

One

COLOR THINKING™

Speak the Language of Abundance

By Sofia Santiago, Ph.D.

Mario wanted to have sex with me.

What I'm about to confess happened when I was in my early 20's, so let's take a little journey into my past.

Mario was my client. Well, not mine personally; I had founded my own computer training company a couple of years before, and my client—my *only* client—was the huge bank for which Mario was Human Resources Director.

That's why I felt like I was going to die when, during one of the regular high-end lunches I took Mario to, he made it *very* clear that either I went to bed with him or else.

I couldn't sleep for days, trying to figure out how to get out of this dilemma. The way I saw it, either I did what Mario demanded, or my 62 employees would lose their jobs, and I'd be plunged deeply in debt left with two empty buildings, 124 depreciated computers, and 124 pink plush computer-mouse covers that looked like real mice (which back then I thought were adorable).

I felt responsible for the situation and berated myself for having allowed Mario's increasing requests to prevent me from diversifying my clientele. I knew the dangers of having all my eggs in one basket, yet I had made that big, basic mistake. Those were useless thoughts, I know. Sigh.

There was no way I'd give in to Mario's disgusting demand, but what could I do if my only two choices were doing what he wanted or losing everything I had worked so hard for?



I wish I'd known in my 20's how to manage conflicts like this, but I didn't. I neither had the tools nor the self-confidence to speak up: my fear of making things worse prevented me from confronting Mario.

I knew his threat was real, so I resorted to convoluted maneuvers to save my company. I'll share with you what I did, even when it's really embarrassing.

I sent Mario an envelope with three things: a ticket to the largest annual Las Vegas-based computer tradeshow in the world, a round-trip plane ticket to Las Vegas, and a letter inviting him to join "us" in attending this expo, "so we could evaluate the latest computer-training technology and its potential benefits for his bank." His traveling arrangements and expenses would be taken care of, obviously, and I'd pick him up at Las Vegas airport. I mentioned I'd fly in a few days before to coordinate meetings with our IT providers.



Mario gratefully accepted and didn't mention his, ahem, "request" again, and I certainly wasn't going to.

When Mario landed in Vegas, my friend Luke and I picked him up at the airport. I introduced Luke as my "software provider," but you've probably already figured out that he was a friend I had flown to Las Vegas as my chaperone and accomplice.

The three of us explored the expo all that day before returning to our rooms to freshen up and get ready to meet for dinner. What Mario didn't know is that I had a plan and it was already in motion.

Phase one: Immediately after dinner, I excused myself, alleging a headache. Phase two: After I'd escaped, Luke took Mario somewhere else and hired a drop-dead-gorgeous-blonde call girl. Phase three: Later that night, Luke called me to report that he had just left Mario in his room with—? I don't remember the name Luke gave me for the blonde, so let's call her "Bambi Mae."

Final phase: The next morning we all met for breakfast. Shaking inside, I gave Mario the speech I had rehearsed a million times that morning alone. Looking him in the eye, I firmly but pleasantly said, "Mario, as I have shown, my company can give you everything you request. However, I don't do everything myself but delegate to experts in each area, as I'm sure you've realized after meeting our 'PR Manager,' Ms. Bambi Mae 'Garcia.'"

After that trip, Mario's bank and my company had a fruitful relationship for years to come, with no more talk of Mario's request. What happened in Vegas didn't stay in Vegas.



If I faced a similar dilemma now, there's absolutely no way I would handle things this poorly. My solution was convoluted and unethical (not to mention expensive).

Still, there was one good thing about what I did: I found a more "colorful" way to solve a problem that, had I been fixed on a "black-or-white" decision between two mutually exclusive and fixed options (having sex with Mario or losing my company), would have led me to a dead end. (Or, more likely, to living under a bridge using pink plush mouse covers for shelter.)

I didn't have a name for it then, but what I did was Color Thinking™.

I was able to find a solution that was beyond the only two obvious alternatives I originally had when I saw the problem in black and white. And that's one of the foundations of the mindset of abundance I now call Color Thinking™.

A World of Color

If you've ever stopped what you're doing to enjoy the stunning beauty of a crimson sunset, gone scuba diving in a coral reef, or stood hypnotized while one of your favorite paintings finds its way into your heart through your eyes, then you know that colors give us pleasure beyond words. Sometimes in ways as simple as when we find a new color of lipstick or a shirt that makes us look great—and feel great.

