

RACHEL BRIDGE

AMBITION

WHY IT'S
GOOD TO
WANT MORE
AND HOW
TO GET IT



CAPSTONE
A Wiley Brand

Ambition

Why it's good to want
more and how to get it

Rachel Bridge



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For Harry and Jack

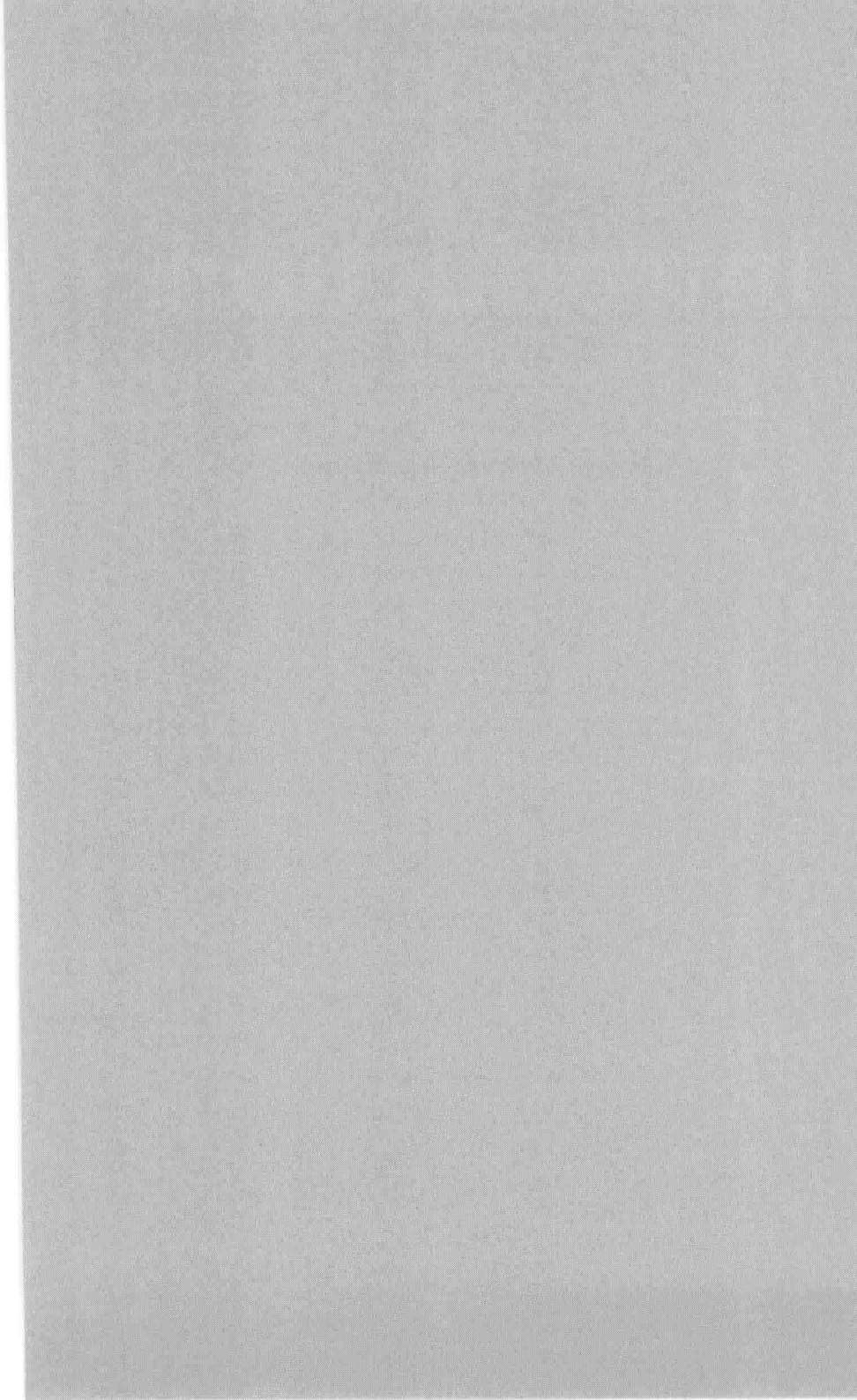
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Introduction

"Intelligence without ambition is
a bird without wings."

