

## **Chapter 10: Creating Breakthrough**

### **From Breakthrough: The Power of Conscious Conversation by Bill Mills**

*"Whatever you can do, or dream, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it." -- Goethe*

To really experience breakthrough requires an inner victory first. We are bombarded with stimuli and people and events that entice us to believe the battle is "out there." We have a wealth of hopes, dreams and goals for the life we want to live, and when we see the problems and roadblocks standing between our future and today, we interpret them as reality. They become the constraints that limit what is possible.

My friend Terry Miller says that when you set a goal to lose weight, the first thing that shows up is banana cream pie. I think Terry is half right. What actually shows up is Ben & Jerry's Cherry Garcia ice cream.

The point is, Cherry Garcia, poor employee morale, inflexible policies, a down economy or all the other constraints that stop us in our tracks only exist by agreement. If we think a constraint "out there" is real, it may as well be. But what if its existence is not actually a constraint?

What if you believed that the economy was depressed and you were still going to grow your company? What if you only had 24 hours a day and you were still going to honor your faith, your family, your career and yourself?

How is it that certain people are able to create mind-boggling results when so many of us struggle just to get to daycare before they close?

How does a Bill Gates drop out of college to become the nation's richest man? How does a Mother Theresa, who has taken a vow of poverty, become a world leader synonymous with love and compassion while attracting millions of dollars to her efforts all around the world?

I would like to offer the possibility that the people who achieve results at these huge orders of magnitude are operating under a different reality. They see things we don't see.

These people are not defying the laws of gravity and physics. They have opened themselves to a world where the solutions are "out there" and the battle lies within.

Breakthrough people operate under a different reality, a reality shaped in general by their conversations and specifically by their commitments and their complaints. When you dissect a complaint, what do you find? You find a person at odds with reality, a person with an inaccurate view of the world. (I can hear your grumbling beginning already. "I can't believe what this guy is saying!" "That's not true! My complaints are valid!")

A complaint accompanies emotional discomfort. We are angry, frustrated, hurt or fearful when we complain. In the act of complaining we are resisting the existence of the thing we are complaining about. Not only does the complainer focus on what's wrong, they focus on the degree of wrongness.

**Complainer 1: I can't believe Jody did this to me. It's terrible! She is so inconsiderate!**

**Complainer 2: I have a terrible manager. He doesn't know the first thing about what we do, he is so stupid.**

In Complainer 1's reality, Jody is a constraint to her happiness and peace of mind. Complainer 2's reality is constrained by a stupid boss. There is not a lot of opportunity in a reality constrained

by insensitive and stupid people. The more you resist the facts that such people and their behaviors exist and that you can not control them, you will be in pain. You will also be constrained because you'll focus on the wrong things.

The first step to creating a reality of possibility is to accept the existence of an unwanted reality. I know this can be a bit confusing at first, so let me use the following example as an illustration.

Your 13-year-old child never cleans his room and he rarely does his household chores without lots of reminders and nagging. This is an unwanted reality in your life. When you complain about the mess and undone chores, you feel stress, frustration and anger. In your child's world you have become the complaint. You have become the stressed-out, angry and frustrated parent who is powerless over a 13-year-old.

Notice that your complaining doesn't remove the unwanted reality. The mess remains. As you resist the existence of the mess you are reinforcing your belief that "this should not be," all the while the mess is not moved. Then your focus shifts to "you should obey me," even though you know that obedience is voluntary. Your brain is struggling with the paradox. The mess should not be and yet it is. You should obey me, yet you don't. The frustration escalates right along with your growing awareness that you are powerless. You do not control the universe.

Your complaint has now shaped your reality. You have become an angry, helpless victim.

Earlier we discussed TUA, total unconditional acceptance. This is a deeper inspection of that idea. What if you trained yourself to think, "This mess is an unwanted reality. I accept that it exists. I am now searching for the best response. "

Or, try this one. "My boss does things that differ from my point of view. This is an unwanted reality. I am now looking for a response that will help us both be happy." The more we complain

about something, the more solid and immovable it becomes in our reality. The complaint that “You can’t fight city hall!” prevents thousands from trying.

