

# Confidence Building Action Plan

## CONFIDENCE FLYWHEEL ACCELERATING BELIEFS



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# CONFIDENCE BUILDING ACTION PLAN

This workbook is designed to help you build the momentum of Confidence from wherever you are starting.

## WHERE DO I START?

Pick one area you would like to build first: *Resilience, Able, Courage, or Esteem*. Once you make progress in that area, choose the next one you want to build. Focusing your learning on one area at a time will help you move forward more quickly than trying to move several forward at once.

## STILL DON'T KNOW?

If you don't where to begin, take 5 minutes to complete the [Confidence Self-Assessment Quiz](#). It will help you decide where to begin.

## RESILIENCE

Resilience is bouncing back after a setback. Often it's a conscious choice, and when you practice it consciously for long enough, it can become a habit. It's like a muscle you can build with repetition.

**Here is the secret few people understand**—when you practice resilience over and over, it becomes your habit. Once it becomes a habit, you've transformed your resilience into Confidence. Confidence is simply a habit of thinking and being that you can build through practice. The keys to confidence have been in your pocket all along. Rock on, my friend!

## BACKGROUND

Practicing *Resilience* is a choice each of us gets to make every time something happens that we didn't expect. Most of us have several opportunities every day to build our *Resilience* muscles.

*Resilience* can be:

- Bouncing back from bad news—getting back in the game instead of giving up.
- Choosing to divert your attention toward something you like when you notice yourself obsessing about something negative.
- Redirecting a conversation that's gone off the rails toward a more productive track.
- Reframing a failure into something you gained, like asking a question, "What did I learn that I can carry forward?"

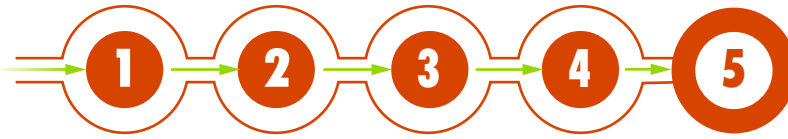
The options for how to practice *Resilience* are endless.

You have practiced *Resilience* many times, but if you'd like to build the muscle further, it's a matter of training yourself into a new habit.

Use the following five action steps to build your *Resilience*.



## PUTTING IT IN ACTION



- 1 Get specific.
- 2 Describe the small change you will make.
- 3 Describe the trigger.
- 4 Complete this commitment to yourself.
- 5 Track your progress.

### 1. Get specific.

*Resilience* is a choice you make in a specific moment in time to make a different move or have a different thought. You will have faster success when you pick a specific area of your life where you want to build resilience. Choose an area where practicing Resilience is achievable rather than picking the most difficult situation in your life. This is about building a new habit. Once you're better at the habit, you might want to start practicing in a more challenging situation.

The specific situation I want to practice greater *Resilience* is:

### 2. Describe the small change you will make.

What is the old habit you will replace with the new resilient habit?

When I think/act like this (old habit)

I will replace it with a more resilient thought/action like this (new habit)

### 3. Describe the trigger.

What would trigger you to react with the old habit?

Triggers include:

- Comments or actions of others.
- Events when the old behavior often occurs.
- A time of day or night when the old habit is likely to pop up.
- Locations that elicit old habits, like something you do every time you walk into your office or get into your car
- Something that reminds you consciously or unconsciously of an old, negative experience when the old habit was useful, like when your boss's comments trigger a negative memory of how your dad criticized you as a kid.

### 4. Complete this commitment to yourself.

To build my *Resilience*, I will consciously choose to replace my old habit with my new, *Resilient Habit*.

When I am triggered by: *(from Question 3)*

My old habit was to react by: *(Old Habit)*

Instead, I will choose in that moment to: *(Resilient Habit)*

## 5. Track your progress for this commitment.

At the close of each day, write down:

- How many times was I triggered: \_\_\_\_\_
- How many times I chose the *Resilient* thought or action: \_\_\_\_\_

The trick to creating a more *Resilient Habit* is to identify the specific trigger that caused the old behavior and choose in advance a more *Resilient* action you will take, instead. It's even better if you practice the new habit regularly when you're **not** triggered. This helps you build a body memory of the *Resilient Habit* so you can call on it more easily when you've been knocked down.

