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INTRODUCTION

This book is a completely new approach to self-help. It will allow you to focus all of your energies on the achievement of your objectives while remaining open to all the possible future opportunities which are certain to come to your aid.

The Scenario method that is used within this volume is not particularly new—it has been used for decades and with great effect in assisting political decision-makers, as well as those making decisions on behalf of small, medium, and large enterprises. It has proven highly effective in helping organizations prepare themselves well in advance of subsequent changes and challenges. Nevertheless, this method has not yet, to my knowledge, been applied to individuals. Can the individual benefit from such an effective method? The answer is of course, yes—on condition that we adapt it properly. My success as a personal coach has demonstrated that the Scenario Method works by elucidating new perspectives and by opening doors theretofore unknown or considered unbreachable. This process allows the individual to move beyond virtually any impasse, be it external or self-imposed.

This book is particularly important to me because it represents the realization of a personal aspiration long in the making. All throughout my career as a coach and consultant to business, I have used the principals described in this volume on myself, on close friends, and eventually on others. I have been positively astonished by the results; particularly how this method allows one to consider lingering problems in a completely new light and then find unexpected solutions to them. That is why I set out to

document this process and write this book—for the benefit of all those who want to take control of their destiny.

There are those who wonder; “How can I anticipate the future when I don’t even know how the month is going to end?”, or “Will I still have a job in two months time?”, or “Will my diploma guarantee me a job when I graduate?” etc. These pressing problems demand an immediate response and rapid resolution; and of course, we have to be able to manage the “here and now” before dealing with the future. Yet there are others who, with the help of a compelling vision, are able to free themselves of their routine troubles. So driven are these people by their vision of the future, they quite easily dismiss the trivial, deal with their daily problems with ease, and ultimately surpass their greatest expectations.

Have you ever resolved a problem only to find yourself once again in a similar difficult situation? If the actions and behaviors which led to the original problem weren’t resolved, then why should you expect to end up anywhere else than right back in the same difficult spot. If, however, you take the initiative, anticipate, are pro-active, and learn to change your behavior, you absolutely can change your situation and you can succeed. This volume shows you how to do it and more importantly, shows you how to create the will to shape your future with courage. This book will guide you on your path to your most intimate universe, and reveal a fascinating and joyful future. You are the only one responsible for your future. If you don’t shape your future, who will do it for you? You are the CEO of your life. What could be more passionate than planning for, preparing, and managing your life?

Let yourself be guided by this book as if you are at the dawn of an exciting journey. This book will serve as your guide and help you learn what you ought to discover, and what you should approach with caution or avoid altogether. The decision to undertake this voyage now belongs to you, but don’t forget your guide, “There Is Always an Alternative”.

I would like to thank all those who, throughout the writing and editing of this book, have supported and encouraged me; journalist, friend, and colleague Gundula Englisch, whose advice

was invaluable; and last but not least, my dog Nelson, who during the long hours I spent in front of my computer, remained faithfully by my side.

THE BENEFITS OF ANTICIPATION

“Here’s my definition of intelligence: to be able to see not only that which is under your nose, but also that which the future is likely to bring you.” Terenz

The desire to know the future, to understand, or even to divine that which awaits us, is as old as humanity itself. The methods which promise to elucidate the future are also as original, funny, particular, and outrageous as those who have invented them. Consider animal sacrifice from antiquity whose entrails served as signs for oracles, or the more occult procedures such as astrology, numerology, or legends such as the Oracle of Delphi. The choice of method varies according to the tastes and preferences of each. All the methods of prediction of the future have something in common, not a single one, to this day, has ever effectively predicted the future. Everyone tries to be rational about anticipating his or her own future, and the market for such products is ever-expanding. The more nebulous the methods, the more lucrative they seem to be.

When we consider the subject of the future, we ought to keep in mind the following two principles:

1. The future is not foreseeable (and that's a good thing!)
2. However, you can shape your future.

With respect to the first principle:

Let's imagine that you could actually predict your future. What would be the consequences? You would know in advance all the happy moments that await you, as well as all your future trials and tragedies. You would even know how and when you're going to die. How does one live knowing all that? You would, in all likelihood, do your best to avoid the tough times, but all of your

energy would be absorbed in the avoidance strategies and you would neither have the time or the strength to enjoy the happy moments. There are those perhaps who would go so far as commit suicide to escape the suffering that destiny had in store for them. But, of course, that would stop you from living all the enriching and positive aspects of your life.

If, for example, you had been condemned to die in a car accident, you would try, by all means possible, to avoid cars on that predestined day. However, escaping your destiny is not so easy. Do you remember the story of the merchant of Samarkand? Having learned that he was supposed to die on the same day, he left the town in order to escape death, but wherever he went, he saw nothing but violence, death, pestilence, and suffering. He fled from town to town, and at nightfall he found himself back in Samarkand. At the city gate, the Grim Reaper welcomed him with these words, "There you are, finally, I have been waiting all day for you." The lesson to draw from this story is that you may be able to shape numerous elements in your life; however you will never be able to master everything.

