

ADAM BERGSTEIN

THE UNINTENTIONAL FINDINGS OF A HONEY BADGER

This talk is dedicated to my mother, whom I can never thank enough for her love and dedication to me

Please note: this slide deck is full of cute children and pics of beautiful Asheville taken by others

LET US START
AT THE
BEGINNING



Before we move on, let's start at the beginning

My brother and I grew up so well taken care of

My father has MS and due to his health, my mom routinely had to take on a lot

Always had multiple jobs, worked and went to grad school, and still cooked dinner and got us baths

She instilled a sense of compassion, hard work, dedication, and commitment from the day we were born.



My mom helped put my brother and I through college

I learned to program and started to solve new problems and acquire new skills by working hard. I met my first mentors.

I met my beautiful wife and we married.

After a brief stint in private industry, I went to Penn State to go to grad school, to teach, and to work full time.

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Hard work, etc

SEEKING

PERSONAL GROWTH



After 8 years, I got my masters degree in Information Security and taught four different CS classes. Life was very comfortable.

But, I exhausted my growth. I needed something new.

During my time there, I had learned Drupal and evolved from just “a programmer” to someone capable of solving bigger problems

I left and went to Acquia



My personal life was growing too.

I felt a deeper purpose, more responsibility.

I wanted to make the world a better place for my kids to be in.

I also had less time and more obligations at work.

“Success is most often achieved by those who don't know that failure is inevitable.”

–COCO CHANEL



Even with all of my hard work, my good intentions, my commitment - I failed.

I had a hard time juggling my personal priorities with those at work. My wife and kids needed me. Work was demanding.

Even though I cared about my job, my customers, worked hard, some projects I had were too challenging.

All of my strengths were not working.

I didn't realize that for me to really succeed, I needed to fail.

I LEFT ACQUIA

FEELING LIKE DAMAGED GOODS

Had I made the wrong choices? Was I in the wrong career?

I learned every single day I was on the job and I cared. What went wrong?

I had so many doubts.

I felt like damaged goods, uncertain of my choices and what the future held.

CIVICACTIONS

PRIORITIES AND BALANCE



Then I joined CivicActions

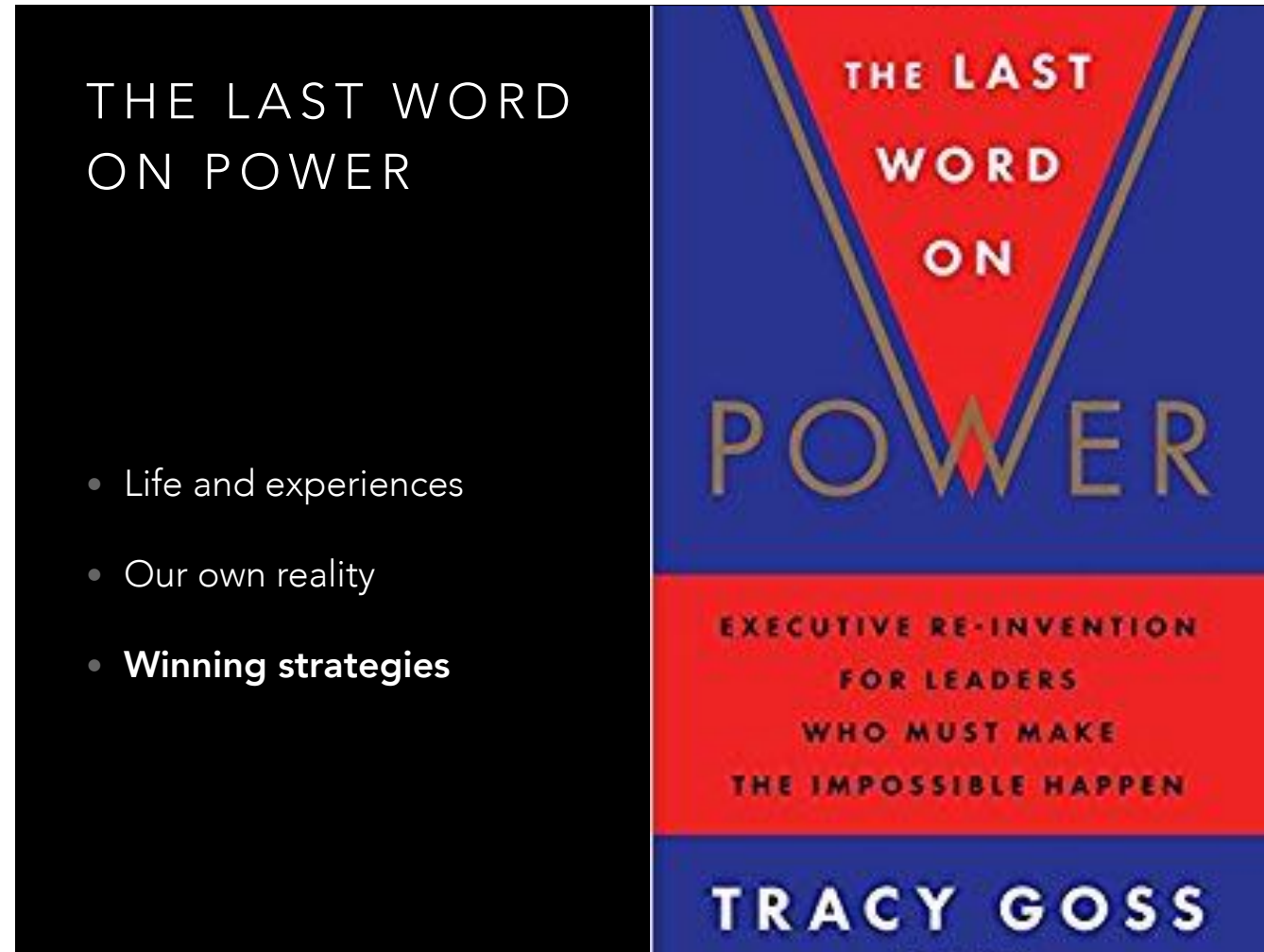
I felt they took on a project by hiring me

