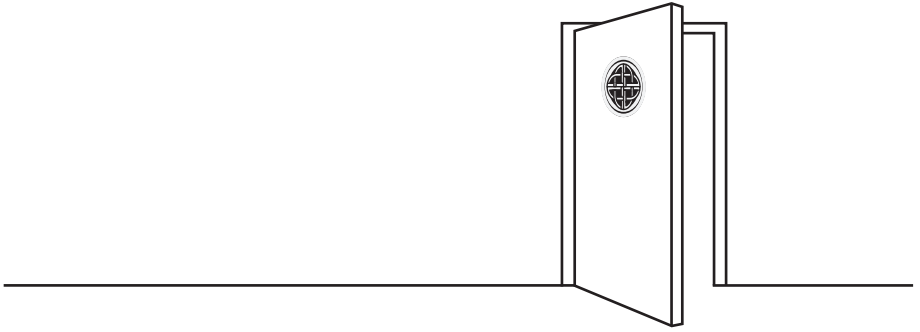


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*“Every story has a beginning,  
middle and end.  
And each of us is a story.”*

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# introduction

## **my story**

In the summer of 2005, I quit my job as a sales executive for a high growth technology company, winking in the rear view mirror at a twenty-plus year career in sales and sales leadership. Soon after, I enrolled in a credentialing school for coaching to become a business and life coach.

I could not have imagined that the next eighteen months would test, stretch, challenge, humble and inform me more than my entire working career. I was beckoned to make important personal foundation shifts that were total difference-makers. The journey through schooling and the required practice to become a certified coach transformed me.

Unable to articulate what it was that I did really well—beyond being “good with people” and “successful in sales”—I was lost without my title. But now I’m found. I can define in one single sentence my talent for creating value for others. Moreover, I found *it*—doing what I love ... as my work. You know the old cliché: do what you love for work so much that it seems like guilty pleasure. And not only did I find *it*, I’m doing *it*. Coaching.

I am in the middle of my story, after writing a twist in the plot so compelling that I know the best is yet to come. Along this journey I discovered an insatiable drive, through coaching, to help others discover and find *their* work—work that will open the door for them to a fulfilling, productive and prosperous life.

## **your story**

*So, what's your story?*

Is it already written? How will the rest of your story unfold? Is there a “next” for you? Is your fate sealed or will you change the plot?

How is your work? Have recent events unfolded to challenge you like never before? Are you doing the work that you love? Have you dared to believe this is possible?

Do you have a dream? If asked, could you say what you do really, really well? How have external circumstances affected the work you do or the decisions you've made about what you do for a living?

Is it possible for you to believe that right now, today, we are in a place and time that presents an abundance of opportunities—unprecedented opportunities—for you?

Do you know how to ACCESS that which you need to thrive? Could it be as simple as knowing a secret password to ACCESS your goals and fulfill your dreams? Like ... **Open Sesame?**

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If only prosperous living were as simple as repeating Open Sesame to ACCESS all that you desire!

I am suggesting to you that it really can be this simple. Simple, but not necessarily easy—at least not at the beginning.

Open Sesame ACCESS to fulfilling and rewarding work is like anything else in life that you identify as worthwhile—you first have to learn how, and then you have to do it. And do it. And do it. Until it becomes not just what you do, but who you are.

Is there something in your past that you really wanted but had to wrestle with? Maybe you wanted to get in shape, improve your physical condition or lose weight for better health. And you came from a cold start with a new exercise regimen or diet. Or possibly, you wanted to give up something—like caffeine, for example.

At first, it's just plain awful. It's torturous.

You end up sore from exercise—so sore you don't think you're up to exercising the next day. You need a little rest. So you rest. And you rest. And you rest. Until it seems just as hard to get back to it as it did on day one.

Or the diet is only making you focus on what you can't have to eat—what you are depriving yourself of. And it's so hard because you are sure that being that hungry throughout the day can't be good for you. Or the day seems really tough to start without the ritual of your morning cup of hot, steaming coffee or tea.

But if you stick with it, you start to get results after a few weeks. You are stronger, less sore and able to run farther without stopping. You can lift heavier weights and increase your repetitions. The scale reads five pounds lighter, your clothes feel better and you are noticing that your thinking is more focused and clear. People start to notice and compliment you. Or you've found a satisfactory substitute for your caffeine blend, and the morning is back to a comfortable ritual ... just a different one.

