

FOR COACHES WITH AMBITIOUS CLIENTS

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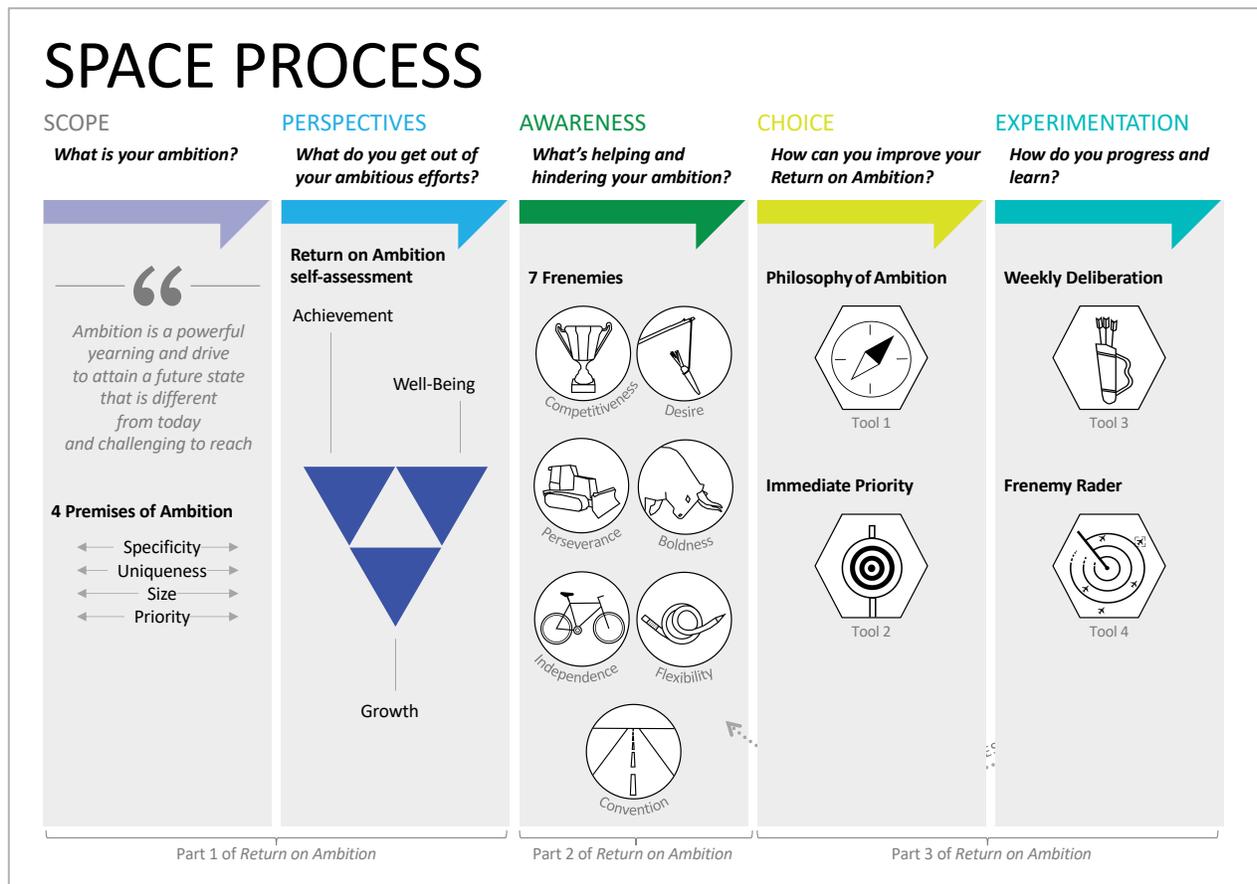




THE VISION FOR OUR BOOK, RETURN ON AMBITION, IS THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF DEVELOPMENTAL COACHING. We want to help ambitious people who find capable coaches too expensive to pay out of their own pocket, and who haven't had the opportunity to attend a top-notch leadership program, where corporations take their top talent through a developmental journey. One way we have done this is to provide readers with a structured process to expand their awareness through reflections and self-coaching sessions.

We want to strongly emphasize our belief that a book can never replace an experienced and empathic coach. Because, when you listen to your clients, while giving full attention without judgment, you help them to be truer to themselves. In short, you can take your clients further than our book.

Even though the book is not written for you, if you are a coach, it could stimulate your curiosity and might be helpful in your own practice. **THE BOOK CAN BE ESPECIALLY HELPFUL FOR COACHES WITH AMBITIOUS CLIENTS, AS IT DELVES DEEPLY INTO THE NUANCES OF AMBITIONS AND RELATED OPPORTUNITIES AND PITFALLS.** We have had to put tremendous effort into understanding our target readers and designing a journey of questions, concepts, and tools that help them. Here is an overview of the coaching framework underpinning the book, and which we will walk you through in this paper:





This white paper presents our key findings and the applied theories, complementing the book's elaborations on our overall ideas and tools in laymen's terms. The present paper entertains five questions:

1. Why is it worthwhile for your clients to reflect on their ambition?
2. How does the SPACE coaching process work?
3. What are Frenemies, and how can they help and hinder ambitious people in succeeding and becoming fulfilled in life?
4. What tools might help you and your clients, and what is their foundation?
5. What questions are relevant to your own practice?

The rich footnotes in this whitepaper direct you to potential further readings, in case your curiosity is not yet satisfied.