Established good culture, work life balance, doing good in the world — work with purpose and “life” friendly

Everything I wanted, what I believed in, and aspired to be

I felt far removed from this before joining the team

I never realized how difficult it would be to fit in from my past



To help transition, the CEO asked me to read a book.

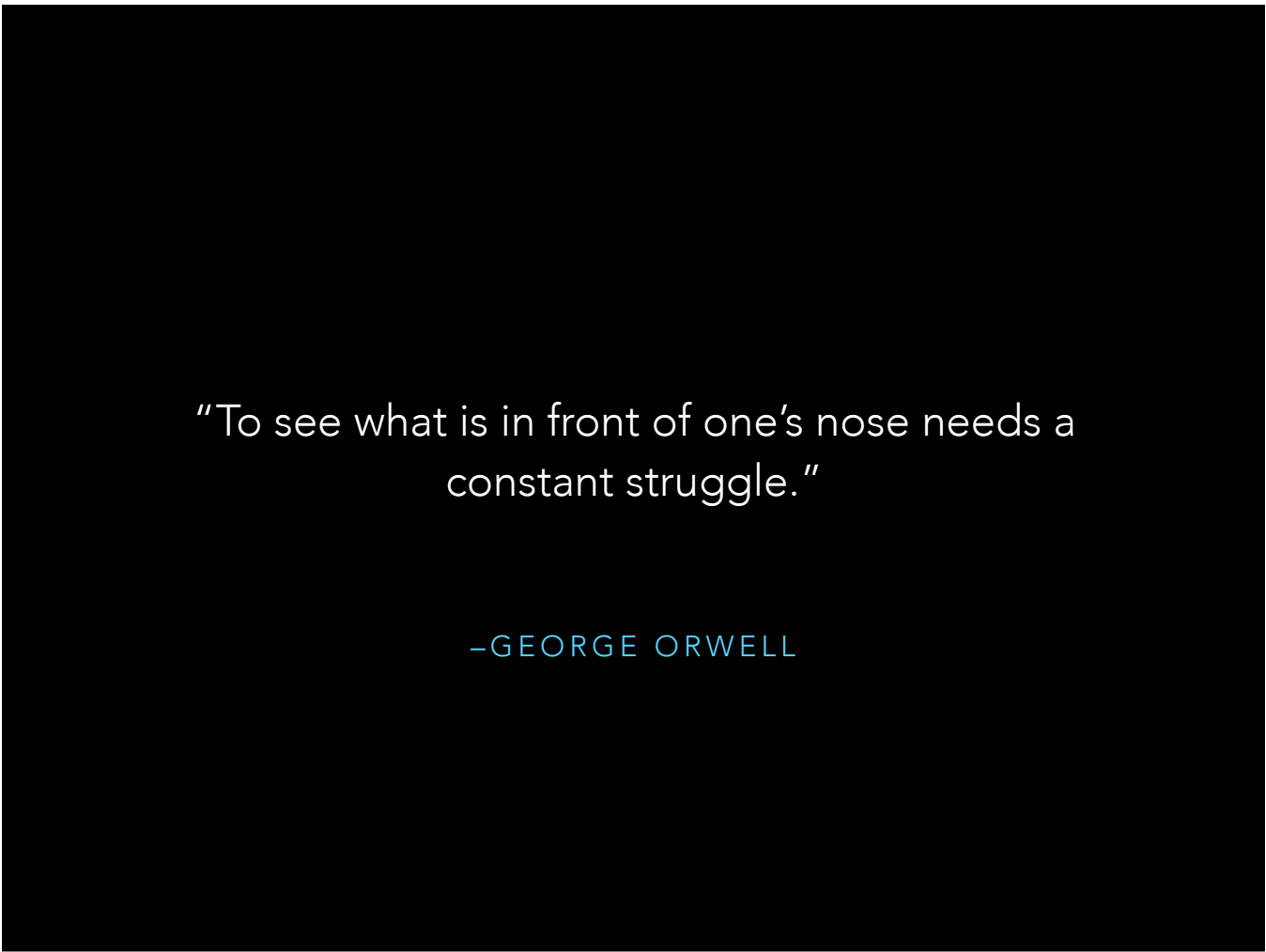
I learned that our brain has been conditioned from every experience we have ever had across our entire life

