

# Kind AMBITION

Practical Steps to Achieve Success  
Without Losing Your Soul

Ian Blei

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For information, contact:

Optimized Results  
PO Box 460638  
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optimized-results.com

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## Foreword

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*Kind Ambition* is about you having the tools to slide over to the driver's seat of your own life. Circumstances will always be changing, seemingly thwarting our plans, but we don't have to be thrown around by them. You can be in charge of your choices and actions more than you might imagine...yet.

The arrangement is a collection of insights and actions designed to help you move forward and get more out of your life at home and at work. The chapters cover several areas, and hold to a formula of first giving you a new way to look at things, then offering you tangible Action Steps to try them out, and finally some things to notice when you do.

This formula came to me several years ago while visiting the Exploratorium Museum in San Francisco. Many of the exhibits would have a sign posing a fact or assertion that was new to the visitor. There would then be some kind of activity you could try out that would illustrate the assertion in an experiential way, and really learn it. The instructions for these experiments always had a sign that said: "To Do and Notice." To me, this has always felt like the integral work of true Coaching: questioning or challenging an old perspective or idea, taking actions that will bring the idea into a brighter light, and noticing, or becoming more conscious and aware of the true ramifications or consequences.

We try to learn from our mistakes, and sometimes we're pretty successful. Sometimes, however, we wonder how we could possibly be repeating these "patterns." What if you could mark off territories with warning signs or red flags, so that when you approached the area you have difficulties with, you'd know to be extra cautious, and exactly what to look out for? That's one of the skills you will take from these coaching lessons.

The insights and exercises start out a bit simpler and easier to practice, and become deeper or perhaps a bit trickier as you get further along. This is just like learning an instrument or a new language. Once you are more familiar with the territory, the lessons need to keep up with your growth. As you progress through your journey, you'll also probably notice certain themes re-surfacing. Approaching these from

different angles at different stages, and in different contexts will help you to really absorb and integrate them into your life usefully. Usefulness is the guiding principle of the book.

Although you can start anywhere, and take however long you'd like with each idea, the ideas and actions do progress in depth and build on each other as you progress through the book. Also, there are 50 experiments, which easily sets up a plan for working with one per week, and having a year's worth of fun with two weeks off for vacation.

To simplify (and shorten) the chapters, principles that can be applied universally are not always spelled out for all applications. The word *organization* can refer to your business, family, or any entity of more than one person. The principles will still apply. I may use the word *employees* in an example, but the principle will still apply to your children or perhaps your in-laws. Let your creativity reign, and apply the metaphors to your own life as specifically as you can. They will have the most impact that way.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs calls Self-Actualization the *highest* of our needs. This is what this book seeks to offer you: a viable, useful plan for self-actualization. Whether you work in a corporate environment or are a stay at home parent, whether you are an entrepreneur or thinking about becoming one, these ideas and actions will take you to a place of deeper understanding, better interaction with others, and more joyful fulfillment with yourself. In short they will propel you forward to becoming the best you—the you who you *want* to be, the you who you *can* be.

## 2. Don't Be Seduced by the Promises of Multi-Tasking

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This is a long standing argument with a lot of people, many of whom firmly believe they cannot live without multi-tasking. Let's start by clarifying that I'm not saying not to multi-task at all, ever—that would be an unreasonable request.

I am saying that the promises of accomplishment are greatly exaggerated. There is an old saying: "Never confuse activity with progress." This is where the "seductive" nature of multi-tasking shows up. You may think that you're getting more done by answering e-mails, while answering the telephone, while carrying on a conversation. After all, you're a non-stop flurry of activity. However, if you were to measure your actual productivity at the end of the day, you'd be quite surprised.

You see, we're not really doing these things absolutely simultaneously. We're actually bouncing back and forth between them all as quickly as we can. We have to pull our attention back from one thing, and then send it toward another. As our brains re-focus on what is now taking primary attention, a little "lag" time goes by. As we continually flick between tasks, our brains spend an enormous amount of cumulative time adjusting to each activity. In addition to this, the secondary and tertiary activities are not getting our best effort or attention (leaving vulnerability for having to fix mistakes and use up even more time later).

From a purely quantitative perspective, you're getting less done than if you took a specific amount of time to do one thing "mindfully," and then move on to the next item. The cumulative lag time can be reduced significantly.