List your most common complaints and notice the reality they create:	
Complaint	Created Reality
Example: I hate lazy, stupid people.	My emotions and life are at risk every time I interact with “those” people.

I had a chance to practice my own advice this past summer. I was helping my wife put 300 bales of hay in our barn. Every ten minutes or so, I had to stop because my lungs were burning and aching. I thought I was out of shape or that I had some sort of bronchial infection.

A few days later my doctor suggested I was suffering from acid reflux and prescribed a strong antacid. We also agreed that I would undergo a stress test just to be sure there was nothing wrong with my heart. The day of my stress test was a Friday that coincided with my 5<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary with Lisa. I drove myself to the hospital, got hooked up to the monitor and started walking on the treadmill. Sure enough my lungs started to burn. The technician stopped the test and called for a cardiologist.

They immediately ordered an angiogram, injecting dye into my arteries to check for blockages. Again, they stopped the test abruptly and called for the cardiologist. He looked at the monitors for a few seconds, put his hand on my shoulder and said, "You're not going anywhere, bud. First thing Monday morning we need to perform triple bypass surgery." Then he left the room.

Talk about unwanted realities! I'm only 45! I'm too young for this! This shouldn't be happening to me! It's not fair! My chest started to ache and I became short of breath. Thankfully, I realized I was resisting reality, and my resistance was creating a physical consequence!

I caught myself and said to the nurse, "This is really happening, isn't it?" She said, "Yes, it is." Then I asked "What do we need to do to have a happy ending?"

The moment I said "This is really happening" my stress disappeared. I was calm and coolheaded as we planned my therapy. Not only was I calm in that moment, my fear never returned. They put me on bed rest and oxygen and made me lay still over the weekend until they could operate.

I thought everyone was being overly dramatic until I learned that I had blockages in all three major coronary arteries. One contained a 100% blockage, another was 90% blocked and the third, on the back side of my heart, was 75% blocked. They weren't sure why I was even able to walk!

As a result of that experience I have been re-doubling my efforts to accept the existence of unwanted realities in my life. Every time I do, they have ceased to be constraints and I find myself peacefully moving beyond them.

I've noticed something else as well. When I eliminate resistance, peace and joy move in to fill the void. It's as if resistance blocks my sense of my place in the world, and the practice of

acceptance allows me to locate myself, which brings a sense of well-being. When I'm resisting reality I'm setting myself in judgment over the world. From that position I am under the illusion I can control things that I really have no control over at all. When I accept an unwanted reality I am flowing with life, not against it.

I now suspect that joy, peace and love are the natural programmed state of the human being. We override that programming when we resist the unwanted realities in ourselves and in our lives. I don't think peace actually fills the void when we eliminate judgment and resistance. I think it is always there, patiently waiting for us to tire of railing against the injustices and problems that are simply a natural part of life. When we complain about the world as it is, we lose our peace.

Now let's turn our attention to a major component of breakthrough; our commitments.

I've heard it said that a commitment is a promise you make that you will not break. There is magic in commitment. Most of us fail to make promises. Instead we make predictions. We set goals; we make New Year's resolutions. You can almost hear Failure laughing in the shadows as the division managers squirm to answer the question, "What will we accomplish this year?"

"Well, our GOAL is to grow 15%," they say, "but you know, with the economy the way it is I'd be happy just staying even."

"Last year we grew 3%, so we feel we can do 4% this year. After all that's a 33% improvement!" they say, hoping no one challenges their logic.

It's all goals and prediction and it leaves people flat.

Breakthrough is not about predictions based upon extrapolations. To achieve breakthrough you need to get to a place of not knowing. Knowing is the enemy because it is predicated on the past. Knowing pressures us to follow the beaten path, to think the same thoughts and get the same results. Knowing precludes real thinking and blocks possibilities from getting through our filters.

Not knowing is alive with possibility and inventions.