And that's an excellent point of departure because predicting the future is impossible. This ignorance allows us to enjoy the happy and abundant times of our life without reservation or regret. Moreover, it helps us to get over the ordeals without torturing ourselves for months or even years in advance. Knowing nothing of our future allows us to draw lessons from our past, and assume life's responsibilities. It allows us to seize our destiny in our own hands, find new solutions, and develop ourselves personally as human beings. As Marcel Proust once said, "Happiness is good for the body, but sorrow allows us to develop our mind." Anyone who has a little experience with life will confirm this truth. Those who've had to overcome hardships are stronger for them. Difficult experiences often give us a completely new sense of meaning and direction in our lives.

Everyone has already heard declarations such as, "If I hadn't been so initially misfortunate, I would have never met my companion, or realized such an outstanding career." We all know how crises can have a salutary effect. Without them, we would

get bogged down in the routine of life without ever examining our actions in a critical way. When we are at an impasse, there are two solutions. We can either stay there (which is extremely uncomfortable and in the long-term may provoke illness), or we focus all of our energy and resources in finding a solution.

With respect to the second principle:

Yes, it is possible to forge our future. What does that mean exactly? Can we create a desired future to the minutest detail? The answer is yes, but only with a good portion of humility vis-à-vis the greater forces, God, or whatever you wish to call it.

Let's be clear, shaping your future does not mean being self-centered, but it requires a close exchange with the world and people around us—those who inspire and challenge us. We need more than just a little flair and intuition; we also need a method to understand how the future may develop in a systematic and systemic way. This book offers you these methods—methods which will allow you to construct your own future and confront it without fear.

Why should you be concerned about the future, especially during a period of crisis?

Crises are moments that are both difficult and important in our lives. They are the impetuses which allow us to grow personally and encourage us to make better decisions.

The Chinese character which means “crisis” is composed of both danger and opportunity. This is why I assume that each problem is a challenge and that each crisis marks the beginning of something new. If, my dear readers, you envision your life with this perspective, you have everything to gain. As Paul Watzlawick, the great American Psychologist once said, every misfortune has a positive aspect, and vice versa. That is why I invite you to appreciate the positive aspect of every crisis. Without crises there is no change in direction. Human beings need to be confronted with challenges. These challenges push us

to explore new horizons and effect lasting and positive change in our lives.

How to get out of a crisis? There are several models. The model proposed in this book is a method that has stood the test of time, and one that has been used in the corporate world for a long time.

PROCEDURES AND METHODS TO OVERCOME CRISES

“You ought to imagine your life as a path, where you are both the point of departure and the horizon.” Jacques Salomé

The approaches that allow us to overcome crises are numerous, and they range from the simple to the extremely sophisticated. In the following passage, you will be introduced to some of these approaches in increasing order of complexity.

DO NOTHING AND WAIT FOR THE CRISIS TO PASS

At first glance, this solution isn't particularly exciting, but it's nevertheless the recourse of numerous politicians and executives. The most famous adherent to this approach is the former German chancellor Helmut Kohl, who had perfected the method to such an extent that he had practically made it his brand. However, this approach is far from being infallible, and thus must be used with prudence. Doing nothing and waiting often makes the problem worse and so we shouldn't resort to this approach unless we are absolutely certain that waiting will not sour things further or have dreadful consequences. Thus, my advice is to avoid this approach when facing a crisis, because the risks are simply too great.

CONTINUE TO MUDDLE THROUGH THE CRISIS AND HOPE THAT THINGS WORK OUT

This particular approach also has numerous adherents, not only among average folk, but among executives, and those in positions of political power. It's the method of choice for

those who fear change, especially change concerning themselves or their immediate environment. Furthermore, the manic activity that accompanies such an approach allows one to indulge in the illusion that one is actually doing something. However, this approach rarely reveals an exit to the crisis, except when the crisis isn't terribly serious and would otherwise be resolved on its own.

IGNORE THE CRISIS OR CONCEAL IT

Hiding your head in the sand and believing firmly that the crisis doesn't exist is an approach quite popular in political circles. "There's a trillion dollar budget deficit—no problem!" Despite the fact that the economy is tanking, we'll simply focus on the good economic news, scarce and insignificant as it may be. "Besides, my economic advisors tell me that we have made tremendous progress concerning the deficit!" If we translate this approach into the language of enterprise, we often hear CEOs speaking in the following terms, "The market is not performing as well as we would expect, however we [our company] have outpaced the S&P500." Nevertheless, the CEO is concealing fact that the company's latest acquisition has exhausted all of its financial resources, and as a consequence the company must lay-off thousands of employees. Despite the company's horrible performance, we mustn't forget to generously compensate the executives, especially the CEO. We are all familiar with this discourse, and you needn't look much farther than the business section of your daily newspaper to find it in one form or another.

