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## ● CHAPTER ONE

# FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

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Stop chasing happiness and start choosing happiness.

—Unknown

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**R**emember the last vacation you took and how you felt while you were getting ready to go? It was exciting! You were passionate and energized just by the thought of it. While you imagined the white sand beaches, the sun warming your skin, and the sound of the waves crashing, your workdays leading up to your departure went by faster, you worked harder, and you were happier.

Now let me ask if you ever felt this way about going to work. Most people answer no to this question. In fact, they look at me as if to say, “Are you nuts? Why would I feel this way about going to work?”

I remember feeling this negative about work myself, years ago when I worked for a manufacturing company in upstate New York. On a typical rainy, windy spring day, after dropping papers into a puddle and having my umbrella flip inside out, I trudged into the lobby, trying to sneak past our overly cheerful receptionist. But she caught me with her usual chipper greeting, “Good morning, Laurie! How are you this morning?” “I’m having



a bad day,” I muttered begrudgingly. In a dramatic gesture, she whipped her arm almost out of its socket to show her watch and exclaimed, “Wow, and it’s only 7 A.M.!” At this point, I wanted to leap across the counter and choke her. It hit me as I walked away that I was *choosing* to let this bother me. How I was acting and reacting was a choice. All of a sudden it was clear to me that I was making myself miserable. It was as if a fog had been wiped away from the mirror and I could see. I had a choice. I could choose to be positive or negative. Rather than letting my mind control me, I could focus my thoughts and attention where I wanted them to be. As the fog continued to clear, I began to realize the amount of freedom and self-control I was gaining!

### The Choice is Yours

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I am who I am today because of the choices I made yesterday.

—Eleanor Roosevelt

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Many of our experiences are based on the choices we make, either consciously or subconsciously. Our life is a reflection of our own beliefs and choices, and often we don’t even realize that we are making choices. Sadly, it usually takes tragedies, near-death experiences, getting fired, or other forms of loss to wake us up. When these life events happen, reality hits us so hard that it makes us aware of life and the choices we have. But do we really need that kind of shock treatment to wake us up? Experiencing a tragedy is also no guarantee that we will wake up and recognize our options and choices. Just imagine if we could become aware and see the value of making positive changes in our lives without first enduring that tragedy. We could realize our plight and potentially prevent negative repercussions, all by making different choices.



We can't always control what happens in life, but we can control the way we react to it. We can blame others or bad luck, or we can ask ourselves what we can learn from our experiences. We can use the faith we have in ourselves and other people to help us through. We can choose to live life to the fullest and do our best with the hand we're dealt. We can find humor in the situation and lighten up a little. Just making a choice to be grateful, appreciative, and happy will return joy to our lives, at work and at home.

I was reminded of this recently when my friend Mike was telling me about his first week at his new job. He previously worked in a physical job, as a mechanic, but switched careers to road construction. Mike's plan was to move up the ladder and become supervisor, but he wanted to start where everyone else did, on the road, laying pavement. Mike admitted that after the first couple of days on the job, he was pretty sore and honestly thinking, "Wow, this is really hard stuff!" He noticed an older man, who looked to be in his 60s, plugging away like the Energizer Bunny in the battery commercials. Mike eventually worked his way over to strike up a conversation with the man because he was curious as to how this guy did it. He complimented him in that tough construction guy sort of way: "Hey man, you've got to be pushing 60 or so, how do you have so much energy? I mean, really, why are you still here, still working?" The man's reply was shocking. He said, "Actually, I'm 82, and I can't wait to come to work every day. I love it. It keeps me young and alive!"

As Mike and his new coworker talked more and more, Mike discovered that this guy had figured out what he wanted from life, and he had built his life around that. He was genuinely positive and did not dwell on all the negatives. He chose to be happy, and you could see the payoff in his health, his attitude, and his productivity.

Of course, we're not all naturally like this. And the construction worker may not have always been that way, either. In fact, in my experience, a lot of people at some point in their lives need



help with choosing a positive attitude. And being positive at work can sometimes be very challenging. A lot of people suffer through each day, counting down the minutes, waiting and wishing their weekdays away for the weekend, for vacation, for anything other than the time they are spending at work. Considering how much time you spend at work, you're spending a lot of time choosing to be negative.