## Action Steps:

1. Schedule every other hour as a “no-phone” hour. During that time, let voice mail grab it, and keep plugging away on another project.
2. Then during the “phone” hour, call everybody back, make the calls you need to, and actually pay close attention to the person your talking to (without working on that other project).
3. Notice the nuances in the interaction that you would’ve missed, had you been splitting your attention between the person on the phone and the project you’re working on.
4. Notice how much work you accomplished during the “no-phone” hour.

**You wouldn’t watch TV over your child’s head while reading them a bedtime story, while doing crossword puzzles would you? There are some things that you can do simultaneously without a “noticeable” deficit in quality, and some things you can’t. Rather than trying to make the most *efficient* use of time by multi-tasking, which doesn’t really get you those results, you can go for the most *effective* use of time, which ends up being the most efficient use as well.**

## 10. Recognize the Difference Between Counterfeit Power and Real Power

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Recommended reading for really getting the most out of this exercise is Hanna Arendt's essays on definitions of Power, Strength, Force, Authority, and the huge differences between them. You'll be surprised at just how different they are.

Building on the last exercise concerning conflicting/contradicting directives from management, and losing your "best and brightest," I'd like to address a prime motivator behind much of this confusion: the pursuit of "power."

This isn't innately an evil pursuit. Depending on your understanding of power, it is both necessary and nourishing to everyone concerned. This is where I'd like to make the distinction between real power and the great pretender: counterfeit power.

Counterfeit power looks like the archetype we've all come to know: one person making other people do things. As a manager/leader, this looks right, at first glance. The problem is the inevitable breakdown of this system, and the built-in Machiavellian behavior that follows. Neither of these enable one's business to flourish, while allowing the leader to breathe freely, and the work force to not feel trampled. Real power does! Counterfeit power (making people do what you say, etc.) is temporary and fleeting. Real power (enabling people to do what is needed, etc.) grows and blossoms organically over time.

Enabling others to do things, and evoking their best work gives you phenomenal power. This is one of those wacky paradoxes of life: the more you give, the more you have. Not to belie my 60's roots too much, but it could be said that power and love are quite similar in that respect. They share this incredible and rare paradox. Mathematically and realistically, the converse is just as true: the more you withhold, the less you have.

Let me give you a real-world example of how this plays out. One organization that I worked with some years ago was suffering every ailment a retail establishment could suffer. Sales volume was down, morale was horrendous, staff turnover was a runaway train, and quality was

almost non-existent. Management had been unable to make their people do what they wanted them to do, no matter how many management training seminars or workshops they went to. They brought me in to "fix the problem."

By systematically training and giving the staff an understanding of the big picture and how they fit (or could potentially fit) in that picture, they understood why they needed to do what they needed to do. We could make an agreement with each other wherein they would do what was needed, and management would in turn provide the tools, training, and return commitment required. They understood how keeping the organization alive and healthy gave them the security of an ever-increasing paycheck, and the environment supported them attaining their highest potential. They accomplished the tasks at hand not because I forced them, but because it was obviously the best thing to do for the organization, and thus themselves. Mutual commitment and enlightened self-interest are bi-products of Real Power.

Real Power requires no use of force or show of strength, and doesn't hide behind the duck-blind of authority. Counterfeit power requires all of the aforementioned, using up incredible energy, and only lasting until the inevitable coup. Puffing up, wearing gold braid, and intimidation are all doomed to fail.

You remember every teacher, supervisor, or friend who helped you to be the best you, with fondness and respect. If they asked something of you, chances are you would want to help. They'd never need to bully you. Managers or bosses rarely think of themselves as schoolyard bullies, yet the dynamic they foster is just that. And the results are just as detrimental.

### **Action Steps:**

1. The next time you come to a four-way stop sign, take the opportunity to make eye contact and smile to each of the other drivers before letting them go first. Have that tiny interaction with them. As you drive away, pay attention to how you feel: heart rate, breathing, are you smiling? (warning: this usually puts you as much as 45 seconds behind schedule). Do you feel the power?

2. Then at the next four-way stop sign, make sure you go first, no matter who you tick off. Then see how much power you feel like you have, and for how long. (Hey, you won, right?!)
3. Notice from the first experience/experiment, a tiny taste of how much better you feel, when you bestow “power” and thus become powerful.
4. Notice from the second experience/experiment, how hollow and empty your victory was.

