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Breakthrough Leadership— WOO Yes! (Lesson 1)

What you look for in others and yourself, you will find. And what you find, you will unleash. It is an extraordinary WOO that is possible in every precious moment!

by **Brian Biro**

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Is it possible that your life, relationships, energy, health, business, and balance can flourish as never before, despite even the most difficult circumstances? Is it possible for you to build supportive, high performance teams, even with those people you're pretty certain God put on the planet to "bug" you?

Is it really possible for you to have more fun, greater sense of purpose, and genuine peace of mind in a world accelerating so quickly that there is more computer technology in your children's Christmas toys than in the Apollo that went to the moon in 1969? And is it even remotely possible that your family can actually flourish with unstoppable love and connection, despite the seemingly endless distractions and disconnections of reality TV, internet, Madison Avenue, cell phones, traffic, malls, I-Pods, and instant messenger?

The answer to these enormous, vital questions is WOO YES!!!

> ***Stop reading right now and yell out the word WOO! Isn't that a FUN word?***

Now, if anyone asks you what you've been reading and thinking about, put a big grin on your face, look them right in the eye, and say… You've got it! WOO!

WOO stands for something very special. It is the WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY, and with every ounce of my heart and soul I want you to know that we all share the most important, magical, and magnificent of all WOOs right now!

Do you know what it is? It is EVERY PRECIOUS MOMENT! Every precious moment is a WOO. What do I mean?

You never know if the next person you meet today may become your lifetime friend, just as you didn't know it when you met your lifetime friends. You never know if the next time you talk with your son, daughter, spouse, friend, or brand new prospect, if something you say in that conversation may be the one crucial thing they could not see without your eyes, and a life that was on its way down is instantly reignited. You never know if the next idea that pops into your head may have the same impact on your own life.

I had a high school counselor named Mr. Anderson who pulled me into his office in the ninth grade, sat me down, and with an intensity that surprised me because he was usually so light-hearted and jovial said, "Brian, a student like you only comes along about once every ten or fifteen years."

Now, at that time, it was pretty likely he meant it BAD more than he meant it good! You see, I was at a point in my life where all I really wanted was for everyone to like me. And so, I was playing the clown, not applying myself anywhere near my potential. But Mr. Anderson saw through all of that. What he was really saying to me in that moment was, "Brian, don't waste the gifts you've been given. Live FULLY. Put your heart into all that you do. When each day is done, know you've given all you had. That's what really matters in life."

And, you know, I GOT it! I would not be writing this article right now had Mr. Anderson not seized that WOO so long ago! I never would have elevated my academics and earned my way into Stanford University,

never would have had my life move in the wonderful directions it's flowed, and, most of all would never have stepped onto the path that brought me to my wife and children. The question is not, "is there a WOO?" THERE IS! The real question we should be asking is, "how many of those WOOs have we MISSED?" And, why do we miss them?

This article and the series to follow in the coming weeks and months is about "seizing the WOO! We will live by the KISS principle – Keep It Simple Superstar! But always remember there is tremendous power in simplicity. Our new motto will be "Carpe WOO!—seize the WOO!" As you learn to make the most of every precious moment, you will discover the secrets that will enable you to answer those enormous questions of life we posed at the beginning of this article with a triumphant, resounding: WOO YES!

Seizing the WOO—It's all about BREAKING THROUGH!

As a professional speaker I have become known as "America's Breakthrough Coach!" I love this title because I believe passionately that we are all in the business of breaking-through. Whether we're moving from fear to freedom, from failure to faith, from good to great, or from ego to "we-go," seizing the WOO requires us to grow and move beyond limits, obstacles, fears, or doubts.

Every day as parents we are in the breakthrough business helping our children make good choices that will lead them to confidence, compassion, and happiness. In our professional careers we are seeking to move to the next level in terms of challenge, responsibility, success, and abundance. When it comes to our health, our breakthroughs in diet, exercise, attitude, and habits will determine the way we feel every single day. And in our relationships that are the most important determinants of our overall happiness and spirit, our success in breaking through in terms of our communication, patience, understanding, openness, and trust make all the difference.

Your life and your business are about to BREAKTHROUGH!

WOO Lesson 1: What You Focus On Is What You CREATE!

Here's a fun little question. What color is a yield sign?

When I ask this question in my seminars I ALWAYS hear the audience call out, "Yellow." But many years ago the United States adopted the International Signage Standards, and the yield signs you and I have seen for all those years are not yellow. They are red and white!

I have a hunch you might be thinking something along the lines of, "well, maybe they're red and white out there in Asheville, North Carolina where you live, Brian. But not here!" That's exactly what I thought when I was in the audience at a seminar and was asked the question the first time. My answer was an immediate, "Duh…yellow!" But, son of gun, from the time I finished that seminar that day they've managed to change every single yield sign I've seen ever since!

The truth is, we've seen thousands of yield signs. We very likely see the same yield signs almost every day when we drive our standard routes to work or school. And yet, we haven't seen one of them for what's really there. Why?

> ***The truth is we rarely use our vision to see! Instead we use our memory and our conditioning. The challenge is, when we use our memory to see, we don't see what's here now. We see the past.***

Now, I hope you'll chuckle every time you see a yield sign from now on, just as I do. But there are far more important areas in which to apply this understanding and see clearly what is here now. Where in our lives does it really matter to awaken our true vision, and no longer depend upon our memory to see?

As a Network Marketer you better believe it's with PEOPLE!