**Q: How will you get her to notice you?**

**A: *I don't know, I just will.***

**Q: How will you ever get your project done in time?**

**A: *I don't know, I'll have to get creative and do whatever it takes.***

**Q: How will you reduce your costs while improving your service?**

**A: *I don't know, we'll just keep working it until we succeed.***

Two men have influenced me greatly on this subject: David McNally and Terry Miller<sup>1</sup>. David posed a question to me that I have in turn posed to thousands of people. In fact, I often end my workshops with it and the answer is always the same.

---

<sup>1</sup> David McNally is the author of Even Eagles Need a Push. Terry Miller is a business consultant and mentor.

I'll ask a room full of people to think of the times when they were 100% committed to achieving specific results in their lives. I ask them to think of those times when they absolutely knew they would be successful because they had *decided* to be. They were dialed in and locked on. There was no possibility of failure because they simply wouldn't allow it. Now I'd like you to do the same. Please take a moment to recall those times when you have been completely committed to achieving a specific outcome, and begin reading again when you have them in mind.

Notice the number of times you can recall being totally committed are relatively few. Now please answer this question: When you have fully committed yourself to achieving a specific goal or outcome, what percentage of the time did you actually achieve it?

Write your answer here:

**When fully committed I have been successful \_\_\_\_\_ % of the time.**

When I ask this question of a group of people, I ask them to raise their hand if their answer is 80% or above. What do you think happens? Nearly every hand goes up. When I ask people to keep their hand raised if their answer is 90% or above, only a few hands will drop away. Then I ask people to keep their hands up if their answer was 100%, and again most hands stay up. Depending on the group, anywhere from two thirds to as many as 100% of the people polled have never experienced failure when they have fully committed themselves to achieving something.

Consider the implications of this discovery. Perhaps we don't have cash flow problems, quality problems, vendor or technology problems. Perhaps we don't have problems with our families, friends and co-workers. Maybe we have commitment problems.



Perhaps we are interested in so many things; we have forgotten what we are committed to. When was the last time your sales force *promised* the number of sales they would make? When did you last review your life and establish the four or five commitments that would define your purpose and legacy?

Commitments are powerful because the most committed person ultimately wins. When complainers are more committed to their point of view than others are to a positive result, a team, department or marriage is doomed.

When people dedicate themselves to creating a great life, a great marriage or a great company, it generally succeeds.

When the founders of the United States of America transformed their interest in living in a free country into a commitment to create one, they put their commitment into a Declaration of Independence. When JFK declared that we would put a man on the moon before the next decade, it happened. A declaration is part of commitment. Whether public or private at first, it soon becomes public when you act on it.

As a senior in high school I learned that the fall play was to be *The Music Man*. I immediately decided that I would win the leading role, and I committed myself to making it happen. Obstacles immediately appeared. The role required singing solos and dancing. I had never done either in front of someone else, aside from singing with a large group of classmates. The director, Ms. Nelson (who never selected a play without a couple of people in mind) already knew who she wanted in the lead roles. I was not one of those people. In fact, though I'd been in plays before, I'd never had a lead part. And finally, tryouts were only a few days away and we were not allowed to see the script before hand. We would be given parts to read cold at the audition. But I was committed. I went to music store after music store until I found the Music Man sound track on a vinyl record (this was 1974). The play's most memorable song is probably "Trouble in River

City,” which is a syncopated song sung to a fast, bouncing rhythm. I figured it would be used at the singing tryouts.

Putting the record on my dad’s turntable I played the song over and over. I tried to sing along but I couldn’t keep up – it was too many words and they came too fast. Try as I might, I couldn’t follow along for more than a few seconds. But I kept playing it over and over. “Well, you’ve got trouble my friend, right here -- I say trouble right here in River City. Trouble with a capital T and that rhymes with P and that stands for POOL!”

I wore that record out playing that song till I had to go to bed. And I was not making progress. The next morning I picked out the uniform that helped me feel the most comfortable -- a blue chambray shirt and my jeans with all the patches and the ripped-out knee. Throughout the day I tried to remember the words to the song, but I could only get the first sentence to flow before I became tongue-tied by the rhythm and speed.

