



# **Playing It to Excellence and Happiness in Real Life**

Five Concepts I Learned by Playing Basketball,  
Working and just Living

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Thanks for reading...

What is **True** on the  
**Basketball** court

is also  
**True** in **Life**



## Introduction – or why should you read this E-book?

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My  
  
Story

I come from a family where basketball is not only a sport – *it's a way of life.*

My father is a professional basketball coach and has coached at the highest levels of Israeli and European Basketball for the last 30 years, including more than 10 years as the head coach of the National Israeli Men's Team. My mother, who was a professional basketball player for more than 30 years, was part of the National Israeli Woman's Team since she was fifteen years old. My only brother was a leading player in his high school basketball team and is now a professional basketball coach for children and cadets. My aunt played professional basketball for a number of years and in her youth, was a part of the National Israeli Cadets Team. *I could go on, but I believe you get the idea.*

"And what about you?" you ask.

Well. That is a good question. You can say that I am somewhat the black sheep of the family. Until a few months ago, I was a lawyer ("Oy Vey"! ). Actually, I did try playing professional basketball for a few years when I was a kid. Let's just say that *it was not my true calling in life.*



By now you must already understand, that although basketball is not my profession, my family heritage dictates that basketball will always be an important part of my life. Otherwise, I could never participate in the conversation during family dinner...

But seriously, I don't know if it is by choice or due to the fact that it was always there, I still enjoy playing basketball weekly with friends and I very much enjoy watching it every chance I get.



"Ok, but what has that got to do with this E-book?"

Another good question!

Well, a lot actually. These last few weeks I had a lot of time to think about the experiences I had in life so far. In a few months period, I will be leaving Israel in order to study for a MBA degree in Sydney, Australia. As I am preparing for that enormous change, professionally and personally, I have a lot of time to sum up and think about what I learned in almost 30 years of my life.

Now, I don't know when was the last time you tried to embark on such a journey – thinking about what you learned in life so far. I can assure you, it was not an easy journey. Fortunately, I am happy to announce that not only did I succeed in indentifying the main lessons I learned in life, but I actually got them pinned down to five concepts, that *I believe might help anyone to reach excellence and happiness in life.*

I decided to commit these concepts to paper and share them with everybody who wants to read about them. Oh, right. Why the long explanation about basketball? The more I thought about it, the more I understood, that most of the lessons I learned in life, can also be found on the basketball court, and perhaps some of them came from playing and watching this sport for all these years. So it seemed natural to use basketball as a way to explain these concepts.

*"Wait a minute there. Go back. Isn't that a little pretentious? You can tell me how to reach excellence and happiness in life? Who do you think you are?"*

Well, you are full of good questions today, aren't you? Perhaps I should clear that up.

*Firstly*, I am not presuming to be an all knowing source or the bringer of total truths. I don't believe such things actually exist. That is why I said I *believe* the concepts in this E-book *might* help anyone reach excellence and happiness in life. I know that in many cases, they worked for me.

*Secondly*, I, like everybody else, am not perfect. Unfortunately, most of my life I did not adhere to all the concepts I present in this E-book. Actually, some of them came to me from unsuccessful – to say the least – experiences (the best way for learning things, isn't it?). So I can't frankly say that I have reached excellence and happiness in life. It is quite hard. *But I do keep trying*. I think it is worth the effort.

*Thirdly*, I am not presuming these concepts are the only things that are important in order to reach excellence and happiness, only that they might help. When dealing with excellence and happiness every improvement is welcome. For me, these five concepts proved to be the most important ones. Perhaps they could be as important for you too.

So, tough I can't tell you what will certainly help you reach excellence and happiness in life, I can simply try to explain what I believe will do some of the work. If you like it – that's great. *If you don't, I hope you will at least enjoy the journey*.

"Ok. As they say: 'Good luck with all of that', so why should I read This E-book?"



Again, that is a good question. Perhaps the best question up to this point. The first and most important answer I can give you is that *you don't have to*. I only want you to read it if you will (a) enjoy it or (b) find it useful in any way.

To be totally honest, I did not write this E-book for you. *I wrote it for me*.

I believe that writing down thoughts or concepts to paper (or electronic paper at least, we do want to protect the environment after all) has a symbolic significance, because committing them to paper also means committing oneself to them. You see, the writing, *by itself*, is important in the process of transforming lessons from mere thoughts and ideas to reality (not the kind you see on TV. *the real reality*). Writing concepts down helps in the process of *materializing* them. Since I fully intend to try and act for the remainder of my life according to these concepts, I needed to fully understand what I had learned and turn it into concrete behavior tips.

Great



Quote

Edward Shapiro said that: "The most important skill is to learn from our personal experience and that of our fellow-men". While [Eleanor Roosevelt](#) once suggested: "Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself".

So, I wrote this E-book trying to learn from my personal experience. I am sharing it with you hoping you will also learn a little from the experience and mistakes of your fellow-men, who is, well ... me.

"Ok, what's the catch? There is always a catch! What are you gaining from me reading this E-book?"

The million dollar question! Well, *there is no catch*, but hopefully *I will gain a number of things* if you read this E-book. *Wait! Let me explain.*



There are no material gains for me. I admit that this E-book does contain links to different sites, blogs, book recommendations, research and other internet data. The links are affiliate free and I will not be getting paid whether you chose to click on them (though I really recommend it). I don't know any of the writers of the blogs or books I will refer you to along this E-book (although, I wish I had, because some of them are really interesting people, see more on this in page 99). In addition, this E-book is totally free, as you might have already understood.

So, why do I say that I will gain something if you read it? Well, for a number of reasons. *Firstly*, I believe in sharing ideas. If you read my E-book, my ideas spread. This is why this E-book is free. Actually, I encourage you to spread it, to post about it on your blog or to share it with your friends anyway you can. Just credit me and don't change anything written in it or sell it. The more people will read all of it or part of it, *for free*, the better.

Secondly, as I said earlier, I believe that if more people act according to what I write in this E-book, they will reach excellence and happiness. That will probably [make the world a better place](#). If you had the possibility to change the world, even by a tiny amount, wouldn't you call it a *worthy cause* (almost as worthy as "true love" if you want to use the "princess bride" lingo)? Isn't that enough gain in itself?

Great



Quote

[Aesop](#) said that: "A generous deed, small as is it may be, is never a waste".

Thirdly, if you do read this book and have some kind of feeling about it (loathing, happiness, bliss, apathy. Any emotion will suffice), I hope you would take the time to tell me about it. Putting my ideas out there for a challenge and hearing how they affected people gives me great joy. Those are the main gains. *That is it.*

If any of the above mentioned gains does not sound right to you or if you think there is a catch I did not mention, I thank you for your time and encourage you to close this E-book and delete it.

As I said earlier, I wrote this E-book mainly for myself. But if I did arouse some interest, I will be happy if you keep on reading. I put a lot of effort in making it readable, simple and interesting by intertwining it with stories from different era's of my short life as well as a lot of basketball examples (sports almost always works, doesn't it?).

Oh yes. I also tried to make it humorous (well at least to my standard of humor).

So, are you still with me? Great. *Let's begin.*

Oh! I almost forgot one more thing. I am, as you might have already guessed or know, Israeli. This means that my mother tongue is Hebrew. So, not only that I am not used to writing in English, I actually used to writing right to left. Crazy, ah? Anyway, I did try to write this E-book without any spelling or grammar mistakes. But, it is free and was not

edited or proof-read by a professional, so I apologize in advance if there will be any such mistakes. I hope it will not harm your enjoyment of this E-book in any way. Now that I took this last thing out of the way, *we can really begin.*



## The five concepts:

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1. Focus on the process
2. Use your comparative advantage
3. Be passionate
4. Communicate
5. Call it as you see it



## Concept # 1:

### Focus on the Process

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Basketball is a competitive sport. As such, winning is not the most important thing, it is the only thing. Success is measured by the bottom line results. Did you win or lose? However, although counterintuitive, I think one of the most important lessons I learned from basketball is focusing on the process and *not* on the bottom line end results.