This positive reinforcement is new motivation for you to stick to your goals and see them through. All of a sudden, it's not hard. You come to your workout sessions ready to work and love the endorphin rush that leaves you feeling spent but exhilarated all at once. You aren't even tempted by the ice cream that is in the freezer; you're excited to see more change in the scale on Monday and plus, you've noticed that ice cream, while it tastes good, now makes you feel a little off. You are aware that you get lethargic and feel a little lazy after eating sugar. Or all the caffeine is out of your system and you notice you are now calm, not jittery.

After a while, you've created new habits that support your goal and these habits have simply become part of the fabric of your day. You do them without struggle. You are changed.

But, for how long? Somewhere along the way, you slip back into old habits. Maybe you can't even recall how it happened. Or maybe you know someone who set out to change something about themselves or their situation and experienced great success, but then end up going back to old habits. They gain back those fifteen pounds they had shed or quit their fitness program. What happens?

Change falls short. Transformation is what is called for to get you to *Open Sesame*, or effortless ACCESS. Transformation is change on a level so deep that you are no longer aware of new behaviors on a conscious level. They are as much a part of you as your DNA. And it would take equal effort to make the transformation back.

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This book is a learning experience. It is a how-to-guide. The call to action is about transformation—your transformation—to realize your talent and become who you need to be to have *Open Sesame* ACCESS in this unprecedented, globally connected world. The purpose of this book is to put an effective step-by-step process for transformation within your reach. It is the next best thing to having a personal coach.

But this is hard work. If you find that you just aren't able to follow through on your own, that's okay. If you still have the desire, hiring a coach will help you expedite the process.

I have a core belief that everyone has talent; when you develop your talents into strengths, you discover what you do uniquely to create the most value in your work. I believe that when the worker is meaningfully productive—aligning his or her talents with the job and expressing his or her authentic self—the worker moves out of struggle and into flow, and opens the door to a prosperous life. This is where legacies begin.

This is the worker's legacy!

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The Celtic knot that you see as a 'portal on the door' and that leads each chapter in this book draws from the old traditions of Ireland and is a part of my legacy. The strongest links are where the knots actually connect which serves as a rich metaphor for relationships; we draw strength from others when we connect, especially when we create value and serve others through our work.

The Celtic knot is the icon for ACCESS. It represents all that is worthy and noble in *your own* ACCESS pursuits.

### **in this book, you will learn:**

- The toughest practice for workers of all stripes to master.
- The three attributes that will put prosperity within your easy reach, forever.
- How to discover what you do to create the most value.
- How to find the work that you love.
- How to get the job doing the work you love.
- How to ACCESS who you need, what you need, whenever you need it.
- The foundation for rewarding work and a fulfilled life.

### **OPEN SESAME!**

## **resources**

### **[www.coachu.com](http://www.coachu.com)**

*Coach University* – for information on finding a coach.

### **[www.coachfederation.org](http://www.coachfederation.org)**

*The International Coach Federation* – the largest independent professional association for coaches worldwide, it also offers a coach-referral service.

### **[www.innerbeautyinstitute.com](http://www.innerbeautyinstitute.com)**

*Jille Bartolome, MCC* – Master Certified Coach through the International Coach Federation and a pioneer in the coaching profession. Jille is a Coach University faculty member since 2004.

### **[www.osullivanwright.com](http://www.osullivanwright.com)**

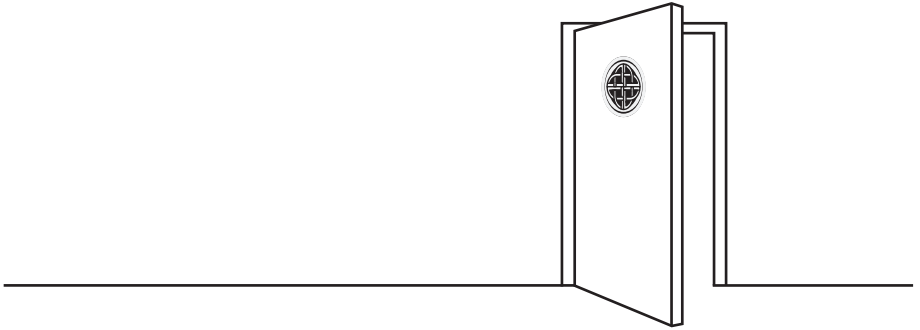
*Joan Wright, MCC* – Master Certified Coach through International Coach Federation who specializes in Executive Coaching.