What if we were able to think about it differently? What if we could make some different choices? Perhaps we could become as positive as the 82-year-old Energizer Bunny. Since my 7 A.M. wake-up call on that rainy day in upstate New York, I have been on a path to continuously improve my own awareness and growth and to focus on being more positive. It has definitely entailed making different choices.

The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. Yet isn't that what we continually do? We repeat the same behavior and then complain when things aren't different. So if we took a different approach at work, shouldn't we be guaranteed to produce a different result?

I'm not suggesting a radical change. I'm talking about going back to some basics, tried-and-true principles that have been proven effective. Since change is inevitable, maybe we can play a role in how change unfolds, rather than just let it happen. It's like a farmer and his crops. He can plant seeds, leave them alone, and hope for the best, or he can weed, prune, and water his plants, and the farm will yield a robust crop.

There's no doubt we need a change, not only for our own health and happiness but also because today's organizations will have a difficult time surviving the current competitive marketplace, with its ever-changing technology and the pressure to do more with less. We need leaders who are intentional in developing the culture and the individuals therein. Being an intentional leader begins with knowing ourselves and staying true to ourselves. Then we can give authentically to others. Practicing GRIT<sup>®</sup>—generosity, respect, integrity, and truth—will



enable us to focus on the right issues, develop ourselves and our teams, and create more with less. We might not have much control over the direction of the marketplace, but we can make a big impact with the way we lead.

Once we become aware that we have a choice, we can begin to examine and change our beliefs, beginning with believing that we can make a positive impact. When we choose to cultivate the right mind-set with GRIT<sup>®</sup>, it is possible. Being able to visualize what it could be like and how it would feel propels us into action. However, without an open mind and a positive attitude, there will be no foundation to build upon.

Take a moment to visualize how it would feel if you couldn't wait to get to work. Think about it from the moment you wake up. What would your thoughts and feelings be? How would it affect what you did in the morning, how you interacted with your family, what you wore, how much time you gave yourself to get ready? Do you think you'd feel rushed and stressed, or relaxed and happy? And imagine that when you reach your workplace in the morning, you're greeted by coworkers who are genuinely happy to be there. They take the time to smile and say hello, and they really are interested when they say, "How are you today?" Everyone communicates openly and to the point, without holding back for fear of upsetting someone or rocking the boat. There are no triangulated conversations (full of he said, she said). And when people receive direct communication, they don't get defensive. They listen objectively, consider what is being said, and reply openly, immediately. They do not feel frustrated, angry, or defensive in any way. Everyone's goal is to understand each other, be as productive as possible, and have a good time. Even when they disagree, there is open communication: "I'm just not seeing it that way; can we talk about it a little more?" and the receiver of that message simply says, "Sure, when's a good time?" They continue to go about their business, without wasting time brooding over a misunderstanding. People are generally happy, productive, and completely engaged.



Sound impossible? Consider this: Would you agree that your thoughts about going on vacation are what get you energized and motivated, not necessarily the event itself? You haven't actually felt the warm sun on your skin or heard the sound of waves crashing on the beach, but just thinking about being there puts you in a good mood.

On the other hand, have you ever been excited about attending a New Year's Eve event, only to be disappointed when it didn't live up to your expectations? You had high hopes for the evening, only to be disappointed when it wasn't as fabulous as you imagined.

Think about how much your thoughts control your emotions and feelings. If our thoughts create the mood we're in, could we not change our thoughts about work? Some of you might be thinking, "Work is not at all like a vacation or a fun event, so how could I have positive thoughts about work? Won't I be setting myself up for disappointment, like the New Year's Eve example?" The reality is that just like anticipating New Year's Eve, we're not able to control what actually happens. But we can choose our attitude, how we react, and where to focus our attention.

