

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

Wild Courage

**GO AFTER
WHAT YOU
WANT AND
GET IT**

Jenny Wood

“Your candid career coach for unstoppable growth.”
—Kim Scott, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Radical Candor*



About the Author

Jenny Wood is an unstoppable confidence booster dedicated to helping people make their impossible dreams likely. After chasing an attractive stranger off the subway, giving him her number, and later marrying him, Wood vowed to always pluck up the courage to go after what she wanted in life. And it's worked; Wood is a Google Executive, founder of Own Your Career, speaker, writer, mom, and pilot. Her writing has been featured in *Harvard Business Review*, *Entrepreneur, Inc.*, and *Forbes*. She earned her B.A. in Economics & International Business at Brandeis and was a research associate at Harvard Business School. She lives in Boulder with her husband and their two kids.

Years ago, I chased a total stranger off the New York City subway. Today, he's my husband and the father of our two children. The wild courage I mustered that day has driven my professional achievements as well, first as a researcher at Harvard Business School, then as an executive at Google, where I climbed the ranks for nearly two decades, and now as an author, speaker, and consultant to Fortune 500 companies.

Why is courage essential to success? Because we are often timid on the inside. Every single one of us, including me. At Google, I conjured up plenty of fear: fear that I wouldn't impress my boss in our weekly one-on-one. Fear that I would say something stupid in that big meeting full of VIPs. Fear that no one would ever forget the presentation I flubbed. Cool and collected exec on the outside. *A lot* more going on on the inside. I realized that fear will always be my companion. But I have succeeded largely by pushing through that fear to achieve my heartfelt ambitions. **That's where all ambitions hide: on the other side of fear.**

wearing gloves, so I can't tell if you've got a wedding ring; however, if you're not married, you were on my subway, and I think you're cute. Can I give you my business card?"

Reader, Jon took the card.

"It was a pretty gutsy thing to do," Jon later told the *Times*. "That sort of thing appeals to me."

Too excited to wait for the next train, I walked the remaining thirteen blocks home, smiling, through a blizzard.

Serendipity isn't found; it's made.

Or that when fate (i.e., luck) plays a role, it means the relationship was “meant to be.” If I’d dutifully followed the arbitrary dating rules until things felt “meant to be” instead of summoning the courage to hustle off that train, I’d still be single.

I made my own “meant to be.” All it took was wild courage.

This book is about getting what you want in life and why it’s not talent, skill, money, or luck standing in your way—it’s you.

You.

And that’s such good news. It means that all you really need to do is overcome your limited mindset. Your self-defeating attitude. Your worries and fears. Once you quiet the stubborn inner voice telling you to hold back when you could be leaping forward, all the obstacles *out there* will no longer intimidate you.

You can let that voice stand in your way forever. Or you can take courage from a simple truth: *This is your life and no one else’s*. Whatever you’ve been through and wherever you are right now, you can *always* take the wheel and drive. You have agency. All it takes is courage to push through your

- fear of the unknown,

- fear of failure, and
- most of all, *fear of the judgment of others*.

Brave these fears and nothing is beyond your grasp.

Ironically, we usually know what it will take to achieve our biggest ambitions, but we don't take action because we're worried about how it might look. We fear what other people, even strangers, will think of us if we carve a path instead of following the crowd.

The desire to fit in runs deep. Shake off these irrational fears, and you'll be free. Free to act on your behalf for the first time in your life. Free to become your own champion. Everything you've ever wanted is on the other side of fear.

Again, this isn't about fear of heights or fear of clowns...unless you want to become a pilot or a circus ringmaster. When it comes to personal and professional goals, we're quaking with fear of the judgment of others. What friends, family, and even complete strangers will think about us if we seize the spotlight. This fear drives us to conform instead of conquer.

Successful people take action despite their fear. They muster the courage to do what's necessary to succeed before it's encouraged by others—or even considered socially acceptable. What they *don't* do is look elsewhere for permission or affirmation. They *don't* wait until everyone else is doing it. No, they just *act*. Others may judge them, but they persevere, confident that *success will justify their actions retroactively*.

永远都会害怕， 所以.....

If you accept this book's challenge, you'll be astonished by what you discover. After a courageous act or two, you'll realize that many of your fears are just stories you're telling yourself. They aren't real. You can choose to listen to them...or rewrite them.

🕒 That said, fear isn't useless. It's actually a handy *compass*. When fear says, "Run away," it means you're chasing something important to you. Something *valuable*. Resist the urge to avoid the very behaviors that will accelerate your growth and maximize the chances of personal and professional success. To grasp the prize, you're going to have to reach, stretch, and get pretty *uncomfortable*. And that's scary! Fear is there to keep you safe...and small. When fear tells you to stop, you may have only a split second to decide. Don't balk. Think *wild courage* and go for it! Chase after what you want, whether it's the job of your dreams, the business you've always wanted to build, or, as was my experience on the subway, the ideal partner for you.

successful enough to pull it off. Somehow, we never realize that a **success mindset precedes success**. That famous person didn't get away with doing what they did because they were famous. They became famous because they conjured the courage to try things they weren't guaranteed to pull off.

→ We see everything differently in the context of success. Where the intern's behavior is "weird," the boss's *identical* behavior is "authentic." Where the employee's decision to leave the company is "selfish," the owner's decision to sell the same company is "sensible." Where the business school grad's new solo venture is "reckless," the successful entrepreneur's start-up is "courageous." **We're comfortable with risks only after we know they paid off. Unfortunately, time only moves in one direction. By the point a risk feels safe, the opportunity is long gone.**

A mindset of wild courage will save you. Push past fear and the desperate need to please others, and you'll be free to follow good advice instead of wishing you were the kind of person who could. No one will ever give you that permission. You must give it to yourself. Don't let your fear of being labeled a certain way by others hold you back. Because these labels are ridiculous. / We apply very specific ones to people who break social norms to get what they want: **WEIRD. SELFISH. SHAMELESS. OBSESSED. NOSY. MANIPULATIVE. BRUTAL. RECKLESS. BOSSY. /**

These words don't paint a rosy picture. But think about it: What's actually wrong with being "weird"? In high school, being yourself (i.e., weird) gets you ostracized. But how long has high school been over for you now? Having been an executive for many years at one of the world's best companies to work for, I can tell you that standing out—being a little weird—gets you promoted. Be yourself or be forgotten.

Likewise, what's fundamentally wrong with being "selfish"? If you don't advocate for yourself, no one else will. Your manager has problems of their own. They don't necessarily wake up every morning wondering how to make *your* career flourish. Call it selfish if you want, but being your own champion is essential. As the legendary sage Rabbi Hillel wrote long ago, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?"

Also, what's wrong with acting "shamelessly"? Why should anyone feel shame about going after what they want? I always wince when someone apologizes for the "shameless plug" of their own work. Plug away! Where does shame enter into it? Take pride in your accomplishments!

Wild courage
=
break social norms

WHY IT TAKES WILD COURAGE

You *must* stand out to get what you want. Standing out is your best—and possibly only—shot at success: A great career or thriving business. An amazing partner. Creative fulfillment. Public recognition. Whatever you're after, passive acceptance and anonymous invisibility won't help you catch it.

The reason we find it so hard to go out on a limb is because of our evolutionary roots. On the savanna, exclusion for *Homo sapiens* living in small tribes meant not only loneliness but certain death. Lions picked off the conspicuous. Early humans were as interdependent as any colony of ants or bees, and this heritage is baked deeply in our DNA. Acceptance by the tribe meant survival. That's why feelings like embarrassment, shame,

Normalization

THE NINE TRAITS

In the following chapters, we will transform these nine labels into powerful Traits that will direct your efforts and fuel your courage. Through techniques and strategies validated by the many individual contributors, managers, and leaders I've taught and coached, I'll show you how each Trait functions as a powerful principle for success. Throughout the book, they will appear in bold when I refer to them in their refined, courageous sense versus their original, negative connotation:

- **WEIRD:** The courage to stand out.
- **SELFISH:** The courage to stand up for what you want.
- **SHAMELESS:** The courage to stand behind your efforts and abilities.
- **OBSESSED:** The courage to set your own standard.
- **NOSY:** The courage to dig deeper.
- **MANIPULATIVE:** The courage to influence others.
- **BRUTAL:** The courage to protect your time and energy.
- **RECKLESS:** The courage to take calculated risks.
- **BOSSY:** The courage to listen and lead.

To be fair, these words carry negative connotations because some push them too far. Yes, some people really are selfish, manipulative, or reckless. But these are the exceptions that prove the rule. In my corporate experience, most employees overcorrect in the other direction. They let their fear of being seen as brutal prevent them from making hard but necessary choices. Or their fear of being seen as bossy from taking the lead when no one else will. And so on. It's for this majority that I've written this book—to level the playing field.

Because you can go too far with every **Trait**, each chapter will close with **Trait Traps**, simple guardrails to flag your attention when a strength threatens to become a weakness. **OBSESSED** is about adopting a vigorous work ethic, not spiraling into self-destructive work addiction and burnout. **NOSY** is about healthy curiosity, not invasive surveillance of coworkers. And so on.

Sometimes, the thing you want to chase after might involve stepping off the familiar path and forging into the unknown. If that's the case for you and you're nervous, I can relate. I haven't lived with wild courage every minute of my life. Not by a long shot. There have been many times when I let fear win. I've held back when I should have raised my hand, only to watch someone else run with an opportunity that should have been mine. I've performed below my ability—and gotten the performance scores to match. I've let other people steer me instead of carving my own path. In addition to the successes I share, you'll learn about my failures, hesitations, and missteps, too. This isn't about perfection. The **Traits** are simply guiding principles to help you keep chasing after what you want.

What do you want?

What keeps you alive?

