

EXECUTIVE BOOK

SUMMARY

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BIG POTENTIAL

HOW TRANSFORMING THE PURSUIT OF
SUCCESS RAISES OUR ACHIEVEMENT,
HAPPINESS, AND WELL-BEING

BY: SHAWN ACHOR

"We found that the traits contributing to your success are linked in such a way that when you help those around you become better, you raise not only the collective performance of the group, but that of everyone in it"(Achor, 2018, p.38)



SEEDS OF BIG POTENTIAL:

1) SURROUND

yourself with a star system of positive influencers.

2) EXPAND

your power by helping others lead from every seat.

3) ENHANCE

your resources by becoming a prism of praise.

4) DEFEND

the system against negative attacks.

5) SUSTAIN

the gains by fueling the virtuous cycle.

SUMMARY

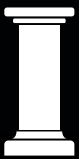
Achor (2018) is known for his research on **happiness**, **success**, and **potential**. In the book *Big Potential*, Achor (2018) works from the foundational perspective that the greatest potential of one is only reached when we strive for **success together**. Achor (2018) examines eight original research projects he conducted and integrates them with research from other disciplines to demonstrate what effect living the principles or seeds of Big Potential will have. The author states, "**like lightning bugs, once we learn to coordinate and collaborate with those around us, we all begin to shine brighter both individually and as an ecosystem**" (Achor, 2018, p.17). Achor (2018) uses the metaphor of seeds throughout his book, as seeds cannot grow without the sun, soil, and water, much like humans cannot grow to their full potential without cultivating **relationships** with others. He digs deep into the path to big potential, chapter by chapter, and describes each step in the path as a "seed" to success. Achor (2018) describes it best when he says, "**no matter how brilliant your mind or strategy, if you are playing a solo game, you will always lose out to a team**" (p.30). When success is built as a team, there are more resources available. When more resources are available, there is more significant potential for success, building what Achor (2018) refers to as the **Victorious Cycle**. Potential breeds greater potential. Achor (2018) believes that we all have the power to bring out the best in others, and the key to your success is helping others to find theirs. This book dives deep into explaining how you can impact others positively, use your influence for the better, and "**lift the ceiling on your potential, well-being, and happiness by helping others do the same**" (p.56).



SEED 1: SURROUND YOURSELF WITH POSITIVE INFLUENCERS-CREATING STAR SYSTEMS

Achor (2018) proposes that all too often, people become so focused on showing others what they are capable of individually that they underestimate the strength that comes from the people around them. If people surround themselves with others who are “positive, authentic influencers who support each other, reinforce each other and make each other better” (p.68), they have a star system that will help propel them to greater heights. Alternatively, if people surround themselves with others who are dragging them down and constantly taking their energy away, they will have difficulty reaching their greatest potential.

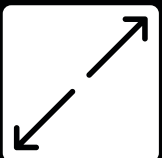
FIND PEOPLE WHO ARE:



PILLARS-PEOPLE WHO HAVE YOUR BACK NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS



BRIDGES-CONNECTORS TO NEW PEOPLE OR RESOURCES OUTSIDE OF YOUR ECOSYSTEM



EXTENDERS-POSITIVE INFLUENCES WHO PUSH YOU OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE

STRATEGIES:

1) TAP INTO THE POWER OF POSITIVE PEER PRESSURE

"People work faster, are more creative, and are more collaborative when they are surrounded by others" (p.72).

"The more you surround yourself with positive voices, the easier positive change will be to sustain and amplify" (p.74).

2) CREATE BALANCE THROUGH VARIETY

"The more diverse your social support network, the more resilient you are when life throws you a curveball"(p.75).

Check the make-up of your relationships. Is everyone the same (race, gender, political beliefs, interests)? If they are, they are limiting your potential (Achor, 2018).

"While people perceive collaboration as more challenging when teams are diverse, the researchers concluded that adding cognitive diversity leads to better outcomes because it forces people to stretch their comfort zones and consider perspectives and ideas they might not have considered or do not agree with" (p.76).

3) CREATE RECIPROCAL BONDS

"To find people who are willing to be open, authentic, and giving, the greatest test is whether you are willing to be open, authentic, and giving yourself" (p.84).

"Givers succeed in a way that creates a ripple effect, enhancing the success of people around them" (p.82).

