



The Bigger Game White Paper

What makes an individual, a group, a community, or an organization successful? Many books, briefs, articles and case studies have been written to address that question. The prevailing conclusion seems to be that successful individuals, groups, communities and organizations align behind a common vision, and their corresponding behaviors, values, attitudes and actions support it.

This appears to be a simple concept, but often difficult to enact. Yet when individuals align their behaviors, attitudes and actions with a compelling vision they experience success. And if they are part of a group, community or an organization that shares a common, compelling vision, they become a model for high performance.

This white paper introduces a different approach called "The Bigger Game," for individuals, teams and corporations to play, in order to achieve great success. Certainly in terms of personal and/or professional success — but even more importantly in terms of the positive impact individuals have on their family, community, clients or organizations.

Business As Usual

Human beings have a tendency to fall into the trap of "*Business as Usual*," which can be defined as a state of predictability, unchanging expectations, and blaming circumstances as the reason for not succeeding or for poor performance. In short, *Business as Usual* is characterized by doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. Most individuals, groups and organizations do *Business as Usual* really well. They have that one handed and rely on the same personal competencies to carry it out. The problem is that *Business as Usual* doesn't invite people to grow and develop. It merely invites staying the same.

Laura Whitworth, the co-founder of The Coaches Training Institute, and Rick Tamlyn, founder of It's All Made Up, inc. and a senior trainer for the Coaches Training Institute, have created an innovation model called the Bigger Game. The Bigger Game lays out a framework and approach to help individuals and groups achieve great things, not out of obligation, but because they are compelled or driven by a compelling purpose.

The Bigger Game offers a different approach to innovate and evolve as an individual, a group, or an organization. The method, when rigorously applied, helps individuals and groups intentionally define what they want to accomplish and who they want to be with their families, communities, environment or work. Individuals tap into their hunger for a fulfilling life, and allow this sense of a higher purpose or a deeper meaning determine what they are up to in their life versus allowing circumstances to dictate their behavior and action.

Play a Bigger Game

*Comfort
Zones*

Hunger

*Compelling
Purpose*

ASSESS

**BOLD
Action**

G U L P

**SUSTAIN
ABILITY**

Allies

Investment

Comfort Zones

The backdrop for the human condition is contained in the elements of *Business as Usual*, called Comfort Zones. It is a natural, normal human tendency for individuals to seek comfort. Unfortunately, as individuals continue to seek more and more comforts, they find themselves unfulfilled. In the March 2003 issue of *Fast Company*, the author points out, "The desire for more is the most powerful drive in our culture...what does all that income and spending add up to? A lot of nothing it turns out...The cost of our wealth to other societies and the environment has been well documented. But the greatest toll might be on us. Between 1970 and 1999, the average American family received a 16% raise (adjusted for inflation); while the percentage of people who described themselves as "very happy" fell from 36% to 29%. The conclusion is inescapable: Our lifestyles are packed with more stuff, but we lead emptier lives. We're consuming more, but enjoying it less." (*How to Lead A Rich Life* — Polly LaBarre).

What is the relationship between this observation and the *Comfort Zone* phenomena that exists in corporations? This same philosophy of driving after more and more dollars as a way to achieve fulfillment and satisfaction at work is a prevailing theme. And yet, professionals have a sense that their work, their vocation is about more than just hitting the bottom-line results. The Bigger Game invites individuals, professional teams, departments, divisions, and organizations to examine their work from a sense of experiencing themselves performing at their very best, and of being engaged in something valuable and consequential. It invites professionals to examine their work from a feeling of being fulfilled, and then to examine the comfort zones that get in the way of that happening.

