

ON THE SHOULDERS of GIANTS

33 new ways to guide yourself to greatness

RHONDALYNN KOROLAK

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Acknowledgements

In search of my mother's garden, I found my own. ~ Alice Walker

I started off on this epic journey of self-discovery some sixteen years ago after my mother was brutally murdered. I was desperate for answers. I spent many years searching for my mother's garden - trying to keep her memory alive, doing what I thought she wanted me to do and fighting for my right to be the victim.

Surprisingly somewhere along the way, I stumbled upon my own garden. The answers I was so desperate to find, found me. The surprise was not so much in what I found but rather where I found it. I discovered my own truths, my answers, my power, my meaning...and in so doing I set myself free and began living again.

This book represents a snapshot of the experiences and insights that have moulded and shaped me into the person I am today. These are true stories - real people doing the best they could in often impossible circumstances with the resources they had available at the time. In my mind, there are no villains and there is no judgment. I am sincerely grateful for all the lessons that I have been entrusted with and the many wise teachers and giants who have graced my life thus far.

Writing this book was an overwhelming and daunting task. I found that the words poured onto the page relatively easily but with them came vivid emotions and memories that I thought I had successfully buried. Had it not been for the support, encouragement, understanding and expertise of Karen McCreadie, this book simply would not have been possible. I consider it an absolute miracle that we connected via the internet and that she agreed to assist me with this project. I respect, trust and admire her immensely. She helped me to write the thoughts I couldn't express easily but desperately needed to communicate and she often read my mind and my heart - which was no easy task. I also wish to acknowledge Clare Hallifax for her hard work, dedication and contribution to the professional editing of this book.

Rhionda Lynn Korolak

Most of the real “gold” in this book, however, is not my own - I have been fortunate enough to meet some amazing mentors and teachers along my journey that have shown me the path when I had lost my way. Each and every one of them is an amazing individual and I owe them so much more than words can express - Nicholas and Alvina Kutinsky, Gary Kovacs, Sondra Goplen, Sonya Savage, Rhoda Dobler, Dianna Lynn, Debra Tate, Rachel Wilson, Harwant Riehl, Angela Gawne, Debbie Hardwick, Jackie Keeble, Jeff Poule, Grant Thomas, Josephine Brown, Kieran Perkins, Anthony Robbins, Justice John Rooke, Darwin Greaves, Rev. Sigmund Schuster, Roger Sept, Gary Anderson, Mrs. Styles, Dr. Dave McMullen and Rod Turnbull.

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Most of all, this book is a tribute to the memory of my mother, Darlene Korolak. There is never a day goes by that I don’t miss her, she truly was an amazing, gentle and caring woman. She was only forty three years old when she died - far too early for someone who was so vibrant and full of life. I take comfort in the fact that she is always with me - watching over me, guiding me and encouraging me to pursue my dreams and to stand up for what I believe in. This book is as much her accomplishment as it is mine.

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*I*ntroduction

Rhionda Lynn Korolak

In 1159, theologian and author John of Salisbury wrote a treatise on logic called Metalogicon. Although written in Latin the gist of what Salisbury said is, *'We are like dwarfs sitting on the shoulders of giants. We see more, and things that are more distant, than they did, not because our sight is superior or because we are taller than they, but because they raise us up, and by their great stature add to ours.'*

Centuries later, in 1676, Isaac Newton sent a letter to his rival Robert Hooke. He wrote, 'What Descartes did was a good step. You have added much in several ways ... If I have seen a little further it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants'.

This book is about the giants of life, the scientists, scholars, writers and philosophers that have positively influenced our understanding of the world and offered us new perspectives. These are the giants whose words litter personal development books, whose wisdom is often spun to create self-help homilies about the all-abiding importance of a positive attitude.

But let's face it; having a positive attitude is easy when life is good. It's easy when you are already thinking happy thoughts to remember to always expect the best. It's easy when you're supported by a loving relationship, a fulfilling career or great friends to feel optimistic about life. It's easy for the quotes and snippets of wisdom to clearly resonate with your experiences, serving only to galvanize your positive disposition.

