibet, is one of the least economically developed countries in the world. Its average per capita annual income is about \$700. Estimates of its per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which have always been uncertain because the first modern census of Bhutan was not conducted until 2005, place Bhutan in the bottom 15 percent of countries. This is barely ahead of such impoverished nations as Djibouti, Rwanda, Burkina Faso, Tajikistan, Benin, Eritrea, and Mali. Living conditions in Bhutan can be harsh. Villages become isolated when roads are closed by landslides and less than two-thirds of the people in Bhutan have access to improved water supplies. Ninety percent survive by subsistence farming. The first modern roads were not built until the 1960s, and neither television nor the Internet were available until 1999. The Bhutan National Bank did not issue its first credit cards until 2004, and plans are only now being made to install the first automated teller machines in the country.

Despite its economic poverty and hardships, many people think of Bhutan as a peaceful Shangri-La that has managed to avoid the negative aspects of modern civilization. This is because of an intentional decision by King Jigme Singye Wangchuck to pursue a policy of increasing the Gross National Happiness rather than the Gross

National Product. First enunciated in 1972, when the king ascended to the throne at age sixteen, the policy is based on promoting four areas of possibility: economic growth, cultural preservation, sustainable use of the environment, and good governance. The king's vision represented possibility on a grand scale. This was not the well-carved path that other countries hiked.

Scholarly research lends credence to the idea that happiness is not dependent on economic growth. In a paper published in the *Journal of Public Economics* in 2004, economists David Blanchflower and Andrew Oswald examined the degree of happiness in the United States and Great Britain during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Although some groups such as American men and African Americans reported increases in happiness, and people with high incomes and high levels of education reported more satisfaction than those with low incomes or the unemployed, the overall sense of happiness among Americans appears to have fallen over the years.

The people of Bhutan have manifested impressive possibilities. Life expectancy in Bhutan has increased and infant mortality has fallen under the policy of Gross National Happiness. Primary school enrollment has increased, with a goal of universal enrollment by 2007, and in recent years the government has spent as much as 15 percent of its budget on education. Economic growth has also been both strong and balanced by environmental preservation. Bhutan is developing hydropower resources while mandating that 60 percent of the country must remain forested. Twenty-six percent of the country is preserved as parks. The number of tourists allowed to enter Bhutan is limited to a few thousand per year and each tourist must spend a minimum of \$200 per day. Hiking and trekking are encouraged, but high-altitude mountaineering expeditions were banned in 2003 in deference to spiritual beliefs. Bhutan became a tobacco-free country in 2005. Despite its successes, the country continues to grapple with unavoidable outside influences in its attempt to balance happiness and economic growth. In response to concerns about the influence of television on young Bhutanese, the government recently banned both MTV and professional wrestling

on television. Each year its leaders explore and manifest new possibilities that serve their goal of high Gross National Happiness.

The Bhutan example is evocative. To what degree do you measure success based on what you produce? If your ultimate goal is to feel fulfilled, connected, and joyous, your milestones ought not be about money, status, or possessions. What if you focused on manifesting possibilities that improve your individual, familial, or workplace happiness? When you shift your focus, different sets of choices emerge. This may not seem easy, and I struggle with it myself. As a recovering yuppie, my natural inclination is to define success by what I produce and the fruits of my productivity. Here's the catch and challenge: I know that I could work less and improve my happiness. Think about that. *I could work less and enjoy life more.* Seems like a no-brainer, doesn't it? That's what I thought, too, and I set out to change how I measure success. I have made great progress in the last couple of years and continue to manifest new possibilities for ways to increase my gross individual happiness.

What stops you from manifesting the life you seek? While you manifest possibilities every day, you may not be generating the reality that will best serve your goals. A barrier that affects many people is an unwillingness and inability to recognize the full range of possibilities. They give up too early or believe that because one option is no longer open, they can do nothing more to reach their goals. There are possibilities that you have not considered and that would allow you to spend more time on activities that enrich and enliven your life.

You can build your muscles for seeing, taking on, and manifesting possibilities by adopting the following states of mind: wonder, inquiry, abundance, exuberance, and courage.

Wonder

When in a state of wonder, you feel admiration for beauty, welcome the unexpected and inexplicable, and are drawn to exploring the unfamiliar. You delight in pleasant surprise. Do you notice the extra-

ordinary beauty all around you? Are you cognizant of your wonderful talents and gifts? Do the possibilities blow your mind and make you feel all tingly? For the next hour, try putting yourself in the mind-set of wonder. You will be looking at the world through a lens where anything is possible.

Inquiry

When we see the wonders of the world, we seek to explore and understand them through inquiry. The art of inquiry is at the core of learning and great conversation. By asking provocative and evocative questions you will achieve many layers of understanding. When absorbed in inquiry, your mind's open-for-business sign is turned on and burns bright. Inquiry is how we interact with and relate to the world.