And all too soon it was tryouts. When it was time for the singing audition Collin, Gordon, Rob and I all raised our hands and stepped forward. Collin and Gordon were the clear favorites. Tall and strong compared to all 130 pounds of me, they looked like leading men. I looked like their little brother. But I was switched on!

They lined the four of us up and gave us the words to “Trouble in River City.” They asked us to all sing together. The director told Peter, our local piano virtuoso to begin and he dove into the music with gusto.

“Well you’ve got trouble my friends . . .” The music moved so fast you couldn’t read the words.

“Right here, I say trouble right here in River City . . .” Gordon, Collin and Rob had stopped singing. I didn’t need to read the words; they were coming out of me on automatic pilot.

"Trouble with a capital T and that rhymes with P and that stands for POOL!" I was the only one singing and people were starting to stare.

"Now sure I'm a billiard player, certainly mighty proud, say I'm always mighty proud to say it. I consider that the hours I spend with a cue in my hand are golden. Did you ever take and try to give an iron clad lead to yourself from a three rail billiard shot? But just as I say it takes judgment, brains and maturity . . ." When I stopped, the play director and the choir director were frowning and whispering. "You are a tenor," said the choir director. "This part requires a tenor. Why haven't you ever been in choir?"

"I don't know."

"Well, you've certainly made this difficult for me," said Ms. Nelson.

A few days later I was awarded the lead. I have used that experience over and over again to push myself into situations that scared me to death.

Now fast forward to the summer of 2000. I had created a coaching workshop to teach managers and leaders how to have conversations with employees and teammates that would help them re-align with the vision and values of their organization. We named the workshop Coaching with Confidence, and we started searching for consultants to distribute it across the country. Terry Miller acted as my personal coach and he asked me what I was willing to commit to achieving. His eyes must have rolled back in his head when I told him I wanted 10 more distributors by year end, 50 distributors in 2001 and 100 by the end of 2002.

"Bill," he said, "Get out of your head. Stop predicting."

"What do you mean?"

"I didn't ask for your prediction about the future, I asked what future are you committed to creating. So, again, what number of distributors do you want before year end, a number that you don't know how to get to."

"Well," I said, "I don't know how to get to 100."

"Great!" he replied. "What are you feeling?"

"I'm scared. My plate is full. I have these consulting projects that are taking all my time. I don't know where to find the time to get this all done." (Notice how subtle and reasonable my complaint sounded? Poor Bill, he doesn't have the time to reach his goals!)

Then Terry brought out the big guns. "That's simple, Bill. Just create a solution that is not constrained by time or effort."

If he hadn't been 1200 miles away I would have slapped him. "It's not nice to tease people," I thought. Then I said, "Well, if time and effort are not constraints, then maybe I should get all this done and take every Friday off as well."

"Now you've got it!" Terry exclaimed. I wanted to bang my head with the telephone. Terry Miller must not understand sarcasm.

But then that queasy feeling in my gut turned into the same determination I experienced in high school and I made the commitment. Nothing happened for the next two months. It was nearly October and we were 80 distributors short of what I had promised. Terry told me I should schedule my breakthrough in October. (Terry really does live in a different reality, doesn't he? Whoever heard of scheduling a breakthrough?)

So I “scheduled” my breakthrough for October. I looked at my calendar and saw I had only one opportunity. Lisa and I had a booth at a Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM) conference. Maybe we could convince eighty HR managers to become distributors inside their company. Ha!

*Our doubts are traitors and make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt. -- Shakespeare*

The day of the conference came. Our booth was off the beaten path in a hall with about sixty other vendors. The SHRM members had no occasion to enter the hall except for lunch because all their workshops were held in another part of the building. And their lunch hour was so short they had barely enough time to eat and run back to their next sessions.

“Trouble right here, I say trouble right here in River City.”