It is difficult to stop an old habit cold turkey, but is much easier to actively replace an old habit with a new habit over time. **The trigger will remain the same. The habit will change.**

Some people benefit from making their commitment publicly to one or more people they trust and who support them. Sharing your commitment to people you trust helps you follow through.

## ABLE

*Able* is a belief in your capabilities in a specific skill area that matters to you. It needs to matter to you for it to be worth investing in. For example, I can't fly a plane, but flying a plane isn't important to me, so it doesn't hurt my confidence that I don't believe in my capability to fly.

## BACKGROUND

When you feel *Able*, you engage, you join in. You say, "I can." When you don't feel *Able*, you hold back and avoid interaction with others. You don't bring forward your best, which further reinforces your lack of belief.

When you don't believe you are *Able*, an effective move to make is to reframe the situation from "I can't do that" to "I can't do that, YET." This shifts you from a dead end where the game is over to a learning endeavor where you have choices. In other words, it puts the power into your hands.

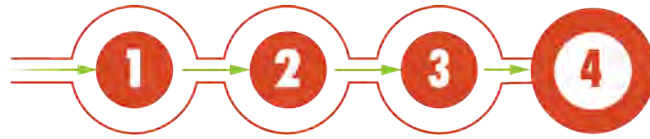
**Beware:** *Able* is about a belief in your abilities.

Some people actually have the abilities already. Gaining more skills still doesn't make them believe they are able. If this is true for you, the area to focus on may be *Esteem*. One strategy of people who lack *Esteem* is to keep piling up degrees and further education hoping they will one day believe in their abilities. If you've tried this strategy and you still don't feel *Able*, jump forward to the *Esteem* area of this action plan. It will be more useful.

Use the following four action steps to build your belief in your abilities.



## PUTTING IT IN ACTION



- 1 Identify what it is I don't know.
- 2 How can I learn those critical things I've identified I cannot do?
- 3 Which of these resources will I leverage?  
How will I leverage them?
- 4 What is my learning action plan?

Now that you've reframed your challenge into a learning task, the productive steps to follow are to engage as a student with a learning goal.

### 1. Identify what it is I don't know.

The critical things I don't understand are:

The critical things I do not know how to do are:

The critical things I understand how to do, but cannot do are:

Note the word "critical" in each statement. Focus on the critical things you want to learn to be able to do what you need to do. If you have a curious mind, you may identify more things you want to learn. While those are probably worth learning, do not include them if they will not help you get to "I can" for this specific topic. Taking small bites in a narrow area will speed your progress.



## **2. How can I learn those critical things I've identified I cannot do?**

What resources do you have available? (i.e., people, training programs, written materials, activities, practice)

## **3. Which of these resources will I leverage? How will I leverage them?**

## **4. What is my learning action plan?**

Specifically, a learning plan will identify:

- a. What you want to learn.
- b. Why you want to learn it. *It's helpful to remind yourself of your motivation, as it will carry you through challenging times.*
- c. How you will learn it.
- d. What actions you will take, including when and how you will take them.
- e. By when will you complete this learning action plan.

I encourage you to answer each question, a – e. Research consistently proves that the more specific you are about the details of your learning plan, the greater the likelihood of your successful completion of the plan.

Commit to the specifics of your learning plan. You'll execute it with more success and see quicker and better results.

Some people benefit from making this commitment publicly to at least one or more people they trust and who support them. Sharing your commitment to people you trust helps you follow through.

## COURAGE

*Courage* is a belief in a bigger reason—something bigger than just you. Some people call their bigger reason a cause or a purpose.

### BACKGROUND

When you feel connected to a bigger reason, you are inspired to take actions and make moves you wouldn't have before. Every person feels fear at different times. *Courage* is the power within you that helps you move beyond the fear. Fear will still exist, but it won't hold you back if the courage you feel is stronger.

Fear is natural and helpful if you're in real danger, but excessive fear or fear about things that aren't really a threat can shut down your confidence and your momentum. For many people, fear shows up in ways that aren't as obvious:

- **Anxiety.** A fear about something that MIGHT go wrong. It is generated in our minds, not by reality. But our neurological system processes anxiety in the only way it can: as fear. We still have a fight, flight, and freeze response that shuts us down, even though there is no danger.
- **Procrastination.** Many times we procrastinate because we are afraid to take the action we need to take, say, or do that would be the best for us or for others. Even though it looks nothing like fear, the root of procrastination is often fear.
- **Making excuses.** When we make excuses, we're avoiding having to try something that may be difficult and scary. Again, it kills our momentum. It's fear disguised as reasonable caution.
- **Inertia.** Avoiding change to avoid the discomfort of having to change.