Imagine for a second a world without the vibrancy of yellows, blues, or reds. Think of how much we'd be missing if we saw only two options: a total absence of color (white) or all the colors lumped together (black).

We would not choose to see the world only in black and white (B&W). However, with our minds, we sometimes “see” the world as if it were only B&W. We’re so used to doing this that we don’t even notice we’re missing out on so much.

That’s why I coined the term Color Thinking™ to label the alternative: our ability to *consciously* “see” the range of options that exists between the two extremes for a scenario.

Seeing the world as B&W is called “dichotomous thinking”: either I win or I lose; you love me or you don’t; you’re with me or you’re against me; you love ramen or your taste buds stopped working; someone is smart because their beliefs are in line with mine or they’re stupid because they don’t see things as I do (think politics, religion, or football). Either X or not-X.

People who see only the extremes in situations are not seeing all the shades of gray in between (and some scenarios contain more than fifty). They have a mindset of scarcity. But so do people who see only shades of gray—they’re still missing the glorious oranges, greens, and purples, for example.

Seeing with our minds in B&W, or even in shades of grey, reflects a mindset of scarcity. In contrast, Color Thinking™ is living with a mindset of abundance. It’s training our minds to see more alternatives and, as a result, make better decisions, implement better solutions, and find more paths to happiness and success.

I know what you’re thinking: “Wait a minute. Sometimes in life things really *are* only black or white.”

Two

“IF YOU HAVE TO DO IT ANYWAY, JUST DO IT!”

Move into a Mindset of Achievement

By Margarita Sarmiento

“If you have to do it anyway, just do it!” When I was growing up, this was something my mom said frequently. We heard it the most often about homework on Friday.

“If you have to do it anyway, just do it. You do your homework when you get home from school Monday through Thursday, just get it done. You’ll enjoy the weekend more. . .”

And when did we do it? You know. Sunday night. My brother? Monday morning. Was she right? Of course she was. All weekend, this is what we heard,

“Did you do your book report?”

“Is your math homework done?”

“Don’t you have a test to study for?”

That homework, like a black cloud, hung over us all weekend!

Studies tell us that 95% of people admit to procrastinating and of those, 25% claim it is a chronic, defining characteristic.¹¹ To “stop procrastinating” is one of the top-two most common personal improvement goals people set worldwide, according to Psychology Today (it should come as no surprise that the other is to “lose weight”). Personally, I can attest that in the management courses I teach, the two most common areas that participants identify as a challenge at work are “doing unpleasant duties right away” and “dealing with poor performance,” both of which are directly connected to procrastination.

Procrastination can steal up to 218 minutes out of your week.¹² That said, here’s my promise—taking positive action after reading this chapter will not only help you get things done, it will help you regain a few hours to your already busy week! So, let’s take a look at what keeps us from getting things done, what it costs us, and what we can do to move into a mindset of achievement.

Procrastination Defined

So what does procrastination really look like? I’m going to get to that a bit later (see what I did there?), but first let’s talk about what it means. Procrastination has been defined as “the act of putting off to a future time”;¹³ “to defer action, especially without good reason”;¹⁴ and “to voluntarily delay an intended course of action despite

¹¹ Steel, Piers, Ph.D. (2012). The procrastination equation: How to stop putting things off and start getting stuff done. *Harper Perennial*

¹² Atik, Nilufer (2015). How to stop procrastinating—now. *The Telegraph Ratesetter/YouGov survey*; February, 2015

¹³ Definition from Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary

¹⁴ Definition from The Oxford English Dictionary

expecting to be worse-off for the delay.”¹⁵ What these definitions all have in common is that procrastination is behavioral—an action, with intent and consequences. As a master procrastinator myself, I would argue that those consequences are not intentional; they just happen! But, even I have to be honest and admit that denial or lack of awareness does not erase intent. If it did, I would not feel so guilty, and even anxious, while postponing the inevitable.

While preparing a course on managing interruptions a few years ago, I came to a startling realization. Procrastination is simply an internal interruption. To make my point, let’s take a look at the definition of an interruption: “The act of delaying the continuity of an activity; an abrupt occurrence that interferes or creates a break; a time interval during which there is a temporary cessation.”¹⁶ Notice anything interesting? Did the words jump out at you, the way they jumped out at me? The act of ‘delaying’ the continuity of an activity; an abrupt occurrence that ‘interferes’ or ‘creates a break’; a time interval during which there is a ‘temporary cessation.’ Every time that I make a choice to defer a task, I am interrupting myself.