“The Last Word on Power” introduces the idea of a winning strategy based on this conditioning

This has formed our reality and shapes how we see the world subconsciously

Each of us has a winning strategy that reflects our lives.

Quote from the book: “This is both the reason for your current success and your biggest limitation to moving forward”



“To see what is in front of one’s nose needs a
constant struggle.”

–GEORGE ORWELL

Our winning strategy is a formation of what has worked for you to maintain comfort.

Our brain has been conditioned to seek what is comfortable. We avoid the uncomfortable.

We are not even aware it exists - it is part of our subconscious

Because it influences how you see the the world, you will always carry a bias based around your winning strategy.

OUR PROGRAMMING

As technologists “programming” has a certain meaning

What if you look at your brain. It has been programmed too.

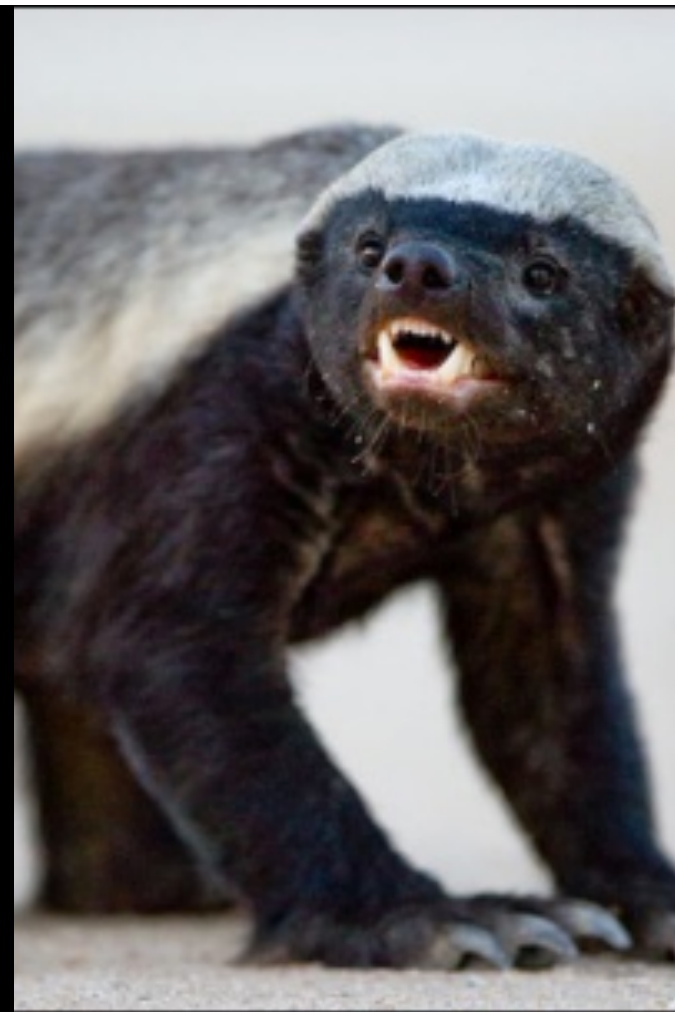
We all bring bias to how we see the world.

Our experiences and winning strategy help shape that which is good or bad, right or wrong - and MOST IMPORTANTLY - possible and not possible.

This forms our own reality

MY WINNING STRATEGY

I AM A
HONEY BADGER



My winning strategy is that of a honey badger

I work hard and vigorously pursue my endeavors with full focus. I have a tireless drive.

My inner honey badger helps me deliver. I dive into anything and I get crap done.

I don't let anyone or anything get in my way.

If I deliver, nothing bad can ever happen to me. Right?

ATTEMPTS TO HIDE
MY OWN
VULNERABILITY



My honey badger is just a way to hide my own vulnerability

As a honey badger, I want the world to see what's in the clearly photoshopped picture.

Someone who delivers and is strong, capable, and technically brilliant.

I have tried to avoid my own vulnerabilities. I recognize now I can't reach my fullest potential without embracing it.

I have deep seeded fears of my own livelihood based on how I grew up. This was never present to me until recently.

Hard work, dedication, focus, and problem solving is my winning strategy, intended to help overcome my fear.

I would be forever successful if I did this.

My winning strategy has already failed me.