**Do you have the permission/legitimacy to go
after what you want and get it?**

Contrary to how we're programmed growing up, success isn't about meeting someone's arbitrary standard of performance or behavior. Permission to reach for success never comes from outside. *You get what you want by having the courage to unapologetically chase after it.* Some people hear my subway story, or learn how I secured a particular professional opportunity, and label my behavior as aggressive. But is it "aggressive" to go after what you want *without* undermining yourself or disparaging your own efforts? That's not aggression. It's courage! The courage to pursue what you want.

1 WEIRD: Win as you or lose as “who?”

2 SELFISH: Be your own champion

3 SHAMELESS: Find your swagger

4 OBSESSED: Push, perform, and persist

5 NOSY: Get insatiably curious

6 MANIPULATIVE: Build influence through empathy.

7 BRUTAL: Draw lines and stick to them

8 RECKLESS: Err on the side of action

9 BOSSY: Steer others to success

Conclusion: Embrace a life of wild courage

CUT TO THE CHASE

If time is short and you're looking for quick, targeted help on key career and success topics, jump directly to hands-on advice as follows:

[Set goals](#)

[Boost confidence at work](#)

[Own your personal brand](#)

[Prioritize tasks](#)

[Evaluate a prospective manager](#)

[Tackle impostor syndrome](#)

[Identify your strengths](#)

[Minimize negative self-talk](#)

[Communicate with conviction](#)

[Self-promote tastefully](#)

[Procrastinate less on intimidating projects](#)

TRAIT TRAPS

Every chapter of this book closes with **Trait Traps**: guardrails to flag your attention when a strength threatens to become a weakness. Beware too much of a good thing.

WEIRD

Win as you, or lose as “who?”

- **Play it hot.** Unlike high school, the real world is too crowded and competitive for us to wait to be noticed. Be visible, sit in the front row, diplomatically disagree with your boss, and share your best stuff with the world.
- **Sharpen those elbows.** When starting in a role, career, or industry, say yes to at least three out of every four opportunities.
- **Make your mark.** Prepare a four-to-five-sentence intro to quickly tell others what you can offer, then paste it everywhere. When you make something, take credit so people know where to find more of what you offer.
- **Pay the fine.** Instead of avoiding mistakes entirely—and stifling growth—write off the negative consequences of smart risks as the cost of doing business.
- **Be your (best) self.** Stand out by highlighting your strengths, not going for shock value.

WEIRD

Win as you or lose as “who?”

Weird

(adj.): of strange or extraordinary character.

Weird redefined: The courage to stand out.

Before catching the right man on the New York City subway, I embarked on a painful, long-drawn-out chase after the wrong one: “Brian.” Instead of moving on when the wrongness of the match became obvious—to any rational person, anyway—I refused to accept defeat. By the time I stopped twisting my authentic weirdness into his idea of normal, I’d done real damage to myself.

Never again.

There is no normal. We’re all **WEIRD** in different ways. I’m bold, outspoken, driven, confident, and a bit loud. I dance down the sidewalk in public while listening to a cappella Broadway show tunes on my headphones. I’ve never been one to play it cool, dim my light, or curb my enthusiasm, and some people find me odd or a “bit much.”

My attributes have always been strengths or weaknesses, depending on the context and how well I’ve leveraged them. Unfortunately, with Brian, my iron determination quickly became a weakness. From the start, he

My attributes have always been strengths or weaknesses, depending on the context and how well I've leveraged them. Unfortunately, with Brian, my iron determination quickly became a weakness. From the start, he wanted someone demure and quiet. A wallflower. More accurately, a blond and petite wallflower. Ignoring this disconnect, I pursued him, and eventually, we started dating. Sort of.

"I want to be with someone gorgeous but insecure," Brian once told me.

It took six full years of flirtation, dating, friends with benefits, and "what even *is* this?" conversations to hit bottom. While I was squatting in the rubble of my old self, it finally struck me: I would *never* be Brian's person. Mustering the courage, I made a clean break. (See **BRUTAL** for more on those.) One of the best decisions I've made, however late. If you keep squeezing your square peg into a round hole, you'll get bent out of shape.

Had the average pilot gotten larger since the 1920s? After all, the American diet had become more abundant. To his surprise, Gilbert S. Daniels, the Harvard-educated lieutenant assigned to solving the problem, discovered that the “average pilot” didn’t exist in the first place. Cockpits had been designed around average measurements—average height, average arm width, and so on. However, no air force pilot was within 15 percent of the average on all ten body measurements. Like the American family with 2.5 kids, the average pilot around whom cockpits had been designed was a statistical mirage. *Every* pilot was **WEIRD**.

The aircraft controls had never been easy to reach. Accidents happened more frequently because planes had gotten faster and their controls more complicated. With less time and more complexity, that extra half an inch required to hit a button or flip a switch went from annoyance to deadly hazard.

Once Daniels convinced the top brass that every pilot was unique (i.e., **WEIRD**), the air force introduced adjustable seats, and the accident rate plummeted.

Carlye Kosiak was one of our best hires at Google. After rising through the ranks, Carlye is now a global product lead. Did I choose to interview her because of the remarkable accomplishments on her résumé? Accomplishments are table stakes at a company like Google. No, I interviewed Carlye because, besides her impressive work history, her résumé indicated an interest in "recipe tasting in pursuit of the perfect oatmeal raisin cookie." Carlye had the chops to work at Google, but so did fifty other CVs in my stack. She got the interview because her résumé

↪ 爱好?

To stand out, let it hang out... within reason. Figuring out who you are—how you think and solve problems, what you enjoy and dislike, the values that matter most—is essential in (a) deciding what to chase in life and (b) actually catching it. Aiming for average always feels safe, but the results are boring and forgettable. Being forgotten is the real danger in any career. Life is too busy and competitive on this crazy planet for *well-rounded* to make a dent. Get *angular*. 

Think about that intern who worked in your department last summer. They played it safe. Rather than rock the boat, they formatted their résumé according to the guidelines, arrived promptly in the expected business casual attire, and quietly observed every meeting. Where are they now? And what was their name again?

→ Follow the rules and meet expectations. Pay your taxes and sign on the dotted line. But remember that the unwritten rules we obediently follow to “fit in” aren’t rules at all. They’re traps, filters to weed out people without the guts to transcend them. Study the careers of notable figures in business, science, politics, or the arts. Breaking with convention is the only rule they consistently follow.

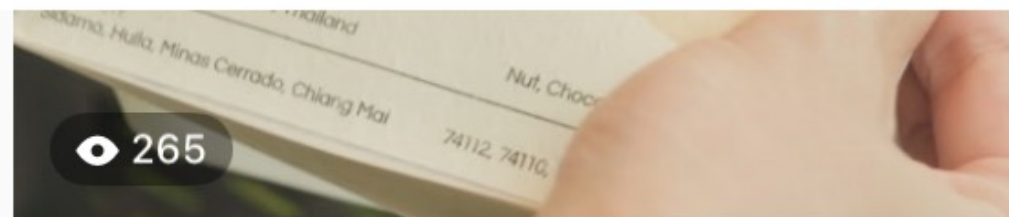
According to research, authenticity drives “work outcomes such as job satisfaction, in-role performance, and work engagement.” But being yourself isn’t just a good strategy for getting ahead. It’s good *for* you. Struggling to meet some imagined template—cool, hip, “leadership material”—leaves you feeling alienated and sad. Instead, get comfortable with the discomfort of being yourself. Stop suppressing every impulse and instinct. This liberates enormous mental and emotional energy you can invest in going after what you want. For example, my team at Google was once up for an award we *really* wanted to win. Rather than fill out the submission form with dry details about our project and its business impact, we spent way too much time making a goofy music video. Talk about WEIRD.



Posts

Collects

Likes



House blend | 来一杯好喝的意式咖啡

Terroir Roasters

8



带着咖啡豆去徒步

Terroir Roasters

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在 JJ Market 上表演的他们来为我们唱歌

Terroir Roasters

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Terroir Roasters

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Terroir and friends in Chiang Mai

