



HOW TO GET OUT OF THE BOX AND WIN



Discovery Novel

Mikel J. Harry, Ph.D.

Catherine Lawson, Ph.D.



Through the unique and captivating story line of this book, the authors have skillfully interwoven the principles and practices of *The Great Discovery* to show how the lives of everyday people can be greatly improved by following a simple step-by-step way of thinking. By reading about their lives, you will gain a deep and rich understanding of how *The Great Discovery* can be applied in your home life, personal life and work life. Once you start reading this book, you won't be able to put it down. The intriguing dialogue and profound discussions between the main characters will bring you many deep insights into how virtually anyone or any work team can achieve breakthrough toward the realization of their dreams, aspirations and goals. Once you finish this book, you will want your children, friends, parents and colleagues to read it.

*Michael Vandermark, Ph.D.
Organizational Psychologist*

From the Co-Creator of Six Sigma and Best Selling Author



Dr. Mikel J. Harry has been widely recognized and cited in many publications as the principal architect of **Six Sigma** and the world's leading authority within this field. His book entitled *Six Sigma: The Breakthrough Management Strategy Revolutionizing the World's Top Corporations* has been on the **best seller list** of the Wall Street Journal, Business Week, and Amazon.com. He has consulted to many of the world's top CEOs and has been a featured guest on such television programs as the NBC show *Power Lunch*. In addition, he has been recognized and distinguished by many of the top governmental, professional and academic institutions for his ground breaking work and contributions.



Dr. Catherine Lawson is a Certified Six Sigma Master Black Belt, Professional Life Coach and Certified Discovery Trainer. She started her career at Motorola in 1985 as a process quality engineer and was part of the group that worked directly with Mikel Harry implementing Six Sigma. Cathy became one of the first Six Sigma Black Belts within the company and later one of the first Master Black Belts. She served on the Motorola Corporate Black Belt Steering Committee and was a member of the Corporate Science Advisory Board. In 2008 Cathy left the corporate world and opened her own business known as Life Sculpting.

Discover How to Achieve Victory in Your Life

The Great Discovery resulted after 25 years of successfully practicing *Six Sigma*, which is a system of management aimed at creating big improvements in the performance of a business. Whereas *Six Sigma* was designed for corporations, *The Great Discovery* was created for the masses. Owing to this, individuals and teams can now enjoy the same level of success as big companies. In this sense, *The Great Discovery* is a step-by-step way of thinking that ordinary people can use to consistently achieve extraordinary things.

"Mikel Harry, the founder of the Six Sigma methodology and the world's leading authority in the field has tutored corporate legends such as Jack Welch, Jac Nassar and Larry Bossidy."

The Economic Times

"Mikel Harry's innovation of the *Breakthrough Strategy* has taken quality into America's boardrooms."

***Gregory Watson, Former President,
American Society for Quality***

"Mike's passion is ultimately to offer his knowledge to society in general, empowering individuals, families, and organizations to move confidently to the next level. Mike calls this "*The Great Discovery*" and it's worth checking out. A heavy hitter has stepped back into the batters box -- I'm looking for another home run."

***Gary Cort, Former Vice President,
Research In Motion (Blackberry)***

"When I was first introduced to *The Great Discovery*, it made my head spin with the possibilities. It was absolutely incredible. I couldn't stop thinking about it. Since that point in time, I have embraced its wisdom, applied the principles and used the process, not just in my home life, but at work as well. Through Lucky Kat TV, we are now using *The Great Discovery* to show kids how they can reach out to the stars and achieve their dreams. Wow, what an impact. Even better, they "get it" and use it in their lives. After my experiences with *The Great Discovery*, I can't imagine any other way of living, working and prospering. It's the only way to go."

***Steven Wilzbach, Emmy Award Recipient
Vice President, LKTV Productions***

"Not that long ago, I was told about *The Great Discovery* by a friend. He said how "great" it was and thought it might do me some good. Why? Because at that time, I was passionately chasing a personal dream, but getting nowhere. So I started looking through the materials and then all of a sudden it hit me like a ton of bricks – this stuff is really, really good. It outlined a roadmap to follow and clearly explained how to navigate that path in order to succeed. Its been said that "you don't know what you don't know." Well, I didn't know then, but I do now. Because of *The Great Discovery*, I'm back on track to my dream and moving forward in a much more confident and productive way."

***Tim McManimen
Professional Realtor***

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Foreword

Throughout our personal and professional lives, we sometimes feel a compelling need to pursue a dream or achieve a stretch-goal. Some people must do this for a work team, committee or group of people attempting to realize a collective aspiration. But how is this done? How can the odds of success be maximized? Is there a tried and tested way of getting yourself or others on the path to success? The answer to such questions is founded on knowledge, as “you can’t do what you don’t know.” Consequently, if you expect to achieve breakthrough in some dimension of your life, you must have the underlying knowledge required to innovate and execute high quality solutions.

Interestingly, during the course of our formal education, we are taught many facts and skills, like reading, writing and arithmetic; but, we are never formally taught how to succeed. We attempt to create success based on our existing knowledge and often rely on trial-and-error in our search for the elusive path to success. That is to say, we sit down, think about what we would like from some dimension of our life and then try to invent a formula for realizing our dreams or goals – calling on our education and experiences to help guide our efforts. Almost without saying, such an approach to breakthrough results in a hit-and-miss strategy that often leads to disappointing results, if any at all. The Great Discovery® overcomes the shortcomings of trial and error and fills the knowledge gaps that will streamline the path to your dreams.

In a nutshell, The Great Discovery® is a process that advances human achievement to the point of breakthrough – and beyond. It is a way that ordinary people can envision, plan and achieve extraordinary things. From this perspective, The Great Discovery® is a highly structured, disciplined and systematic way of thinking that allows you to formulate a dream or stretch-goal, and then create a clear roadmap to the realization of such aspirations. The Great Discovery® is a repeatable, teachable and sustainable system that will help guide you to what you value most in life. It's a way you can unify the thinking and activity of people toward a common vision. It's a method that allows you to provide solid, confident leadership – in your personal life, your home life and your work life.

By now you should have a general idea of what The Great Discovery® is about, as well as its basic purpose and intents. However, you might be wondering where the discovery came from and why it's so great. The Great Discovery® is a direct descendent from the world-acclaimed business management system called “Six Sigma.” Essentially, Six Sigma is a better way to run a business. It's a way to move an organization to higher levels of performance – in everything they do. It's a roadmap and set of tools that, when

properly applied, will create breakthrough in the way work gets done; therein, leading to higher levels of profitability and customer satisfaction.

The first generation of Six Sigma originated at Motorola in the 1980's and was focused on defect reduction. Then, in the '90's, General Electric ushered in the second generation of Six Sigma to drive costs down and profits up. The third generation of Six Sigma was inaugurated by DuPont around 2000 and was used to increase their overall value proposition – to customers and shareholders alike.

After nearly 25 years of demonstrated success, Six Sigma is now recognized as a top management innovation. For example, Newsweek magazine reported that Six Sigma is now used by 82 of the Fortune 100 companies. The great CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch, said that Six Sigma was the biggest opportunity for growth, increased profitability and individual employee satisfaction in the history of GE.

The power of Six Sigma has saved corporations billions and billions of dollars, made incredible improvements in product and service quality, and greatly increased customer satisfaction while concurrently improving shareholder value. Given such a track record of success, it's fair to say that the Six Sigma Way of Thinking has withstood the test of time and proven its ability to create breakthrough. And now, the fourth generation of Six Sigma is centered on the advancement of human achievement – how you can create breakthroughs in your life and achieve extraordinary things – just like many of the world's top corporations have done over the past two decades.

Across these 20 years of successful practice, we gathered a great amount of data and information from thousands of Six Sigma projects. This knowledge was then filtered by our research team to reveal the common denominators of success. The results of this inspiring research uncovered a pattern of thinking that was consistent across virtually all of the documented cases where positive, quantum change was achieved. Consequently, we call this way of thinking The Great Discovery® and refer to the application process as the Proven Path.

Through the dialogue and exchange of ideas that occur between the primary characters in this book, you will discover the Proven Path and its supporting principles and practices – presented in an entertaining, yet educational way. Above all, you will come to understand how the Proven Path can be leveraged to create great improvements in virtually any dimension of your life.

As with anything in life, it can be said that "we all get by with a little help from our friends." Because the foundation of The Great Discovery® is built from the bricks and mortar of Six Sigma, the authors would like to acknowledge the Six Sigma community (at large), especially the early pioneers within this field, like Bill Smith (Motorola), Bob Galvin (Motorola), Larry Bossidy (Honeywell) and Jack Welch (General Electric). Their

innovations, contributions, experiences and leadership will always be greatly admired and appreciated.

In this spirit, the authors would also like to gratefully acknowledge The Great Discovery® research team, which included Reigle Stewart, Tom Hughes, Dave Antis and Phong Vu. These individuals provided their wealth of knowledge, experience, information and data resulting from many years of successful Six Sigma practice. They dedicated large blocks of their personal time to pool, filter and subsequently synthesize the many lessons of Six Sigma. Also, the authors would like to thank Hank Cousine for his “street smarts.” As a former Army Airborne Ranger, Los Angles police officer and business entrepreneur, Hank was instrumental in helping simplify the Proven Path into a well-defined methodology that could be understood and applied by virtually anyone, even young adults and children.

The authors would also like to recognize the contributions of Connie Januzzi (administration), Craig Elden (information technology) and Mike Vandermark (industrial psychologist) for their many hours of critical review and feedback, not to mention the creation of course materials, workbooks and videos. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the fine contributions of Sandra M. Harry, especially for her endless stream of encouragement. Sandy dedicated countless hours performing technical reviews and conducting additional research for many of the materials associated with The Great Discovery®. Through her keen eye for detail and faultless reasoning, she provided several key refinements that were subsequently incorporated into the instructional content; ultimately finding their way into the book you are now reading.

The authors would also like to give recognition to Alan Leduc and Emily Taylor, both of Ball State University, who assisted with the editing process for The Great Discovery. Alan served as a technical editor, while Emily completed copy editing. Alan is an associate professor in the Department of Technology at Ball State and a Six Sigma Black Belt. Emily is a graduate student in Literary Journalism and works as a Graduate Assistant in the Department of Journalism.

Of course, there were many other individuals and organizations that had significant interactions with The Great Discovery®. Their efforts served to help perfect the Proven Path, as well as its supporting principles and practices. Still others made weighty contributions by taking part in pilot studies, participating in encounter sessions, attending workshops, engaging in lengthy interviews, sharing ideas during numerous hallway discussions and even teaching the concepts to university students, business executives, workers and children. Needless to say, many, many eyes have scrutinized The Great Discovery® over the last four years. Of course, the ultimate review comes from those that read the book, including you. For that, we offer you our words of appreciation.



Chapter 1 – Introducing Stephanie

The day started badly. It was the final day of a business trip that had been stressful, rushed, tedious and less productive than I would have preferred. I was riding in a taxi driven by a small Chinese man who did not speak English well. As he sped through the narrow and crowded streets of Hong Kong trying to return me to the airport so I could fly home, I tightened my seatbelt and drifted off into a moment of reflection.

I felt like I had been away forever, but in reality it had only been a week. It was too long to be gone from my husband and two daughters, but not enough time to fly across the world for an international conference. I felt anxious, hassled and travel weary, though I had yet to even start the 16-hour journey home. I sat in the back of the small taxi fervently praying that this recklessly fast driver would land me safely at my destination. In that moment, I was completely unaware that the events yet to unfold that day would change my life forever. My name is Stephanie Grant and this is the story of my Great Discovery.

The Hong Kong International Airport looks more like a shopping mall than an airport. But as I exited the taxi with my luggage, I was not in the mood to shop. All that beauty and extravagance was lost on me. I was more concerned with the long line at the ticketing counter and glad I had arrived almost three hours before my scheduled departure. I was even the tiniest bit grateful for the little Chinese man who had raced through the dense city streets like a NASCAR driver to get me here so fast. It was clear I was going to be in this line for a long time. The minutes ticked by with agonizing slowness. I nudged my two bags forward with my foot an inch or two at a time. The line of travelers, many of them looking as weary as I felt, seemed endless.

When at last I was at the front of the line, a space opened in front of a young Chinese woman with bobbed hair. I was delighted to learn that she spoke English flawlessly as she asked for my travel documents.

"You are booked on flight 1894 to Tokyo at 10:30 a.m. and flight 729 departing at 4:50 p.m. to Los Angeles," she said.

It sounded more like a statement than a question, but I nodded in response.

"Flight 1894 to Tokyo is overbooked," she continued. "I am authorized to offer any confirmed passenger on flight 1894 willing to give up his or her seat a \$500 travel

voucher plus a guaranteed seat upgraded to business class on the next flight. Would you be willing to accept this offer?"

I considered the option. Five hundred dollars and an upgraded seat on the next flight out. The thought of business class seemed a luxury too wonderful to pass up. But I was cautious.

"When is the next flight?" I asked.

"There is a direct flight from Hong Kong to Los Angeles departing at 4:25 this afternoon arriving in LA at 12:55 p.m. the same day," she replied.

I paused to do the math. Because of the 15-hour time difference, as well as crossing the international dateline, this flight would get me home in about 12 hours, arriving a mere four hours later than my original flight. The decision was obvious.

"Yes, I'd like to accept that offer," I proclaimed.

A few minutes later my bags were taken and I had a business class ticket in my hand. The only problem I now faced was the eight hours I had to pass until my flight boarded. As I moved through the terminal I started to pay more attention to the shops and dining areas that filled the airport. Since I didn't relish the thought of leaving the airport to do any sightseeing before I had to depart but didn't need to get through the security line for at least seven hours, I wandered through the shops leisurely, enjoying the free time that was such a rare treat for me.

I managed to effortlessly spend four hours browsing and wandering. It wasn't until I sat down with my plate of steaming Chinese vegetables for lunch that the weariness of the past few days caught up with me. Accompanying the overwhelming exhaustion was an uncomfortable feeling of depression that swept over my entire body - a stark mixture of anxiety and melancholy. I couldn't quite place the source of this feeling. My life was pretty good, all things considered.

I had been recently promoted to director of marketing and public relations within the firm I worked for, a company that manufactured equipment which significantly reduced carbon emissions from petroleum processing factories. Though I had only been working for this company for the past eight years, my career spanned 18 years. It all started when I landed my first job as a technical writer immediately following graduation from UCLA with a degree in communication and marketing. My professional dream was to lead a marketing team for an established and prospering American corporation. To have achieved that goal just months before I turned 40 was a great accomplishment in my mind. In fact, it was entirely possible that in just a few short years I would be

promoted to vice president of marketing as the current vice president, my manager, was within five years of retirement. There should have been no reason whatsoever to be dissatisfied with my career. And yet I still felt this vague sense of disappointment.

I don't know that I could articulate exactly what the problem was. I just knew I disliked Mondays, loved Fridays and managed to muddle through the rest of my work week. But, I argued with myself, what else could I do? It would be hard to find a job at my current level in another company and even if I did, it would mean starting over with vacations, stock options and all the other little perks I had come to appreciate as a member of the senior staff. If I changed careers altogether, I'd be starting over at an entry level position in the mid-point of my life. That would be foolish. Besides, I was afraid of starting a career in a new field. Change is always difficult.

There was only one thing I had ever dreamed about doing. Yet I had never spoken that dream aloud to anyone, not even my husband or my parents, because I knew it was an impossible dream and one I could never realize. On days when I was completely dissatisfied with my career, I allowed myself the luxury of indulging in a beautiful daydream in which I was living my ideal life. It gave me such a feeling of contentment and joy even though it was a complete fantasy. I sighed and allowed myself to drift briefly into that make-believe world. After a few minutes I made the journey back to reality, disturbed to realize that the nagging feeling of discontent still lingered.

This melancholy certainly didn't stem from my family life. Slightly teary-eyed, I pulled out my wallet and gazed at a picture of my beautiful family. I had been married to Nathan for almost 12 years. We met at a single's event for young professionals when I was 26. Nathan was an electrical engineer and currently worked at a technology company in El Segundo, California where we lived. We had two adorable daughters, the oldest was turning nine next week and the youngest was five. They were my delight. My only regret was the time I had to spend away from them. My work often kept me from being the involved parent I wanted to be. This week due to the business trip, I had to miss a concert my older daughter was singing in. I consoled myself with the knowledge that I had a fabulous birthday party planned for her, complete with dress-up, makeup and modeling for her and her friends at an upscale children's boutique that specialized in fantasy parties for young girls.

My relationship with Nathan was likewise pretty solid. We didn't have any major problems, just the typical issues associated with juggling two prospering careers and two active daughters. We didn't get to spend as much time alone together as I would have liked, but I could always count on Nathan to chip in and help out wherever I needed him.

I had a lot to be thankful for, really. So why did this uncomfortable feeling that something important was missing persist? I wasn't sure, but I didn't want to continue dwelling on it. I cleaned up the remains of my lunch, passed uneventfully through the security check point and made my way to the gate to await my flight. I took out a book and read my way through the long afternoon, enjoying the excitement of an espionage thriller. Before I knew it, there was an announcement allowing all business class passengers on my flight to board. Feeling like a VIP, I gathered my belongings and made my way down the jetway. My adventure was just beginning.



Chapter 2 - Meet Mikel Harry

The plane was not crowded yet. I made my way to my seat and decided to put my carry-on bag, which doubled as a large purse, in the overhead compartment instead of trying to shove it under the seat in front of me. I had already put my book away. After reading for more than three hours in the terminal I was much more interested in enjoying the luxury that my seat in business class would provide. Besides, I imagined dinner would be served soon after takeoff. I struggled a bit as I tried to squash the bulky bag down so it would clear the overhead compartment.

"Here, let me help you with that," a voice behind me offered. A pair of hands effortlessly slid my bag into place.

"Thanks," I acknowledged as I took my seat by the window. The man who assisted me took the seat next to me.

"Don't mention it," he replied.

I noticed that he also was not carrying a book, laptop or any other device designed to keep a person isolated during travel. Maybe I could start a conversation with him, I thought to myself.

Conversation was a dying art, especially on airplanes. People were so over-committed in their daily lives, especially those who traveled for business. Many tended to use the few precious hours on an airplane away from cell phones, internet and e-mail to enjoy the indulgence of reading a good book, listening to favorite music or watching a movie.

I certainly understood those notions and was often tempted by them myself, but truth be told I have always been one of those annoying people who likes to talk to my neighbor. If not now, when will I ever get another chance to know this person randomly assigned to sit next to me for a few hours on our journey through life? The person might be someone I would never want to encounter again. Or my seatmate might just be a kindred spirit, maybe even someone who could become a fixture in my life for some time to come. One never knows, and the process of discovering a connection with another person this way always intrigued me.

"So you are returning to the U.S.?" I inquired as the gentleman settled into his seat.

He turned to me and smiled warmly. "Yes, I am. And you?"

"Yes, I was attending an international conference on global warming for my company," I replied.

"Well that sounds interesting. Tell me more about that. What do you do that allowed you to attend something like that?"

He responded with more than just politeness in his tone, indicating a willingness to engage in this tentative conversation I had started. I settled back in my own seat, glad to have lucked into such an amiable travel companion.