The importance of the process is the reason you hear a lot of basketball commentators say something like: "Johnny was not able to make a basket at the end of that move, but it is a good Idea for him to keep trying to do that". This is also why you hear coaches interviewing after games saying something like: "We won, but I am not content. We played bad today. We can't keep looking like that on the court".

They know what every basketball player knows. In the long run, it is the process that counts. It is the repetition. These are the things that lead to great results. If you think about it, a lot of the work of a basketball coach is to identify which processes work best for a specific player and encourage him to pursue them. And work hard on them. Again



and again and again. If there is one thing that sports teaches us, is that *practice makes perfect* or as the ["Know can do"](#) book puts it: "Perfect practice makes perfect". It was [Aristotle](#) who said that "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit". [Success is much more complex than failure.](#)

This is why, when I play, I always try to identify what brought the basket – the preceding pass, a player's movement without the ball or a body block one of the players gave – and encourage the player who did it to continue doing it (unless that player was... well, me). The important part is that the encouragement *does not go to the player who made the basket*. He already got the praise he needs, merely by making the basket. The

encouragement should go to the players who enabled the basket, because it is all about the process that led to the basket. If they will do it again, we will get another basket.

I do acknowledge the player who made the basket – when he doesn't make it. If he was free and took a good shot that did not go in, I will tell him: "Good shot, try it again". If it is a good shot, he needs to do it again. Eventually, he will succeed. More importantly, *I believe he needs to enjoy the process*, if it was done correctly – hearing that he did well takes the edge of the miss.

The concept of focusing on the process is also very important when playing defense. Sometimes, even when you do everything right, your opponent still gets the basket. It is frustrating! However, it does not matter. You need to keep doing the same thing. It will eventually hinder your opponent's percentage. I always give a good word to someone who did his best in defense, but the opponent still made the basket. This is when he needs to hear it the most.

What I try to explain in this entire E-book is that what is true on the basketball court is also true in life. That is why focusing on the process and on the effort is an important concept on the road for excellence and happiness in life. The thing is, in real life there is no scoreboard to tell you the bottom line. This makes focusing on the process much more important.

In her book, "[Mindset: The New Psychology of Success](#)", Psychology Professor [Carol Dweck](#), describes a study she and her colleagues conducted with adolescences. They gave a few hundred students a non verbal IQ test. When the students finished the test, they praised them for their results. Some students were praised for their *ability*: "Wow, that is a really good score, you must be *really smart*". Other students were praised for their effort: "Wow, that is a really good score, you must have *worked really hard*". Both groups had equal scores to begin with, but after the praise the groups began to differ.

Students who were praised for their *ability* were not inclined to taking on new tasks. They did not want to expose their flaws. They wanted to keep their smart appearances. In contrast, the group that was praised for their *effort* showed a different behavior, they actually asked for new challenging tasks to handle!

After interviewing the groups, the researchers gave a new test, much harder this time. The *ability* group reported feelings of failure. Most of them, when asked to describe their feelings of failure, said: "We are not so smart after all". More importantly, the *ability* group, who reported enjoyment of the first test, told the researchers *they did not enjoy the second one*. In contrast to the ability group's reaction to the second difficult test, the *effort* group did not see their lesser results at the second test as failure. When confronted with their failure in the second test they mostly said: "we will just need to put in more effort in order to succeed". More importantly, they reported enjoyment from both tests. Even the one they failed!



Later, both groups were given an easy test again. The ability group performed worse than it did in the first test. They lost their faith in their ability. The effort group actually performed better than it had done in the first test. They used the harder test to enhance their skill. *Not only did they enjoy the ride, in the long run, it improved their outputs.*

Important to



Remember

*If you focus on the process, you can enjoy it even if you fail.* If you focus on the result, and don't succeed, you lose twice!

In life, many times, even if you do everything right, you still don't get the desired result. You can let that demoralize you or you can stand up to it by focusing on the process. Not only does focusing on the process helps you reach the needed results in the long run, but it *makes the journey worthwhile* and enjoyable.

Talent and ability are not the most important traits. It is a lot about the effort. It is about the way you handle the process. You need to always keep going. You need to always try

and get better at it. [Effort is not a myth](#). You need stamina and you need discipline. As Hugh Macleod put it [in his blog, gapingvoid](#):

Great



Quote

"I've noticed that building a Global Microbrand, whether you're a tech consultant or a maker of hand-built guitars, is a lot like learning how to teach oneself to be a cartoonist i.e. you need the same three basic ingredients: *Talent, stamina* and *discipline*. Like any good Kung Fu master will tell you – There are no secrets. There is no magic formula. Just a lot of hard work".

Or as I call concept # 1: Focus on the Process.

[Malcolm Gladwell](#), who compares [Michael Ventris](#), the decipherer of [Linear B](#), with [Andrew Wiles](#), the solver of [Fermat's Last Theorem](#), says in his amazing [speech at the New Yorker conference](#) labeled: "Genius: 2012": "Modern problems require persistence more than they require genius and we ought to value quantity over quality when it comes to intelligence".



When Thomas Edison was asked how it felt to fail 800 times before coming up with tungsten as the filament for the light bulb, his answer was a revealing one. "Fail?" he said. "I didn't fail once. I learned 800 ways how not to make a light bulb". The same idea can be found in [Ken Robinson's inspiring speech regarding creativity and education](#): "If you are not prepared to be wrong, you will never come up with anything original". In many aspects of our life we focus so much on the end result that we forget to enjoy the process and effort and forget that the process has its own results that have nothing to do with the original results we were trying to achieve.



Important to



Remember

Good processes lead, in the long run, to better results. For the long run, you need stamina and discipline. You need to practice, because practice makes perfect. When you ride the road to perfect (the road has no apparent ending), the results will show themselves on the way.

This does not mean that the results are not important at all. As I said earlier, in basketball, winning is actually the only thing (or at least some continue to believe). But if you try to go by life with the same motto – the results are the only thing – like so many people do, you will probably not only be unhappy, but do worse in your results. "[The Ant and the Grasshopper](#)" story is actually true. You really need to work on it.

My



Story

When I became a senior instructor in the research and development department of my military unit, I was assigned to give a class about motivation. It was supposed to be my first class to the advanced instructor's course. To that day, that motivation class was just a

repetition of what the attendees learned in an earlier course, not teaching them anything new. I decided to change that. I learned new theories and put a lot of effort into bringing the interesting theories and creating instrumental teaching aids. I worked "by the book" and followed every rule I knew about how to build a great class.

The big day came and I gave the class. *It was a disaster.* The theories I chose were not



comprehensible to the attendees and I could not translate them into real life examples. I had a hard time explaining concepts that seemed simple to me, and the class took three hours instead of two (and I was known as an instructor who always keeps to the time allotted to him). I felt like a total failure.

After the class I considered letting go, perhaps asking someone else to give the class next time or going back to the old method – teaching the same stuff as an the earlier course.

Instead I stuck to the process and decided not to let go. I examined what I learned about the class and re-built it, changing focus and theories. *I went back to the "drawing board" and worked again from scratch "by the book"*. By using the same process and not letting go, I created a new and improved class. I continued giving it for the next courses and later for few more years during reserve duty, *improving it every time*. It became not only one of my favorite classes, but one the attendees of the course liked best.

Sticking to the process paid out in the long run. You know what, not only did I enjoy the challenge, but every time I gave it I felt proud I overcame the difficulty.

[Randy Pausch](#) was a professor at Carnegie Mellon University who died from pancreatic cancer on July 25, 2008. A few months earlier, when Pausch discovered he had cancer and he was going to die, he decided to give one last speech. His amazingly inspirational speech, titled: "Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams" was [uploaded to the internet](#) and was watched by over 7 million viewers in a relatively short time (I guess that when



you are reading these lines, the number must have grown). It was later translated into a [book](#). If you still haven't seen it, I recommend you take an hour and half and just watch it. It is a great show of passion, life, presentation abilities and an abundance of tips and ideas about life. I don't want to ruin it for you.

