



Take Charge of Your Talent

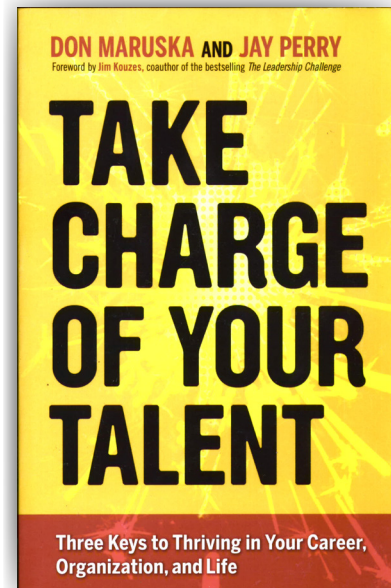
Three Keys to Thriving in Your Career, Organization, and Life

Don Maruska and Jay Perry

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ISBN: 978-1609947231



KEY CONCEPTS

Key #1 Power up Your Talent Story

- Each person's talent represents a story that can be transformed. For people's careers and lives to move forward, they must always act as the heroes of their talent stories.
- By engaging in "Talent Catalyst Conversations," people can gain powerful insights into their talent stories and the necessary changes they need to make in their lives to realize their hopes and dreams.
- "Talent Catalysts" are the people who engage in "Talent Catalyst Conversations" with others with the aim of helping them to unlock their talents. The only requirements are that they practice generous listening and ask open-ended questions.

Key #2 Accelerate through Obstacles

- When a person chooses a hopeful frame of mind and works hard to keep their hopes alive, they gain the necessary motivation to sustain their talents and accelerate results.

- The key to recognizing and attaining opportunities is maintaining the personal quality of openness.
- To achieve forward progress, people must make healthy stretches. A "healthy stretch" is when a person takes on the right-sized challenge: one that is stimulating without being overwhelming or too stressful.

Key #3 Multiply the Payoff for Self and Others

- People must transform their talents into the types of tangible career assets that further their personal brands.
- When people share their career assets with their organizations or communities they define themselves as sources of wisdom and valued contributors.

INTRODUCTION

Many people are frustrated with their work. They feel their talents are untapped and consequently they are unable to move forward in their careers. While professional coaching could help, it is a luxury too

expensive for the majority of people. In **Take Charge of Your Talent**, Don Maruska and Jay Perry make talent development easy and accessible to people of all backgrounds. By combining their years of professional experience as CEOs and professional coaches, they offer three keys and various exercises to help people not only unlock their talents but elevate their work performances and overall satisfaction in life.

KEY #1: POWER UP YOUR TALENT STORY

Be Your Own Hero

Everyone has a talent story in which they are the hero or the victim. Most people are victims stuck in a talent story of limitation, fearful and unable to move forward. Fortunately, becoming the hero in one's own talent story is universally attainable.

Victims often feel other people and extraneous circumstances are preventing them from fulfilling their dreams. They surrender their power to these perceived obstacles. To ensure their talent stories become fulfilling, these victims must take back the power as heroes would. Heroes do not have superpowers; they are ordinary people willing to overcome their perceived limitations in the following ways:

1. *Heroes have hopes.* Heroes are willing to do whatever is ethically necessary to bring their hopes to fruition. They confront and overcome any fears that might act as obstacles.
2. *Heroes recognize opportunities.* Heroes look for opportunities and often spot them where others see dead ends. They also will create opportunities and enlist others if necessary.
3. *Heroes act.* Heroes consistently make steady progress towards their goals when others would prefer to play it safe and watch from the sidelines.

Everyone has a choice and gets to decide their roles in their own talent stories. Once they become the hero and follow a clear set of actions their careers and lives can begin to move forward. No talent story is ironclad or incapable of change.