But what happens when the shit hits the fan? What happens when everything you know is ripped away from you? What happens when the love of your life runs off with your best friend, leaving you with three young children? What happens when you lose your job and your house gets repossessed? What happens when your marriage falls apart or your business goes down the tubes? What happens if you just hate your life and can't see any way to change it? What happens if you suffer from chronic illness or your child is diagnosed with a terminal disease? Or what happens if a loved one is killed before their time?

Does the wisdom of philosophers or scientists hold any weight then? Do the words of these giants really help when your world is engulfed by darkness?

Many of the most popular motivational speakers today would have us believe they can. Open any self-help book and you will find it is not uncommon for financial distress to be the driving force behind the personal transformation of many well-known speakers and authors. No doubt, living on the streets, eating only every third day or being \$70,000 in debt could be the catalyst for enormous growth and change. Similarly, being 100lbs overweight or extremely frustrated in a dead-end career could be the turning point that gives someone crystal clarity about what they want to create in their life.

I don't want to poke fun at the personal development industry nor do I want to trivialise these issues – which I agree individually or collectively would be a source of significant dissatisfaction, pain and unhappiness. However, what I do want to talk about is a completely different level of pain, another kind of darkness entirely. I'm talking about the darkness that shuts you down completely. The empty, no-return, nothing will ever be the same again darkness, a cold, damp blanket of pain that seems sure to extinguish even the frailest ember or faintest whisper of hope. From a place of complete despair and senseless tragedy, is it possible to stand on the shoulders of giants and find hope and meaning again?

The answer is, 'Yes.'

Sometimes there are moments in life that instantly rip the past and the future apart. Everything is irrevocably divided into 'before' and 'after'. Life as you know it dissolves and an alien, foreign and unwelcoming world appears in its wake.

For me that moment was about 4 pm on April 14th in 1992. I was studying for my final law exams. I had just returned to my house from the law school library and the phone rang. It was the Dean of the Law School.

She asked me to sit down ... my mother had been murdered. The Federal Police (RCMP) hadn't been able to find me on campus. Concerned that

I would discover the awful truth from the TV news, the Dean had finally been forced to tell me over the phone. Shortly after the call, I saw the story on the national news. They had found her body in a ditch; she had been strangled, suffered multiple stab wounds and had been badly beaten.

My mum was Head of Histology at the municipal hospital; in the 25 years she'd worked there she had rarely taken sick leave or been late, so when she failed to show up for work, the alarm was raised. She had been murdered in her own home two days earlier by three 16-year-old boys. Those boys had been given a key to the house by my 18-year-old brother. On the promise of a \$500 beaten-up truck as reward, they went to her home in the middle of the night and brutally murdered her. They rolled her bloody body in a rug, drove her to the countryside and dumped her in a ditch. The next day, the boys and my brother cleaned up the house and went shopping to pick out the things they would buy when the insurance money came through.

By the time I was told, the boys and my brother were already in jail. I was 24 years old and I had lost my family. When I saw her body, although I knew it was her, all I could recognise were her hands. I could never do justice with mere words to the magnitude of that event. I could never explain the searing pain, shock, disbelief and numbness that eclipsed my life for years following her death.

To lose such a loving parent was bad enough, but to do so at the instigation of my own brother was inconceivable. The loss and betrayal were collectively almost more than I could bear. I knew he unfairly blamed her for the end of my parents' marriage, and I had been worried by his open hostility towards her, but I never really believed he was capable of such atrocity. And yet as soon as I heard what had happened, I knew intuitively that he was involved. My mum's only real crime was marrying the wrong man, a man incapable of taking responsibility for his alcoholism and abuse and of fostering hatred in my brother.

I am by no means the only one to experience extreme trauma. Open any newspaper from Melbourne to London to New York or Tokyo and you'll

read of some disaster that's fractured someone's life. A senseless killing that will haunt those connected for years.

Life's not always pretty. It's hard, it's messy and it's unpredictable. It's often stranger than fiction and it can break your heart. But as this book will attest, real life is also magnificent, beautiful and awe-inspiring. We each are a composite of the experiences and conditioning we grow up with. There is goodness and kindness all around us and we survive or prosper because we are able to stand on the shoulders of giants.

Giants can take the form of great philosophers and scientists, great presenters, poets and writers. Perhaps, more importantly, they can take the form of a good friend, a wise elder, a loving stranger or a protective teacher – everyday heroes who profoundly touch our lives and change its course without ever really knowing the gift they have given.