Terroir Roasters

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Roasters

Terroir Roasters

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泰国公假日，店里坐满了神仙客人

Terroir Roasters

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Home



Shop



Messages



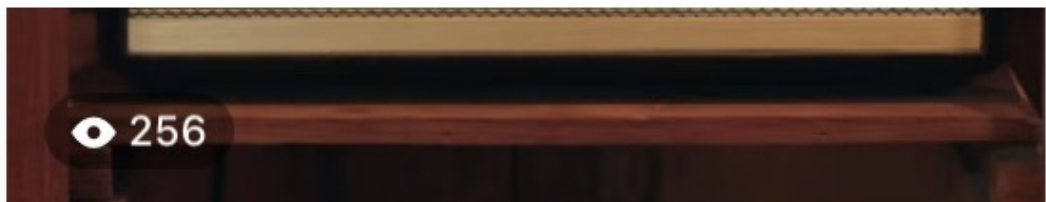
Me



Posts

Collects

Likes



Terroir Roasters 店里的书和音乐

Terroir Roasters

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House blend | 来一杯好喝的意式咖啡

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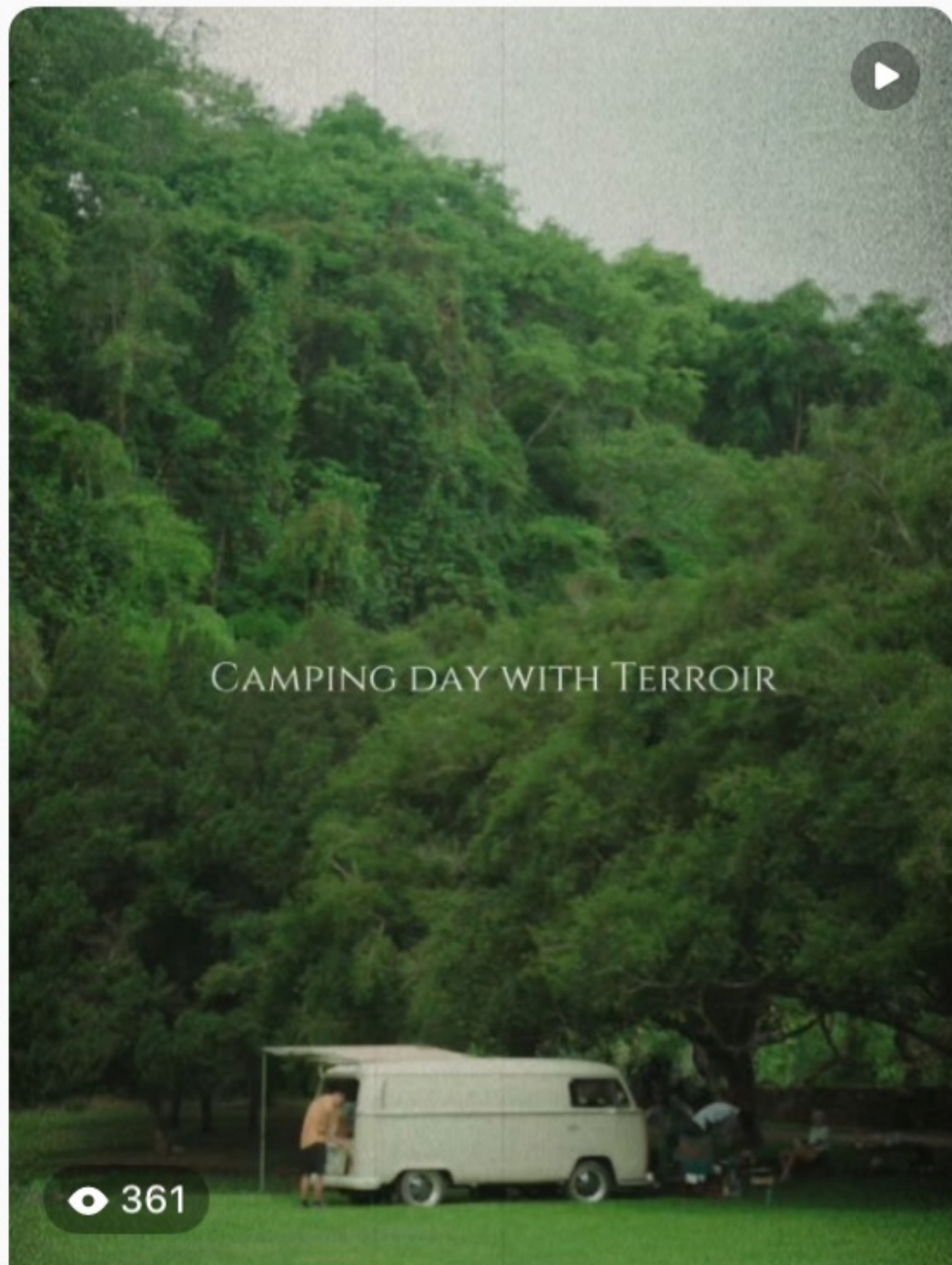
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雨季的清迈，是 Terroir 的样子

Terroir Roasters

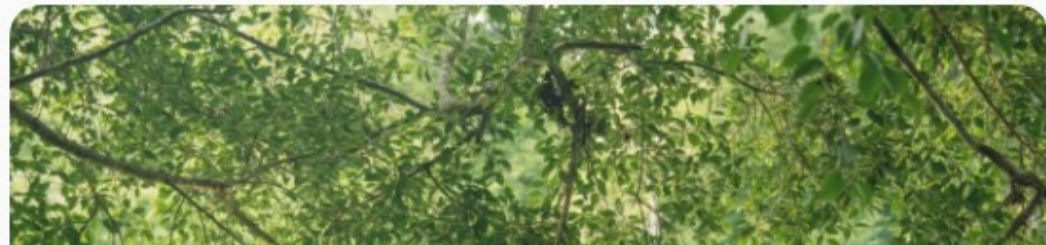
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No.5 Astra | 目前店里最受欢迎的一款手冲

Terroir Roasters

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Terroir Roasters

7



从巴厘岛到清迈，她眼中的 Terroir Roasters

Terroir Roasters

16



Home



Shop



Messages



Me

3



AHU Brand
Business chat



7%

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MAY 1 AT 1:42 AM

Hi, this is Eric. We met at Camplife 3. I recently opened a café in Hangdong called Terroir Roasters (located inside Din Cafe). If you're ever in the area, feel free to drop by for a cup of coffee.

I've always admired your products — and if you're interested, I'd love to offer space at the café for consignment or hosting workshops.

Wishing you and your team all the best!

สวัสดีครับ ผมชื่อเอริคครับ
เราเคยเจอกันที่งาน Camplife 3
ตอนนี้ผมเพิ่ง  ร้านกาแฟที่หางดง ชื่อว่า Terroir
Roasters (ตั้งอยู่ใน Din Cafe)



Shigehiro Oishi

read, listen to, or share them. [Learn more](#)

APR 28 AT 12:13 PM

Hi Professor Oishi,

I just finished your new book *Life in Three Dimensions* and enjoyed it very much. Your discussion of psychological richness truly struck a chord with me, and it inspired me to reach out to you.

I noticed that in your book, you referred to the proverb 温故知新 and described it as a Japanese saying ("there is a popular proverb in Japan, 温故知新"). Actually, it originally comes from Chinese, as a famous teaching from Confucius.

While looking into it, I also discovered that there's a Japanese book called *Onkochishinsho*, which shows how the idea has been embraced across cultures.

The so-called safe alternative to **WEIRD** is trying to be everyone's cup of tea. Going along to get along feels perfectly comfortable when you're doing it, but it's so much riskier. The obvious move is easily forgotten. Why make it in the first place? When you put your unique spin on things, from how you speak and act to how you get the job done, you discover kindred spirits, just as banging a tuning fork creates sympathetic vibrations in objects that resonate on the same frequency. **WEIRD** leads to dependable allies, better gigs, and more compatible romantic partners.

PLAY IT HOT

People tell you to play it cool when you're trying to impress. That might work in high school, but planet Earth is slightly bigger. Adding so many people to the mix changes the risk–reward ratio. Weirding out your circle of friends in high school is social suicide. Weirding out someone you met on Tinder is par for the course if you want to find an authentic match one day. Different stakes make for a different game. In the real world, you either stand out or sink into obscurity.

Play it *hot*.

Playing it hot is a strategic commitment *not* to blend in. It's a mindset: *I will bring energy and excitement to every interaction, confident that the benefits outweigh the risks.* Because, in the long run, they always do.

Yes, *this week*. In a large organization, people must be reminded of who you are and what you can do *regularly*. Playing it hot means defaulting to visible over invisible, heard over silent. Being distinct. Being noticed. For example, when you're in a meeting or conference call, speak! Don't just nod along like a wise sage. You add palpable energy by speaking even when you don't say the perfect thing. If your suggestion isn't accepted, it might spark something useful from someone else. If your information isn't correct, being corrected will help everyone else who was also mistaken about that fact. Take the risk and participate. It's always worth the risk to ensure you're noticed and remembered, even if you're the intern.

Especially if you're the intern. You don't have to be an expert to be a valued contributor.

SHARPEN THOSE ELBOWS

As part of a significant restructuring, first-tier leaders within a Fortune 500 retail company gathered from around the world in London to determine new placements for all second-tier leaders. Through a **WEIRD** “coincidence,” some of the more ambitious second-tier leaders arrived in London the same week for *totally* unrelated business reasons. While these sharp-elbowed few didn’t have the audacity to crash the actual planning meetings, they made themselves highly visible around the company’s London offices and arranged impromptu coffees with the first-tier leaders who were in the middle of deciding their fates.

It takes sharp elbows to rub shoulders. To stand out, put yourself out there. Draw attention. Declare your willingness to tackle opportunities. If your manager asks for extra hands on a project, don’t second-guess yourself: “Will I look too eager, enthusiastic, or naive?” Maybe, but so what? **WEIRD** is about pushing through that discomfort, carving a path to

If this makes you look eager, good—you are. Similarly, “opportunistic” is another one of those good things that gets a bad rap. Opportunities are *amazing*. We all want them. Unfortunately, our high school–honed egos say the captain should pick us for the team. *Pick yourself*. Seize every opportunity you can. Get comfortable saying, “I’ll tackle that!” Whether it’s an internal awards program that needs revamping, an AI workstream being formed, or a company baseball team short one shortstop, stake your claim. It doesn’t matter if you have no experience. Let *them* decide whether you’re qualified instead of disqualifying yourself. If you’re given the chance, trust yourself to figure it out.

Do you want sharp elbows? Easy: When you’re asked, the answer is yes. When the question is who, the answer is you. Default to *interested, willing, sign me up*. If something needs an owner, own it. What better way to get on your manager’s manager’s radar?

If you are searching for a role within your current company, consider that many job opportunities are announced publicly only as a legal requirement. The people making the call draw on a bench of talent they're always mentally assembling. Leaders keep lists, whether for new projects, maternity leave backfills, or succession planning. You go after these opportunities not by submitting your résumé to open roles—too late by then! —but by regularly declaring your interests and demonstrating your abilities (more on this in **SHAMELESS**). Whatever your interests and talents, advertise them. Let peers, managers, and industry connections know (a) what you're good at doing, (b) what you're eager to improve, and (c) what you're just plain interested in trying. When something opens up, you'll be much likelier to hear about it in time.

MAKE YOUR MARK

Starting in the Middle Ages, papermakers used watermarks to prevent counterfeiting. To this day, fine paper still reveals a trademark when held to the light. Photographers, illustrators, designers, and filmmakers use digital watermarking techniques to ensure they receive credit for their work, an increasingly difficult challenge in the age of AI.