Explore a Talent Catalyst Conversation

A fresh perspective is paramount to the transformation of one's talent story. The "Talent Catalyst Conversation" is a tool that not only gives people valuable

insight into their actual situations but also helps them identify new possibilities for the future. The purpose of participating in a "Talent Catalyst Conversation" is for people to figure out what is important to them and where they want to go.

There are two roles in any "Talent Catalyst Conversation": the participant looking for answers and the "Talent Catalyst" conducting the exercise. The role of the "Talent Catalyst" is to help the participant clarify their obstacles, hopes, and opportunities. Anyone can be a "Talent Catalyst" as long as they can keep the conversation's focus on the participant, and employ generous listening by suspending judgment as the participant speaks.

A "Talent Catalyst" must ask structured questions like those provided by the authors in the "Talent Catalyst Conversation's" framework to reveal the participant's hopes, opportunities, and next steps. The "Talent Catalyst Conversation" framework is broken down into three different rounds, ten steps, and twenty questions.

Round I: Enliven Hopes

Step 1: Connect with Hopes—When people connect with their deepest hopes it produces an energy that

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helps them see the opportunities around them more clearly.

- What are the participant's hopes about the topic of the Talent Catalyst Conversation?
- Why are they important?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Don Maruska is founder and CEO of three Silicon Valley companies, a venture investor, and recipient of the National Innovators Award. After nearly 20 years in Silicon Valley, he became a Master Certified Coach, helping leaders and teams to cultivate success in their organizations. His clients include large firms such as Accenture, Blue Shield, Duke Energy, Microsoft, and Wells Fargo. He founded and directs the Cal-ICMA Coaching Program, which provides professional development for more than 3,000 local government leaders annually. He wrote *How Great Decisions Get Made: 10 Easy Steps for Reaching Agreement on Even the Toughest Issues*, which was reprinted in Asia and Africa, and has helped businesses, governments, and communities around the world.

Jay Perry is a Master Certified Coach. His clients include Fortune 500 corporate executives, entrepreneurs, and creative artists. He is also known as one of the world's leading mentors for new coaches seeking professional certification. He has a BFA from Boston University and an MFA from Ohio University and a background in professional theater as an actor, teacher, director, stage manager, and theater owner. He has coached and led workshops around the world on topics such as business planning, leadership, transformational change, communication, and career planning. In 1991, he began working with legendary coach Thomas Leonard and participated in the creation of Coach University and the International Coach Federation. His coaching clients include executives at AT&T, Avaya, Genentech, Shell, and Schlumberger.

Step 2: Consider Concerns—Acknowledging concerns is essential so that they can eventually be overcome.

- What is standing between the participant and realizing his or her hopes?
- Which of the identified concerns seems most important to address so that progress can be made.

Step 3: Tap Success Stories—By reflecting on the participant's previous success stories, clues emerge that the catalyst can use to help the participant overcome his or her current concerns.

- How has the participant successfully dealt with concerns like these before?
- What did he or she learn from previous situations that might help now?

Round II: Expand Opportunities

Step 4: Identify Opportunities to Learn, Grow, and Develop—Participants' progress toward hopes hinges on their abilities to identify where they need to grow and what they need to learn.

- Where does the participant need to grow to move toward his or her hopes?
- What does the participant need to learn?

Step 5: Use Available Resources—Once people realize the abundance of resources they are surrounded by, their brains respond with a sense of possibility.

- Catalysts should encourage participants to think about the resources they have that can help them to realize their hopes.
- How can these resources be used?

Step 6: Revisit Hopes—Participants' perspectives on their hopes may have changed as the conversation has progressed.

- At this point in the conversation, catalysts might ask participants if they have some greater clarity about their hopes.
- How would they express their hopes now?

Round III: Energize Through Actions

Step 7: Make a Healthy Stretch—Participants must develop a "healthy stretch" or an objective they can reach for that is challenging without causing stress.

- What might a healthy stretch look like?

- Is there something the participant could start doing now to enjoy greater fulfillment?

