



## BOOK EXTRACTS

bochy ball! The chemistry of winning and losing in baseball, business, and life

*by kevin and jackie freiberg*

leading and managing change in the age of disruption and artificial intelligence

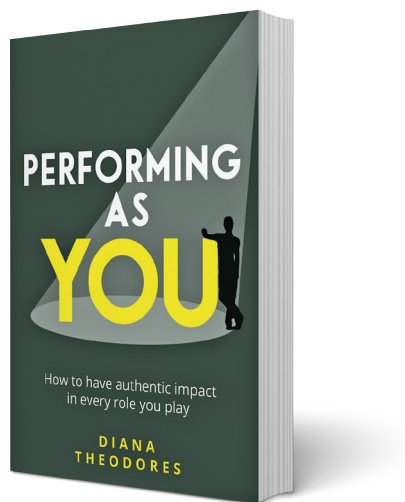
*by mathew donald*

performing as you

*by diana theodores*

# performing as you

by diana theodores



**Diana Theodores**

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**I**n a corporate training room in London, an inspiring space with lots of natural light, creative décor, and room to move around in, twenty-five magnificent women came to the end of an off-site leadership programme and were about to re-enter their ‘real’ worlds again.

We’d done wild-card icebreakers to uproarious laughter, and high-energy warm-ups. We’d shared stories, challenges and action plans. To wrap up the day, we stood in a circle for what I call a ‘valuing ritual’. It consisted of taking some deep, slow breaths with our hands on our hearts and taking a moment to appreciate the day, one another and ourselves.

As I looked at this room full of women standing in their full integrity and dignity, breathing in some self-acknowledgement, I saw many eyes welling up with tears and faces holding tight against the dam of emotion wanting to spring forth.

Breathing is our great tour de force of being. Breathing makes us possible and fuels our presence, energy, voice, thinking and feeling. It beckons our feelings, and that’s why there wasn’t a dry eye in the house.

In the rush, in the action-driven day-to-day of life, particularly corporate life, our breathing can become superficial and thin. This is what produces speech that is

monotone and too fast. The deeper we breathe, the more we have to slow down. The more we slow down, the more present we are to sensation, to the moment and to feelings. Our broken hearts, elations, loves, losses, fears, dreams, courage, failures, triumphs – our very life stories – are written on the breath. When we breathe deeply, literally taking our breathing to heart, we honour ourselves.

Touching that core of vulnerability for a moment through the power of breathing doesn’t mean you’ll have a meltdown at the office or be too emotional in your next presentation (genuine fears often expressed). It just means that you have a powerful resource whenever you want it; a way to value yourself and give the gift of compassion to yourself and to others.

## Getting to know you

A client, Ava, asked for coaching to ‘find her voice’. She explained that her visibility was rising in the male-dominated automotive sector. She had been invited to give a series of keynote talks to large audiences and she wanted to sound more confident.

We were in a room that was well protected from outside noise and had good acoustics, but I struggled to hear Ava. Her voice sounded tight and whispery. When I asked her to speak

up, she stopped, blushed and said: 'I can't. This is how I speak. And I'll always use a microphone.'

Ava believed that with a few tips and techniques she could get through her keynotes with the aid of a microphone. But no amount of microphone volume was going to make her talks compelling. Why? Because when I listened to Ava speaking, I had no idea who she was. Why would anyone listening to Ava's keynote be inspired, moved or persuaded by her ideas or trust her if they didn't know who she was and if she didn't share her humanity with them?

We threw away the script and the agenda. Ava told me her life story, a story of loss and hard work and reinvention. It took a few starts; her eyes welled up, and she got short of breath, anxious and stuck. I encouraged her to keep going through her tears. I asked her to move as she wished and as her emotions led her: to walk, to sit, to stand, to make eye contact, to face the wall; to let her body lead; to break all the rules. There were no rules.

In this rehearsal space, Ava bravely explored her story. She didn't stop. Not when the going got tough and she was close to tears. Not when she actually cried. Not when she moved

and not when she was still. Her story found new life. Her story found new words. Her words started to pour forth with pace, with volume, with tones, with intensities. They carried weight. She was unstoppable. When she came to the end of her story, Ava looked and sounded very different.

Ava had broken through her fear of expressing her emotions.

By following role models who believed vulnerability was off-limits in the boardroom, she had left her full self at the door. There was nothing Ava needed to learn about vocal exercises or speaking techniques.

By facing the fear of an old story – 'If I start crying I won't stop' – and by honouring the wisdom and experience behind her tears, Ava found her voice. She may always prefer microphones, but now she can still be heard if the technology breaks down. Even if Ava chooses never to tell personal stories in her talks, she has experienced their power and can show up in her full humanity when she walks to the podium, takes a breath and begins. She will inspire her audiences with the weight of her presence and her words.

There are so many things you can do to move forward with courage and creativity, as your fullest and most authentic self. Drop the

corporate mask; allow yourself to express emotion rather than damping it down; share your vulnerability rather than blockading it; harness your animated, passionate, energised self and don't let it atrophy under conformity and conventions that may belong out of date.

The call of the revolutionary within you, whether gentle or gigantic, silent or seismic, diplomatic or disruptive, is your unique energy and gift that must be expressed. The greatest act of your inner revolutionary is the act of bringing yourself fully through that door and performing as you in all the roles you play. Go forth. The world needs you. ■

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