One thing from that speech stuck with me. Pausch tells that one of his childhood dreams was to play for the NFL (The National Football League). Then he talks about the things he learned from playing football at high school, while trying to achieve his dream.

Great



Quote

As you can understand, Pausch did not make it the NFL, but he still regards the experience of football training as a very significant period in his life. He talks about the lessons it taught him. As he puts it: "**Experience is what you get when you didn't get what you wanted**".

Important to



Remember

In other words, *the process in itself is valuable*, sometimes more than the end result. Sometimes it is worthwhile even when you failed in achieving the end result. If you try hard enough and keep working on the process, even when the results don't come at first, you will succeed, you will enjoy the ride, and you will benefit from it.

Great



Quote

I believe [Samuel Beckett](#) explained it very accurately, in his novel, *Worstward Ho*: "**Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better**". If we must fail every time, we need to try again and *fail better*, and enjoy the ride.

My




Story

During my undergraduate academic studies I was at the top of my class. I assure you, this is not the result of me being smarter or more talented than any of my classmates. Actually, I think most of my friends are smarter and more talented than me.

I think I got to the top of my class because I focused on the process of learning, worked at it and perfected it. When many of my fellow classmates focused most of their efforts near the final exams period – the result – I developed a method of learning all through the semester – the process. When we reached the exam period, I already knew a lot about the material and only had to sharpen my knowledge. My learning process was better and this led to better results. It was harder on me during the semester. It took stamina and a lot of practice, but it *paid off*.

*Focusing on the process always does.*

## What can you do right now?



"Ok, you got me. Process is king! But what practical advice do you have for me? What can I do to utilize this concept?"

Good question. A lot. Take a piece of paper and give yourself a few minutes to answer the following questions:

- What are the processes in my life? Am I sticking to them? How can I improve these processes?
- Where did I fail? How did it affect me? Did I give up? When I fail at something, how does it make me feel?
- Did I fail because of a bad process or in spite of a good process? If I could, what would I have done differently?

If you take the time and answer these questions truthfully, I guarantee you will get insights. Try me. Copy the questions and close this E-book. Just think for half an hour about processes.

By the way, I believe you should develop you own processes. But if you do want to see other people's processes and recommendations about processes that work for other people, a good place to start is the [Zen Habits Blog](#).

## Concept # 2:

### Use your comparative advantage →

It is important to understand that even though focusing on the process and practicing it again and again is important, it is not the all-important concept. Looking back on the way I handled my basketball "career" when I was a child, I can say with absolute confidence that if I gave a little more effort, worked hard, focused on the process and used some of the concepts I describe in this E-book, I could probably have been much better at it.

But still, as I said earlier, basketball is not my true calling and no matter how hard I would have worked, nothing could have changed that. I admit to myself (and mind you, this is not an easy admission) that I could never have been Michael Jordan. Actually, I could probably never have been even a mediocre player in a minor league.





It is a good thing that I stopped playing basketball professionally when I was fifteen and moved to other activities that opened new worlds where I could truly excel. Although I have some talent and understanding of the game (or so I seem to think), I don't have enough comparative advantage on the basketball court.

Basketball is a game that demands you watch constantly for your advantage. You can see on the court in many situations. Usually it is a tall player who is guarded by a short player that can use his height advantage to score easily under the basket. Sometimes, it is the other way around. The shorter player, who is quick and can handle the ball better, is guarded by a tall player, who is heavier and slower. The short player can use his advantage to pass the tall player and make an easy basket. In the basketball lingo this is called a "mismatch".

Again, what happens on the basketball court happens in real life.

Important to



Remember

*Each and every one of us has a unique comparative advantage. We just need to find it and use it.*

That is concept #2: Use your comparative advantage.

The comparative advantage is something one of my favorite authors, [Marcus Buckingham](#), talks about in his book, co-authored with Donald O. Clifton: "[Now, Discover Your Strength](#)". According to Buckingham each and every one of us has a special ability or abilities which he is better at. Our strengths. To excel at any given job, you don't need to be perfect. No one can be perfect at everything. You need to maximize the use of your strengths. Many people focus a lot of their resources and time on improving their weakness. Buckingham explains that although we can improve our weakness, it is a waste of time, because even if we do succeed in improving our

weakness, our "strengthened weakness" would not allow us to reach the heights of excellence that focusing on our strengths will enable us:

Great



Quote

"...[Y]ou will excel only by maximizing your strengths, never by fixing your weaknesses. This is not the same as saying 'ignore your weakness'. The people we described did not ignore their weakness. Instead, they did something much more effective. They found ways to manage around their

weakness, thereby freeing them up to hone their strengths to a sharper point. Each of them did this a little differently. Pam liberated herself by hiring an outside consultant to write the strategic plan. Bill Gates did something similar. He selected a partner, Steve Ballmer, to run the company, allowing him to return to software development and rediscover his strengths' path...".

Great



Quote

[Peter Drucker](#) also writes about this concept in his book: "[Management Challenges for the 21st century](#)". As he states it: "Concentrate on your strengths. Place yourself where your strengths can produce performance and results". Drucker says you need to concentrate on your strong

abilities, improving and expanding them all the time and spend minimum effort improving your weakness.

The concept of comparative advantage has many meanings and many manifestations in life. It is a very widely used term in [economics](#). [Seth Godin](#), another favorite writer of mine, [uses it](#) in a marketing context. I am talking about using it in your personal and professional life.

My



Story

As I mentioned earlier, during my undergraduate studies I had perfected a process that helped me study more effectively. In the first few weeks, I would sit in class, write what I heard with a pen (laptops were less

common back then), and then go home and re-type and edit it. Sounds crazy, but the re-typing and editing helped me go over and understand the material, and helped me to come more prepared for the next class.

After a while, I discovered that when I try to write what the professor lectures about, I sometime miss things. So, I started taking the notes of a friend and comparing it with mine when I typed it at home.



I quickly discovered that my friend was doing a much better job at it than me. I was better at listening during the class and understanding what I heard. I was not as good in committing it down to paper at the same instant. In addition, because I have learning disabilities, I really hated to write using a pen.

At the same time, I also discovered that other people were different than me. Many of my friends could not concentrate on the lecture if they were not writing it down. They

actually did a much better job at summarizing the lecture than I did and preferred to do it. So, at some point I stopped writing and took the notes from two of my friends. After I typed it down and edited it, I sent it back to them. I got a better material and could use the understanding I got by just listening in class to improve the editing of the summaries. They got edited and improved summaries of the lectures. We each used our comparative advantage for the greater good.

Important to



Remember

Using your comparative advantage allows you *to produce better results for the greater good.*

My



Story

When I was a senior instructor in the research and development department of my military unit I repeatedly told my team that we each have to use our comparative advantage. I was part of a very diverse team of the most experienced instructors of our unit. We each had different

talents and different areas of strength. But instead of utilizing it, the system was built in such a way that assigned each of us the same assignments. I strived to change that. My teammates and I were doing things we did not enjoy and were mediocre at, while each of us could do what he or she was best at. We were stuck in this situation to begin with due to people's tendency, in the name of equality, to make everyone do the same things.

I repeatedly told my teammates: "let's see what we like to do and are good at, and assign the assignments according to our comparative advantages". We did that and it produced great results and made us much happier.

I actually used the term "comparative advantage" so much, that as a birthday gift, one of my teammates gave me a letterhead with my details and the words "The Comparative Advantage" printed on it. I really thought I invented something new. To my dismay, I entered the first microeconomics course and discovered that it is a basic concept in economy.

I quickly learned that what happened to me in the army happens a lot in life. People like to standardize stuff. Everyone needs to go by the same routine and do the same things. It is rare that a position is tailored to your needs and strengths. When I started to work as an intern in a law firm, no one asked me what my strengths were or what I majored at during my studies. The work was just handed out equally between the interns.