1. WHY IS IT WORTHWHILE FOR YOUR CLIENTS TO REFLECT ON THEIR AMBITION?

THE BOOK DEFINES AMBITION AS “A POWERFUL YEARNING AND DRIVE TO ATTAIN A FUTURE STATE THAT IS DIFFERENT FROM TODAY AND CHALLENGING TO REACH.” Ambition is a fantastic force that drives personal success, brings prosperity and possibilities to families and communities, and benefits the greater good. Yet, ambition is one of the greatest factors preventing ambitious people from succeeding and living a fulfilling life. Indeed, not living up to one's ambition can be devastating. At the same time, many successful people become hostages of their own success, continuously battling self-criticism, stress, and jeopardizing personal relationships. These outcomes point towards the fact that the very mindsets and behaviors moving ambitious persons forward at an early stage of their lives can turn partly counterproductive at a later stage, if they remain unmindful of their ambitions.

To understand ambition better, we conducted in-depth research on the topic, including a global survey of professionals across industries whom we (or other people who know them) consider ambitious. We ended up with a sample of 200 relevant responses, who were both selected the way they were and assessed themselves to be ambitious. **59 PERCENT OF THESE RESPONDENTS STATED THAT THEY WERE CURRENTLY STRUGGLING TO ACHIEVE THEIR ASPIRATIONS, WHILE ALSO MAINTAINING THEIR PERSONAL GROWTH AND WELL-BEING. EVEN MORE CONCERNING, 43 PERCENT DOUBTED WHETHER THEIR AMBITIONS WOULD SERVE THEM WELL IN THE LONG RUN. THEY WONDERED WHETHER ALL THEIR HARD WORK WOULD ACTUALLY PAY OFF IN THE FUTURE.**

AMONG THOSE WHO BELIEVED THAT PERSONAL REFLECTION IS BENEFICIAL, FOUR OUT OF TEN WERE NOT ABLE TO MAKE TIME FOR IT. THERE ARE TANGIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF THIS SELF-CONTRADICTION. THE DATA SHOWS A 2.1 TIMES HIGHER PREVALENCE OF STRESS AMONG THOSE WHO DO NOT TAKE THE TIME FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION.

Furthermore, we selected over 25 people who appear ambitious, successful, and, at the same time, fulfilled in life, and then conducted in-depth interviews and case studies. This diverse group



of people from around the world confirmed the importance of reflecting holistically about life, as it plays out, and of experimenting with ways to thrive.

The combined research, survey, and interviews motivated the Return on Ambition Equation:

$$\text{RETURN ON AMBITION} = \text{ACHIEVEMENT} + \text{GROWTH} + \text{WELL-BEING}$$

Achievement is not the only benefit of ambition. Success and fulfilment are closely associated with personal growth, including learning and taking care of one's well-being.

WE FOUND THAT PEOPLE WHO ARE CONSISTENTLY SUCCESSFUL AND FULFILLED IN LIFE TEND TO CONSCIOUSLY AND CONTINUOUSLY NURTURE ALL THREE ELEMENTS OF THE TRINITY – ACHIEVEMENT, GROWTH, AND WELL-BEING.

Our meta-study of research from various scientific domains substantiates the close interdependence among achievement, personal growth, and well-being and how they enforce each other. We found no research covering all three factors, but several confirming dependencies between achievement and growth, between achievement and well-being, and between growth and well-being. (The book's third chapter provides examples of such studies with specific sources.)

If somebody jeopardizes one of these elements over time, then the two others are likely to suffer consequently. For example, a person can temporarily compromise growth or well-being, but consistent and sustainable success during an entire career is much more likely when the person continuously nurtures all three elements in the equation.

The self-enforcing nature of the three factors resembles a point made by **TIMOTHY GALLWEY**, who was pivotal for shaping coaching as it's known today. Gallwey emphasized the relationship among performance, learning, and enjoyment.¹

The trinity of achievement, growth, and well-being can also be considered as a **MULTARITY**. That's like a polarity, but with three poles. Polarities and multarities can be experienced as dilemmas, as each pole represents something inherently good. Meanwhile, people tend to favor one pole, harvesting its benefits while also experiencing negative consequences of overuse. That could be achievement, which means, as in the example, compromising on growth and well-being. People who are not confident with polarities, or multarities, are likely to overcompensate when they realize that their approach doesn't work. This could be by moving all weight from achievement to well-being, thereby repeating the pattern of overuse followed by an overcompensating change. The art of polarities and multarities is to navigate and continuously experience the benefits of all poles simultaneously without overusing any.²

2. HOW DOES THE SPACE COACHING PROCESS WORK?

John Whitmore's GROW model is probably the single most popular approach within coaching.³ Ask first about the clients' goal, then ask about the clients' reality, then about what options are



available, and finally about what they will do next. This represents a powerful way to help solve various problems that people meet in life.

IN OUR EXPERIENCE, HOWEVER, THE GROW MODEL IS NOT THE MOST HELPFUL APPROACH FOR PEOPLE TRYING TO IMPROVE THEIR RETURN ON AMBITION. For busy, ambitious people face an ever-evolving landslide of interdependent issues. Trying to solve these issues one-by-one is like helping clients kick a whole lot of small stones, though they ultimately aspire to move an entire mountain. For this reason, we sought something that goes deeper and wider in allowing ambitious people to explore their lives and start creative experimentation, as opposed to adding a new range of goals to their busy lives and extending their long to-do lists.