I am eternally grateful to the giants in my life, my grandparents, friends, famous scholars and the teachers who have given me a new perspective and genuinely changed my life. My hope is that this book will open your eyes to the profound wisdom of the giants in your own world, of the people who will reach out and help you when you can't walk another step, the people who care, even if they find it hard to express it in words. I hope it also reminds you of the instances where your actions have made you a hero or a giant to others and that it will encourage and inspire you to continue to do so.

I hope that the concepts and ideas so often hijacked by the self-help gurus truly come alive for you as fact, and you begin to see their relevance in your own life. Often these philosophical perspectives are many thousands of years old, they are born in science, truth and mysticism and sadly trivialised through psychobabble. I hope that you see their wisdom through fresh eyes and learn to apply their gifts.

But most of all, it is my sincere desire that this book affirms to you that it is not what happens to you that matters it's what you decide to do about it. It's about what you do and who you become because of what happens, not despite it.

Chapter 1

The finest steel goes through the hottest fire.
~ Richard Nixon

Richard Milhous Nixon was the 37th President of the United States from 1969 to 1974 and was the only President to ever resign from office. More often remembered for his infamous involvement with the Watergate scandal, Nixon's administration wasn't all bad. Under his leadership the relationships between the US and the Soviet Union and the US and China were greatly improved.

You might consider it odd that I have chosen a disgraced US President as my first giant. And yet I have found huge comfort from his quote throughout the most difficult times in my life. His words pulled me back to a more balanced position when I felt overcome with sorrow and unsure if I could carry on.

I vividly remember reading the quote for the first time. It was about three years after my mother's death. Up until that point I had considered myself damaged goods. I couldn't see any other explanation for what had happened and I felt as though I was broken. I felt a deep sense of loneliness and shame – I felt there was obviously something deeply wrong with me to have come from a family where something so awful could happen. Life felt such a struggle, as though everything from that point forward was always going to be tainted and overshadowed by my past. I was going to have to 'survive' the rest of my life, not live it! And then I found eight little words ...

The finest steel goes through the hottest fire.

In an instant my whole perspective shifted. What if I wasn't broken by what happened but I was actually moulded by those events and something strong, meaningful and positive could emerge as a result? We all have scars. Some of them may be visible to others through illness, accident or disability or they may be internal emotional scars that no one else knows about. Both can be debilitating. This simple little quote allowed me to see for the first time that I was who I was not despite losing my mum but because of it. I couldn't change the past no matter how much I wanted to but I could change 'right now' and by doing so I could certainly change my future. I realised in that moment that I actually had a distinct advantage over most people – I had already experienced the worst thing I could ever imagine ... and survived! I felt sure that I could handle ANYTHING that life threw at me, because I already had.

People worry everyday about what's around the corner. It is so easy to get caught up in worrying about financial difficulties, illness, global events, or even our own mortality, that we often forget to dedicate any of our time and energy towards actually *living*. I am thankful every single day. I am thankful for the

knowledge that no matter what happens, no matter what life brings my way – it will never break me!

Did you know ... ?

American psychologists and authors Richard Bandler and John Grinder are best known as the inventors of Neuro-Linguistic programming (NLP) – an **interpersonal communication** model based on the subjective study of language, non-verbal communication and personal change. It wasn't until I discovered NLP that I realised what had actually happened the moment I read the Nixon quote. I had experienced what is called a re-frame.

Reframes are linguistic tools used to transform a person's perspective from the currently held belief to any number of different possible interpretations or meanings. We ascribe meaning or significance to every event that we experience. These meanings are then stored in the subconscious mind and recalled at a later date (as beliefs, memories or decisions) to support or corroborate what we believe to be true about ourselves and the world we live in. A re-frame is a way to interrupt the patterns we have forged by putting the idea, memory, belief or decision into a new and empowering context. In so doing, the idea, memory, belief or decision takes on an entirely different meaning and this opens the door to new and more resourceful choices.

Much like a small stick of dynamite, the reframe has the power to shake an idea, memory, belief or decision at its very foundation. Successful reframes can be delivered via precise questioning or statements which allow the individual to redefine a situation or memory so they can find an empowering meaning and move forward in their life.