That’s worth repeating, with emphasis—every time that I make a choice to defer a task, I am interrupting myself! That interruption may come before the activity begins, or in the middle of the activity, but it is still an interruption. It is as if I walked into the room with a question, or called myself on the phone, or texted, or sent myself a notification, taking my attention away from the task at hand. This realization helped me to see something that I didn’t realize I had—control over my tendency to procrastinate.

¹⁵ Steel, Piers, Ph.D. (2012). The procrastination equation: How to stop putting things off and start getting stuff done. *Harper Perennial*

¹⁶ Definition from The Oxford English Dictionary

Just as I have the ability to manage external interruptions, I also have the ability to manage internal interruptions. In fact, I would argue that internal interruptions are easier to manage because we have more control. It is simply about applying self-discipline. I can almost hear you groan; I didn't say it would be easy, I just said it was easier. Although external interruptions can only be managed, internal interruptions can be controlled. The secret to achieving what we want to achieve is to take control of our decisions and actions.

We've determined what procrastination is, so let's check out what procrastination looks like. (I told you we'd get back to this!) To really answer this question, we must understand that the easiest way to see procrastination is to hear it. We see it through the excuses we give ourselves, and sometimes others, to appease our negligent behavior.

- "I'm reprioritizing. . ."
- "I'll be able to focus more, once this is done. . ."
- "I am waiting for inspiration. . ."
- "I need more information to get started. . ."
- "I'm too tired. I'll do it when I get my second wind. . ."

And, my favorite,

- "If I put it off today, I might not have to do it tomorrow. . ."

Whether these words literally come out of your mouth, or you just think them, they are just excuses. And, they are not even original excuses. Man, along with woman, has been putting things off since before the invention of the modern-day calendar. It is a problem that humans have dealt with since the beginning of time.

Victor Hugo, knowing his penchant towards procrastination, would have his servants take away his clothes and not return them until his

Three

GUTSY PIVOTING

Change Your Life Trajectory

By Chrystina Katz

What rocks your world? What brings you joy?

Recognizing those joys and deliberately making changes in your life will help you create a more fulfilling, worthwhile existence for this lifetime. Whether you are still searching for those joys or already know them, this chapter will give you a few powerful strategies that can help you pivot to your next life adventure.

For me, I feel absolute joy when I speak before hundreds of people, hear their cheers, and see their faces when inspiration flows. I could not have done public speaking twenty years ago; it took many life changes to reach this comfort level. Maybe public speaking isn't your thing. I imagine, though, there is something that rocks your world. What gives you energy? What makes you feel worthwhile?

Twelve years ago, I felt completely worthless as a human being. I spent more time hiding than living. Scary thing is, I had a preteen to raise, and I was considering ending it all. After I lost my job in

2008, I realized I would soon lose my home to foreclosure. Having only pennies in my bank account and a daughter to support, I felt depression taking over me. I was on the brink. Have you ever felt this desperate? One afternoon on the phone with my mentor, I noticed he quietly listened to my frantic rambling of insecurity, self-pity, and surrender.

When I took a moment to breathe, he calmly said:

“It is not what happens to us; it is what we do with it that counts.’ Benjamin Franklin.”

A chill washed over me; his words struck my very core. The flood of tears stopped. I sat up, rolled back my shoulders, and straightened my spine. I finally fully grasped the concept of self-accountability.

I am responsible for MY life, MY choices, MY reactions.

“It is not what happens to us. . .” Crap happens; accidents happen, people can be unpredictable, and we can find ourselves in uncomfortable situations. Life happens, whether I have direct, indirect, or seemingly no control of it. More importantly, how do I respond to it?

“. . .it is what we do with it that counts.” I finally woke up to this concept. I mean, I fully accepted my part in the equation. My response is within my control. That one phrase literally changed the trajectory of my life. Complete accountability of MY life shifted to its rightful owner: me! That quote ignited a fire inside that has continued to burn ever since.