We draw, amongst other, on our experience with Adult Development theory. Harvard professor Bob Kegan is one of the pioneers of this research.⁴ Jennifer Garvey Berger also merits mention for her significant role in applying the insights of Adult Development and popularizing developmental coaching as a discipline.⁵ (For the sake of transparency, it should be mentioned that Nicolai Tillisch works with Jennifer in Cultivating Leadership.) We should also mention the training that we both have taken with Bob Anderson in the Leadership Circle Profile assessment.

The way that adult human beings make sense of themselves and their surroundings evolves through stages, each of which hosts a unique form of sense-making—or level of consciousness. **WE ARE, IN THE BOOK, PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN THE SHIFT, WHICH KEGAN CALLS THE TRANSITION FROM THE SOCIALIZED MIND TO THE SELF-AUTHORING MIND. THIS IS THE TRANSITION THAT IS FEASIBLE AND RELEVANT FOR MOST PEOPLE DURING THE TIME OF THEIR LIFE THAT THEY SPEND IN A PROFESSIONAL CAREER.** The transition can help them more consciously steer their own life.

People who make sense based on the Socialized mind rely on the values and expectations of others, whom they consider authorities, and the society in which they live. They are uncomfortable with standing out and being different. The authority deciding right or wrong is outside of them. An illustration of this can be seen in its relation to emotions. Somebody can make a Socialized person angry, whether through words or deeds. The angry person experiences feelings largely as a result of what happens outside him. “I’m angry because Eve did...” this or that.

People gravitating toward the Self-Authoring mind, however, guide themselves by an inner compass. They define and own their personal values. They relate to feelings as an object, not something to which they are a subject. For example: “Aha, now I’m getting tense again because Eve is so much faster than me.” Self-Authoring people are naturally aware in the very moment that ambitions are causing a sensation, not Eve or anybody else. For that reason, they have an actual choice about whether to let the associated feelings rule their actions.

The Socialized and Self-Authoring forms of mind are opposites in most regards. Moreover, the transition between the two is by no means trivial. It’s the source of much confusion, doubt, and



loneliness over years, or even decades. Far from all adults get so far as to this transition, and not everyone who enters the transition completes it.

The Socialized and Self-Authoring minds operate differently when formulating and afterward pursuing an aspiration. Even when Socialized people full-heartedly aspire for something—to carry out a New Year resolution, for instance—they are much more likely to be distracted or conflicted after a relatively short time. This is caused by a phenomenon that Kegan, together with Lisa Lahey, calls Immunity to Change.⁶ In this phenomenon, one's subconscious can act like an immune system, rejecting anything new and different, even when one has made a clear decision about changing.

As an alternative to the GROW model, we chose to create a process based on **DESIGN THINKING**. Design Thinking implies a human-centered, explorative, and experimental process of generating ideas, trying them out, and evolving along with them.⁷ There are five steps in the process that underpins the book: Scope, Perspectives, Awareness, Choice, and Experimentation. Together, they form the acronym SPACE. The SPACE process guides the journey that the readers go through in the book, although the book doesn't mention the name.

THE SPACE PROCESS DOES NOT, BY ITSELF, CHANGE PEOPLE FROM BEING SOMEWHAT SOCIALIZED TO FULLY SELF-AUTHORING. RATHER, IT STIMULATES REFLECTIONS WITH SENSE-MAKING BEYOND THE SOCIALIZED MIND. ONE OF THE BEAUTIES OF A DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH IS THAT IT CAN HELP PEOPLE, EVEN THOUGH IT MIGHT NOT IN ITSELF LEAD TO A TRANSITION BETWEEN STAGES.

We were delighted when some of our colleagues, who have a well-established capacity for Self-Authoring, shared that the book's coaching process had been personally beneficial for them.

Indeed, the SPACE process gives people room to explore, reflect, and learn along the way. Let's walk through the process. The steps of the SPACE process are as follows:

- **Scope: What is your ambition?** The scoping in the first step should loosely demarcate the later arena for exploration and experimentation, which is different from defining a tight goal. The default scope of the book is to help ambitious readers to become more successful and fulfilled in life. We refer to this as their Return on Ambition. Improving it can mean anything from maintaining their current level of success with less effort to reaching a much higher level of success and personal fulfillment with a similar magnitude of effort. It is critical here that readers reflect on their own ambition, and determine whether it is congruent with who they really are or want to become. The book introduces the four premises of Ambition: Specificity, Uniqueness, Size, and Priority. Through real-life stories, we show how differently successful people position themselves in each of these four dimensions.
- **Perspective: What do you get out of your ambitious efforts?** The book helps the readers put their lives into perspective through a self-assessment regarding their current level of achievement, growth, and well-being. This perspective-taking helps them identify blind spots and untapped potential for improving their Return on Ambition. **THE SELF-ASSESSMENT IS**



COMPLEMENTED BY A RED FLAG TEST, WHICH INDICATES A POSSIBLE RISK OF BURNOUT OR OTHER NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF PUSHING THEMSELVES TOO HARD. WE RECOMMEND THAT READERS WHO CAN ASSOCIATE WITH ANY OF THE RED FLAGS SEE A MEDICAL DOCTOR OR PSYCHOLOGIST, INSTEAD OF TRYING TO FIX SUCH PROBLEMS ALONE WITH A BOOK.