You're going to experience fear. Don't waste your time trying to avoid being afraid. Instead, cultivate your *Courage*, a force stronger than fear. As you generate more *Courage*, the fear will have less power over you.



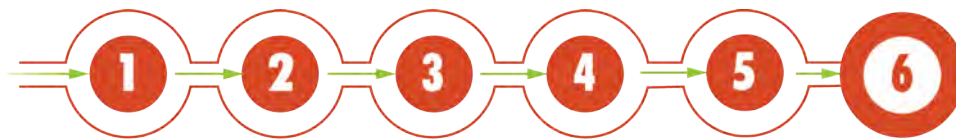
As you become connected to a bigger reason, you'll notice that you find an inner inspiration to do (or not do) what you used to avoid (what you used to do). This connection to your bigger reason produces a sense of direction and drive within you that causes you to make new moves and stop old, unproductive moves because you know this new way of behaving will move you closer toward your bigger reason.

A bigger reason doesn't need to be highly dramatic, like a firefighter who has the courage to run into a burning building. A parent who is committed to the best for his or her child is connected to a bigger reason. A customer service representative who is committed to providing great service to customers is committed to a bigger reason.

The "bigger reasons" that inspire us usually fall into a few categories:

- Building personal power
- Empowerment of others
- Love of self and others
- Service to a cause, a belief, or other people
- Fun, enjoyment, feeling good for yourself and others

## PUTTING IT IN ACTION



- 1 Personal Power
- 2 Empowerment of Others
- 3 Love
- 4 Service
- 5 Fun, Enjoyment, Feeling Good
- 6 Declare

Answer the questions below to help you identify bigger reasons that will help you generate or grow your courage. Not all questions below will apply to you, but answer thoughtfully when it does apply. Pay attention to yourself as you answer. *Courage* is as much a "feeling" as it is a logical thought process. If you "feel" something amp up within you as you answer a question—you might call it inspiration, excitement, juice,

enthusiasm, or just an energy surge—this could help you identify the bigger reason(s) you want to commit to. We usually feel that surge when we're thinking about our bigger reasons.

## PERSONAL POWER

What big accomplishments do you regularly wish to achieve that you would be extremely happy or excited to accomplish?

Who is the ultimate version of yourself that you'd like to become? Describe the ideal you.

When do you feel the most alive, the most enthusiastic? What are the circumstances—people, location, activity, environment, etc.—that elicit these feelings in you?

What do you love learning or improving at?

What is your best dream for yourself?

## EMPOWERMENT OF OTHERS

What people or causes would you like to operate at their full power, feeling strong, capable, and supported?

For whom or what would you be willing to sacrifice many important things in order to help them achieve their goals, live their dreams, change their world?

## LOVE

What or whom do you love greatly that inspires you to be your best?

What or whom do you care deeply about that you would protect or uplift under any circumstances?

What or whom do you value above all else?

## SERVICE

What person, cause, group of people, or idea would you serve gladly, with great enthusiasm and dedication?

What person, cause, group of people, or idea do you often think about ways you could help?

To what person, cause, group of people, or idea would you gladly give your time, talent and/or your money to help them be more successful or happier?

## FUN, ENJOYMENT, FEELING GOOD

What or whom makes you happier than anything?

What is your favorite way to live?

What is the most meaningful thing in your life that you'd like even more of?

What thought gets you to jump out of bed in the morning because you can't wait to get to it?

Review your responses from these last few pages. These are all clues that can help you build a stronger connection with your bigger reasons.

- Look for common themes where you gave the same or similar answers to different questions.
- Pay attention to where you just felt the most alive or the most enthused when you wrote down your comments.
- You may not be able to give logical reasons for why you connect to something, but courage is usually not a reasonable thing. If it were, nothing in the world would ever change.

You may want to discuss this with someone who you trust deeply and who knows you well to help you refine this and make sure it's true to you.

Now, take these personal insights and turn it into action.