If Mohammed wasn’t coming to the mountain I would bring the mountain to Mohammed. I was committed! I grabbed a handful of brochures and started hunting. I would approach a lunch table full of HR managers and offer them a brochure. As people turned to see what I was doing, I would offer a brochure and ask “Would you like one, too?” and nod my head yes. Everyone took one. Then I would give them a quick explanation of our process and invite them to our booth.

I got ZIP. Nothing came of it. They ate their lunches and threw \$100 worth of my brochures in the trash on their way out.

Then I narrowed my eyes and turned my attention on the sixty vendors in the now nearly empty hall.

One of the other booths was manned by someone I had briefly met about eight years earlier. As we got re-acquainted he showed an interest in our workshop. It turns out he had developed a network of consultants who purchased his assessment products, and he wanted to expand into my type of workshops and materials.

“How many distributors do you have?” I asked. “Oh, I think we have about 85,” he replied.

We signed the papers later in December, just days short of the date I had committed to.

My newest commitment is for Lisa and me to retire by 2007 with a passive income in excess of \$200,000 a year. I’m going to do it by teaching other consultants and executives how to earn a six-figure income while working two weeks a month using a consulting model I’m currently using.<sup>2</sup>

Breakthrough living requires breakthrough thinking. The real battle lies within; the solutions are all out there.

The greatest key to breakthrough is to create a reality free from the constraints of time, effort and money. This reality is created by your conversations and their correlating actions.

As I was reflecting on the nature of breakthrough it became clear that there are only 4 activities in life. By reorganizing yourself in these four activities, you greatly enhance your chances of breakthrough.

*When you get right down to the root of the meaning of the word “succeed,” you find it simply means to follow through.*

---

<sup>2</sup> For more information on this opportunity visit [www.mnexecutivegroup.com](http://www.mnexecutivegroup.com).

### **Activity 1: Administrative Activities**

Administrative activities refer to those things that need to be done (paying bills, cleaning your house, filling out paperwork, etc. etc.). These things do not create breakthrough, they eat up your time.

Breakthrough Strategy: Eliminate, delegate or simplify administrative duties. If it feels like a duty and your heart is not in it, find a way to shrink its impact on your life. Free up as much time as you possibly can for living.

### **Activity 2: Advancing Activities**

Advancing activities are the high-payoff activities that advance you towards your commitments. They are often uncomfortable, yet necessary. They are only uncomfortable if we resist them. They are much easier to handle with time and with the knowledge that they are the price of success. Advancing activities directly product achievement and progress. Activities that build relationships, make sales, get the right things done; these are advancing activities (and there aren't all that many of them). One of the best things about advancing activities is that they generate enthusiasm and energy. People who feel burned out have either stopped working on advancing activities or they have not selected a life goal worth committing to.

Breakthrough Strategy: Schedule big blocks of time for advancing activities. Half days or full days work best. Do whatever it takes to limit distractions and work in at least 90 minute segments. Take a five minute mental break every twenty to thirty minutes, but don't take phone calls or allow interruptions. Don't change your focus. I do a tremendous amount of creative work in restaurants because the environment works perfectly for me. Find a place that allows you to do your best. If your highest pay activities require you to work with other people ask them to help you make that time effective and productive.

### Activity 3: Rejuvenating Activities

Rejuvenating activities give you the energy you need for activities 2 and 4. Vacations, hobbies, alone time, social time, exercise, spiritual pursuits, or any activity that brings acceptance, compassion or peace is a rejuvenating activity. You need lots of these activities. I currently work a four-day week and I'm on track to a 10-day month. It is the ideas that come to me and energy I receive during my rejuvenating activities that make it possible.

Breakthrough Strategy: Spend the time to learn which activities truly feed your soul. Experiment with activities that take only a few minutes up to several days to do properly. Then when you have a free afternoon you can select from a list of quick activities and when you have more time you can work off a larger list. Make sure your list includes things you can do at home as well as away from home. Work with your life partner to include his or her favorite activities as well. Many of your rejuvenating activities can be spontaneous but I find that looking forward to a planned activity is very satisfying as well. Lisa and I try to schedule vacations out as far as one or two years in advance.