Step 8: Enlist a Talent Fulfillment Team for Results—A Talent Fulfillment Team is composed of people that support and inspire the participant.

- Who would be ideal to have on the team?
- Who could help the participant to play as big as he or she would like?
- Can the participant visualize these people cheering him on along the way?

Step 9: Target Concrete Actions—Success depends on taking action.

- What forward-moving actions would the participant enjoy taking now?

Step 10: Reflect on Possibilities and Progress—Participants should take a few minutes to reflect on the experience of their conversations to really absorb the insight they gleaned.

- What has been gained from the conversation?
- What will help them to follow through on their intentions?

Your talent is not simply your strength or your skill set. It is your self-expression—the joyful demonstration of your unique abilities that benefit both you and the world.

Connect with a Catalyst

The role of the Talent Catalyst is crucial to a conversation's success. While it is true that anyone is capable of playing the role of a Talent Catalyst, it is important to note that not everyone will put in the same amount of effort. There are four essential attributes Talent Catalysts must have to be effective:

1. They are willing partners. Good Talent Catalysts are eager to help and give participants their full attention.
2. They ask carefully structured, open-ended questions. Talent Catalysts must avoid yes and no questions in order to facilitate deeper thought processes for participants.
3. They are generous listeners. Effective Talent Catalysts do not listen to participants mindlessly and

selfishly and do not try to impart their own wisdom. They suspend their judgment and take note of what the participant says. They also reflect what participants say back to them. The more generous the listener, the more comfortable the participant will be in exploring thoughts in the conversation.

4. They give participants the freedom to be in charge. They are present and supportive and allow the participant to be in charge.
5. Talent Catalysts do not need extensive training to perform their jobs well. When picking Talent Catalysts it is important that participants choose people they are comfortable with and who can facilitate conversations without a personal agenda. They also should be people who can offer ideas without taking away the participant's power.

KEY #2: ACCELERATE THROUGH OBSTACLES

Keep Your Hopes Humming

Hope is powerful in any talent story. When people learn how to live in a cycle of hope they become more energized and committed to their best creative thinking. To attain a perpetually hopeful mindset it is necessary to overcome fear-based thinking. While the human brain uses fear as a form of protection, it paralyzes people from moving forward and blinds them from opportunity. Many people get caught in a vicious cycle of fear in which fears about their talent stories lead to lack of opportunities, which perpetuates inaction.

The first step in breaking out of a cycle of fear is for people to acknowledge that they are stuck. It then becomes necessary for them to consciously choose a different response, one that fosters their hopes. The virtuous cycle of hope encourages creative thought, allows people to identify opportunities, and helps them take action. These exercises help people nurture their hopes:

- *Take 5.* People should take five minutes every day to focus on their hopes. This can include a few minutes in the morning, outlining steps they need to take during the day and a few minutes at night, reflecting on their actions.

- *Make hopes visible.* It is important to have a physical reminder— such as a collage, a screensaver, or even just a symbol—of one’s hopes visible throughout the day.
- *Use hope holders*—“Hope Holders” are specific friends and family members people choose to cheer them on and help keep their flames of talent flickering.

The second part of successfully entering the virtuous cycle of hope is the way in which a person handles their concerns. Concerns typically become obstacles that keep people stuck. While it is nearly impossible to eliminate concerns, it is possible to turn them into the kind of energizers that propel people forward. This can be achieved in the following ways:

- *Get “but” out of the way.* People must examine the things they feel are in their way. Then remove whatever is preventing them from achieving their hopes.
- *Turn concerns into hopes.* It is possible to turn concerns into positive guideposts by examining their flip sides and identifying the hope that lies underneath.
- *Craft inspirational stories with themselves in the lead.* This exercise requires people to write a story that describes how they want their hopes to come into fruition and how to get out of any ruts.