"I'm the marketing director for a company that manufactures equipment to help reduce carbon emissions from factories," I explained. "The vice president of marketing sends his team to events like this so we can hear the latest regulatory information being discussed, as well as make connections with people who might become future customers or strategic partners."

The man nodded. "Good idea. Did you make many contacts?"

"A few, not as many as I would have liked."

As I made the response, I was a little surprised by my own candor. Usually I don't share information that could seem even remotely negative. I don't like appearing as if I need help in any way, and I certainly never imply that I am not able to do my job. But there was something in this man's manner and soothing tone of voice that encouraged me to share what was truly on my mind. However, as soon as I realized that I had let my guard down momentarily, I immediately put it back up.

"So how about you?" I asked, diverting the conversation back to him in an attempt to focus attention away from myself. "You must be returning from a business trip, as well."

"I was hosting a summit for some CEO's in China. There's a group of manufacturing companies that are interested in implementing Six Sigma."

I pondered the phrase for a moment. "Six Sigma? I've heard of that. It's some sort of quality program, right?"

The man smiled. "That and a whole lot more."

At that moment the flight attendant stopped at our seats and gently interrupted us.

"I'm Sonya and I'll be serving you on this flight. Would you care for a beverage before we take off?" she asked.

"I'd love a diet soda," I piped up.

"How about some coffee?" the man next to me asked.

Sonya nodded. "I'll be right back with those."

I turned to my seatmate. "I'm Stephanie, by the way. Stephanie Grant."

"Nice to meet you, Stephanie. I'm Mike Harry," he replied, offering me his hand to shake.

The name sounded vaguely familiar. "Mike Harry," I repeated slowly. "I've heard of you. Where have I heard of you?"

"Probably in connection with Six Sigma."

"Yes," I did recall hearing that name somewhere in the distant past. "So tell me about Six Sigma, quality and all the rest of it."

"Six Sigma began in the mid-'80's at Motorola, a company known for making cell phones, radios and other communication equipment," Mike said.

Sonya returned with our beverages. Mike paused to thank her and take a sip of coffee before continuing.

"At the time, the company was having numerous quality problems with their pagers and their radios. Six Sigma was proposed to the CEO as a program that would significantly improve quality in all areas of the business by focusing on reducing defects and problems in the equipment being manufactured.

"Without getting into all the math and science of Six Sigma, let me put it in perspective for you so you can understand why it was so important. For the sake of discussion, sigma is simply a measure of goodness. More sigmas mean more goodness or the better things are. At the time, the quality standard that many manufacturing companies were striving for was four sigma, which is just a bit more than 99 percent good quality. We've all heard that 99 percent quality was 'good enough', but let me quote you some statistics about 99 percent quality. 99 percent quality would mean 12 newborns are given to the wrong parents daily; 2 million documents would be lost by the IRS each year; 5 million books with the wrong cover would be printed each year; and, there would be 315 misspelled words in the dictionary."

"Wow, that's incredible," I said in awe, with just a bit of panic in my voice. He was certainly sharing some startling numbers.

"In contrast Six Sigma is about 99.999 percent good quality, which is about 1800 times better. If you had a 600 page book, there would be only one misspelled word in a Six Sigma world versus 1800 in a four sigma world.

"Think of six sigma as world class quality. Four sigma is about average. Three sigma is below average and two sigma would be something you would not want to purchase or associate with in any way. Airline baggage handling, for example, is about four sigma, whereas airline passenger safety is greater than six sigma which means if you check your bags, you are about 1,800 times more likely to arrive safely at your destination than your luggage."

I chuckled at the humor, but realized the truth of the statement as Mike continued.

"Have you ever had the experience of buying some electronic product - a VCR, TV or a microwave oven for example - and you get it home, plug it in and it doesn't work?"

I nodded. "Oh, yes, too many times. It's extremely annoying."

"That was the dilemma that Motorola faced," Mike replied. "Large percentages of their products were being returned by consumers because they didn't work when they bought them. Six Sigma was thought to be the solution to this problem."

"But what did you do with Six Sigma? I mean, I get that the quality is better when you are operating at six sigma versus four sigma, but how do you get there?"

"Well, we learned there was a roadmap for success. We learned that we needed to define what we wanted to accomplish, study and analyze the current situation, understand the cause and effect between things so we could create the changes and improvements we wanted to see, and then we had to put something in place to make sure we stayed at the new level of quality we had achieved. It became a disciplined process for improvement. Six Sigma forced us to think differently about how to get the work done."

"Sounds simple enough, but I'll bet there was a lot more to it behind the scenes," I commented. "How successful was Motorola? Did they achieve Six Sigma quality?"

Mike shook his head. "Not across the board, but they were able to achieve and generally maintain greater than five sigma in many of their manufacturing areas. And not only did they achieve significant reduction in defects, but significant reduction of operating costs. Just think about all those defects that were never manufactured and

didn't have to be repaired. Motorola reported savings of about two billion dollars over a five year period."

"That's amazing," I remarked. "Didn't other companies besides Motorola pursue Six Sigma?"

Mike nodded. "I left Motorola in the mid-'90's to help other companies implement Six Sigma. One of them was General Electric."

"Yes, I think I've heard more about Six Sigma at GE than anywhere else," I said.

"The CEO of GE became very interested in the concept of Six Sigma because he believed it was a way to not only save the company money, but to generate substantial returns on his investments. At GE, Six Sigma evolved away from the focus being entirely on reducing defects and grew into a culture focused on cost reduction, cash generation and return on investment. This change in focus within Six Sigma became known as its second generation."

Mike paused as Sonya collected our cups and instructed us to prepare for departure. I was so engaged in conversation with Mike and fascinated by what he was sharing that I had barely noticed the plane fill up with people.

"Also at GE the concept of a Six Sigma Black Belt really became popular," Mike resumed.

That sounded interesting. "Black Belt? You mean like in martial arts?" I asked.

Mike smiled. "The concept is similar. Practitioners of martial arts become recognized as a Black Belt after they have spent much time training, increasing their skills and then demonstrating those skills in a series of tests. A Six Sigma Black Belt is recognized for their training and skills in the use of statistical methods and process engineering. Before they can be recognized as a Black Belt, Six Sigma practitioners must demonstrate their knowledge and ability to apply their skills to solve a real world industrial problem. At GE, Six Sigma Black Belts in training were assigned large projects that were meant to provide large returns to the company."

"What kind of money are we talking about here?"

"A typical project expectation was a return on investment of about \$300K."

"Wow, that's pretty significant. Did it work?"

"Consider the fact that after about two years into its Six Sigma implementation GE had a large number of Black Belts in training, many of whom successfully accomplished their projects and created returns that far exceeded the \$300K goal. GE

estimates that it saved over one billion dollars worldwide in the late '90's because of Six Sigma, and they were able to accomplish that a little faster than Motorola did."

"If GE created the second generation Six Sigma, is there a company that created the third generation?" I asked feeling a little pride in my ability to keep up in this conversation.

"Well, DuPont is a company that stands out in my mind as another example of superb leadership and integration of Six Sigma into the fabric of their culture. They also took Six Sigma to a new dimension beyond cost reduction, one that I would label third generation. They began a corporate-wide deployment in the late '90's. They did many of the things that had been successful in the other examples. They focused on defect reduction. They focused on cost savings. They were successful in their top down approach and enterprise-wide integration of Six Sigma into their corporate culture. But they took it one step further. They used Six Sigma as part of their up front marketing and sales. They used it to achieve top line growth and create shareholder value for the corporation. They realized that to keep creating success for the company, they couldn't focus primarily on today. They needed to be strategic in their thinking and planning for the future. Six Sigma was a key ingredient in creating that future."

"Makes sense to me. Six Sigma could easily be used in a marketing campaign to generate new business," I said, surprised at how much sense all of this was making.

I made a mental note to ask a few people about Six Sigma in my company when I returned to the office.

"So is Six Sigma primarily used in manufacturing companies?"

"No, Six Sigma has branched into several industries, including service and transactional industries such as banking and health care," Mike replied. "There's really no limit on where the principles and practices of Six Sigma can be applied. Six Sigma was recently declared one of the top ten most important management innovations of the last 150 years."

The doors of the airplane had closed. We were interrupted as the lead flight attendant started the routine speech about safety and aircraft features. I waited until that was completed before asking, "So you were talking to some new companies that want to implement Six Sigma?"

"Yes, there are still many places that want to use Six Sigma for improvement. I was there to help them understand the concepts and the big ideas, but I won't be the one doing the implementing this time."

"So you've moved on to something bigger and better?" I asked with a smile.
"What could be bigger than what you've just described?"

"A process that advances human achievement," Mike responded. "It's a concept I am calling The Great Discovery."

We sat back in our seats as the plane taxied down the runway and lifted into the sky. As our conversation lagged for just a moment, I knew I was in for an enlightening flight.

Chapter 3 - Overview of The Great Discovery

I had to wait until the plane took off before pursuing the conversation further.

"Tell me what you mean by a process that advances human achievement," I asked Mike.

"The Great Discovery is a process that advances human achievement by providing a pathway to breakthrough," he replied.

"Breakthrough?" I wasn't quite grasping the concept. "What does that mean?"

"Consider the first person to run a four minute mile, the first person to run the Boston Marathon in under 2.5 hours, the first figure skater to make a quadruple jump or the first person to weight lift 500 pounds. These are people who achieved breakthrough - doing something others thought impossible until it was achieved," Mike explained.

"So breakthrough is achieving something extraordinary, something beyond what we would normally expect to achieve?" I asked curiously.

Mike nodded. "Yes, exactly."

"How does that relate to the work you've done with Six Sigma?" I asked, trying to make the connection.

"I'm a pack rat by nature," Mike said with a smile. "I kept just about every piece of documentation I ever had about Six Sigma over the 20 plus years I worked with it. One of the CEO's I worked with once said to me, 'Mike, I'd give a lot to know how you think.' The statement made me consider just that. How did I approach these Six Sigma projects that made them successful? Was there a pattern to my way of thinking that led to success?

"To figure it out, I gathered a group of people who had worked closely with me during the years we implemented Six Sigma. These were people who were subject matter experts in their own right: process engineers, statistical folks and others who had witnessed the breakthrough results achieved with Six Sigma. I pulled out the tons of paperwork I had kept over the years and challenged the group to find a common pattern in the tools, approaches and thought process behind those successful Six Sigma projects.

"After spending weeks reviewing thousands of projects, a pattern indeed emerged. There were certain attributes present in the successful projects that were not present in the projects that failed. We had identified a proven pathway. I thought if this pathway could work for industrial projects, why wouldn't it work for other kinds of projects - projects that involved the realization of life dreams? The concept of The Great Discovery was born from that revelation. It is a time-tested approach that leads to breakthrough. I've witnessed it many times with Six Sigma, and now I'm seeing it unfold in individuals' personal lives, home lives and work lives."

"Wow, that's impressive," I said truthfully. "But if breakthrough is something extraordinary, how can this apply to ordinary folks, those of us without any special talents or skills?"

"The good news is The Great Discovery is for anybody, not just athletes who can win Olympic medals," Mike said with a smile. "Remember that I said four sigma was considered average for human driven processes? It turns out that the creation of errors on restaurant bills is about a four sigma process; but interestingly enough, so is the error rate on prescriptions written by doctors. Doctors receive a lot more formal education than restaurant servers, and yet they generally perform at about the same rate as other people without as much formal training. Special skills don't necessarily guarantee a person will achieve a world class level of performance. But fortunately the reverse is true, as well. It turns out you don't have to have any special abilities or skills to lead a six sigma life. The Great Discovery is about showing people how to achieve a world class life. It empowers ordinary people to achieve extraordinary results."

"Well I would agree that if you can make that happen, it is a great discovery," I commented. "How does it work?"

"Let me show you a conceptual model of The Great Discovery," Mike said. He paused for a moment to get out of his seat. After opening the overhead compartment and rummaging through his carry-on bag, he sat down again and handed me a piece of paper. I glanced over it as he began explaining. (See Appendix A — Exhibit 1)

"We begin by looking at the right side of the model," Mike said, gesturing to the sheet of paper. "Within this circle is a world class life, a six sigma life. Let me ask you, what you would consider a world class life?"

I pondered his question.

"I'm not sure," I responded slowly. "I don't think I've ever considered my life in that way before. I suppose a good life would be satisfying my desires, realizing my dreams, getting to do what I want to do without anyone interfering or telling me what I can't do."

Mike smiled. "You've just described a world class life as one that is aligned with your values, has many high quality choices available to you and is not unduly constrained."

"What do you mean by unduly constrained?" I asked.

"Let's suppose you're shopping for shoes," Mike said.

I smiled, as shoes were one of my weaknesses. This was an example to which I could definitely relate.

"There are many different types of shoes you could pick from," Mike continued. "Freedom of choice would allow you to pick from any of the possibilities equally. But let's add a constraint - your budget. Let's say you can only afford shoes that are \$100 or less. Now your choices are more limited based on this constraint. Further, let's assume that this is a smaller store and they don't stock every size. You are now even further constrained by the fact that you might not be able to get your first choice of shoes because the store doesn't carry your size. Your budget and the availability of size selection are undue constraints."

I nodded. "Okay, I get that. Now what's your definition of a value?"

"I define a value as something of utility, worth or importance. Values are not constant between people. What you value, someone else may not and vice versa. You alone need to define what is of value to you."

"Makes sense. So The Great Discovery shows me how to achieve a world class life where I live out my values and can experience freedom of choice with no undue constraints. How in the world does someone achieve that?"

"There are eight steps to the process. Let me discuss them in groups of two. In the first two steps, we Do-the-Dreaming. By that I mean we identify our values and the catalyst dream. Think of the catalyst dream as a dream free of the undue constraints that keep you from fully living your values. These first two steps are represented by the circle at the right on the diagram," Mike said, pointing to the appropriate spot.

"In the next two steps, we Dream-the-Doing. We envision the roadmap that will lead to the catalyst dream. We do that by defining milestones, which are nothing more than stepping stones to lead us through the proven path. We then separate the steps to our dream into those that are easy to accomplish – those we can just do – and those that are going to be more difficult. Again, looking at the diagram, you can see the milestones laid out as the pathway to the dream."

"Plan-the-Doing covers the next two steps. Here we identify the forces at work in our environment, and from that we can identify the actions we need to take in order to move toward the achievement of our dream. The final two steps involve Do-the-Plan. We need to complete the actions defined previously and then check our results to assure we are on track to fulfilling our dream. The figure in the diagram is a pictorial representation of these steps."

"All right, the concepts are starting to come together," I said, still studying the diagram. "So following these eight steps will lead me to my dream?"

It sure sounded great, but with my marketing background I had heard some pretty good claims that sounded wonderful yet had absolutely no substance. I seriously doubted that a program used to improve quality and productivity in corporations could be followed to help people make their personal dreams come true. Life just didn't work like that - usually just the opposite.

Lately it seemed like there were several people out there making these kinds of grandiose claims, but most had very little substance to back them up. And yet the eternal optimist in me really wanted to believe in something like this. I somehow felt it might just be the kind of thing to help me escape the doldrums I had been living in for some time now. I didn't know why I wasn't satisfied with my life the way it was; I just knew I wasn't. Could there really be a proven way to get from where I was to something that I could only dream about? The concepts Mike was talking about sounded logical and well thought out, complete with over 20 years of experience and results to back them up.

I was glad we had several hours left on our flight. I wanted to dig deeper into these ideas to satisfy my curiosity, or satiate my cynicism, whichever the case turned out to be.

"Let me take you through this at the 30,000 foot level, and then we can focus in more closely on each step," Mike suggested. "Let's talk about Fred."

"Fred?" I asked with a curious smile.

"Yes, Fred. The ordinary, commonplace everyman. To start, Fred needs to Do-the-Dreaming. Can you recall what that is?"

I nodded. "He needs to define his dream, his world class life."

"Yes, and he does that by identifying his core values. So let's say Fred's values are leadership, education, status and financial independence. With these values in mind, Fred has defined his life dream as becoming the vice president of operations of

the company where he works as a line supervisor. Do you think Fred has some constraints that will make it harder for him to achieve his dream?"

"Sure, you said he was a line supervisor," I responded, sizing up the fictitious Fred's situation. "He probably doesn't have the education needed to serve as vice president, and he certainly doesn't have the experience. He might not even have the right personality for it. Those sound like pretty big constraints to me."

"Well, Fred needs a way to remove those constraints so he can live his world class life," Mike said. "He must define the catalyst dream, which is Step Two of the process. So let's say Fred's catalyst dream is to receive the education and experience needed to become the vice president of operations. If Fred can gain the education and the right job experience, then he'll be ready to step into the position he wants."

"Assuming the company will give him the job," I pointed out.

"That's simply another constraint - one that can be overcome with hard work, dedication and a willingness to achieve. So now he's ready for the next two steps, which involve Dream-the-Doing," Mike said.

"What's that again?" I asked, trying to keep everything straight.

"In Step Three Fred must create a personal roadmap to get from where he is to where he wants to be. These are the conditions he must satisfy to claim his dream. For example, he'll need to upgrade his education. He'll need more experience on the job. He may need some leadership training. He might even need to take classes to improve his public speaking. In this step he needs to envision the roadmap that leads him to that catalyst, the steps that I refer to as milestones."

"Milestones are a common term used in project planning," I commented. "They represent fairly big events or achievements that move you along the path to completing the project."

Mike nodded. "And that's essentially what they are here, as well. I consider milestones as constraints going in and achievements coming out."

"More constraints?" I made a displeased face.

"Sure, but don't think of constraints in a negative way," Mike said. "In Fred's case, a milestone would be enrolling in the college degree program he needs to complete his education. We agreed that the proper education credentials are key to Fred's dream. Those credentials are a constraint until he enrolls, takes the classes and completes the program. After he's done, they become an accomplishment. The same can be said for any milestone along the path. Applying for the college degree program is

a constraint. He needs to apply and get accepted. Once he does, then it becomes an accomplishment.”

“So the proven path is made up of milestones that lead to the catalyst dream, which ultimately lead to living your values,” I summarized, trying to make sure I had it all straight.

“Yes, exactly,” Mike replied. “So that leads Fred to the next two steps, Plan-the-Doing.”

“How’s that different than Dream-the-Doing?” I asked, still attempting to keep the terminology clear in my mind.

“In Dream-the-Doing, time is spent envisioning the details needed to achieve the dream, visualizing the catalyst and the milestones needed to get there. In Plan-the-Doing, the steps involved actually create the plan that will take Fred from where he is to where he wants to be,” Mike said.

I nodded as he continued.

“Let me throw another concept at you. The first four steps of The Great Discovery involve innovation and the last four steps involve execution.”

“Could you explain that, please?”

“Dreaming and envisioning a future that doesn’t exist is innovation. If you think about it, everything you see around you began with a thought. An airplane didn’t exist until the Wright brothers and other inventors dreamed up the idea of creating a flying machine. Before they could even envision what it would be like, they had to have the idea - which was nothing more than a thought. Then they envisioned lots of different ways to achieve their goal. Again, all thought. The innovation that created the airplane started with thought. The innovation of anything in life starts with a thought, an idea, a dream. Hence Do-the-Dreaming, Dream-the-Doing. With me so far?”