Salvador Dali



When you are a child, adults are always asking you what you want to be when you grow up. Along with “What’s your favourite subject at school?” and “Haven’t you grown!” it is pretty much the standard question at any family gathering and indeed sometimes used by teachers as a lesson theme. I can still vividly remember a fabulous picture painted by my sister at the age of five, depicting her as a pop star with sparkly purple hair and big red shoes.

As you get older, however, people gradually stop asking you what you want to do, and by the time you are grown up no one ever asks at all. Presumably they feel that you have either already achieved what you wanted to in life, or you haven’t, in which case you probably don’t particularly want to talk about it.

It is a real shame because no matter what you have already achieved and regardless of what stage you are at in life, having the ambition to achieve more can be a wonderful, life-affirming force. Ambition drives us on to better and greater things, whether for ourselves, for our family, or for

the world. Without it we would have no progress, no inventions, no innovation, and no change for the better.

Unfortunately, the concept of ambition is often misunderstood and as a result can sometimes be regarded with suspicion. People who are old enough to remember the 1980s, in particular, recall how wanting more somehow became synonymous with shouty people with big hair wearing red braces or shoulder pads. Ambition became a dirty word, a shorthand term for greed and the desire to win at all costs.

Even now, many of the words used to describe ambition are harsh, fierce words – burning, raw, naked, ruthless ambition, anyone?

So let's start by clarifying exactly what we mean by ambition. At its simplest, ambition is the desire to make the most of your potential to achieve something special, which would make a profound difference to your life and to those of others, whether that be through success, achievement or distinction. That might mean the desire to create something unique; reach the top of your field; start a business; become an expert in a particular area; or make a positive difference to the world.

Ambition spells the difference between those who are content to let random circumstance determine their journey through life, and those who would like to have a say in where they end up.

The late American preacher Dr Myles Munroe divided opinion with some of the views he held, but he got it right when he talked about the tragedy of people not using their potential.

He said: “The wealthiest places in the world are not the gold mines of South America or the oil fields of Iraq or Iran. They are not the diamond mines of South Africa or the banks of the world. The wealthiest place on the planet is just down the road. It is the cemetery. There lie buried companies that were never started, inventions that were never made, best-selling books that were never written, and masterpieces that were never painted. In the cemetery is buried the greatest treasure of untapped potential.”

Or as one of the people I interviewed for this book put it: “It’s about trying to squeeze the juice out of life.”

The interesting thing about ambition is that it is not just a driver for success; it can actually increase your chances of being successful. A study of more than 700 people with high ability by American academics Timothy Judge and John Kammeyer-Meyer in 2012 found there was a definite positive link between ambition and success. In particular, they discovered a link between ambition and educational attainment and prestige, which in turn led to higher wages, more prestigious work, and greater satisfaction with life. In other words, your ambition will not just set you on the road to success; it will also increase your chances of reaching your ultimate goal.

The purpose of this book is to show you how to use your ambition to achieve the big goals in your life. It will show you how to harness and direct your ambition in the most effective way, how to target it to overcome the things that stand in the way of your goals, how to chart your progress, how to stay motivated. And above all, how to succeed.

All the advice in this book is based on the stories and experiences of successful people in all walks of life and is grounded in academic research and proven studies.