Provo-Evo Communication

I have been using the term *Provo-Evo* in my coaching practice for some time. It's a combination of the terms provocative and evocative.

Provocative: Exciting and stimulating. Intriguing. What if . . . ? What's special? How'd they do that? Have you noticed . . . ? This team has the opportunity to impact the company's direction with its research. This problem has plagued the department for years—let's look at it from another angle. We need to come up with a short list of projects that will best support this goal, and all ideas will be considered. I'd like to pick your brain about a new idea I have been tossing around in my head.

Evocative: Pulls people in and helps bring things to mind. How did you do that? Tell me about your favorite. . . . If you could do it in any fashion, what would you do? Imagine the proposal is approved; what's our next move? You've come such a long way with this company and this year has been a great year for your project management leadership.

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Provo-evo is a way to approach inquiry and a tool for stimulating fresh thinking; yours and that of your employees, peers, and customers. It is a way of communicating that is engaging and connecting. If you want to experience many breakthroughs and improve your rate of success, master provo-evo communication. I think leaders ought to be master conversationalists. Your ability to provoke and evoke is an important aspect of conversation. I am an introvert, but I love a provo-evo conversation. This is an important point. Provo-evo transcends style and gregariousness. To be powerfully provo-evo, you must be sincere. The goal for creating great inquiry is not to see who can ask the most obtuse and intellectual question at the next staff meeting. It's about moving the conversation forward with velocity.

Are you provo-evo enough? Provo-evo inquiry unearths rich possibilities and paints a glow onto your goals. When you connect to others (provo) and they reflect because of your inquiry (evo), you tap into a deeper place in their hearts and minds, a place where the most interesting possibilities are kept.

Abundance

To notice and manifest possibility, it helps to see the world as a place of abundance. The opposite of a scarcity mind-set, abundance is the belief that there is more than enough to go around. It's the belief that if someone else has launched the type of business that interests you, there is room for you both (or for hundreds of like businesses). It's the thinking that tells you there are many right ways to do things and if one approach did not work, many others have the potential to succeed. It's the mantra that competitors make excellent partners. Just because you are not first to market or don't have the biggest budget does not mean that you cannot be wildly successful. Abundance is the epitome of a win-win perspective. When you adopt a mind-set of abundance, you believe

- The market and potential are unlimited.
- The more I manifest, the more I can manifest.
- The resources and connections I need are available to me.
- The more I support others, the more resources I will have available to support others.
- If I seek input, I will receive generous wisdom.

Whatever your goal, you can find and use the resources you need to achieve success. Your success does not have to come at the expense of others. In fact, your success can support and facilitate other people's accomplishments. You can have your cake and eat it too. You can create a work life that is both prosperous and fulfilling. You can love your work and your life of leisure.

Exuberance

Exuberance comes from the Latin *exuberare*, which means to be abundantly fruitful or fertile. A feeling of exuberance occurs when our minds are fertile and filled with liveliness, energy, and excitement. When exuberant, we grow luxuriantly. Exuberance is the inward personification of an abundance mind-set. While we each display exuberance differently (based on our unique personality and style), it's our state of being animated and vigorous.

Your physical energy impacts exuberance, but only a bit. The choice to be excited and engaged is mostly mental. Right now, as you read this, are you jazzed? When I schedule time to write, I go through a short psych-up routine where I turn my brain on the bright setting and get excited about the chapter or passage before me. You've likely heard about sports stars and actors who do this too. Your goal is important. Strike that. *Your goal is the essence of your life.* It is life. Exuberance offers possibilities that enable you to be amazing.

Courage

Courage is another way of being that brings out your best. According to Gus Lee, author of *Courage: The Backbone of Leadership*, “Courage is a deep-seated, fundamental competence that leverages our other abilities. It invokes within us our absolute best selves. The tremendous results purchased by courageous behaviors can’t be replaced” (p. 64). When we think and act with courage, we create a current reality and futures that could not have existed otherwise. Life changes for the better when courage walks into the room. Again from Lee’s book: “Courage is manifested in courageous communication, courageous leadership, courageous problem-solving, and in resolving high-end conflicts” (p. 7). Courage is both a possibility and a catalyst. The courage mind-set helps you translate powerful possibilities into manifested greatness. Resolve, responsibility, and ownership are at the heart of our courageous minds.

Does reading about this collection of mind-sets make you sit a bit straighter in your chair? Are you thinking about your day in a new way? These heady concepts pack a punch and are not typical sources of conversation in many homes and workplaces. One of the unique aspects of the Two Weeks to a Breakthrough program is that these five powerful mind-sets form the program’s foundation. While you are blazing through your practical to-do lists, you will also be seeing and manifesting new possibilities because your mind is being tuned for success.

I love this program because it allows me to work with and support many amazing people. The people I work with feel something big welling up inside their brains and guts. It’s a deep desire to make something special happen. They want to manifest possibility and break through to immeasurable success.