I nodded, struck by the passion of Mike’s words and the power of dreams.

“But in order for the airplane to come into being, to become real, someone had to do something and that’s execution. So within The Great Discovery there is a time for innovation, dreaming, divergent thinking, creating new thoughts and ideas, envisioning and so on. But in order to make a dream a reality, you have to do something. The other half of The Great Discovery is devoted to execution. You actually have to do something to see results.”

I laughed. “Yes, I guess for something to get done, someone’s got to move.”

"Yes, now let's return to Fred and Plan-the-Doing. Until this point, Fred has just dreamed and envisioned the steps he needs to take. He has taken the time to write down his dream and vision so he doesn't lose them, but he has yet to take any action – he has yet to execute. Plan-the-Doing is made up of two steps: defining the forces that are at work for each milestone and the actions needed to turn the milestone into an accomplishment."

"Okay, I get the action plan but I'm struggling with this concept of forces," I admitted.

"For every major milestone on the path there are forces at work. Driving forces help move you forward, while restraining forces move you back. It's important to know which forces exist so you can take the appropriate actions."

"So give me an example of those for Fred," I said.

"Well, let's look at the milestone associated with applying for the degree program," Mike began. "Driving forces are going to include Fred's eagerness to start the program; his ability to gather the information he needs to apply, such as his transcripts and other records; and the fact that the application process is online, making it easier to submit the information. A restraining force could be Fred not having the time to complete his application by the deadline. In addition, perhaps his wife is not as eager for him to continue his education because she thinks it will take away from his time with her and their children. Her negative attitude could be a restraining force for him."

"Knowing the forces at play and whether they are driving or restraining forces help create the action plan. Fred will have an action to gather the information he needs to complete the application in a timely manner. He's going to have to set aside time to complete the process. He may have to discuss his dream with his wife to help her buy in and become supportive instead of negative. This is all part of Plan-the-Doing."

"I see how the forces affect the plan. I just never realized that you needed to consider things like that when making a plan," I said, relating especially to the concern of family obligations.

"Without understanding the underlying forces at work in your life, it may be impossible to achieve any kind of dream or strategic goal," Mike replied.

"Wow, that may be why so many people fail to achieve their dreams," I mused.

"It certainly plays a significant part," Mike agreed. "Now all that's left for Fred is to Do-the-Plan. Now he executes the actions required to move him forward on his path."

"So he completes his actions and then he achieves his goal?" I asked with caution. This sounded too easy.

"Perhaps. But for each action taken, Fred needs to check the results. Did he accomplish what he wanted with the action? If yes, then he can successfully move on to the next one. If not, then he may have to re-evaluate some things. For example, maybe the action wasn't appropriate to accomplish what he needed. Maybe he executed it poorly or less effectively than he could have. Maybe some unforeseen outside event came into play and created a different outcome. If at any time you find yourself off course from where you think you should be on your path, it's time to stop and re-evaluate so you can quickly get back on course."

"What if you have to re-plot your course?" I inquired. "Let's say Fred didn't get accepted to his degree program of choice."

I loved playing devil's advocate, determined to find the weak spot in this concept.

"That could certainly happen," Mike said, unfazed by my scenario. "Fred may have to revisit his catalyst dream and re-evaluate his milestones, forces and actions."

"What if a dream is simply impossible to achieve?" I asked rather smugly. "Like someone in his fifties who wants to be an astronaut or someone who wants to win the lottery? I mean it's not impossible to win the lottery, but it's highly improbable. And a 50 year old is probably not going to make it through flight training at NASA."

"Well, let me clarify something about dreams," Mike said. "There are life dreams and there are pipe dreams. Life dreams are based on putting you in alignment with your values. When you're clear about your values, your life dream allows you to freely live those values without constraints. That's a world class life. In Fred's case, his values revolved around financial stability, status and leadership. If, as you ask, he didn't get accepted into his degree program and after examination realizes he can't achieve his catalyst dream because of that, he can always create a new catalyst dream - one that still allows him to live out his values, but in a different way than he originally envisioned.

"For example, maybe he could change industries, or even create his own business to generate the financial stability, status and leadership he's seeking. In Fred's case, his catalyst dream might change as circumstances change, but his underlying value system remains constant. Therefore, his life dream is still to achieve a life that allows him to live in alignment with his values.

"The same could be true with your example of the astronaut wannabe. That man would have to understand his underlying value system. What is it about becoming an astronaut that aligns with his values? Becoming an astronaut may have been a catalyst

dream that would have to be re-evaluated, but the individual could still live his life dream in alignment with personal values through another scenario. A pipe dream, on the other hand, is nothing more than a fantasy, something people may toss about in their mind for amusement, but don't really believe will happen.

"Winning the lottery is probably the most popular pipe dream out there. I always ask people who tell me they want to win the lottery what they would do after winning all that money. To me, winning the lottery means a big constraint has been removed in their life - the constraint of monetary restriction. Without having to worry about financial stability, the individual is now less constrained to pursue his or her values. So the dream isn't about winning the lottery in this case, it's more about removing a constraint standing in the way of the life dream. If you're not sure what you'd do after winning the lottery, then you haven't really defined your life dream."

"I'm saying there is no such thing as an impossible life dream if you are clear about your values. The Great Discovery is about getting your current position to your life dream by bringing all of these concepts together in a systematic and disciplined manner."

"Pardon me," a voice said.

Just as I had scarcely noticed when the plane filled with travelers before takeoff, I had remained all but oblivious to our fellow passengers thanks to the absorbing conversation I was having with Mike.

Looking around the cabin, Mike and I realized the voice came from a gentleman sitting across the aisle.

"I've been shamelessly eavesdropping on your conversation for some time now," he said. "My name is Richard Morgan."

"Hi, Richard. Mike Harry," Mike said with the same graciousness he extended to me when we began our conversation.

I waved my hand. "Hi, I'm Stephanie."

Richard acknowledged our introductions and said, "I used to work for Allied Signal. In fact, I was in the Black Belt program. I saw firsthand how Six Sigma changed the way we worked at Allied."

Mike replied he was glad the program had been such a success for the company.

"It changed the way we thought about how to get the work done," Richard continued. "So I'm a believer in that process. I can't help but be fascinated by this Great Discovery concept. As you described it, I can see the underpinnings of Six Sigma in the way the process unfolds."

"Stephanie, for your benefit, the whole idea of the forces at play was a critical one in Six Sigma. At Allied Signal, we used analysis to help us understand the forces that allowed us to maximize positive effects and minimize negative. The idea of checking the results as you go and making adjustments to the plan comes directly from the Six Sigma process. I just never thought that the ideas of Six Sigma could apply to one's own life. That's a fascinating twist on it.

"I have a 16-year-old son trying to figure out what he wants to do with his life. His mother and I divorced two years ago and I don't get to be with him as much as I would like. He's a good kid, but he's starting to hang out with the type of kids who could lead him astray. I think if he could define his life dream in terms of his values, he would make the choices that will lead him to fulfilling that dream. I think I'm hearing The Great Discovery could lead him to that."

"Absolutely," Mike answered. "The Great Discovery is for your personal life, your home life and your work life."

"Can you tell me what you mean by each of those?" Richard asked.

I, too, was curious about the differences.

"Personal life dreams are about you as an individual," Mike responded. "What do you want to achieve in your life? We all have personal life dreams that reflect our individual value systems and the proven path would be constructed to help you overcome the constraints that keep you from living in alignment with those values. A home life dream consists of the values you hold as part of a family unit. Stephanie, your home life dream would include the values you and your husband hold together and the dream you have for your family to live out those values. Richard, the same is true for you and your son. He may not physically live with you, but together you could have a home life dream that reflects your mutual values and relationship as father and son."

"That's exactly what my fiancé and I need," a fourth voice joined in.

Looking up we realized that our flight attendant, Sonya, was the source.

"Sorry, I was listening in as well," she said with a smile. "My fiancé and I are planning to get married next year. We have dreams for our life together, but I think they fall more into what you referred to as pipe dreams. I don't think we have any substance to our dreams. But we could, and probably should, develop some more meaningful dreams. It sounds like we might even be able to achieve them through the system you've been talking about."

"Definitely," Mike agreed. "It's tremendously satisfying to work on achieving a home life dream with the important people in your life."

"What about the work life dream?" Richard asked.

"In that case, an organization could create a life dream that reflects the organization's values," Mike said. "The Great Discovery is used to not only help the organization achieve its dream, but to align its employees to the organization's values."

"Okay, I don't get that one," I interjected.

"Well, let's go back to Motorola," Mike said. "The company recognized that quality was an issue. They had a core value of providing customer satisfaction and knew that excessive defects degraded that value. Six Sigma became the catalyst dream for Motorola. By achieving Six Sigma quality, they could realize the corporate value of customer satisfaction more fully and without constraint. In the early days of Six Sigma, Motorola mounted a corporate-wide training program. Every employee was exposed to some level of the concepts of Six Sigma. That gave everyone in the corporation a common language to use when discussing Six Sigma, as well as a common framework for making improvements. Everyone was on the lookout for where defects occurred so they could be reduced or eliminated. Employees were also trained in customer satisfaction so everyone understood the corporate value and looked for ways to increase it. By having the dream of Six Sigma at the corporate level and training everyone in the concepts, the entire organization was aligned with the core values of the company. The Great Discovery can be used by any company looking to achieve a work life dream that aligns with corporate values, creating a roadmap for success that every employee can adopt."

"Oh my goodness!" Richard suddenly exclaimed.

I could tell he had just had an epiphany, and I couldn't help but smile at his elation.

"The Great Discovery would help my new company," he rushed on. "When I left Allied Signal I went to work for a semiconductor company. Just recently they decided to spin off a portion of that business and merge it with a portion of another company to create a start-up business in a new market. I was asked by my company to lead that merger. I'm now faced with the task of bringing together two operations from different companies with different cultures and different values, as well as creating the start-up business in a new market. I took the job as a challenge. If it's successful, it will be amazing for everyone involved. If it fails, we go down in flames. It's very risky. I think we could use something like The Great Discovery to help identify corporate values for this new entity, something that takes the best of the two organizations to create an environment that aligns all employees around that common vision."

"The Great Discovery would be perfect for that," Mike agreed.

Sonya spoke up. "I would love to stand here and listen to this throughout the flight, but unfortunately I have some work to do. If you don't mind, I'll pop in and out when I can."

"Of course," Mike replied.

Richard took a deep breath. "Mike, would you be willing to help me get started on this? I know you just gave Stephanie an overview of The Great Discovery using Fred as your example, but could we walk through it with a real life example?"

He looked over at me. "Stephanie, how about it? Would you like to try this out for your own life? See how The Great Discovery could help you live your life dream?"

I paused for a moment to reflect on everything. I was unsure about my feelings. Sure, it all sounded great. Most things like this do until reality sets in. Usually the people who come up with this stuff never face the challenges and constraints, to use Mike's words, the rest of us face in our everyday lives. So while the model sounds like it will fix everything in your life, it often falls extremely short.

This could be just another one of those great ideas that doesn't really work when all is said and done, I thought to myself. My cynical side was quick to judge. Yet my hopeful side really wanted to believe this could be possible. I wasn't even sure I knew what my life dream was at the moment, at least as far as Mike had defined the concept. Whatever it was, I wasn't sure I wanted to talk about it in front of two strangers.

But if there was even the smallest chance that I could live my life dream, it was worth at least some consideration. I decided to play along.

"I'm in," I said, turning to Mike. "Will you help us?"

"Okay," Mike nodded. "Let's put The Great Discovery to work for both of you."

Chapter 4 - Clarify Core Values

It took a while to get organized. Sonya came through the cabin and served dinner. Rather than try to start our discussion while we each had food trays, we waited until we had eaten and everything had been cleared away. After dinner, while the rest of the passengers enjoyed a movie, Mike, Richard and I got to work.

Mike gave us some worksheets to use to document our progress. With them in front of us, we were ready to follow Mike on this journey of discovery. I still had mixed feelings. I was very interested to see where Mike would lead us, but was afraid when it was over I would be disappointed. I tried my best to put my disbelief and cynicism to rest so I could give this the attention and focus I believed it needed. I was going to do my utmost to take the process seriously and consider all that Mike had to say with an open mind. I vowed to be willing, even if somewhat reluctant, to explore the idea that my life dream, whatever it turned out to be, could be manifested.

"What you are about to do is what I call a Discovery Project," Mike said when we were ready. "There are eight major steps. The worksheets I gave you will help you organize your thoughts and ideas as we move through the steps. We'll talk through the steps here, but keep in mind that if you're serious about creating breakthrough in your life, you will have to do more than just listen and take notes here today. You'll need to take what we do into your world and make it happen. Are you ready to begin?"

He looked at both of us, We nodded and he began.

"We'll start our journey by identifying and clarifying our core values. If you recall, I define values as something of worth, utility or importance. So take some time and write down your values."

I bit the cap of my pen as I considered this. The truth was I wasn't entirely sure what my values were. My husband and children were important to me. I guess that would qualify as a value. I valued my good health. I valued my spirituality. Of lesser importance but still on my list was my lifestyle. I thought that Nathan and I had made a good life for ourselves and our girls. We lived in a nice house. We each drove a nice car. We often enjoyed evenings out at nice restaurants. We took fun vacations. All of this was somewhat important to me. I just wasn't sure these were what Mike meant by core values.

I glanced up and saw Richard totally engrossed in what he was writing. I bent my head back down, trying to dig deeper. I valued our extended family. My parents lived in New England, so I didn't get to see them much, but I talked to them on the phone a lot. They were in good health. I had a sister who lived in Atlanta. She and I were pretty close growing up and we stayed in touch probably more than most siblings. Nathan's parents lived fairly close by and spent a lot of time with us and the girls. I sighed. This was not getting me anywhere.

"Richard, you seem to have put some thought into this. Can you tell us what you have written down?" Mike's voice pierced through my mental wanderings.

"I'm looking at this for my new company," Richard said. "This new venture is a mixture of the semiconductor company I worked for and another manufacturing company who was somewhat of a supplier to us, but actually they really complemented our abilities. The powers that be at both companies decided to create this spin-off company to pursue a new market with a new product. The parent companies will retain some of the stock of the new company, but for the most part they will be hands-off. The merging of the two enterprises will rely on me and my counterpart from the other company to bring the team together. I will serve as the chief executive officer, while my counterpart will be the chief operating officer. I will be the senior manager, but he will be my right hand man. Together we are creating a staff made up of high-potential employees from both groups. Now that I've set the stage of what we're trying to achieve, let me get back to what I wrote down here."

"For the new company - we don't even have an official name for it yet - we still face the challenge of bringing together two different corporate cultures. We're talking about people who have not worked together before launching a new product in a new market space with a new customer. Lots of challenges. As CEO, I'm going to speak for the team. I've defined our values as cash flow, profitability, customer satisfaction and employee alignment with our mission. Does that sound like the kinds of values you're talking about?"

"If those items are of worth, utility or importance to your organization, then those would be the values of this new company," Mike stated. "How about your personal values, Richard? What are those?"

Richard looked a little uncomfortable.

"I didn't write those down," Richard said. "Truthfully, I'm not really sure what they are."

Good, I thought to myself. I wasn't the only one struggling with this. But my turn was coming.

"Well, let's see what Stephanie wrote and then we'll get back to your list, Richard," Mike said.

"I didn't do much better," I confessed. "I mean, my family is very important to me and I value them, but I don't think that's what you meant."

"Family is very often a value that people list, so there's nothing wrong with that," Mike explained. "But what I'm looking for is your personal value system. What are the things that matter most to you? What qualities are most important to you that you want to enjoy every day of your life? I'm sure you'd both agree that you'd like your children to be happy, healthy and growing into their own sense of self. That's a value. What else is there?"

"Can you give us an example of the kinds of values you mean?" Richard suggested.

"Sure, let's talk hypothetically about people who are living their values already," Mike responded. "Consider an artist who paints. This artist's values may be to create, inspire, lead, be honest and have integrity. His life aligns with his values because he creates art; that's his job. His artwork inspires some people who appreciate what he has done. Maybe he lectures on his art, teaches students or talks with people who appreciate his art. In this way he gets to inspire. He leads by creating art that provokes new thoughts or new ways of looking at the world because of his art. If he teaches, he leads his students through his own abilities by providing new ideas for them to consider. Finally, he enjoys honesty and having integrity so he can express who he is through his art honestly and not have to conform to what someone else believes he should create. He can sell his art at a fair price, preserving his integrity. He can donate art for causes he believes in. This is a person who is living his life dream, having freedom of choice without undue constraints because he knows his values and his day-to-day existence are aligned with expressing those values. Keep in mind that he does work; he may not be independently wealthy, but that's not a constraint for him because he still gets to live his values every day."

"So in this example, values are attributes or qualities that are enjoyable and feel good to this individual." I said, struggling a bit to find the words to convey what I felt based on Mike's example.

"Yes, that's right," Mike concurred. "Let's talk through another example to help the idea sink in. Let's consider a woman who values taking risks, competing, seeing the big picture, integrity and accomplishing things. This is someone who would be running a company. As CEO, she would get to live in alignment with her value set every day. A good CEO is not afraid of taking risks and does so when the right opportunities come along. As CEO, this woman would enjoy the competition she faces from other

companies in her market space. She would not be threatened by it, but rather use her love of competition to help grow her company and expand to other markets. A good CEO is strategic and can see where she wants to take her company over the next year, five years or even ten years. Someone who can see and appreciate the big picture would do this well. Because she values integrity, her business practices would be ethical and she could create that ethical frame of mind within her company. And finally, because she loves to accomplish things, she will see the goals and objectives she sets for herself and her team through to the end. This is someone who is working at a job she loves because the job embraces everything she values.”

Mike paused to see if we were following him and asked if we had any questions. Since neither of us spoke, he went on.

“Okay, one more. Take someone who values teaching or coaching, someone who likes to serve others, someone who values listening, someone who loves to motivate. What kind of profession would a person with these values be good at and enjoy doing?”

“Teacher,” I said immediately.

“Social worker,” Richard responded.

Mike nodded. “Either profession would be a good fit for someone with these kinds of values. Now you know that neither teaching nor social work usually comes with a high salary. Yet I would venture to say that would be unimportant to someone who had these kinds of values. The ability to serve others, to listen, maybe to teach or coach someone and have that person become motivated to do something positive would be very rewarding for this type of person. Someone able to do this type of work that expresses these values would be living his or her life dream.”

“I hope you see by these examples there are many different sorts of things that people value,” Mike continued. “The life dream is simply the freedom to live those values every day without constraints. So with that in mind, go back to your list of values. What are the things that excite you, interest you, the things you deeply care about doing in this world? That’s the start of your list of values.”

I turned to look out the window, staring blankly into the twilight. What excited me? What were the things I would want to do if I had complete freedom of choice over every aspect of my life? I liked coming up with new ideas. I think that was one of the reasons I enjoyed marketing and public relations. There was a creative element to the job that I found satisfying. But if I was honest with myself, I knew I really wanted to create on a totally different level. My secret dream had always been to become a writer. I now realized that the reason why I loved the idea of writing was that I wanted to create new

places, new people and new experiences for myself and others to enjoy. I wrote down “Creating New Ideas” on my worksheet. What else?