Bandler and Grinder's contribution to personal transformation is enormous. They developed NLP by modelling three exceptional psychotherapists: Virginia Satir, Fritz Perls and Milton Erickson. Today the predominant patterns of NLP and its many variants are taught in seminars, workshops, books, exercises and audio programs of many famous speakers such as Anthony Robbins, Tad James, Brian Tracy, Tony Buzan and Christopher Howard.

Yes, I have scars, but they were not ‘terminal’ blemishes as I had once thought, they were not evidence of my defects or validation of my lack of worthiness. They were the result of the ‘hottest fire’ and they would empower me to emerge with the strength and unbending determination of ‘the finest steel’. This quote was a simple reminder that life isn’t easy but that perhaps it was never designed to be! That amazing things can happen, character and strength often develop through the most challenging of circumstances and whether the heat destroys you or sculpts you is entirely up to you.

I used to be frustrated and overwhelmed by all the obstacles and hardships that I encountered on the journey towards my ideal life. I saw these as hindrances that held me back and prevented me from really living my life to the fullest and achieving my potential. But then one day I realised that the trials and tribulations were my life. As Bette Howland once said, *For a long time it seemed to me that real life was about to begin, but there was always some obstacle in the way. Something had to be got through first, some unfinished business; time still to be served, a debt to be paid. Then life would begin. At last it dawned on me that these obstacles were my life.* Day by day, the obstacles and challenges I faced were slowly bending, moulding and shaping me into the woman that I was truly meant to be.

Nixon was up to his neck in political espionage and sabotage; he abused his power and eventually paid the price. And yet in some way his quote is especially poignant to me because of the scandal, not despite it. As I learnt more about him I realised that whilst he made mistakes (granted pretty big ones!) he also did some great things in his time as President. He opened communication and worked to remove the tension in some key relationships, which were potentially explosive – for both sides.

I have experienced some incredibly challenging times in my life but I am not alone. There are millions of people the world over who have been forged by intense heat and pain. Those that have risen to meet the challenges they faced and fought to survive.

Lance Armstrong is a well-known and inspirational example. Diagnosed with advanced testicular cancer that had already spread to his lungs and

brain, Armstrong was given a 50/50 chance of survival. But he did so much more than survive. He beat cancer and returned to the sport he loved, going on to win the Tour de France – the most gruelling cycle race on earth – an incredible seven times. Armstrong is quoted as saying that cancer was '*the best thing that ever happened to him*'. His best performance was made possible by his cancer, not despite it. He was able to use his fear and win the greatest battle of his life. And in so doing, he offered hope and inspiration to millions of others. His contribution to the world of cycling is undisputed but perhaps his greatest contribution is to the people affected by cancer every year.

Or what about the kids in Rwanda who were abducted from their families in the dead of night? Children as young as eight years old were kidnapped and forced into a life of unfathomable violence – how do you recover from such unspeakable horror? With the help of UNICEF, these kids are being rehabilitated, cared for and reintegrated back into their communities. They are excited at the prospect of going to school and are being helped to face their own demons and go on to live productive lives.

The idea expressed so poetically by Nixon has also been articulated by many others. For example, Friedrich Nietzsche said '*That which does not kill us makes us stronger*'. I've also heard, *If God brought you to it, He'll bring you through it*'.

Learning to come to terms with all the parts of your life – even the hard bits – can be a liberating experience. If you had a 5-carat diamond ring given to you by your great grandmother and your house burnt down, would you walk away from the ash and rubble or would you get down on your hands and knees and look for it? Diamonds are forged through extreme circumstances and so are we. And no matter what disaster or difficulty you experience, by standing on the shoulders of giants, we can all find the diamonds – the magnificence of our true selves – in the ashes.

How to incorporate this wisdom into your life

Limited thinking is very pervasive – people will do and say almost anything to defend their limitations. Think about the last conversation you had with a work colleague over coffee or with that friend who just popped by to have a chat about the troubles they were having with their spouse. Did they use negative statements, limiting beliefs, reasons and excuses for why they couldn't do something? Did it sound convincing? Or were these statements and excuses simply the 'truth' or the 'facts' based on *their* interpretation of events? Is it possible that we could change our experience of events simply by finding a new or alternative interpretation? NLP says categorically, '*Yes, it is possible*'. So think of a belief, decision or behaviour that you have right now that is holding you back in some area of your life. It could be something similar to:

- I can't start my own business because I am a single parent.
- I will never be a successful because I didn't go to university.
- I will never be rich because my parent's didn't teach me how to manage money.
- I will never be a good parent because I came from a broken family.
- My child or spouse never listens to me and this means that they don't respect me.
- My spouse is a workaholic and this means they don't love me anymore.