### **[www.saluminternational.com](http://www.saluminternational.com)**

*Carlos Salum* – the president of Salum International Resources, a produced international playwright and a tennis coach who contributed to the careers of Grand Slam winners.

### **[www.interactskills.com](http://www.interactskills.com)**

*Peter Popovich* – Co-owner of a Keller Williams Realty franchise, a motivational speaker, a business coach with certification from Duke University, and an associate member of the Interact faculty.



“There is no such thing as  
absolute value in this world,  
you can only estimate  
what a thing is worth to you.”

CHARLES DUDLEY WARNER

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## chapter 6

### ACCESS principle #1

## create value

If the attributes of awareness, abundance and adaptability serve to put prosperity in easy reach, how do you actually grab hold and ACCESS prosperity for life?

#### words

Words are important. Haven't we been told that all our lives?

“Say what you mean, mean what you say,” and all that. Understanding the meaning of words, especially an auspicious word like ACCESS, is critical for the work we are doing here together.

Throughout history, societies have created new words and have changed the meaning of existing words, using language to reflect the culture, people, and often, the values of that time. The Renaissance period served to pull Europe out of the restrained Middle Ages, also known as the Dark Ages, into an enlightened era when language, music, art, writing and architecture expanded and thrived. And here we are today, in the first decade of the 21st century with, as Fisch informs us in “shifthappens,” 540,000 words in the English language. That’s five times more words than existed when Shakespeare walked the earth.

The Information Age of the later 20th century birthed a whole new language around the Internet by cleverly assigning new connotations to old words like *web*, *mail*, *thread*, *visit*, *site*, *spam* and ACCESS. When used in the context of the Internet, they mean something entirely different than their pre-Internet definitions.

Our current world is one of password protection, cyberspace security and paperless money. Without the public noticing it, ACCESS has changed—and continues to rise in value.

The world is very big now. Our connections are global, and ACCESS is the master key to anything and everything.

ACCESS is a power word, holding the promise of grand achievement and fulfillment for those who invoke its action. ACCESS has been transformed into a superlative. Not one of its synonyms, such as *admittance*,

*approach, entrée, or contact*, is equally effective at conveying the action that ACCESS suggests.

There is an ACCESS component to *everything* we do. If you want to mow your grass, you need ACCESS to a mower. If you want to drive to work, you need ACCESS to a transportation vehicle. If you are cold and want to warm up, you need ACCESS to some wrap or environment that will raise your temperature. If you have your eyes set on a new job or career, you want ACCESS to someone who can make that happen. If you want to win the lottery, you have to ACCESS a place to purchase a lottery ticket. If you want to pray or meditate, you need to focus and ACCESS your mind.

It is helpful to maintain awareness of the ubiquitous nature of ACCESS, but for the intended purposes of this book, we'll consider ACCESS in the context of powerful internal forces combined with strengths and talents. You'll discover how to use the power of ACCESS for overcoming external challenges to open doors for prosperous living. *Open Sesame!*

## **why ACCESS principles?**

A method for finding work that is personally fulfilling remains elusive for many. ACCESS is seldom perceived as a process with principles that can be universally applied for fail-proof success, no matter who or what one desires to ACCESS. When it comes to ACCESS, the apprentice seeking the sous-chef's position in the new swanky restaurant has everything in common with the sales person trying to close a multi-million dollar deal. To thrive and be successful, *both must create value for others through their work.*

### **ACCESS principle #1:**

You must create value for ACCESS.

George Bernard Shaw once said, "...we have no more right to consume happiness without producing it than to consume wealth without producing it."

I'd like to borrow that concept to set the foundation for just how critical value is to the outcome of ACCESS:

***We have no more right to consume value without producing it than to consume wealth without producing it.***

In fact, I'd go so far as to say that there is an association that emerges around the connection between value and ACCESS:

***Value is to ACCESS as air is to breathing.***

Have you made this vital connection?

*"The most amazing products aren't born from metal, wood, or plastic. They're born from ideas. Human ideas. Therefore, no matter how valuable the products and services that exist in a business, the true worth of the business lies with its people..."*

Nightingale-Conant

This is why economists and businesses refer to the worker as human capital. Human capital is the value created by the worker, as opposed to other components such as machinery or land. And if Thomas Friedman is correct that we are in a new era, the Talent Era, (and I believe he coined this exactly right), the worker has become the most critical capital component in the world economy. And the worker is you!

