



A Spark from Heaven?

The Place of Potential in Organizational and Individual Development

Book summary By Frumi Barr

Author: Adrian W. Savage

Publisher: PNA Publishing, New Jersey

Copyright year: 2002

ISBN: 0-9718369-0-6

Author bio and credits: Adrian Savage is president of PNA, Inc. Educated in England at The Cathedral School, Hereford and Peterhouse, Cambridge. He is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of personnel and Development. For more than twenty-five years, Mr. Savage has researched the way people and organizations utilize their potential, developing new ways of understanding what allows companies to achieve optimum performance. He has been a consultant at national and multinational businesses on both sides of the Atlantic and a university lecturer as well as holding senior management positions in several large organizations.

Author's Big Thought: each of us has the potential to become successful. What gets in our way is allowing habits of thinking, as well as values and outdated beliefs to block the path to accomplishment. This book offers advice and insights to help find, develop and reap the rewards that potential can offer as a vital element of growth and achievement.

Supporting ideas:

According to the author, potential is a deliberate choice to undertake something more demanding than we are doing right now, in conjunction with the opportunity or possibility to make such a change. Developing potential is a process of adapting, innovating and improvising. Potential consists of all the gifts we could be using and

the things we could be doing, or thinking, or saying, or learning but haven't done so yet. Realizing potential takes purposeful action today, beginning with the talents and skills you have already and with whatever advantages you have.

Potential is possibility and is always expansive - it opens our minds to new ideas adds to our skills and experiences and broadens viewpoints and perspectives.

Awareness

Becoming self-aware is the first essential step. We must notice when old habits and assumptions block us and hold us back.

Potential is a process, not a thing. When we limit our potential, we limit our actions, not just our concepts.

Conscious Choices

Conscious choice unlocks unused potential because whenever we choose consciously, we open the possibility of reaching a new place. Whenever we make choices, those choices have consequences. If we do what we always do, choosing habitually or automatically, we increase the odds that the future will most likely be a continuation of the past. If we make conscious choices, ones that are better aligned with the kind of person we aspire to be, the future will reflect that new present. For building potential, what matters is to become aware of the causes over which we have some control, and the effects each one produces. Without awareness of yourself and all the causes that arrive with you, no choice can be conscious.

We allow our habitual values, beliefs, attitudes and modes of thought to feed or conscious minds only what gets past their inspection. Self-awareness lets us identify our entrenched mental habits and identify what they are doing below the level of normal awareness.

Strengths and values

The key to finding success and fulfillment is simple: discover our long term strengths, our potential, and put ourselves where we can make the best use of them and where they will be most valued.

Three steps are needed to discover and then make full use of our potential:

1. Exploration, in depth and without hurrying - increases self awareness and gets beyond superficial judgments about strengths and weaknesses
2. Patient removal of blockages - cures ignorance and arrogance.
3. Long term continuous development and learning - involves working to broaden our minds and increase our options.

How we do our work is far more important than what we do. The point is to discover what works for you, and then develop it as far as you can go, ignoring everything else. Potential is in the *how*, not in the *what*. It is the *how* that determines how well we do the *what*. It is the *how* that we can take to different fields of work. The *what* may be the measure of success, but it is the *how* that got us there.

To find potential, we need the motivation to start plus the determination to sustain our efforts and attention long enough to make a difference. Recognition comes next, based on exploring how we function today and how we could function in the future. After that, we need to take action in order to make our potential real. That means seeking out the opportunities we need and deliberately stepping outside our comfort zones and old habits.

Potential only functions when we are flexible and open to unexpected possibilities, taking any opportunity that will lead us in the right direction and improvising freely to cope with all the unknowns. We must stay firmly focused on our goal- to realize as much of our potential as possible - yet be extremely flexible about the means of achieving it.