MY WINNING STRATEGY SUCKS

- Myopic focus shuts out the outside world
- Working with people can threaten “progress”
- Does not play nice in the sandbox
- Deep care about people and solving their problems

I rarely considered the social repercussions of the honey badger.

This can come off as a lack of sensitivity, especially when what I pursue involves other people. I’m too focused on getting crap done.

People can impede my progress. They can challenge ideas or slow things down if there isn't consensus. People can be a threat to my winning strategy.

This conflicts with my actual motivations because I deeply care about helping people and solving problems

HOW DO YOU MOVE FORWARD?

Now that I've identified the problem...

How do you move forward?

Learn to act with more purpose

TO GROW

WE MUST SEEK TO EVOLVE BEYOND OUR WINNING STRATEGY

We must understand what our winning strategy is to learn how to use it effectively

Have you ever tried to deeply understand and analyze yourself?

Have you ever paid attention to your patterns and tendencies?

It is hard. But - It is eye opening.

The only way we can evolve is for us to be able to recognize our tendencies



My first recommendation is to deeply reflect about yourself.

Put your thinking cap and nerdy glasses on.

You need to be capable of recognizing your winning strategy

You must carve out time on a routine basis to afford focus and reflect on your current life

Have you defined your priorities? Are you honoring them?

You may say “no” but don’t beat yourself up too much - there is hope.

"I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail."

—ABRAHAM MASLOW



We must learn to only use our winning strategy when it's the right strategy to win.

We cannot use it all of the time, like we are inclined to.

In everyday life, even subtle triggers bring out our winning strategy

To grow, must learn to transcend our own winning strategy.

PRESENCE

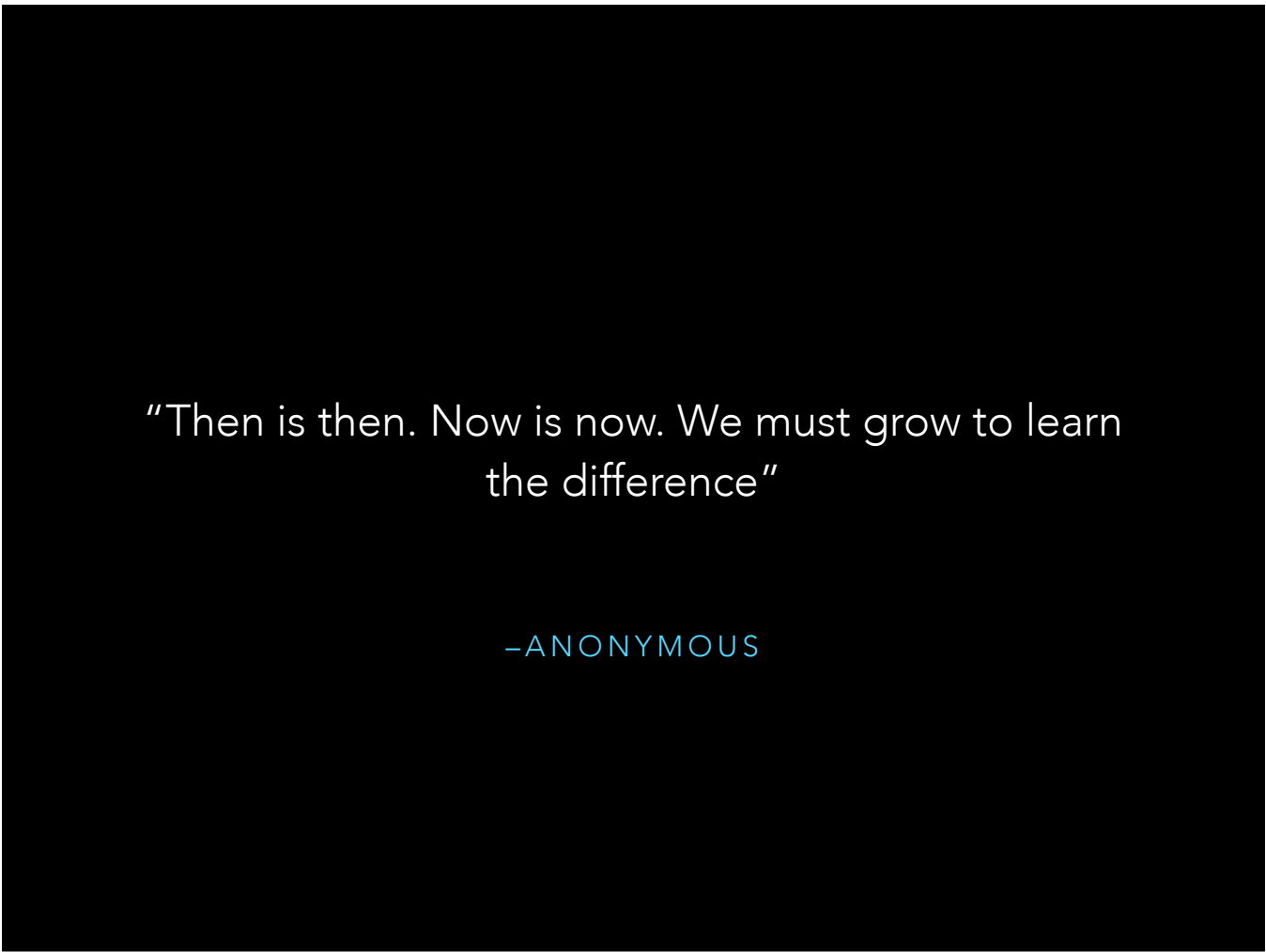
Your winning strategy will not “win” in every situation