- **Awareness: What's helping and hindering your ambition?** We introduce the seven Frenemies of ambitious people, which are patterns of thoughts, feelings, and habitual behaviors constituting some of their greatest strengths, but which can also turn into their biggest obstacles to success and fulfillment. These seven are *Competitiveness*, *Boldness*, *Perseverance*, *Desire*, *Independence*, *Flexibility*, and *Convention*, which we explain in more detail below in section 3. The book shares stories to familiarize the readers with each Frenemy, so that they can recognize it in their own lives.
- **Choice: How can you consciously improve your Return on Ambition?** The process has been an exploration to this point. Before moving forward, readers receive help to focus on what gives them most meaning in life and to define how they want to improve their Return on Ambition in the near future. This is accomplished by introducing the first two of the four tools in the Return on Ambition Toolbox— Philosophy of Ambition and Immediate Priority. We explain the background of the book's tools in the white paper's section 4.
- **Experimentation: How do you progress and learn?** Design thinking applies prototyping, which involves turning ideas into rough models, testing them in the real world, and then refining the design accordingly. Continuous trial loops like these are essential for conscious learning. We actually encourage readers to keep doing many small and widespread experiments, without trying to converge towards an optimal solution, as would be the case in formal prototyping. Change predominately fails when people try to fix and control outcomes in a complex circumstance, instead of making a persistent effort to experiment and learn. The third tool, Weekly Deliberation, helps readers institute a routine of setting intentions, gaining insights, and instituting a weekly ritual. The fourth and final tool is Frenemy Radar, which enhances awareness of the emotional and somatic sensations that occur during the pursuit of a higher Return on Ambition. The final two tools are powerful feedback loops that together ensure progress, learning, and the expansion of awareness.

3. WHAT ARE FRENEMIES, AND HOW CAN THEY HELP AND HINDER AMBITIOUS PEOPLE IN SUCCEEDING AND BECOMING FULFILLED IN LIFE?

MOST AMBITIOUS PEOPLE RECOGNIZE SEVERAL OF THE SEVEN FRENEMIES IN THEMSELVES. YET, EACH FRENEMY IS A DISTINCT PATTERN OF THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, AND BEHAVIORAL HABITS. The readers have taken active part in shaping their Frenemies by repeating certain tactics from as early as seven years of age. The tactics have worked for them, so they have reused them over and over again. In fact, they have internalized the tactics to such an extent that the Frenemies have become a part of themselves.



For example, a reader can realize early in life that, the higher the grades she earned in school, the more recognition and appreciation she received from her parents. This only made her more determined to outcompete others and be her best. In this context, the Frenemy, *Competitiveness*, has now become her friend. The two become so close during the rest of her education that they are inseparable, long before she starts her professional career. Her friend is, however, also an enemy. This becomes evident as she moves up the corporate ladder and forms personal relationships with other adults. She instinctively tries to win every encounter no matter “the opponent.” People may laugh and forgive her when playing a boardgame, but she can exhaust her friends while discussing any random topic because she wants to win the argument. Her colleagues value her drive and dedication, but are annoyed by her relative aggressiveness, even on issues that are not particularly important.

The seven Frenemies are:

1. **COMPETITIVENESS**—The ability to outcompete others and be the best . . . or to try to win at all costs.
2. **DESIRE**—The ability to push constantly against the limits of possibility and break new boundaries . . . or to chase success only for its own sake.
3. **PERSEVERANCE**—The ability to go the extra mile and complete challenging tasks, even when you’re overloaded . . . or to frequently exhaust yourself and burn out.
4. **BOLDNESS**—The ability to move quickly and throw yourself into new, challenging situations . . . or to miscalculate what is required to attain your ambition.
5. **INDEPENDENCE**—The ability to get things done by yourself, without help . . . or to fail to include others when needed.
6. **FLEXIBILITY**—The ability to adapt adroitly to different people and situations . . . or to be constantly swayed by others.
7. **CONVENTION**—The ability to follow a well-trodden path and attain success as judged by society . . . or to get stuck in expectation and routine.

You might already have noticed a resemblance with other concepts within coaching, such as Bob Anderson's Reactive Tendencies, Enneagrams, Robert Hogan's Derailers or Dark Side, or Human Synergistics. You would be correct in so doing. Yet, the Frenemies help the readers in three ways that these existing concepts don't seem to.

First, the Frenemies are all about ambition, and the fact that there are seven of them adds more granularity than do the other models used with the most ambitious down to the least ambitious people.

Second, it was essential for us that our readers appreciate their ambitious selves, as they are, and not simply dream of being different. Indeed, they should never doubt the inherently positive side of their Frenemies. The name starts with the two-thirds of the letters in "friend" married into the word "enemy." **MOST AMBITIOUS PEOPLE ARE OVERQUALIFIED IN CRITICIZING THEMSELVES**



AND THUS BENEFIT FROM BEING MORE GRATEFUL FOR WHO THEY ARE, HOW FAR THEY HAVE COME, AND WHERE THEY ARE GOING.

We have also observed how many people who receive coaching end up looking down at old patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behavioral habits. They can receive feedback as a request for them to swing like a pendulum from supposedly bad practices to good ones. However, it would be better, if they instead become more aware of their impact and start to choose more consciously where to use their strengths and where not to overuse them. People's past is what makes them who they are. They might have an appetite for changing some aspects of themselves, but they continue to carry their past along with them into the future.

Third, the Frenemies are animated characters meant to make them easier to relate to. Our book's target reader doesn't currently benefit from coaching and is unlikely to have had much exposure to other sophisticated approaches. Part 2 of the book helps readers spot the Frenemies in their own lives and imagine possible futures. There is an entire chapter dedicated to each Frenemy, presenting real-life stories about ambitious people and considering where the Frenemy comes from and how it behaves. In Part 3, the Immediate Priority and Frenemy Radar tools integrate techniques to watch out for and sense the Frenemies. We have deliberately kept things fairly simple without much intellectual scaffolding, to meet the reader where most are.