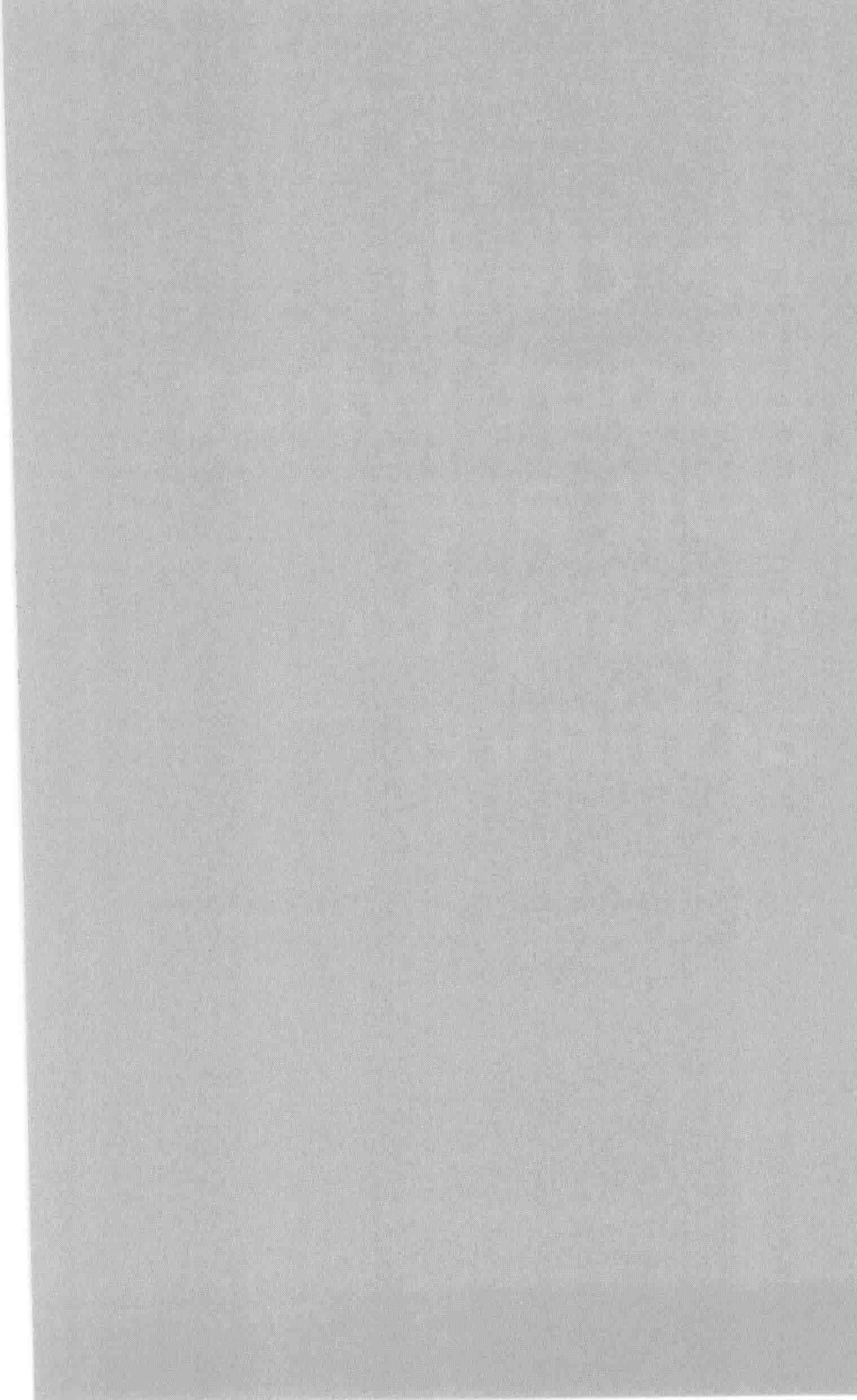
The world is an exciting place, full of wonderful possibilities and amazing opportunities. And the good news is that whatever ultimate goal you have in mind, your ambition can help you get there. Faster.

So what are you waiting for?

Be clear about what you are trying to achieve

"You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose."

Dr Seuss



Goals can come in all shapes and sizes. So before you start, you need to be very clear in your mind about where you are trying to get to. What do you really want to do? Become a best-selling novelist? Be promoted to a high-flying role at work? Build a school in a poor underdeveloped part of the world? Start your own business? Win a gold medal at the next Olympic Games? Get to the top of your academic field? Be a professional deep-sea diver? Whatever it is, if you are going to successfully use your ambition to achieve your ultimate goal, you need to have a very strong sense of where you are heading before you begin. Otherwise you will get lost long before you reach your destination.