What are *Comfort Zones*? They are habits, habitual patterns, routines, and self-indulgences that are familiar and ubiquitous, and linger even after they have become damaging. And in spite of that, individuals/teams are reluctant to give them up. Common comfort zones found in businesses include:

- Only interacting with other people when you need something from them
- Managers not taking the time to help develop people
- Tolerating each other vs. recognizing each other's strengths
- Focusing only on personal self interests
- Standing behind the title of "boss," (using the language of 'working for' vs. 'work with')
- Blaming circumstances and outside forces for not focusing on people development and spending time coaching, e.g., the manager asks for too much, there isn't enough time, the employee is a poor performer
- Impatience
- Blaming the economic state for lack of success
- Making sure all the pieces are in place before making a move — avoiding risks
- Going to the 'same' circle of contacts vs. developing relationships with new allies, and constituents
- Escalating vs. collaborating & resolving issues based on strong working relationships

- Copying everyone on email notes for fear of reprisal

Do any of these sound familiar? A quick mental inventory of the pervasiveness of these comforts might be unsettling. Categories of comfort zones include doing things out of **habit**, e.g., checking email 5-6 times per day, or **self indulging**, e.g., finding or creating circumstances in order to swoop in and be the savior, or **protecting ego**, e.g., avoiding taking risks out of fear of looking bad or **minimizing effort**, e.g., avoiding perceived challenging conversations.

These corporate/cultural *Comfort Zones* and individual *Comfort Zones* hold people and companies back from achieving professional and business growth. Unexamined *Comfort Zones* often unconsciously drive how an individual shows up in front of clients and colleagues and serve to block collaboration. It takes the Emotional Intelligence competency of self-awareness for a professional to notice when his/her default and habitual behaviors undermine his/her competencies and capabilities. And it takes self-management to then deliberately choose to step into the discomfort of adopting new behaviors in service of the client, colleagues and the company.

The Bigger Game does not profess that all comfort zones are bad; it simply invites the individual or team to examine them. It is the unexamined comfort zone that runs our life and can obstruct an individual or team's success. Here are some key questions to ask in the examination:

1. What is the cost of keeping this comfort zone?
2. What is the payoff?
3. Finally, if the comfort zone is turned around 180 degrees, what possibilities/opportunities might emerge?

Often it is possible that the payoff of keeping a comfort zone is greater than the cost, so examining comfort zones becomes a constant discipline when playing a Bigger Game.

Examining the comfort zone also reveals if it is keeping the individual or team stuck and thus preventing growth, learning, and expansion. The decision to step into the discomfort leads to powerful growth and the opportunity for an individual, team or organization to change.

Herein lay the paradox. Is changing a *Comfort Zone* easy? No, changing a *comfort zone* is itself uncomfortable. This is why so many people who make New Year's resolutions can't stick to them even after a few weeks. Or why a recent study of heart-bypass patients showed that 90% of patients couldn't change their lifestyle even at the risk of dying. Even when presented with the option of change or die, the odds were 9:1 against patients choosing to change. (*Fast Company*, May 2005)

To change a *Comfort Zone*, awareness that it exists is certainly an important first step. But to really change a *Comfort Zone*, there needs to be a good enough reason, something that will compel an individual or team to step into discomfort. Because the danger of prolonged comfort is that an individual or team falls into a state of entropy, which is defined as a degradation of a system... an individual's system... the team's system. How much will an individual grow if he/she continually avoids the seemingly difficult colleague or customer, or the challenging task or project out of fear of failure? How much will the team evolve when the individuals are intently and only focused on their personal success instead of what's best for the team?

A lot of time is spent on *Comfort Zones* because it is the backdrop of The Bigger Game. It is the Bigger Game that pulls individuals and teams out of their *Comfort Zones* and calls them forth to evolve and innovate. It calls individuals and teams forth toward more fulfilling experiences with each other and with customers. It calls them forth toward a more fulfilling work existence. And most important, it calls human beings forth to be their very best.

Playing a Bigger Game Designs Who You Want to Become

Many individuals and teams are who they are today as a result of circumstances. Some of these are uncontrollable, e.g., a reorganization, the economy, quota, a new manager.

Consider an example in the public domain of a person and a city that had to evolve as a result of uncontrollable circumstances. New York City and its mayor, Rudy Giuliani, were thrown into a set of uncontrollable circumstances on September 11, 2001, when terrorist planes took down the world trade towers. Those circumstances designed who Mayor Giuliani had to become to manage the situation, and it designed whom the inhabitants of New York had to become to persevere.

In other cases, individuals, teams, organizations control their circumstances. For example, an individual deciding to move on to a new job, or to a new location; a team that takes time for team building vs. meeting only to discuss business transactions.

