Free Yourself from Conflict
at Work, at Home, and in Life

Optimal Outcomes

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Introduction

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What Is an Optimal Outcome?

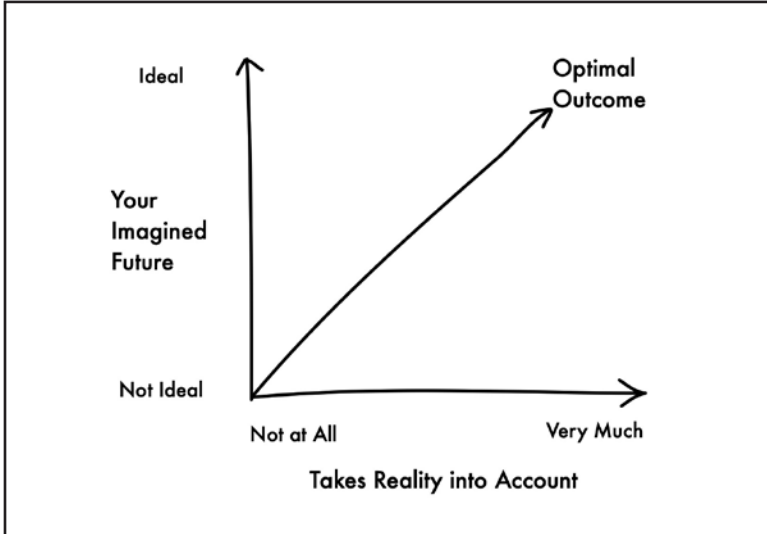FIGURE 1: An Optimal Outcome maximizes your imagined future and reality.

Get Started

Choose a recurring conflict that impacts your life so you can apply the practices to it throughout the book. Take a moment now to consider:

✳ Who is involved in the situation?

✳ What is the conflict about? In other words, what are the people concerned about?

✳ Why do you want freedom from this conflict?

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Notice Your Conflict Habits and Patterns

Apply the Practice

NOTICE YOUR CONFLICT HABITS AND PATTERNS

Identify Your Habit

Of the four conflict habits, which is your primary one?

- ❋ Blame Others
- ❋ Shut Down
- ❋ Shame Yourself
- ❋ Relentlessly Collaborate

Identify the Pattern

Of the five most common conflict patterns, which, if any, are you involved in with others?

- ❋ The Blame/Shame pattern
- ❋ The Blame/Shut Down pattern
- ❋ The Relentlessly Collaborate/Shut Down pattern
- ❋ The Shut Down/Shut Down pattern
- ❋ The Blame/Blame pattern

Notice

Simply notice the habit and pattern you've identified. There is no need to change or do anything about them yet.

You can take an online assessment to identify
your primary conflict habit at:
optimaloutcomesbook.com/assessment

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Increase Clarity and Complexity: Map Out the Conflict

Going from Simple to Complex

When I helped Bob create his map, I asked him to begin by identifying as many individuals, groups, and other factors that might be relevant to the situation as he could and to draw circles representing them. I suggested he put people and factors on the map regardless of whether they existed in the past, present, or potentially in the future, whether he knew the people well or not, and whether he was certain of the factors' influence or not. Anything he thought *might* be a factor would be helpful to note at this stage.

I suggested he use each circle to represent one person or a pair, group, team, or entire organization and that he consider which circles belonged inside others. He drew a circle representing himself inside a larger circle called "Exec Team" and a circle representing Sally inside a larger circle called "Sales Team."

Then he enclosed all four circles inside a larger circle called "The Organization" to show that he and Sally were each part of two different teams inside one company. He drew a circle called "VC Investors" half inside and half outside the circle called "The Organization" to indicate that the company's venture capital investors were influential inside the organization but also had responsibilities outside it.

When Bob thought about the factors that influenced how he and Sally had been interacting, he noted their backgrounds: how they had each been raised and their families of origin. Bob knew about Sally's family because, over the course of a decade of friendship, she'd told him stories about her childhood, and he'd even met her dad once or twice when he'd been in town visiting.

You may not know the backgrounds of the people in your own situation, and it's not necessary that you do. But you may know more than you realize. It can be helpful to pause and think about what you *do* know about them. What stories have they told you about how they grew up? Have they told you about their parents? Siblings? Teachers, mentors, or coaches who've had an impact on their lives?

