

attained a position in the company commensurate with his talents. Herb had always believed that people should be treated fairly, regardless of their religion or personal life. He didn't feel that what he had done for Arnold was special.

When Herb opened Arnold's letter, he read that Arnold considered him one of the most important people in his life, the one who had made the most difference. Arnold's thanks to Herb was heartfelt. Herb was deeply moved by the letter. "That letter was probably the most important thing that ever happened to me in my job," he explained to me. "And I never knew until now." The letter was worth more than all of Herb's years of salary and bonuses, achievement medals and stock options, because it represented not just outward success but true Accomplishment.

It is by the grace of such reflections that we are able to look back on our life and say it was worthwhile. It is what, in the end, allows us to grow old and die with dignity.

This section will explore several areas where the Cool Positive energy of Accomplishment expresses itself. The chapter on control is, paradoxically, about letting go of control, of letting the wisdom of the situation express itself. Generosity is the classic expression of the accomplished spirit, when the self is open and unguarded and can freely share with others. From a sense of Accomplishment comes gratitude, a thankfulness to be here, alive with everyone. And last, power expresses Accomplishment not when it imposes from without but when it abides within, in the integrity of a mature, developed character.

I started this book by pointing out that the workplace is one area of our life where we are not fully in control. In other areas of our life we are quite independent. We rent or own our own home, we are free to think and say what we want, to influence the course of political and community life, to travel freely, to worship without constraint, and to enjoy all the fruits of modern civilization. But in the workplace, we are hostage to a variety of forces—our immediate superiors, company

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policy, government regulation, union rules, the caprice of the marketplace. That is one reason why so many people are willing to sacrifice the security of a regular paycheck to strike out on their own. That feeling of independence, of being in charge of your own destiny, is worth a great deal. It certainly was to me.

But in a spiritual sense, control of any kind is an illusion. We are never fully in control of anything—not our health or our possessions, not the weather, not our spouse or our children, not our job, not our community, not our country or other nations. (The one exception, as I have said so often in this book, is our inner life.) All our technological miracles have obscured just how unpredictable and out-of-control human life still is. The first lesson of Buddhist teaching is the principle of

The wind moves the kite, but you hold the string. You, the wind, and the kite are one.

impermanence: Nothing lasts, nothing can be counted on, everything changes. That is another way of saying that we can't control anything in our world, at least not for long. Everything is continually slipping through our grasp.

When we feel in control—in other words, when things are going as we want them to—we feel good. We feel calm, relaxed, and at ease. In the terminology of the Energy Wheel, we are in the realm of Cool Positive. But beneath the surface of that feeling lies some anxiety. Suppose something unexpected happens. Suppose this good situation ends. Suppose the boss changes his mind. Suppose the big client is wooed away by a competitor. Suppose the floods rise and wash out the warehouse. Suppose this, suppose that. That is why we cling to our success—to hang on to our good fortune, so that it will not turn on us and slip away.

Many of the management activities in the workplace—the meetings, memos, directives, and team building—are all efforts to get control of what is inherently an unpredictable situation. Teamwork itself—a popular buzzword these days—is more complicated than it appears. A team is not just a bunch of people in a room. Inspiring a sense of shared vision, cooperation, and trust is difficult to bring off, even for the most talented manager. The Saturn division of General Motors, long touted as a model of team-based management, was recently reported to be having second thoughts. Many of the workers wanted to scrap the team approach and go back to the old six-hundred-page United Auto Workers contract. I'm sure that bulky contract seemed more solid and predictable than the difficult and ephemeral task of sustaining real teamwork.

In business, as in life, there are no easy answers. I often say in my talks that if business were a sure thing, anyone could be good at it. Being able to manage uncertainty is what separates those who prosper in business from those who do not. And managing uncertainty is a skill as valuable in the spiritual world as it is in business. It is one thing to confront uncertainty and doubt in a meditation retreat, where the outer environment is calm and controlled, but quite another to have to manage it when chaos reigns and the stakes are high.

You may have noticed that I put the title of this chapter in quo-

tation marks—"Control." This chapter will explore a different way to be in "control" called Controlling by Paying Attention.