To recognize when to use it, you need to be present. This is your words, your actions, your entire being.

This is self awareness

Presence is a tool to help look at any situation and recognize how we normally respond to it. We need to be aware of our state of being.

The real challenge is the discipline to do so. To be present, pause and respond in a way that may not be natural to what we typically do.



“Then is then. Now is now. We must grow to learn
the difference”

–ANONYMOUS

To be self aware, we need to reflect on our lives.

Our winning strategies are formed by the past, yet this shapes our bias for the future.

People often sit back and wait for the right opportunity or right point in their life

There is no time like right now.

Every day you wake up, you’re given a chance to move toward your goals.

You have a clean slate and a fresh beginning. What are you going to do with it?



You are capable of reconditioning your brain

You need to be motivated to do so.

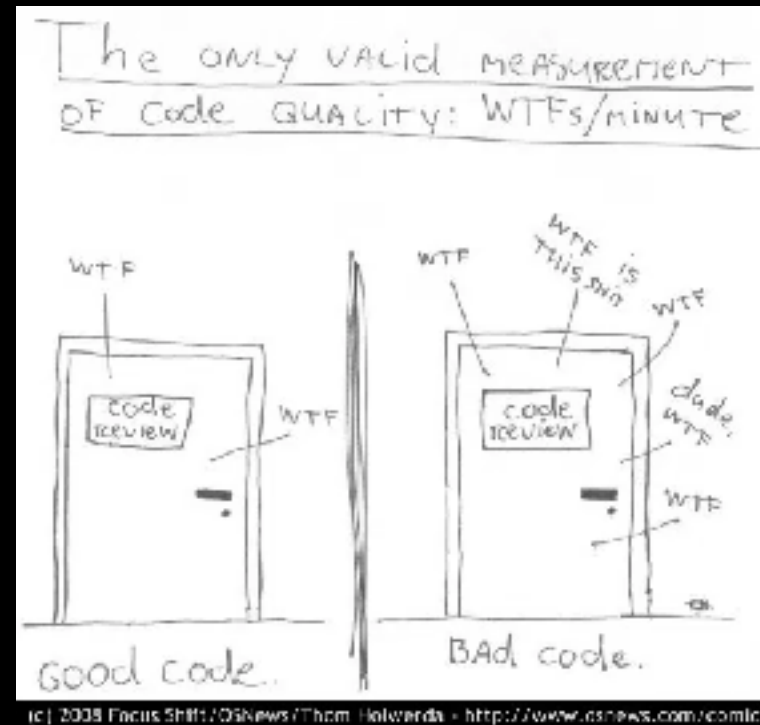
Think of when you learned how to program. It was hard. You were routinely tripping up over semi colons and misspelling function names. You stuck with it because you knew it would get you to your goal.

You trained your brain through repeated action. With each attempt, you learned, programming got easier.

I need to recognize what triggers my inner honey badger and act with more purpose.

Repetitive change for my traditional hardwired response. This will gradually become second nature to me, like programming is now.

PROMOTING EMPATHY



For me, I need to routinely practice patience, empathy, and embrace these challenges.

We are all in some state of learning.

I need to continuously train my brain to promote empathy and not let my inner Honey Badger take over.

Imagine what you are capable of doing if you have the support of other people? Bring others with you on your journey.

This demands emotional intelligence, not just technical skill

“Once you take fear out of the equation, the what ifs and maybes disappear and you go forth boldly from a place of love and courage.”

–WENDY CARRILLO

I need to have an awareness of what I fear and not be afraid of failure for me or others.

Failure presents the greatest opportunity for growth.

What are you afraid of? Have you asked yourself that question?

Your fear will prevent you from achieving your goals



Let's spend a minute on goals.