By taking the time now to think hard about what your ambition looks like, you can dramatically improve your chances of success before you even start. Just make sure your ambition has these six essential ingredients:

1. Your ambition should be big
2. Your ambition should be measurable
3. Your ambition should be personal
4. Your ambition should make a difference

5. Your ambition should be achievable
6. Your ambition should be something you really, really want to do

Let's look at each of these in turn:

1. Your ambition should be big

It may sound counter-intuitive but having a big ambition actually improves your chances of success. If the ultimate goal you are trying to achieve is too small, it can be easy to feel that you don't need to make much of an effort to achieve it. Which invariably means that you don't make any effort at all. So inevitably, nothing changes. And your ultimate goal never gets reached.

If, on the other hand, you have set yourself a big challenging goal, then if you are to have any chance of achieving it at all, you know you must face it head on and be fully prepared. And leave nothing to chance because it is going to take every ounce of your focus and energy to even have a shot at getting anywhere close to it.

In the 1960s, American psychologist Professor Edwin Locke did a lot of pioneering research into the link between goal setting and performance. After reviewing a decade's worth of laboratory and field studies, he found that in 90% of cases, setting specific and challenging goals led to higher performance than setting easy goals or "do your best" goals. He concluded that the more difficult a goal is, the harder people will work to achieve it.

This is why people might successfully build a house from scratch when they have never even put together a flat-pack bookcase, or run a marathon when they have never found the motivation to join a gym. Big becomes easier to achieve because it sits itself right in your sight line and flatly refuses to budge until you do something about it.

There is a wonderful children's story by Jack Kent called *There's No Such Thing as a Dragon*. It is about a small boy called Billy who finds a small dragon at the end of his bed when he wakes up one morning. He goes to tell his mother about it, but she refuses to admit that the dragon is real, even as she cleans the house around it, climbing in and out of windows because the dragon is in the way. So the dragon grows and grows and grows, until it has grown so big that it walks off with the house attached to it. It is only when the postman has to chase after it down the street and Billy's father has to climb up the dragon's back to get into the house, that his mother is finally forced to acknowledge its existence. "Why did it have to grow so big?" she asks. "I'm not sure," says Billy, "but I think it just wanted to be noticed."

Make sure your ambition is big enough for you to notice it.

Remember, if nobody laughs at your idea and tells you that you must be mad to even think of trying to do it, you are setting your sights too low. Much too low. Any successful person will tell you that at some point in their lives, probably more than once, someone has quietly taken them to one side and told them firmly to give up their ambition because they will never succeed at it. If everyone nods their head in approval and tells you what a great idea it is, you are doing it all wrong.

2. Your ambition should be measurable

Every weekend in Scotland, dozens of enthusiastic climbers set out to pursue an activity known as Munro-bagging. This is the act of climbing a Munro, the name given to the 282 highest mountains in Scotland over 3000 feet. They are named after Sir Hugh Munro, a Scottish mountaineer who first catalogued them back in 1891. It is possible to bag several Munros at a time, or even to try and tick them all off in one go – the current record for climbing them all in one continuous round is just under 40 days.

It is an immensely popular activity, and with good reason. That's because goals are much more satisfying to achieve when you can measure them. Whichever Munro you choose to bag, you've either climbed the mountain, or you haven't. There is no middle way and no room for doubt. (Check out www.munromagic.com or www.walkhighlands.co.uk/munros for more information if this sort of thing interests you.)

The fact is people are more likely to achieve their goals if they are measurable, simply because they are easier to see, and easier to aim for. And because you know for sure when you have got there.

3. Your ambition should be personal

When he was a child, Edward Peppitt fell in love with lighthouses. He says: "My love of lighthouses came from holidays spent at my grandma's house. I had the attic bedroom, and the lighthouse at Dungeness nearby flashed through my bedroom window and lit up my bedroom wall. Aged about six, that left quite an impression. It made me want to stop