Big Potential= Individual Attributes x (positive influences-negative influences)

SEED 2: EXPAND YOUR POWER-LEAD FROM EVERY SEAT



Achor (2018) proposes that when leaders believe that everyone within their team, no matter their title, holds the power to lead, a leader's ability to move their organization forward expands. Leadership knows no hierarchy. Change and renewal within an organization happen when work is shared between all members, and everyone within the organization understands what the completed mission will look like (Achor, 2018). Achor (2018) states, "your job as a leader is to help others recognize their own capacity for meaning and magnify it" (p.111). When people believe that their job has meaning and purpose, they help push to complete the mission that their organizational leadership has set. People rise to the challenge, and their potential and the potential of everyone around them grow.

"WHEN YOU LET GO OF THE IDEA THAT ONLY CERTAIN PEOPLE HAVE THE POWER TO LEAD, YOU DRAMATICALLY AMPLIFY NOT ONLY YOUR OWN POWER, BUT ALSO THE POWER OF THE GROUP AS A WHOLE" (ACHOR, 2018, P.91).

BIG POTENTIAL STARTS WITH YOU!



Are you willing to improve people's lives with your work?

Are you able to connect with people at a deeper level?

Do you have the opportunity to brighten someone's day?

Are you helping to improve the world?

STRATEGIES:

1) LEAD FROM THE 11TH CHAIR

The first step in understanding potential is recognizing that you can create change and lead from wherever you are (Achor, 2018).

2) DEVELOP YOUR ELEVATED PITCH

Many times people do not want to change, and some people feel disengaged. A leader's job is to convince others that they can be a positive force for change (Achor, 2018).

"The idea is that when you help people see why they should want change, it activates a sense of ownership, turning indifference or inertia into potential" (p.102).

3) USE PROGRESS AS FUEL

When people begin to see the work that they are doing is paying off, they continue to do the work. The work becomes more meaningful (Achor, 2018).

"To sustain change, we must reward and reinforce people's efforts to create change" (p.108).

4) LEAD FROM EVERY LUNCH SEAT

A leader's job is to help others recognize the meaning in the work that they are doing (Achor, 2018).

"You can find a path of leadership in almost any job, but first you need a path to meaning" (p.109).

SEED 3: ENHANCE YOUR RESOURCES-CREATING A PRISM OF PRAISE AND RECOGNITION



**"BY DENYING THE LIGHT OF
PRAISE, WE EXTINGUISH IT. BY
BENDING THE LIGHT TOWARD
OTHERS, WE MAGNIFY IT"
(ACHOR, 2018, P.119).**

Achor (2018) suggests that when people receive praise, they have a tendency to deflect it or ignore it, but instead of doing that, it is best when people accept the praise and then extend the praise to other people. Creating a culture of praise within an environment helps others feel better about themselves and allows them to reach their full potential. Success breeds greater success, and creating a culture of praise helps develop the Virtuous Cycle. Praise is a renewable resource, and "when done right, praise primes the brain for higher performance, which means that the more we raise, the more success we create" (p.117). Shining the light on others also takes the focus from a "me-centred" place to a "we-centred" place. Understanding that no one wins alone and that praise is likely due to everyone who helped that person achieve is a difference-maker.

1. STOP COMPARISON PRAISE

When giving a compliment, do not say someone is "better than". Just state the compliment (Achor, 2018)

2. SPOTLIGHT THE RIGHT

Help others see what they are doing right if there is a desire to see an improvement in performance and potential (Achor, 2018).

3. PRAISE THE BASE

"When we praise a win, we also need to recognize the supporting players who made the win possible" (p.130).

4. DEMOCRATIZE PRAISE

"A good leader praises people who make success possible. A great leader does not merely praise other people, but rather turns other people into praise providers" (p.134).

5. UNLOCK THE HIDDEN 31

"The people who are most expressive, positive or negative, have the power to impact change (Achor, 2018). According to research, "31% of people at work are positive, but not expressive" (p.139). The key to creating a positive system of praise is getting this group to be more expressive.