## DECLARE

*Declare* a bigger reason that you are committing yourself to, no matter what.

The bigger reason I am committing myself to is:

You may want to describe a specific goal or outcome you're committing to. Describe it in detail with

- who/for whom,
- what,
- where,
- why,
- how, and
- by when will this happen?

If you would like to really deepen your commitment, share your commitment with people you trust and who support you. Stick your neck out in front of others.

Because *Courage* is not a logical thing, rather than just describe your bigger reason in words, you may also want to draw a picture or create some visual representation of it or even choose a hero or an icon that inspires it.

## ESTEEM

*Esteem* is a belief in your value as a person in the world, not because of what you do for others or the actions you take, but simply because you are a person who is valuable. When you have *Esteem*, there is nothing you need to prove or achieve. You just know that you're valuable simply because you're here. That's *Esteem*.

## BACKGROUND

Most people have moments of doubt about their personal value. Some people almost constantly doubt their value. In my work, I see people regularly taking actions to compensate for their *perceived* lack of value or to hide it so that others won't notice it.

Most people who experience this doubt are not aware that their doubt is mostly a habit of thinking. They learned this habit of thinking earlier in life, and it probably was useful in some way at that time. The old habit has become the dominant habit. To build their esteem, they need to learn to change their habits of thinking. There are many ways you can change this habit, and I'll share one useful method in the *Putting It in Action* section.



## CRITICAL VOICES A.K.A. TRASH TALK

Often, these habits of thought show up as self-critical voices—the inner dialogue we have with ourselves about how we're not measuring up to some standards—not enough money, poor results, too much weight, not a big enough job title, not attractive, not smart enough. This list could go on forever. I call these comments “trash talk.” If it gives you comfort to know it, I've said every one on this list to myself at some point. In fact, I was really, really good at trash talking myself. I could have won an Olympic gold medal for it.

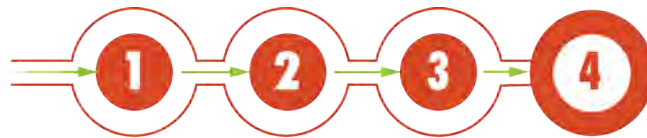
You can begin to quiet these critical, trash-talking voices and create a new habit.



*Esteem* is a sensitive topic for some people, so I want to treat it respectfully. Please know two things:

1. This is just one approach. The approach I'll share below is not the only way to build your esteem, but it has proven effective for many people. There are other very effective approaches you may prefer.
2. Be responsible and smart. *This activity is in no way a replacement for any sort of therapy or counseling.* If you're working with a therapist, I recommend you consult with them before doing this exercise to make sure it fits well with the work you're already doing. This is a simple mindfulness practice like people have been using for thousands of years, and it works well. However, I don't know you or your needs as well as you or your therapist do so please take responsibility for yourself.

## PUTTING IT IN ACTION



- 1 Make a List – Data Collection Phase
- 2 Identify Themes – Categorizing Phase
- 3 Practice Recognizing the Themes – Awareness Phase
- 4 Turn the Voice in a New Direction – “New Habit” Phase

Follow these steps to help you begin to tame your self-critical, trash-talking voices. Eventually, you can replace the trash-talking voice with a more positive, empowering voice. Step by step.

Remember, you're replacing an old familiar habit of thinking with a new one, nothing more.

Surprisingly, letting go of our trash-talking voices can create inner resistance. Change can be challenging, even when we want the change. If you think you might lose momentum in this process, I encourage you to find a buddy who will help you hold yourself accountable. It is even better if they're also doing the activities at the same time as you, so you can hold each other accountable.

Make it fun. Setting yourself free doesn't have to be serious work!

**Complete each step fully before proceeding to the next.** Being thorough is much more important than being fast if you want this to be effective. Old habits can run deep, and quick fixes usually don't stick as well as thorough practice.

This process, done well, could take you several weeks. As soon as you heighten your awareness, you may notice small shifts, but switching one strong habit to a new one can take time.

## STEP 1: MAKE A LIST – DATA COLLECTION PHASE

In a central place like a notebook or a file on your computer or smart phone, begin to make a list of the self-critical things you say about yourself to yourself. You may say some of them out loud to others, also. Capture at least 30 separate trash-talk comments you make before you go to step two.