Motivations, Emotions and Reason

Emotions are much stronger than rational thought. Our emotions are fueled by our values, not by logical thought. We may use logic to justify what we value, but we will not give up our values easily. It is our values that cause both guilt and elation. Values are so embedded in our being. They are so familiar and automatic that we rarely recognize when they operate, but they can stop any thought, action or choice before it begins to register in our conscious minds. Because of this, values are probably the best place to start looking for potential values are matters of the heart. Our potential always aligns with what is in our hearts, even if our heads have learned to think differently. Our values tell us what is good, bad, right, wrong, important or irrelevant. Although we rely on them totally, they do not always tell us the truth. Our values are also processes - processes of valuing or evaluating - fueled by emotions more than reason. Values work all the time, unconsciously and automatically. Values, by definition, are valuable and important to the person who holds them. At any specific time, the values we hold are completely right in our eyes. Which means that any opposing or different values must be wrong, equally without question. Our core values tell us what we should devote our lives to, so they are central to the motivation we need to find and access our potential. Whenever our values become automatic and habitual, they govern our actions and

start to close down conscious choice. Unconscious habits are the most common blockages to potential. The only way to deal with them is to bring them out into the open and subject them to the antidote to all habits: conscious choice.

Over time, our thought processes become as habitual and unconscious as our values. Whenever we let habitual thought processes and values take charge of our minds, much of our potential will be hidden or blocked.

Postcards (key indicators)

There are a number of key indicators that point to true potential. They start with questions to help us choose the best route to our potential; then change to queries that will tell us if we are heading in the right direction.

- Does it align with our true values? - true potential always does.
- Does it feel exciting? Potential is exciting - when we connect with our true potential we are in flow.
- Does it build on our strengths? Our natural areas of strengths are the only sound basis for realizing potential.
- Is this a stretch? Anything within our comfort zone is competence, not potential. Competence means doing what we do already, only better. Potential is doing something new or extra: something that will stretch us and extend the breadth and range of our capabilities. Realizing potential means stretching. If it is not something that goes beyond our habits, requiring us to step outside our comfort zone, it is not potential. We have to reach a balance: enough stretch to keep us vibrant, alive, and pushing our limits, without tipping over into strain and stress.
- Is it increasing our learning? Learning is an essential part of the process of realizing potential. We need the opportunity to experiment with new ideas, accept wider responsibilities and gain fresh experiences.
- Are we learning something, not about something? Learning about something increases our competence. Learning something new broadens and enhances potential
- Does it broaden minds and open perspectives? Potential is always expansive.
- Does it produce more values, confidence or joy? Realizing potential is always exhilarating.

Blockages

There are several things that cause us to get in our own way: lack of conscious choice, automatic habits and lack of motivation are the strongest. Deteriorates strengths and being unaware of the fears that come with core values are others. Letting go of negative beliefs is a good place to start. Our beliefs have power over us only because we treat them as the truth. A belief is a thought, or an opinion, that has been given the force of truth in our minds. Beliefs need to be checked and rechecked for accuracy and usefulness. Softening and easing our deep-seated habits is essential to accessing our unused potential, and habitual beliefs are as narrow and limiting as any other kind of habit.

Anger, jealousy and self-loathing are the most common results of poor insights into how our minds work. They drain us of energy and set us on a path that will produce only suffering and frustration.

When strengths work against us

There are always two sides to every strength. On the positive side is a benefit. On the negative side is the corresponding fear. e.g. if there is no failure, there can be nothing called success. Deteriorated versions of strengths develop the opposites of the qualities that potential would have brought. Just as with our other strengths (logical analysis/analysis paralysis), our strongest values (core values) are probably those most prone to being present in dysfunctional forms. Because our core values are so important to us, they are prone to sliding into dysfunctional and constricted forms, where they become rigid and automatic. When they do, they produce limiting, demanding kinds of behavior, often characterized by self-righteousness and careless cruelty. Diversity of values is the best antidote.

Obsessive achievement is a good example because it can make people believe that the end justifies the means. They worked long hard hours and devoted themselves totally to achieving their objectives. They also ignored ethical considerations.