6. DON'T JUST PRAISE THE OUTCOME, PRAISE TO AN OUTCOME

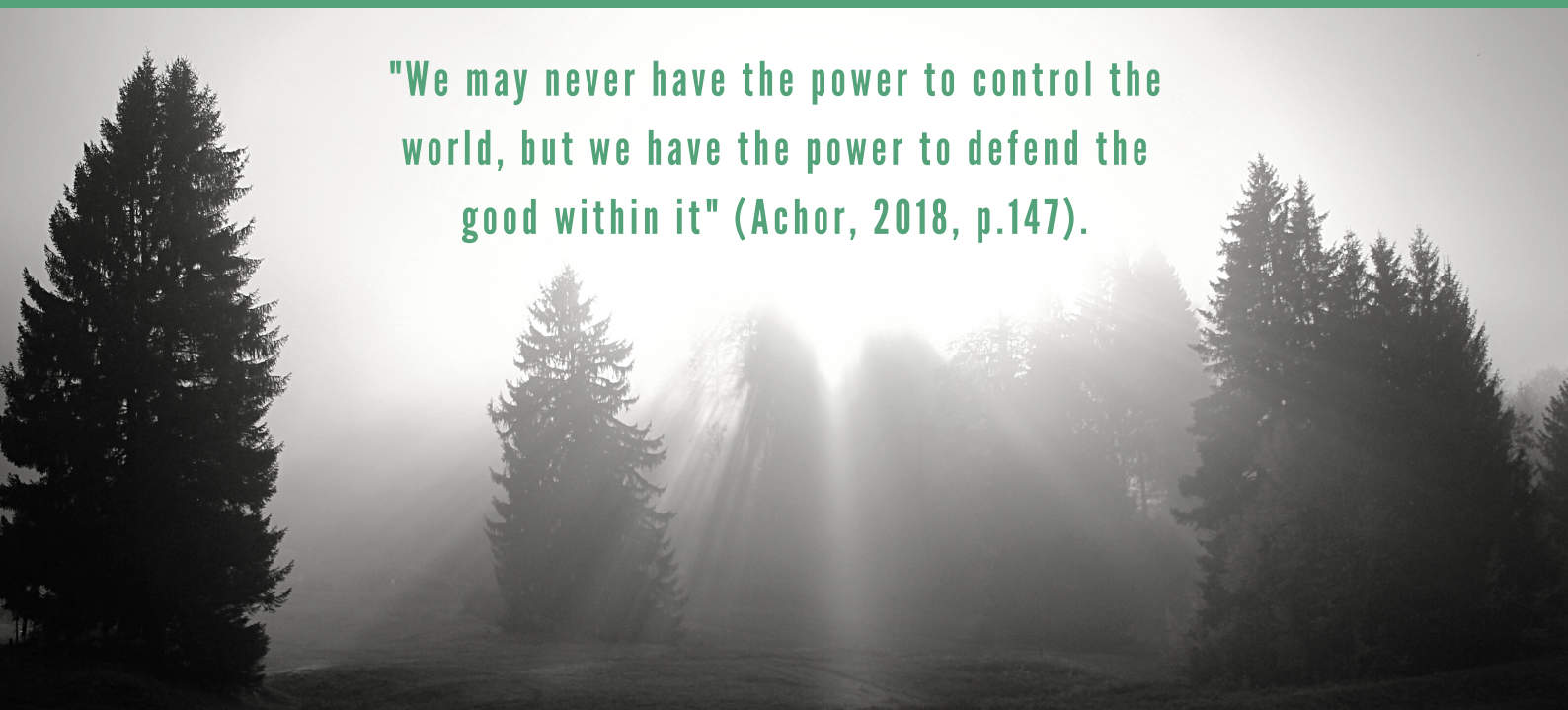
Praise for past achievements is great, but getting a person to think about their future and praise them for what they will accomplish gives fuel to a positive fire (Achor, 2018).



SEED 4: DEFEND AGAINST NEGATIVE INFLUENCES-PROTECTING THE SYSTEM AGAINST ATTACKS

There will always be negatives in the world around us, but the key to combating the negatives is to turn them into positives (Achor, 2018). Negative situations have the potential to help build strength and resilience within a system. The key is to find positive influencers so that you can defend against the negative ones. Achor (2018) suggests that you surround yourself with positive influencers as they infect other people to be more positive. This does not mean that you will never have difficult situations in your life, but it does mean that you must make sure you have positive people that help you through, so those situations do not lead you to a place of imbalance (Achor, 2018). Many things threaten our ecosystem. Stressors are not only seen and heard but are also felt (Achor, 2018). According to research quoted within Big Potential, “roughly 90 percent of anxiety at work is created by 5 percent of one’s network-the people who sap your energy” (p.150). The key is to overcome and defend against negative influences so that one’s creativity, energy, passion, and potential are at their best (Achor, 2018).

"We may never have the power to control the world, but we have the power to defend the good within it" (Achor, 2018, p.147).



5 STRATEGIES FOR DEFENDING, DISARMING, AND OVERCOMING NEGATIVE INFLUENCES

STRATEGY 1: BUILD A MOAT

- Media can often carry negative weight. Build a media-free moat 30 minutes before bed and 30 minutes after you wake up in the morning.
- Turn off alerts
- Cancel noise (practice meditation, turn off the radio)
- Do a meeting detox. Figure out ways to shorten meetings and sometimes eliminate them.