The phrase “Inspiring Others” came into my mind at that point. I spent a moment trying to figure out what that meant and how it felt. Would I want to inspire people with my own words and ideas? I felt the tiniest of shivers at the base of my neck, a little spark of excitement. Yes, that idea felt good. I wrote down “inspire.”

I really enjoy listening to people and their stories. I have always believed that everyone has an interesting story to tell if they are willing to share it. Would I want to spend a large portion of my time listening to people tell their stories, or be a person they could come to for empathy, support and validation? That felt good, as well. I added “Listening to Others” and “Empathizing with People” to my list.

Thrilled that I had four ideas on my list motivated me to keep looking inside for more. I liked the feelings I was getting as I thought about these ideas. They were delightful and exciting. These ideas wrapped themselves around me, and I felt like I had come to a place that was welcoming and encouraging and completely accepting. What else could I add to this list to increase these good feelings? I enjoyed taking different concepts and ideas and integrating them to create a new idea or catch phrase. I sometimes did this for my job when we needed a new slogan or catch phrase to market a new product or idea to our customers, or to roll out a new program to the employees. This wasn’t creating something new, but rather integrating existing elements to form something different. I wasn’t exactly sure how this fit into my list, but I wrote down “Integrating Ideas” anyway. I glanced at my completed worksheet and was happy with it I looked up and saw Sonya on her way back to our area.

“Would you care for anything else to drink?” she asked.

“I’d love a bottle of water,” I replied.

All this intense thinking made me thirsty. When she brought the drinks back a few minutes later, Mike briefly explained to her what we were doing.

“That’s something I’m going to have to give some thought,” Sonya declared. “I’ve never done this kind of work before. I probably could come up with a list of values for myself, but I’d be really interested to hear my fiancé’s values as well. They don’t have to be the same by any means, but they do have to complement each other or else we’ll have to find some way to reconcile those that don’t mesh.”

“It would be extremely valuable for you to have that discussion with him sometime in the near future,” Mike said. “If a person has to deny his or her values in order to have a relationship with someone else, that person will eventually grow resentful and the

relationship will sour. Better to have a thorough understanding of each other's values before you get married. There are most likely ways you can work together to help each other achieve your personal life dreams and create the dream you want to achieve as a couple and family unit."

Sonya thanked Mike for the advice and wished us luck as she wheeled the beverage cart away.

Mike turned to Richard. "Have you got your list completed?"

Richard laughed. "Yes, I think I do. There is nothing on my list that's a surprise, but what did surprise me were the feelings I experienced as I thought through this. It was really fun."

"Of course it's fun." Mike agreed. "Your values bring you joy and peace and happiness. Thinking about them should be an enjoyable experience."

"I wrote down leadership, motivation, influence, envisioning and balance," Richard said. "I really enjoy being a leader. Oddly enough, I recognized that when I went through the Black Belt training. Some of the best times I had were when I was leading a project, which prepared me for management. I found that I really enjoyed leading a group of people, challenging them to achieve something that was a reach-out goal, helping individuals become better employees. All of these experiences led me to the position I just stepped into.

"I'm going to need those qualities to be successful in this new job, and since it's a value, I'm really going to enjoy it. Motivation, influence and envisioning are somewhat related to leadership in that they are the particular aspects of leadership I really enjoy. I love motivating and influencing people in a positive way. It's rewarding to see someone achieve something and know that I had a small part of that through my words or my example. Not long ago I started a volunteer project with Junior Achievement. I realize now it's something I was drawn to because of these values. I get tremendous satisfaction out of working with young people who are so full of excitement and initiative and want to achieve something big for themselves. I hope I can do more with that, even when this job becomes more demanding.

"And that leads me to the last word I wrote, which is balance. I've found that I can't be a workaholic. The periods in my life when I did that, were the most depressing and saddest times I can remember. In many ways, that's how I ended up in divorce court. Whenever I slow down and take time for myself and for the people I love away from the job, I become much more relaxed and oddly enough more productive when I go back to work. In verbalizing that, I realize that the value is a balance between work and home. I

need to remember that every day as I move into this new position. I also need to make the time to be there for my son as he starts his transition into adulthood.”

“Richard, that’s a really honest assessment of your values,” Mike commented. “What I particularly like about what you’ve said is that you recognize how these values have played a part in some of your decisions in life already, both the good and the not so good decisions. Our values are part of us and how we relate to the world. As you discovered, the more you align with your values, the better you feel. Values provide the texture to the fabric of your life. Getting to live your values every day is indeed a world class life. So with your personal list of values and the values you’ve described for the new company, you can see where they match and where there are some gaps. I encourage you to have this conversation with the other senior manager and your leadership team. Guide them through this exercise. As a group, discuss the values you want for this new venture. You can certainly start with the list you’ve created. Imagine if you can arrive at a commonly held set of values for the new company that your entire leadership team embraces, and further that each of them knows their personal values and how that relates to what the company is trying to achieve. Do you think that will give a competitive advantage right from the start?”

Richard nodded vigorously. “Completely. It would be an amazing start to our venture. In fact, it will be the first thing I do when I get back to the office on Monday. I think I’m going to schedule a leadership team meeting, perhaps even offsite somewhere, so we can start this process and give it the attention it deserves.”

Mike turned to me and I knew my time had come. I felt uncomfortable revealing these precious ideas that had just come to me. While I thoroughly enjoyed the feelings I was experiencing as I thought through my values list, I felt unsure and slightly exposed at the idea of voicing them out loud. What if Mike or Richard laughed at or ridiculed what I had come up with? These ideas were the shards of my most precious dreams, the fragments of my soul that I’m not sure I had ever shared with anyone, not even Nathan or my parents. They were like my children; they were the most honest part of me and if I shared them and they were rejected in any way, it would be the same as a complete rejection of who I was as a person.

I took a deep breath. When I finally spoke I was surprised to find my voice small and hesitant.

“This is really hard for me.”

As I talked, I looked directly at Mike who smiled with an understanding that helped alleviate some of my concern.

“If you’d rather not share your list, that’s okay,” he assured me.

I took a second deep breath.

"No, I think I can do this."

I looked down at my list, not that I needed to be reminded of what I had written. I just didn't want to look anyone in the eye as I revealed this most intimate part of myself.

"I wrote down create, inspire, listen, empathize and integrate." I paused briefly, not quite ready to verbalize my explanations for each of these choices.

"Beautiful," I heard Mike say softly.

That single word spoken in that way, assuring me that anything that was to follow would be perfectly accepted, gave me the encouragement I needed to go on.

"I realize that I love creating new ideas, which is probably why I went into marketing in the first place. I also like taking various pieces of different ideas and packages and integrating them in new ways to create something new or different. I realized that some of the best times I've had in my career were assignments to create new slogans or come up with new twists on existing marketing campaigns. I also enjoy listening to people. In this modern world with so much technology to communicate, I find that the art of conversation is dying. People don't talk to each other any more. They text and Twitter and do all sorts of things to communicate with each other, but they don't really ever talk to each other. I enjoy listening to other people and being a person they know they can talk to. I almost always empathize with whatever is going on in their lives.

"This exercise has shown me that one of the things I really want to do more of is to listen to many different people whenever I can so they can feel heard and know that someone truly gets them. That was somewhat surprising to me. The other surprise was that I want to inspire. I guess I hadn't realized how important it was to me to inspire people in some way, either through my words or with some new idea I come up with. I kind of want to look through the work I've done over the past few years and see where that has played a role. If it has, it was unconscious and I want to make it more conscious."

"That's amazing," Richard said. "What a great set of values. I have no doubt you possess the talent to bring those to life for yourself."

I heard honest and deep admiration in his voice.

"You've both done really good work on this," Mike said. "I've found this is one of the hardest steps for people to take, not because they don't know what their values are, but because they may have forgotten them in the course of living daily life. We get caught up in our routines and can easily put aside our dreams for the future because we need

to get through today. Living that way means the future is something that never manifests for us in the way we'd like it to because we have not taken the time today to do the work to create the life we dream about."

"Yes, that's exactly right," I exclaimed. "I'm guilty of not really ever taking the time to think about my dreams and hopes for the future except in the vaguest way. I mean, I hope my children grow up happy and healthy. I want my marriage to be fulfilling. I want to retire some day with my husband so we can do more of the things we don't get to do now. But all of that is really vague and not clearly defined. This is the first time I have ever been specific about what I really love about my life and what I would like to have more of."

"Ditto," Richard chimed in. "It surprised me how good it felt to do this. Everything I came up with I knew but I hadn't acknowledged in a long time, if ever. In addition to having this conversation with my team, I also can't wait to have this conversation with my son. I think I can help him identify his values, which will be a great discovery for both of us. I think it will get him right back on track, or maybe even on a better track than he currently envisions."

"One of the most powerful things you can do with this is bring other people on board with your values and the catalyst dream that we'll talk about soon," Mike said. "You will be quite surprised to learn that there are a lot of people out there who are willing to help you accomplish your dream."

"Why do you say that?" I asked. "I'm not sure I'd agree with that."

It had always been my experience that many people tried to rain on my parade whenever I got excited about something. That was one of the reasons why I was so reluctant to share my values list. I was concerned about the potential ridicule or worse than that, hearing that what I hoped to achieve couldn't be done.

Mike turned to me. "Do you think if you shared the list of values you just created with your husband that he would be unwilling to help you achieve your dreams?"

"Well, no. He'd be supportive," I admitted.

"Would he be willing to do this work with you so that you could create a dream for your life together as a couple and as parents? Would he be willing to identify his own personal values so that he could work on achieving his own life dream as you pursue yours?"

"I don't know for sure," I replied honestly. "He's an engineer. No offense, because I realize both of you have engineering backgrounds, but I think he might see this as touchy-feely and not scientific. He might be uncomfortable with some of it."

"Well, first it's really not touchy-feely," Mike laughed. "Remember, the whole concept is based on proven scientific principles that came from the implementation of Six Sigma. But that aside, once someone really understands what The Great Discovery is about, they are usually more willing to try it and see where it takes them. After all, an hour ago you weren't entirely willing to give it a try yourself. Am I correct?"

I felt myself blushing. "Yes, you caught me there. I guess maybe I'm underestimating Nathan. But even if he comes along, you said look for other people to help, as well. How do you do that?"

"Well, it's like everything else in life. WIIFM. Do you know what that stands for?"

"What's in it for me?" Richard laughed.

"Exactly," Mike replied. "In Richard's case, his leadership team has a lot in it for them as far the success of the company goes. He will most likely have no problem convincing most of them to do this work on a personal level, as well, because they will understand that the achievement of personal and work life dreams can only lead to a higher quality of life for them. They will pull together to create the success they need to create for the company and for themselves. In Sonya's case, she and her fiancé have a vested interest in assuring that they can find a dream together as a couple, which allows them to grow as individuals within the relationship achieving their personal life dreams. Same with you and your husband, Stephanie."

"In each of these cases, there is something in it for the other person. There are more people out there who will benefit from you and anyone else who wants to do this work of achieving life dreams. Maybe through your core values of inspiration and listening, you will encourage someone else to achieve their life dream. By doing so, you've created a dynamic whereby another person now cares deeply about you and wants you to succeed in your pursuits. Now you've got someone who will help you achieve your dream, just as you had a hand in helping that person achieve theirs."

"Okay, I can see that as a possibility," I acknowledged. "I just can't easily make a list of people right now who would fall into that category."

"Fair enough. As we progress that may change," Mike replied. "All right, let's take a quick break, and then we'll talk about the catalyst you need to get moving toward your life dream."

Chapter 5 – Determine Catalyst Dream

Thirty minutes later we were just about ready to begin the next step of our journey. I was glad for the few minutes of solitude the break provided. Clarifying my values was difficult, but definitely rewarding. Like Richard, I wasn't surprised with the list I had come up with, but I was surprised by my feelings. I didn't expect to feel the sheer delight that went through me as I briefly imagined what it would mean to embrace those values every day in my life. How had I forgotten that about the things I truly love? Do most people lose touch with that part of themselves due to the demands of daily life - making a home, paying the bills and all the other things that distract us from our dreams?

I briefly wondered what it would feel like if, instead of worrying about the future, I was dreaming about it and actively working to make that dream a reality. It would probably feel really good. I just didn't see yet how I could make it happen. I mean, a dream is a pretty nebulous thing. For something to come of all this, it seemed to me that the dream needed more substance. Up to this point, all I had really done was identify a few words on a piece of paper. Even though the feelings the words evoked were great, I had no idea how to take that list and do something with it that would amount to living a dream.

All of a sudden I felt like a wave of cold water had hit me. Were we being led down the primrose path? I was getting too invested in this and so far had only a small list of vague ideas to show for it. I watched as Mike took his seat and prepared to take us through the next step. Please don't disappoint me, I said in silent appeal.

"All right, let's move to Step Two. Turn to the next worksheet," Mike said briskly.

"So you've identified your values. That's one part of the life dream. The other part you need is the power to live out those values with freedom of choice. But before we can understand what that is, let's take a moment and finish Do-the-Dreaming – let's establish a catalyst dream. You've both talked about your values and put some context around them, meaning that you've begun to explore the possibilities of how you might live in alignment with those values. It's time to get more details into this dream.

"Imagine, if you will, that you have arrived at your life dream. There are no constraints to deal with and you get to do any activity you want that expresses your values. What would you be doing? How would you be spending your time? Would you be working? If so, what would the job be? If you're not working, what are you doing? Take as much time as you need and dream about this life that allows you to live your values with

complete freedom of choice. One word of caution. I've just given you permission to dream about the life you would love to be living. My advice is dream big, dream large, dream wide. In my experience, people don't dream big enough."

"Why do you say that?" Richard asked curiously.

Mike shook his head. "There are lots of reasons. Fear of failure is one. Interestingly enough, fear of success is also at the top of that list. But here's one thing I do know: if you don't dream big, you won't get the world class life I've been talking about. Let me refer back to all those companies that implemented Six Sigma. By striving to achieve six sigma performance as their corporate dream, they opened up the possibility that perhaps they could achieve it. Even if they didn't achieve it, they reached far greater results than they ever would have plugging along day to day striving for four sigma performance. Four sigma was very achievable and required nothing extraordinary to obtain other than some basic problem solving skills. Six Sigma required a whole new way of thinking.

"So back to your dreams. If you want a four sigma life, there's not much you have to do. In fact, you may already be there. But if you want a six sigma life, a world class life with freedom of choice to live out your values, there's a lot that needs to be done, starting with how you think about it. So set your dream really high. At this point don't worry about how you are going to get there. Just Do-the-Dreaming."

I leaned my head back and closed my eyes. Here we go, I thought. What does that dream look like for me? Would I work if I had complete freedom of choice? Well, no. Why would I? I would have all the money I needed to survive without working. Nathan wouldn't have to work either. We could spend all our time together. We could take the girls and travel all over the world. Of course, they would have to go to school somewhere. Although I suppose we could home school them. Certainly traveling all over the world would be educational. I sighed and tried to envision what this life would look and feel like.

I imagined myself sitting at a sidewalk café in Paris. Nathan had taken the girls to see the Eiffel Tower and I was enjoying a croissant and a cup of coffee. I watched people stroll up and down the boulevard. Perhaps I would talk to someone, find out about their life. Or maybe I'd have a notebook with me, and I'd be writing a story about our travel experiences. My eyes shot open as I was struck by a thought. Of course, I'd be doing something related to the list of words I had written an hour earlier. I looked at my list again: create, integrate, listen, empathize, inspire. How would these values show up in my life if I got to choose how to spend my time?

It came to me in a flash. Scrap the travel and everything I had just pictured. That would be a grand vacation, one we could easily afford. But the real dream would be

becoming a writer. That was the secret dream I had held my entire life. I would write true stories about real people either for adults or children, well maybe teenagers, or both. My research would allow me to meet and talk with people, listen to them, understand their stories and empathize with their journey through life. I would integrate the thoughts and ideas that came from many people into the final product I created. My work would be an inspiration to others. Then more people would tell me their stories because they were inspired by what I had already done.

Yes, that felt right. My dream was to be an author, which would allow me to live my values. Sure, I'd be working, but it would be on my terms. I didn't mind the idea of having a deadline from a publisher. That was not only reasonable but would give me a goal to achieve. Yet I wasn't going to allow anyone to tell me what I could or could not write. This was my dream and it felt good.

Well, that's nice, a taunting little voice inside my head said. But come on, how is this possible? Do you know how hard it is to become a published author? You need an agent and those are hard to come by. What makes you think you are gifted enough, special enough or have such a unique idea that someone would take you seriously as an author? Come on, get real.

I shuddered and instantly felt my dream float away. I hated those thoughts, but they were right on. It was all well and good to dream big, but what did it matter if it was unachievable? How could I possibly believe for even one minute that I could become a published author? That was just as silly as the dreams of millions of people who wanted to become movie stars. It sure feels good, but it just doesn't happen for most of us. I sighed, put the cap on my pen and turned to look out the window into the blackness of the night sky. I wasn't ready to share my disappointment in this process with either Mike or Richard.

"There's a problem," I heard Mike say quietly.

I sighed and restrained a groan.

"Yes," I said honestly. "I'm having a hard time with this. I had no problem coming up with a big, big dream. But, let's face it, it's not realistic. There's no way I can achieve it."

"That's absolutely correct if you've made up your mind before you even begin," Mike said simply.

"But I don't see how I can think otherwise," I protested.

His calm acceptance of my defeat over this angered me more than if he had tried to cajole me to see his point of view. "I can certainly dream about a fabulous life that lets me live my values; but, if there's no realistic way to get there, then what's the point of

doing this? All I'm doing to myself is creating the opportunity to be extremely disappointed when it doesn't happen."

"I'm not arguing with you, Stephanie. I can see that you've made up your mind and that's perfectly fine."

Again, he spoke quietly. To his credit, I think he was trying to keep our side of the conversation from being overheard.

"I'm going to work with Richard now but if there's anything I can help you with, just ask."

Mike leaned across the aisle and spoke softly to Richard, as well. Richard, however, seemed to be having no problem with this. As I turned back to the window and tried to get lost in my own world, I couldn't help but hear their conversation.

"For the company, I am dreaming really big," Richard said. "I want us to be profitable by the end of the first year and forever after that. I want a corporate culture of teamwork and empowerment. I want people to feel comfortable trying out new ideas and suggesting new ventures, but I want it to be okay if someone fails so people feel comfortable taking risks. I want our customers to love us so much that they will propose new products and ideas to us, or even ask us to produce something that they currently buy from someone else."

"That's quite a list," Mike commented.

"I have no idea how to do all that," Richard confessed.

"If you did, you would have already set the plans in motion and it would be on its way," Mike replied matter-of-factly.

I listened carefully at this point because Richard seemed to have no problem with the fact that his dream was probably just as unachievable as mine.

"Good work. Did you also consider your personal life dream, as well?" Mike asked him.

There was no immediate answer, so I turned my head and saw Richard considering his words. When he finally spoke, it was very slowly as if he was testing each word before it left his mouth.

"Yes and no. I mean, I learned from the previous exercise that my personal values are closely related to the work I do. So as I work to create success for the company, I will get to live most, if not all, of my values daily. That's great, but beyond that I'm not sure what I would dream for myself."