Take your statement (or one you relate to from the list above) and ask yourself: '*What else could this mean?*' or '*What is it that I have not noticed within this particular situation that could expose a new possible meaning, and therefore change my response to the person or situation?*'

EXAMPLE

Comment: *I can't start my own business because I am a single parent.*

Reframe: Isn't it possible that the time and money management skills that you have mastered as a single parent will increase your chance of success as an entrepreneur? Isn't it possible that the responsibility

you feel toward your children could be a driving force toward success in your new venture ensuring you maintain your motivation and sweep aside all and any challenges you meet? Isn't it possible that starting your own business could offer you a level of freedom and security that would ensure you were never at the mercy of an employer again and you could fit your work around your children making you an even better role model and parent?

EXAMPLE

Comment: *My spouse is a workaholic and this means they don't love me anymore.*

Reframe: Isn't it possible that the reason your partner is a workaholic is because they love you so much? They want you to have the very best money can buy? Perhaps all this means is that it's now time to discuss how you feel? Your partner may be relieved to hear that you would like them to take it easier and spend more time together – that the money isn't all that important to you.

Chapter 2

The Map is not the Territory ~ Alfred Korzybski

Alfred Korzybski was a Polish philosopher and scientist best remembered for his theory of general semantics. In essence Korzybski believed that we are limited in what we know by the structure of our nervous system and the structure of our language. Our experience of the world is therefore not necessarily an objective perspective but rather it is influenced by what our mind interprets and how we describe it.

If you have come in contact with Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) you will probably have heard of this statement. But what does it actually mean? As the developer of general semantics, Korzybski was studying reality and it was obvious to him that what we presumed to be reality was only ever one representation or interpretation of what could be described as reality. The way he articulated this was by saying the map was not the territory and therefore there was no such thing as objective reality.

If you look at a map of Melbourne, it is only a representation of Melbourne. No matter how good the map, even if it shows every detail, even if the map was a full-scale model of Melbourne created down to the last lamppost, it is still just a map. It is a representation and not Melbourne itself. In life, our memory is our map. We use our memory, the cumulative experiences of our life, to influence our present terrain. We assume that the map is the terrain and that what we remember or what we believe about our past experience is the truth. Yet reality is not concrete. It is entirely subjective – based on the map we hold of the world.

That map is never accurate but we assume it is. It is this conflict of maps that causes so much of the conflict in the world. We wrongly assume that what we think is true or right or accurate is exactly that. And yet if you put two people of varying religious beliefs together they will both believe that their viewpoint is correct.

What we believe is real is nothing more than an interpretation and the words we use to describe that interpretation.

One day Korzybski was giving a lecture to a group of students and in the middle of the lesson he went to his briefcase to retrieve a packet of biscuits wrapped in white paper. He muttered that he had to eat something and asked the students in the front row if they would also like a biscuit. A few students took a biscuit and started eating. Korzybski says, ‘Nice biscuit, don’t you think?’ while he took a second one and the students were in the front row were happily munching away. He then tore off the white paper from the biscuits, in order to reveal the original packaging. On it was a big picture of a dog’s head and the words ‘Dog Cookies’.

The students were shocked and two ran out the lecture theatre with their hands over their mouths as though they were going to throw up. ‘You see, ladies and gentlemen,’ Korzybski remarked, ‘I have just demonstrated that people don’t just eat food, but also words, and that the taste of the former is often outdone by the taste of the latter.’ Apparently his prank aimed to illustrate how some human suffering originates not from reality itself but from the confused representations we make about reality. The reality was those students and Korzybski ate dog biscuits but that wasn’t what made them sick. The same effect would have occurred if they were not dog biscuits but wrapped as though they were. The reality of the situation was irrelevant – whether they were dog biscuits or not was irrelevant to whether they became sick or not. The only difference was that one minute they *thought* they were eating a nice biscuit and in the next they *thought* they were eating a dog biscuit. The distress was only caused by their perceived reality.