Consider the aspects you do like about work. Maybe there are only one or two things. Perhaps what you do is having a positive impact on children, or maybe you enjoy helping certain teammates or customers. It could be as simple as appreciating that your upcoming vacation is made possible by this job, or it could be the overall flexibility you enjoy. What is your bigger purpose related to your job? You may not be in your dream job or have found your passion yet, but focusing on the positive aspects will help you get clear on your intentions for being in this position. Whether you love what you do or you're doing it to be able to do what you love, either way, you can choose to put your whole self into it. When you're clear on why you're in this job, you can accept that you chose this job, for whatever reason or motivation, and you can choose to be positive and enjoy it while you're here.



Now you may be thinking, “Okay, I’ve found *my* motivation and I’m being positive, but I can’t control all the other negativity around me.” Be honest with yourself and consider what, if anything, you might be doing to create, support, or enable the workplace negativity. Do you believe you have any role in it at all? Or is it someone else’s fault, like your boss, the team you’re on, the owner, or even the board?

This isn’t to say that it’s always you who needs to change. But if you are doing everything you can to be positive and productive, then it’s much clearer when it really is the environment that’s negative, not you. Sure, it can be frustrating when you’re in a negative environment—you can maintain your positive attitude for only so long. But you’ll be able to quickly discern this and make a change for yourself, rather than suffering through it, feeling helpless.

Following a formula for creating your own happiness at work simultaneously creates a healthier company. It’s a win–win for both employee and employer. The company can then make a bigger difference in its community, in its country, and, hey, maybe even a little difference in the world. The method is tried-and-true and was used by countless companies worldwide even before it got its name.

When combined and applied, the four elements of GRIT<sup>®</sup> (see Figure 1.1) free us to create a healthier, happier, and more productive experience for ourselves and for our workplace.

GRIT<sup>®</sup> is a mind-set that ensures you’re doing your best. Through GRIT<sup>®</sup>, we learn how to take a look at ourselves on a deeper level. We see that how we’re treating ourselves, what we’re doing and saying to ourselves, directly influences the way we are treating other people. GRIT<sup>®</sup> exercises our mental equipment to ensure that it’s in the best possible shape to properly overcome any challenge.

It’s similar to making sure your car is in tip-top shape so you’ll have the best adventure you can have. Your gas tank is full,



**Figure 1.1.** The Four Elements of GRIT®

your oil has been changed, and your tires are the right pressure. You're in alignment—you're fine-tuned and ready for anything! It's widely accepted that we need to spend time improving our physical being and even, to some degree, our intellect—but what about our mental and emotional being? If we leave just one element out, like not changing the oil, the car will eventually break down.

Many studies have linked illness to our mental state. In 2003, Gallup linked misery at work with unhappiness at home. In March 2010, *Science Daily* (2010) reported that chronic job stress and lack of physical activity are strongly associated with being overweight or obese. Elizabeth Heubeck of WebMD (2007) wrote that a toxic work atmosphere can lead to deteriorating health. Results from a GAZEL study (2012) indicate that “poor psychosocial working conditions are prospectively linked to reduced health functioning, in particular mental health functioning.” Showing a link to stress and our health is not saying that it's the only cause of any illness; if someone has cancer, it





doesn't mean it was definitely caused by stress. But it has been proven that stress can be at least a factor in causing or worsening illnesses. I've witnessed this firsthand in numerous clients over the years, and I'm sure most of you have had some experience with stress and illness.

Not only does our mental and emotional state impact our health but also it affects the way we participate in any relationship, professional or personal. It's difficult to successfully function in any relationship without knowing ourselves and having integrity by making the right choices to support what we want and need. Only then can we authentically give to any relationship.

With all the data and information we have, the question arises, why wouldn't people take care of their thoughts and better manage their thoughts? Perhaps it's too intangible to measure. Or they don't believe it's possible. Or they aren't yet aware that they can control their own stress. Or they don't have a way to do it.

It all starts with your relationship with yourself. GRIT<sup>®</sup> is the tool to fine-tune your mental equipment. So what do you think? Are you ready to explore GRIT<sup>®</sup>?