Equality is an important concept in many aspects of life, especially in the legal field, as I know so well. But in real life, because equality is intertwined into our thinking DNA it is used in ways that many times hinders excellence. Earlier I mentioned [Ken Robinson's inspiring speech regarding creativity and education](#). In it he says that standard and equal education for everyone is not necessarily good because it "misses" people's strengths. *All men are not born equal.* Whoever tells you that is lying. *All man should deserve an equal opportunity to excel, to be happy and to use their comparative advantage.* That is the truth. And there is a big difference between the two.



Important to



Remember

Nobody can be good at everything. People who truly excel do it by recognizing their comparative advantage, maximizing it and letting other people do what they are better at than them.

Great



Quote

Remember [Randy Pausch](#)'s last lecture. In it, he said: "We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand".

It is not uncommon to see someone who was very good at his job and is promoted to be a manager. When he was part of a team or even a solo player, he excelled at his job. But when you put him in a managerial position, which is not his comparative advantage, he just can't handle it. This is interesting. Usually this man actually wanted the promotion even though he was happy with what he was doing and even though he does not like to manage people.

We are so used to the Hierarchy Thinking Model and not the Comparative Advantage Thinking Model, that we actually want positions that our abilities are not compatible with. The reason being this is just the way we know the system works.

Well, the system sucks! The problem is that not only this man can't handle the job of a manager, he also can't handle the truth (Wow! [What a great use for that sentence...](#)). He does not have what it takes to be a manager. And I am not just talking about an application of the [Peter Principle](#). This man is actually unhappy being a manager! *It is not his comparative advantage*. Bill Gates got it when he put Steve Ballmer to manage while he did software development, so why can't it work for all of us? I think that the challenge for companies is to find influential roles for these talented people, where they can use their comparative advantage, in addition to feeling promoted.

People who use their comparative advantage effectively manage to overcome their weakness. Leo Babauta from [ZenHabits](#) calls it: "[Attack Your Limitations: Turn Your](#)

[Weaknesses into Strengths](#)" and gives some great examples. I think his terminology is not accurate, because when you focus on your strengths you are not turning weaknesses into strengths. You are using your strengths to overcome your weaknesses. But, the terminology doesn't matter. *The concept does.*



Understanding the concept of comparative advantage, not only helps you excel as an individual, but also enables you to help others excel if you are a manager or team leader. In a different book called "[The One Thing You Need to Know](#)", Buckingham states that the most important thing a manager can do is to find the strength of the employee and create an atmosphere which will enable him to maximize it and excel at it. He explains that good managers know that they are playing chess and not backgammon. Why? Because in chess, every piece on the playing field has a different and distinctive role and advantage, and they are different from each other.

Great



Quote

[John Ruskin](#) said that: "Every great man is always being helped by everybody; for his gift is to get good out of all things and all persons".

How many such managers have you encountered to this day? How would it feel if you had such a manager? How would it feel to be such a manager? Did I mention excellence and happiness?



The comparative advantage is not only an individual concept, but also a teamwork concept. Using it in a team setting can have a tremendous effect. In basketball there are five players of each team on the court at any given moment. The player who has the advantage needs to use it, and to some measure it depends on him. But most of the time, he depends on his teammates to work for him and to create the opportunity to use his comparative advantage. *In a team setting the advantage of one player is the advantage of*

*the entire team.* Mind you - This is by no means an easy task. But teams that succeed in doing so are great teams.

Even [Michael Jordan](#), who probably had the most dominant comparative advantage in basketball history, could not have reached his accomplishments alone. It was a symbiosis with his teammates. He needed the other players to pass the ball to him and block for him, and even move out of the way for him (in basketball, it is not as simple as it sounds). There are a number of times that the winning shot came not from Jordan but from the comparative advantage of other players.

Actually, Jordan's teammate, [John Paxson](#) is best known for his championship-winning shot during the 1993 NBA Finals. The Bulls were down by two in the dying seconds of Game 6 of the finals series held at the America West Arena in Phoenix, before Paxson sank a three point shot with 3.9 seconds remaining, giving the Bulls a 99-98 lead and their third consecutive NBA title (even writing about those moments causes me, a keen

[Charles Barkley](#) fan, pain). Paxson could make the shot (shooting 3 pointers was his comparative advantage as a player) only because Jordan drew the other team's defense attention, thus enabling Paxson to use his comparative advantage.

*The Bulls used the comparative advantage of each player and made it the team's comparative advantage.*



Like basketball, which is a team sport, life is, in many cases, also a team sport. There is the known proverb saying: "**there is no 'I' in the word 'Team'**". If you ask me, it is a silly notion because it takes to edge of the most important factor of the team - The teammates themselves. I think that a team is composed of a lot of "I"s. That is what makes it a strong team.

Just look at the use of each of the letters in the word "Team". "T" is different from "M". It is pronounced differently and has a different function. When you compare "T" to "E" or to "A" you can easily see the difference, because they are vowels while "T" is not.

Important to



Remember

*A team is made powerful by using the comparative advantage of each team member and making it the team's advantage.*

The word "TTTT" is not a word, it is a bunch of letters.

My



Story

Remember my team in the army, which I convinced to use each and every teammate's personal advantage? We were very different from each other.

We had different goals that sometimes collided. However, I think working with that team was so fun and we were so successful, because we all

focused on our comparative advantages and made our individual advantage the advantage of the team, while still keeping our individuality.

Important to




Remember

Using your comparative advantage and giving each member the opportunity to use his or her comparative advantage, will not only make the team more effective, but also more fun to be a part of. That is a very happy thought.



## What can you do right now?



"But what if I don't know what my strengths are? And what if I do? What can I do with this knowledge?"

Well again, there are a lot of things you can do.

If you are not sure what your strengths are, go out and find out. Use the book "[Now, Discover Your Strength](#)", which has an explanation of how to do it. Go to Buckingham's [website](#) where there is more information about the subject. You can also use different personally tests that show who and what you are. They have suggestions on the line of work you would feel comfortable with. It is a good idea to let others tell you a little bit about yourself. [This](#) is a good place to start. I recommend you stop reading and think a little bit about your comparative advantage.

If you already know your comparative advantage, try to ask yourself:

- How much of your time is devoted to using your comparative advantage?
- Are you giving others the opportunity to use their advantage in order to help you use yours?
- When is the last time you sharpened your advantage by taking a course about the subject or reading updated material about it?

You can start there. *I think the rest of the journey will be self explanatory.*

## Concept # 3:

### Be passionate →



It is not uncommon to see a very talented basketball team lose to a less talented team. This is because basketball is not only a game of talent and advantages, but also of passion. Many times, an under-talented team comes as the underdog, and thus is strongly motivated. The passion it shows on the court, in contrast to the apathy of the more endowed team, helps it overcome the differences of talent.

In fact, this is something I can feel personally when I play. The mindset with which I approach the game and the court influences my ability on the court. Moreover, it actually influences the way my teammates see me. When I am passionate about the

game, my fellow teammates respond to it, they enjoy the game and become more enthusiastic about it. This naturally affects the results.



Some of the best players basketball has ever known were not great athletes. Although they had a lot of talent, the main thing that made them so great was that they were passionate about the game. [Larry Bird](#), [Dejan Bodiroga](#) and [Šarūnas Jasikevičius](#) are names that pop to my mind. These are players who used a lot of passion instead or in addition to talent, and led their teams to great achievements. It was said, that Michael Jordan, was not only one of the most talented players ever, *but one of the most passionate*. He hated losing.

Once more, what is true on the basketball court is also true in real life. The passionate and enthusiastic reach excellence and happiness more easily. They are respected and regarded as people you are happy to work with, to be around and to consult with. Hence concept #3: Be passionate.

Looking back on where I excelled and was happy during my short life, I can say with confidence that it had a lot to do with passion. Every position I held and was successful at, I can truly say I was passionate about. The minute I lost the passion I lost my happiness and became less productive and inventive. Sometimes, due to inertia, it took me time to realize it. However, looking in hindsight I can say that the correlation between passion, excellence and happiness is evident.