Mike nodded. "All right, let's talk through this a bit if you're willing. Let's say you can achieve all that you envision for your company within the next three to five years. What would that journey be like for you?"

"Well, it would be challenging and exciting while we strive to get there. There will probably be disappointments along the way, but I think that would only motivate me to try again and achieve the next time. I think most days would be very rewarding and I'd go home at night feeling that I had a good day."

"What would it feel like after you had achieved these goals, or at least got close to achieving them?" Mike continued to probe.

"I don't know," Richard said honestly. "I mean I'm sure it would be great. The leadership team, including me, would profit financially."

"Let me tell you what I think," Mike said. "I think after you achieve your dream for your company, you would be bored."

"Bored?" Richard asked in surprise.

"Sure, because after the dream has been achieved, your day-to-day activities will change and you will no longer be living in alignment with your values."

"Yes, I can see that. Definitely the thrill is in the journey for me,"

"So what if your life dream was to create a job or a business where you get to help new companies or acquired companies achieve the dream you have outlined for your current company?"

Richard had a puzzled look on his face. "You mean like a CEO for hire? A consultant who takes over as the CEO for a period of time to get the company on track and then moves on to the next one?"

I noticed Richard's enthusiasm grow as he spoke.

"Exactly," Mike said.

"But to the best of my knowledge, no such job exists. There are entrepreneurs who start businesses and turn them over to others to run, but that's not what I want to do. There are people who are called to come in to close a business, but I can't see a company hiring someone off the streets to help with a new venture. They would have their own people for that."

"We could spend the next hour discussing jobs that didn't exist as little as a decade ago until someone dreamed them up and suddenly they are in demand. That's not the issue. The issue is, does that sound like a world class life to you?"

"Well sure, especially if I had freedom of choice over whom I worked with going forward. I mean, I don't know that I could do this for just anyone, but given the right conditions that would be my dream job."

"So for the sake of discussion, let's say your life dream is to be this CEO for hire. You help establish a new venture and get it started off on the right foot with its customers, employees and all other stakeholders involved. How does that feel?"

"Unbelievably great," Richard said with excitement, before his voice quickly deflated. "But I have no idea how to do that."

"I think I told both of you when we started this exercise to dream big and not worry about how you were going to achieve your dream or if it was even possible to achieve it," Mike reminded us.

He turned to me. "Do you think you'd be willing to share your work with us, Stephanie? I think you're pretty convinced that your dream is unachievable, as well."

"I don't just think it, I know it," I said crisply.

I didn't want to be rude, but I just couldn't explain how deeply it would hurt to learn that my dream was impossible. As long as I carried it around safely inside me, no one could harm it or tell me how ridiculous I was. No one could tell me what I already knew - that it was impossible. But if I heard either one of them say that out loud, it would crush my spirit. That would be a hurt that would take a really long time to heal.

"It's okay," Mike said. "We'll move on."

"No," I protested, feeling angry and defensive.

Suddenly I wanted to hear them say that my dream was impossible, because at least that would close the discussion once and for all.

"My life dream is to be a published author," I said firmly. "I want to write non-fiction books that are a compilation of people's life stories, sort of like mini-biographies of unknown people."

There, I had said it. Actually, it was more like I declared it defiantly. And then I sat back and waited for the protests.

Instead, what I heard from Mike was, “Very nice. I’m curious why you think this is unachievable.”

Did he not live in the real world, I wondered angrily.

“It’s very hard, darn near impossible, to get published these days,” I explained in exasperation.

“All right,” Mike replied. “We’re going to get back to that in a moment. But I’m curious about something else. Would writing this type of book allow you to live your values?”

“Well sure. I would get to listen to people tell me their stories. I would get to integrate all the stories I’ve heard into a book. I would create how those stories come together. Then because it is published and people get to read it, they would become inspired by these stories through my work in bringing them together.”

“And when you think about a life that allows you to write in this manner and then publish your work, how does that make you feel?”

I sighed and said in a small voice, “It’s so wonderful I can barely stand it. That’s why the thought that it’s unachievable is so hard for me. This is my dream.”

Mike nodded in understanding. “Okay, since everyone really wants to focus on why they can’t achieve their dream or how hard it may be, let’s deal with that issue right now. I have one question for both of you. What’s stopping you?”

But before we could respond verbally, Mike put up his hand and said, “I just want you to think about that question and then write down everything you come up with.”

I didn’t have to think long on this one. I knew exactly what was going to stop me. I wrote down getting an agent. Then I wrote down getting a publisher. That’s what was going to stop me. I looked up and saw that Richard staring off in the distance as if he was really contemplating this issue. Mike and I waited in silence for him to finish.

“All right, what did you write down?” Mike finally asked us.

“Mine was simple,” I said jumping right in. “The thing that’s going to stop me is finding an agent to represent me and then a publisher who will publish the work.”

Mike merely nodded and then turned to Richard. “And yours?”

“I wrote down that the job we just discussed doesn’t really exist as I would define it. So if I was going to create a consulting business or some kind of role where I was an independent contractor going into a new venture, I would have do some serious

marketing to get the word out. I think finding clients will be difficult. I'm also concerned about living expenses while I begin this new venture."

"Very good. In both your scenarios what you have described are nothing more than constraints," Mike explained.

"Constraints? I think mine are brick walls," I laughed.

"And since mine is a concept that doesn't really exist yet, it seems like a vapor," Richard proclaimed.

"But nonetheless, these are just constraints," Mike persisted. "Richard, let's say you made enough money in your new company over the next few years to take two or even three years off and not receive any income. Could you use that time to create this concept – business, consulting role, whatever you want to call it – and see where it leads you?"

Richard considered this. "I might. If I didn't have to worry about income for a long period of time, I wouldn't have that much to lose so why wouldn't I pursue it? That still doesn't help me with the other constraints, but it would remove a huge barrier."

"The other constraints have been overcome by other people. You need a marketing strategy, some contacts, probably a portfolio of what this type of work would involve and what you have already done. You need a way to reach out to potential clients. Those are constraints for you right now, but others have overcome them so what couldn't you? Stephanie, I really like your list because nowhere on your list did you list "YOU" as a constraint."

"Me?" I said in surprise.

"Sure, when I asked what's holding you back, you said the absence of an agent and a publisher. To me that implies you don't consider your talent or ability or some other quality about yourself as a constraint to achieving this dream. The only constraints you listed are finding the right people who can help you. As in Richard's case, others have walked this path before you, faced these same constraints and overcome them."

"Yes, if you are JK Rowling, you'd have no problem finding a publisher," I said a trifle sarcastically.

"But even JK Rowling had her original manuscript for Harry Potter rejected several times by agents and publishers before it was finally accepted," Mike pointed out. "Let me ask you this, could you start writing this book immediately? Is there anything holding you back from that?"

I thought about that for a moment. Finally I shook my head. "Actually, no. I would have to make some time in my schedule to fit it in and then I'd have to figure out what angle I would be taking with the book. I would need to get my family on board with this. They've never heard about my dream. But assuming they're okay with it, there's nothing really holding me back from doing it."

"Wonderful, let's hold off on discussing the time aspect and all that. We'll get to that later," Mike assured us.

"So let's regroup," he continued. "Both of you successfully identified a life dream that aligns with your values. You identified constraints currently keeping you from achieving that life dream. But we don't want to dwell on those constraints now. We will deal with those later. Let's get back to focusing on the catalyst dream."

"Yes, I recall you mentioning that before," I said. "But I'll admit I didn't really get what that meant."

"The catalyst is the power you need to get you to your life dream," Mike said. "The catalyst dream is the milestone that removes the remaining constraints from your ability to have freedom of choice to live your dream. Let me suggest what might be the catalyst dreams for each of you. Stephanie, your catalyst dream is to become a "Published Author." To do this, you will need to have an agent agree to represent you and get you a book contract with a publisher. After that, you need to write a book that's successful in the marketplace. If that were to happen, then you would have the freedom to live your values without constraints. Is that correct?"

I thought about that for a moment. Then I slowly nodded.

"I guess so. If I knew that I had an agent to represent me, then my book would be published and from there I could write more books. By writing the books I want to write, I get to enjoy living my values."

"Exactly," Mike nodded.

"Now for you, Richard, there are actually two catalysts here," he continued. "There is the one you need to achieve the dream you have for the company and the one you need to achieve your own life dream. Let's start with the company. In order to achieve profitability, customer satisfaction and employee alignment with your values, you're going to need to get everyone rallied around developing and producing that product as quickly as possible with the highest quality possible. I would suggest that the company's catalyst dream is to get this product to market within 9 to 12 months, at or below projected cost with at least 4.5 sigma quality. If you can manage that, then the company has successfully started. Does that make sense?"

Richard nodded. "Yes. While nine months will be an extremely aggressive target to shoot for, we need to do that if we hope to gain a substantial market share in this space."

"I would further suggest that your personal catalyst dream is to achieve the company values you have defined here and create a sustainable process for maintaining those values in your absence so you can walk away," Mike said. "If you do this successfully, you have created the most advantageous marketing strategy ever. You can then demonstrate to potential clients that you can successfully start a new venture and have it become profitable within a relatively short time frame. You can do this while maintaining high quality standards, as well as customer and employee satisfaction. And most importantly, when you have shown them the path to success, you can leave, and they will be able to sustain the success and move forward on their own. With those credentials, your defined constraints are removed. Would you agree?"

"I think so," Richard nodded. "That's amazing. Achieving the company vision puts me on the path to my personal dream. And I get to do the things I love to do while I'm working at the company, so it will be an enjoyable experience as well. It doesn't get much better than that and who would have thought this was even possible?"

"Life is wonderful when you get to live your values without constraints," Mike agreed. "Now that we have managed to navigate through that gate, it's time to Dream-the-Doing."

Chapter 6 – Establish Leading Milestones

“Before we move to Step 3, let’s briefly re-cap where we’ve been,” Mike said. “I think that will help both of you gain perspective for where we’re going next. We’ve just spent the last hour completing the first two steps, Do-the-Dreaming. Each of you identified, prioritized and defined your core values for your personal life and work life. From that, we defined a catalyst dream. The catalyst dream is the power you need to live out your core values. Achieving the catalyst dream means that the remaining constraints that keep you from having freedom of choice to live out your core values have been removed. So we’ve been innovating and envisioning the end state. Now we move on to innovating and envisioning the journey. That’s what I call Dream-the-Doing.

“An Olympic athlete who has a dream of winning the gold medal can envision himself on the platform, triumphant, receiving the medal. But that’s not all he must envision. He must also visualize the journey to the victory platform. In other words, he must see himself accomplishing all the steps required along the way to his ultimate victory.

“The next task I’m going to ask you to do is create a roadmap. You know where you’re starting from. That’s like the ‘You Are Here’ sign on the map. We’ve just discussed where you are traveling to: the end point – your catalyst dream. So what’s in between? What are the stepping stones that will lead you from where you are now to where you want to end up? Every stepping stone on that journey is a milestone.”

“Yes as we discussed earlier, I’m familiar with milestones because they are used routinely in project planning,” I chimed in.

“Yes,” Mike responded, “As I mentioned, milestones are constraints going in and achievements coming out. Since this is your life project, what are the milestones that you need in your journey? Take some time now and write them down. As you do, I want you to envision the journey you will take. See it in as much detail as you can.”

“Should we start at where we are now and go forward, or start from the end point and work backward?” Richard asked.

“Whatever is easier for you,” Mike replied. “For some, it’s easier to start from where they are and create each successive step forward. Others find it easier to start from the end point and think about the step just prior to that end point and then move on

to the step prior to that one. It's all about visualizing the journey. Whichever way allows you to accomplish that easily is the way you should do it."

"What are the JDIT and SWOT columns on the worksheets you provided us for this step?" I asked.

"Oh, don't worry about those right now," Mike said. "We will cover that in the next step. Just focus on visualizing the steps along the journey to your dream."

I tapped my pen on the pad of paper as I tried to focus my thoughts on this step of the process. Truth be told, I was actually quite overwhelmed by the fact that neither Mike nor Richard thought my life dream was impossible. Could I actually start believing in it myself? Could I get there from here? With everything Mike was telling us, it was quite clear he thought so. But he said something very important to which I needed to pay attention. He was quick to point out that if I didn't believe in my dream, it would be impossible to achieve it.

So I was at a fork in the road. I could suspend my disbelief and travel the road Mike was advocating, or I could stop right here and put those precious dreams away for good. I absolutely believed Mike when he said if I couldn't believe in my dreams, then I would never realize them. I had defined my core values and Mike helped me define a catalyst dream. I could stop here and go on with life as it always had been and always would be. I had a feeling if I proceeded much farther down this path with Mike, there would be no turning back.

In that moment, I made my decision. If there was even the slightest chance that I might achieve my dream of being a writer, I was prepared to take that road.

So what would that journey look like? Being a fairly good planner, it was simpler for me to start from where I was rather than where I wanted to end up. I decided that I was going to try to focus on just listing the steps and not worry so much about how I would get them done. What would be the first step? That was an easy one. I needed to create "Project Time" and space in my life to devote to my dream. I was a firm believer in the adage there is no such thing as free time. You have to make the time to accomplish what you want to in life. My schedule was fairly busy, not only with my work activities and travel, but also with the girls' schedules. Each of them had different activities after school that required either Nathan or I to drive them to and often attend.

I needed to talk with Nathan about this, as well. If I took action on this, he would not only need to know, but also support me in my endeavors. The point that Sonya made about having a home life dream with her fiancé made so much sense as I thought through this. I was hopeful that Nathan would be supportive, but what if he wasn't? Would I carry

on with this dream if I didn't have his support? Hopefully I wouldn't have to cross that bridge, but I wrote it down just in case.

After the time issue was resolved, the next logical step was to find a "Publishing Agent." How would I ever do that? I had to remind myself to focus on what needed to be done and not get bogged down in thinking about the how of doing it. Realizing that I shouldn't be focusing on the how made this task seem much easier.

Okay, next I would need to conduct some "Content Research." Since this project would entail getting stories from other people, I needed a milestone that addressed this aspect. I certainly needed to identify what kinds of people I'd be talking to and how I would go about finding them. I also needed to know if there were legal ramifications associated with this kind of book. If I told someone's story, even if I granted them anonymity, what kind of release or legal coverage did I need to have in place? I created a milestone labeled "Content Research."

Once I did some Content Research, I should be ready to create a "Book Proposal." The book proposal wouldn't require me to know the exact details of every chapter; but, I would need a starting and ending point so I could put the whole thing together. I couldn't help but reflect on the fact that in thinking about putting together the book, I was going through the same process of "Do the Dreaming" that Mike had just led us through. I was looking for a starting point, trying to determine what was important and envisioning the completed project. I was starting to understand why Mike called this a "proven process."

Finally, I would simply need to put it all together as a book. I labeled that milestone "Final Manuscript." The final milestone was the catalyst dream - my agent and publisher who would take the manuscript and turn it into a published work.

When I was done, I looked at what I had written. There were five milestones on my roadmap. Richard was still working furiously, so I took a moment to reflect. As I relaxed back into my seat, I began to envision the journey to my life dream. I could see myself taking a hard look at my schedule to find time to interview and write. My youngest daughter played soccer and had practice two days a week with games on Saturday mornings. I could certainly bring a pad of paper and write during her practice sessions and maybe even during the games since there was often a lot of down time. I had a few other activities I was involved in that I did out of a sense of obligation rather than devotion or enjoyment. I would seriously consider giving those up so I could spend more time pursuing my dream.

Nathan was going to be a challenge for me. Just because Mike and Richard didn't seem to think my dream was ridiculous didn't mean my husband wouldn't. What would he say when I came home and announced that I wanted to be a writer? For the moment, I chose to envision him as incredibly supportive of the idea. I could see him encouraging

me and helping me every step of the way. I could see him taking on a few extra duties around the house so I could devote a little more time to my writing. I smiled. That certainly felt good. I'd have to see how it actually played out later.

Then I sighed. Finding an agent and publisher was what I dreaded the most. I would love to think that my work would be so inspiring that the first agent I called would want to work with me, but I was pretty sure that would not be the case. In fact, I'm pretty sure most aspiring authors felt the way I did and were disappointed when their manuscripts didn't sell. I needed to get over the fear of rejection that made me dread this process. Maybe if I kept in mind that many of today's respected authors had initially been rejected multiple times, it wouldn't be so bad. Also, if I knew deep down that I had written a really good story, then it would be much easier for me to stay motivated and enthusiastic about it. Getting to that milestone was a long way off for me, though. Hopefully by the time I reached it, I would be better prepared for it than today.

What would I write about? I really liked the idea of interviewing older people and sharing their stories. As a child, I loved listening to stories told by my great uncle, who traveled all over the world with his wife. He was in the diplomatic core and they were sent to many different places during his career. They loved their travels and always enjoyed the culture and the people of the places where they were stationed. I could easily recall the excitement he exhibited when they were telling the stories, and the excitement I felt as I listened to his tales of their journeys. Looking back, I think that was where I developed my love of travel and listening to other people's stories. I was sure there were many older folks out there who had interesting stories of their own and probably would appreciate having someone listen to them.

That would be my starting point, I decided. I could see myself visiting assisted living facilities or other retirement communities, just listening to residents' adventures. I knew it would be an absolute joy for me to take what I heard and turn it into something that many other people could enjoy, as well. I didn't think the writing would be difficult at all. In fact I was pretty sure that the book would write itself once I had the material. How fun would that be? I suddenly realized that, like Richard, as I worked toward my catalyst dream I could still enjoy living my values as everything came together. I may not have total freedom of choice, but I would certainly enjoy the journey.

I couldn't help but imagine how good it would feel to be a published author. I could easily see my first book going into multiple printings and the publisher asking me to write a second one, maybe about teenagers and their stories about life. Or maybe I could focus on single mothers or entrepreneurs. Perhaps Richard would let me write his story once he reached his dream. I smiled. The world was full of possibilities once I achieved that catalyst dream.

I looked over to see how Richard was doing. I wondered if it was time for us to re-group and share our journey. I met Mike's eye and smiled. Once I had made the decision to follow the fork in the road that seemed the scariest, it became a fun adventure.

"So how was it?" Mike asked me.

"Great," I replied enthusiastically. "Oddly enough, I didn't have any problems with this task."

"Good. Do you want to tell us what your journey looks like?" Mike asked.

I spent the next several minutes sharing my worksheet, taking Mike and Richard along the mental road I had just traveled. Other than injecting a question here or there to better define the milestones, Mike had no comments or advice for me. I took that as a sign I had done fairly well. Then it was Richard's turn.

"I started at the end and worked back in my mind," Richard explained. "It just seemed easier for me to work through it that way. Looking forward, it seemed immense. Looking backward, it became a logical sequence of events. However, I will relay it back to you from the starting point going forward. My first big milestone involves getting my leadership team on board with the dream. They need to understand the core values of the company as I have defined them. They need to buy in and align themselves with that vision.