This principle is particularly relevant in the context of examining where things might go wrong in relationships – either personal or business. Anytime you have more than one person observing an event, the door is open for the possibility of misinterpretation and miscommunication based on differing maps of reality. Learning to recognise that we all have different maps (filters by which we see and process the world around us) allows us to see the world through another person’s eyes and therefore understand, relate and communicate with greater respect and results.

Years ago, in Canada, I was married for about seven years. In many ways my husband and I were really quite different from each other but we never identified or discussed those differences prior to getting married. Our family upbringings and experiences were disparate and we had diverse goals and ideas about what we wanted for our future. I was very emotional, spontaneous, laid back and a risk taker – I felt more comfortable flying by the seat of my pants. Tim, on the other hand, was an engineer – very level-headed, practical, organised, structured and methodical. His map of the world was entirely different to mine – everything had to be in its right place and major life decisions were planned out on paper well in advance, along with contingency and back-up plans.

A couple of years into the marriage, we began to discuss starting a family. I had met Tim about one year after my mother had passed away, so he had been with me through some really tough times and he knew that I really struggled with the fact that I had lost my immediate family. Even though I had always been very career-focused, I was open about the fact that I very much wanted to have a family of my own one day. I desperately wanted a chance to create a new family and a sense of belonging, connection and foundation. Tim's family was particularly welcoming to me and I really enjoyed the times when we would go to his parent's house for the holidays and we would be surrounded by his four siblings, their spouses and all their children. It was loud, hectic and pretty full on but there was a real sense of love and support.

I was still struggling with the loss of my mother and had tried many forms of counselling and therapy to help in my healing. The first real turning point for me came when I was referred to a psychiatrist, Dr Dave McMullen. I don't actually think he was many years older than me – he might have been 30 years old when I first met him and he was the most casual, laid-back guy you could ever meet. Whenever I went to his office, he would be there in khaki pants and a casual shirt looking more prepared for a mountain hike than a medical appointment. He was incredibly good at what he did and he had a way of making me feel very comfortable and accepted.

I saw him about once a month for more than two years. There wasn't much that we didn't talk about. He had seen me take great strides in dealing with the loss of my mother and I was genuinely beginning to feel much stronger. I remember very distinctly telling him one day that my husband wanted to meet him. Dave asked me why and I told him that, 'he has prepared a list of all of the things that are wrong with me. He feels that because my parents were divorced and I haven't properly dealt with the death of my mother, I am somehow damaged goods. He doesn't think I will make a good mother and he doesn't want to have children with me.'

What Dave said to me on that day changed my life forever. He said, 'I have no doubt that your husband needs to see a psychiatrist, but you, however, do not! There is nothing wrong with you – you are not broken.'

You have been through an unbelievably tough ordeal and you are coping extremely well. What you have done and who you have become, despite your upbringing and the loss of your mother is precisely the reason that I know you will make an incredible mother one day. You cannot let someone else's map of reality limit what you believe that you can do.'

At the end of the day, there was no right or wrong in this situation. Tim had come from a large loving family and I did not! We both saw the same situation and each of us developed a very different prognosis about what that meant for the future.

There is no such thing as objective reality and as such there is no truth only your truth. The lives we live are not so much about what happens but about what we make those things mean. In my marriage, my husband made the tragic events of my life mean that I was broken and as a result that also meant we shouldn't have kids. I didn't agree. Ultimately, I chose to leave that relationship to pursue my chance to meet someone who would see the potential in me. Someone, who like Dave, could appreciate that my tragedy had the potential to make me an even more loving mother, with valuable lessons and insights to pass on to my children.

Did you know ... ?

One of the principles of general semantics was the idea that reality is greatly influenced by the words we use to describe our experience. This is obvious if you consider that language is a fundamental instrument of communication, either with others or ourselves. Language was the only thing that turned a happy little lecture hall snack into a disgusting experience. Studies of indigenous cultures have shown that very often they don't have words to describe certain concepts and as a result, those things don't exist. For example, some Native American languages have no word for 'lie'.