**Simply put, the world needs you—as a value creating talent—  
more than you need the world.**

Friedman nails this point in his latest book, *Hot, Flat, and Crowded*. The book presents remarkable evidence for why the world needs to find, very soon, the answer for sustainable, renewable energy sources to replace the current and growing global dependence on fixed energy sources (oil). And more, Friedman wants the United States to take its rightful place in solving this world dilemma. He doesn't know the solution, but he knows how we'll discover the solution—the "Jobs and Gates way." Steve Jobs and Bill Gates, that is.

Friedman envisions 10,000 make-shift garages-turned-energy-laboratories across the country, teeming with aspiring entrepreneurs and scientists, all working to find the solution. Out of these, possibly a yield of 1,000 reasonable solution tracks could be investigated to eventually find the one or two answers to solve our planet's climate vulnerability.

It all goes back to talent. *Individual talent*. Friedman isn't calling on enterprise or government or think tanks for discoveries. He wants to tap the talents and personal determination of individuals.

If this were to become a reality, we need to start asking questions that can extrapolate to you and your work situation. Which 10,000 talented individuals will take on this challenge to discover a whole new energy platform for the world? What are those 10,000 individuals doing today? Where have they been? What will the two talents who deliver on the best solutions have that the other 9,998 didn't have?

Today this job doesn't exist. But tomorrow, through Friedman and others progressing these ideas, it might.

The coaching profession is another excellent example of a job that didn't always exist. When I was a kid, there was no such thing as a business coach. But now this is who I am, what I do for work and the value I create for others. Also, there are some twenty thousand coaching professionals world-wide now. Where were they and what were they doing before coaching?

What is on the horizon for you? What can't you see today, but through a strong Prosperity Meter, meet up with tomorrow?

What is it that you do really, really well to create value for others?

**The world needs you—as a value creating talent—  
more than you need the world.**

I realize that if you are in the clutches of despair about your work situation, this sounds like an empty line, right out of a B movie. If, like millions of other workers, your job is not coming back, you'll probably find it difficult to comprehend this idea, much less believe in it. But this is *the* fundamental idea behind this era—the Talent Era.

There's an often-repeated story about the late Walter Payton, former NFL running back with the Chicago Bears. He was supposedly camping with a friend who asked what would happen if they encountered a bear. "Run," said Payton. The friend, thinking he was crazy, said, "You can't outrun a bear." To that Payton replied, "I don't have to outrun the bear ... I just have to outrun YOU!"

Same concept—you just have to out-value the next guy to get back in the job game, your game, and stay there.

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If I were to ask you to quickly tell me how you create value, would you have a ready answer? Chances are that if you are aware of your talents and have taken time to develop these into strengths that you use often in your work, you could easily reel off a response. However, if you are unaware of your talent themes, you would be at a loss to say how it is that you create value.

When this question about personal strengths, talents and value is put to workers whose talents are not manifested in the obvious, many are challenged to provide a clear answer about what they do really, really well—or how they uniquely create value.

If you don't know what your talents are or how you create value, how do you find out?

You can take the long way on this and begin journaling and asking friends, family and co-workers what they think about you and how you have

created value for them or in your work. Or you can take a short cut, by way of an assessment that will quickly lead you to learn your top five talent themes.

## strengthsfinder 2.0

StrengthsFinder 2.0, endorsed by the Gallup Organization, is the best, most precise talent scout assessment I know. Not only will this assessment capture your top five talent themes, it will spark discovery about yourself that will widen the lens on your world and your opportunities.

For about twenty dollars you can purchase *StrengthsFinder 2.0: A New and Upgraded Edition of the Online Test from Gallup's Now, Discover Your Strengths*. It comes packed with a sealed envelope containing a unique pass code for you to access the StrengthsFinder 2.0 website and take this on-line assessment. Once you submit your completed assessment (which takes about thirty-five minutes), you'll immediately receive an emailed report identifying your top five talent themes.

Moreover, you can find your personal themes in the book and further discover development exercises to use to build your talent themes into real strengths for you.