Furthermore, I think that the reason for my success in the positions I held and for that I was always offered a possibility to stay and be promoted at each position is the fact that

people connected to my passion. Focusing on the process and using my comparative advantage sure did help, but *it was the passion that won people over.*



When I started working as an instructor for a Securities Law & Ethics course, preparing people to undergo the Israeli Securities Authority's exam in order to be eligible for an Investment Advisor or Portfolio Manager license, I joined a company that had a group of about 12 instructors. The teaching method used a very detailed textbook and some power-point presentations that were prepared by the company's owner and manager. Where most instructors would make a perfunctory and cursory glance of the textbook and follow the owner's instructions, I would read the book thoroughly and apply a critical eye to all that was written. I did not hesitate to thoroughly read it, investigating every legal rule applicable, making observations, and adding my remarks and additions to almost every single page out of the 550 pages in the textbook. In other words, *I did it with passion.*

The manager and owner later told me that in her nine years of experience, she has never met anyone he who undertook the assignment with such a degree of serious application. This impressed her so much, that not only did I get to instruct the best classes, but she also let me handle a legal case against an infringer of her copyrighted book. She later hired me as a product developer, to continue improving the text-book and create new teaching aids. *My passion paid up big time!*

Important to



Remember

*People connect and react to passion and passionate people. If you get people to react, you have already done half of the job.*

Once again, I will use the words of one of my favorite authors, Seth Godin. In a [post](#) in his [blog](#), he wrote the following inspirational statement:



"If you want to do something worth doing, you'll need two things: *passion and architecture*. The tools will take care of themselves. (Knowledge of tools matters, of course, *but it pales in comparison to the other two.*) Sure, picking the wrong tools will really cripple your launch. Picking the wrong software (or the wrong hammer) is a hassle. *But nothing great gets built just because you have the right tools...*"

My translation: Process & Passion.

I am a keen reader of Godin's blog. He talks a lot about marketing by creating an experience that the customer/consumer will talk about. For him everything is marketing and we are all marketers. Without disregard to Godin's theses and long experience in this field, I think you can sum the idea up with one word: *passion*.



Important to



Remember

If you are passionate about your business and try to make the best you can (and it does not matter what kind of business it is) you will succeed. It is simple. As I already mentioned, people connect to passion.

People like saying things like "that hotel clerk went out of his way to help us"; "the woman from the client service department really helped get through the mix-up. She really did everything she could"; "this company went out its way so we will have an amazing product and an amazing service – wow". It is all about passion.

Now, mind you. Passionate and enthusiastic does not mean that you have to be hyper and jump up and down all around the office. Actually, this will probably make people dislike you. Furthermore, passion does not mean you have to be extraordinary competitive. People usually don't respond well to that either.

So, what does it mean? In my experience, these are the main, albeit not the only, things that passion is all about.

## 1. Be interested in what you do

I think one thing that makes passionate people, is that they are truly immersed in what they are doing. As Francis Wade, writer of ["The 2Time Management System" Blog](#) describes it, passionate people experience [awakeness](#) at their jobs: "...the quality of being present to the outcome of a task while one is engaged in it". They regard their field as a real wonder and an opportunity to keep on learning. They look for connections between different aspects of their life and their current occupation. They are interested in developments in the field and use every opportunity to widen their knowledge or enhance their skills. Their work is not just work, it is a learning adventure. Is that how you feel regarding your current profession?

Great



Quote

My  
  
Story

When I worked as a lawyer in a law office, you could see which people were enjoying themselves and which weren't by their inclination to discuss a theoretical subject and argue about it. Good passionate lawyers were always ready to learn new subjects and to try and solve new problems. When an intern was not interested in such questions, did not read through the daily case-law updates and did not ask questions that were outside the scope of his immediate project, you could easily guess he was not going to be a great lawyer or a lawyer at all.



The best instructors I ever worked with were instructors that never took anything for granted. They always casted doubt and requested me to explain the theories. They were genuinely interested not only in what they were teaching, but also in how to do it properly. They never gave up an

opportunity to learn new things. On the other hand, you could easily see the instructors that just copied their notes from someone else's work, without changing anything. For them, it was just another job. It was not a calling. It showed when they came to class. You can't fool people for a very long time. They feel passion!

When I stopped being interested in law, I knew I had to stop being a lawyer. I am still interested in instructing and presentation techniques. It is easy to tell. Every time I see a TV series that I think can be used to explain some concept of presentation techniques, I immediately think how to get and incorporate it the next time I explain the subject. I know I will look for a position that entails these kinds of skills.

Sports Illustrated columnist Chris Ballard commented on this in his manifesto, "[The](#)



[Eyeball Artisan](#)": "It occurred to me that if one were to design a litmus test for whether someone had found a calling, this could serve as it, in one easy question: do you see beauty in the details of your work?"

Mind you, it doesn't have to be an intellectual interest. What makes a great waiter at a restaurant? Think about it. It comes down to passion. [Here is such a story](#) about passion, restaurants and cheese plates.

It's all about the desire to help the customer, to be there for him, and to help him enjoy a great meal. In every way the waiter can. The passionate waiters are the ones we remember and tip better. That is just the way it is.

Important to



Remember

*Passion is about really being interested in what you do.*

## 2. Passionate people always strive for change and improvement

This has a lot to do with being interested in what you do, but still stands as a sole characteristic of passionate people. We live in a rapidly changing world. More so in the

last few decades then ever in human history. The ability to change and to lead change is now considered one of the most important business traits. But according to some, it has been the way of the world for centuries.

Great



Quote

A long time ago [Charles Darwin](#) claimed: "It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change". [Mahatma Gandhi](#) said: "We must become the change we want to see in the world".

Passionate people are agents of change. As I said earlier, they don't take anything for granted. They improve things. They invent new things. They mix things to create something entirely different. They are always prolific.

Important to



Remember

If you want to change something it means you care enough. It means you are willing to risk it and to study in order to understand it. *It means you are passionate.*

Of course I am not talking about change in the name of change, but change that comes from real interest and worries. Change that comes from real understanding and real doubt. When I look back on my career, the situations I was most happy with are ones where I had the ability, the know-how and especially the desire to change things. These are the positions I was passionate about.

Change comes from looking ahead. One of the first skills kids learn when playing basketball is to dribble with their head up. When you take the ball up the court, you need to be able to look around so you can pass or penetrate the defense.



Change, for itself, is not important. It is a change combined with a look to the horizon and the sky that makes a real difference. *This is the kind of change passionate people bring.* They know that you have to raise your head and look forward. Some call it leadership or vision. I see it as another manifestation of passion.

### 3. Sharing

Passionate people share their passion. They want to talk about their passion. They want to tell the world about it. This is why there are clubs with specific subject matters and it is especially why there are blogs.



I found out that when I was passionate about things, I became a knowledge center. People could feel my passion and connect to it. Suddenly, I got calls, e-mails and face-to-face visits from people interested in the same subject or ones that just needed help. They knew I was ready for the challenge and willing to help. And they were usually willing to give something in return. It is an amazing process!



It is easy to know if you are passionate about something. *Ask yourself if you have the desire to share your knowledge of the subject with others.*



As I mentioned in this E-book, I believe in [sharing](#). This is why this E-book is for free. I am passionate not only about writing, but also about the things I write about in this E-book. Look at my writing. Not only am I creating something new and trying to improve the understanding of the subjects I am writing about, I am also really interested in these subjects. You could easily see it, by the different quotes and links I incorporate in the E-book, these are subjects I read and learn about. This E-book was created out of passion. Does it feel like that? *If you got this far, I think it does.*

There are a lot of people who do not feel such passion during their every day job. I might be making a generalization here, but I am sure that these people are less happy and do not excel at their job as people who are passionate about what they do.

## What can you do right now?

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"So what can I do if passion is not a part of my life?"