There are two sources of inspiration for how we constructed the Frenemies. The first is **THE ANCIENT GREEK PHILOSOPHER AND POLYMATH, ARISTOTLE, WHO DEFINED ELEVEN ETHICAL VIRTUES AND ADVOCATED THEIR MODERATION.**⁸ According to his teachings, each virtue is inherently good as long as it's not overused.

By the way, one of Aristotle's eleven ethical virtues happens to be proper ambition. That's the moderation between undue humility and empty vanity.

Each virtue stretches throughout a spectrum from deficiency to excess. The equivalent for a Frenemy reaches from not having the Frenemy at all to experiencing its enemy side in its entirety. Moderation then means to be able to live out the friendly side of the Frenemy, without facing its enemy side.

The book introduces the Frenemies to help people become more aware of those relevant to themselves. An ambitious reader should be able to recognize at least a few of the Frenemies. By now, we have tested the concept with many hundreds of people, and this certainly seems to be the case. There are even many who are familiar with all or almost all of the Frenemies.

That said, some people are already so relatively conscious about their Frenemy patterns that they can enjoy the friendly sides, while mostly avoiding any enemy line. It could be interesting for such people to contemplate the patterns associated with the Frenemies that they don't currently experience in themselves. **WHILE THIS IS BEYOND THE SCOPE OF OUR BOOK, IT MIGHT BE INTERESTING FOR YOU AS A COACH, NOT LEAST IF YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH JUNGIAN SHADOW WORK.**⁹ That's applicable when you might encounter relatively developed clients who are



suppressing a natural human quality in themselves, limiting their ability to grow further. The notion of Frenemies might help you, as well as your client, to identify such a shadow.

The second source of inspiration for the Frenemies' construction is **KAREN HORNEY'S WORK ON CHARACTER STRUCTURES**.¹⁰ Horney identified and described three Character Structures: Moving Against, Moving Away, and Moving Towards. These three distinct moves represent our instinctive way of reacting when faced with any explicit or subconscious threat. Healthy, well-functioning people have each of the three Character Structures in them, although one will tend to dominate. Moving Against and Moving Away resemble, together, the "fight-or-flight" phenomenon uncovered by **NEUROSCIENTISTS**, while Moving Towards links to what they call the "freeze" and "appease" reactions.¹¹

Bob Anderson has established a connection between Horney's Character Structures and Adult Development. Building on Horney's work, he defined three Reactive Tendencies in his Leadership Circle Profile assessment. The fully Self-Authoring mind does not react instinctively based upon emotions or the fear of others' perceptions. (However, even those who have the full capacity to be Self-Authoring can react in this way. It's not unusual to behave, on occasion, based on an earlier form of mind.) **ANDERSON HAS GENERATED ASSESSMENT DATA SHOWING A REVERSE CORRELATION BETWEEN REACTIVE TENDENCIES AND THE STAGE OF ADULT DEVELOPMENT**.¹² That's despite the fact that his leadership assessment is contextual, meaning that some leaders lead in more complex environments than others, increasing the chances that they are thus more likely to be more Reactive.

Anderson breaks down his Reactive Tendencies in sub-dimensions, one of which is Ambition. Yet, only 4 of his 124 survey questions relate to this concept. The statements associated with these survey questions are "I'm excessively ambitious"; "I believe winning is what really matters"; "I believe to feel good, one must constantly move up"; and "I'm aggressive."¹³ Clearly, our book takes a much more granular perspective on ambitions. Furthermore, we address ambitious people, in general, without limiting ourselves to people in leadership positions.

Most ambitious people have, within them, a lot of Horney's Moving Against. They want success in everything. If anything threatens to push them, then they push back. Four of the seven Frenemies are most closely associated with Moving Against, namely *Competitiveness*, *Desire*, *Perseverance*, and *Boldness*. Moving Away is, paradoxically, a close neighbor to Moving Against, despite the fact that the movements are opposites. Moving Away does often go hand in hand with high personal standards. If life pushes, then many excellent people pull away to overview and contemplate. *Independence* is strongly associated with Moving Away.

Horney's Moving Toward has less to do with ambition. However, many ambitious people experience strong traits of the character structure, making it difficult for them to understand themselves. The Frenemies of *Flexibility* and *Convention* relate to Moving Toward. It's not unusual to see Frenemy combinations such as *Competitiveness* and *Flexibility*. The former



implies wanting to beat others in anything that looks like a game, while the latter involves adapting to other people's needs. That's a contradiction and thus can cause inner conflicts.

If you, as a coach, build on **ENNEAGRAMS**, then it is interesting that you can divide the nine Enneagram types into trios that each fit with one of Horney's three Character Structures.¹⁴ While there is debate about the predictive power of Enneagrams, from an empirical perspective, it's fair to say that many coaches find the description of the types helpful in their work. The three types associated with Moving Against and closest to ambition are Type 3 (the Achiever), Type 7 (the Enthusiast), and Type 8 (the Challenger). A central idea in Enneagrams is that people of a certain type tend to disintegrate—for example under stress—into a specific one of the other types. Likewise, people integrate—as they grow—into yet another of the types. Actually, five of the other six types either integrate or disintegrate into Type 3, 7, or 8. The only exception is Type 4 (the Individualist), so only one out of the nine Enneagram types is unrelated to Moving Against.