There are three things to love about this talent assessment:

- 1) This will create a big "aha" moment for you! I have used it with numerous clients, family and friends, and recommended it for very large groups. The positive feedback has been unanimous—it is a remarkable tool for discovering you.
- 2) The book and ACCESS to the assessment is in the public domain. You don't need a coach to learn and understand how to apply the results; all you have to do is read the book and the descriptions for your themes. *StrengthsFinder 2.0* is carried by the large chain bookstores as well as on Amazon.com.
- 3) It is likely that your talent themes are lying dormant, just waiting to be awakened and begin working for you. This book has a generous outline for each talent theme that provides suggestions that you can put to work for your personal talent development.

I learned that my top five talent themes are *learner, strategic, input, maximizer, and relator*. Before taking the SF Assessment, I never identified any of these as my talents—except for possibly the *relator* talent. I knew that I had a special way with people and that it had been very effective for me in the field of sales and sales management. But I had a bit of a skeptic's view thinking, "Learning is a talent?" Yes, come to find out—it really is!


Additionally, everyone's top five themes are presented within a true ordering principle, which means that your talent themes make you unique, and different from someone who has any one, two or three of these same themes. It is the order that makes you, you.

<b>learner</b>	<p>"You love to learn. The subject matter that interests you most will be determined by your other themes and experiences, but whatever the subject, you will always be drawn to the process of learning. The process, more than the content of the result is especially exciting for you. You are energized by the steady and deliberate journey from ignorance to competence. The thrill of the first few facts, the early efforts to recite or practice what you have learned, the growing confidence of a skill mastered - this is the process that entices you ... This outcome of learning is less significant than getting there."</p>
<b>strategic</b>	<p>"The Strategic theme enables you to sort through the clutter and find the best route. It is not a skill that can be taught. It is a distinct way of thinking, a special perspective on the world at large. This perspective allows you to see patterns where others simply see complexity. Mindful of the patterns, you play out alternative scenarios, always asking, "What if this happened? Okay, well what if this happened?" This recurring question helps you see around the next corner... You discard paths... that lead to nowhere... You discard the paths of confusion... to make selections, always asking, "What if?"</p>
<b>input</b>	<p>"You are inquisitive. You collect things. You might collect information—words, facts, books, and quotations - or you might collect tangible objects... Whatever you collect, you collect it because it interests you. And yours is the kind of mind that finds so many things interesting. The world is exciting precisely because of its infinite variety and complexity... At the time of storing, it is often hard to say exactly when or why you might need them, but who knows when they might become useful? And perhaps one day some of it will prove valuable."</p>
<b>maximizer</b>	<p>Excellence, not average, is your measure. Taking something from below average to slightly above takes a great deal of effort and in your opinion is not very rewarding. Transforming something strong into something superb takes just as much effort but is much more thrilling. Strengths, whether yours or someone else's, fascinate you. Like a diver after pearls, you search them out, watching for the telltale signs of a strength... And having found a strength, you feel compelled to nurture it, refine it, and stretch it toward excellence. You polish the pearl until it shines. This natural sorting of strengths means that others see you as discriminating. You choose to spend time with people who appreciate your particular strengths. Likewise, you are attracted to others who seem to have found and cultivated their own strengths. You tend to avoid those who want to fix you and make you well rounded. You don't want to spend your life bemoaning what you lack. Rather, you want to capitalize on the gifts with which you are blessed. It's more fun. It's more productive. And counter intuitively, it is more demanding.</p>
<b>relator</b>	<p>Relator describes your attitude toward your relationships. In simple terms, the Relator theme pulls you toward people you already know. You do not necessarily shy away from meeting new people - in fact, you may have other themes that cause you to enjoy the thrill of turning strangers into friends—but you do derive a great deal of pleasure and strength from being around your close friends... For you a relationship has value only if it is genuine. And the only way to know that is to entrust yourself to the other person... These are your steps toward real friendship, and you take them willingly.</p>

What is so thrilling about the StrengthsFinder assessment is that The Gallup Organization was able to put language to the indescribable! These descriptions eluded me for my entire business career. Whether considering a new candidate for hire or creating strategies to sell to customers, I had systematically relied on vague language like “She’s really good with people” or “He is a workhorse and always gets the job done.”

Have a little fun and see if you can identify your talent themes from the thirty-four possibilities in the StrengthsFinder table.