**Helping someone up will always give you far more power than shoving someone down. If we all learned this lesson early enough, our world would be a far more productive and compassionate place.**

## 26. Remember Before You React

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Every now and then we look back, reflect, and assess where we've been and where we're headed. This reflective time is necessary for us to get clear perspective. We tend to get caught up in the heat of the moment while busy at our jobs or lives, and as a result, often do things we never intended, (or don't do things we did intend). In addition we often don't have a chance to really learn from things happening in the moment, as we're busy dealing with that moment. We don't necessarily notice when we hurt someone accidentally or forget a promise made.

In the Jewish tradition celebrating Yom Kippur, there is a day of general repentance for whatever promises were broken during the year, and in effect for stepping on toes that were never intended to be stepped on. The assumption is that one must have messed up during the year whether it's known or not, so one probably owes some apologies to somebody.

A clear example of our not-so-conscious toe-stomping is what often takes place in meetings (or around the dinner table). A real agenda is at hand, and in the midst of trying to actually accomplish something, we state positions, maneuver, and posture in almost complete "reaction-mode." Reactions beget reactions, which beget further reactions. This is where the damage occurs, perhaps starting with toes, but invariably escalating. Once the dynamic of hurt/defense/strike-back is in motion, virtually all constructive communication comes to a screeching halt, and nothing is accomplished, except for the bad feelings that are stirred up.

This is where bottom-line conscious folks need to take note: meetings are incredibly expensive, from the standpoint of payroll, time away from primary tasks, etc. They must be productive to justify their expense. Otherwise, we end up with financial and emotional waste in all directions, to no better end than providing a forum for enabled tantrums. How do we address this dynamic and turn it around?

What gets left out of our interactions, is taking the time for a little empathy and the space for each of us to be seen, heard, and respected for all that we are. Combining some of the lessons you've learned to date can give you a refreshing approach to gatherings of any kind, from meetings to dinner table conversation.

If we take the concept of “being excellent to each other” (Chapter 8) a little further, “become the change we want to see,” (Chapter 12) “eliminate blame from the equation,” (Chapter 15) and “question our assumptions of intentions,” (Chapter 18) our interactions become positive, productive, nourishing, and fulfilling.

If we add one more component that addresses a starting point of genuine empathy and respect, the dynamic that we want to turn around will be addressed and dispatched with ease. There is a Sanskrit word used as a salutation or blessing, that can be translated basically as “the divine in me honors and blesses the divine in you, in truth, we are one.” This word is NAMASTÊ—(pronounced Na-ma-stay) and if we were to truly stay conscious of this message with each other, it would be quite difficult to “behave badly” at the table. It may just become second-nature to be more empathic and respectful.

### **Action Steps:**

The next time you’re in a meeting, at the dinner table, or in any potentially inflammatory conversation, and someone says something that gets to you, before responding:

1. Take a breath or two.
2. Remember the salutation/blessing above—  
“Namaste”. Perhaps say it silently to yourself.
3. While remembering the humanness of each person present, try the “Compassion Exercise” from the book *ReSurfacing*® by Harry Palmer of the Avatar® Course Program. With attention on the person, repeat to yourself:  
“Just like me, this person is seeking some happiness for his/her life.”  
“Just like me, this person is trying to avoid suffering in his/her life.”  
“Just like me, this person has know sadness, loneliness, and despair.”  
“Just like me, this person is seeking to fulfill his/her needs.”  
“Just like me, this person is learning about life.”  
“Just like me, this person is looking for some happiness.”
4. Question your assumptions of the other person’s intentions. They may not be attacking you. They may be in defensive,

strike-back mode over something you may not have anything to do with. You may have totally misunderstood them. Remember that you need to clarify their meaning with them. Ask questions, and check-in in an open, friendly way.

5. Eliminate blame from the equation. There is no solution to be found in blame. It only serves to fuel the flames of discord, and take you farther from a productive interaction.
6. Become the change you want to see. If you want someone to treat you with compassion and respect, start by treating them that way. If you don't want the interaction to disintegrate into a shouting match, don't raise your voice.

**None of us are so busy that we can ignore the need to interact with each other in a productive manner. We cannot just stomp our way through life like a bull in a china shop. It doesn't save time, as we end up spending far more time repairing the damage than we ever would have spent being more caring and respectful in the first place.**

**So to you the reader: "Namaste'."**

## 41. Why'd They Do That?

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It's a foregone conclusion that we need to understand the people we interact with at home and at work. Everyone has agendas, motivations, and goals, and different ways of pursuing them. In our quest to understand, we've developed countless systems for categorizing or "typing" people. (Hey, it's how our brains work!).