STRATEGY 2: BUILD A MENTAL STRONGHOLD

- A stronghold is what you build to retreat to when things go badly, and it is tightly secured in case of attack. Gratitude is a mental stronghold. Achor (2018) recommends beginning meetings with gratitude to help build mental resilience.
- Create opportunities to practice mindfulness, as "mindfulness is the credit card for resilience, the more you spend, the more rewards you get at the end of the month" (Achor, 2018, p.162).

STRATEGY 3: LEARN THE ART OF MENTAL AIKIDO

- Stress is a part of life, do not try and block it. Instead, recognize that stress is better than disengagement or apathy and arrives as a result of something that is meaningful to us. Use it as a source of energy or motivation.
- Pay attention to how you speak about challenges and instead reframe challenges to think about them in terms of opportunities.
- Achor (2018) looked at the Navy Seals and researched their ability to overcome obstacles and found "the secret to their extraordinary levels of teamwork, engagement, and loyalty wasn't just the stress itself, but the effort invested in helping each other overcome that stress" (p.167)

STRATEGY 4: TAKE A VACATION FROM YOUR PROBLEMS

- Many people feel that they cannot take a vacation from work because they have too much work to do (Achor, 2018). The truth is that when people take a break from work and go away on vacation, they are more likely to return to work happier, rested. This leads to greater creativity and productivity (Achor, 2018).
- "The greatest competitive advantage in the modern economy is a positive and engaged brain" (p.173)

STRATEGY 5: PICK YOUR BATTLES

- Sometimes we must recognize that some circumstances are beyond our repair no matter how powerful our tools are, and we need to leave the situation.
- "In work and in life, when we repeatedly stumble and fall along a certain path, rather than dusting ourselves off and trying again (and again), it might be time to ask if we are simply on the wrong path" (p.176).

OPTIMISM HOPE



ENGAGEMENT PEACE

SEED 5: SUSTAIN THE GAINS-CREATING COLLECTIVE MOMENTUM



Achor (2018) refers to Newton's first law of motion in reference to sustaining gains. This law states that an object in motion stays in motion unless acted on by an outside force. All energy is interconnected, and therefore it is crucial that once a person begins to make forward momentum, they find other people to encourage them and work with them to keep moving in that direction (Achor, 2018). When this occurs, more positive energy is generated, leading to Big Potential not only for the person who started the charge but for the entire team of people working together. Achor (2018) states that "without some force helping you sustain momentum toward your goals, inertia and the world will slow you down" (p.182). The leader's responsibility is to be magnetic and channel energy in a positive direction to help pull others along with them (Achor, 2018). When others are pulled along, more significant momentum is created, and the positive force is strong. Due to the strength of the force, it is sustainable. It takes a considerable amount of negative energy to bring it to a stop.

STRATEGY 1: CREATE TOWERS OF MEANING

It is critical that we find meaning within the work that we do; "meaning is the unbalanced force that keeps us going, especially in busy or stressful times" (p.187). When you find meaning within the work that you do, you are more engaged, successful, and have more energy (Achor, 2018).