<b>Achiever</b>	<b>Activator</b>	<b>Adaptability</b>	<b>Analytical</b>	<b>Arranger</b>
Half full. Next.	It would be full by now if we did something and not just talk about it	I think it is half full but if it turns out differently we'll go with that.	The glass is two times the size it needs to be if you only use half of it.	We need to put something in the glass to make it look appealing.
<b>Belief</b>	<b>Command</b>	<b>Consistency</b>	<b>Communication</b>	<b>Competition</b>
It's what you need it to be.	It's half full and that's the end of the discussion.	Let's fill up a dozen glasses and make sure they are all the same size	While I realize the perception may be different for others, the glass of water to me appears to be half full.	What do I win for being right?
<b>Connectedness</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Deliberative</b>	<b>Developer</b>	<b>Discipline</b>
What can this glass of water, whether half full or half empty, tell us about ourselves and our team?	Is there an historic model to follow to help me solve this?	I'm going to need a measuring cup before I can respond accurately.	The glass has the potential to be a full glass of water and offer great things to others.	What are the rules to this game?
<b>Empathy</b>	<b>Focus</b>		<b>Futuristic</b>	<b>Harmony</b>
Whoever on this team needs to be right at this time, let's all go with that.	Is there a point to this exercise? If so, what is it?		Wouldn't it be great if someday the glass could be full all the time for everyone?	Whatever makes the group happy.
<b>Ideation</b>	<b>Inclusiveness</b>	<b>Individualization</b>	<b>Input</b>	<b>Intellection</b>
If you put small colorful stones in the bottom of the glass, it will raise the water to be higher, and the stones will make a decorative addition to the glass.	Get a bigger glass and put more water in so everyone can have a sip.	Let's get everyone's thoughts and find out why they think half empty or half full and then take a vote.	Let's get points of view about the glass that tells us more than how full it is!	Is the glass really there at all? And who's to say the truth about its content. Can we ever know for sure?

Learner	Maximizer	Positivity	Relator	Responsibility
Why does water evaporate? How long will it take for the water to become completely empty? Is there a math equation for this?	There are so many ways we can improve this glass of water.	It's just so great that we are all together trying to solve this puzzle, whatever the outcome.	I'd like to select my team — people who I know and trust to solve this puzzle.	I hope no one spills the water because I will be the one to have to clean it up.
Restorative	Self-Assurance	Significance	Strategic	Woo
It's not important whether it's half full or half empty, we just need to get it back to being a full glass of water.	Stick with me team, the glass is always half-full.	Is there an award if I'm correct?	What do we know about the glass? What don't we know about the glass? What don't we know that we need to know?	Hello, you tall, beautiful drink of water!

Any of these ringing a bell?

## do-er, thinker, relator

There are three distinctions among the thirty-four talent themes—do-er, thinker and relator. Can you see how if we had only these three broad traits without capturing the actual themes, the distinctions would fall short of capturing the essence of a person?

It would be like telling the server in an Italian restaurant that you'd like pasta!

Oh really? Well, would you like spaghetti, vermicelli or ziti noodles? Would you like red sauce, pesto, white sauce or perhaps a clam sauce? With meat or without? Spicy or mild?

How can anyone get close to getting what they want for themselves without the language to define what it is that they do really, really well, and then do it? These talent themes, when discovered, will open personal awareness and insights that will create that special "aha" moment.

## **kathryn's story—a talent dramatization**

As a longtime manager of a business unit, Kathryn had a burning desire to become an executive. The title, compensation and level of responsibility that is implied by the term “executive” were parts of the dream she had been working toward her entire career.

Kathryn had initiated several conversations with her boss about her career aspirations, but was unable to get specific feedback about how to be promoted. She had consistently accomplished her objectives and goals each year, and had received rave performance reviews. She was stumped as to what was blocking her from reaching this goal and she was out of ideas for what to do next.

There are additional things you should know about Kathryn. She is viewed by her subordinates as a great manager, or servant leader. She is committed to doing what she can for each member of her team to guide them to personal success, as well as team and company success, and all believe that she cares about them personally. She possesses a solid work ethic, has integrity, honor and respect for all who work with and for her. Kathryn has consistently reached or surpassed goals set by her superiors. She is willing to take on new responsibilities and comes to work each day with a positive attitude. She has respect for the customer and weighs in on the side of win-win when resolving customer issues. She also has a belief system that strongly honors the protocols of the organization's hierarchy; simply stated, she minds the reporting pecking order under all circumstances.