We look at external actions, and determine whether someone is an analyst or a driver, an INFP or an ENTJ\*, and then make the grand assumption we have them "pegged." Instinctively, it's pretty obvious that there are far more than 4-10 types of people on the planet, so this has to be an over-simplification at the least, and therefore inaccurate.

\*Meyers-Briggs Personality Inventory system

The inherent flaw in 99% of the "let's put Mary or John in this box" typology methods, is that they look at external actions, and attempt to apply that information to the inner workings of the mind. In fact, you and I could participate in identical activities, for incredibly different reasons.

What motivates us is the true identifier of who we are. Why do we do what we do? Understanding this offers us far more useful information on many levels. We strive to predict people's behavior, but doing this from an observation of input is fraught with problems. (This is similar to ascertaining the results of someone's work by measuring the number of hours they've expended—hardly relevant to anything beyond pulling a crank in a factory). There really is no one-to-one correlation. Furthermore, we've reduced the person down to a thing that will or will not behave a certain way. Even if we end up getting relatively good at guessing this over time, it's still gambling at best.

What will inform us in a more predictive and reliable way? Understanding why someone does what they do will give you a far more accurate idea of what they will likely do. If you know someone loves vanilla ice cream, it's far more useful than collecting statistics on their ice cream choices over time, and deducing that they order vanilla most of the time, which would indicate a preference. This gets us a statistical projection at best. We have the option of asking them and knowing.

There are many ways to look deeper into each other; into each



other's perspectives, world-views, and character-based leanings. Looking at the "why" behind the action is like looking at the genetic coding for the eventual entity. Predictability is far more accurate and transferable across different circumstances.

For example, how we take in information, and which information is important to us, tells a great deal. Does input come in first through your brain, then go to your feelings for a check-in? Is it the other way around? Do you have an intuitive "sense" about something, and then check in with either your feelings or analytical side?

Quite often, a breakdown in communication can be traced to this simple difference in modality. One person is having a completely different experience than another, and when they try to communicate, it seems as though the other person is either crazy or just plain wrong.

Understanding these differences in modality is a great start toward understanding each other. What I might experience as someone being cold or detached, you might see as their totally logical approach to keeping others from draining them of energy.

Putting ourselves in the other person's shoes means more when we look out at the world through their eyes as well. In their shoes, we still look at things from our own perspective. Their circumstances, with our perspective, is not a very accurate way to understand their experience. The more we can separate what we would do in their place from what they are thinking, feeling, intuiting, the more we can actually understand them. Seeing the world from their eyes is far more useful, powerful, and effective than walking in their shoes.

### **Action Steps:**

1. The next time you find yourself in a communication breakdown with someone, take a moment to back up to where your two paths seemed to part. Who isn't understanding whom?
2. If you aren't "getting" what someone is emphatically trying to convey, think about where they're coming from, what motivates and moves them, and how that might sculpt their communication.
3. Ask yourself questions about them. If someone grew

up not being able to count on anyone or anything, isn't it reasonable that they would have trust issues?

4. If someone grew up getting praise and admiration only for their accomplishments, wouldn't it make sense that they would identify more with what they do than who they are?
5. If someone connects with others through conflict (needing to feel the other person's push-back to feel that connection) and you go into "appeasement mode" trying to avoid conflict, do you see how you'd actually inflame the situation?
6. If they aren't "getting" what you're trying to convey, take the same steps. What filters are between their ears and their brain? How do those filters alter your meanings?

**This is the tip of the iceberg, when it comes to truly communicating with one another as opposed to talking at each other. The more consciousness and effort that goes into the initial communication, the less repair work will be required, saving time, money, motion, and energy.**

## 49. Remove the Fudge Factor

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A running theme in these pages has been examining the folly of using one's own motivations to explain other people's actions and words. In Chapter 45 we looked at our tendency to assume the more negative motivations, and how that rarely works in our favor. In this chapter we'll address the mechanics of misunderstandings, and how we use assumption and projection as a "fudge factor," misleading us into thinking we understand more than we do.

Most misunderstandings are not about drastic differences, but are actually brought about by both sides being very close, and yet slightly out of sync. That closeness gives us the impression that with a tiny bit of assumption or projection, we'll understand what the other person was saying. That assumption or projection is what I'm calling a "fudge factor."

When Albert Einstein was developing his calculations describing general relativity, the prevailing assumption at the time was that the Universe was static and unchanging. Under this assumption the equations didn't work, as the inexorable force of gravity pulling on every speck of matter demanded that the Universe collapse under its own weight.

By introducing a "fudge factor" he called a Cosmological Constant (represented by an uppercase Greek lambda) he compensated for reality not adhering to his assumption, and the equations worked (or at least seemed to work until we had physical evidence that the Universe was expanding—thank you Friedmann and Hubble).

Back to our two people having a conversation; the listener employs a "fudge factor" almost subconsciously to expedite their apparent understanding. In response, the first person either assumes that the listener seems to understand and continues, or hearing a difference as extreme, reacts to that difference. Each incremental assumption or projection may be tiny, and yet creates a cumulative affect that can accelerate rapidly. This would be the linguistic equivalent of a whip's motion. A relatively small deviation at the origin increases geometrically as the interaction progresses. A single degree of deviation can take you incredibly off course over time or distance.

This phenomenon is widespread in both business settings and personal relationships. In striving to relieve these conflicts, and facilitate clear, conscious communication, I have found a common thread. That's usually step one in discovering a feasible solution. It appears that a major factor instigating this dynamic is good old Ego.

Let's quickly define what I mean by Ego in this context, so we don't start down the very road we're trying to avoid. I am approaching the description of our Being as existing in two areas: Ego and Essence. (Okay, this is an extreme simplification, yet will still work for our purposes here). Essence is that which embodies us all as One; that magical energy of Life which goes by thousands of names in thousands of languages and cultures. Ego is what we use to differentiate ourselves from one another. This is the paradox of our Being: All is One, yet consciousness allows us differentiation. We need this ability to differentiate for self-preservation. Ego is very helpful in making the decision to not step off the curb just yet, if you don't want to become One with the oncoming truck.

That's a great job for the Ego, and the one that actually helps and supports our survival. We get into trouble when we let the Ego take on other jobs that it has no business performing. Ego is what fuels the belief that we still get accurate data when we make assumptions and projections. This is not a conscious mechanism, but one that is so quietly insidious, that merely bringing it to awareness can give you the ability to halt its dubious advance. This unconscious mechanism, this "fudge factor" only has value because we give it value. We can just as easily take that value away. Remember, Einstein was compensating for reality not adhering to his assumption. How much value do we want to put on our assumptions over reality?

Once this Ego driven mechanism is identified, properly discounted for its inaccuracy, and halted, we are left with a void or a space. This space is the place where we can truly hear and see without the assumptions and projections. This, from an epistemological standpoint, is striving to escape the egocentric predicament, and see reality as it truly is. This is to climb out of the crater of our own existence, our womb of comfort zone, and see what's going on out there.

This empty space is the goal of a Zen approach. Remember that Zen master pouring the cup of tea in Chapter 28? Unless there's space

for something, it can't come in, no matter how eager the donor, or how needy the recipient. If you've ever tried to give a gift to someone who couldn't accept it, or help someone who didn't want to be helped, you understand the power and the necessity of the empty space. Creating this empty space allows you to hear the person you are communicating with, without leaning on your "fudge factor" of assumptions and projections. If there is a disconnect in your comprehension, you can stay there and clarify before moving on, rather than simply moving on with a tainted understanding.

Although it may seem to be a slower process, in fact the accuracy of your communication will end up saving far more time in the long run. This is akin to the old expression "measure twice, cut once." It takes far less time to measure twice than to have to start over again with a new piece of wood.

## **Action Steps:**

When someone says something that strikes you as ridiculous or stupid:

1. Catch yourself in the moment, making that judgment.
2. Notice that you are comparing their statement to your own internal motivational schema, where it doesn't fit, and most likely wouldn't make sense.
3. Consciously try to remove this overlay of your own schema, creating that space, and listen again without your Ego taking control of whether you understand or not.
4. If you have the opportunity to check-in with their true motivation, do so in an open, curious, and welcoming way (not judgmental).
5. If you don't have that opportunity, try to imagine the most reasonable motivation for their words or behavior, where it makes perfect sense. (As long as your Ego isn't part of the equation, you'll have no stake in making them "wrong.")

**Once we remove our own Rulebook written by our Ego from the equation, we create space. We leave open the space needed for Essence. When our Essence is in the driver's seat, rather than our Ego, we are One, and true communication is freer, easier, and far more accurate and effective.**