Watermark your work even if you don't have an artistic bone in your body. This isn't to prevent colleagues from using what you've made but to help those who like your stuff find its source.

Watermarking isn't weird, it's **WEIRD**. (Remember, the Traits appear in bold to distinguish them from their original, negative connotations.) Think of it as *branding*. If you love movies, you want to know if *this* movie had the same cinematographer as the similar-looking one you loved last year. You might want to watch all the movies in their filmography. Similarly, if work is being completed on an impeccable renovation in the neighborhood, the architect's sign on the lawn saves time and effort for other homeowners needing such help. The architect isn't bragging. They're being *useful*. If you do good work, people will want more of it. Stop being precious and help them find you.

TRAIT TRAPS

Every chapter of this book closes with **Trait Traps**: guardrails to flag your attention when a strength threatens to become a weakness. Beware too much of a good thing.

Pay the fine

The first Nike Air Jordan was mostly red and black in defiance of regulations requiring basketball sneakers to be at least 51 percent white. When the NBA fined Michael Jordan \$5,000 for violating that rule, Jordan—and Nike—celebrated. Nike had already agreed to pay the fine on Jordan's behalf with the intention of turning the NBA's decision into a marketing bonanza: "On September 15, Nike created a revolutionary new basketball shoe. On October 18, the NBA threw them out of the game. Fortunately, the NBA can't stop you from wearing them." In short order, all fifty thousand pairs were sold—covering the fine easily—and a billion-dollar brand was born. Talk about a red sneaker effect.

Newton's third law of motion states that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. When a comedian offends part of their fan base with a joke, they do so in the hopes that the rest will laugh and that more people who appreciate edgy humor will be drawn in. Growth entails loss. It's never a question of avoiding fines but choosing the ones worth paying. 取关?

The next time you're tempted to get **WEIRD**, ask, "What's the fine, and is it worth the expense?" If you're going to speak up, do it with the

Be your (best) self

WEIRD doesn't mean unpleasant, abrasive, aggressive, or rude. We've all had that "friend" who insults people and calls it being honest. All they're doing is unleashing their hurt and resentment. Being yourself is vulnerable *and* generous: you risk letting people know how amazingly unique you are.

In short, this **Trait** is about highlighting your strengths; it's not a license to talk nonsense or go for shock value.

On the first day of seventh grade, when I was new to the school and didn't know a soul, my English teacher, Ms. Howard, asked us if we had any questions. Insecure and desperate for a laugh, I asked, "Are you a virgin?"

What. On. Earth.

WEIRD

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- **Be your (best) self.** Stand out by highlighting your strengths, not going for shock value.

2

SELFISH

Be your own champion

Selfish

(adj.): concerned excessively or exclusively with oneself.

Selfish redefined: The courage to stand up for what you want.

如何定义“自私”？

什么时候我们需要“自私”？

要警惕什么？

SELFISH

Be your own champion

- **Say yes to the big, no to the small.** Avoid low-payoff work to tackle more of the high-value, high-visibility projects that will accelerate your career. Do 10 percent less NAP work (not actually promotable).
- **Play to WINN: What I Need Now.** Don't hesitate to abandon goals and renegotiate deals when circumstances render them obsolete.
- **Smart START.** When job hunting, prioritize working for a manager who will see your value and support your ambitions. The right manager can be more important to your career than any other factor, so evaluate their style, thoughtfulness, attitude, responsiveness, and transparency.
- **Grow the pie.** To get what you want, find ways for everyone else to get more of what they want. Expand the ZOPA (zone of possible agreement) in any negotiation.
- **Second-dog advantage.** It's inefficient to always seek the lead position. Outside of a few key areas, draft in another leader's wake to save time and energy.

TRAIT TRAPS

Grow the pie

As with every other **Trait**, you must strike a balance with **SELFISH**. One thing you want to avoid is bringing a binary “me or them” energy to the situation, whether it’s a negotiation, a sales pitch, or your job as a whole.

For example, don’t focus on salary alone when negotiating a job offer. Ask for something else you’d appreciate: extra vacation days, for example, or a signing bonus, or the right to work from home one day a week. There are areas other than compensation that might be easy for the company to grant but won’t unless you ask. Expert negotiators call this widening your **ZOPA: zone of possible agreement**.

But there's a flip side. You can get carried away. You can become so swept up in grinding your way to the top that you neglect life's other priorities. There's an undeniably nice view from the top, but life has many peaks, personal and professional, and the unsparing pursuit of one inevitably comes at the expense of the others. **So be honest with yourself: Do you really *care* about being the lead dog?** It's one thing to *want* the pole position more than anything but hold back out of misguided selflessness. Don't do that. But what if you're happy following? Turns out Dad himself was:

The rewards of being second dog might not be as big, but neither are the risks. It's an easier path that may also be more enjoyable. Just be honest with yourself: **Do you prefer the safer approach, or are you suppressing your desire to lead because you've been taught to defer to the needs of others?** It's OK to reach for the top spot. It's also OK to seek a healthy balance, leading in some areas and following in others.

IN DEFENSE OF SELFISHNESS

We value selflessness for evolutionary reasons. Self-sacrifice makes sense in a tribe. If you risk your neck to put out your neighbor's fire, they'll return the favor when a spark lands on your house. This communal mentality is still heavily reinforced in modern times: "You can eat your birthday cupcake only if you have enough for the whole class."

Don't get me wrong: sharing with friends and family is beautiful. The problem is that our "tribe" is much bigger now than back in the Ice Age. If you give *everyone* a leg up at your own expense, you'll get trampled. This doesn't feel like a moral victory when it happens, either. When someone else walks away with what you wanted without a fight, you experience

Being **SELFISH** doesn't mean seizing everything you can like a treasure-hoarding dragon. It means championing your agenda at least as strongly as you champion the needs of others. Fighting for yourself just as enthusiastically as you fight for your friends and colleagues. In movies, the protagonist's selflessness and modesty inspire a helpful mentor to raise them up. In real life, people help those who are busiest helping themselves. Allies flock to your side only once you're going somewhere. Show them your success is inevitable; they'll help you get there faster. We all want to join a winning team.

→ 主动选择

Call it **SELFISH**. Savor the word. It helps spot the opposite impulse, that insidious guilt you experience around doing something for yourself: Skipping that meeting because you need thirty uninterrupted minutes to catch up on actual work. Missing the kids' bedtime routine to prioritize a much-needed yoga class. Delivering the presentation even though five of you contributed. The guilt is natural. Caving to it every time is self-defeating.

Selflessness is a powerful instinct and, if unchecked, a harmful one. Being **SELFISH** ensures that our needs are met even when our “tribe” extends to thousands of people across our personal and professional networks. Start by acknowledging that *you* are as important as anybody else in your life. Does that feel uncomfortable? Point to someone more important than you are. If your answer is “my child,” tell me: How can you act as a loving, patient caregiver if no one takes care of you? Also, does your kid need a miserable martyr as a role model?

You matter.

There's much more on boundaries in **BRUTAL**. For now, get **SELFISH** by saying no to the small. What's small? There is no payoff in being the eighteenth person to reply all to the "Happy Birthday, Larry" thread. There is no advantage to you in quibbling about a minor point in someone else's presentation. There is no promotion waiting for the person who attends every weekly status meeting without fail. Not long ago, all managers had administrative assistants. The good assistants were treasured for protecting the boss's time, energy, and attention. Today, we must be **SELFISH** and protect ourselves. Do so aggressively. Be a bulldog around your calendar and to-do list.

We say no to the small so we can *say yes to the big*. What's big? For example, raising your hand for this year's marquee strategy project or your boss's top Q2 business priorities. Tasks like these may be intimidating and involve lots of work, but they will bolster your résumé and put you in the room with higher-ups. Say yes to these opportunities and then knock them out of the ballpark. My friend Amelia from the start of this chapter did this, and it brought back that high evaluation score she'd been chasing.

From now on, when presented with the small, say no firmly, with a brief explanation and a smile. Never apologize or equivocate:

“Do you have five minutes to hop on a call?”

“No, I’m heads down in Q4 planning right now.”

“Can you lead logistics for our November off-site?”

“No, my bandwidth is maxed out with the customer satisfaction project.”

(I’ve included more scripts for saying no to different kinds of asks, including meetings, projects, and favors, as well as tips for backing out of or renegotiating deals at wildcouragebook.com/resources.)

Stop waiting for your manager or colleagues to magically know your bandwidth. They don’t know how busy you are or how effectively you allocate your time and energy. Sighing is passive-aggressive, but it isn’t no. Nor is grimacing. Only no means no (more on that magic word in **BRUTAL**).

Saying no to the small *feels* risky, but it doesn’t *look* insubordinate or lazy to others. It actually makes you look like you’re working on valuable contributions to the team.

PLAY TO WINN: WHAT I NEED NOW

Navigators who refuse to course correct at sea might reach landfall, but probably not where they intended to arrive. Always remember that you can change your goals midway, even when it's not ideal for others. You only get one life. The **SELFISH** question you must ask is: What do I need *now*?

For example, let's say you petition hard for a new role, get it, and then discover that you and your partner are expecting a baby. Uh-oh. Now you're legitimately apprehensive about managing twice the business travel with a newborn at home. Yesterday, this was a fantastic opportunity. Today, it's a problem.

We pin our resistance on others, but more often, **SELFISH** is an internal struggle. We are our toughest critics. A few years ago, becoming a lawyer made sense to you. Now, it no longer does. Does it matter that you've passed the bar exam and have an offer from a top firm? The law is no longer your path. This doesn't make you a dilettante. Just human. The sooner you learn to balance the things you're trying to get against each other, the happier you'll be. Goals are great, but your original goals may have faded in importance for reasons you never could have predicted when you set your sights on them. Don't ignore your intuition and call this stubbornness "discipline." While you might need a pep talk to keep going, it's also possible that you've changed. Find the wild courage to move on to what matters now.