Another popular example in the public domain of someone who created the circumstances by declaring a game was Martin Luther King. His "I have a dream speech" clearly articulated his desire for equality of all men and women regardless of race or creed. Not a very popular proposal at that time in America. He faced great opposition and countless threats. He didn't know exactly how equality was going to happen, but he was determined that it would be done nonviolently.

This prompts an important question. Do individuals, teams, organizations want to wait for the circumstances to design them? Waiting for circumstances or situations invites victim hood and elicits reactions. Who is the captain of the ship? Instead of waiting for circumstances, the Bigger Game asks individuals and teams to consciously and intentionally design the game, which is simply a metaphor for what an individual or team is up to. Imagine the possibilities that emerge as a result of choosing a game versus letting circumstances define the game!

So, the first step is to define a game that is energizing, that propels people out of bed in the morning and out of comfort zones. One caveat about the Bigger Game is that if it is familiar, then it probably is the same game. That may be OK, but recognize that the same game does not elicit growth and development. Remember, this is an innovation model in the sense that the Bigger Game is an invitation to strengthen or develop new competencies and skills, e.g., relationship skills, emotional intelligence, subject matter expertise, etc.

The second step is for the individual or team to rigorously and intentionally work all components of the Bigger Game every day in order to sustain and proliferate it.

Connecting to the Hunger and Compelling Purpose

Most individuals carry a deep-rooted hunger that they have not yet accessed. Generically it is a hunger to live a more fulfilling and meaningful professional and personal life. Look around. What do individuals hunger to be different in their personal lives, or what do teams hunger for to be different in their professional life? What has to happen? What

needs to stop or what is no longer acceptable? These questions point to a Bigger Game paradox. The game is not about the individual or the team; it's about something greater. And yet it is about the individual or team because they define it. If the game is **only** about the individual or team and they can do it on their own, that is, they don't need to engage others, then it is most likely the same game. A Big Game perhaps, but not a Bigger Game.

A Bigger Game *has to be in service of something beyond the individual or team*. Finding *this Compelling Purpose* helps name the game and keeps the individual or team connected to the game. Because when the going gets tough, or when the team and its members find themselves up against the wall, often the first people they sell out on are themselves. So the idea is to play a game that has a *Compelling Purpose*. A game that is more important than the individual or team.

The Gulp!

An individual or team reading this white paper or contemplating a Bigger Game might experience sweaty palms or a faster pulse. This is the *Gulp!* that is inherent to the Bigger Game. The *Gulp* engages the subtle voice human beings carry inside that says something like, "I don't know how," or "how is this going to happen?" or "it will be too difficult." This voice often stops forward progress, and elicits the prevalent comfort zone in our culture to not move until all the pieces are in place and all the steps are carefully planned out. This is the common comfort zone called "fear of the unknown or avoiding ambiguity." Reflecting on the hunger for a meaningful professional life, or on the compelling purpose the individual or team wants to serve, will enable them to acknowledge the *Gulp* and step through it, a step that might itself be uncomfortable.

Allies

Here is good news... the model accounts for the fact that an individual and a team can't play the game alone. Again, if they could, it would be the same game. So the component of the model that handles playing the game with others is *Allies*. Look around... *Allies* are everywhere. Are individuals and the team tapping into those *Allies*? Intentionally designing those *Allies* is critical to the Game. And there are different types of *Allies* to draw on. The individual or team may need to design *Allies* who are co players, who provide resources, who call the individual or team forth when they have fallen back into their comfort zones, or who cheer on the individual or the team when the going gets tough. Imagine designing *Allies* with people who are perceived to be the most resistant or the most difficult to work with! Those could be the most important and strongest *Allies*.

Investments/Bold Action/Sustainability/Assess

Investment: The mere fact that allies are needed in order to play the game points to a key aspect of the Bigger Game — it has to be public. The individual and/or team must publicly speak it again and again. The speaking of the game is the first and most important *Investment*. In fact, speaking the game to at least three new people every day is the first *Investment* assignment an individual or team embarks on in order to really begin shaping the Game (otherwise it is just nice words on paper.) Other important *Investments* include individuals on the team committing to play the game with each other, getting ready, putting closure on things, handling relationships with family, colleagues and customers that aren't going so well, committing to checking in regularly with each other about the Game's progress.