There are about 200,000 words in common use in the English language. If you counted the words in the Oxford English Dictionary there are

about 615,000. If you added scientific and technical words there would be millions of words to choose from. And yet it's estimated that the average person's working vocabulary is between 2,000 and 10,000 words. Many of those that have made the greatest contribution to the world have had a much wider grasp of language. William Shakespeare, for example, used 24,000 words in his writings and he coined hundreds more – such as amazement, perplex and majestic.

There is a story about twin boys who grew up together. Their father was in and out of prison and their lives were not easy. One of the twins became a successful lawyer and lived a productive life. The other twin spent many years in prison. They were interviewed and when asked separately why they ended up where they did, considering their background, each replied, 'I had no choice'. Both lived the same reality and yet each interpreted that reality differently. One assumed that because his father was a criminal then he had no choice but to follow in his fathers' footsteps. The other twin saw it very differently. To him he had no choice but to break the cycle because he knew that a life of crime was no way to live, he saw how it damaged his family and he was determined NOT to follow in his father's footsteps.

What made the difference? They experienced the same life as children, they even had the same genetic make-up, but their interpretation of those experiences differed. As a result their lives were very different. As Frederick Langbridge said, '*Two men look out the same prison bars; one sees mud and the other stars.*'

Who writes history? Considering that the losers of most battles are either dead or imprisoned it's pretty safe to say that the winners write history. On that basis it can't possibly be an objective account. If we were able to go back and ask the losers of history for their versions, we would be reminded that the map is not the territory – there are always at least two sides to every story. And our history is no less concrete. It is merely a memory or representation of what we assumed happened at a moment in time. It is a captured assumption. If we can review those assumptions with new insights or new knowledge then we can change the past and release the hold that

memories have over us. Old wounds and traumas will cease to exercise power over us and we can be free to move on.

You can change the past – the past is just one perspective of what happened. Understanding that there may be a myriad of other perspectives, all equally ‘true’ can release us from their grip. Korzybski was not the only great mind to arrive at the conclusion that objective reality doesn’t exist. Carl Jung is known to have believed the same thing. He is quoted as saying, *‘Perception is Projection’*, meaning that what we see outside us is merely a projection of what’s inside us. Author and Booker Prize winner, Penelope Fitzgerald, said, *‘no two people see the external world in exactly the same way. To every separate person a thing is what he thinks it is – in other words, not a thing, but a think’*.

Once you understand that truth and reality are nothing more than a composite of our beliefs and interpretations you have much more control over how you view the world. Outside events and influences cease to have the same power. No one can make you feel anything you don’t want to feel. Whether you see everything as a setback and confirmation of your inadequacy, or whether you see it as a validation that you can overcome anything, is entirely up to you.

How to incorporate this wisdom into your life

Our internal maps of reality can change over time. What we consider possible, normal or sensible can evolve through a variety of ways:

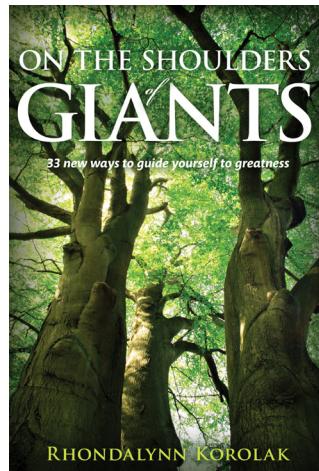
- The people we meet
- The knowledge we gather
- The places we visit

Essentially our viewpoint changes when we expand our knowledge. We may meet someone from a different culture who gives us a completely new perspective. The same can be said about the places we visit, the programs we watch on TV or the books we read. While an afternoon of Jerry Springer isn't going to help in any way, every belief you have could be convincingly overturned by a visit to your local library. Ideas and knowledge contained in books, documentaries and on the Internet can open up your perspectives and give your life new meaning. And because these are so accessible, the possibilities for change are open to everyone.

If you want to be rich, for example, you must understand the landscape of wealth. You must understand the terminology and language of money. If you want to be a successful business owner, you have to expand your understanding of business so you can converse in that world.

Every time you read or hear a word you don't understand go and look it up in a good dictionary. Your task is to then use that word in conversation within the next 24 hours. If you expand your understanding, knowledge and vocabulary, you will expand your maps of reality and that in turn will expand the possibilities for your life.

Rhionda Lynn Korolak



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