To align yesterday's ambitions with today's circumstances, play to **WINN: What I Need Now**. Just as your long-term vision informs your day-to-day decision-making, your day-to-day experiences should shape your vision. Changing course often feels selfish because your plans inevitably involve other people. However, everyone's needs and desires change over time. What you wanted may no longer resonate. As a strategy, WINN means continuously coordinating your short-term experience with your long-term vision.

→ Success requires a steady flow of energy and enthusiasm. If you rarely experience that flow, pay attention. Do you still want to succeed at this particular pursuit? Incredible things become possible when you make a habit of releasing goals and ambitions—not to mention personal and professional relationships—that no longer matter. When your destination is no longer relevant, don't let angst about time and money spent trick you into continuing a fruitless quest. This is the “sunk-cost fallacy,” the natural human bias to throw good money after bad. What's gone is gone. Aim for the WINN. Ask yourself, “What do I need now?”

While you care deeply about the people you love and will help the occasional stranger in need, you also have things you want to do in your finite life. Things you want to experience and accomplish. That's your agenda, and *it's just as worthy and valid as anyone else's*. Stop deferring to those with fewer hang-ups about being **SELFISH**.

Approach any important new relationship, from business cofounder to romantic partner, with a smart **START**. Being **SELFISH** means insisting on the allies you deserve.

The START framework flips your mindset as a job applicant from “hire me” to the far more **SELFISH** “wow me.” **START stands for Style, Thoughtfulness, Attitude, Responsiveness, and Transparency.** It helps you evaluate a manager to ensure they will support you in achieving your ambitions *before* you take the job. To play a game you can actually win, one where your hard work is rewarded, prioritize finding the right manager.

Style. A hiring manager emailed me during an internal hiring process with the subject line “Stuff!” She wanted to update me on interview-related details. Another applicant might have found “Stuff!” too vague, but to me, it suggested a friendly and informal communication style similar to mine. Pay attention to these telling details in terms of not only how the manager communicates but also thinks and makes decisions. It isn’t about a “right” style but compatibility.

3

SHAMELESS

Find your swagger

Shameless

(adj.): insensible to disgrace.

Shameless redefined: The courage to stand behind your efforts and abilities.

Grandma Lila was **SHAMELESS**. At eighty-eight years old, she agreed to be a bridesmaid in my wedding, and she couldn't have cared less how she compared to the others half a century her junior. She was cranking out push-ups at one point—we have the video. **SHAMELESS?** At four feet ten and ninety pounds, Grandma was *unstoppable*.

Grandma's credo was "No is just an opening offer." She sold annuities for a living—retiring as CEO of a financial services firm at ninety-two—and brought as much cheerful and unapologetic shamelessness to selling as she did to everything else she did in her long, rich, and vibrant life. Whenever a customer told her no, her eyes gleamed. That meant it was time to *sell*.

IN DEFENSE OF SHAMELESSNESS

When was the last time you felt ashamed at your job? The answer may not spring to mind, so I'll put it another way: When did you last beat yourself up over a mistake at work, or otherwise worry about what people would think about something you did, said, or wrote?

Is the answer...right now? Are you ruminating at this moment about a late project or imperfect performance evaluation even as you (try to) read this book? I wouldn't be surprised. "Shame" may seem abstract, but we all know what it's like to get in our own heads because of a miss, mistake, tricky relationship with a colleague...even a strange look from the boss. "What did *that* mean? Are they mad at me?"

This is shame at work. It's the feeling that you're not OK as you are. Shame manifests as anxiety, internal criticism, embarrassment, and stress, taking a constant toll on our mental and emotional bandwidth. To others, our feelings of shame can come across as self-doubt and lack of confidence. When we sense this happening, it can lead to a shame spiral. Oof.

Shame is an appropriate emotion at times—we'll get to that. But it can easily become a toxic burden that serves no healthy purpose, dragging us down and preventing us from performing well, let alone enjoying our lives.

Since the 1970s, more research has shown that impostor syndrome affects all kinds of people, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, age, experience, or accomplishments. It's something we're all prone to experiencing. Accolades don't cure it, either. If anything, external recognition makes it worse: "If the Nobel Prize committee knew the truth about me, they would never have considered me in the first place..."

Impostor syndrome is just one manifestation of shame, an emotion that holds us back and keeps us small, long before that middle-of-the-night call from Sweden about our Nobel Prize.

Fear. Blocks. Us. From. So. Much.

Because positive affirmations and even objective facts are useless against impostor syndrome, you have only one option: **acceptance**. The feeling is real. It isn't going away. Time, experience, and accomplishment won't cure it. **Being SHAMELESS means working through feelings or even working *with* them.** Start by unpacking the bag. It's a change of mindset. Rather than treat shame as something to push down and ignore, heed its message. Use shame as your compass. It flares up when you put yourself in challenging situations where the outcome really matters. You feel it around intelligent and capable people who impress the hell out of you. **That nagging sense that you don't belong is your intuition telling you that you're exactly where you *need* to be if you want to grow.**

Now, stay there.

In the Jewish community, we call the ability to go somewhere you feel out of place—and do what you need to do anyway—**chutzpah**. Chutzpah is Yiddish for swagger, gall, audacity, *nerve*. As perennial outsiders, we've always relied on our chutzpah to survive. When people treat you like you don't belong, you have no choice but to give that approval to yourself.

SHAMELESS begins with owning your strengths. Embrace and highlight what you can offer. Ask yourself: “What’s a struggle for others but easy for me? What am I passionate about? Where have I made the greatest impact?” If these questions bring up negative self-talk, flip those defeatist thoughts on their head. No experience? “I bring a fresh perspective.” Don’t know the internal politics yet? “I have an unbiased view of the players.” Every weakness is a strength from a different perspective. It’s on you to figure out how to leverage everything you’ve got. I call these **Power Assets**.

Take the time to label and memorize your three most distinct and valuable **Power Assets** for sharing with mentors, bosses, and anyone else who can influence your career or help you get what you want. This will be your **Power Portfolio**. Memorize it.

我已尽我所能把事情做到这个地步。如果结果不尽人意，那我就从中学学习然后立刻调整。

REFRAME THE SHAME

“Shameful” is subjective. Shame is an emotion generated internally based on our beliefs and values. Something that shames a person from one culture might inspire a sense of triumph in someone from another. The feeling emerges (or doesn’t) depending on the stories we tell ourselves about our lives. The morals of these stories are passed along to us by parents, teachers, and peers early in life. Though you may no longer agree with some of these attitudes intellectually, you can’t help but experience some shame when you transgress your oldest programming (i.e., rules like sit still, don’t make a fuss, and do what you’re told).

To get better at **SHAMELESS**, try telling the story differently. Reframe the narrative to release the shame preventing you from getting what you want. New story, new emotions.

That said, sidestepping shame through storytelling isn’t always desirable. Shame is an important emotion. A pang of guilt—“I shouldn’t have yelled at my kids just now”—can motivate us to do better next time. However, most of us carry far too much shame about small things like speaking up or asking for our fair share. That kind of shame does nothing more than burden us and keep us playing small

Think *hands high*. Get in the habit of asking questions during the Q&A portion of *everything*, whether it's your organization's quarterly town hall or the school PTO meeting. It helps if you sit close to the front, signaling you're invested and paying attention. Now, open that big mouth. Asking the *first* question builds swagger. Leaders notice and appreciate those who speak up first. It not only conveys boldness but also decreases their anxiety that no one will ask anything. Be the person who helps them.

Ask without hesitation and use as few words as possible. Think *confidence* and *clarity*. If it helps, write your question beforehand to avoid the "mini monologue at the mic" people tend to deliver before getting to their point. Whatever works for you.

TRAIT TRAPS

Don't be a robot

Self-promote, but do it tastefully. Keep impostor syndrome in check, but don't be obnoxious. Stay positive when a project goes off the rails, but don't be oblivious. When a project fails after months of effort, don't become a manic cheerleader when everyone else is still licking their wounds.

SHAMELESS doesn't mean clueless. As with every other trait in this book, achieving the right balance is everything. I've included suggestions and guidelines here, but you'll have to fill in the blanks through observation, especially if you're a touch socially awkward like me. You can always have too much of a good thing.

Own your mistakes

SHAMELESS means being willing to make mistakes to learn. If you adopt the habit of speaking up and making a splash, your career trajectory will tilt toward the vertical, but not just because it puts you on management's radar. Hiding is safe. Nothing you say can ever be refuted if you never say anything meaningful. If you speak up boldly, on the other hand, you'll be visibly, irrefutably wrong now and then, especially at first. This is important, because mistakes are how you grow. You'll learn the right approach by taking the wrong one. Just make sure to learn from every error. But screwing up doesn't stop there.

SHAMELESS

Find your swagger

- **Reframe the shame.** A positive, new narrative can quiet negative self-talk. Know your three **Power Assets** that make up your **Power Portfolio** and distinguish between **Truth** and **Tales**.
- **Big talk.** Risk being noticed by speaking up. Do so clearly and confidently. If an important truth might make people uncomfortable, speak it anyway. Stand behind your opinions and beliefs.
- **Cheer every win.** If you don't champion your efforts, who will? Celebrate progress to spur more progress. Write a fifteen-minute email to your boss every Monday with last week's accomplishments and this week's priorities.
- **Don't be a robot.** Self-promote tastefully and pay attention to how your efforts are received.
- **Own your mistakes.** Acknowledge and rectify your shortcomings as transparently as you cheer your wins.

4

OBSESSED

Push, perform, and persist

Obsessed

(adj.): preoccupied with or haunted by some idea, interest, etc.

Obsessed redefined: The courage to set your own standard.

