

BILL GATES, *MICROSOFT*

“

WHEN PEOPLE GO TO WORK, IT'S
IMPORTANT THAT THEY BE CONNECTED TO
A DREAM.

Dreams

DREAMS

Be a good one. How does feel relate to being good at something? When I visited Doug's lecture that first night, and he asked how did I want to feel, I couldn't answer the question. No one, not my mother, not my father, none of my teachers or employers have ever asked me that question. I couldn't sleep that night. It took me, in fact, eighteen months and about 40 drafts to come up with what I thought was a for-the-moment satisfactory answer: light, unhurried and engaged.

I got that after tearing my right rotator cuff playing basketball. I had the surgery, but still had a full professional slate including two professional conference talks in California, one in the LA area and one in San Francisco. So ten days after surgery with the staples still in, I flew to LA. My wife came along to help me up and down and to help shlep the bags. The LA talk went fine, to a packed house actually. Then we rented a car and drove up Highway 1 to San Francisco. We played word games along the way to pass the time and enjoyed the beauty of scenic California. We visited Susan's brother in Atascadero and then drove up to the City.

I was unaware of how, if at all, my body was compensating for the staples, the sling, and the cuts by hunching and leaning. We arrived at the hotel, parked in the underground lot, pulled our wheelies into the hallway, up the elevator and into the room. Susan was in the bathroom and I bent over to take off my shoes, one-handed, and as I did, I felt every vertebra in



my back go “pop, pop, pop, pop, pop” all the way up as my back muscles seized harshly. It was excruciating. I cried out and was immediately in a fetal ball on the bed.

We were supposed to go out that night with my mentor, Tony Athos, a man whose initials are tattooed on my wrist. I couldn’t move. Susan undressed me, fed me Advil, and tucked me in, still in the fetal ball. Tony brought Chinese in and we talked about how absurd this all was. It was also the day we were supposed to take the staples out. Susan had the tool, and so with Tony supervising, she pulled the 23 staples from my shoulder.

The next day the hotel rented a portable elevator (they have such things), Susan dressed me, we got a wheelchair, and I was wheeled downstairs and up onto the stage, still unable to stand at all. I was sitting there in front of a thousand people, looking at my wheel-chaired image on the fifteen foot screens spread throughout the audience, thinking, “there’s something wrong with this picture.”

I liked being on stage, I liked giving talks, I liked in some small way helping people find themselves through my teaching, writing, and professional activities. Sitting in a wheelchair, staring into the glare of the lights, I knew this was wrong.

We had to cancel the rest of our post-work vacation and wheel me home. I learned for the first time about the handicapped world and the paths one has to take to travel in it. It’s inconvenient, inefficient, time consuming, and left me with a sadness born of dependency.

Finally home, I cleared my calendar for the next six months. Canceled all my appointments. Susan had a lot to do with that. She scolded me for not slowing down, for not paying attention to my body, for not, basically paying attention to how I felt. I had fifty years of experience focusing on what I did. I believed that what you love is what you do. I remember my mom’s voice teaching me, sternly sometimes, “You do the job. You do the

job right. It doesn't matter how you feel. Just do the job." Push through. You can conquer pain, sleeplessness, fatigue, boredom, anger, depression, anything. Just push through.

I discovered there are limits. It's poignant for me writing this. I'm on an airplane on a 15 hour trip from Dubai to the U.S. Last year, I tore my left rotator cuff in taekwondo, holding a large pad (improperly it turns out) for a flying, jumping, kicking ten-year-old. My shoulder hurts like hell every day now. I've slept for eight hours already (unusual for me on planes), and I'm "awake." I could nap more, but I'm awake and I owe Doug and the process this chapter. Besides, I like writing, I'm describing this event from ten years ago and in some ways, habitually, reliving it live.

Anyway, I cleared my calendar and worked on the third edition of my book, *Level Three Leadership*. The book just tumbled out of me. Every day, I awoke, did my rehab and exercise, wrote, and rested. My back released. My mind released. I felt calm and peaceful, but alive and engaged. Looking back on that experience six months later, I realized that THAT was it. *Light, unhurried and engaged.*

When I over commit as I'm wont to do I feel heavy. I tend to stress and eat more and get heavy. When I over commit, I get hurried and feel like a chicken with my head cut off running around in circles. Yet lying on the couch eating chips and watching TV doesn't do it for me. I love this feeling of being light, unhurried, and engaged. More and more, I've realized now, I also like to be connected to others, not just alone in my "productivity."

