

Liz Levin Leadership Salon Series – The Faces of Leadership

Reaching for the Stars

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My experience ‘Reaching for the Stars’ is really something that I never knew I was consciously doing. Liz complemented me when she handed out my speaking assignment by saying that in her observation, she figured I had been reaching for the stars most of my life.

I hadn’t ever thought of myself in that way.

Being yourself is never something that you are usually very much aware. You are who you are and in many cases you are today who you *were* about the time you graduated from college, got the job that influenced you most, and/or got married, etc. These defining moments occur and quietly become an integral part of the DNA of our adult lives. Often times it is not until many years later that we associate their significance on the influence of our present day attitudes.

This is especially true in the rapid-fire lives of today. The opportunity presented by our unlimited world gives us almost no time to ponder and even less time to react.

After reflecting on the topic for some time, I determined that for me, the “Reaching...” part has never been a difficult thing. I assume it is the same for most of us. We all want to be successful at what we do. In many ways, striving for great achievement is part of how we are ‘wired’ as human beings.

Creating a pattern or approach that marries your attempt (the *Reaching* part) with a successful outcome is the key to any truly amazing or exemplary outcome or endeavor.

‘*Reaching for the Stars*’ starts with **Talent**. Each one of us has been given a certain set of talents and abilities that are unlike those of anyone else in the world. In fact, when combined with your own very personal and unbelievably unique life experiences, our natural or acquired Talents get modified, taking on a color that has never been seen before.

The sweet spot of your mixture of Talent & Experience needs to be very well defined so that when it crosses your path, you know enough to fully engage and pursue the opportunity. If you are waiting to be recognized as an aspiring actor but are far more brilliant at creating wild spreadsheets, your time might be better spent searching for a company who needs your greatest ability.

Success requires Talent but a much larger part of how we achieve greatness is all about **Drive**.

Athletes get the most credit in our society for having great Drive. Larry Bird (hall of fame basketball player), Ted Williams (hall of fame baseball player), and Serena Williams (one of the

most successful female tennis players of all time) all get credit for the extreme dedication and focus that they have applied to their trade. Business is no different in function and outcome than athletics, it just does not have the same glitz, glamour, and scrutiny. Amazing amounts of diligence and tenacity are needed to achieve great success in business. Talent is important but without Drive it usually remains as simply unrealized potential.

Tapping into the part of you that allows you to apply great focus and energy to an endeavor requires that your focus be in concert with your **Passion**. Once this is achieved, amazing new personal and professional tools suddenly become available to you.

Working in your Passion is so integral to outstanding achievement that if you are truly there, the end results can often be virtually a foregone conclusion.

Starting Waterfield Design required superhuman amounts of all of the above. Since our humble beginnings, we have accomplished some truly amazing things. None of these would have been possible had we not made sure what we were attempting was in synch with the Talents and Drive of our group.

More important, I believe, than a Business Plan, the alignment of Passion with Talent is a determining factor in the amount of fuel you will be able to apply to the effort. As with a real engine, large amounts of fuel can deliver great power. Understanding you or your group's capacity for energy investments is an important and critical factor in your ultimate success.

In many ways, I focused far more on what I believed we could achieve rather than on the probability of whether we could achieve it. Almost every decision of our early years was made with this lens.

For me, this established an interesting pattern of achievement within the firm. In many ways, this index became the basis for my go-no-go decisions. By focusing more on vision, talent, and determination, we were concerned less and less on the risk of failure, clearing the way for outstanding achievement.

This is, by definition, a very entrepreneurial outlook. In a traditional business environment, this decision matrix is typically not part of go-no-go discussions. This doesn't mean it cannot be part of a larger organization, it simply means that its potential needs to be recognized and more regularly utilized.

Over the last 8 years, I have led over 30 different teams of volunteers to Haiti to spend one or two weeks of their lives working at an orphanage in the heart of Port-au-Prince. I spent several months with each team prior to our departure date teaching them about Haiti's culture, the people, its history as well as what to expect visually, socially, and physically. Without fail, their encounters in Haiti paled in comparison to mental image they had created based on my intense coaching. By the _ point of every trip, I would spend an evening talking about Talents and Passion. After spending several days and nights miles outside their comfort zone and after being completely isolated from any communication or tie to home, the trip to Haiti was able to, without fail, peel away the layers of each person, leaving a beautifully exposed inner core. It was at this

point that I encouraged them to take stock of what was important to them, seek out what they love to do, and to set about creating a plan to align the various aspects of their lives with their Talents to expose their Passionate reserves.

We spend so much time, energy, and money planning our vocational career that we sometimes forget that vocation and passion need to be in synch in order for us to be wildly successful people, wildly successful friends, or wildly successful professionals. With a very small amount of seven year periods available in our lifetimes, planning how best to unlock your true Talents needs to be a regular and diligent effort. The distraction of a busy life means that some people never find the joy of working regularly in their sweet spot.

Once you figure out these things for yourself, they are easy to apply to your organization, group, or staff.

Find out what gets people jazzed, put them in the right spot orchestra pit and let them play their jazz. On a macro level, find out what gets your company jazzed, set out to achieve it, and watch what happens. Your company will soon be playing jazz, and lots of it.