So what's going on here?

Let's take a closer look. It is clear that Kathryn is a top performer in her current job, but what about the job that eluded her? A question that Kathryn needed to ask to gain a different view of her situation was pivotal: “What is the job description for an executive?” Or better, “What core competencies do members of the existing executive staff possess that reveal what this particular company values in an executive?”

Kathryn realized that the common thread that connected all of the executive members in their different roles was not necessarily being great managers, but being really good leaders. They were all big thinkers and had the abilities to create solid business strategies and effectively execute them within their own business units.

As Kathryn's coach, I asked questions that dug a bit deeper to help Kathryn discover her promotion blockers. Her truth-telling session went like this:

**“Do you have the attributes needed to fulfill this role as a thought leader?”**

Kathryn: “What do you mean?”

**“Do you ever sit in meetings with your executive team and think**

**during the conversation, ‘This group is on the wrong track—I know exactly what I would do in these circumstances.’?”**

Kathryn: “That happens to me all the time.”

**“Do you speak up?”**

Kathryn: “No, not unless I’m asked to weigh in on something specific.”

**“What is behind you not sharing your ideas?”**

Kathryn: “I think it would be rude for me to do so.”

**“Rude? Tell me about this as being rude.”**

Kathryn: “Well, I think it is rude to disagree with a superior in a public forum.”

**“Where did you get that belief?”**

Kathryn: “I guess from growing up. My mother demanded respect for authority.”

**“Does that mean that you don’t question those in a position of authority, even if you think you have a better answer, a better way?”**

Kathryn: “Yes.”

**“Have you ever witnessed any of your peers speaking up to offer a different opinion or suggestion to an executive?”**

Kathryn: “Yes, it happens frequently.”

**“And what is the outcome when this occurs?”**

Kathryn: “It sparks dialogue, sometimes heated discussions.”

**“To what end?”**

Kathryn: “Sometimes it ends up being the right thing for the company, and the executives move forward with the suggestion. Sometimes they stick with the original plan.”

**“Have you ever witnessed any of your peers getting a warning, a demotion or perhaps, even getting fired for speaking up?”**

Kathryn: “No.”

**“Have any of your peers who frequently speak up been rewarded?”**

Kathryn: “Yes—there was one promotion last year.”

**“So, it sounds like executives come to the table willing to listen to different ideas from their middle management team. Would you go as far as to say that they might really value this kind of input?”**

Kathryn: “Yes, I guess so, now that you put it that way.”

**“Would you go as far as to say that they expect to get this input**

***from their management team and need to see this evidence of thought leadership before considering anyone for an executive position?"***

Kathryn: (Chuckle.) "Yes, I guess it's pretty clear now that they do indeed."

Kathryn was so occupied with managing down the organization—her team and the business unit—that she never took opportunities to manage up. She could look back on specific events and see where her actions had actually sabotaged her opportunity to be promoted to executive. She clearly had the talent to contribute value to the organization as an executive, but because of a long held *belief* she carried with her from childhood around challenging authority figures, she held back from sharing those ideas and promoting them passionately. When she realized that the limiting belief she created for herself long ago was not based on truth and that it was essentially blocking her from being promoted, she was able to realign her thinking. Creating awareness around this blocker, and then changing her mind about asserting her ideas to her executive team, was the shift needed for her to raise the bar on her performance and be considered for promotion.

Next, Kathryn needed to take action. She chose one idea among several she'd thought about over the recent months and then developed a plan to present it to the executives. She had already done significant analysis around the cost savings opportunities her idea would provide the company. Her idea focused on fixing an internal problem that was adversely affecting a number of the organization's most valued customers. It seemed that there were several departments involved in the sales and customer care process that were causing internal chaos, as well as customer confusion. Some customers had as many as six contact people within the company, whose specific roles were not well defined. This confusion delayed responses to requests for help because one department thought the other department was responsible, resulting in a hot-potato exchange of emails and phone calls before issues were resolved. Action items were redundant, slowing the response time to the customer, and often creating erroneous information. Duplicitous information and, in some cases, bad information from too many departments hampered new sales efforts with prospects. And the power plays among the departmental stakeholders, resulting from ill-defined plans, contaminated the environment and pitted people against people.