Rocky Mountain National Park, Estes Park in Colorado

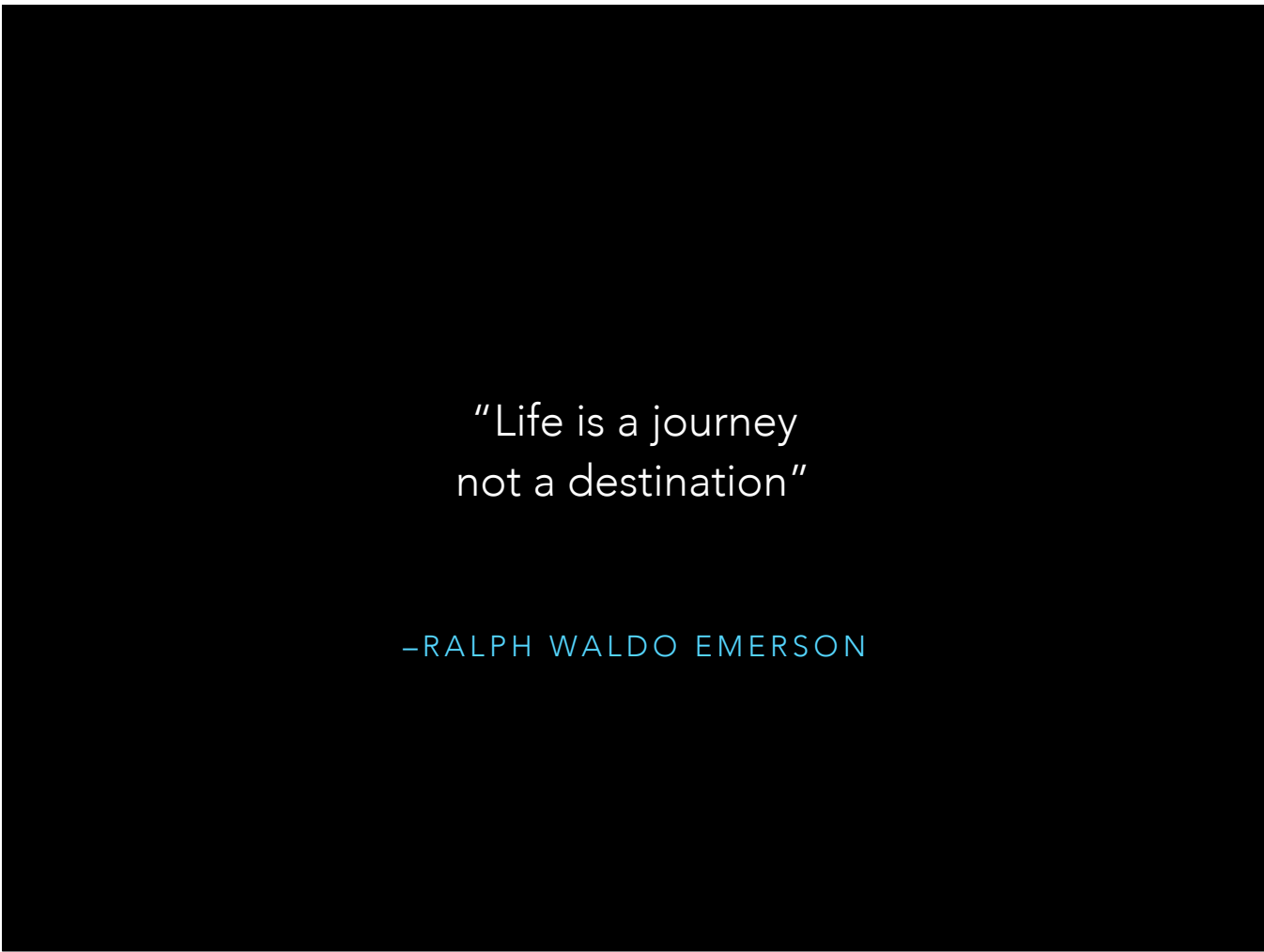
Let's view our goals like a peak. We all want to get to the peak.

We may have a specific path to get to the peak.

What happens if we encounter a boulder in the path?

We need to seek a different path to get to the peak.

This analogy applies to your winning strategy. You may not be able to reach your peak with your winning strategy. You need other strategies when yours does not work.



“Life is a journey
not a destination”

–RALPH WALDO EMERSON

We are all in some state of our life’s journey.

Life IS the journey. It’s not simply a peak on a mountain we are climbing.

Imagine what opportunities you miss when you are focused on reaching a certain peak.