Right away that seems like a contradiction in terms. How can we control something or someone just by paying attention? Isn't paying attention too passive, the opposite of control? How can that be enough? Indeed, Controlling by Paying Attention is something of a paradox. It actually means giving up control, allowing things to happen, letting the unpredictability of the situation surface and play itself out, while we remain actively engaged in the drama, not just as a spectator but as a participant.

This is not what we usually mean when we say "control," but this capability still deserves to be called control in the wider sense of mastery, of having a rooted inner confidence that the situation will prosper. Think of how you "control" a kite. The wind moves the kite, but you hold the string. You don't let go of the kite, but you don't hold it close to your chest either. You let it soar. Without you, the kite can't fly. But you don't tell it where to go. You, the wind, and the kite are one. Controlling by Paying Attention means throwing yourself all the way into the situation and trusting yourself and others enough to let the wind do most of the work. Without some wisdom in our efforts to exercise control, we end up like so many managers and bosses in the workplace, resorting to rank and status to get our way with others.

Penelope, a middle manager at a large electronics manufacturing firm, had a boss who had a habit of throwing tantrums, of being vindictive and petty at management meetings. Penelope was quick to say that her boss was capable and generally well regarded, except for this unfortunate tendency, which most of his staff tolerated as unavoidable.

Once, after a particularly ugly meeting, Penelope decided she had had enough. She marched into her boss's office, sat down, and said, "Ralph, the way you acted in that meeting was unacceptable. You know none of us had anything to do with missing that deadline. It was ridiculous for you to carry on like that. Why did you do it?"

Ralph hung his head and didn't say anything for a long time. Finally he looked up at Penelope and said, "You're right. I'm sorry. I'll apologize to everyone tomorrow morning."

From that time on, Penelope noticed a change in Ralph. He didn't entirely stop his moody behavior, but she could tell he was trying to contain it. He was not a bad person, not even a bad boss. He had just succumbed to the seduction of power, which surrounded him like a plastic bubble and cut him off from others' feelings.

Ralph's actions are by no means unusual. If you are a manager, you may have found yourself occasionally behaving a bit like Ralph. And if you are someone who reports to a manager, you may have had an experience similar to Penelope's. People like Ralph do not behave the way they do because they want to hurt others. They too are responding to the stress of not having things under control. They just do not know another way.

If your job gives you a lot of conventional control, if you are a boss, or an owner, or a senior manager like Ralph, then this chapter may offer a different way to express your power and your success in a way that includes the truth of change, uncertainty, and impermanence. And if your rank or status on the job is not that high, Controlling by Paying Attention can still work for you. In the example of Ralph and Penelope, who, at that moment, was the real "boss"? Who was in control? It was Penelope, who was able to express the truth of the situation, regardless of whose title was on the door.

INTERDEPENDENCE AND SIMULTANEITY

Controlling by Paying Attention is based on two spiritual principles: Interdependence and Simultaneity.

Interdependence means that although we all seem to be separate, distinct people, we are deeply connected to others. Through our essential humanity, the universality of our basic wants and needs, and our desire to love and be loved, we share a common fate and destiny with everyone. We will explore Interdependence in greater detail in chapter 17, "Gratitude."

There are many Buddhist stories that illustrate this principle. A woman whose son had recently died came to the Buddha with her dead son in her arms and pleaded with him for medicine to restore

his life. "Bring me a handful of mustard seed," the Buddha replied, "from a house where no one has ever been ill, or died, and I will help you." The woman did as she was told and traveled from door to door, asking whether anyone within was free from the experience of sickness and death. "No," one person after another told her, "someone recently died here too. We too have lost a child."

In the course of her journey the woman realized that her personal tragedy was nothing other than the human condition shared by everyone. "How selfish I am in my grief!" the woman realized as she sat by the roadside contemplating her condition. "Death is a fate shared by everyone!" She realized that in her grief she was not alone. She was connected with everyone, and everyone with her. That is how the Buddha helped her.

The principle of Simultaneity is an outcome of this connection. It means that when a thought or feeling occurs to us, it is probably occurring to someone else at the same time. That is what the woman with the dead child realized in the story. There is a saying in the Chinese Buddhist tradition that illustrates this point: "When Joe drinks whiskey, Pete becomes tipsy." Human beings are much more the same than they are different. And aside from that shared fate, we are also social animals, who have evolved over millennia to cooperate, to join forces, to share and interact. Our thoughts and feelings, our inspirations and insights, are not our unique possession but flow naturally from one person to another. If I have an inspiration or a good idea, chances are someone, somewhere, is thinking along the same lines. If I smile, my neighbor is happier. If I frown, my colleague begins to worry. In the workplace, this natural affinity of one person to another is often masked by the organization, hierarchy, and culture of competition. Even so, Simultaneity can be a resource, as we shall shortly see.

WHAT IS ATTENTION?

Attention is the core skill of a spiritual life. Every spiritual practice, to one degree or another, requires it. Attention means to notice what

is really happening, as opposed to what we imagine is happening. For example, when we pay attention to our breathing in meditation, we are tuning in to a much more fundamental reality than the inner and outer dialogues that usually absorb most of our waking hours. The searchlight of the mind's attention can be pointed anywhere, but how often is it consciously pointed where we wish it to be? That difference is one boundary line between conventional life and spiritual life.

One of my favorite stories concerns the sixteenth-century Japanese Buddhist master Ikkyu, who was the abbot of a famous Buddhist temple. One day, a wealthy patron paid him a visit and asked Ikkyu if he would create a calligraphy scroll for him. Obliging, Ikkyu took up paper and brush and rapidly wrote the single Chinese character for attention.

This was not quite what the patron had in mind. "Perhaps the Master will write something more?" he politely inquired.

Without a word, Ikkyu picked up the brush and wrote the same character again: "Attention!"

The patron was becoming annoyed. He was hoping to have an inspirational poem he could hang in the central alcove of his mansion to impress his visitors. "Surely the Master is not finished with his poem."

Equally annoyed, Ikkyu picked up the brush and in rapid succession wrote three times, "Attention! Attention! Attention!"

In a spiritual sense, attention is more than ordinary watching and listening, different from the concentration needed to do a crossword puzzle or thread a needle. Spiritual attention includes being attentive to what is *not* evident to your eyes and ears, being open to what has not yet been said, being aware of the edges of a situation. It works best when our focus is rather soft, like the quality of light at dusk. In twilight, we cannot see the sharp edges of things so clearly, but the *possibility* of what things might be, including what we ourselves can contribute to the situation, is stronger. That is why dusk is a time of magic and poetry, when the boundary between the inner and the outer world becomes soft. What is that rustling in the bushes? Is it a quail, or is it a bear? We can't see, so our imagination includes both possibilities.

This is why martial arts students are taught to cultivate a "soft gaze," in which they do not look directly at their opponent but at the space surrounding him. This seems odd when you first try it, but in fact it is the only way to see the whole picture. At the same time, just because this kind of attention is "soft" does not mean it is passive or disengaged. On the contrary, it is energized and focused.

Suppose you have arranged to meet your spouse or partner in the lobby of a downtown hotel but forgot to specify which entrance. You can't get in touch, so all you can do is go to the hotel and position yourself in a central location where you can see all the entrances and revolving doors.

Perhaps it is a special occasion, such as an anniversary dinner. So whether or not you meet matters a great deal. You know exactly what you are there to do and what you want to accomplish. But in order to have the best chance of spotting your loved one, you can't just stare fixedly at one door. You have to soften your gaze, moving your glance from door to door, to make sure you don't miss your mark. You have to open yourself up to multiple possibilities.

LETTING GO OF CONTROL

How can this approach be applied in the workplace?

William was a vice president of operations in a chain of women's apparel boutiques. His team was responsible for the day-to-day management of forty stores nationwide. Because of the firm's rapid growth, William's whole department lived under a daily cloud of impending crisis. There was always some kind of emergency at one of the stores, whether it was a shipment delay, a broken water main, a store manager's sudden resignation, or a street crew cutting the store's computer link to the home office.

William had attained his position because he was a problem solver who knew how to get things done. The most important part of his day was the morning staff meeting, at which he and his staff reviewed and prioritized the tasks for the day. These meetings were famous for their rapid pace and near-military terseness. The format was

always the same. A staff member would report a problem; after brief discussion, William would ratify the team's solution or propose one of his own. He would assign responsibility for the task and move on.

The firm's annual performance review included comments from subordinates. William had just had his review at the time I met him, and while his overall performance score was high, his subordinates criticized his management style, using such phrases as "doesn't listen," "imperious," "overly critical," "impatient with suggestions."