Grab Opportunities to Grow

There are two different types of people: those with fixed mindsets and those with growth mindsets. People with fixed mindsets think their intelligence and talent cannot change. This frame of mind prevents them from recognizing opportunities and moving forward. When people have a growth mindset, they believe their intelligence and talent has the potential to increase. Their openness offers them an impetus to learn more and progress. To cultivate openness for growth:

- *Observe thought patterns.* People should take note of when their outlooks seem fixed, how often they feel stuck, and then consider how a new perspective might benefit them.

- *Question what feels fixed.* Determine what aspects of the current situation feel fixed and consider how new opportunities could be created.
- *Keep a reminder that inspires openness.* Everyone should find an image or object that makes them feel open and place it in a visible spot.

One of the best ways to get your hopes out of the closet is to give them physical form. Create a symbolic representation that will, metaphorically, wave its arms to remind you of why your hopes are important to you or poke you whenever you start getting off track.

People’s inner qualities, or “IQs,” are the cornerstones of their beings and consequently affect all of their external actions. By developing their IQs, people can help their talents find their voices. The “Inner Quality Checklist” can help people to identify which IQs are the most important to helping them realize their hopes:

- *Head—Mental Processes:* Wise, curious, focused, and mindful.
- *Heart—Emotional Processes:* Compassionate, generous, passionate, and vulnerable.
- *Health—Physical Processes:* Vital, grateful, joyful, and peaceful.
- *Ingenuity:* Creative, inspired, unconventional, and visionary.
- *Relationships:* Authentic, respectful, supportive, and gracious.
- *Strength:* Assertive, courageous, faithful, and promotional.

After determining which three to four qualities are most important to their hopes, people must set out to develop them. They can surround themselves with people who have the IQs they are looking for, take classes, or just be mindful about bringing them to life throughout the day.

To accomplish anything, resources are necessary. This is especially true for people looking to express their talents fully. People can expand their lists of resources and use existing valuable ones more strategically by using a “Resource Power-Up,” which includes the following steps:

1. *100 Resource Challenge.* Most people have plenty of resources—they just need to reconnect with them. This exercise involves writing down as many people, places, and things a person can use as resources and then adding one a day to the list for ninety days afterward.
2. *100 Percent Resource Usage Challenge.* It is important to get the most from each resource as possible. People must identify which resources on their lists are the most valuable and then squeeze 100 percent from those resources.
3. *Resource Mash-Up.* People can practice connecting and combining different resources to break up log-jams that prevent their hopes from being realized.

Cultivating openness to growth can strengthen the cycle of hopes, opportunities, and actions in rewarding ways. Anything that engages the brain in learning can open up exciting new and unexpected opportunities. People engaged in growth and learning are more likely not only to achieve success but also to enjoy their success.

Challenge Yourself to Stretch

To live a successful life of talent expression it is necessary for people to stretch themselves beyond their comfort zones. When the brain is met with just the right amount of challenge it makes a “healthy stretch,” a necessary state to keep people engaged and making the most of their talents. If people feel like they are on autopilot or disengaged, they may be in need of a bigger stretch in their lives. If they have stretched as far as they can go and are still in an uncomfortable place, they are in need of a “big leap,” like a new position or career change.

Sometimes people are too stretched in their lives and end up feeling frazzled and overloaded. The following steps help people ease back into the healthy stretch zone:

1. *Reexamine the story.* Tweaking one’s talent story in whatever way possible can enable more balance in life.
2. *Do more of what you like* (and have something to look forward to). To dilute stress, people should schedule and integrate activities they enjoy into their daily schedules.

3. *Create or enlist a team of support people.* People must others for support when needed.
4. *Delegate, delegate, delegate.* To break up stress, people should delegate responsibilities to others at home and work.

Nobody can accomplish anything important entirely on his or her own. This is why it is important for people to enlist a “Talent Fulfillment Team.” By identifying the best members from their resource lists to offer support, people become more likely to realize their hopes. To ask someone to join a Talent Fulfillment Team, a person must make a simple, direct request.