In Chapter 16 of our book, we formulate three brief scenarios inspired by Enneagram narratives, without attempting to map each of the seven ambitious Frenemies against the nine Enneagram types. The scenario related to Type 3 (The Achiever) involves the Frenemies of *Competitiveness*, *Convention*, and *Flexibility*. The *Desire* Frenemy is evident in the story about Type 7 (the Enthusiast), while *Boldness* and *Independence* are at play in Type 8 (the Challenger).

GROWING AS AN ADULT INVOLVES GAINING AWARENESS AND CONSCIOUSLY CHOOSING WHEN TO BE FRAMED BY ONE'S FRENEMIES, AS WELL AS WHEN AND HOW TO FRAME THEM. AMBITION IS ULTIMATELY A CHOICE FOR THE PEOPLE, WHO ARE CONSCIOUS OF THEIR CHARACTER TRAITS. BECOMING FULFILLED IN LIFE IS NOT A QUESTION ABOUT WHETHER TO BE AMBITIOUS OR NOT, BUT RATHER ABOUT HOW ONE RELATES TO ONE'S PERSONAL HOPES AND FEARS AS LIFE PLAYS OUT.

Let's briefly, at the end of this section, mention that we have developed an online self-assessment called the Frenemy Map, which we are currently testing in a beta version.

4. WHAT TOOLS MIGHT HELP YOU AND YOUR CLIENTS, AND WHAT IS THE FOUNDATION?

IN THE SPIRIT OF SIMULATING SELF-AUTHORSHIP, WE ARE NOT GIVING READERS DIRECT ADVICE ON WHAT TO DO AND NOT TO DO. Instead, we offer an enabling toolbox that enables them to find their own answers. These tools should not be all surprising to you, as a coach, even though each tool contains some finesse that might make you curious. Let's go through each of the four tools.

Philosophy of Ambition: The tool helps readers personalize their notion of Return on Ambition. It resembles the formulation of a purpose statement, which can be traced back to the philosopher **SØREN KIERKEGAARD (1813-1855), A PARENT OF EXISTENTIALISM AND,**



ULTIMATELY, ALSO COACHING.¹⁵ The Philosophy of Ambition is not limited to defining only a single purpose or, as Kierkegaard called it, an ideal. With the tool, the reader should formulate between one and seven principles. There are two motivations for giving the readers these degrees of freedom.

First, modern life is so much more multi-faceted than when Kierkegaard—an unmarried, childless, and deeply religious man living off family wealth—took his thoughtful walks in the shallow hills of Gilleleje outside Copenhagen. Ambitious people of today have more complex daily lives with profession, partnering, parenting, and other passions that are incredible difficult to fit into one single overarching and genuine ideal.

Second, requiring people to synthesize their purpose into a single, short sentence risks either a vague, impotent statement or unnecessarily dramatic and eventually regretful decisions. The latter tempts people to swing their inner pendulum abruptly to one side, instead of improving their balance in life.

The Philosophy of Ambition helps readers deal with life's polarities and multarities. This encourages them to reflect on what's personally meaningful, without curbing their further growth. The stage beyond Self-Authoring in Kegan's model is **SELF-TRANSFORMING**, which, amongst other facets, encompasses the ability to thrive with polarities.

KIERKEGAARD DID, BY THE WAY, DESCRIBE SEVERAL STAGES IN LIFE, WHICH COLLECTIVELY HAVE CLOSE SIMILARITIES TO KEGAN'S MODEL, EVEN THOUGH THE FORMER IS RELIGIOUS BY NATURE AND THE LATTER SECULAR AND SCIENTIFIC.¹⁶ Kierkegaard's equivalent to Self-Transforming is the Religious, involving the capacity to embrace the paradoxes of Christianity as a central element.

Immediate Priority. Empirical research confirms that goals have a significant impact in coaching.¹⁷ Meanwhile, there are many concerns about whether, when, and how goals are constructive.¹⁸ We have very positive experiences with the Immediate Priority tool amongst our target readers. It might help that—contrary to the other tools in the toolbox—it focuses strictly on simulating the Self-Authoring mind. Furthermore, **OUR RESEARCH FOUND THAT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOALS TENDS TO BE LOW FOR AMBITIOUS PEOPLE DUE TO THEIR INCLINATION TOWARDS TOO MANY, TOO LENGTHY, AND TOO SUPERFICIAL GOALS.** The design of the Immediate Priority tool took this fact into account.

Key performance indicators pace most corporate professionals, who, in many organizations, must formulate 2–5 development goals at a time once every six to twelve months. Their daily lives are further full of goals in disguise, with all kinds of demands and needs that require activities and that should surpass certain quality thresholds. The Immediate Priority counters the too-many and too-lengthy aspects by targeting one single, mission-critical goal for improving one's Return on Ambition over the coming 1-3 months. After that, readers can define their next Immediate Priority of a similar nature, if there is still a lot of untapped potential, or move on and define a new one in another area. **USING RELATIVELY SHORT-TERM GOALS IN SEQUENCE IS**



MORE EFFECTIVE FOR IMPROVING ONE'S RETURN ON AMBITION THAN POSSESSING MULTIPLE LONGER-TERM GOALS THAT RUN IN PARALLEL.

The Immediate Priority circumvents superficial goals in a couple ways. The readers formulate both a qualitative objective and between 2-6 quantitative measures for their Immediate Priority, inspired by the **OBJECTIVE KEY RESULT** (OKR) method applied by many technology companies, including Google, to steer their businesses.¹⁹

We encourage the reader to define at least one quantitative measure related to performance and one to practice. This distinction comes from **K. ANDERS ERICSSON**, the world's leading expert on how to build expertise. He highlights how meticulous absolute top performers are with their daily practice.²⁰ The advantage of paying attention to both practice and performance is that people can ultimately only manage their practice, while external factors influence their actual performance. Practice allows people to develop deliberately and to learn, even if they don't fully perform as they hope.