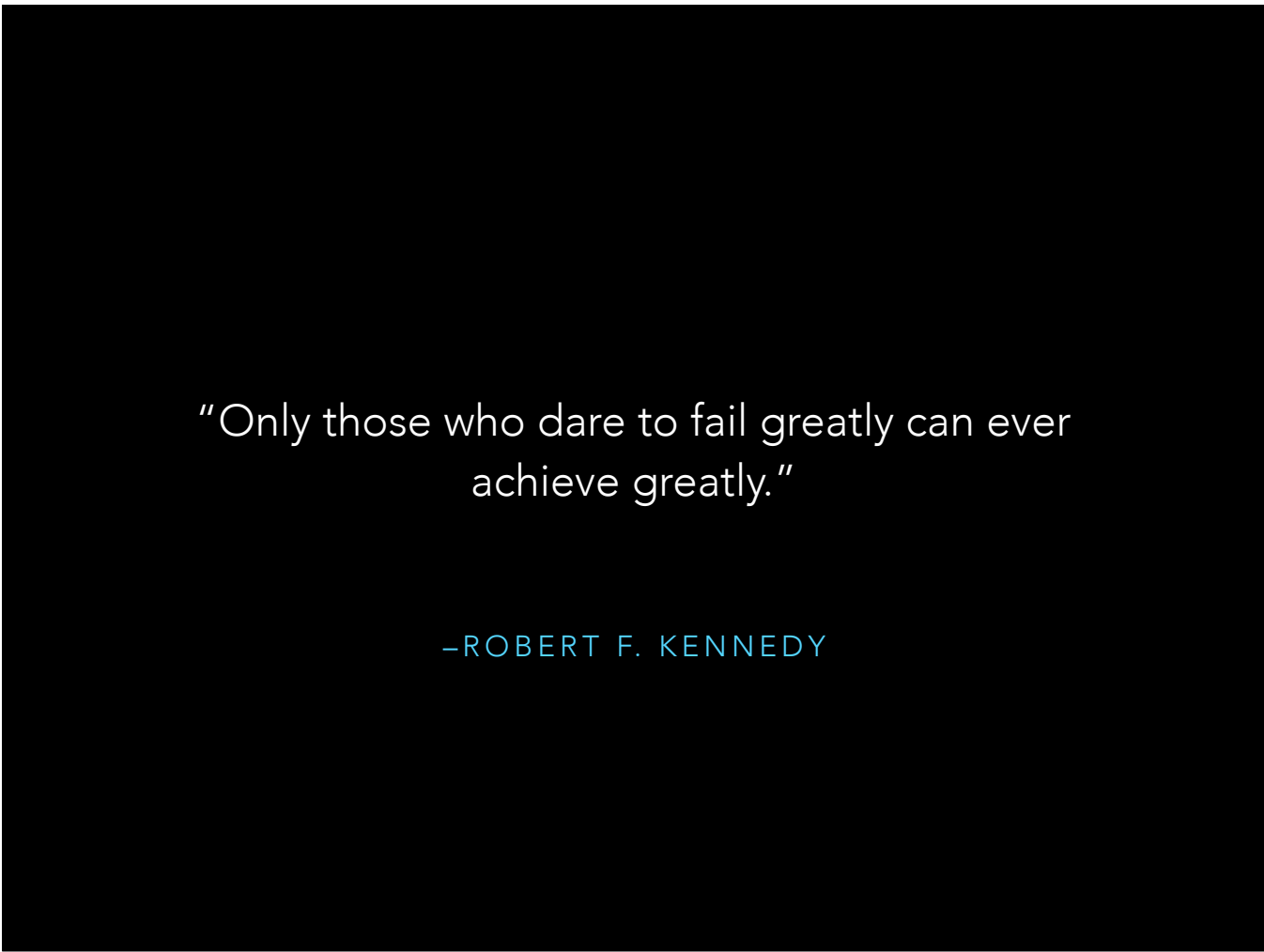


SEE OPPORTUNITY IN EVERY DAY LIFE

We often dismiss opportunities if we can't see how it gets us to our peak.

What if we took what life handed us? Opportunities may offer unconventional paths that inevitably lead us to a peak.

Ignoring life's opportunities means we may never achieve



“Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever
achieve greatly.”

–ROBERT F. KENNEDY

Ignore your winning strategy: take risks

Suppose you take opportunities presented to you. The worst that can happen is you fail and you learned a ton throughout the process.

But, maybe you won't fail and you just cured cancer.

You cannot achieve greatly without having the courage to move past the risks and your own avoidance of it.

“The right perspective makes the impossible possible”

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN



IDENTIFY PROBLEMS THAT
DRIVE YOU



If you are capable of failing with anything you do, wouldn't you want to invest toward what drives you?

Identify what brings you energy and dedicate yourself. If you have no drive, you will give up when it gets hard.

Invest your time to what is important to you. If you fail, you were at least investing in learning about what you are passionate about.

FREEDOM FROM CONSTRAINT

- Imagine you just found out you are dying
- What are your priorities?
- You now have a sense of urgency



Our reality sets constraints. “I don’t have enough money” or “I’m too busy at work”