For several years, I had had a job similar to William's and had received some of the same criticisms. My temperament is quick and impatient, and verbally dominating. If I want to, I can usually get my way, but needless to say that mode is not the best for fostering teamwork. Over time, I tried to apply what I had learned from my Buddhist training and came up with the following steps:

1. When I was in a meeting or in conversation with an individual, whenever a good response or a solution came up, whether it was my own or someone else's, rather than immediately acting or speaking I instead visualized that response going "into the room," like a puff of smoke, and just let it stay there for a while.
2. If I felt the conversation drifting or becoming unproductive, rather than immediately acting to refocus it, I let it go. Sometimes I found it helpful to actually verbalize this intention: "Let it go, let it go." Other times I would invoke a self-mantra: "Waiting, waiting, waiting . . ."
3. If I felt an uncontrollable urge to speak, I tried to speak neutrally and say as little as possible. (This was hard!)
4. I watched and paid attention to whatever happened next.

Sometimes I found that it helped to "throw" my impatience into a physical object in the room, such as a vase of flowers or a piece of furniture. This worked better than biting my tongue! It gave my impatience a place to rest and gave me a safe place to focus my attention.

What I found is that often the direction in which I wanted to

move the conversation occurred whether I intervened in it or not. Because the energy of the solution was already in the room, it found a way to express itself. What's more, because I was not imposing my will as I used to do, the group had more of a sense that decisions were being arrived at by the group, not just me.

I also found the practice quite difficult, as did William, when he decided to try it. For impatient people like William and me, the experience of letting the situation take its own course can be excruciating. But whenever I could manage to do so, I felt a sense of satisfaction. Over time, my team began to pull together more and became less dependent on me.

At first, William's experience wasn't quite as positive as mine had been. For him, the main effect of his effort to practice Controlling by Paying Attention was that everything took longer. Often, when the time for his daily staff meeting was up, no one had come up with the solution he favored and he still had to impose it.

"What kinds of solutions did come up?"

"They weren't bad," William admitted. "But they usually weren't as good as mine. Most of those people just don't have my experience in how to solve these problems."

"Were they ever better than yours?" I asked.

"Sometimes," William admitted.

I asked him if he had tried "throwing" his solution into a physical object. William admitted that he found that idea bizarre and hadn't really felt comfortable trying it.

"Well, how about this," I said. "Whenever it occurs to you to say something, say it silently to yourself. See if the other people in the room can hear what you are saying."

William thought this was nearly as strange as "throwing" his thoughts into a vase of flowers, but he agreed to try it.

The next week, his report was more encouraging. Strangely enough, when he silently "shouted" at the group, there did seem, sometimes, to be a shift in the group's direction toward the solution he favored.

Controlling by Paying Attention is a method that depends on faith in our fellow human beings to be at their best, to know what

you know, to think what you think. Ultimately, this is not control as much as it is respect. William was already the boss in the situation. Everybody looked to him as the final decision maker. In other words, everyone was already paying attention to him! He just needed to pay more attention to them.

Deborah Tannen explored some of this ground in her bestselling book *You Just Don't Understand*. There she describes two different communication styles, one that sees conversation as a kind of competition and another that sees it more as collaboration. One feature of the competitive style of conversation is that the person will pay close attention to the tiny gaps in the conversation where he can interject or, in some cases, interrupt. A person using the collaborative style is more interested in drawing the other person out, in listening attentively.

Although these two styles are different, both require close attention. The competitive talker is watching for a place to interject, while the collaborative person pays receptive attention to the other person's words. William's style was more competitive, and that is why I suggested he try a more collaborative approach. For someone whose style is more collaborative to begin with, and whose main difficulty is getting a word in edgewise, some combination of the two may be the answer. Both methods subtly change the dynamic of the give-and-take in conversation. The collaborative style is closer in spirit to Controlling by Paying Attention, but some of the techniques we have mentioned, such as "shouting" silently, make use of the competitive style's energy. In either style, it is the attention itself that counts. Paying attention is a powerful energy. It only seems private and invisible to the person doing it. To others, it is a tangible force, whether they are consciously aware of it or not.

WAITING FOR THE RIGHT MOMENT

Controlling by Paying Attention is not only a communication style. It reflects an attitude of generosity and patience, and can be a way of teaching, of making a suggestion, and of giving feedback.