The “Talent Action Plan” is like a road map that consolidates all of an individual’s efforts and empowers them to move forward. People’s ability to translate their Talent Action Plans into daily progress is crucial to their success. The Talent Action Plan includes the following elements:

- A brief statement of the aspirations the plan will address.
- What needs to be learned or developed for an individual to realize his or her hopes.
- Why these things must be learned and developed.
- How they will be learned and developed.
- A list of people who need to be involved.
- A deadline.
- Projected resources for completion.
- How this will impact other priorities.
- What reporting needs and coaching support are needed to track progress and sustain results.

KEY #3: MULTIPLY THE PAYOFFS FOR SELF AND OTHERS

Create Enduring Career Assets

Talent is more valuable when it becomes a transferable asset. For a person to translate their talents into career assets they must first think about what they want to accomplish and then identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities that represent them best. Once this

is clear, they can develop their talents into tangible career assets such as a checklist or a how-to video, using the surgeon's method of:

1. *See one.* An individual starts by shadowing an expert in the field and observing that expert's desired tangible talent or skill carefully.
2. *Do one.* The expert oversees the individual trying out the new skills.
3. *Teach one.* The individual documents what they learned and teaches it to others so the new information sticks.

There is a lot of power in a personal brand. A clear, personal brand not only communicates what talent a person has to offer but also attracts new opportunities. The authors offer a simple formula to illustrate this: $\text{Brand} + \text{Proof Points} = \text{Opportunities for You}$. Each component defined:

- *Brand:* A person's promise that creates a preference for their talents.
- *Proof Points:* Career assets or what the person has to offer.
- *Opportunities:* What the person wants to be doing.

Share the Wealth and Everyone Wins

When people share their talents with the world, everyone around them benefits. In essence, this process is a "Talent Wheel." A person puts his or her talent into action by producing tangible career assets and then sharing them with others so that they become organizational assets, which ultimately creates more opportunities and room for everyone to grow. In this cycle, the more a person gives, the more he or she gets back.

By efficiently managing their own time, people allow their talents to bubble up more freely. This can be achieved when people use their Talent Catalyst Conversations and Talent Action Plans as effective to-do lists. Excellent time management, however, also requires a stop doing list. By cutting out time wasters, people can focus more time on their talents. A stop doing list is made up of three categories of activities:

1. Activities that can be dropped altogether.
2. Activities that can be delegated to others.
3. Activities that can be delayed.

Champion a Take-Charge Talent Culture

Talent thrives when people are willing to override their fears and invest their energy into cultivating environments in which everyone can grow. To maintain this momentum is not easy. It requires people to exercise excellent self-management. For individuals to keep moving forward on their paths toward realizing their hopes it is important that they learn to navigate obstacles and use them to increase their flexibility. Whenever people need to regain momentum in their talent stories, they should tap into the practices of keeping their hopes humming, grabbing opportunities to grow, and challenging themselves to stretch.

To help other people be their better selves, it is important to avoid pointing out others' shortcomings. It is better to gently invite them to a new perspective by asking questions similar to those used in a Talent Catalyst Conversation. For people to help others enjoy the benefits of an actual Talent Catalyst Conversation, they can either offer to be a Talent Catalyst or ask the other person to be one for them, effectively demonstrating the ease of the process.



FEATURES OF THE BOOK

Estimated Reading Time: 3–4 hours, 195 pages

Take Charge of Your Talent offers practical advice and straightforward exercises designed to help people increase their productivity and sense of fulfillment at work. It should be read cover to cover, because each chapter offers information and jargon that leads into the next. The book also offers real-life testimonies of people along with the "Take Charge of Your Talent Manifesto," FAQs, and other resources. Between the three keys, numerous exercises and overall insight, this is an excellent book for anyone in need of an affordable career coach.

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