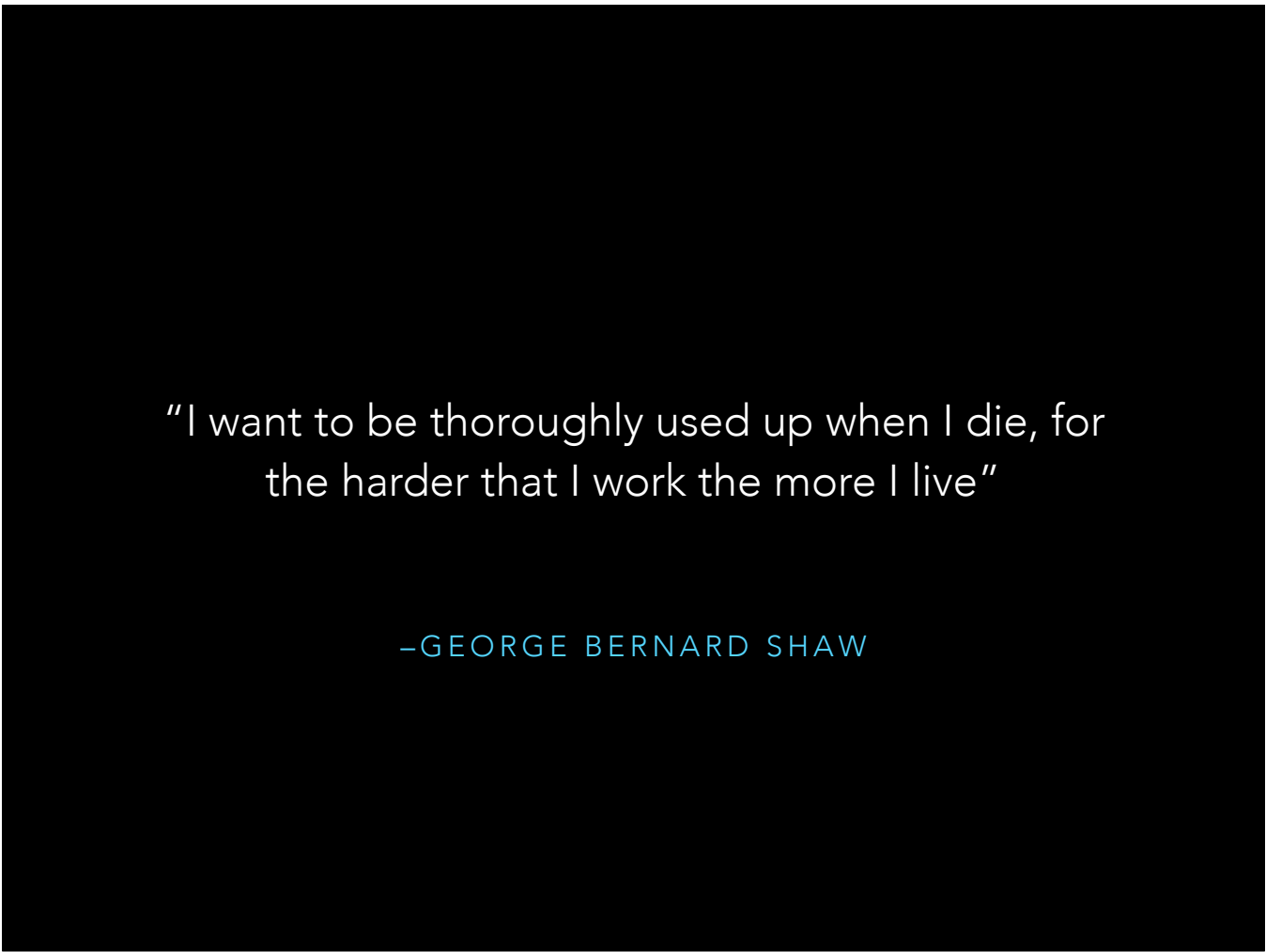
Imagine you just found out you have 3 months to live.

Are you going to be worried about closing out as many client tickets as you possibly can?

Heck no! You now have a true sense of urgency to pursue your life’s priorities.

You are free from constraint.

What would happen if you did that now? You are not promised tomorrow.



“I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for
the harder that I work the more I live”

–GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

Life is too short. We need to look at each moment as a way to invest in our future.

Dedicate yourself and work hard to achieve everything you are capable of

Live with no regrets

Vigorously pursue them and work hard to achieve your life’s purpose.

You may get hit by a bus walking across the street. Have a sense of urgency to achieve your life’s goals

SUMMARY ADVICE

- Self awareness
- Reconditioning
- Take risks
- Be opportunistic
- Honor priorities
- Freedom from constraint
- Urgency

In conclusion:

we need self awareness

we need to recondition our brain to move past our winning strategy

we need to be willing to take risks to achieve our goals

don't get stuck on one "path" toward your peak, view common opportunities as a way to move forward

and, we need to honor our priorities

let's move forward free of the constraints we've been conditioned to see.

be urgent, you don't know when

“Seems like there is enough miserable stuff happening in the world without us being nasty to folk in our own industry. We can be better.”

—RACHEL ANDREWS



For me to reach my potential, I need to keep the honey badger at bay.

Rachel Andrews recently tweeted the following quote which summarizes this well.



I just did what I thought was never possible.

Thank you, Asheville!

Live fearlessly and never settle for anything but your best self.