IN DEFENSE OF OBSESSION

As with every other **Trait**, the word *obsessed* carries negative connotations. It suggests anything from a nerdish preoccupation with a specific television show or wild-eyed conspiracy theory all the way to dangerous behaviors like stalking and harassment. As usual, this means we're working with a potent concept that's worth reclaiming. Let's harness its sizzling semantic power and use it to bolster us through difficult times.

Obsess comes from the Latin word meaning to set yourself against something, to *besiege* it. Obsession is wading in to fight instead of waiting your turn. Rather than let the idea of Google intimidate me into setting my sights lower, I let the size of the challenge inspire me to besiege that city until it fell.

Obsession derives from two convictions: (1) that what you want matters *and* (2) that you can achieve what you want with sufficient effort. The opposite of **OBSESSED** isn't apathetic; it's fatalistic. If you sometimes feel like your fate is largely out of your control, you know the feeling.

High performers overprepare, sweat the details, and go the extra mile. Their colleagues might scoff. Back in school, bullies taunted the teacher's pet. But who cares? Being **OBSESSED** is about achieving your potential *on your terms*, leaving nothing—ambition, talent, or interest—on the table. It means rehearsing your presentations until they're as smooth as butter, preparing a list of priority items before meetings, and using clear and concise bullets instead of long, meandering paragraphs when communicating with VIPs.

OBSESSED

Push, perform, and persist

- **The pencil sharpener.** Beat procrastination and improve impact by starting every project with a written plan of attack within twenty-four hours.
- **Fresh meet.** Send an agenda to attendees before every important meeting; the IKEA effect tells us that if they are involved in pre-meeting details, you'll get better in-meeting outcomes.
- **Set your own bar.** Establish personal standards that stand apart from the crowd. Use checklists and timers for your most critical tasks and adopt a growth mindset with the word, "yet."
- **Is the juice worth the squeeze?** No professional effort is worth depleting your physical or mental reserves. Don't proceed unless you're confident it deserves the bandwidth—and that you have the bandwidth to spare.

- **Live by limits and leeway.** Plan an approach in advance that protects your time and energy on big, open-ended projects. Then, add 20 percent to that estimate before sharing it with stakeholders.
- **Put life on the books.** Block out meals, exercise, rest, meetups, and play on your calendar before it fills with work meetings and calls.

5

NOSY

Get insatiably curious

Nosy

(adj.): of prying or inquisitive disposition or quality.

Nosy redefined: The courage to dig deeper.

IN DEFENSE OF STICKING YOUR NOSE WHERE IT DOESN'T BELONG

If I had to point to one skill that's gotten me where I am today, it's curiosity. And curiosity *is* a skill. It's genuinely hard for many of us, but *anyone* can work to cultivate it. Lucky for me, curiosity has always come naturally. I'm a busybody, and I'm not ashamed to admit it. Whenever we check in to a hotel, my husband, Jon, steps back from the front desk and gestures at me with an air of resignation: "Go on, Jenny, ask your questions."

Curiosity is an attitude, but it's also a super-practical business and life asset in the right here, right now sense. Want to meet someone special? Tell everyone in your network that you're single. Get on all the apps. Go on lots (and lots) of dates with an attitude of flexibility, openness, and *curiosity*: attention and intention without a rush to judgment. **Be NOSY, and you'll find your match. It's not magic but simple probability. Maximize those odds by getting curious instead of cynical. As my mom always said, turn worry into wonder.** The same logic applies to job opportunities. And investments. And finding that one-in-a-million real estate agent, auto mechanic, or coach. Curiosity opens the faucet of serendipity.

Great leaders? They ask *tons* of questions. Conversely, people who ask questions exhibit leadership potential from the bottom rung up. Questions show engagement. They tell the other person that you value their opinion and like to make informed decisions. Put this kid in charge!

Beyond, you know, *answers*—which can be pretty useful in life—curiosity offers intrinsic benefits. Researchers at UC Davis used MRIs to study the effect of curiosity on the brain. They found that putting the brain in a curious state (by asking participants trivia questions for the purpose of the experiment) substantially enhanced learning and memory, *even for facts unrelated to the trivia*. In other words, getting curious about one thing helps you soak up *everything* more effectively. When we're curious, we're open, calm, and receptive. An ideal state of mind for learning and growth.

SPIN THE SPOTLIGHT

Meeting people is simple, but it can *feel* difficult when we're stuck inside our heads, worried about how we are perceived. This makes us self-conscious and awkward. Then others sense that awkwardness, increasing the challenge of connection.

NOSY solves this. Instead of dwelling on whether our shirt is untucked, we observe the other person. Who are they? What do they want? Whenever you feel apprehensive about meeting someone—on a date, in a job interview, or at a work event—turn your perspective outward and draw confidence from curiosity. Networking becomes easier, more enjoyable, and more productive if you approach it as a learning opportunity rather than a directive to “make connections.” Sorting everyone you meet into “opportunities” or “wastes of time” keeps you small and scared. Forget what you can get from others and get curious.

Bonus points: Supercharge a new connection by doing your homework.

When you know you will meet a new person, learn everything you can about them by asking mutual acquaintances for a briefing or, if that isn't possible, doing a Google search. Again, this is something that feels strange for no logical reason. Why would someone put their work history on LinkedIn if they wanted it kept secret? Same for anything they post on social media—why put it out there if not for *you* to see it? Don't dole out what you've learned creepily—"You sure looked like you were enjoying yourself at the beach on Saturday!" Just point out a shared interest or common experience: "You play guitar? Me too! Do you prefer Fender or Gibson?" The better your prep, the more relaxed and confident you'll be.

There is nothing selfish or manipulative—in their negative senses—here. You're doing the other person a favor by getting up to speed on them. US presidents get briefed before every meeting because it helps avoid awkward missteps. If only we all had in-house research teams to prevent the occasional faux pas. Being **NOSY** helps you contribute more effectively and connect more deeply.

When I was five, my mom took me to the bookstore. We went there often, so the owner, Linda, knew us.

“Ricki, you didn’t tell me you were expecting!”

“I’m not,” Mom replied with friendly bluntness. “I’m just getting fat!”

Nobody wants to be Linda in that moment, face beet red and mouth agape. Gaffes like this one are usually avoidable if you do your homework first. Get **NOSY** and seek information early, even if it’s just a quick, three-minute internet search. (My mom approved this story and says the encounter successfully motivated her to lose the extra weight.)

BEHOLD THE BRILLIANT BASICS

“Asking questions shows interest,” my mentee Rachel Burke once observed. “It lets others talk about themselves or their project. People *love* talking about themselves or their work—it’s human nature.” Research confirms Rachel’s impression: the brain’s pleasure center lights up when someone shares their opinion or talks about themselves.

Questions are pure magic. A **NOSY** one can improve any social or professional scenario. From a stressful job interview to a department meeting, good questions add energy to the room, demonstrate engagement, and increase likability—all that before we even get the answers!

This begs the question: What makes a good question? The answer, in most cases, is *an honest one*. Unfortunately, we avoid asking questions that might reveal our ignorance (which, if you think about it, misses the point of asking). The most basic question is usually the most brilliant.

STEAL YOUR BLUEPRINT

In the last chapter, you learned to **set your own bar**, establishing your own performance standard instead of blending in with the crowd. There's a corollary to that strategy: imitating someone else's approach. When you experience envy because someone else can do something you can't—*yet*—don't retreat. **Revel in that discovery: you want that thing! Get NOSY about it.** Study your rival with intense curiosity. Deconstruct their approach. Then experiment with aspects of their formula that might apply to you. Why stay demoralized by another person's gold medal when you can melt it down and forge your own crown? It's like matching your pace to a faster jogger for that extra oomph.

TRAIT TRAPS

Don't reinvent the wheel

Asking questions is a power move. Don't squander that power by failing to act on the answers you get. Being **NOSY** isn't just about demonstrating curiosity but benefiting from what you learn. *Take careful notes.* Every time you learn something useful, spend time capturing it. Then review your notes regularly. Ideally, find a way to incorporate that knowledge into your approach.

For example, if a mentor forwards you an email they've used for a cold outreach, don't just archive it. Turn it into a reusable template for the future. Future you will *so* appreciate the effort.

I hoard useful information: pithy quotes, compelling stats and other facts, memorable diagrams, Gantt charts used to plan successful projects—anything that might come in handy later when facing a blank slide deck, document, or email.

Read the room

When seeking clues, don't be clueless. Questions can convey curiosity and interest, but when taken too far or pushed too aggressively, they become genuinely obnoxious or disrespectful. (Remember me and my seventh-grade teacher?) *Pay attention to social cues.* Drop it if a given line of questioning isn't leading anywhere useful or generates irritation or annoyance. If it *seems* like they're avoiding the question, *they're avoiding it* — take the hint!

Likewise, asking questions requires the willingness to answer them. No one wants to feel interrogated. That means *reciprocity*. Don't spend the whole conversation asking questions while deflecting those that come your way. If you ask another entrepreneur their monthly recurring revenue and they share it with you, reciprocate that transparency by sharing yours with them. Answer questions with the same degree of vulnerability, authenticity, and candor you expect from others.

NOSY

Get insatiably curious

- **Spin the spotlight.** Lead with questions as the ultimate icebreaker. Ask *what* and *how* questions over yes-or-no questions for richer answers. Do at least three minutes of internet research on someone before you meet them.
- **Woo with *you*.** Avoid writing sentences that start with *I*.
- **Behold the brilliant basics.** Asking “dumb” questions is both smart and courageous. Be the brave one who asks what the acronym means.
- **Steal your blueprint.** Replace envy with curiosity and learn from the competition. You don’t even need to speak to someone if you can observe them in action and learn from their example.
- **Should I get my...** Approach additional education strategically. Don’t just get that MBA or professional certification because you’re bored with your job or unsure of your career goals.
- **Don’t reinvent the wheel.** Hoard templates, quotes, statistics, reports, and other relevant info—your future self will thank you. Report back to mentors and helpers to let them know you took their advice.
- **Read the room.** If you’re going to ask questions, be willing to answer them. Pay attention to social cues to gauge when you’ve pushed it too far.