**Critical instruction:** Capture the trash-talk comments verbatim or as close to verbatim as possible. The more specific you are with your notes, the more effective you will be. The higher quality (verbatim) comments and the more (minimum of 30) you write down the easier and more fruitful the next three steps will be. It's ok if several of your comments are similar to one another. That's quite common.

For example, write down on your list the verbatim of "I always screw this up. Geez! Why can't I get this right?" instead of writing the general description of "I talked to myself about not getting things right." You want to start hearing and seeing the actual words you use so that you can build your awareness. Specificity is your friend at this stage.

This first step is intended to heighten your awareness to pay attention to the things you say to yourself. Many people have been saying critical things to themselves for so long that it's like the background music in a movie. It's affecting the way they feel, but just like the movie music they don't even notice it playing in the background. Becoming very aware of it is helpful.

Simply paying attention to your inner dialogue by writing it down can be useful. It builds your awareness of yourself, and self-awareness is an extremely powerful tool.

## STEP 2: IDENTIFY THEMES – CATEGORIZING PHASE

AFTER YOU'VE CAPTURED YOUR 30 COMMENTS MINIMUM, look over your list to identify themes or trends that connect several comments. For example, perhaps several comments are about your abilities to get work done, a few other comments are about your body or how attractive you are, another cluster of comments is about how you compare to someone else, etc.

To help you along, here are three very common themes that most people find.

1. **Not great.** Trash-talk comments that tell you that you are not great, inferior, not good enough, inadequate, etc. I call it the “I suck!” voice. If you’re human, you probably have some version of this voice talking to yourself.
2. **Not you.** Comments that compare you positively or negatively to other people. I call it the “Compare me” voice. “I’m not as fast at John at X.” “I hate doing this with Mary because she always makes me look stupid.”
3. **Not done.** Comments that tell you that you have so much to do and you’ll never get it done. “I feel like I’m walking through mud.” “Oh geez, will this ever end? I’m never going to get this done.”

You may find other themes outside of these three, so please identify the ones you find on your list.

Two of my goals for you in Step 2 are to know:

1. **You’re not alone.** Become aware that your trash-talk comments are very common. Many people believe the nagging voices in their head are unique to them and that there is something wrong with them. Actually, self-critical voices are so common that I’m able to identify three common themes that your voices fall into without even knowing you. In fact, the source I draw these ideas from is over 1000 years old. Humans have been dealing with this stuff for a very long time.
2. **There aren’t as many voices as you thought.** Some people feel overwhelmed by the idea of changing all of the trash-talk voices in their head to something more positive. They believe there are so many that it would take them years to do so. However, once you start to identify the main themes your voices fall into, there are usually five or fewer themes. When you hear the “theme,” you can use the same new move each time. You won’t need a new voice to replace every single voice, simply one new voice per theme. So

instead of changing thousands of voices, you only need to change a few themes.

Make a list of your main themes below. Feel free to use the descriptions I shared above or give them your own labels.

My main trash-talking themes are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

### STEP 3: PRACTICE RECOGNIZING THE THEMES – AWARENESS PHASE

For the next few weeks, practice recognizing the themes you identified as they show up. Focus will make this go more quickly. Therefore, pick only ONE theme that you will be on the lookout for and ignore the other themes for now. Every time you hear a voice in your head that fits into that theme category, make note of it to yourself. “Ok, there is the ‘I suck’ voice again.” Some people even like to keep score of how many times they’ve successfully identified one of their theme voices. Making it a game keeps it fun.

The goal is to heighten your awareness so you begin to notice how often and in what ways you express this theme in your head. Don’t worry. You’ll still be able to function fully. It’s not a huge distraction. In fact, some people report that they become more focused when they’re doing this step.

It’s easy to get serious about all of these trash-talking voices in your head and start to get down on yourself. I encourage you to try to laugh about it, like you’re watching something ridiculous happening. Or just stay neutral about it, like you’re a scientist observing your experiment.

If you get mad about how many times you say negative things to yourself, then you're being critical of your critical voice. How funny is that? Keep it light and just observe.