Practice includes, but is not limited to, introducing and adhering to new habits. Marshall Goldsmith is among the pioneers of using habits in his Behavioral Coaching.²¹ **IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT, CONTRARY TO GOLDSMITH, THE IMMEDIATE PRIORITY ONLY ENCOURAGES ASPIRATIONAL HABITS, NOT AVOIDANCE HABITS. THAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN STARTING OR STOPPING SOMETHING.**

Finally, **THE IMMEDIATE PRIORITY INCLUDES A SIMPLE, EASY-TO-USE VARIATION OF KEGAN AND LAHEY'S PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED IMMUNITY TO CHANGE METHOD.** Three circumstances make the simplification possible. First, the tool concentrates on the transition between the Socialized and Self-Authoring form of mind, instead of spanning all the stages of Adult Development. Second, it focuses on ambitious people, who have common traits. Third, by the time readers start applying the toolbox, they are already familiar with their most prevalent Frenemies and the associated patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behavioral habits. These patterns reflect the readers' underlying hopes and fears and assumptions about themselves, which are at the center stage of an Immunity to Change exercise. As part of the Immediate Priority self-coaching, the readers complete the equivalent of an Immunity to Change exercise not only by identifying which Frenemy is most likely to affect them in their upcoming effort, but also by reflecting upon their underlying beliefs and assumptions. This aspect of the Immediate Priority tool goes by the name of the Frenemy Watchlist.

Weekly Deliberation: The Weekly Deliberation helps readers integrate the pursuit of their Immediate Priority into their daily lives, instituting a routine for structured self-reflections that includes a weekly ritual at a fixed time slot. These weekly sessions do not need to take more than fifteen minutes. Here, readers prioritize and contemplate opportunities to progress with their Immediate Priority. To do so, they pick three events or tasks in the upcoming week and then formulate an intention for each of them. This exercise supports them while they stretch themselves, thereby creating excitement and learning.



NICOLAI TILLISCH HAS WORKED EXTENSIVELY WITH STEFAN FALK TO DEVELOP A SIMILAR METHOD IN RELATION TO THEIR SOFTWARE SOLUTION, STEPUPYOURDAY, WHICH HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT WALKS OF LIFE HAVE TESTED AND USED.²² There is plenty of evidence for the method's direct positive impact on achievement, growth, and well-being. **MIHALY CSIKSZENTMIHALYI** and his research into the Flow state have been a vital inspiration.²³ So has the before-mentioned K. Anders Ericsson, along with a range of other sources within **NEUROSCIENCE** and psychology. It should also be mentioned that **DAVE SNOWDEN'S** notion of Safe-to-Fail Experiments has inspired the book's instructions on how to use the tool.²⁴

Weekly Deliberation stimulates new ways of acting, observing, and thinking. Conscious learning and experimentation are critical to people thriving in **VUCA** (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) environments.²⁵ The COVID-19 pandemic has forced people to experience VUCA first-hand and sense how different it is from more predictable environments.

Frenemy Radar. OUR EXPERIENCE IS THAT COACHING CLIENTS ACT AGAINST THEIR OTHERWISE HEARTFELT COMMITMENTS, UNLESS THEY ARE AWARE OF THEIR HOPES OR FEARS, AS WELL AS THE SOMATIC AND EMOTIONAL SENSATIONS THAT ACCOMPANY THEM. They might intellectually acknowledge a Frenemy's historical pattern, but what counts is whether they are conscious about it in the very moment that a sensation boils in their body. This is precisely **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "CONCEPTUAL AWARENESS" AND "EMBODIED AWARENESS."**²⁶ For the readers' Frenemies loom constantly, together with their subconscious hopes and fears.

Earlier in this white paper, we exemplified with a reader who befriends *Competitiveness*. She might actually be very well aware of that Frenemy's closeness. Nonetheless, she starts impulsively to fight as she reacts to the subconscious threat of losing an innocent boardgame with her friends. She can get so emotionally entangled that she misinterprets others' behaviors and then makes unsubstantiated claims. She has a conceptual awareness of her Frenemy without noticing what starts happening in her body when the subconscious fear is strong. Her heart is beating rapidly and adrenaline pumps in her veins, but she doesn't have enough embodied awareness, at least not in this moment, to be in the position to make a conscious choice about whether to go along with her Frenemy or overrule it.

The Frenemy Radar helps readers to adapt when they experience sensations related to old patterns of being too competitive, too striving, too stubborn, too bold, too independent, too flexible, or too conventional. They should make a note of significant sensations and wait for 3-24 hours to reflect on which Frenemy was at play and on what motivated it.

There are several sources of inspiration for Frenemy Radar. At one end is the recent progress within neuroscience.²⁷ At the other end are **NICOLAI CHEN NIELSEN'S BUDDHISM-INSPIRED MEDITATION PRACTICES**. In between lie several somatic practices and the acknowledgement of how our body, posture, and mental state interplay.²⁸ The closest parallel to the radar that we know of is the Pain Button app used by the employees at the hedge fund **BRIDGEWATER**.²⁹ (The company is, by the way, one of the "deliberately developmental organizations" that Kegan and



Lahey have studied.³⁰) Contrary to the Pain Button, however, the Frenemy Radar applies for any strong sensation, whether it's a big increase or decrease in energy level, or whether it comes with a negative or positive flavor.