6

MANIPULATIVE

Build influence through empathy

Manipulative

(adj.): intended to control.

Manipulative redefined: The courage to influence others.

MANIPULATIVE

Build influence through empathy

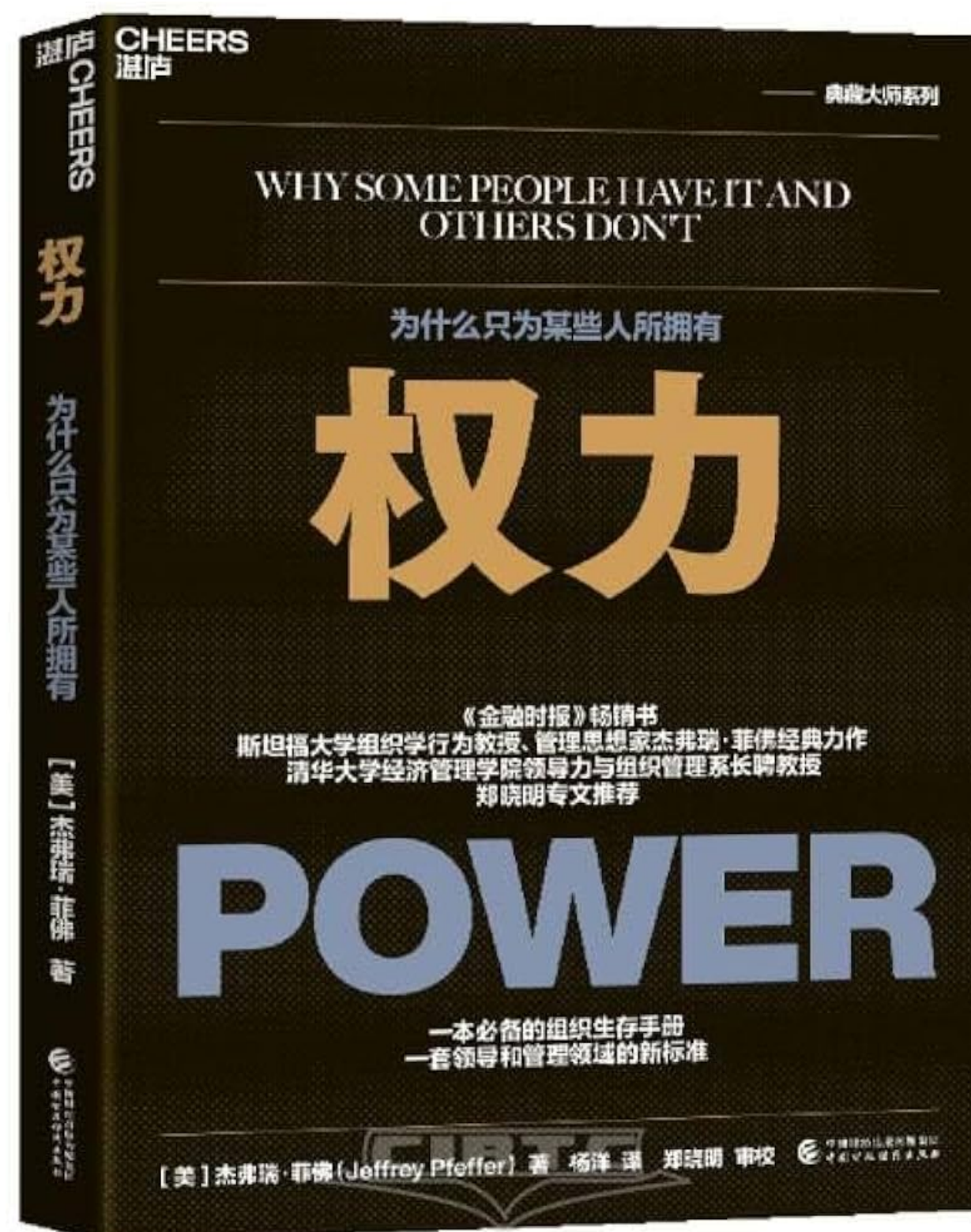
- **Play politics.** Instead of pretending office politics don't exist, discuss them with your team and navigate them together. Politics are unwritten chapters of the company's operations manual; figure out whose buy-in you really need to make things happen just as you would figure out how a crucial piece of equipment works.
- **Fluent in influence.** Fearlessly manage relationships in every direction to increase your impact within the organization. To build influence, connect with your skip-level manager, your boss's peers, and anyone who might make a good mentor or sponsor. Consistently add good energy to every email and encounter through word choice, tone, facial expressions, and body language.
- **Generosity reciprocity.** Nothing builds influence like authentic generosity. Give to grow with your time, ideas, and network.
- **Manipulation gone wrong.** Influence, inspire, and motivate—don't use.
- **The authenticity trap.** Be authentic appropriately. You can be yourself and stay professional. Sometimes you have to keep your game face on and still get the job done.
- **Don't fawn.** Stand up for yourself; exhibiting self-worth establishes status. Feel confident going toe-to-toe with people in positions of power and influence.

Why are some people so utterly convincing and credible? So effective at motivating and leading others? Charisma appears in community organizers and cult leaders; it isn't tied to the message but to the messenger. Some make friends wherever they go. Some people persuade others so easily they should require a license. Why? And why do others have the opposite effect, lowering the energy in every room and sending minglers fleeing for the drinks table?

Equally important to this chapter is another question: Why does skill with people inspire negative emotions? “She’s so *manipulative*.” You’re saying it’s bad that she gets others to do what she wants? I’m curious: What are *you* trying to accomplish when you talk—massage eardrums?

What is intrinsically bad about getting people to do what you want? Call it leadership if you want, but that word is so overused it lacks any potency. Whatever the label, people in any walk of life succeed by befriending, convincing, motivating, empathizing with, and rallying others. Why did you open your mouth if you weren’t trying to get someone to do or think something? We manipulate constantly. Then, we call it “catching up,” “shooting the breeze,” or even “parenting.”

Org charts are hierarchical. Power flows in a network pattern. Imagine dotted lines of influence crisscrossing the actual org chart, leaping between departments and across functional silos. These lines represent friendships and other connections that bridge gaps between domestic and international sides of the business, creative and production, sales and marketing, and so on. Mapping these dotted lines will make politics at your company easier to understand.



Seek power. Get in the room. To gain more power, you must spend time where it's wielded. If there's a regular business review meeting for top leaders, ask to sit in "to learn more about high-level priorities." Or "to see our other leaders in action." If you work closely with another org within the company, ask to sit in on its leadership meeting: "Hey, sales has a weekly revenue report meeting, don't they? Open to my sitting in once in a while? It would help me understand the needs of your sellers better." In most cases, access is easy for leaders to grant. In the words of Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, If you don't have a seat at the table, "bring a folding chair."

Power grows through proximity. Get adjacent to it. Rub shoulders with the elite. Listen, pay attention...and be seen. For people to know you, they first have to recognize you. So be visible. Be present. Be **MANIPULATIVE.**

FLUENT IN INFLUENCE

Being **MANIPULATIVE** is all about extending your influence, and management is how we exert influence at work. We manage people to influence them. *Management is manipulation*, and being properly **MANIPULATIVE** extends far beyond our direct reports.

Some management resources discuss “managing up” (i.e., investing effort in a productive and healthy relationship with your manager). However, this encourages a two-dimensional view of your work relationships: up or down. Remember those lines of power running like a web throughout the organization? Manage relationships in *every* direction to be *fluent* in how you *influence*. This doesn’t mean sending an occasional email or text, either. Connect face-to-face (in person whenever possible) and at least voice to voice. You’ll never build and sustain a meaningful

TRAIT TRAPS

Manipulation gone wrong

Sway people, don't shove them. It's easy to become so focused on achieving your objective that you stomp on the other person's sense of agency. Don't be that manager. Don't be that partner. Don't be that person.

Manipulation has a bad rap for a reason. If you get what you want but leave others feeling used or even abused, you're missing the point of this chapter. As Mo Bunnell advises, everything works better when we build solutions together for a mutual win. The idea is to lead people toward an objective that serves everyone. If you're leading and they're not eager to follow, you've misjudged either the objective or their need for it. Stop pushing and start listening and empathizing. Whatever you do, don't force it. You might break something.

7

BRUTAL

Draw lines and stick to them

Brutal

(adj.): unpleasantly accurate and incisive.

Brutal redefined: The courage to protect your time and energy.

BRUTAL:

Draw lines and stick to them

- **Permission granted.** Escape the trap of *performative* work by focusing on *rewardative* work that moves the ball forward. If an investment of time isn't paying off, leave at intermission.
- **Don't cry over spilled email.** Instead of chasing the mirage of an empty inbox, filter what doesn't matter, focus on email during specific blocks of time each day, and check your feelings before hastily responding to important emails.
- **Let the tree fall.** Skip unimportant tasks quietly. If they're actually necessary, they'll come around again, and you'll have been busy doing unambiguously important work in the meantime.
- **Kind, friendly...and BRUTAL.** Don't be a jerk when setting boundaries. Just set them and move on. You can be unapologetic about your needs while also being thoughtful. Clear *is* kind.
- **Invert your pyramid.** Prioritize your basic needs, like food, water, and rest, because they're the foundation of everything goal-related.

IN DEFENSE OF BEING A LITTLE BRUTAL

No is a complete sentence. Give it a try when no one's watching: "No."