The first step in bringing potential to bear on current strengths should be to explore whether we have begun to harbor any deteriorated forms of our strengths. The second way to bring more potential to bear on current strengths is to increase our ability to focus from close up and detailed to broad and holistic.

Presence of mind is a universal antidote to most of these difficulties. When we are truly present it is easy to see when we are losing perspective.

Possibility

There are four essential ingredients in the process of realizing potential: motivation, recognition, opportunity and above all, choice. We need to recognize our potential through exploring possibilities and options.

Uncertainty means not knowing, but not knowing is far more valuable in searching for potential than any amount of prior knowledge. Keeping an open mind is a prerequisite for realizing potential. We need to be willing to live on the edge between present and future, and between comfort and stretch, where past patterns can be broken up to let new patterns take their place.

Habits

Our ability to form habits developed because of its evolutionary value. By making routine actions automatic, habits free our minds for other things. Your automatic habits keep you functioning, while your conscious mind attends to something else. Habits work - they are not bad. They are there because we found by experience that they success. Our habits always represent past successes. That is why they fee so useful to us. We form habits around how we work, how we deal with other people, how we react to problems, and even how we think. It is not their usefulness that is a problem when they hinder us in developing potential. It is their tenancy to solidify and their unconsciousness.

The most deeply unconscious habits we have are habits of thinking. If we want to develop our potential, we must step over even our most fondly held and successful habits and try some new types of thinking. Habits of thinking block us from seeing things in a new light or from finding fresh ideas. No new ideas, no new learning. No learning, no access to anymore potential. Our brains choose what to focus on and how to think about it. Nearly all of this goes on below the level of consciousness. By the time the brain has grabbed our attention, it has already dumped what it saw as irrelevant and categorized and sifted the rest. Now it is ready to present us with the situation, plus a nice set of instructions.

Choices

Our destiny is made up of choices. What will happen for us depends on the choices we made in the past and their consequences in the future. Choice offers us options - options to respond differently than we have responded in the past. As Viktor Frankl discovered in Auschwitz, choice is the ultimate human freedom. The mot important step in realizing potential is to re-establish conscious choice in place of

all those automatic habitual decisions. Every conscious choice contains the possibility for allowing us to connect with a little bit more of potential.

To be able to learn from our experience, we must always know what we are doing and why. By doing this consciously, we can trace the patterns of cause and effect. Doing this deliberately allows us to repeat what we learn.

Concept and Toolkits

A concept is a piece of learning that has been generalized so it can be applied in many different contexts.

Potential begins with the conscious choice to take charge of our attention and focus on what matters. What we focus on expands. Whatever we pay attention to powerfully and consistently will always grow larger in our lives. By giving most of our attention to actions which will increase potential, we also find there will not be much left over for worry or depression. Conscious choice allows us to bring all our attention to our decisions, so we can learn from the consequences. We can all practice increasing conscious choice, using these guidelines:

- Take your time
- Explore more options than you would automatically consider
- Direct your attention deliberately
- Trust yourself and accept that sometimes you will get it wrong
- Try to respond consciously to events instead of reacting to them automatically.

Conscious incompetence

"Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm." Sir Winston Churchill

Doing something new almost always means doing it badly the first time. To develop your potential you must start to develop a new skill: the skill of conscious incompetence. Accessing potential consciously and deliberately means doing things badly and on purpose, so you can learn to do them well. The best time to practice is when making decisions.

Reviewer's recommendation: We are all told how important it is to live up to our potential. It always seemed like a goal - some point in the future to arrive at. This book defines potential and makes it achievable by anyone who is open and willing.



Contact Frumi at 949-729-1577
frumi@leaderlylearning.com

Frumi and Deborah Gaal are co-founders of the Leaderly Learning Center, a leadership development company specializing in women. We get results because our workshops are led by women who have been CEO's, entrepreneurs and certified coaches. We walk the walk.

Our unique curriculum enables leaders to achieve results through a combination of learning and implementing research-based leadership lessons, coaching to develop self-awareness, and mentoring to provide support.