STRATEGY 2: UTILIZE VIVID DIRECTION

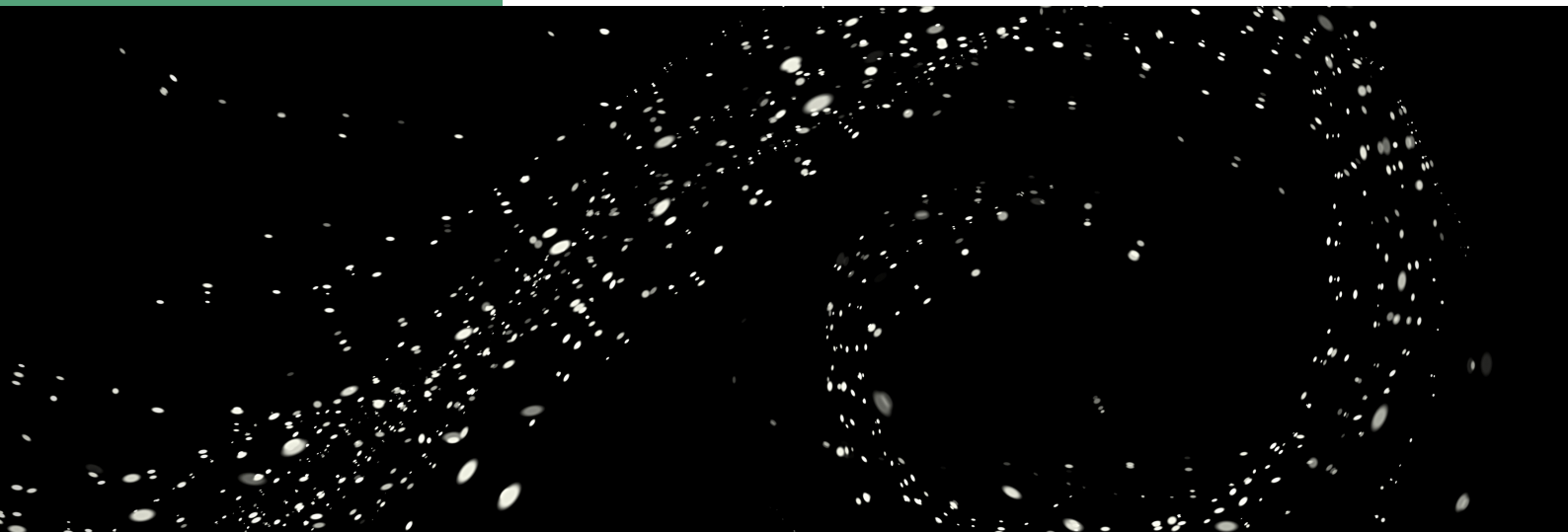
Leaders need to help people around them envision what their success will look like (Achor, 2018). When people understand what is possible and how it will feel, the more likely they will be to push to that end. Achor (2018) states, "only once we can truly see ourselves overcoming whatever challenges we face we can sustain our efforts to help create a better world" (p.200).

STRATEGY 3: CELEBRATE THE WINS!

Be a cheerleader for others, and they will be a cheerleader for you! Celebrate the big things, but more importantly, celebrate the little day-to-day things. Celebrate people's strengths, and act as a magnet to pull out positive energy. Engage in celebrating meaning, by writing notes and recognizing what people are doing for one another. "If our own momentum is stopped or stalled we don't stand a chance in helping other people accelerate theirs" (p.209).

CHANGE STARTS WITH YOU!

CHANGE IS NOT A ONE-TIME EVENT AND CANNOT BE PURSUED ALONE. RESILIENCE, SUPPORT, LEADERSHIP AND COLLECTIVE MOMENTUM ARE KEY TO BUILDING AN ECOSYSTEM OF POTENTIAL (ACHOR, 2018).



QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between a job and a calling. Think about your current occupation. How would you classify it? Is it a job or a calling?
2. When reflecting back on the SEEDS of Big Potential, which SEEDS do you recognize in leaders of your past? How did they embody them?
3. Achor's Big Potential focuses on working together to achieve success. Think about a team that you were apart of encouraged the greatest potential of all members. What did this team accomplish together that you could not have accomplished individually?
4. What things are you currently apart of that breathe life into you? How can you capitalize on that within your area of work?
5. Creating real and lasting change is not easy, nor is it a one-time event. Why is it vital that we have an "ecosystem of potential" in order to make a lasting change?

CRITICAL EVALUATION

Big Potential is a book that emphasizes the message that we go further together than we could ever go alone. When we bring out the best in each other, we help each other succeed, and we can capitalize on each other's strengths and successes. Achor (2018) states, "your potential is way bigger than your success, your well-being and your performance are all connected to the people around you" (p.38). When we look at the ecosystems surrounding us, we must also recognize that if people within our environment are not thriving, it affects all of us. Achor (2018) referenced a tribe in Kenya that, instead of asking "how are you?" when they greeted each other, they would ask, "how are the children?". If the children are well, then so are the adults, and vice-versa. There's a lesson in that for all of us. If people around us are not well, then often, we are not either. Achor (2018) gave strategies to support the SEEDS (surround, expand, enhance, defend, sustain) of Big Potential that would lead to the virtuous cycle, which is all about becoming stronger, courageous, and more creative while finding the meaning within the work we do.

In reflecting on *Big Potential* and the positive psychology base upon which it is written, I believe that many aspects of this book can be applied to professional and personal life. This book is not a magic wand, but it is anchored with a plethora of ideas about how much potential is at the ready if positive leadership is applied. Change does not happen quickly, and many of the strategies that are given take time to apply individually. Achor (2018) works upon the premise that positive leadership can start with anyone from any position. I think that enables us to change our perspective and create a positive ripple of renewal and transformation wherever we work.

Reference:

Achor, S. (2018). *Big potential: How transforming the pursuit of success raises our achievement, happiness, and well-being*. Currency.