For both sides, boundaries can feel, yes, **BRUTAL**. When someone asks you on a date and you reply with a flat-out "Thanks, but I'm not interested," people say, "Man, that was *brutal*!" The conventional response is to let them down "easy" instead. The irony! A friendly but firm refusal is much easier on the other person than equivocation. While it may not feel great for a few minutes when you get shut down cold, how much worse is it to imagine romantic potential where it doesn't exist? Nothing is more punishing than the friend zone. Here and elsewhere, "no" is an act of mercy.

We must also draw boundaries with ourselves: our time, our agenda, our priorities. When I asked a mentor how he stayed sane with everything on his plate, he said, "Ruthless prioritization." Every minute you spend doing one thing, you actively say no to everything else you might be doing instead. When you invest money, energy, or mental bandwidth in one

When you offer a mirror to a colleague in the form of constructive feedback, it's an act of generosity. Cutting the bull and telling someone how to improve is helpful. It's also brave, bold, protective, clear, direct, and authentic. Being **BRUTAL** in this sense is hard to stomach if you're not used to it, but so worth it. Dealing with awkward, unpleasant, and cringeworthy situations is like removing a Band-Aid. The faster you tear it off, the better. Spare your direct report any equivocation during their annual review. When you know a romantic relationship is doomed, tell them "It's over," not "We need to talk because I'm not sure how I'm feeling anymore about this." Life is too short to take anything but the shortest path between two points. When someone is mad because what *you* want doesn't align with what *they* want, don't dilute the message to mollify them. Tear—ouch! —and move on.

What if you're dealing with an underperforming direct report? Here, it's even more important to deliver constructive feedback quickly and help them turn the situation around. Sure, say it tactfully, but say it clearly, too. Then, if they don't improve after being given a fair chance, let them go. Don't sit on it. If you keep the ones who aren't a fit, you lose the ones who are.

LET THE TREE FALL

When you're overwhelmed, the conventional wisdom is to sort everything by urgency and importance, then delegate or delay smaller items. But why sort the small stuff when the big stuff is right in front of you?

Go do that thing.

Delegating takes effort. Delaying postpones the inevitable. What a waste! Deferring and delaying will never be as efficient as dropping minor tasks altogether. Be **BRUTAL** about it. You can do this safely more often than you realize.

The age-old question goes: When a tree falls in the forest and there's no one around to hear it, does it make a sound? Spoiler alert: it doesn't matter. The next time you're handed something that isn't worth *anyone's* time, **let the tree fall**. Give yourself permission to skip things that don't need doing (without telling anyone else).

TRAIT TRAPS

Kind, friendly...and BRUTAL

Here's the obvious guardrail around being **BRUTAL**: *don't be a jerk about it!*

Serving your own needs can sometimes appear to threaten the needs of others. For example, resting for a few minutes while helping a friend move furniture might temporarily frustrate your eager-to-finish partner. They might have more endurance than you—or the bad habit of pushing themselves to exhaustion. Regardless of how they might react, *rest when you're tired*. They certainly won't be happy if you pass out because you've exceeded *your* limits, and *they don't know what it feels like to be in your body*. You've got to look out for yourself.

That said, keep your statement of needs friendly, even if the response you expect won't be. Detach with kindness and set your boundary: “Whew! That was heavy. I'm going to sit down for five minutes and rest.” There's no need to be passive-aggressive: “Boy, you sure own a lot of stuff!” Just

8

RECKLESS

Err on the side of action

Reckless

(adj.): marked by lack of proper caution.

Reckless redefined: The courage to take calculated risks.

IN DEFENSE OF HEALTHY RECKLESSNESS

If you're on the fence, do it. If you don't act on passion and excitement immediately, they fade. If you do, they can give you the strength and focus to compensate for insufficient forethought. Anyway, most forethought is fear-thought: rather than planning out a strategy, you're just weighing worst-case scenarios against each other with no thought to their relative likelihood.

Don't let yourself become trapped pondering the options to death. There are too many possible paths in this big, crazy world. Given the option between endless deliberation and imperfect preparation, err on the side of action. Perfection is impossible.

I call this bias toward action being **RECKLESS**. If the word feels a little dangerous, that's good. It should. It's a powerful, life-changing tool to apply judiciously, not carelessly. We don't just take risks. We weigh them based on the available data and make an informed call within a reasonable timeframe.

In the next Own Your Career newsletter I wrote, I used my difficulty, explaining the five-step process I'd followed to REACT to my mistake and overcome it.

1. **Recognize** that not everything you do will be perfect.
2. **Empower** yourself to own it quickly and clean it up. Then take a deep breath. It happens to everyone.
3. **Apologize** directly to those involved.
4. **Celebrate** the unexpected goodness that comes out of a mistake.
5. **Trust** that your fellow employees will have your back.

RECKLESS

Err on the side of action

- **Use the difficulty.** Instead of pretending you didn't make a mistake, own it, apologize, and then leverage a silver lining.
- **Move, then map.** Don't use planning and research to postpone action and learning. Experiments provide data, and data informs decisions. This ensures you're never far off course. Put ten minutes a day toward concrete action when starting something new.
- **Take a dance break.** Don't confuse speed with sloppiness—always take a quiet moment before important decisions. The more someone pressures you to decide, the more important you take the time to think it over.
- **Pride lies.** Aim for smart, calculated risks—don't let your ego get you in hot water. If that inner voice says, "It'll be fine," get a second opinion.

9

BOSSY

Steer others to success

Bossy

(adj.): inclined to domineer; dictatorial.

Bossy redefined: The courage to listen and lead.

BOSSY

Steer others to success

- **Hands off the wheel.** As a leader, you get more credit for helping others do their jobs than for doing it yourself. Step back and give your team what they need to grow. Fifty percent of your job is managing up, down, and across.
- **Be a set rat.** Take it slow in any new leadership role. Shadow until you understand the problems you hope to solve. Aim to observe someone on your team for one hour a week—not to criticize, but to empathize.
- **Patterns, not problems.** As a leader, you must not miss the forest for the trees. Lead with an iterative, data-driven, holistic approach to your team's biggest challenges. QUASH the temptation to have a knee-jerk reaction (quantify, understand, assess, support, and hypothesize).
- **Fail-safe feedback.** Maintain morale and improve performance with early, clear, and constructive feedback and highlight each SAFE element: setting, action, feeling, effect. Never assume your team knows what they're doing well or what they could improve.
- **Don't break people.** Push your team to excel, but be mindful of their well-being and give them the benefit of the doubt. Don't expect them to look as busy on the outside as you felt on the inside when you were in their shoes.
- **Don't be toxic.** Don't let the pressure of leadership turn you into a monster. Contempt, anger, and jealous behavior have no place in the workplace.

IN DEFENSE OF BOSSINESS

Something happens when you keep successfully getting what you go after. People look to you for guidance. They set their bar by yours. Yes, *you*, that **WEIRD, SELFISH, SHAMELESS, OBSESSED, NOSY, MANIPULATIVE, BRUTAL**, and **RECKLESS** person who once assumed they'd be none of those things. All the **Traits** that looked so scary and negative in this book's table of contents come together to create something unique. Through a strange alchemy, they create a "natural" leader.

All the **Traits** are leadership traits, and yet all are discouraged when we're young or seen as lower in status. What's worse than being "bossy" on the playground? When embracing them pays off, however, these behaviors are regarded differently. Shamelessness transmutes into confidence. Nosiness to curiosity. Recklessness to courage.

Next time, stay SAFE:

Setting. Instead of offering feedback in general, address a recent instance of the problematic behavior and say when and where it happened: “Let’s talk about your presentation at last week’s partner meeting.” Be specific even if the behavior happens frequently.

Action. Describe the behavior in simple and concrete terms without editorializing or catastrophizing what happened: “You talked over senior leaders three times.”

Feeling. Once you’ve identified the problem, seek to understand the other person’s intention before going further: “What were you feeling when this was happening?” This gives them a chance to say, “Oh, wow. My intention was not at all to talk over them. I was anxious that we wouldn’t get to the end of the presentation, which covered the data the senior leaders had specifically requested.”

Effect. Acknowledge their intention yet explain the negative outcome of the behavior: “Ah, that makes sense. You were nervous about not getting to the analysis; however, cutting people off this way made you seem impatient and less collaborative than I know you are.”

From there, brainstorm simple ways to improve. For example, someone with the bad habit of talking over others—including yours truly—might count to three after anyone else stops talking before continuing. It’s a solvable problem.

Embrace a life of wild courage

Though I've emphasized hands-on tactics in each chapter, the nine **Traits** underpin them all. Let's review these nine powerful words one more time:

- **WEIRD:** The courage to stand out.
- **SELFISH:** The courage to stand up for what you want.
- **SHAMELESS:** The courage to stand behind your efforts and abilities.
- **OBSESSED:** The courage to set your own standard.
- **NOSY:** The courage to dig deeper.
- **MANIPULATIVE:** The courage to influence others.
- **BRUTAL:** The courage to protect your time and energy.
- **RECKLESS:** The courage to take calculated risks.
- **BOSSY:** The courage to listen and lead.

Muster the wild courage to chase what you want in life, and you'll discover a vital truth: whether you succeed or fail at doing any one thing, you'll never feel as purposeful, powerful, and alive as when you're pushing through fear toward the wonder and joy on the other side. As I said at the beginning of this book, everything you've ever wanted is waiting for you on the other side of fear. It's right there waiting for you—**reach for it.**

This book is my earnest attempt to help you achieve *all* your cherished goals, the personal and professional objectives that, secretly or not, occupy a large part of your heart and mind. Using these nine powerful, wild words, I've sought to help you and even push you to adopt a new, empowered mindset. If you're willing to embrace these **Traits** and the behaviors they describe, I believe you can achieve absolutely anything.

With wild courage, a life of boundless adventure and possibility awaits.
I'm rooting for you. Let's go.