"Next we have to create a project roadmap for the development, manufacture and delivery of our product. That's a big milestone. Then I have two separate milestones for employee and customer alignment. I'm not sure yet what order they go in, or maybe they are concurrent. It doesn't matter right now, but I want to get our biggest potential customers on board with us as soon as possible so they have input into our design. That way we are creating a product that meets their needs. I want the employees aligned to our new company vision, values and goals. The companies coming together have pretty diverse corporate cultures. My company was definitely the bigger entity and as a result, it has much more infrastructure, procedures and processes in place. The other company was smaller and much more flexible in how things got done. Virtually anyone could do any task if they were even remotely qualified to do so, and people were able to respond quickly to solve problems.

"The down side with this approach is there is not much in the way of process associated with it, which leaves room for errors and variation to creep in. The new company needs to take the best of both worlds and the employees need to come together to support what needs to be done. Like I said, I'm not sure yet how this will happen, but I know it's

important. I can envision the alignment easily, but not necessarily all the details of how it happens. So those are my milestones.”

Mike nodded. “Good work. The actual steps you need to take for each milestone are defined later in this process. However, I want to point out something very important. When we first defined the catalyst dream, I believe both of you said you didn’t know how you’d get there. Now only a few minutes later, you have that journey defined in a series of milestones that will take you from your starting point to your end point. You have just created the pathway that will lead you to your life dream.”

Chapter 7 – Select Problematic Milestone

“Now that you’ve defined the milestones that are the stepping stones of the journey, let’s focus on the concept of divide and conquer,” Mike said next.

“Sounds like war,” I commented.

Mike shook his head. “Not war. Strategy. Divide and conquer is just one element of strategy that helps move us forward. When all of your focus is on the end point, no matter how great the dream may be, it is often hard to visualize how you will get there. By breaking the journey down into critical milestones, you have divided the journey into measurable steps that allow you to more easily visualize the map. As you’ll see, you proceed to your end point by systematically conquering each milestone along the way. Just like the catalyst dream, each milestone can be considered a constraint going in and an achievement coming out.”

“So each milestone is a smaller version of the catalyst dream,” Richard summarized.

“You can think of it that way.” Mike agreed. “Along those lines, the next concept we need to discuss involves the 80/20 rule.”

“What’s that?” I asked.

“It’s based on the Pareto principle,” Mike explained. “Vilfredo Pareto was an Italian economist who noted that 80 percent of the wealth in that country could be attributed to 20 percent of the population. Turns out that principle is evident in many systems we experience in our everyday lives. For example, in a corporate environment, 80 percent of the revenue comes from 20 percent of the customers.”

“Eighty percent of employee complaints come from 20 percent of the employees,” Richard threw in.

“Yes. And 80 percent of a problem is relatable to 20 percent of its potential causes,” Mike continued. “To further refine our discussion, let’s refer to the 20 percent as the vital few and the remaining 80 percent as the trivial many. So for example, when problem solving, if we know that 80 percent of the problem is related to 20 percent of the potential causes, we can focus on those vital few causes to help gain the maximum leverage in solving our problem. It might be that the ratios are 85/15, 90/10, or maybe

even 70/30. But you get the idea. Focusing on the vital few is more effective than spinning our wheels trying to affect a change through the trivial many causes, which hardly make an impact.

"An example will help illustrate this idea. Consider someone trying to get a new job. What are some factors that would influence how he performs in an interview?"

"He needs an updated resume, one that demonstrates how his experience relates to the position he wants," I responded.

"Having a contact in the company would help," Richard added. "Preparing ahead of time by knowing something about the company and anticipating what kinds of questions he might get asked would be very helpful."

"All right, and let's add to that list things like the type of clothes he wears to the interview, how he combs his hair and what car he drives that day," Mike said. "Now within that list, which of those factors will most likely have the greatest consequence on the outcome of his interview?"

"A good resume and being prepared would be on the top of my list. Knowing someone in the company wouldn't hurt either," I said.

"So in this discussion we identified the vital few factors that would have the greatest impact on how someone could be successful in a job interview," Mike said. "Now if that person was creating a list of milestones to achieve his dream of having a successful job interview, the wise counsel would be for him to devote 80 percent of his efforts to the 20 percent, or vital few factors, that will have the greatest impact. Would you agree that spending a great deal of time and effort combing his hair a certain way or deciding which car to drive to the interview will not yield significant results in his quest?"

Richard and I nodded.

"So while he understands how appearance contributes to his success at the interview, it probably should not be where he spends a great deal of his effort," Mike continued. "He would be far better served by devoting the majority of his time preparing to answer questions and portray his current level of experience to his advantage."

"The same ideas apply to the milestones you just created. Eighty percent of the effort in a project will most likely be spent on 20 percent of the critical process steps. You have identified milestones to take you from where you are to where you want to go. More than likely, 80 percent of your effort on this journey will be spent with 20 percent of those milestones."

"But let's spend a minute on the trivial many that make up your roadmaps. Just because a milestone may not be part of the vital few doesn't mean you should ignore it. You still have to take action to move through it. It's just that those trivial many milestones should be much easier to get through than the others. Let's use examples from each of your maps. In Richard's case, I would suggest that one of the trivial many milestones is going to be the project plan, the budget, schedule and so on."

"I thought that would be one of the bigger milestones," Richard mildly protested.

"I don't argue that it will take some time to complete that milestone," Mike said. "It will require some detail and planning on the part of you and others from your team; but, you've managed large projects many times in the past, from your Six Sigma days and other executive experience. So the concepts associated with project planning are not new to you. You've been there, done that, so to speak. There's really nothing stopping you from completing that step. You just need to get the right team on it and it will be completed within a reasonable amount of time. Am I right?"

"I guess so," Richard replied. "I just saw it as a detailed project and that seemed like a lot of work."

"It may be a lot of work, but you could just go do it. Right now you have the skill set and thought process needed to complete that milestone. I call milestones that fit that description JDIT's, or Just Do It. Now, on Stephanie's map, I believe one of her JDIT milestones is writing the book."

I nodded. "I get it. Once I have all the information and research I need at my fingertips, I can just start writing. It may take awhile to actually write the book, but I have everything I need to just do it."

"That's right," Mike replied. "So you understand the concept of the 80/20 rule and how it applies to your efforts to manifest your life dream. Now let's tackle those vital few milestones, the ones that are going to give you some problems. I call those SWOT milestones. SWOT stands for 'Six Sigma Way of Thinking.'"

"Okay, that sounds intimidating," I said in alarm. "Do I have to know something about math and statistics to do this?"

Mike chuckled.

"No, but you do have to look at how you think about things. If you recall, I said early on that one of the critical aspects of The Great Discovery was that you had to learn to think about your life differently. Here's an old adage: 'If you think what you always thought, you get what you always got.' If it were possible to get to your life dream by doing what you always did, you'd have probably achieved it by now. But in fact, we've just spent a

lot of time talking about your life dream, and you perceived that it was not only be hard to obtain, but unachievable.. So the way you've always thought about it has gotten you where you are now. You haven't achieved that dream yet; in fact you hadn't even started to try. As I said before, if you keep thinking that your dream is impossible, then you'll never realize it. You will get what you always got.

"SWOT milestones are going to require more effort because you are going to have to think about them differently. You have to have the will to trigger different actions. Remember, everything starts with a thought. Thinking about what you want in a positive way is the first step on the journey toward achieving it."

"The power of positive thinking?" Richard questioned with a laugh.

"Yes, there is great power in thinking positively," Mike replied seriously. "There is even science to back that up. Ever notice that when you make a decision to buy a new car and you've decided on the type of car you want to buy, suddenly you see those types of cars everywhere you go?"

I laughed. "Yes, that just happened to us. I needed a new mini-van and once Nathan and I decided on the model we wanted, I saw them all over the place. I even noticed ones in the specific color we wanted."

Mike nodded. "There's a part of your brain called the Reticular Activating System which takes your thoughts and translates them into visual imagery. Once you imprint an idea in that part of your brain, suddenly your mind starts triggering impulses and you notice the very thing you imprinted there in your external world. If you think you are going to get bad service somewhere, you probably are going to see that show up and vice versa. This implies that your thoughts are a very important part of this process. By thinking positively, you are going to find that the actions you take might seem easier. You might notice helpful people showing up suddenly. You may find critical information that you need appearing before you, almost as if by magic. That's your Reticular Activating System engaged in helping you notice what will help move you along your path.

"But positive thinking will only take you so far. Your thoughts must translate into actions that move you toward the realization of your dream. As we discussed earlier, winning the lottery is more like a pipe dream; but if you really believed it was achievable, you could sit around all day and thinking about winning. You could even be incredibly positive with these thoughts. But in the end, if you didn't buy the ticket, you would never have a chance of winning.

I nodded. "What I'm going to need from you is the understanding how to think differently. I'll admit I've always thought my dream was impossible, which is partly why

I've never devoted much time or attention to it. I guess that's proof, to some extent, of how my thoughts have influenced my actions. But I have no clue how to change those thoughts so that they will lead me to my dream."

"That's where we're headed," Mike said. "We're going to move from the innovation side of the dream process to the execution side. Execution is taking action on the things we need to navigate the roadmap we've created so we can arrive at the life dream. So Stephanie, what milestones do you believe are going to require SWOT?"

"Well, finding project time for sure is going to require SWOT. While Richard was finishing up his list, I was envisioning my journey and thought about writing while I was at my girls' soccer games, along with some other ideas. But I'm having trouble visualizing how I can find time to work on my dream when I have so many other obligations as an executive, a mom and a wife. I also think that finding a publishing agent will require SWOT."

"Really?" Mike interjected. "Does finding a publishing agent take any special skills that you don't already possess? Sure, you might have to make several calls before someone says yes. You might even have to move this down the list because they want to see your book proposal first. But is this going to require extraordinary thinking, or is it something that just requires you to overcome a little fear and 'Just-Do-It?'"

I had already faced fear several times in the process Mike was leading me through. I took a deep breath.

"You are absolutely right. I can and need to Just-Do-It," I said.

"That's the spirit," Mike replied.

"I do think 'Content Research' will require SWOT," I added.

"I agree," Mike said. "Now let's go on to the execution part of the journey, let's pick one of those problematic, or SWOT, milestones on your maps. We'll use the one you choose to illustrate how we engage vital forces that either drive us or restrain us. From there we'll define actions that allow us to move forward. Woven through all this is how we envision our success, our journey and our day-to-day actions that take us there. That's the part that relates to our thoughts. Which milestones do you each want to work with?"

I looked at my list. "For me the obvious choice is the first milestone, which is about setting aside weekly periods of 'Project Time.' I need to not only make time to write and research, I also need time to think about what this new direction in my life means for me and my family. If I'm going to do this, I'm going to have to have a

conversation with Nathan very soon. I think it will be hard for me to do that if I approach it with the same thought process I've always had about my dream to write."

"That would be an excellent milestone to focus on in this next part of the discussion," Mike agreed. "Richard, how about you?"

"I think one of my toughest milestones is going to be employee alignment to this new vision I have for the company and the culture I want to create," Richard said. "I'd like to focus on that."

"Great, we have our SWOT milestones identified. Let's move on to Step 5," Mike said.

Chapter 8 – Identify Vital Forces

“Now we will take the problematic milestone you chose from your list and talk about the forces that drive and restrain us in our attempts to overcome our milestone,” Mike said. “These next two steps make up Plan-the-Doing. Let me illustrate the concept of forces with an example. In order to achieve her catalyst dream of improving her self-esteem, a woman has determined that a significant milestone in her journey is to lose weight. For her, that’s a problematic milestone. She’s tried many times in the past to lose weight and been unsuccessful in keeping the weight off. So this is not a JDIT milestone. It is a SWOT milestone and will require some effort on her part. So at this point in the process, she needs to consider the forces which influence this milestone.”

“I’m still struggling with the idea of forces,” I confessed.

“With every SWOT milestone on your list, there are forces at work that have the power to influence the results you experience,” Mike replied. “I know I said earlier that you didn’t need to know any math, but let me show you a formula that describes what I’m talking about.”

Mike turned to a blank page in his notebook and wrote $Y = f(X)$.

I groaned. “Oh no, it’s algebra class.”

Mike laughed. “Don’t think of it as a mathematical formula, but rather a model to illustrate a point. I promise you there won’t be any algebra where we’re heading.”

“That’s good, because I wouldn’t be able to follow,” I said.

I looked across the aisle and saw Richard smiling. “I’m sure you get this.”

Richard nodded. “I know what the formula represents, but I don’t know where he’s going with it.”

“Consider Y in the formula as the result you want to achieve. In our example, Stephanie, what is the Y that the woman is trying to achieve?”

“Losing weight,” I replied.

“Exactly,” Mike acknowledged. “Now consider X as the forces she can apply in her life to help her achieve her desired result. Remember, forces have the power to

influence her desired result. Forces can be physical, emotional, spiritual, societal, behavioral or psychological. They can be internal or external. What are some forces that influence the desired result in this weight loss example?"

"Well, her diet," I said. "There's also exercise."

"There are physical health and genetics, as well," Richard chimed in.

"There are her environment and how much support she will get from the people in her life," I continued. "There's her access to foods that will support her chosen diet."

"Another force could be any prescription medication she takes," Richard said. "Also, her willingness and the strength of her desire to lose weight seems like it would be a force."

Mike nodded. "That's a very good list of forces. So for every SWOT milestone there will be a list of forces to consider that ultimately influence our ability to achieve our desired result. In a few minutes I'm going to ask you to consider what forces are in play for the milestone you selected. But before that, I want to take this example a little further. It's not enough to just identify the forces. We need to know how we can influence those forces to create our desired result. To do that we need to understand a little bit more about forces. Every force on our list can be considered a driving force or a restraining force. Do either of you recall the differences between those two?"

"A driving force is something that assists you in achieving your desired outcome and a restraining force holds you back," Richard jumped in.

"Yes, that's it," Mike agreed. "So it's important to know what kind of forces are at work. With this in mind, let's go back to our weight loss example and identify which of the forces you mentioned are driving forces and which are restraining forces."

"This is hard, because many of the forces we mentioned could be driving or restraining depending on the circumstances," I protested.

"Tell me more about that, Stephanie," Mike encouraged.

"Well, take diet for example," I said. "Diet seems like it would be a driving force. I mean, if you eat the right foods, you should lose weight. But what if she can't give up sugar, for example. Now diet holds her back. Same with exercise. Exercise should help, but let's say she has knee problems. Maybe she can't exercise and the lack of physical activity is a restraining force."

"You have just illustrated one of the common misconceptions people have about these forces," Mike said. "You equated the force with an action. Actually, a force is not an action. A force is a noun. It's some attribute, condition or factor present within your

system. It either has the power to drive or restrain you. The action that you take as a result of the force being present is an entirely different aspect.

"Think back to the equation $Y = f(X)$. The f is the action you take to apply or remove the force. Diet is a driving force. How closely the woman follows the recommended diet is an action. If she follows the recommendation, she is applying the force of diet to positively influence her desired outcome. If she does not follow the recommended diet, she is removing the force and that will negatively impact her desired outcome through the action she has chosen to take. Do you see the distinction?"

Stephanie nodded. "Yes, I get it. I was ready to jump into creating an action plan from the forces, but you're saying that first I need to categorize these forces as either driving or restraining, and then look at how much control I have over them. Once that's done, then the action plan starts to develop."

"You got it," Mike said. "So back to the forces in our example. Let's define whether they are driving or restraining."

"Well, I would say diet, exercise, her motivation and support structure are driving forces," Richard ventured. "It's hard to say without knowing her specific condition whether physical health, genetics and even prescription medication are driving or restraining forces. Some people have metabolisms that make it harder to lose weight, or a family history of weight problems. She might be taking a prescription that has weight gain as a side effect."

"Yes, we'd have to know more about her condition to assess that," Mike agreed. "But you see how this works. Let's look at the force of diet. If diet is a driving force, how strong is it?"

"Pretty strong," I chimed in. "Ultimately, we each are responsible for what we eat, and if this woman follows the recommended diet for her condition, then she should be able to easily influence her desired outcome and lose weight."

"Good assessment," Mike acknowledged. "This is important because it helps us understand how much influence and power these forces have on our ability to achieve our desired outcome. Now in this example, diet would be what I would call a physical force. Let's look at an emotional or psychological force – motivation. I think with Stephanie's assessment we can see that diet is a force within this woman's control and one that will have a significant impact on achieving her desired result. How about motivation?"

"If she's motivated, this is a strong driving force," Richard commented. "We're back to the power of positive thinking. But if she's not motivated, then her attitude will hold her back and she may not be able to achieve her desired outcome."

"There are a couple of key points to discuss based on Richard's assessment," Mike stated. "First, emotional forces are every bit as important to consider as the physical ones. In fact, all the categories of forces I mentioned are equally powerful. Let's consider a societal force – say, family norms about eating. She comes from a family that regularly eats a diet loaded with sugar and fat. Further, there is a family norm that these kinds of foods are served whenever the family comes together for events. In this case, that is a large restraining force that will negatively impact the woman's ability to achieve her desired outcome. My point is, it's extremely important to consider all the forces at work in your system because you need to know what's helping and what's hindering you. Then you can make the right choices about the actions you need to take to achieve your desired results.

"The second point that Richard alluded to that I want to bring to your attention is the concept of leveraging these forces. Many times you can engage the various forces in a way that their combined effect is more than the simple sum of the individual effects. For example, the force of diet and the force of exercise will each drive this woman toward her desired result. If she did nothing else but exercise more than she currently does, she would most likely lose some weight. If she changed her eating habits to the recommended diet, she would no doubt lose weight. But if she engaged the two forces together, then she is most likely going to lose even more weight than she would by applying one force at a time. The concept of leveraging is applying forces in such a way that their combined effect is greater together. If this woman combined diet, exercise and the power of positive thinking, her results would most likely be very favorable."

"This is really starting to make sense," I said.

Mike smiled and continued.

"Now it's time for you to put these ideas to work on your milestones. For now, let's just focus on the one milestone we identified for each of you. Spend a few minutes and identify your forces."

I took a deep breath and looked at my list. My milestone was the starting point for me. It was creating the time, space and environment to begin and complete my writing project. The physical forces for me were the environmental ones. My schedule and working space were physical forces. So I listed "Schedule" and "Environment" as driving forces. I had several emotional forces I could identify. One was motivation and the other was belief. I assessed "Motivation" as a much stronger driving force, because I knew deep down that I loved to write and once I got started I would be motivated to finish. On

the other side of the coin, I listed “Confidence” as a restraining force. I still had to believe that I could be taken seriously as a writer, and that meant that I had to believe in myself. I wasn’t there yet. That belief would hold me back, as it had for other projects I attempted over the years. Societal forces came into play with my family and my social commitments. I listed both “Support” and “Commitments” as restraining forces. Social commitments would erode my schedule and keep me from writing. I had no idea how my family would respond to this. I wasn’t as worried about my girls as I was Nathan. I expected him to be skeptical and not necessarily supportive, especially if my writing significantly interfered with our family schedule and division of work. I identified several other driving and restraining forces, but I didn’t believe they would have much impact on the final outcome, so I didn’t really consider them as serious contenders.