Ask yourself – are you passionate about your job? If the answer is yes, make sure – ask again – how do I know I am passionate? Am I interested in the field and trying to learn more each day? Am I striving to change and improve what I do? Do I share my passion with others?

If not, well, my advice is to find something you are passionate about.

Great



Quote

Leo Babauta from [ZenHabits](#) put it very well: "Find your passion, and pursue it doggedly. Don't settle for a job that pays the bills. Life is too short to waste on a job you hate".

I know this is not an easy thing to do. [Not everybody has to ability to change their careers or quit their jobs](#). It doesn't have to be done casually or without weighing the consequences. I know a number of people who did it. They are quite happy. I am currently in such a phase, and I can testify that it is absolutely scary.

Even without taking extraordinary measures, there are plenty of ways to make your daily job more about your passion. Even if you increase passion in your life by a small amount, it will have a significant effect on your happiness and excellence.

I suggest you start with two resources that inspired me, among other things, to write this E-book. *One*, is "[A brief guide to world domination – How to Live a Remarkable Life in a Conventional World](#)" by Chris Guillebeau, the writer of "[The Art of Non-Conformity](#)" [blog](#). *Second*, read "[A Simple System To... Achieve Your Goals](#)" by Paul Myers. These two will probably get you started. I encourage you to explore them right now. Really. Close this file and go read them. We can wait, my E-book and I.

## Concept # 4:

### Communicate

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While the three first concepts are important, they mainly deal with yourself, and don't have much to do with the way you interact with other people. Life is, in some ways, just recurring interactions with other people. This is why, concept #4: Communicate, deals with these interactions.

If after watching a basketball game on television you would ask a layman to analyze what were the main factors which led to the success of the team he just saw winning, he probably would not rank communication as one of the contributing factors to a winning result.

Nevertheless, communication is a key factor in basketball. Watching the game closely reveals that the players and the coach transmit tremendous amounts of information during a game.

Everybody who ever played basketball knows this. Players pass along information during the game regarding their positions on the court, blocks created by the other team, plays to be made and especially feedback about previous plays in order to improve the next play. A team that communicates is much more lethal on the court. In addition, not only does communication help the team, but it also allows specific players to contribute more to the game and use their talents and advantages in order to make a positive impact.

My  
  
Story

For me, communication during the game has a lot to do with how much I enjoy the game. I play basketball twice a week with two different groups of friends. In the past, I used to play with a different group. Even though

the players were much more talented in comparison to where I play now, I did not enjoy playing there. All the communication was done by shouting. Nobody ever gave you a good word and only commented if you made a mistake. Nobody wanted to listen in order to cooperate and everybody just came to score as many baskets as they could, *alone*. While such behavior helps to release anger, which is one of the goals for playing basketball as a hobby, it was not worth the hassle. Even when my team for the evening won every game, which meant I played the entire night, I did not enjoy myself. I eventually stopped going there. The two places where I play now have a positive "vibe" and allow you to communicate more easily and play better. Did I mention excellence and *happiness*?

As you might have already guessed, I believe the concept of communication not only determines excellence and happiness on the basketball court, but also in real life. The positions in which I could easily communicate with my fellow teammates and superiors were the positions I was happier and more successful at.

Each and every one of us communicates daily. So, I don't feel the need to elaborate more on the importance of communication. The problem is, like the layman watching the basketball game, many people don't attribute communication its due honor.

Great



Quote

[John Powell](#) said that "**Communication works for those who work at it**".

That is why instead of talking about communication in general, I will talk about 4 points that I learned are important regarding communication.

Keeping these points in mind will help you stick to concept #4: Communicate, thus getting you closer to excellence and happiness.

### 1. Demand feedback. If you don't get it, walk away

We all need feedback. As [Abraham Maslow](#)'s "[Hierarchy of Needs](#)" states, we all have esteem needs. We all need to hear what other people think about us. No one is perfect. We can all improve some fashion of our behavior. If you can't get an appraisal of your

performance you won't be able to reach excellence. Mediocrity is the express way to unhappiness.

Great



Quote

As [Doug Lowenstein](#) put it: "Everybody needs feedback, and it's a heck of a lot cheaper than paying a trainer".

Important to



Remember

If a position does not allow you to get feedback, demand it. [Be honest about the praise you need to hear](#). *If you still can't get it, walk away.* It is not worth it.

The problem with feedback is that many people: (a) don't know how to give it (b) don't appreciate its importance. You have to ignore these problems. If somebody does not know how to give feedback you need to ignore his inability and take what you can from what he does tell you.



Great



Quote

Even the worse given feedback is still something you can learn from. As [Hugh Prather](#) puts it: "Negative feedback is better than none. I would rather have a man hate me than overlook me. As long as he hates me I make a difference".

My



Story

Being an intern in a law office is not a walk in the park. Even if you actually do real legal work (like I did) and not only copy and staple, there is still a huge amount of uncertainty inherited in the position that makes each day last a life time. You never determine your schedule. You come in every morning not knowing when you are going to leave or what you are going to work on. On top of all that, you are learning a new occupation and you are not sure how you are doing. My problem, when I was an intern, was that I did not receive any feedback.

I worked with 3 different lawyers, and rarely did one of them actually explain what I did right or wrong. One of them, never even said a good or bad word, except one time, when he returned something I handed in and wrote on it: "Not good". Very constructive indeed. After 8 months of internship, my boss took me to lunch, and offered me to stay at that firm as a full time lawyer once I pass the bar exam. I told him that what troubles me is that I did not get any feedback. I only learned by trial and error and a little by watching what others do, and not by direct feedback. I said I would like that to change if I was to stay.



He was genuinely surprised. He said to me: "Well, if I were not happy with you, you would have already known". When I think about it, I still can't quite grasp that reaction. But it really stands for how people usually feel. If there is nothing wrong, there is no need to say anything. Frightening!

He promised to try and improve and I agreed to return to the firm as a lawyer. Unfortunately, things did not improve. I was not a bad lawyer. But, I could have been a much better one if I got more feedback. I believe this is one of the reasons I left that specific firm and the occupation. Talking to my friends I learned that not too many lawyers know how to give good feedback (if they do it all). This, among other revelations, made me understand that it is not the career path for me.

This experience taught me that it is not only important to give and demand feedback but also to *feedout*. The problem is that even where there is feedback, a lot of the time communication is one sided. The whole point of communication is that it has to go both ways. This means you not only have to wait for or demand feedback, you actually need to tell people what you expect of them. You need to clarify what is your comparative advantage (hey, all the concepts connect with each other). You have to ask them what they need from you in order to excel. This is especially important if you are a manager. *Don't only react. Proact* (I think I just made up a word, but did you ever think how come

there is no word that is the opposite of react). Ask the people what they need from you, and make it clear to them what you need from them.



Another manifestation of this idea can be found in a [great quote](#) of [Zen Habits](#) contributor, [Jonathan Mead](#): "Ask for what you want. Everyone's heard the saying 'the squeaky wheel gets the grease'. It never surprises me how many people fail to get what they want because they're too afraid to ask for it. Their fear of rejection and embarrassment holds them back from asking for help. In order to get what you want, you have to have the courage to ask others for assistance. That doesn't mean you mooch off of other people. It means you have the wisdom that by working together, you can accomplish far more than you could alone".

Getting back to feedback, I feel it is important to clarify that I am not only talking about professional feedback. "You did that and that was wrong or right." Feedback is not only important in order to improve your behavior, but in order to get a multitude of ideas.

No one knows everything. No one can see the entire game plan. One of my professors said once that two men are always smarter than one man. Do you Remember [Malcolm Gladwell](#)'s [speech at the New Yorker conference](#), "Genius: 2012", I mentioned earlier? In it, Gladwell is comparing [Michael Ventriss](#), the decipherer of [Linear B](#), with [Andrew Wiles](#), the solver of [Fermat's Last Theorem](#). One of his main claims is that *13 smart guys are better than one genius in dealing with modern problems*. Teamwork today is more important than ever, and communication helps the team to reach its full potential.