Based on what he'd noticed, Bob drew two circles representing their respective backgrounds and families outside the organization to illustrate that those factors influenced the organization but originally existed outside its structure. He drew lines between the circles to show how they were connected to one another. He added arrows to note the directions of influence between people and factors. He drew a double line to show a strong relationship between himself and Sally. He drew arrows pointing from the VC investors and CFO toward himself to note the pressure he felt to lower Sally's compensation. He drew an *X* between himself and Sally to note the conflict in their relationship, and he drew a heart on the line connecting Sally to her family since he sensed that she had a deep affection for her family and how she had grown up.
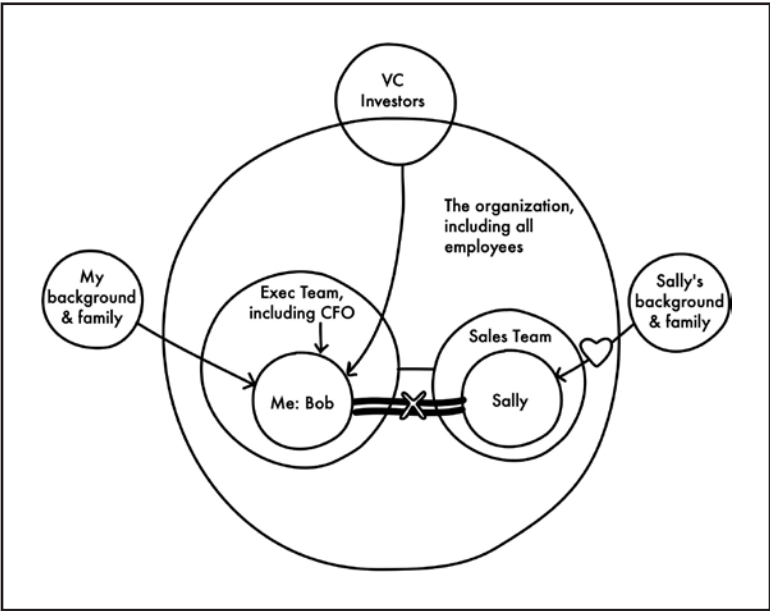
Bob's map looked like this:

FIGURE 2: Bob's map.

Drawing the map helped Bob gain a more complex view of the situation. He could now see that his conflict with Sally was not just about the two of them but also involved his executive team and in particular the CFO and VC investors, who had advised him that Sally's compensation had to be renegotiated. Indirectly, it also involved the sales team and everyone else at the company, since he knew he had an obligation to act as a strong, fair leader in the company's best interest. It also involved Bob's and Sally's backgrounds, because their life experiences influenced how they thought about compensation and leadership.

Going from Fuzzy to Clear

When my student Emmanuel began the mapping practice, he was in a state best described as befuddled bewilderment. The idea that he would need to write down the names of dozens of people across three generations of his family, who were dispersed across the United States and Haiti, was overwhelming to him.

When I suggested that he didn't need to name each person individually but could draw circles showing groups of family members, he decided to give it a try. After a few frustrating attempts, he finally hit on something he hadn't noticed before: when he had the courage (or audacity, as he saw it) to put himself at the center of his map, everything else started falling into place. He drew lines representing his relationships with his parents and his grandparents, as well as with each of his aunts, uncles, and first cousins.

Emmanuel also decided to put the United States and Haiti on his map, which helped him become aware of his inner conflict about his dual allegiances to his modern life in the United States and his spiritual life in Haiti. He was engaged to be married to an American woman, and he was studying and planning to become a psychologist in Boston, so he had firm commitments to stay in the United States. But he also had spiritual and familial ties to his traditional life in Haiti, where he was expected to assume his grandmother's

position in the community.

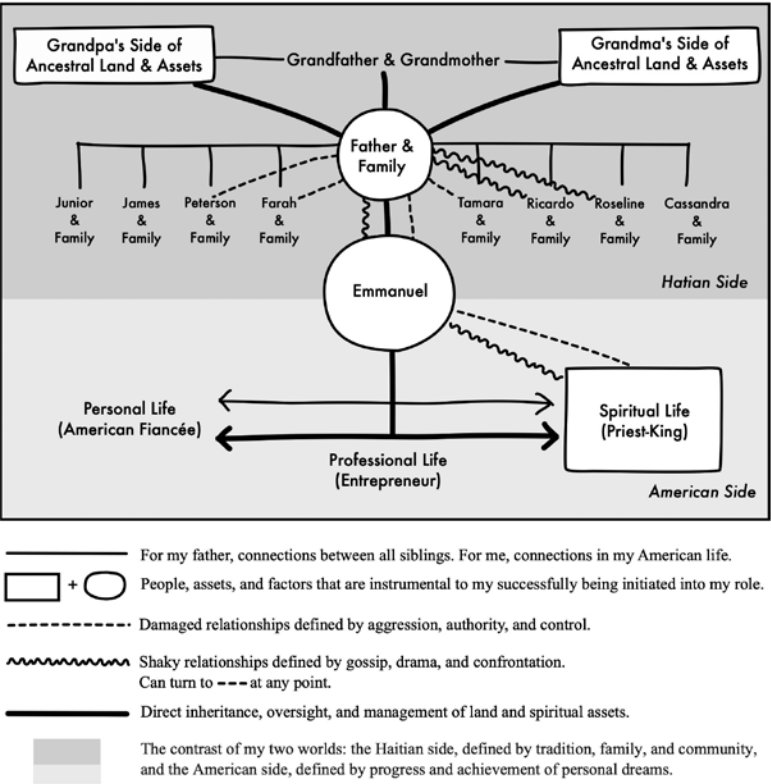This is Emmanuel's map and key:

FIGURE 3: Emmanuel's map and key.

INCREASE CLARITY AND COMPLEXITY: MAP OUT THE CONFLICT

* *Sketch.* On a blank page, write down the names of the people or groups from the situation that you identified at the end of the introduction. Draw circles around the names and lines to show how the people are connected.

* *Add.* Add as many people, places, events, ideas, and other factors to the map as you can. These can be factors from the past, present, and possible future that you think may influence or be influenced by the situation. Be sure to put *at least* one new person or aspect of the situation on your map that you hadn't before considered relevant.

* *Be creative.* Draw or write anything on your map that will help you understand the situation better. Your map should tell the story of the situation in a different way than you have told it in the past.

* *Observe.* Look at your map. What story does it tell? Is this story different from your description of the conflict at the end of the introduction? What do you notice about the conflict now, that you didn't notice before you drew your map?

You can download a worksheet to create your own conflict map at: optimaloutcomesbook.com/map

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Put Your Emotions to Work for You

Apply the Practice

PUT YOUR EMOTIONS TO WORK FOR YOU

✳ *Pause.* Acknowledge and name your emotions. You can do this proactively on a regular basis and also reactively when you feel emotions rising.

✳ *Settle.* Let your emotions settle. Get to know your emotions as if they're old friends who have come to visit you. What do your emotions look, sound, feel, and even smell like?

✳ *Ask.* What messages are your emotions trying to send you?

✳ *Act.* Based on the messages your emotions are sending you, what constructive action can you take that would be different from what you have done before—that would break the conflict pattern of the past?

> *You can visit Dr. Paul Ekman's Atlas of Emotions, supported by the Dalai Lama, to learn more about the five emotions and the states they contain. It is the best representation of emotions I've seen:*
> *atlasofemotions.org*

> *You can take an online assessment to identify your Emotion Trap at:*
> *optimaloutcomesbook.com/assessment*

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Honor Ideal and Shadow Values—Yours and Theirs

Your Turn

Identify Others' Ideal and Shadow Values

To help you continue to make breaks in the conflict pattern in your situation, just as you identified your own ideal and shadow values earlier in this chapter, take a moment to try to identify others' values now. This exercise offers a powerful way to develop empathy for others by suggesting possibilities about their perspectives and behavior that you haven't yet considered.

Of course, you can't know for certain what other people's values are unless you ask them. And because they may not be consciously aware of all of their values, even if you do ask, they may be unable to talk about some of them. Also, as I noted earlier, projection and the fundamental attribution error can cause you to incorrectly identify other people's values. That said, in my experience with hundreds of clients and students, I've found that the potential rewards of trying to identify others' values are worth the risk, especially if you take measures to lower the risk by following the instructions.

First, reflect on anything you know about how they grew up, including influences from their parents, extended family members, teachers, friends, and coaches, as well as the cultural experiences they may have had at school, at work, and in the communities of which they are or once were a part. What messages were they likely to receive from those people or in those places that might influence their behavior today? Write your answers down.

Now go back through the Values Inventory and select two to three values you think might be ideal for them and write those down.

Next, try to identify their shadow values. When a value is in the

shadow, the person who holds that value is likely to vacillate between two extreme ends of behavior with respect to the shadow value, as was the case with me in the situation with my mom. Whenever my mom called, either I wouldn't answer the phone and I'd feel guilty, or I'd talk until whenever *she* was ready to end the call and feel resentful. Because my value of autonomy was in the shadow, I had no way of clearly articulating it, never mind honoring it. Instead, it came out in those two extreme, unhelpful ways.

If it is hard for you to identify their shadow values, you can note your experience of their behavior and write a shadow value that might be behind it. Remember, one person's shadow value may be another person's ideal value. It all depends on the messages we received and the ways we interpreted those messages when we were growing up. The values on the right-hand side of the table that follows are examples of values that might underlie the behavior that you are attributing to them on the left-hand side of the table (shown in pairs of extremes).

YOUR INTERPRETATION OF THEIR BEHAVIOR	THEIR POSSIBLE SHADOW VALUES
Greedy *or* overly generous	Financial security
Passive-aggressive *or* aloof	Competition
Excessively authoritative *or* weak	Authority
Overly controlling *or* distant	Love
Power-hungry *or* aloof	Leadership
Status-seeking *or* detached	Recognition
Overly driven *or* lazy	Achievement

TABLE 1: The shadow values that may underlie others' behavior.

Create a Values Map

Using the lists of ideal and shadow values you've already created, write down your own ideal and shadow values in two columns and, underneath that, those of one other person (or one other group) in the situation you identified at the end of the introduction. If you'd like to include values for multiple people or groups, you can find Values Map templates accommodating various different configurations of people at optimaloutcomesbook.com/valuesmaps

	IDEAL	SHADOW
ME		
THEM		

TABLE 2: A Values Map to help you identify values that overlap or clash inside yourself and between you and other people.

Now consider any values overlaps. Are the values you listed in any of the boxes the same as or similar to one another? If so, circle them and draw lines between them.

Next, look for values that clash and draw lines between them with arrows pointing away from each other to denote the tension between them. Many clients draw thicker, darker arrows to represent major tensions and smaller, thinner ones for clashes with less tension.

Look for overlaps and tensions among all four boxes; in other words, among your own ideal and shadow values and between your own values and others' values.

What do you notice? Are there tensions between your ideal and shadow values or between your own ideal values? Are there tensions between your own values and others' values, either ideal or shadow? Are there any overlaps between your own and others' values? If so, which ones?

Do any of the tensions or overlaps you've noticed surprise you? If so, how?

Honor Your Shadow Values

Once you've noticed the tensions between your own ideal and shadow values, choose to honor one shadow value of yours that seems most relevant to your situation. First, seek to understand why it became a shadow value for you. Was it implicitly impressed upon you, so you haven't been fully aware of it? What messages did you receive at some point in life that might have led you to suppress it? You don't have to spend lots of time on this. In fact, thinking too much might lead you down the wrong path. Simply settle yourself into a quiet space, read the following questions, and write down whatever first comes to mind.

* How or when did I first develop this value?

* How or when did I first learn this value was *not* okay?

* Which of my ideal values might this shadow value be in tension with? Considering the both/and principle, how does my shadow value coexist with that ideal value? Write down at least three ways you currently express each value in thoughts, words, or actions.

* Can I acknowledge that one value does not negate the other? That I already express both simultaneously in my life?

* How will I honor my shadow value by thinking about, talking about, or acting on it constructively? What words or actions, if any, will I say or do?

Honor Others' Shadow Values

It's time to honor a shadow value of someone else on your map. Which of his or her shadow values will you honor?

Consider why this value might be in the shadow for that person. You may have no way of knowing exactly how or when he or she first developed it, but even just thinking about it can raise your empathy for that person, so it's still a useful exercise. And when you do know the other person well, you may be surprised at how easy it is for you to answer the following questions plausibly:

* What circumstances or messages might have led the person to originally develop this value?

* What circumstances or messages might he or she have received suggesting that it was *not* okay to hold?

Apply the Practice

HONOR IDEAL AND SHADOW VALUES

Keeping in mind the conflict situation that you wrote down at the end of the introduction:

* *Identify your ideal values.* Using the Values Inventory in appendix 1, identify your own ideal values—the ones that you are proud to hold openly.

* *Identify your shadow values.* Using the Values Inventory in appendix 1, identify your own shadow values—the ones that you are not proud of.

* *Estimate others' values.* Using the Values Inventory in appendix 1, see if you can identify some of the ideal and shadow values of one other person or group on your conflict map. You can't know what they are for sure, but take your best guess. Doing so will help increase your empathy.

* *Map the values.* Using the Values Map on page 106, write out all the values you've identified, and note any overlaps (similarities) and tensions (differences) between values. Use circles, lines, and colors to show the overlaps and tensions between and among your own and others' values.

* *Honor your shadow value.* Choose one of your shadow values that seems most relevant to your situation. Notice which of your ideal values it might be in tension with. Considering the both/and principle, how does your shadow value already coexist with that ideal value? Write down at least three ways in which you currently express each value

in thoughts, words, or actions. How will you honor your shadow value by thinking about, talking about, or acting on it constructively? Write these down as a reminder of your commitment.

✴ *Own your projections.* Is it possible that you've been projecting your shadow values onto others? If so, can you honor those values for yourself now?

✴ *Close the gap between your ideal values and your behavior.* Think about how well your behavior in your situation has reflected each of your ideal values. Is there a gap between any of your ideal values and your behavior in the situation you've been facing? For any gaps between an ideal value and your behavior, write what actions you will take to close the gap.

✴ *Honor their shadow value.* Choose one of the other person's shadow values that seems relevant to your situation. What might have led them to originally develop that value? What circumstances or messages might they have received suggesting that value was *not* okay to hold? How can you acknowledge their shadow value through constructive thoughts, words, or actions (even if you do so only privately)?

You can download a Values Practice Packet that will walk you through the work of this chapter, including a printable version of the Values Inventory and Values Maps for multiple people at: optimaloutcomesbook.com/values

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Imagine Your Ideal Future

Apply the Practice

IMAGINE YOUR IDEAL FUTURE

✳ *Imagine.* Take a moment to imagine your Ideal Future in as much vivid detail as possible. Use all five of your senses—seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling—as well as your emotions to imagine the best possible future situation. Remember, right now, you don't need to concern yourself with the constraints of reality—you'll do that when you get to Practice 8. For now, simply imagine an Ideal Future based on the work you've done in the previous practices.

✳ *Record.* What is *your* version of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, "I Have a Dream" speech? Once you've imagined your Ideal Future in detail, write, draw, collage, or audio- or video-record the pictures, sounds, feelings, tastes, and smells that you imagine will exist in your Ideal Future. This will help you remember what you're shooting for, which will make it more likely to happen in reality.

✳ *Prepare to communicate.* Would it help to share your Ideal Future with anyone else? Or might telling others ironically make it harder for your Ideal Future to come to pass? If you think it makes sense to share it, whom might you tell? What will you tell them?

You can watch Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech (and read the transcript) to see how he helps us imagine his Ideal Future at:

https://www.newsweek.com/mlk-jr-assassination -anniversary-i-have-dream-speech-full-text-video-870680

You can download a worksheet to help you imagine your own Ideal Future at: optimaloutcomesbook.com/imagine

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Design a
Pattern-Breaking Path (PBP)

Apply the Practice

DESIGN A PATTERN-BREAKING PATH (PBP)

To design a set of action steps that will help you exit the conflict loop while keeping your actions simple and surprisingly different from what has been done in the past, ask yourself the following questions.

* *Step One:* What solo or pause practice can I begin with?

* *Step Two:* Who is the first person, if any, whom I will involve? What action can I take that will be simple and surprisingly different?

* *Step Three:* Who else, if anyone, will I involve?

* *Step Four:* Are there groups of people I can engage? If so, which groups? How can I engage with them?

* *Steps Five and beyond:* How will I build a path of linked action steps from here?

You can learn more about the Beer Summit at:
https://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/31/us/politics/31obama.html

You can download a worksheet to design your own
Pattern-Breaking Path (PBP) at: optimaloutcomesbook.com/PBP

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Test Your Path

Apply the Practice

TEST YOUR PATH

* *Think ahead.* What might be some unintended consequences of your PBP? How will you prevent and prepare for those?

* *Experiment.* What mini-experiments will you conduct? Who will be part of your laboratory?

* *Review.* Note the results of your mini-experiments. Did they go the way you intended? What did you learn? How will the results of your experiments influence the actions you take when the stakes are higher?

You can download a worksheet to help you think
ahead and conduct mini-experiments at:
optimaloutcomesbook.com/testyourpath

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Choose an Optimal Outcome

Compare the Costs and Benefits

Once you have assessed the costs and benefits of any Walk-Away Alternatives, your Ideal Future, and Staying in Conflict, compare them with one another.

Here is an overview of Bob's comparison:

	IDEAL FUTURE: *REBUILD RELATIONSHIP AND OFFER NEW PACKAGE*	STAYING IN CONFLICT: *DO NOTHING*	WALK-AWAY ALTERNATIVE: *FIRE SALLY*
ANTICIPATED COSTS	✳ Need to try new behaviors ✳ Feels scary— what if I can't do it?	✳ Deteriorating relationship ✳ Still paying Sally too much ✳ Worse outcomes for company and clients ✳ Silence is awkward	✳ Long friendship gone ✳ Client relationships gone ✳ Company/ client knowledge gone ✳ Expertise gone
ANTICIPATED BENEFITS	✳ Pay less ✳ Retain Sally's expertise and company and client knowledge ✳ Potential for increased mutual understanding and trust	✳ Comfort and relief from not having to stretch myself as a leader ✳ Won't retrigger Sally's animosity	✳ Hire someone for less ✳ Don't have to deal with Sally's money issues and reactive temperament anymore

TABLE 3: Bob's Reckoning.

When you do your Reckoning, your Ideal Future *may* turn out to be your Optimal Outcome—the viable option with the lowest costs and greatest benefits—as Bob's did.

Bob saw that his hesitation was not due to a costly or unfeasible Ideal Future or PBP. His Walk-Away Alternative wasn't worth pursuing; it was way more costly than his Ideal Future. His hesitation was due to the fear that naturally arose as he anticipated the changes he would have to make to his own behavior in order to pursue his Ideal Future.

In contrast, your Walk-Away Alternative may be less costly than your Ideal Future, as Roxanne found when she wrote out her Reckoning:

	IDEAL FUTURE: *COLLABORATE*	STAYING IN CONFLICT: *DO NOTHING*	WALK-AWAY ALTERNATIVE: *FIND NEW JOB*
ANTICIPATED COSTS	✴ Keep getting disappointed and frustrated ✴ Waste time and effort trying to work together with poor results ✴ Continue to suffer financial losses when efforts to collaborate don't work ✴ Have to deal with angry, disillusioned employees because we can't solve our differences	✴ Continue to suffer financial losses due to our inability to work together ✴ Daily frustrations and anger ✴ Have to deal with angry, disillusioned employees because we can't solve our differences	✴ Moving costs, including the need to find new home, doctors, friends for self and kids ✴ Need to climb the corporate ladder again
ANTICIPATED BENEFITS	✴ Maybe this time will be different and we will figure out how to collaborate	✴ Don't need to change; can go with the flow	✴ Get to learn new things ✴ Make a real impact ✴ Experience excitement and joy again at work

TABLE 4: Roxanne's Reckoning.

Seeing this in black and white was compelling for Roxanne. She saw that her Walk-Away Alternative had lower costs and greater benefits than both her Ideal Future and Staying in Conflict. It was clear that her Walk-Away Alternative wasn't such a fantasy after all; it was her Optimal Outcome. But like Bob, she was apprehensive of change.

Apply the Practice

CHOOSE AN OPTIMAL OUTCOME

* *Identify any hesitation.* What sources of hesitation are at play for you, if any?

* *Reckon with the options.* What are the feasibility, costs, and benefits of your Ideal Future, Staying in Conflict, and any Walk-Away Alternatives?

* *Identify your Optimal Outcome.* Which of the feasible options (Ideal Future, Staying in Conflict, and any Walk-Away Alternatives) has the greatest benefits and lowest costs for you? This is your Optimal Outcome. Design a Pattern-Breaking Path to pursue it.

* *Be courageous.* What is one courageous action you can take to follow your Pattern-Breaking Path toward an Optimal Outcome?

* *Learn.* If this helps you exit the conflict loop, congratulations. If it doesn't, pause and design and test another path until you free yourself from the loop.

You can download a Reckoning Template at:
optimaloutcomesbook.com/reckoning

How to Achieve an Optimal Outcome

PART I	**UNDERSTANDING THE CONFLICT LOOP**
Practice 1	Notice Your Conflict Habits and Patterns
PART II	**BREAKING THE CONFLICT PATTERN**
Practice 2	Increase Clarity and Complexity: Map Out the Conflict
Practice 3	Put Your Emotions to Work for You
Practice 4	Honor Ideal and Shadow Values— Yours and Theirs
PART III	**FREEING YOURSELF FROM THE LOOP**
Practice 5	Imagine Your Ideal Future
Practice 6	Design a Pattern-Breaking Path (PBP)
Practice 7	Test Your Path
Practice 8	Choose an Optimal Outcome

Appendix 1: Values Inventory

This Values Inventory is adapted from Stewart D. Friedman's *Total Leadership: Be a Better Leader, Have a Richer Life* and Robert J. Lee and Sara N. King's *Discovering the Leader in You: A Guide to Realizing Your Personal Leadership Potential*. I have edited and added to it over the years, based on student and client feedback, to help it speak to as diverse an audience as possible. It is by no means exhaustive; please add your own values as you see fit. Interested readers can find a printable version of this Values Inventory at optimaloutcomesbook.com/valuesinventory

Values Inventory

Achievement: a sense of accomplishment or mastery

Advancement: growth, seniority, and promotion resulting from work well done

Adventure: new and challenging opportunities, excitement, risk

Aesthetics: appreciation of beauty in things, ideas, and surroundings

Affiliation: interaction with other people, recognition as a member of a group, belonging

Affluence: high income, financial success, prosperity

Authority: position and power to control events and other people's activities

Autonomy: ability to act independently with few constraints; self-reliance

Challenge: continually facing complex and demanding tasks and problems

Change and variation: absence of routine; unpredictability

Collaboration: close, cooperative working relationships with groups

Community: serving and supporting a purpose that supersedes personal desires

Competency: demonstrating high proficiency and knowledge

Competition: rivalry with winning as the goal

Courage: taking action in the face of fear

Creativity: discovering, developing, or designing new ideas or things; demonstrating imagination

Curiosity: a desire to learn or know things

Diverse perspectives: ideas and opinions that open up new pathways and illuminate new opportunities

Duty: respect for authority, rules, and regulations

Economic security: steady and secure employment, adequate reward, low risk, ability to afford basic needs

Enjoyment: fun, joy, and laughter

Family: spending time with partner, children, parents, extended family

Friendship: close personal relationships with others

Health: physical and mental well-being, vitality

Helping others: helping people attain their goals; providing care and support

Humor: the ability to laugh at yourself and at life

Influence: having an impact on the attitudes or opinions of others

Inner harmony: happiness, contentment, being at peace with yourself

Justice: fairness, doing the right thing

Knowledge: the pursuit of understanding, skill, and expertise; continual learning

Location: choice of a place to live that is conducive to a desired lifestyle

Love: involvement in close, affectionate relationships; intimacy

Loyalty: faithfulness; dedication to individuals, traditions, or organizations

Order: stability, routine, predictability, clear lines of authority, standardization

Personal development: dedication to maximizing potential

Physical fitness: maintaining health through physical activity and nutrition

Recognition: positive feedback and public credit for work well done; respect and admiration

Responsibility: dependability, accountability for results

Safety: physical, mental, or emotional freedom from harm or danger

Self-respect: pride, self-esteem, sense of knowing oneself

Spirituality: strong spiritual or religious beliefs, moral fulfillment

Status: being respected for a job or an association with a prestigious group or organization

Trustworthiness: being known as reliable and sincere

Wisdom: sound judgment based on knowledge, experience, and understanding

Appendix 2:
How to Apply the Practices
to Teams and Organizations

I 've spent the past twenty years consulting with leaders and teams in organizations, including Fortune 500 companies, growing start-ups, universities, international nonprofits, and governmental agencies, helping them achieve Optimal Outcomes. As an organizational psychologist, I know that it is possible, and necessary, to work at multiple levels simultaneously—with individuals, their teams, and the whole organization—to help people break free from existing conflict patterns and achieve individual, team, and organizational Optimal Outcomes. I've written a short bonus chapter showing how to use the practices to create Optimal Outcomes for your team and organization.

You can download this chapter at optimaloutcomesbook.com /teams