I finished before Richard, which gave me a few minutes to reflect on this process before we shared our thoughts. I was glad that Mike made us do this step. My mind was already jumping to my to-do list and all the actions I needed to take. I would have completely bypassed this idea of forces, yet I now understood how they would influence the outcome. If I had ignored the forces, then it’s quite conceivable that at the first sign of trouble I would have abandoned the project and remained stuck in my little world of self-pity and frustration. My negative thoughts would inevitably show up at some point. Depending on how loud those voices were in my head, I would most likely have given up on my dream and bought into the negative voices that said there was no way I could possibly ever become an author. However, knowing it was just a force at work in my system, and knowing that Mike probably had some method for me to deal with it, I felt much more confident that perhaps this time I would break through and achieve my dream.

“Stephanie,” I heard Mike call my name. “What did you come up with?”

I went through my list and even shared my last thoughts with Mike. I noticed his eyes flash warmly when I talked about my beliefs and how they might have held me back in the past. Now I felt like I was getting the tools I needed to overcome that negativity, I told him.

“Stephanie, I want you to know how important that realization is for you,” Mike replied. “Our beliefs become our thoughts, which become our actions, which create our results. Just knowing that you may have some negative beliefs about your abilities will, in the long run, help you overcome those beliefs and create the breakthrough you’re looking for. That’s really great work.”

Then he turned to Richard. “Let’s hear yours.”

“First let me add to Mike’s comments, Stephanie. I think your discovery is a huge one, and I admire you for having the courage to look at that, along with the resolve to do

something about it. If I could, I would have every employee on my team be as honest about their negative beliefs as you were, so that we could acknowledge them and look for ways to overcome them,” Richard said.

“My forces have to do with the milestone associated with the employee alignment,” he continued. “I listed physical forces, such as training, communication, rewards, recognition and policies. There will be emotional forces, like motivation and belief. There will be a huge societal force associated with culture. The two company cultures are quite different and I think that creating a combined culture that is a mixture of the two organizations will be a big restraining force, as people have to give up what they were used to and align with something new.”

“Good work,” Mike acknowledged. “This is not easy stuff, but I think you both realize if you don’t understand these forces you are at the mercy of chance in your life. How you feel today will determine whether you take action on your dream. That’s too random to be an effective strategy in achieving the life dreams we’re contemplating. But understanding how these forces affect your desired outcomes puts you in the driver’s seat as you travel the highway to your dream.

“Okay, let’s get to the fun stuff. Now it’s time to talk about your action plan - what you need to do to realize your life dream.”

Chapter 9 – Define Enabling Actions

“At this point, it might seem relatively simple to define the actions needed to complete our milestones and move toward our catalyst dream,” Mike said. “And it is. For Step 6, we’ll discuss a simple strategy designed to maximize your effectiveness as you make progress on your plan toward realizing your dream.

“To create your action plan, let’s first talk about what these actions represent. Each action in your plan is a purposeful task defined to help you achieve your desired result. Let’s refer back to the formula that Stephanie loves, $Y = f(X)$.”

I made a face. “Oh great, more math.”

Mike chuckled. “We defined our desired result as Y. This is what we are trying to achieve. We then defined forces as X. These are the attributes that will either move us toward our desired result or hold us back. We haven’t yet discussed f. In this formula, f is the action we take to engage the forces in a way that brings us to our desired results.

“If a force is a driving force, we want to take action that will increase the power of that force because we know it helps move us forward. If the force is a restraining force, we want to take action that decreases the power of that force because we know it holds us back. So let’s go back to our weight loss example. If diet is a driving force, what actions will help increase its power for this woman and help her achieve her desired result of losing weight?”

“She should eat the foods that are recommended and keep within the recommended calorie range,” I suggested.

“Yes, exactly,” Mike agreed. “Let’s say the recommended calorie range is anywhere between 1,200 and 1,500 calories per day. She can take purposeful action to increase the power of this force by choosing to eat only 1,200 calories per day. She can choose foods that are lower in fat, sodium or sugar to help increase the power of this force.”

“So the action is choosing the food she eats on the diet,” Richard said. “By doing that, she engages the force. By also choosing the 1,200 calorie option, she can, using your term, ‘leverage’ her action. This would further increase the power of the force, thereby increasing the probability of achieving her desired result.”

"You got it," Mike replied. "By understanding how the forces work within our system, we choose not only the actions we need to take to engage those forces, but also the extent to which we apply those actions to help move us forward and increase our odds of success."

"Now I see why the forces are so important," I said. "If you don't understand them, you just start taking random action on your plan. Then later when things don't work out the way you wanted, you don't really have a way to figure out how to correct your course."

"Stephanie, I couldn't have said it better myself," Mike praised. "Another primary reason why people fail in the pursuit of their dreams is that they don't have a strategy for defining and then monitoring their actions, or the results of those actions. When you engage a force and take action, some result is produced. If the result is not what you wanted, then you look back at your system to see what happened. Then you determine new actions to either get back on track, or better yet, achieve the results you were seeking.

"We can further illustrate this using a restraining force. In our weight loss scenario, let's define a societal force called support and label it a restraining force. This would be the condition where the woman who is trying to lose weight is surrounded by people who are overweight and don't want to lose any weight."

"Like we talked about earlier, those people could be extended family members who enjoy food and often share meals with high calorie content," I said. "I actually know someone who deals with a similar situation. It's very difficult for her."

Mike nodded. "So the force is lack of support from her extended family. Since it's a restraining force, the actions she needs to take would minimize this force and decrease its power. What could she do?"

"She could limit the amount of time she spends with the family," Richard pointed out.

"Yes, she could choose to go to every other event they plan instead of every event," Mike agreed.

"But then she might feel cut off from those closest to her," I protested. "My friend tried that and ended up so unhappy she ate just to overcome her loneliness."

"So did she come up with some other actions that were more helpful?" Mike asked.

"She joined a weight loss support group and found a community of people who shared her weight loss goals. This group was supportive and helped her stay motivated. Through the group, she learned how to make better choices when she was with non-

supportive family members. Sometimes she would eat a meal before she went to visit them so she wouldn't be tempted to indulge in higher calorie foods. Other times she brought her own food to events."

"Beautiful," Mike declared. "That's a great example of taking a restraining force and selecting actions to minimize its power. All right, so you see how this works. Now I want you to pick one force on your list and spend a few minutes developing the action plan you need to engage that force in a way that moves you toward your desired result."

"I know for sure that 'Schedule' is going to be the driving force on which I want to focus, as it will highly influence my ability to achieve the milestone called "Project Time," I said.

"I think this is an opportunity to teach about non-value activities.," Mike said with a smile. "Let me give you a suggestion you might want to consider an action item: identify and eliminate non-value added activities."

"I've heard the term non-value activities in a business sense, but have never related them to my personal life," I said.

"Let me see if I can explain," Mike replied. "In the business world, non-value activities are things a customer would not pay for if given a choice. Many companies have activities where they check and double check work in order to prevent mistakes. As a customer, do you feel that you should pay for all of this inspection?"

"Well yes, I don't have a problem in paying for the extra inspection in order to get the product right," I replied.

Mike chuckled. "This is why inspection is usually considered a necessary part of doing business. If the company could simply develop methods to do the job right the first time and eliminate the inspection, you really wouldn't want to pay for the inspection would you?

"Well, no."

"Exactly. Inspection is usually non-value added – something that is done as part of the regular routine, but could be eliminated. Sometimes there are non-value added activities that are necessary. For example, as a customer, I doubt you really want to pay the administrative expenses to fill out government paperwork; but, it has to be done. We call this necessary non-value added work. So as you evaluate your schedule, you need to separate what is essential to your life - either because it adds value or is something that simply must be done - from those things that are not essential."

"Wow, I never really thought about dissecting my time like that," I said. "I can see how it will be important to do so given the importance of my schedule as a driving force."

As I began to think about the need to "identify and eliminate non-value activities," I thought about the need to significantly decrease the time I spent helping various committees at the girls' school and at church. These were activities I always loved to do. I would still help out, but not to the extent I was currently. I could always add those things back later.

I also realized I could "use travel time to work on the project." If I had to travel for work, I would devote the plane ride to my writing. I also made a mental commitment to myself to take action on my project every day. So I decided to "devote one hour per day to the project." While this didn't seem like much, I knew it would keep me moving in the right direction. Although it was not a part of my action plan for this force, I knew I would need some kind of tracking and accountability system for myself. Maybe this was bleeding over into the force I labeled as motivation, but I knew that one of the ways I stayed motivated and on track was to visually see the progress I was making toward my goal. In a sidebar, I listed creating a tracking program. I also I thought it might be nice to have a little reward built in for every major action or accomplishment I completed. I remembered that Mike encouraged us to establish a reward as we completed each milestone, so how could it hurt to establish a mini-reward for every step of the action planned I complete?

Next, I looked at the restraining force called "Confidence." This was the most powerful of my key restraining forces. I took a deep breath as I considered it. I was concerned about this one mainly because I wasn't sure what actions I could take to decrease its power. After all, I had lived my entire life with the belief that I could never be a writer, that I was not good enough or talented enough. I wasn't sure exactly how long I stared at the paper, but suddenly I became aware that Mike and Richard were talking quietly. I hadn't listed one action for the confidence force, but maybe Mike could help me. I turned to them, indicating that I was ready to move on.

"Richard has some great ideas for his action plan," Mike said. "Let's have him share them with you."

Richard smiled a little hesitantly at the praise.

"If you recall, my milestone was associated with employee alignment," he said. "I picked rewards and diverse cultures as the two forces to work on - rewards being a driving force and the other a restraining force. I decided that one of the first actions I will take is to develop a reward system that recognizes the kinds of cultural behavior I am trying to create within the new company. Even though I have some work to do with my leadership team, I know the culture will emphasize initiative, creativity, empowerment

and decision-making. I thought it would be great to develop a recognition program to honor those traits in employees. There's a saying that 'what gets watched works.' If I look for these kinds of behaviors in people and publicly recognize them when I see them, this should go a long way toward embedding the culture I want to create.

"As for the other force, while we need to recognize that the two merging groups come from different cultures, we can't let that diversity stop us from achieving our goals. I don't have time to waste on attitudes like 'not invented here' or 'we've done it this way forever.' So, I'm thinking that we need highly visible training and communication with the employees to recognize and respect the best of the culture they are bringing with them. Through our day-to-day actions, we need to demonstrate that we're not throwing those cultures away entirely. We are just using the best parts of them that will help us achieve our goals. I'm hoping that by the right positive action, this is a force that will lose power over time."

"Nice work," Mike acknowledged. "I believe if you take the actions you described, you are actually going to leverage those two forces in a way that will get you to your desired end state quickly. By that I mean, the more you recognize the behavior you want, the more power you take away from the other force. You can then effectively create the new culture you want to see."

"I wish mine would work that way," I said with a slight whine in my voice. "I had no problem with my driving force, which was my schedule. I need to make time for this project. I think I've identified some effective ways to create chunks of time in my schedule to allow me to pursue my writing. It's my restraining force I'm struggling with. That force has to do with my belief in my ability to become a writer. Actually, it's more of a lack of belief in myself."

"Stephanie, I'm glad you chose that force," Mike said. "Let me commend you for having the courage to even acknowledge that this force is operating in your life, and then taking steps to overcome it. Since we started this discussion, I've been saying how important your thoughts are in creating your dream. Stephanie, you recognize that a belief that you have about yourself is influencing your thoughts and therefore your ability to take the appropriate actions toward your desired result."

"But I don't know what actions to take to reduce the power of this force," I exclaimed. "How can I change a belief about myself, especially one that I've lived with all my life?"

"Well, recognizing that it even exists is the first step," Mike pointed out. "Let me be so bold as to suggest that this belief is really just a fear. Let's spend a moment talking about fear. Fear is a powerful restraining force and I would venture to guess that everyone feels it at some point in their life. Fear disguises itself in many different ways. In your case, it may be a belief about yourself. In some people, fear manifests itself as

judgment, criticism or cynicism. Fear can become anger, resentment or guilt. Fear might be over-protection, worry and anxiety. Sadly, fear can even become self-loathing.

"Regardless of the disguise that fear takes in your life, its primary purpose is to stop you from moving forward and achieving your life dream. Fear is the primary reason many people will not even think about a life dream because they already 'know' they cannot achieve it. Fear has taken such a strong hold on their thought process that it stopped them before they got started. However, those that do start a Discovery Project must realize that fear will show up somewhere as a restraining force. It must then be acknowledged and effectively dealt with."

"We all admire heroes and heroic behavior. Yet we mistakenly think that heroes feel no fear. Actually, true heroes feel fear and do it anyway. I contend that everyone can be a hero if they identify their fears and move forward in spite of them. Now back to your issue with confidence. Can you see that this belief you have is a fear of some kind?"

I shuddered as I recalled the intensity of the feelings when they showed up. I felt like I was totally incompetent. Was that fear? Most likely it was. I nodded in response to Mike's question. "Yes, I think it might be fear of failure."

"Okay, so now we've correctly identified it. What actions can you take to reduce its effects?"

"Well, I could succeed," I said flippantly.

Mike did not acknowledge the sarcasm in my voice. Instead he nodded. "Of course you can. With every success you minimize that belief just a little bit more. However, you won't succeed in your life dream until you reach your catalyst dream, so you've got to find successes along the way to bolster your spirit and your courage."

"Actually, I was kidding just now."

"I know you were, but I think you've hit on an important point," Mike pointed out. "I suggest you look for small things you can take on along your journey to create success in your mind. Each small success chips away at negative beliefs. For every action you take toward your dream, you need to define criteria of success for yourself. When you accomplish success, you need to celebrate it."

"Odd you should say that, because I was just thinking that I needed to build in rewards for myself as I move forward and complete things," I said.

Mike nodded. "See, you really did know what actions to take. I also think you should consider stepping outside your comfort zone and taking on actions that may cause

some anxiety. But remember, these are meant to help you get comfortable with the notions of success and failure.”

I wasn’t sure I liked the sound of this. But I asked anyway, “What kinds of actions are you talking about?”

“Well, you need to get out there as a writer and let audiences evaluate you before you ever submit a manuscript for publication,” Mike replied. “There are many ways to do this. You could take a creative writing course. Not only would that help you with skill development, but you would get evaluated by a teacher - an audience if you will - on your work. That teacher may like your work or may not, which could be success or failure in your mind. You should experience that. There are places that have open mikes and allow people to read their poetry or short stories for an audience. You should do that. You will experience either success or failure as you define it, and that will move you forward. I don’t think failure will be as bad as you seem to think it is, but you won’t know until you go try and see what happens. Failure might even become a motivator for you to get better, hone your skills and create something that is impossible for you now because you haven’t experienced it. How does that sound?”

“Really hard,” I said with a laugh. “But I kind of like it. I’ve never let anyone read anything I’ve written. I guess maybe it’s time to do that and see what happens.”

“Remember that every action we take produces a result. We are the ones that label the result a success or a failure, and that evaluation is entirely subjective. What I might think of as a failure, you might see as a great success. So yes, you need to get out there and have some experiences like this. Then see how it makes you feel and what it drives you to do as a result,” Mike encouraged.

I laughed again. “I can’t believe I’m considering reading my work in front of an audience, when just a few hours ago I had never even admitted to anyone that I wanted to be a writer.”

“I would say that is a Great Discovery,” Mike said with a laugh.

Chapter 10 – Complete Action Plan

“So now we are ready to discuss Do-the-Plan, Steps 7 and 8,” Mike said. “Step 7 is “Completing the action plan” and is really doing more of what we have just done when we “Planned the Doing.” You take each SWOT milestone as you confront it sequentially on your path. Next, you refer to the work you did in Step 5 where you identified the forces at work for those milestones, and whether the force was a driving force or a restraining force and how much power it had. You then focus on the vital few forces. Don’t forget the 80/20 rule. From there you identify actions that engage the forces to help achieve your desired result. When you have completed that for every vital force, you have a structured and sequenced to-do list that moves you toward achieving the milestone in front of you.”

“What about the JDIT milestones?” I asked. “How do those come into play?”

“JDIT milestones are the ones you have identified as something you can just go do, so you don’t have to spend any time evaluating forces,” Mike explained. “You just translate those milestones into actions and put them on your list, or just go do them right away.”

“So would you advise us to create the action plan for every milestone on the path, or just take them one at a time?” Richard asked.

“Execution of milestones is progressive. While you could evaluate every SWOT milestone before you begin, I personally believe it’s wiser to tackle each one in sequence right up to the catalyst.”

“That brings up another question,” Richard said. “Is the catalyst dream considered a milestone? If so, then do we treat it as all the other milestones for planning purposes?”

“The catalyst dream is the terminal milestone in the project. If you recall, the catalyst dream is the removal of all constraints so you can live your life dream with freedom of choice. Therefore, the catalyst dream will be a SWOT milestone, complete with forces and actions.

“Now there’s one other concept I want to bring up concerning actions,” Mike continued. “We alluded to it a bit when we were discussing actions for Stephanie a moment ago, but I want to emphasize it now. For every action on your list, you need to

define your success criteria for that action. By that I mean you need to decide when you have successfully completed that action. For some actions, that will be very simple. You need to go do something and when you have done it, you have successfully completed that action item. However, there will be actions that may not be as clear cut. Let's take one of Stephanie's that I recall - creating time in her schedule and the appropriate work space to pursue her project. One of her actions is to give up some of her volunteer activities at church."

He turned to me. "How will you know when you have achieved that?"

"Well, I won't be doing as many activities with them as I currently do," I said slowly as I thought it through.

"Is there a specific range of time you typically spend on church activities each week or month?" Mike asked. "And is your plan to reduce that by some percent?"

"Actually, I'm not sure. I sometimes help with religious education. I don't actually teach because I don't have time for that. However, I help the teachers by preparing materials, copying things, making sure they have supplies. I don't do that every week, but when I do it usually takes two to three hours. That was one of the things I was going to give up for the time being."

"Let me suggest that for the action of giving up some activities in your schedule, you estimate how much time you are likely to open up for yourself and use that as your success criteria," Mike commented.

"I hadn't planned on getting that detailed, but I see that it is important and would be helpful," I replied.

"When we focus on execution, it's imperative that we be as specific and detailed as we can be about our actions, which includes the successful completion of those actions," Mike said. "The whole Discovery Project is about creating your life dream. To do that successfully, you must be on top of every step along the way. We can't leave our actions to chance and hope that we've done enough to complete that action. We need to know that we've done enough."

"Also, we need to know when to stop and move on to the next action. If we aren't clear about how to measure our success so we will be able to know when it is complete, we could easily spend too much time and effort on something that has served its purpose and doesn't take us any further. The detailed action item list may require some effort to put together; but, it's an integral part of the successful accomplishment of your Discovery Project. Take some time right now and develop the action plan you need for the milestone you selected and be sure to include success criteria for each action."

I went to work with gusto. Detailed action plans were my strength. I loved my to-do lists. As I worked, I found that creating the to-do list for the Discovery Project was delightful because every action brought me one step closer to my life dream. That was exciting. I liked the idea of success criteria for every milestone because some of my actions tended to be more open-ended. In fact, some of them were probably repetitive or on-going actions that would be present and acted on during the entire journey, or at least most of it. For example, taking notes and writing was something I was going to spend a great deal of time on, but I could create success criteria of spending a minimum of 60 minutes per day writing. That was measurable and definitive. I knew that even on a very busy day, I could squeeze in 60 minutes to work on my project. I'd just get up early or stay up late every now and then. But at least I would be taking action every day. More importantly, if I met my set goal of 60 minutes, each day I would have a "success" which would help me work on my confidence which I had defined as a restraining force. I was more confident already.