I am trying to emphasize that you should always try to hear what other people think of your ideas. Even if you are sure of what you think, get some else's opinion. It will open your mind, even if you don't accept it. [Even if the other side is wrong](#) in their assessment of your idea. I am very independent thinker and see myself as a non-conformist in various aspects of my life. But still, I try to hear what other people think. Even If I don't agree with it, it helps me reach better decisions.

Important to



Remember

Another point of view can never hurt. *It can only make you more convinced of your original decision.* It is always worth the hassle. It also means that it is never wrong to ask for help. Don't hesitate to admit out loud – "Hey, I am not perfect" or "Hey – it was my fault, the mistake was mine – do you have any idea how can I fix it?" It will pay off in the long run.

## 2. Put Everything on the Table

I think the most common mistake people make regarding communication, is keeping things bottled up. I talked about demanding feedback. You also need to remember to always give feedback to the people around you. Even when you are not asked to do it. People appreciate honest and true feedback if it is given properly. *If they don't, you should not be there anyway or you should not care about them.*

Important to



Remember

I don't think I even need to tell a story about this one. Every one of us experienced it. There is something you really want to say, but things like time, norms or just shyness prevent you from saying it. You walk around with a bad feeling inside. It is all bottled up inside of you. When you finally say it, you don't exactly say what you wanted to say or you euphemize the difficult message, because it was bottled up for too long. In the bad cases, you just explode. *That is never a pretty picture.*

Important to



Remember

I think people value honesty. It might be harder at first. People's reactions may be emotional. But in the long run, putting things on the table and saying everything you think and especially feel, will enable better communication. One tip. Talk about *your feelings* and *other's behavior*.

Do not presume you know how the other side is feeling or what he is thinking. You can only describe what you saw with your eyes – his behavior. You can not decipher what *he*

was thinking or feeling when he did what he did, but you can explain what *you* were thinking or feeling when it happened.

I always try to say what I think and feel to the people working with me. I always try to describe how things are looking from my point of view. It makes me feel much better, even if the feedback I gave did not encourage improvement. I at least know that I tried putting it on the table. Leaving a place which can not accept that feedback would be much easier after that.

By the way, putting things on the table also means you should not be afraid to admit your mistakes, out loud, and take responsibility over them. People appreciate that.

Putting things on the table also means you have to communicate regularly, even if there is nothing new to say. Sometimes, people just need to know you are there and that you did not forget them.



My  
  
Story

In my early army service I was the commander of the Israeli Air Force's operators of communications course. For different reasons, many of the soldiers who got to the course had very low motivation because of personal problems – broken homes, poor families and other problems that I would not wish on anyone. Soldiers like that usually could not survive the position anyway, and it was our job to locate the soldiers with the real problem and get them the help they needed, which sometimes meant leaving the course. The problem is, the army being what it is, a very big bureaucratic machine, the process of handling their requests to leave the course sometimes took a long time. In the meanwhile they had to stay in the course and act like normal soldiers. This was very hard for them. Because of this, our staff always got poor results in surveys regarding the treatment of the soldiers' personal welfare. They did not care it was not our fault and that the system was bureaucratic. We were they commanders and we were responsible.

Knowing that, when I became the commander of the course I instructed my staff to locate the soldiers whose requests were being processed and talk to them each day. In these daily conversations I asked the rest of the staff to tell the soldiers we did not forget them, that their problem is still being processed and to ask them how are they doing.

The results were amazing. The soldiers actually reported that they felt they are being fairly treated and that somebody was taking care of them. Mind you, there was nothing new in the daily conversations. Only pure communication. Only putting things on the table, as they are, honestly.

### 3. Remember the importance of Semantics



When I was a senior instructor in the research and development department of my military unit, I was assigned to be the commander of the Advanced Commanders' Course, an internal course for the unit's most talented instructors.

In previous courses we had problems regarding the preparations of the attendees for the course. So, I prepared a letter to the attendees' superior officers, specifying the preparations each attendee had to take. I printed the letter and distributed it manually (we had no computer network back then). We had no problems with preparations during that course.

The next course, I decided to do the same thing. Only this time, the unit already had a computer network and I decided to send the letter by E-mail. I sent the letter by an attachment of a file I called: "Instructions to the officers regarding preparations".

A day later, my officer approached me and told me that the officer's forum is very angry about the letter I had sent them. "But it is the same letter as last time" I told her. "Yes, but the name of the file was: 'Instructions to the officers'. They say you are not to instruct them". The problem was not the content of the message. It was the way it was delivered.

Important to



Remember

Semantics is a key part of every communication. People are willing to hear almost anything. It all depends on how you tell it to them. What words you choose. How you paint the picture of the communication.

Because people perspective is picky, they will sometimes disregard the contents of the message and put their focus on the way the message was delivered.

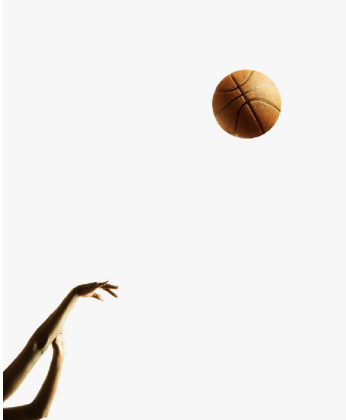
Semantics also means two more things. (a) You should try to give the feedback in a constructive way. Don't just tell them their doing badly. Actually don't say it all. They usually know. Just get them to understand how they can do better. If they did not understand they did badly by now, it will help them understand.

(b) Don't forget to give positive feedback. Too many people only remember to communicate when bad things happen. People should be praised when they do good work, and especially when they do amazing work. Compliment them on the process. It is always a good idea to mix the use of the concepts.

#### 4. Always talk about "Interests" and not about "Standpoints"

Let's say two students are sitting in a library, studying for an exam. They start arguing about whether the air conditioning should be on or off. You can easily imagine it escalating to shouts. You can easily imagine them aggressively turning the air conditioning on and off or taking it out of the socket. A neutral spectator would probably say they don't communicate very well. But what is the problem? People like sticking to certain standpoints and argue about them. We all know that air conditioning is not the problem. But, if you asked them at the moment, they will probably say it was.

The truth is that they only argue about it, because it is their standpoint. It is a manifestation of their interest. Usually, the air conditioning is not what really interests them. So, what are their interests? That is the problem. We don't really know. Actually, the problem is that each of them doesn't know what is troubling the other side.



Perhaps one of them is sick so he does not want to sit with an air conditioning on him. Perhaps he is just cold. Perhaps the second one is really sweaty and he feels uncomfortable when it starts to heat up. Maybe he just feels there is no air and wants the air condition to be turned on so he can breathe more easily. Do note - *They don't speak with each other about what their interests are.* They argue about the standpoint – whether the air conditioning should be on or off. But if

they did speak and told each other about their real interests, what were the solutions they could come up with to their real problems?

Maybe they can switch places. Maybe they can open the window. Maybe one of them has a sweater in his bag he can offer the other one. Many possibilities exist that can make them both happy, possibilities that have nothing to do with the air condition being on or off. But if they continue to argue about the air conditioning being on or off, their standpoint, they will never reach these possibilities.

There is a known method used to teach kids about the importance of communication and tolerance. You divide the group into two teams and select a leader for each team. You give to one leader a note saying that someone close to his team is going to die and can only be saved by using the inside of an orange. The other group's leader gets the same note, just this time it is the peel of the orange that is needed. Then you put the orange in the middle. Usually, the two groups will start fighting over the orange. Sometimes, it actually deteriorates to violence. But ownership of the orange is just the standpoint for each team and not the interest. We need to understand, that both teams could use the same orange, if they would just communicate.

Always ask yourself what my interest is and what my standpoint is. What are the interests and standpoints of the person seating in front of me? How can we agree on a solution that will fit both of us? How can we reach a win-win solution? How can we overcome conflicting standpoints in order to fulfill our interests?