### Activity 4: Breakthrough Activity

This category is the least understood and most overlooked. It is also the most important. When teamed with rejuvenating activities, it is deeply energizing. Two breakthrough activities are making commitments and declarations. Other breakthrough activities are creating annuity and passive results. Thinking up ways to create leverage is a breakthrough activity. Questions to ask yourself might include: How can I build a solution that can be replicated 1000 times? How can I teach 50 or 500 or 5000 people at once? How can I make my sales presentations to 100 buyers one time rather than one buyer a hundred times? How can I use a mortgage or loan to purchase an asset instead of my own money? What can I create, write, paint or record that can produce royalties every time it is sold? What relationships can I create that will reward people for rewarding me? How could I change the game in such a way that I am 10 times happier or 100 times more fulfilled?



Breakthrough is primarily a thinking activity, and it is even stronger when shared with a friend. Set aside time for brainstorming as a family, team or department. Ask yourselves: "What system can we create to simplify, automate, prevent or eliminate the tasks no one enjoys?", "What could we do to get to a completely new level of love and romance?", or "What activities can we combine to enhance our results and save time?" (For example if you and your mate decide you want to spend more time together, exercise and eat healthy, could you power-walk together at the warehouse food store as you carry baskets instead of push carts and together select the most healthy items?)

Breakthrough Strategy: Schedule your breakthrough. Dedicate time on your calendar to setting new standards of success for yourself. Use that time to ask lots of questions like, "What if . . .?" and "How could I . . .?" The quality of the question will be a huge determinant of your breakthrough.

Breakthrough living begins with breakthrough thinking. Don't worry about the ideas that fall a bit short. Each one serves its purpose of coaxing you into a reality of abundance, possibility and solutions.

One of my clients is a large furniture retailer in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. The company has several locations, over 800 employees and it is doubling in size every three to four years.

One of the client's departments is responsible for the site maintenance of all the locations. During a possibility exercise, the team identified a major frustration. Any manager or supervisor at any location could call any maintenance team member and request service. This was done to ensure that every store was always looking its best. The unintended consequence of all this empowerment was immediate. Five or six managers would notice a maintenance issue and leave a voice mail or e-mail request with up to five different team members, who would all swing

into action. This system created tremendous duplication of effort, not to mention the frustration caused when a team member would arrive to solve a problem only to find it had been resolved earlier that day.

As the team members considered how to resolve the issue, they hit on the idea of an electronic in-board. By utilizing their existing e-mail system, teammates could give real-time status reports to each other and all managers and supervisors at a site needing attention. The first person to hear of a problem would schedule the repair and notify all appropriate parties with a few keystrokes. The solution prevented multiple requests and duplication of efforts. Their most conservative estimates indicate they have saved over 500 man-hours with this simple solution. In hindsight, it's simple. But it only became simple when the team shifted their awareness to include possibility.

Amazing things happen when people take the time to stop working *in* their businesses and relationships and they start working on the *design* of their businesses and relationships. Breakthrough activities are design activities. How can I design my relationships to create more happiness? How can I design my work to be more rewarding and require less time?

**Current frustration or constraint:**

**Preferred future state/outcome:**

**Breakthrough ideas:**

**My commitment:**

We started this chapter with an exploration of how complaints and commitments shape our reality and thereby shape what is possible. We end on the need to spend time mentally exploring possibility.

One of my clients recently said to me, “So you’re telling me it’s just a mind game?” I assured him that it has always been a mind game. The difference is that these approaches make it a game you can win because it’s your game. When society, bosses, co-workers and past experiences tell us what is possible, we buy into somebody else’s game. The starting point of this new game is the quality of your conversations. When you see the effects our conversations have on our lives you start to see that conversations are actions that produce specific results.

Breakthrough conversations with yourself and others will have a cumulative effect on your life. Before you know it, you’ll be more at ease and more productive. Problems and constraints will melt away, leaving in their place possibility and abundance. Then one day you’ll look around and say, “I’ve passed through the looking glass. I’m on the other side of complexity.”

You will have experienced Breakthrough.