Before moving into the next four chapters on GRIT<sup>®</sup>, I recommend taking some time to reflect on the brief GRIT<sup>®</sup> assessment provided on the following pages (see Figure 1.2). We'll get more in-depth on the key areas in the coming chapters. This assessment is designed as a framework for understanding the GRIT<sup>®</sup> concepts and as a self-awareness tool.

Although there is scoring, it is meant for your personal development. Be as objective and honest as possible with yourself while answering. It's not a test. The GRIT<sup>®</sup> assessment will help you become more aware of yourself and where you are coming from. This will give you a starting point as we work through the book.

You can approach the interpretation of the assessment in two ways. After you've circled the number that best suits you for each phrase, you can just reflect on the statements and have a basic



TRUTH		
I control my thoughts.	5 4 3 2 1	My thoughts control me.
I know my natural strengths and challenges and I accept myself.	5 4 3 2 1	I'd rather not know what my strengths and challenges are.
I trust my intuition; I use it in decision making.	5 4 3 2 1	I would never rely on intuition; you have to have all the details and facts to decide.
I take time to be still and reflect; I consider myself very aware.	5 4 3 2 1	I don't have time to sit still; my mind is always busy.
I believe I'm supposed to be happy; it is my choice. I focus on the positive.	5 4 3 2 1	I don't believe happiness is a choice; some people are luckier than others.
I am clear on what's important to me to feel successful and authentic.	5 4 3 2 1	I don't really know what I want.
I know my values and priorities in life.	5 4 3 2 1	I justify "other" values when it's convenient; I'm not really sure what I believe in.
My past doesn't predict my future; I am who I choose to be.	5 4 3 2 1	There's not much I can do to change; I am who I am.
<b>Truth Total:</b>		

INTEGRITY		
I do what I say I'm going to do.	5 4 3 2 1	I often change appointments and have to cancel things.
I can confidently say no, without guilt.	5 4 3 2 1	I say yes to please others, even at my own expense; I don't feel like I can say no.
I am aware that my actions influence others.	5 4 3 2 1	My actions and words shouldn't affect others; people are responsible for themselves.
I take on what I can handle; I know my limits.	5 4 3 2 1	I take on more than I should but if I don't I don't advance in my career.
I don't hide truths from myself or people who are important to me.	5 4 3 2 1	I stretch the truth to impress, or I hide truths from people.
I have lots of energy and feel purposeful at work, and afterwards.	5 4 3 2 1	I feel stretched and overwhelmed at work; I dread Mondays.
I don't hold back saying what is important to say.	5 4 3 2 1	I refrain from saying a lot of things I probably should say, or I say way too much.
I keep focused on what's important and align my activities appropriately.	5 4 3 2 1	I'm so busy I feel like I can just barely handle what's coming at me.
<b>Integrity Total:</b>		

RESPECT		
I value my time and others' time equally.	5 4 3 2 1	It's hard enough to get my own stuff done; I can't think of other people's time.
I realize everyone has their own truth, and I don't know their whole story.	5 4 3 2 1	It's obvious what other people are thinking and feeling.
I adapt to effectively communicate with others.	5 4 3 2 1	I communicate consistently in my own style; people can take it or leave it.
I feel confident 'sitting at the table' with other successful people.	5 4 3 2 1	I feel 'not as good as' or 'better than' others.
I allow other people to have their own experiences; I respect their choices and opinions.	5 4 3 2 1	I jump in to help other people make decisions, and give my opinion and advice.
I can understand and empathize with different perceptions.	5 4 3 2 1	Most things are black and white; true or false.
I delegate all appropriate tasks and I feel good about it.	5 4 3 2 1	I can't delegate tasks because there's no one available or qualified.
I realize the things people do are not 'all about me.'	5 4 3 2 1	I feel people rarely consider me and my feelings.
<b>Respect Total:</b>		