5. WHAT QUESTIONS ARE RELEVANT TO YOUR OWN PRACTICE?

WE WANT TO EMPHASIZE THE FACT THAT THE IDEAS AND TOOLS IN THE BOOK ARE NO ALTERNATIVE TO WHAT YOU ARE DOING. STILL, YOU MIGHT WANT TO UTILIZE SOME OF THEM IN YOUR PRACTICE. A book can never create the same close human connection that you offer to your clients. When you sit with your clients, you notice when they pause or dwell in a sentence, and how their breathing and body posture alter. You can seize these moments by asking questions and inviting further introspection.

This last section of the white paper has two parts. First, there are opportunities to reflect on how you can apply and variate these in your one-on-one coaching. Second, we would like to share a few thoughts on how you could benefit in interventions with groups and organizations.

For one-on-one coaching, you can consider both how you relate to ambition and what process you may apply when working with people who have the capacity for Socialized sense-making, but probably have not yet fully reached Self-Authoring sense-making.

Based on our book, we designed and facilitated a conversation on “How do you relate to your own ambition?” with around fifty coaches at the Meadow, which is Cultivating Leadership’s new open platform for exploring and growing.³¹ Inspired by that conversation, you might find it insightful to contemplate the following questions:

- *How do you relate to ambition?* You might have been told as a child that ambition was not socially acceptable. Or you might have experienced your parents’ great expectations of you as a burden. Irrespectively, you might have come to a place in life where you perceive your old ambition very differently than you did in the past. You might have made drastic choices in that regard.
- *How do you relate to ambitious people?* Your own experience of ambition may well flavor how you experience people who are ambitious. You might recognize yourself in them. That could be a younger self, which you feel nostalgic about, or someone whom you now despise. Or you might find ambitious people very alien to your past or current self. You might have fixed viewpoints on what ambitious people should and should not do.
- *Are you ambitious yourself?* You might be proud of being a really, really good coach — maybe so much that it constitutes a big part of your identity. Or, you might not at all identify with your past or imagined future achievements. However, you might still ambitiously pursue personal growth, a balance in life, or an ideal version of yourself.
- *In what ways might your relationship to ambition affect your engagement with ambitious clients?*



It's unlikely that you will find straight, simple answers to those questions. Some questions keep flourishing, while your answers fade.

You might want to try out the SPACE process to help selected clients simulate self-authorship. Here are sets of questions that might be helpful to you:

- **Scope:** What could you do to help your clients reflect on their motivations for addressing their respective ambitions? To what extent is their motivation extrinsic (related to other people's expectations and possible incentives associated with richness, prestige, or power), as opposed to intrinsic (driven by own values and the pleasure of doing things in themselves)? And, if intrinsic motivation is low, how can you then help them to frame the scope in a way that's more genuinely exciting to them?
- **Perspective:** What can you do to help your client see patterns that they currently cannot? Could you encourage them to have certain conversations with selected colleagues, family, and friends? Do you apply techniques that could complement the book's self-assessment? Jennifer Garvey Berger's Growth Edge Interview method can be mind-blowing. For leaders, Bob Anderson's Leadership Circle Profile assessment can also drive profound insights.
- **Awareness:** What can you do to make your client self-observe after your dialogue in the Perspective step? You could potentially introduce the Frenemy Radar here. Could you ask your client to bring themselves into certain uncomfortable situations on purpose? Do you dare to ask your client to use wearable electronics to track heartbeat, breathing, or other indicators of sensations?
- **Choice:** What is your hypothesis regarding the stage of Adult Development at which your client can sense-make? What can you do to help your client not only to formulate principles, creating a Philosophy of Ambition, but also to devise one single, short-term Immediate Priority? You might also benefit from applying aspects of the Growth Edge method here, or conduct an Immunity to Change exercise.
- **Experimentation:** How do the Weekly Deliberation and the Frenemy Radar complement your existing approach? Could they facilitate further client reflection between your sessions? Do you dare ask your client to start journaling or using support software? Are you open to experiment with the frequency and length of your coaching sessions, accordingly?

You might also imagine some interesting opportunities beyond one-on-one coaching. The vision for our book is, as mentioned, to help people to reflect on their ambition and life as they would otherwise only have, if they had a capable coach or participated in an elite development program. **RECOGNIZING HOW CAPABLE PEOPLE CAN BE ON THEIR OWN CAN FOSTER CREATIVITY IN SCALING YOUR CLIENT INTERVENTIONS.** What might happen if you introduced the Return on Ambition equation, the seven Frenemies, and 1–2 selected tools to a group of clients? On the back of this, could you conduct group sessions, instead of coaching one person at a time? Could you even train selected clients in facilitating such group sessions and scale your impact further? We are in the territory where there is not one single answer to each question. Instead, the answers depend on you, your clients, and their unique contexts.



YOUR FEEDBACK AND THOUGHTS

AS AMBITIOUS PEOPLE, WE RECOGNIZE THAT THERE IS ALWAYS MORE TO LEARN. IT WOULD BE GREAT TO HEAR YOUR FEEDBACK AND THOUGHTS. PLEASE WRITE TO OUR SHARED EMAIL ADDRESS ANY TIME: 2xNicolai@ReturnOnAmbition.info. WE WOULD LOVE TO ENTER INTO A DIALOGUE.

POTENTIAL FURTHER READING

Our book is, of course, a possible source. It's available from Fast Company Press as a paper book, e-book, and audio book. Throughout the whitepaper, we have included endnotes that contain possible sources for future studies.



Endnotes

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