Even though I knew it would cause me some stress, I was going to take Mike's suggestion of finding ways to get my work evaluated. I wanted to experience what it felt like to have someone critique my work. Actually, my work was me, so I wanted to know how I would feel deep down inside after I was critiqued. I was pretty sure that the first time someone actually criticized my work, I would feel awful and all the doubts would come rushing back into my head. But I was enough of a realist to know that criticism would happen. It would be impossible to assume that everyone would like my work. The trick for me was to be able to sort out the unhelpful criticism from constructive feedback designed to help me improve. I thought maybe joining a writers' group would be a good step. I put it down on my list as an action.

Time escaped me as I worked. The sky outside the plane was pitch black. It was well into the night. Other passengers in the cabin were starting to turn down their lights and settle in for some sleep. I was far from tired. I actually felt quite energized and hoped we could continue our discussion without disturbing those around us.

Mike was obviously sensitive to the change in the cabin, as well. He motioned to Sonya and spoke to her softly.

"We are going to continue our work on this. We'll keep it as quiet as we can. Will that be okay?"

Sonya nodded. "Yes, that will be fine. If you don't mind, I'm going to hang around to hear the conclusion. I've been keeping my ears open as much as I can. I know I don't have the whole picture yet, but I'm sure you can give me some direction and guidance on how I can pursue a Discovery Project for myself and my fiancé."

"Absolutely," Mike said, reaching into his pocket. "Here's my card. You can call the office and we'll get you the materials you need to start. If you want, we can even connect you with a coach who can help you pull this together."

"That would be wonderful," Sonya said with a smile as she tucked the card into her pocket.

Mike turned to Richard and me. "How's it coming?"

"Great," I said enthusiastically. "This is the part of the project I'm really good at. I love creating to-do lists and checking things off as I complete them."

"That's great," Mike laughed. "How's it coming for you, Richard?"

"Unfortunately, I don't have the same enthusiasm as Stephanie," he replied. "I'm more of a big picture guy, so these details get rather overwhelming. But I have made a good start on this and I certainly understand the concepts. I'll have to finish the complete list later."

"That's fine," Mike said. "This is a work in progress. There are two more concepts I want to bring to your attention while we're on this topic. The first is the 'to-think' list. When Stephanie talked about her to-do list with so much enthusiasm, it reminded me that I wanted to propose this concept to you."

"To-think list?" Richard said with a laugh. "Please explain that."

"Not much to explain," Mike replied. "It's just what it sounds like. We create to-do lists, which allow us to take action and move toward our life dream. But I've been saying all along that The Great Discovery requires you to think about things differently than you have in the past. The motto 'what you think about, you bring about' holds especially true in this case. Stephanie thought her whole life that she could not be an author. Through our discussion over the past several hours, she has started to question that belief and change her thought process. Am I right?"

I nodded. I had not actually processed yet how much my thinking was changing as we went further, but it was clearly evident from everything I was writing down.

"So as important as action is in the movement toward the realization of your dream, thought is equally important," Mike continued. "A to-think list allows you to spend some time each day thinking about your dream and the journey you're taking to realize it. The list also helps you think about what actions you are going to take that day, and every day for that matter, to move closer to your dream. I would suggest you keep a to-think list for yourselves and populate it with the things that you need to constantly reinforce in your thoughts what will help you succeed on your path."

"I love that idea," Richard said. "I like it much more than the to-do list, although I realize both are important."

"The second concept is one that Stephanie hit on earlier - to reward and celebrate your successes," Mike said. "I would suggest that for every action you successfully complete, you reward yourself in some manner. Certainly achieving a milestone is cause for celebration, so at those points the reward can be bigger. But it's very important that for every action that moves you forward, you acknowledge that action through some reward that's meaningful to you."

"What kinds of rewards are you talking about?" Richard asked curiously.

"Well, rewards for completing an action could be things like a nice dinner with friends or your son, spending an enjoyable evening with people you care about, going to the movies, reading a book, virtually anything that brings you some joy. When you complete a milestone, you might want to make the rewards a little bigger. For example, you might plan a weekend getaway, purchase some sort of indulgence for yourself or have dinner in a very elegant restaurant. For every person the reward will be different."

"I also want to stress that even though I mentioned things that might cause you to spend some money; a reward does not have to be monetary in any way. The only requirement is that it's special to you. Building in a reward system keeps you motivated and excited about your progress. Richard understands this because he's listed rewards for his employees as a force on his employee alignment milestone. What you need to remember, Richard, is that you need to be rewarded, as well."

Richard nodded. "I'll keep that in mind."

"So take a moment and jot down some ideas about rewards for yourself. You can add more later, but this will get you started. When you finish, we'll move to the final step," Mike promised.

Chapter 11 - Check Progress Results

"Now let's discuss the last step, Step 8," Mike said when we had finished. "When you have completed an action in your plan, it's important to check the results. Remember, every action you take will produce a result. Your evaluation will determine if you ended up with the result you hoped to achieve. If you did, then move on to the next action. If not, then you must adjust your course in some way."

"What exactly does that mean?" I asked. "Do you try again and hope for different results, or take different actions?"

"Remember your favorite formula, $Y=f(X)$," Mike said with a smile. "Y is the result you are trying to achieve. X is the force you are engaging and f is the action you take to engage the force. If you don't get the result you desired, then the first place to look is the way you engaged the forces - the f in the formula. Perhaps there is a different action to try or a different way to take the action. If that turns out not to be the case, then the next place to look is at the forces. Maybe there's a way to leverage two or more forces to achieve greater gains. Maybe you have incorrectly estimated the effect of a particular force and need to re-evaluate it."

"In our weight loss example, if the woman followed the recommended diet and was not seeing the results she hoped for, she may need to adjust the diet and reduce the calories even more. She could also add exercise to her routine, and the combination of diet and exercise should give her better results than diet alone. The point of this is that it is extremely important to check your results as you go."

"What if you decide you need to re-plan your Discovery Project?" Richard asked. "How should you go about doing that? What would be the signal that might require such an extreme action?"

"That's a good question, Richard. I want to say a few things about that, but let me start with an example," Mike replied.

"If you decide you want to take a trip through California, you have different options to consider when planning your journey. One option is to fly from one end of the state to the other. Another is to take a train. A third alternative is to drive. Each of these choices will get you from one end of the state to other. You will ultimately achieve your desired result. So how do you decide which option to choose? Maybe a secondary objective is

speed of arrival. In that case, you'd choose flying because it gets you there the fastest. If you want to enjoy the scenery along the way, you might choose driving.

"It's the same way with your Discovery Project. When you initially sit down to plan it out, you may have a clear vision of how to get to your desired state and you define your milestones accordingly. But as you start out, new information may become available, circumstances may change, other factors may come into play. Suddenly a new path opens up that takes you to your desired result in a more satisfying way. If that happens, you stop and re-plan your milestones. But the process is the same. For every SWOT milestone there will be forces that drive and restrain you, as well as actions you need to take to move you forward."

"So checking your results at each stage of the process and defining your 'lessons learned' also helps you decide what your next step should be," I interjected.

"Yes. If something is not working the way you want, then it's time to do something different," Mike said "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over, but expecting different results. This is one of the reasons why the 'to-think' list is important. Maybe the roadblock to your success lies in the way you think about it. If you adjust that, then maybe everything else will fall in place. It's definitely something to consider when you're stuck.

"There's another point I want to make on this subject. This one is a caution. If you find that you are struggling on your journey and things aren't working out the way you would like, you may find yourself questioning your whole journey. It might be tempting to abandon your life dream."

Mike looked at me as he said this.

"Yes, with my history I could see myself getting frustrated and giving up the dream," I admitted.

"I would caution you not to do that," Mike said earnestly. "I am reasonably sure that you will encounter difficulties along the path to your dream. After all, if this were easy, you would have already done it. However, with this process as a guide you will get there. You may have to re-plan, take a different route, do some things differently than you anticipated at the start, but you will get there. The only thing that can stop you is you. I could spend hours talking about people who have accomplished amazing things in the face of incredible adversity. Using the ideas and the tools in The Great Discovery, you can achieve all your dreams, as well."

"Negative feedback is another thing that could happen at the first sign of trouble. The naysayers in your environment will be quick to tell you, 'I told you this wouldn't work

out,” Mike cautioned. “There will be people out there who will try to discourage you from pursuing your dream for a variety of reasons. There will be people who will tell you it can’t be done and that you are just setting yourself up for disappointment if you pursue it. Don’t listen to them. They have nothing to contribute to your journey.”

Mike smiled at me. “Someday they’ll be talking about Stephanie Grant, the author. They’ll marvel at how she kept going and wouldn’t take no for an answer until she found a publisher for her book. That publisher was thrilled to do it because the book became a bestseller and made all sorts of money.”

I couldn’t help but laugh. “I’m probably going to need a pep talk now and then as I make progress. Do you provide that service?”

“Absolutely,” Mike said. He handed me his card.

“Call me any time. I’d be happy to help you, coach you and just hear about your progress.”

“Seriously, Mike, how can we get more help with this?” Richard said. “I’d like to have you or someone on your team coach my leadership team through this.”

“Call the office or check our Web site,” Mike said. “There are several options available for businesses, individuals, couples and families. Remember, you also need to take this back to your son and let him start his own Discovery Project. Sonya needs to get her fiancé on board so they can create their home life dream, as well as achieve their personal life dreams.”

Sonya, who had been spending more time listening now that most of the other passengers were asleep, nodded.

“I plan to call you as soon as I have had the chance to talk to my fiancé about this,” she said. “I know he’s going to love the concept and really want us to create our life dream together.”

“I will be happy to help each of you achieve your life dreams,” Mike said sincerely. “If every person was seriously pursuing the journey toward their life dream, imagine the effect that would have on our communities and our world. I wish each of you good luck and happy times on the road to your world class life.”

Chapter 12 - The Rest of the Story

The day that I decided to take a different flight home changed my life forever. I had the great fortune of sitting next to Dr. Mikel Harry, who showed me how to use The Great Discovery to discover my life dream. Here is the rest of the story.

As I exited the plane, Richard pulled me aside and asked if I would consider coming to work for him in his new venture. He explained that the only staff position yet to be filled was marketing director. He said he was impressed with my honesty and willingness to share so much about my hopes and fears regarding my dreams. He thought with my corporate background I'd be a good match for this new company. He also figured I'd be an ally for him with the staff since we both had just experienced The Great Discovery, and that together we could help motivate his staff. He added that since we both were working on individual life dreams, we could help each other with that aspect, as well. He assured me he would support me as I made my life transitions. It was a tempting offer, but I didn't want to make such a major decision so quickly. I told him I'd think about it.

As promised, Mike gave us access to his company resources and coaching partners to help with our Discovery Projects. As I was Dreaming-the-Doing on my journey to fulfilling my life dream, I was hopeful Nathan would be supportive. But I had prepared for the possibility that he wouldn't be. He wasn't. Nathan was completely opposed to my going forward with my life dream project. He was alarmed by the fact that I had come home from a business trip and wanted to change my entire life. He couldn't believe I wanted to make such a huge change – one that would significantly affect him and the girls – based on a conversation I had with a stranger on an airplane. It was probably the worst fight we had ever had. Our arguments lasted off and on for weeks.

During this time, an interesting side effect from my conversation with Mike took hold. The more Nathan protested against my taking action on this project, the more I resisted giving in and giving up. This was curious, because in the past my own internal lack of self-confidence would have kicked in. I would have given up long before someone else had the chance to wear me down. However, somewhere down deep inside, a light had been turned on. That light was my dream and I wasn't willing to let anyone or anything extinguish it. One day I realized that the belief I had carried around for so long that I couldn't achieve my dream had been transformed into an even stronger belief. I knew I

owed it to myself to try, and that it was quite possible I could achieve it. Funny how those forces work in your life.

Nathan and I ended our argument when I managed to convince him to meet Mike and hear firsthand about The Great Discovery. Being the studious geek he is, Nathan made sure he found out every last detail he could about Mike before agreeing to meet him. I couldn't have asked for more because Mike's background is so impressive with his Six Sigma credentials at Motorola, GE, Dupont and so many others companies Nathan respected. Then there were the numerous books and articles Mike had written. It turned out that one of Mike's books was an international bestseller. Nathan even managed to find a clip of an interview with Mike from NBC's Power Lunch. I think that sold him more than anything else.

When we met with Mike, he greeted Nathan with the same casual, low-key charm he showed me on the plane. It took all of about 10 minutes for him to convince Nathan that The Great Discovery was everything I had said it was and more. It really is hard to resist someone who not only offers you the chance to live your life dream, but shows you a realistic and practical way to get there. After that meeting, Nathan decided he wanted to define his own personal life dream and wanted us to create a home life dream for our family. Of course, he became immediately supportive of my dream and we developed an approach that allowed us to work together to achieve all of our goals.

I eventually did go to work for Richard, but not until after meeting his staff. It turned out that most of them were really great people. There were a few I didn't care for, including his second in command, but I decided the overall pros outweighed the few cons.

His staff greeted The Great Discovery with mixed feelings. Some loved it. Some really opposed it, but eventually those who opposed it left the company. Richard hired Mike's company to help him implement The Great Discovery, not only at the staff level, but across the organization.

Looking back, it was a real treat for me to see this unfold in a new organization. I found that people were willing to embrace the concepts of The Great Discovery and the core values of the organization Richard defined. They could see the big picture and how their alignment would help them contribute to the success of the company, as well as their own success. Many individual life dreams were created during those days. It was fun and inspiring to be part of a community building a great vision for the company and its customers, as well as encouraging individuals to create something extraordinary for themselves.

Richard knew that many people would leave the company after they achieved their personal catalyst dream, but he was okay with that for several reasons. First, he

understood that people who are working on something they love are more motivated and produce much better results than those who are stuck in a rut complaining about their lives. Second, Richard was working on his own life dream and knew that he would eventually leave, too. Third, the company was doing so well because of its solid alignment to its core values that we got lots of good press - not only about the quality of our products and revenue growth, but about what a great place it was for employees. That created a demand for positions within the company. As individuals left to pursue their life dreams, there were people lined up desperately wanting to take their place. They wanted to be a part of this incredible culture that supported not only the company, but the individual worker.

On a personal level, Richard talked to his son, Chris, about The Great Discovery. At first Chris was really skeptical, as are most people. Being 17 didn't help either because Chris didn't think it was "cool." But Richard has a really good handle on motivating people. I saw that firsthand as he dealt with employees, and I have no doubt he put those skills to work with his son.

Once Chris came on board, he created an amazing Discovery Project for himself. It turns out he was a very talented graphic artist. His dream was to eventually become an independent artist drawing and creating his own materials. His path involved getting a college education at an art school, and then working for a graphic arts studio for a few years before going out on his own.

When I met Chris and saw how excited he was about pursuing his dream, I had no doubt he would be successful. In fact, the whole experience showed me that when my girls were older I was going to have them create their own Discovery Projects. How great it would have been for me when I was 17 to have known what my core values were and how to achieve a life that was aligned to those values? Fortunately, it hadn't been too late for me, and I was going to make sure my daughters started out their young adult years armed with this information and a solid plan for getting there.

Sonya and her fiancé approached The Great Discovery with tremendous enthusiasm, as well. They even invited Richard, Mike and me to their wedding. While I haven't kept in touch with Sonya much, I do get an occasional e-mail from her. She always writes joyfully about their Discovery Projects and what they've accomplished on their journey.

As for my own journey, it was not without a lot of twists, turns, disappointments, victories and several re-plans. I learned plenty of lessons along the way. It took five attempts for me to find a writers' group that worked for me. I found one that sounded like a good fit, but in six months they only met once because the individual members were not motivated to organize meetings and events. A couple of groups were started

by people trying to sell their consulting services. These were hard to sit through because it was clear that the needs of the individual were secondary to the business agenda of the consultant. It got to the point that every time I found a new group to join, I dreaded it because the others had turned out to be so disappointing.

Finally, I saw an interesting article in the newspaper about a writers' studio. It looked promising, so I contacted the studio about membership. I ended up having to pay what I thought was a pretty hefty fee to join. The only reason I did was because they assured me I had three months to change my mind and get a full refund. This group turned out to be very supportive and constructive with their feedback. I found that constructive criticism did indeed motivate me to do better. I also learned that just because someone else may not like the way I worded something or explained a concept, all that really mattered was whether I was happy with it. I learned how to discriminate among the comments I received and use only those which helped me become a better writer.

My first book focused on senior citizens and their stories. As I discovered, so many seniors have wonderful stories to tell full of warmth, humor and great lessons. But sadly they don't have people who are willing to listen to them. I took their stories and wove a thread throughout the book of what I hoped was inspiration, motivation and guidance for people to live happier lives.

Finding an agent and a publisher was every bit the nightmare I had imagined. Mike even gave me access to his agent and the publishers he had worked with. It seemed nobody wanted the book. That was really disappointing because I had put my heart into it. It was my dream.

Nathan suggested that we self-publish it. He helped me create a Web site where we could advertise it and sell it online. I began taking the book to local assisted living facilities, libraries and other places. I offered to speak for free about the lessons in the book and managed to sell a few hundred copies that way. I found that I loved talking about the book and the stories in it when I could find an audience. My talks got good reviews, which put me in demand for local speaking engagements. My writers' group was a great asset, helping me find speaking engagements and making sure I got to talk to agents when they were available.

A year after I wrote the book, I happened to be speaking at a local independent bookseller who agreed to carry about a dozen copies of my work. In the audience was a representative from a small but solid publishing company specializing in inspirational and self-help books. The representative talked to me afterward and I landed an interview with one of their editors. They eventually agreed to publish my book and promote it to a wider audience.

I cannot possibly describe how amazing it was to finally achieve my catalyst dream. The publishing company also arranged speaking tours for their authors. They actually put on conferences for individuals who were seeking inspiration and guidance in their lives. As an author for the publishing company, I was invited to speak at these conferences. I found myself traveling all over the country talking about the book – the subject I loved best. It was incredibly rewarding and I realized one day, just as I was about to take the stage, that I was living my life dream. It felt great.

I ended up leaving my job at Richard's company about the same time he did. Richard succeeded beyond his wildest dreams and had no need to market his skills because of all the great press he had received as CEO. Suddenly, all sorts of companies wanted him to do the same thing for their new ventures or acquired companies. He asked me to come along with him to be on his team, as well as a few others who had traveled the journey with him from the beginning and were key to the success we had achieved. But I was starting my nationwide speaking tours about that time and regretfully declined.

My change in career direction did not bring me more money. In fact, even though I wrote three more books, my income was less than it was as a corporate employee. I have to tell you in all honesty, it didn't matter in the slightest. I was enjoying what I did and living my core values every day. That was all that mattered.

So as I close out this story, my heartfelt encouragement and advice to all who read it is to go out and create your own Discovery Project. There is no way to describe how wonderful it is to be living your life dream. Every day becomes a wonderful adventure. This is a roadmap anyone can follow. You just need to start.

Good luck, happy dreaming and much success...as you travel the proven path of "The Great Discovery" whether it is in your personal life, your home life or your work life.