GENEROSITY		
I have enough time to do the most important things.	5 4 3 2 1	I don't have enough time to get things done.
I feel good about where I am in my career, my relationship(s), my life.	5 4 3 2 1	I wish I were somewhere else, someone else, doing something else.
I am willing to set my tasks aside to help others, but not at the expense of myself.	5 4 3 2 1	I frequently jump in and help others and then resent it because I didn't get my own work done.
I am happy for others' success – there's enough to go around for everyone.	5 4 3 2 1	I feel jealous of others' success. I fear if they are successful then I can't be.
I feel good about being happy.	5 4 3 2 1	I feel guilty about being happy.
I look forward to going home at night and I have the energy for personal priorities.	5 4 3 2 1	I have no energy left at the end of the day for my personal interests or priorities.
I feel grateful for what I have; I'm content and satisfied.	5 4 3 2 1	I constantly want more; I often wish I had what I don't have.
I mindfully stay present and listen fully.	5 4 3 2 1	I check out while listening because I have a lot going on in my own world.
<b>Generosity Total:</b>		
<b>Grand Total:</b>		

Figure 1.2. GRIT<sup>®</sup> Self Assessment

awareness of your score. Or you can tally up your total score and read the suggestions for each total. Either way, you can use the assessment throughout your progress and keep rechecking yourself to hone in on areas you wish to improve. As you take the assessment, and as you venture through each chapter, remember to enjoy your journey.

### GRIT<sup>®</sup> Self-Awareness Assessment

- In selecting the number that is closest to your true statement, on the left or on the right, remember to be objective and honest with yourself. This is for your eyes only. It is not a test.
- When you find yourself saying, “It depends,” do your best to select the appropriate number for your most likely scenarios.

Because the purpose of this assessment is to provide a framework for GRIT<sup>®</sup> and for your own self-awareness, it's up to you how you'd like to interpret it. Here are a couple of suggestions:

- Simply scan your answers and be mindful of them as you read through the upcoming chapters.



- If you prefer to obtain a score, add each section and then add all four sections.

Each section pertains to a GRIT<sup>®</sup> concept, and you'll be able to see your highest and lowest scores. The lowest score per section is 8, and the highest is 40.

The lowest total assessment score is 32, and the highest total score is 160. Remember, this isn't a test: if you get the lowest score that doesn't mean you failed. Recognizing and accepting where you are, without judgment, is the first step toward self-improvement.

### **Total Score Suggestions**

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- 32–70 As you probably realized while taking the assessment, your GRIT<sup>®</sup> may be a bit out of alignment, and that's okay. In fact, it's great because you now have the tool you need to increase your GRIT<sup>®</sup>—this book! Congratulations for taking the first step. As you are reading through the upcoming chapters, continue to practice being aware without judging yourself. As you notice an emotion or a resistance, just notice it. Accept it. Practice being as open as possible, while also questioning things. If you find that difficult, reread Chapter 1 and skip to Chapter 6. Then go back to Chapters 2 through 5.
- 71–121 You may have noticed that some areas were higher for you and some were lower. Since you're right in the middle of the road, pick a few areas that you feel would benefit you the most, and begin by focusing on those areas. As you read through the upcoming chapters, continue to be aware of those areas, and notice if there's any resistance. Continue to question while balancing that healthy skepticism
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with being open to consider other ways. As you increase your GRIT<sup>®</sup> in the focus areas that you initially chose, you can retake the assessment to see your improvement and then refocus on other areas to continue your development.

- 122–160 If you scored in this category, then you're most likely already living with GRIT<sup>®</sup>, and most likely leading that way, too. Because you scored here, you probably agree that there's always room for improvement. As you reflect over your assessment, be aware of any areas in which you scored lower than a 3, and as you read the upcoming chapters, continue to reflect on these areas, especially as you consider your leadership role.
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No matter what your score, the goal here is to provide a framework and an awareness that leads to development of your leadership skills. Don't be too hard on yourself. Enjoy the journey and have fun as you work your way through this book.

Each of Chapters 2 through 12 contains a reflection called SHIFT at the end. As you are completing this reflection exercise, take a moment to come back to this assessment. Feel free to adjust any of your selections if you feel differently. Reviewing the assessment may help you hone in on an area of focus for you.

And remember, make it a conscious choice to enjoy your journey!

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