I stood up, made the disheveled bed I sequestered myself to in self-loathing, and took a shower to wash off all the self-pity and blaming of

others. I put on my ‘big girl pants’ and dressed in a new way of being—self-responsible, self-accountable, and self-reliant. No more blaming others when I let them control my life circumstances. I journal nearly every day, and on that day I wrote about that revelation—“only I change my life.”

Since that day, I have lived my life knowing whatever happens, good, bad, or indifferent, I am responsible for how I respond and what comes next. Taking charge and making changes is what I call “pivoting.” Just like when a tennis player pivots their body to quickly change direction to meet and return the tennis ball, we too can pivot our lives to find more joy, satisfaction, and happiness. When a conflict arises, we can shift or pivot our position and adjust the stance, reaction, and next steps accordingly. These pivots can be subtle or drastic.

Over these last few decades of major personal and professional pivots, I have read about and tried many strategies. Some resonated; some did not. The strategies I applied helped me overcome negativity (from inside and out), deal with fear and doubt (that ever-present, self-doubting voice in my head), maintain my sanity, shift circumstances, and still feel worthwhile despite many challenges. These strategies helped me find the guts to take chances, speak up, plan, and make gutsy pivots—and they can help you too.

If life seems unsettled, whether it’s because of a pandemic, job or relationship dissatisfaction, or a growing emptiness inside, having sustainable strategies can help you on your path to success. This path includes guided reflection of your life, your challenges, your joys, and what makes your life worthwhile, which can help you realize when it’s time to consider the next gutsy pivot.

Four

STAYING ON TOP OF YOUR GAME!

Become the Best Version of Yourself

by Charlotte Canion

“Always do your best and that is all anyone can ask of you.” My mother used to say that phrase, and it has stuck with me over the years. I did not practice that principle when I was young; I did only enough to get by. As a born-again writer, I have had many challenges in my life. As an adult, I realized the importance of staying on top of your game and giving your best. Your game could be cleaning the house, raising children, being the best employee, running a marathon, or being the best at whatever your heart desires.

When I use the words, *“do your best,”* I am referring to giving that extra push needed to go a step above what you think you can. The game is the journey, and you travel from conception of an idea or opportunity to becoming the best in that arena.

In this chapter I will share a checklist of ways to stay on target. Follow the ideas, and the end result will be to stay on top of your game.

Inspire Others Along the Journey

About forty-five years ago, I was approached to be director and mistress of ceremonies for the Wise County Beauty Pageant. The pageant is part of a week-long reunion that has been happening for over one hundred years since the covered-wagon days along the Chisholm Trails in Texas. Being honored to head up this event was something I had never dreamed possible. One thing that was imperative to me was for every contestant to feel that they were equally important and that they were the best person for the title. I wrote a poem and gave a copy to each contestant:

There's No Such Thing as Losers – Only Non-Winners

Oh, Mom let me win the crown tonight,
Help fix my hair and dress just right.

I'll smile a lot and worry too, what if I trip or forget to turn.
Mom told me there would be days like today, why can't I learn.

Another pageant, what do I gain,
Why put myself thru all this pain.

I guess I hope that maybe someday,
That crown will be mine and I can say. . .

I tried and I tried, but what did I gain,
More confidence, more poise, more pride, and more pain.

Well, there went another contest and a non-winner once more.
I keep trying and trying, but it becomes such a chore.

We buy new dresses and new hair styles we try,
But I was always a winner cause deep down inside,

I got up on the stage again and again,
I smiled and I cried when I did not win.

But as the years have gone fleeting by,
I know now why God gave me the guts to try.

I'm a winner in every sense of the word, cause
I go out and give the best that I can,

And my reward is to know that
I'M THE BEST THAT I AM!

What opportunities have you had to help others do well or feel special?
Doesn't it motivate you to make a good impression by being the best
you can be?

Define What “Best” Means for You

Staying on top of your game means being the best and that may mean stepping out of your comfort zone and being creative. It does not matter what you are doing; you can be on top. Do the job better than the person before you, or if you are the first person to have this opportunity, then conceptualize and do the task the best you can. The desire to sparkle is the new you and the reason you are reading this book.

Let us think in terms of how to do your job better and ultimately get a raise, promotion, or the recognition you deserve. First and foremost, enjoy what you are doing and be knowledgeable about the project you are endeavoring to accomplish. Now with that being said, what if you have a job that you have been doing the same way for many years? Ask your supervisors what they think you can do to stay on top. If you can share your job with your friends, ask them if