The strategy that Kathryn created to solve the issue had to appeal to the stakeholders of several departments as well as the executives. The plan had to present a time frame and proof that her plan would result in reduced expenses, cost avoidance or increased revenues.

Kathryn's plan was amazingly simple in concept. It serves as a great example of how companies keep doing what they do because that is the way it has always been done.

First, she defined the makeup of a prospect or customer team, reducing the contacts from six down to four. Next she named the sales account manager as the lead contact for the customer and the leader of the team in all instances. She also mapped out the sales process for a new customer from beginning to end, appointing the right contact based on where the customer was in the sales cycle. Before the sale, all technical questions would be directed to a pre-sales engineer. After the sale, all technical questions would be directed to a customer service representative. The customer would be informed about all the people on the team and would always know exactly who to contact, at what point and for what reasons. The account manager was copied on all communications and enlisted to make any necessary decisions.

To prepare for the presentation for the executive team and the departmental stakeholders, Kathryn created a flow chart for the current process, along with a second flow chart mapping out her recommendations. The current process visual resembled the diagram of a preschool T-ball game—no order, just a mass of four-year-olds forgetting to run, running in the wrong direction or to the wrong base, getting distracted in the outfield, and letting balls drop without even attempting to make the play.

The proposed process was concise and organized. It clearly defined roles for each customer team member and assigned cost savings/avoidance and revenue opportunities with each step.

Kathryn's plan was insightful and well thought out. Most importantly, it delivered bottom-line profits for the company and enhanced the overall customer experience. This plan involved all the critical elements of great leadership skills, which the executive team recognized. Kathryn's plan was executed and she gained the confidence to bring other ideas forward to the executive team. She was eventually promoted to executive.

To be sure, this change of mind doesn't happen for anyone with the simple flip of a mental switch. Kathryn had held on to her belief around authority figures for a very long time. This belief was one that she had to come to terms with on her own. She had to label it a limiting belief and discover for herself that it was actually blocking her pursuit of the executive position. And to be sure, if she continued to hold on to the old belief and was unable to adopt a new supportive belief, she would not have addressed the real issue. In this case, she would have been less likely to follow through with presenting her ideas. Even if she did speak up, her ideas and concepts would not be delivered with confidence; to do so would run counter to her authentic self.

Can you see in this instance that if Kathryn first tried to change her behavior without uncovering what thoughts and beliefs she was holding, she would not have been successful in achieving her desired outcome? She had to change her belief. This is where the conditioning of the mind, body and spirit comes home to roost for all of us.

One other fact to know about your themes; your talents are your talents.

They have been developing since you were born, creating synapses in your brain that make them stronger, eliminating or marginalizing what you don't use. So that by the time you are around eighteen years of age, your talent themes are firmly established.

As hard as I might try, I cannot organize a bookshelf to make it aesthetically pleasing. But someone who has the *Arranger* talent theme can probably do a stellar job—that individual is drawn to do it and enjoys it. I don't approach *competitive* situations with a killer instinct like those with the *Competition* talent theme, for whom winning and being the best is what drives them and drives them hard.

This is the other thrilling part about discovering your talents—what you do really well, is what you are naturally inclined to do! It's just like Popeye always said; *"I yam what I yam, and dat's all I'll ever be!"*

If you take the longer path to discover your innate talents through feedback from family and friends, and through personal reflection, you will want to contemplate these questions: What is it that you can do for hours on end and not tire? What is it that you love to do? If money were not a factor, what work would you do?

If you go the route of bypassing the StrengthsFinder 2.0 assessment, it may accelerate your process to hire a coach.

Once you learn your talent themes and devise a plan for developing them into strengths, I encourage you to learn ACCESS Principle #2: Everyone creates value differently.

## **chapter summary:**

- ACCESS principle #1: You must create value for ACCESS.
- Value is to ACCESS as air is to breathing. You must create value to win ACCESS.
- Discovering how you create the most value begins with discovering your talents, quickly and easily through the StrengthsFinder 2.0 assessment.
- Develop your top five talent themes into strengths for crafting your own value statement.
- Working in your strengths to create value for others is the currency for ACCESS.

## **resources**

*StrengthsFinder 2.0: A New and Upgraded Edition of the Online Test from Gallup's Now, Discover Your Strengths*, by Tom Rath

*Hot, Flat, and Crowded*, by Thomas L. Friedman