One of the hardest parts of being a manager is having to give criticism to your subordinates. Sometimes no matter what you do, the criticism is poorly received. No one likes to be criticized. Any criticism, even if skillfully given, may lead to resentment by the employee. After a while, many managers avoid giving criticism at all, although that isn't a good solution either.

There is a middle ground between withholding criticism and giving it, and that is to pay close attention to the situation without saying anything until the right moment. If someone working for you has a problem, closely observing that person is a far cry from not doing anything about it. The attention itself becomes a force for change, as well as a way to catch the best moment to intervene.

I first learned this by watching how Suzuki Roshi taught us. He didn't give much direct instruction and rarely criticized. Instead, he would observe someone for weeks without saying anything, until an opportune moment arose. Then he would say what he wanted to say. Because the moment was right, his words went right to the heart.

One summer at the monastery, it was my job to clean his cabin. Although we had ordinary mops, I wanted to clean things Japanese style, so I wiped his wood floor down every morning with a damp towel. He was usually nearby when I did this, sometimes in the cabin attending to other work, or sometimes just outside it, in his garden. I polished the floor with great diligence, and for more than two weeks he never said anything.

One morning, he came over and, without a word, took the towel from me, folded it in a long, narrow rectangle, got down on his hands and knees, and demonstrated drawing the towel in long, broad strokes up and down the floor. It was a much more efficient way to do the job. He could have shown me on the first day, but I think he wanted me to struggle on my own first. Though I wasn't aware of it, he had been observing me every day. That was what made his intervention so effective for me. It was not just that he showed me a different method for doing the task. He also demonstrated his concern for me. That was far more important than the towel.

There is a story about the poet-monk Ryokan, who lived in eighteenth-century Japan, that illustrates the same point. The dissolute

son of a prominent merchant in Ryokan's village had gotten into trouble and was the disgrace of the family. As a last resort, the merchant invited Ryokan to spend a few weeks in his home as his guest, in the hopes that Ryokan could do something to help the young man turn his life around.

Day after day went by, and to the merchant's dismay Ryokan appeared to do nothing at all. He hardly even spoke to the boy. Several times the merchant took Ryokan aside and implored him to say something to his son. Ryokan smiled and nodded, but more time passed and still he said nothing. Finally, on the day of Ryokan's departure, as he was standing in the vestibule putting on his traveling garments, the dissolute son came to the doorway and as his social duty bent down to tie the honored guest's straw sandals.

Suddenly, without knowing why, the young man looked up into Ryokan's face and saw a single tear glistening on Ryokan's cheek. The son realized that the tear was for him. After that, so the story goes, the son was a changed man. Looking up into Ryokan's face had transformed him. The merchant was overjoyed and sent Ryokan a letter of thanks with an expensive gift enclosed. "I don't know what you did," the merchant wrote, "but my son is a new person."

Ryokan returned the gift with a short note. "Thank you for your gift, which I cannot accept. I did nothing to change your son. Everything that has happened he accomplished himself."

Ryokan was not being modest, just truthful. We can imagine how the son must have felt during the two-week visit. He was no fool. He knew that this was another of his father's schemes to make him shape up. Every day he waited for the priest to scold him, to tell him he was no good the way his father did. But Ryokan said nothing. He just observed the young man closely, without criticizing or commenting. He trusted in the youth's good nature, his own emerging maturity.

Ryokan understood that if you watch closely enough, and trust enough, transformation unfolds in its own fashion. Would that modern workplaces were patient enough, and respectful enough, to allow us to grow in that way. Some workplaces are. Some managers instinctively understand these principles and enact them every day in their interactions with others.

Most people want to excel and do well. If we don't try to control them but let them soar like the kite on the end of a string, who knows what will happen?

PRACTICES FOR "CONTROL"

- When you feel compelled to say something in a meeting or a conversation, wait. See what happens if you simply watch and listen.
- When you feel you must criticize someone, first spend more time simply observing that person. Wait for an opportune moment.
- Can you find instances of Simultaneity and Interdependence in your work? Do you find echoes of your own thoughts and ideas in others' contributions? Can you build on these connections in a way that fosters teamwork and cooperation rather than competition?
- If you are a manager, can you use these principles to provide leadership and direction without "pulling rank"?