The greatest leaders and statesmen in history have not been problem solvers. They have been builders. They have been creators.~ Robert Fritz from The Path of Least Resistance

The theme of Robert Fritz’s brilliant book, The Path of Least Resistance can be summed up in three words: “Structure determines behavior.”

Like you, before reading the book I had no idea what the heck that meant. Nor did I have any idea what “structural conflict” vs. “structural tension” was all about—let alone why creating structural tension is the core attribute of creative genius.

As you gain an understanding of how structure determines behavior, you’ll also gain a sense for why Fritz believes affirmations and willpower and all that other “positive thinking” stuff will never give you sustainable creative powers.

For that? We need a whole new structure.

So, let’s get building!!

(Oh, and while we’re at it, let’s hit on some other key components of the creator’s success, shall we?)

**STRUCTURE DETERMINES BEHAVIOR**

Let’s jump right in and get our arms (and brains) around this idea that structure determines behavior.

The easiest way to get it? Per Fritz: “The next time you’re in a building, notice how the structure of the building determines your path through it.”

If an elevator shaft is put in a certain place and a stairway somewhere else and a hallway here and a door there, unless you have some super powers that get you through walls and ceilings, your BEHAVIOR (how you get to where you’re going) will be determined by the STRUCTURE of the building.

Make sense?

The whole book is about the (very!) Big Idea that we often have (very!) bad structures in our life and that until we learn how to create new ones, all the positive thinking in the world isn’t going to help us create the sustainable results we’re looking for.

So what’s a structure look like in our life?

Try this on:
STRUCTURAL CONFLICT & RUBBER BANDS ON A WALL

“The structural conflict most common in everyone’s life is formed by two competing tension-resolution systems. One is based on your desire. The other is based on an incompatible dominant belief that you are not able to fulfill your desires.”

Alright.

Imagine you’re in the middle of a room. The wall in front of you represents what you want. The wall behind you represents a feeling that you can’t get what you want. There’s a big ol’ rubber band around your waist that connects to the front wall—pulling you toward what you want. And, there’s an equally big ol’ rubber band around your waist pulling you backward—toward the belief that you can’t have what you want. Both rubber bands are mellow when you’re right in the center of the room.

You move toward your goal. You’re getting closer and closer to the wall in front of you!

What happens? The tension in the rubber band connected to the wall behind you (fear you can’t have what you want) is getting tighter and tighter until...

Snap! You’re pulled back toward the other wall.

Then what happens?

The rubber band connected to the front wall pulls you forward toward it.

Then what?

Exactly.

The rubber bands want to resolve their tension and as they do, you move back and forth. Back and forth. Fritz calls it “oscillating” and THAT is structural conflict—a structure that, as tension is resolved, has you bouncing back and forth. It’s in conflict.

That’s what life in the oscillating pattern looks and feels like. You have a conflict in your structure that, by its very design, bounces you back and forth and back and forth in a never-ending cycle. You oscillate rather than achieve desired results.

To get out of that oscillation, we need to adopt a whole new structure that resolves rather than oscillates.

Exit Structural Conflict. Enter: Structural Tension.

STRUCTURAL TENSION

“The discrepancy between what you want and what you currently have forms the most important structure in the creative process, that of structural tension.”

Easiest way to describe this one: Remember the rubber bands on the wall? Nice. Now get out of the room and bring one (big ol’) rubber band with you.

You’re standing outside. Picture your ideal vision for your life on a cloud. Keep one end of the rubber band around your waist and staple the other end to that cloud (work with me here! :). Now float back from that ideal cloud toward your current reality on the ground. You feel that tension?!?

THAT is structural tension.

Hold the vision of your ideal. Know where you’re at. Feel the tension between the two.

Guess what?

THAT structure doesn’t resolve its tension by sending you back and forth. It slingshots you toward your ideal.
Fun! :) 

Now that we understand structural conflict vis-à-vis structural tension, the next logical question is: “How do I get out of that oscillating mess and into a model of structural tension?”

The answer?

You need to make some critical choices.

**THE PREDOMINANT CREATIVE FORCE**

“Without making the fundamental choice to be the predominant creative force in your life, no matter what you do to attempt to benefit yourself or enhance your life, you will merely be finding more sophisticated ways of responding to circumstances.”

Fritz makes a brilliant argument that we don’t need more affirmations or more willpower.

We need to make a fundamental choice. A choice on which all of our other choices and behaviors are built. The choice to live at our highest potential. To choose to be a creator not a victim. To choose health and vitality. To choose love.

Few of us ever make those FUNDAMENTAL choices.

This is basically *Stephen Covey*’s “Habit #1: Be Proactive.”

It’s absolutely essential to make the fundamental choice to be responsible for how we show up.

Will we be creators or will be victims?

Will we put control outside of ourselves and blame circumstances (a poor childhood, annoying boss, traffic jam, etc.) for how we’re showing up in our lives or will we own the fact that we alone are responsible for choosing (!) how we bring ourselves to the world?

“This one fundamental choice—to be the predominant creative force in your life—is a foundation for the entire orientation of the creative... From this choice the meaning of the word desire changes for you, from ‘idle wishes and hopes’ to ‘true vision of that which is the highest in human aspiration and vision.’”

**CHOICES: PRIMARY, SECONDARY & FUNDAMENTAL**

“Athletes and musicians may not enjoy practicing long hours, but they do so just the same: not out of duty, obligation, or any other form of self-manipulation, but because they are making secondary choices consistent with their primary choice to be able to perform music or excel in sports.”