Important to



Remember

*Telling the other side your interests is always a good start.* Asking him questions in order to understand the interest behind his standpoint is also helpful.

This is not always done easily, because sometimes people try to hide their interest by talking about their standpoints. This is especially hard in relationships when we don't want to hurt the feeling of the other person. If you want to break up with your girlfriend, which one would be easier, telling her you are different and do not enjoy the same things or telling her that you just don't have any feelings for her...? Which one is the real reason for the breakup? Which one is easier to tell?

Important to



Remember

Standpoints lead to unending arguments, because neither side wants to back down. Interests lead to better win-win solutions, because you don't have to let go of your standpoint, but still reach an agreeable solution.



## What can you do right now?

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"Ok, communication is important, but how can I improve my communication skills?"

Well, the best way is to start communicating. The more you do it, the better you will be at it. One more thing you could try is to start thinking about it. Ask yourself: what troubles me? Have I talked about it with anyone? Do my coworkers know how I feel about them? Am I presenting my standpoints or my interests?

In addition, I recommend taking a workshop on the subject of communication. Make sure it is not only a theoretical one. I took such a workshop not a while ago, where they filmed the participants talking in various situations and then analyzed the footage. Seeing yourself talk and move is mind-blowing. I am sure you could find such a workshop very easily. It is usually worth every penny. Try it now. Search for one online. The rest of this E-book would wait.

## Concept # 5:

### Call it as you see it →

The last concept I want to share with you is the one that is hardest for me personally to follow. I am actually still struggling to implement it into my life. It is also the hardest to explain. Fortunately, I have basketball to help me.



When you play non-professional basketball there is usually no referee. When you think you are fouled you just call out: "foul". When the ball goes out, it is up to the players who were nearest to decide who touched it last. Many times, a player calls out "foul" and an argument starts, where both sides argue whether or not there was a foul.

As you may easily gather, the fact that the decision is left up to the players and depends on the player who calls it means there is a lot of room for manipulation. This is where



the hard part comes. *I try to avoid using this power to my advantage.* I call it as I see it.

It is not uncommon for me to be in a situation where the other player admits he was the last one to touch the ball when I know otherwise. Even though it might be bad for my team, I always admit it. Even if there is no argument and the other player does not claim he should get the ball, I will admit it. *I always try to call it as I see it.*

You know what? Some people take advantage of that. But the truth is that most people appreciate it. They will respect you for it. When I call a foul, people usually don't argue. They know I only call it when I really believe there was a foul.

Important to



Remember

In life, like in basketball, there is no referee. *You are your own referee.*  
You need to call it as you see it.

Now, I think I should make one point clear. I try to act as if everybody else playing with me, will behave the same way. This means, I always count on the other players to call it as they see it. I am not naïve. I know some of them don't. In fact, I know some of them are liars. There is an Indian proverb that says: "The Cobra will bite you whether you call him Cobra or Mr. Cobra". There will always be liars and people who will take advantage

Great



Quote

of you. I believe it doesn't matter. I still try to give them the same respect I want to receive from them. As [Hillel the Elder](#) said: "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn".

I know that there are people who would say that I am not only naïve to act this way but plain stupid. People don't act this way. People will use you. You should not give them so much respect because they will not respect you back. They are all absolutely correct. But following the [conventional wisdom](#) is not always the best way to act.

I know my attitude has its flaws. [Tit for Tat](#), might be a better game plan. Nevertheless, as you already know, I believe in focusing on the process. I want to live in a world where everybody calls it as they see it and I try to act accordingly. Perhaps if I act this way, my actions will inspire others to do the same. This is my own personal version of the Jewish concept of "[Tikkun Olam](#)" Perhaps this is one of the reasons that being a lawyer just wasn't for me.

Great



Quote

This does not only mean you have to tell the truth and respect others. Calling it as you see it, means you have to do what you think is universally right. [Peter Drucker](#) said that: "**Management is doing things right. Leadership is doing the right things**". I wish we had more leaders

who live to this kind of standard. What are the right things? I don't know. The only one who can answer this question is you. I have my rights and wrongs. For Clinton Korver, author of "[Ethics \(for the real world\)](#)", it is "Telling the Whole Truth", as he states in his [manifesto](#). For others, doing the right thing is simpler. Or more complicated.

My



Story

I believe in doing things right because they are right. In obeying the rules because they are rules. I believe that there are certain things that are just not done. We have so many rules around us. Some are better, some are worse. But the sad thing is, that we are used to breaking them every day.

Just think about jaywalking or avoiding certain tax payments or taking something from

your office when you are not supposed to. I believe rules are there for a reason and we should follow them because they are there. Because it is right. If the rules are wrong, it is all right to try to change them. In fact, *we must try and change wrong rules*. But there is a legitimate way to do that. And as long as they are valid rules, we should obey them.

Some may call me an idealist. They will say life is a jungle, and you should act accordingly. But I believe in trying to change the jungle into civilization, or at least in trying to live in the jungle as if it were a civilization. Doing the right things, just because you believe they are right, is a way to try and make that change. And if you do, you will feel better. You will know you did the right thing. And you will be happier.

As I said, this is a hard concept to live by. But I do try my best. A lot of the time, I fail. I keep trying to "fail better" because I believe that in the end, it all comes back to you. If you call it as you see it, if you act according to what you believe in, it will eventually pay off.

## Epilogue



If you got this far in this E-book I must have done something right. I don't know whether you agree with me or not. I guess some of the people who will read this E-book will think it is full of clichés. Perhaps. But, clichés are clichés because they are part true.

As I said in the beginning of this E-book, it was written first and foremost for me. It was an amazing journey. I feel I created a document, that not only represents me and my life so far, but that can also be used as a guide for future reference. The five concepts I described in this E-book were with me my entire life. Some of them I applied better, some worse. But I truly feel they are true and that they can help you reach excellence and happiness.



I hope you enjoyed this E-book. I also hope you gained something out of it. As I requested in the introduction, I hope you will tell me about it. If you liked it, please feel free to send it forward, to post about it or to tell people about it. If you didn't like it, just delete it, tell people how bad it was or use it as an example for how not to write an E-book. It is all right with me. *I trust you will be honest and fair in your judgment.*

Most importantly, I hope you will take the time to tell me about your experience whether positive or negative. I am not sure I will ever write another E-book. I really hope I will. If I ever do, I am sure your insights will be instrumental in making it enjoyable for whoever will read it. I do plan to keep writing things and presenting ideas. Thus, any insight will be welcome.

The most important thing is that you continue to question yourself and decide what will make you happy and what will allow you to excel. I will continue to play out there, in life and on the basketball court.

## Acknowledgements →

- There are many people I want to thank and there is not enough space. Especially, I would like to thank my parents, Zvi and Ronit, who never think twice before supporting me in any way I choose.
- I would like to dedicate the E-book to my grandfather, Israel Gil, who loved reading what I wrote. Unfortunately, He did not get a chance to read some of my bigger works. I hope he reads it up there in the sky (I am not sure there is a lot to do up there).
- I want to thank [Kinneret Razon-Picovsky](#) and Tommer Kahan for reading, editing and proofing this E-book. Your insights and ideas are priceless.
- Most important of all, I would like to thank you, the reader. You deserve it.

## Inspirations



Every year people pay an enormous sum of money to have dinner with legendary investor, [Warren Buffett](#). I often ask myself, if I could have dinner with anyone I wanted, who will it be? The following people, mentioned in this E-book, were my inspiration for writing this book, and continue to be my inspiration by their writing. I hope to get the opportunity to have dinner with them some day. Please take the time to visit their sites:

- Seth Godin, writer of many books, e-books and especially "[The Seth Godin Blog](#)".
- Hugh Macleod, writer of the blog: "[Gapingvoid](#)".
- Marcus Buckingham, writer of many books. This is his [site](#).
- Chris Guillebeau, writer of the blog: "[The Art of Non-Conformity](#)".
- Leo Babauta, writer of the blog [ZenHabits](#).