This approach has numerous adherents. We all know the husband who has systematically ignored his wife with respect to what wasn't working in their relationship only to find himself alone one day, after she packed up her bags and left with the kids.

ANALYZE THE CRISIS, ALONG WITH ITS UNDERLYING CAUSES, AND SEEK LASTING SOLUTIONS

This approach requires a little effort, a clear mind, an analytical capacity, and ultimately the ability to resolve problems. There are myriad methods for analyzing problems, from the simple to the highly complex—each one having its own particular application. However, all of these methods have the following elements in common:

- Define the problem.
- Distinguish between causes and consequences.
- Elaborate alternative solutions. It's important not to implement the first solution that comes to mind, because it may not necessarily be the best one. Rather, I recommend envisioning multiple possible solutions, evaluating them with a clear mind, and then implementing the one which is best adapted to the problem at hand.
- Once the solution is in progress, the work continues. You need to verify that the chosen solution has led to the desired result. In the language of management, we call this process “result evaluation against quantitative criteria”.

SYSTEMICALLY EXAMINE THE CAUSES AND DEVELOP A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM

This method includes the steps from the above method, plus it's fortified by a systemic approach.

- Define the problem.
- Distinguish between causes and consequences.
- Deconstruct and understand the underlying mechanisms and systemic relationships beneath the causes.
- Identify both the driving and driven forces inherent in the system. A driving force is the equivalent of the playmaker on a football team. The playmaker determines the strategy, sets up the play, determines which players which will be involved, as well as the

required tactics to score the goal. Once you've identified the playmaker, it's very useful to play along in order to optimize results. Like with Aikido, it's important to use all forces, including those of your enemy, to your advantage.

- Now that we understand the mechanisms inherent in the system, we need to develop several ideas which are evaluated, tested, and ultimately implemented. Once the solution is implemented, the work is not yet finished. At this point, you need to verify that the chosen solution is actually achieving the desired results.

RESOLVING PROBLEMS WITH A FORESIGHT APPROACH

The last method enumerated here "systemically examine the causes and develop a solution to the problem" is the Foresight approach and it is the subject of this book. It will lead you, I hope, along new paths full of exciting new discoveries. This method will be described in detail in the following chapters, and it incorporates; classic analytical methods, systemic methods, and strategic Foresight.

THE FUTURE FASCINATES AND FRIGHTENS

“To be happy, all you have to do is accept the unforeseeable” Jacques Salomé

Einstein once said, “Nothing is more fascinating than the future because it is there that I’ll spend the rest of my days.” All those who fear the future should keep this aphorism in mind. What could be more passionate or exciting than the future? Nothing is more passionate, especially if we are able to awaken a child-like curiosity and a passion for discovery. In the past, these faculties have allowed us to experience exciting adventures and are the source of our self-confidence.

You certainly remember your childhood, don’t you? Those moments when you escaped beyond your backyard to explore new and forbidden territories about which your parents knew nothing. You also remember, without a doubt, the feeling of empowerment upon returning that night, tired and hungry, but proud of your adventures, and full of desire to return to the vast world newly explored. What has changed since? Where is this world of your adventures, of unexpected possibilities, discoveries, and the unknown? Where is this pioneering spirit that you have since abandoned? Try to rediscover this child-like curiosity for all that which is beyond the visible horizon. Does that titillate you? Are you excited like the child that you once were? If so, then you’re on the right track. That which awaits us now is only possible if you rediscover the desire and the courage to explore the unknown. The realm we call the future will inspire an irresistible desire within you, and ultimately lead to lasting happiness.

As much as the future elicits positive feelings such as desire and curiosity, it also frightens, paralyzes, discourages, and threatens

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because it is full of uncertainty and risk. Furthermore, the future is often perceived as a threat which could worsen the existing situation. That is why there are so many of us who are afraid of the future—not only so-called ordinary people, but also accomplished executives and politicians. All of them at one point or another have been afraid, timid, or have not dared to speak out. Politicians are particularly adept at beating around the bush, and thus people no longer understand their evasive responses or relate to their beguiling platitudes.

Despite fear, change is required in every aspect of social life, particularly in the political, economic, and ideological spheres. Change brings with it all that is necessary to shape, create, and reinvent our world. Change gives us the courage to brave new solutions and we must learn to accept change with poise and enthusiasm. The obstacles that confront us must ultimately crumble so that we can perceive the opportunities which are concealed beyond.

That's easier said than done. We all know that change requires effort and it often raises questions which we have erstwhile ignored. The most uncomfortable aspect of change is that we don't really know what will transpire. Will we be satisfied with our new situation? Will it serve us better or worse? To what extent must we change in order to adapt? In general, we have no problem demanding or congratulating change among others; however, when change concerns our own opinions, entitlements, privileges, habits, and comfort, it's a completely different story.

Yet, there is no way to escape from change. Change is intractable, and the sooner it happens the better. The more we anticipate, the better we can transform change into an opportunity and create positive change in our own lives. You must become a "shaping actor".