SO, light, unhurried, engaged and connected. That's how I want to feel. The definition did not come easy. The implementation even less so. I had 50 years of habits teaching me physically, emotionally, and intellectually to do more, to produce, to be "results-oriented." It IS, after all, a "results-oriented" world. Thing is, when I focus *first* on "light, unhurried, engaged,

and connected” I produce more and with much higher quality. High performance begins with an internal dream. See Figure 9.1.

Focusing on feel has required an intentional, inside-out effort to manage my habits and tendencies. Some of those are genetic — I come from four generations of alcoholics and I have a tendency to obsess a little. So, I’ve printed my “internal life’s dream,” how I want to feel, on my checks. Every time I write a check it reminds me to focus on *feel* first. I sometimes post it in my bathroom on the mirror, to remind me, think about *feel* first and the to-do list later.

This effort has had a profound effect on my life. I’m much more cheerful, much more upbeat, much more “in control” of my life than I was before. Sure, I have relapses, and days go by when I forget. More and more I think about how I want to feel and manage my days to suit. I’ve come to feel I’m living my life, not some mythical life that someone else — mom, dad, god, dean, client — wants me to live.

It may seem odd, but I had a moment of pride just this past week. I’d given a two-day seminar. This requires me to facilitate, guide, and sustain high energy for a room full of 50 people for eight hours a day. Usually by

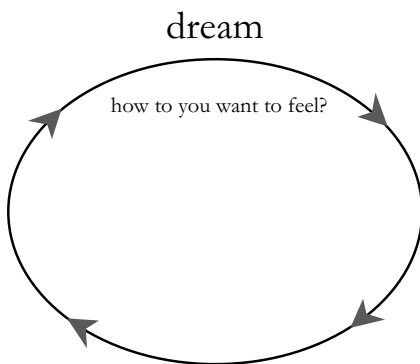


Figure 9.1. High performance begins with an internal dream

the end of the day, I need to rest. On this day, the seminar went really well. Our hosts decided last minute contrary to previous plans to have a dinner that night in my honor. They'd also arranged a tour of their local facilities. The tour began immediately after the graduation exercises. I was exhausted. My knees were beginning to hurt more and more (from the bi-lateral quadriceps tendon ruptures I'd suffered a year ago), and I could hardly stay awake. The tour was to last 30 minutes. It took us an hour just to get to the plant. It was pitch black and you couldn't see anything. My host didn't want to drive back into town and then home an hour each way, so he transferred me into another car with a driver who barely spoke English and sent me on my way. An hour later, not quite yet to the hotel, I was a basket case and my knees hurt like crazy.

The old me would have ignored all of this, sucked it up and gone out to dinner 20 minutes later. Instead, I took a huge risk. I called my contact and apologized and begged off for the night. I'm sure when she got to the dinner that the sponsors were annoyed, even irked, perhaps angry. I went to my room, had a light room service meal and went to bed. I was managing how I felt, something that for decades I did not do. The next morning, I felt much better. I had a good day. It was an example of my progress in managing life and performance. I was living my dream more than I had been.

Doug's interviewees have described many different what I call "internal life's dreams," how they wanted to feel. (See Figure 9.1.) Most people think about an "external life's dream," the thing you can put on your resume or point to as what you do. Doug has this odd way of describing the difference: he says "Resonance is like peeing your pants. Everyone can see it, but only you can feel it." "Gross," I thought the first time he said that. Later, as usual, I thought more about it, and yup, he's right. Only you can feel it. If you have the right *feel*, you do better.

Doug's subjects describe "easy speed" (Olympic gold medalist swimmer), and "playing to win against the world's best competition" (Olympic gold medalist basketball player). I've asked a lot of people Doug's question, "How do you want to feel?" and only a very, very few can answer it right off. Our dean for example, a renowned teacher, said immediately, "Buoyant, connected mastery." Then he went on to describe all three terms as what he seeks and often gets in the classroom. A rising tide of energy, everyone is in touch with each other, and yet, in the midst of the distributed communication, he's in charge.

How do *you* want to feel? What's your internal life's dream? Can you write your first draft here?



What Doug will tell you, though, is that it takes more than *seeing* it to create or recreate your internal dream. It takes intense preparation. His chapter on informed idea energy makes the point. If you don't love a thing enough to persist despite what the outside world is saying, you won't have enough energy to practice, prepare, rehearse to get really good. Really, really, world-class good.