When you begin to notice that the voices in your head don't "grab" you as much as they used to, you can proceed to Step 4. But give yourself some time with Step 3 to get really good at identifying your voices when they pop up. Until you can do that well, Step 4 won't provide as much value. Keep practicing so that you can quickly identify the types of voices and what do to do with them

Repeat it. Once you have become good at regularly spotting one theme when it shows up as a voice in your head, you might want to pick a new theme and repeat the process of Step 3.

#### STEP 4: TURN THE VOICE IN A NEW DIRECTION – "NEW HABIT" PHASE

For each theme that you identified in Step 2, you'll want to create a more positive statement that you'd rather say about yourself instead.

**Caution:** I do not advise you to choose a replacement statement that's the exact opposite statement of the theme you identified in Step 2. That's why I choose the word "turn" instead of "turnaround" for this step. Eventually, you may get to the exact opposite place that you are now, but doing this slowly and subtly will be more effective.

*Remember Newton's Third Law:* for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Metaphorically speaking, our thinking can behave the same way. When you push against your trash-talk theme with a thought that is exactly the opposite, you create a pushing match between the old voice and the new voice.

Instead, I recommend you make subtle shifts. First start with comments that are more positive and empowered than the original voice, but not so diametrically opposed to the original statement that it sounds impossible and makes you doubt that it's actually true.

In the Confidence video, I gave the example of the young man I mentored who changed his trash-talking voice from "I'm dumb" to "I'm smart." But he took some time to get there. He couldn't go straight to the opposite of "I'm dumb" immediately, because it was just too radical an idea for him to accept. If someone had suggested he start saying, "I'm smart" immediately, it probably would have failed. He took three small steps:

1. From "I'm dumb" to "Maybe I'm not dumb."
2. From "Maybe I'm not dumb" to "Maybe I'm smart."
3. From "Maybe I'm smart" to "I am smart."

Each small step was believable from his previous step. It is possible for some people to stretch quickly in a single step, but I find more people have long-term success with the small, step-by-step approach.

For each theme of trash talk you'd like to rewrite, use this process:

What is the theme of trash talk that you'd like to rewrite a new habit for?

If you had no trash talk, what would you say about yourself instead? Imagine that you'd rewritten the comments you make to yourself. What would the ideal thing you'd say about yourself be?

*(If you can't think of anything positive to say instead of your trash talk, walk away and come back. If you still can't, I suggest you call a trusted friend and ask them for help with a positive answer.)*

If getting to this statement is out of reach today, don't force it. What is a statement that feels better than your trash-talk theme, even though it's not as positive as your ideal?

## Take Small Bites

Set some interim goals for yourself along the way to getting to your ideal comments. For example, step A might be to simply become aware of the trash-talk voice and know that it's not always right. Step B might be to be able to question the trash-talk voice when it does arise, "Ok, I hear you, but I know it might not be true." Step C could be to consciously take a different action when you hear the trash-talk voice, like stand up and walk for a minute or go drink a glass of water to break the flow of the voice. Simply diverting your attention can stop the trash talk from droning on and on as it might usually do. Step D—eventually, you can work your way up to inserting the positive statement.

Take your time. If you push too hard too fast, you'll likely create friction for yourself. You'll resist your own positive change, as strange as that might sound. Slow and steady is usually the most productive path.

## From the End, Look Back to the Beginning

Now, look back at where you began with the trash-talking theme a few weeks ago. Does your original trash-talking voice sound a little bit strange? Can you recognize that it's being overly harsh? Does it grab you less than it used to?

If you can say yes to any of these, even if the change is slight, you're making progress. You can draw on these steps whenever you hear your trash-talking voices get too loud.

Once you've made progress with one theme of your trash-talk voices, you may want to repeat steps 1–4 for another theme.

Thank you for letting me share these ideas with you about generating *Resilience, Able, Courage* and *Esteem*. Building these can truly transform you and your enjoyment of life.

David Martin is a leadership expert and business mentor who helps clients have the great impact they envision by leveraging their powerful qualities of Presence, Influence, Confidence and Trust. Clients not only boost their impact at work, they experience greater empowerment and satisfaction for themselves and the people they work with. David has advised and coached clients at companies like Procter & Gamble, Capital One, Sprint, Quaker, GlaxoSmithKline, Abbott Labs, McGraw-Hill Education, Hewitt Associates, Omni Hotels, AARP and City Harvest. He also created programs like Presence to Lead, Leaders Building Leaders, Launch and the Power School.