Bold Action: One trap that individuals and teams often fall into is crafting the “right” words for the Game and the compelling purpose, and then leaving both on paper, or simply talking about the Game instead of doing something about it. The Bigger Game accounts for that as well through the *Bold Action* square on the Bigger Game Board. Notice that this isn’t about generating an action list, but rather feeling pulled to take *Bold Action* over and over again. A *Bold Action* might be for the individual or team stepping out of the three most costly comfort zones, or engaging seemingly difficult allies to be co-players or supporters, or making investments that may be unpopular in order to forward the game. *Bold Action* lives in every part of the game board.

Rating the execution of a *Bold Action* is important. A useful question in assessing progress might include: “how is the team doing on carrying out the *Bold Actions*?” If they have just remained words on paper, then perhaps additional inquiries are in order, e.g., “Is this still the team’s Bigger Game?” “How compelling is the game?” “Is the compelling purpose worth the investments required to make the *Bold Actions* happen?” Teams who play Bigger Games continually check in with each other as to how they are doing on all aspects of the game.

Sustainability: Another key element of the Bigger Game is *Sustainability*. Often when individuals hear or a team hears that one of the investments is commitment; they automatically think self-sacrifice, or they succumb to over working. But sacrifice leads to burnout and resentment and makes the game a “self-game” not a Bigger Game. Self-sacrifice and burnout is addressed in the *Sustainability* square, and specifically there are two aspects to *Sustainability*. First, there is *Sustainability* of the game player(s), that is, the individual or team who sees what has to happen, what has to change, what must be different. The individual or team must have energy to play the game, and not from an ego place but from the perspective of having sustained energy to continue propagating the game. The second aspect of *Sustainability* is the *Sustainability* of the Game itself. As mentioned earlier, the Game is not about the individual or the team... it is about something greater. Therefore, an important measure of the Bigger Game’s success is its ability to continue living on well beyond the existence of the team/individual. How will the Game take on a life of it’s own? What needs to be developed so the Game sustains itself?

Assess: Continuously rating how things are going in a Bigger Game is critically important. A useful question in assessing progress might include: “how am I or how is the team doing on carrying out the bold actions?” If they have just remained words on paper then perhaps additional inquiries are in order, e.g., “Is this still my or the team’s Bigger Game?” “How compelling is the game?” “Is the compelling purpose worth the investments required to make the bold actions happen?” Individuals and teams who play Bigger Games continually check in with themselves and with each other as to how they are doing on all aspects of the game.

It is important to “Assess” versus “vote” when reflecting on the progress of the game. *Assessing* is less emotional. The purpose is to look at facts in order to understand and make appropriate adjustments when necessary in order to *serve the game*. Voting about progress attaches a “good” or “bad” valuation and often leads to blame (at self or other players). It does not serve the Bigger Game or the Bigger Game Players.

Final Thoughts

The Bigger Game is an innovation model — designed to change and challenge you, and to call you forth to be your very best. The Bigger Game asks individuals and teams to take action even in the face of multiple unknowns. So when faced with the thought “I don’t know how,” instead of retreating to the email comfort zone, feel compelled to call on an ally, make new investments, step out of comfort zones, take bold actions and move through the gulp, all in the name of experiencing a meaningful professional life, which ultimately will lead to organizational, team and individual success.

A quotation from *The Scottish Himalayan Expedition* (by W.H. Murray, published by J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1951) captures the essence of the *Bigger Game*:

Until one is committed
there is hesitancy,
the chance to draw back,
always ineffectiveness.

Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation),
there is one elementary truth,
the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans:
That the moment one definitely commits oneself,
then Providence moves, too.

All sorts of things occur to help one
that would never otherwise have occurred.
A whole stream of events issues from the decision,
raising in ones’ favor all manner
of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance,
which no man could have dreamt would come his way.

I learned a deep respect for one of Goethe’s couplets:

“Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.”

Susan Valdiserri, A Bigger Game Certified Trainer, wrote this White Paper.