With our foundation securely laid, we then make what Fritz calls “primary choices” that dictate the “secondary choices” along the way. In his words: “A primary choice is about some result you want in itself and for itself... It functions as the ultimate goal... A choice that helps you take a step toward your primary result is called a secondary choice.”

As an example, let’s say you make the primary choice to optimize your health and to live with radiant energy and vitality. (Good choice, btw. :).

The alarm clock goes off. You don’t feel like getting out of bed to head to the gym, your mind tells you that you deserve a day off from all your hard training, but you recall your primary choice (to get in great shape) and you make the secondary choice to get out of bed, put on your workout clothes and go to the gym.

At the gym, you don’t feel like going all the way through your workout—telling yourself you’ve done enough, but you recall your primary choice and make the secondary choice to complete the workout.


*The human spirit will not invest itself in a compromise.*

– Robert Fritz

*There’s nothing capricious in nature, and the implanting of a desire indicates that its gratification is in the constitution of the creature that feels it.*

– Robert Fritz
Every moment provides us with an opportunity to honor our fundamental and primary choices. Or not. To the extent that we do not honor these choices, we’re in trouble and have little chance of living at our highest potential or experiencing consistent levels of happiness.

Remember: Creators are not buffeted by their circumstances. They get very (!) clear on what they want and make the choice to COMMIT to achieving those results.

So...

What fundamental and primary choices have you made?
Are your secondary choices leading you to achieve your highest goals?

**WHAT DO I WANT?**

“...the vital question of the creative process: ‘What do I want to create?’”

That, my friend, is one of the most important questions we can ever ask ourselves.

As Fritz so beautifully says: “What do I want? ... Whenever you are confused, you can become clear by asking and answering this question. Confusion usually comes from focusing on process, or solution, and not being able to see where you are going. When you are considering what you want, your ability to focus your attention toward desired results eliminates this confusion. When you are confused, it is usually not about where you want to go but how to get there. If you try to find a way to get there before you know where you want to go, naturally you can expect confusion to accompany your quest.”

“What do I want?”

As Fritz says, when we’re confused, we’re usually stressed about how we’re going to do something. And, as the stress builds, it’s easy to forget what we were so excited to create in the first place!

So, the next time you are confused or overwhelmed, pause for a moment. Take a deep breath. Forget, for the moment, that you’re stressed.

And ask yourself the very simple question: “WHAT DO I WANT TO CREATE?”

My hunch is that you, like me, will also discover the truth in Fritz’ wisdom that your overwhelm is coming from too much attention on the “how” and too little attention on a fuzzy “what.”

Try it!

**WHAT DO YOU REALLY WANT?**

“In order to conceive of what you truly want to create, you must separate what you want from what you think is possible.”

Alright.

So what do you really (!) want?

I’m not talking about the watered-down, don’t-freak-anyone-out-want. I’m talking about the truth. What is your soul’s deepest desire?

Be honest.

And remember:
**SOULS DON’T COMPROMISE**

“If you limit your choices only to what seems possible or reasonable... you disconnect yourself from what you truly want, and all you have left is a compromise... the human spirit will not invest itself in a compromise.”

My God I love that.

“...the human spirit will not invest itself in a compromise.”

Reminds me of Abraham Maslow’s admonition: “What one can be, one MUST be.”

That need to become our highest self is not some fanciful, egoic drive.

It’s a fundamental NEED.

In the deepest sense, it’s no different than that need we have for oxygen.

Deprive your body of oxygen and you’ll die.

Deprive your soul of your highest vision and your soul will gasp for air.

So... What are you most passionate about?!!?

If you KNEW you would succeed, what would you dare to dream?

Go ahead and write that down now. :)  

If I knew I was absolutely guaranteed to succeed, I would: __________________________

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

What do you want to create?

Who do you want to become?

What things do you want to have?

How do you want to spend your days? With whom?

WHAT DO YOU WANT?!?

... Ahem.

So, we’ve made choices, created tension and gotten clear on what we want.

Then what?

**1, 2, 3 (AND 4, 5) OF CREATIVITY**

*Step 1. Conceive of the result you want to create.*

As Fritz says: “The best place to begin the creative process is at the end. What is the final result you want? This way of thinking helps you conceive the result you want to create independently from how you will create it.”

So, what do you want to create?!? (Notice how important this question is? I’m deliberately repeating it. :)}
**Step 2. You gotta know what currently exists.**

Per Fritz: "As you learn to master your own creative process, you develop a capacity for truth. Good, bad, or indifferent, you will still want to know accurately what is going on." Are you taking an honest look at reality?

**Step 3. Take action.**

All the positive affirmations in the world won’t do you any good if you don’t take the next step. And the next step. And the next step. TAKE ACTION!

**Step 4. Learn the rhythms of the creative process.**

Every creative process goes through three distinct phases: germination, assimilation, and completion. As we recognize these phases, we become empowered and conscious creators.

**Step 5. Creating momentum.**

As we begin to create the results we want today, we’re more prepared to create the results we want ten years from now. That’s a good thing. So start creating some momentum today!

Alrighty...

That’s a very quick look at this great book. If you’re feeling a desire to get your creativity on, I highly recommend a thorough study of Fritz’ ideas.

Remember the rubber bands?

Staple your vision to the clouds, honestly look at the current reality, and create structural tension that makes the path of least resistance the one that leads to results!

And, finally, *never* (!) compromise your vision.

In unflinching integrity to the creation of our highest selves,

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher