

Raise Your Hand

IT IS OUR CHOICES, HARRY, THAT SHOW WHAT WE TRULY ARE, FAR MORE THAN OUR ABILITIES.

J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

The auditorium was buzzing.

As a speaker, I've had the pleasure of presenting to organizations around the world, from Southwest Airlines to Microsoft; from twenty thousand salespeople at a national sales conference to a dozen CEOs in a boardroom.

On this day, I looked forward to talking with one of my favorite audiences: school-age kids. I love their voices, their laughter, their zest. I always leave the room energized and reminded of how lit up for life our little ones can be.

School districts typically invite me to speak to their entire school, but divide students into several groups based on age. First I get the pleasure of speaking to the youngest cohort, grades one through three. And let me tell you, it's obvious as soon as they enter the auditorium: The party's on.

Laughter bounces off the walls, smiles beam from faces, energy is high, and voices are loud. When I ask questions during my presentation, they answer heartily; when it is their turn for questions, they wave hands in the air in the hope of being called on. When it is time to return to class, they leap to their feet, a line forms by the door, and

they fist-bump me excitedly as they prance on to the next part of their day.

One of the boys in this group pulled back in shock after giving me a fist bump. He looked at my right hand. Then my left. He stared into my eyes, held my gaze, and asked as if stunned, “What happened to your hands, mister?”

Okay. I’d just shared the story of what happened to my hands. I had literally just stood in front of this boy and his classmates and explained: I’d made a huge mistake. Blown up my house when I was nine. Set myself on fire. Damaged my body. Lost my fingers to amputation. But my life was still filled with possibility, and so was theirs. I was expected to die. But I beat the odds. Impossible miraculous things still happened. Every day.

Had he missed the presentation? Been stuck in the bathroom? Was the microphone not on?

Whatever the cause, I took a slice of humble pie, bent to his level, and responded, “Well, when I was nine years old, I was in a house fire. I lost my fingers, but am doing awesome today.”

I could see him thinking about it for a moment, trying to make sense of this, before replying, “Oh my gosh!” He continued enthusiastically, “We had a speaker earlier today, and when he was nine years old he was burned in a house fire, too.” After a short pause he added, “You two should meet!”

The little boy then extended his hand, gave me a fist bump, and skipped down the hallway.

I shook my head and laughed.

Kids may sometimes get the answers wrong, but they are unafraid to ask questions, even the hard ones.

I was still smiling to myself when the next group showed up.

Grades four through six are more subdued. There’s a little less noise when they enter, fewer hands elevated when it’s time for questions, not as much excitement as they filter out of the auditorium.

Then, grades seven and eight enter. Eventually the high school students. And with each subsequent group—well, you can guess what happens, right?

Heads are down. Phones are in hand. During the presentation fewer answers are offered, hardly any questions asked. They're great kids and are internalizing the message, but it seems they've outgrown the joy of fully participating.

It's easy to blame it on adolescence. Sure, you could fault their hormones, their surly attitudes, their desire to fit in, or their craving to be cool.

And yet, is the way they participate so different from the manner in which we show up as adults?

Think about it.

When was the last time you waltzed into a room buzzing with energy?

When was the last time you showed up to a presentation convinced it was going to be awesome?

When was the last time you responded to a question by waving your hand in the air, begging to be called on, shouting out the answer?

We've transformed from excited, engaged, wildly optimistic kids who sprint to school to disengaged, distracted, cynical adults with most of that enthusiasm snuffed out.

Maybe we claim it's because we now possess the wisdom of experience. We've been around the block and know that life isn't always easy. In fact, it's often downright hard.

We're sprinting on the treadmill of doing more and more with fewer resources and less time. We're exhausted, don't feel we are getting anywhere, and tired of all the effort. The constant negativity broadcast through news outlets and social media has us convinced the best days are behind us and the end is near. Don't believe me? Watch your evening news tonight for validation. You're doomed!

Although we're more connected digitally and living in closer proximity to one another than at any point in the history of the world, we've never felt more isolated and alone. It's negatively affecting every generation, but showing up most dramatically in young adults, with 30 percent of millennials reporting that they feel lonely, and 22 percent admitting they have no friends.¹

I don't know about you, I think it's time we address how we are approaching life so we can get back to living lit up, excited and inspired for what's ahead.

And I think our kids have the answers.

This book is an invitation to reawaken five essential senses that you possessed as a child that will allow you to get back in touch with what it is like to live with the whimsical freedom and intrinsic joy of children waltzing through life.

It was a time when you were insanely curious, and your inquisitive nature refused to believe anything was impossible.

When you stepped into every experience with eyes wide open, heart brimming with hope, expecting amazing things.

When you were totally immersed in the moment, instead of worried about the past or anxious about the future.

When you weren't concerned about how you appeared to others and approached everyone (even total strangers) as potential friends.

When you stepped in boldly, raised your hand high, and felt the invigorating sense of freedom that allows you to go all in, dare greatly, and inhabit your life fully.

I call this living In Awe.

This is our true nature.

Unfortunately, as we age, this natural state erodes as the world tells us who to be. We've been trained to let go of our childish ways.

Be quiet!

Sit still!

Don't talk to strangers!

Color within the lines!

Be careful!

It's just the way things are. Don't rock the boat!

I certainly remember those refrains being yelled at me time and time again by my parents, coaches, and teachers. And while they were well intentioned, in the process our natural buoyancy gets slowly squashed. Our inherent creativity gets coached away. Our playfulness and energy get disciplined right out of us.

Their exhortation diminish the senses required to effectively nav-

igate the world in which we live. This affects the way we see our world, and how we show up in it.

Our senses are designed to help us process and understand the world. They inform what we see, hear, feel, taste, smell, and touch. When we lose access to them, we start to perceive a skewed, less vibrant, and distorted version of reality.

As we age, our senses diminish: vision blurs, hearing fades, taste dulls, our sense of smell declines. But we have other senses that we lose touch with as well. Senses that inform our opinions of ourselves, our connections with others, our perspectives on time, our ability to view life with wonder, and our ability to bravely step forward into it with nothing held back.

While it may be difficult to revive your physical senses, for some senses the damage isn't permanent. We can reawaken them. We can rediscover them. We can recalibrate them. And we can utilize them to get back to that state of awe.

Once rekindled, these senses have the power to transform our days and revolutionize our lives. They can improve our ability to innovate at work, connect authentically in relationships, and solve some of the very problems that plague the adult world today.

After interviewing thousands of business owners, thought leaders, and world changers, I've discovered that the very senses responsible for making them successful and effective today are the same traits that flourished most beautifully within all of us as children. These senses are the key to how they dream greatly, innovate wildly, achieve impossibly, connect authentically, and impact profoundly. Most important, it's how they live so fully.

And it's how you can do the same.

Get ready to relearn what you once knew to be true.

Prepare to celebrate the ordinary and achieve the impossible.

It's time to unleash inspiration, meaning, and joy by choosing to live In Awe of every experience, every opportunity, every day.