Here's an example very close to my heart. My daughter Kelsey is eighteen years-old and drives her own car. The responsibility of driving

has helped her feel more independent, confident, and mature. Yet, every so often I treat her like an old yellow yield sign and look at her as if she's still fifteen. Every time I do, our relationship takes a step backwards and needs rebuilding.

The truth is: what we focus on is what we create! Those yellow yield signs were visual creations far more real to me than the actual wood, metal, and paint. The way we see ourselves and others determines the life we create and the messages we send to friends, family, and teammates in our downline and upline.

I learned, first hand, how powerful the understanding that what we focus on is what we create is to those we affect. I attended Stanford University long ago (we won't mention any years!). Like most young people going to college I was trying to figure out what I was going to do with this thing called my life. And though I loved Stanford and the challenge of such an extraordinary environment, I quickly discovered that what I loved most was not at college.

What filled me with passion was what I did in the summers to help put myself through Stanford (that and mega-loans, which I didn't love!).

The pursuit that consumed me so fully each summer was teaching and coaching swimming. I absolutely loved it! I'd start the summer with a group of little kids who had no idea what they were doing. They hadn't learned any stroke-techniques; they'd never been a part of real team, and never set goals to pursue. I was eighteen, nineteen, years-old and so full of enthusiasm you'd accurately describe me as an "Ooh, ooh, ooh guy!"—You know, that fellow you grew up with who, when asked a question simply couldn't control his enthusiasm and would bubble out, "Ooh, ooh, ooh, call on ME!"

I poured my full heart and soul into coaching these kids and by the end of each summer they would improve so much, both individually and collectively, that I couldn't put them out of my mind when I headed back to school.

So, when the time came to graduate, my buddies thought I was crazy because they were going to medical school, law school, or business school, and though I had been fortunate enough to do well at Stanford,

I made up my mind that I was going to live my life doing that which I loved. And it was clear that what I loved was coaching. So that's exactly what I did.

I started my own swimming team in Southern California. It was a U.S. swim team which meant, unlike a school where I'd work with the kids for a season or semester, I was a part of these young peoples' lives year round. When I started we had about fifteen little kids, almost all between the ages of seven and ten years old. But for the next eight years, that team was my life. And let me make a promise to you about the power of your focus.

If you put your full heart and soul into ANYTHING with what's really inside of you for eight years, incredible things can happen.

Over the course of those eight years we grew from a tiny novice team to one of the largest privately owned swimming teams in the country, numbering nearly 275 swimmers. We earned national recognition by placing in the top ten at the Senior Nationals, and the top three twice in a row at the Junior National Championships. More than forty of our athletes earned college scholarships to schools across the country from the University of Hawaii to the University of Miami. Some of our top performers participated in the Olympic Trials and international competitions.

This experience taught me much, and one of my most unforgettable lessons came through a swimmer named Allison. Allison was definitely not one of the "stars." Although a part of our team for many years, she never achieved any great honors. She was short and slight of build, yet very big of heart, and she had bright red hair like Little Orphan Annie. (It took a real effort to stuff that curly mass into her swimming cap each day!) I simply adored her. She always came to practice with an upbeat attitude

and a determination to work as hard as she could. She was utterly unselfish and constantly supported and encouraged her teammates.

But, she was never a star. In fact, she was what in the sport of swimming we call a “drop dead sprinter.” We all know someone with that tendency, like the people who show up at the office at 7:45 raring to go, but by 8:15 they’re crying out, “Where’s my coffee? I need my coffee!”

Well that’s the way Allison swam. Her best stroke was butterfly. It’s a beautiful stroke when done well. Butterfly is the dolphin stroke, undulating and powerful.

Allison had good natural speed and started her races like a rocket ship. She’d be out in front, looking strong, her arms and legs driving with beautiful timing. But for eight straight years the same thing would happen. With a half-lap to go, the skies would open up, and a baby grand piano would fall from the heavens, right on Allison. It was painful to watch. All of a sudden her body position would begin to drop. She’d start forcing instead of flying. Her arms would turn to jelly and her face would begin to contort in pain as the lactic acid built up in every muscle. The other swimmers would catch her, catch her, and then pass her. Her last seven or eight strokes were utter agony. She’d struggle to the wall, dead last, completely spent. She was so exhausted her timers would have to pull her out of the pool.

For eight straight years at this point she had the same instruction from me, her coach, who, keep in mind loved her. She was to come immediately over to me so we could talk about her race. And for eight straight years I did the same brilliant coaching job. Thoroughly defeated mentally, physically, and emotionally, she’d walk dejectedly over to see me.

It has been said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.

If you looked up insanity in the dictionary, you probably would have seen my picture during those years because every time Allison came to me for support and encouragement after those painful races, I said the same ridiculous thing.

“Allison,” I’d say in my most inspirational coaching voice, “one of these days you’re not going to die!”

Great coaching, huh? Then I’d give her a big hug just to lock in those feelings and send her off to loosen up. Off she’d go, her body in knots and her mind filled with thoughts of “dying.”

If I give you the instruction, “Don’t think of the number three,” what happens? Automatically, three pops into your mind. The more you try to push it away, the more you see it. What you focus on is what you create! Unwittingly, I was consistently directing both Allison and myself toward a belief she would die at the end of her races.

In local age-group swimming the major goal for the kids was to qualify for the Junior Olympics. Age-group swimming was like a roller coaster: just as the kids reached the top of their age group, their birthdays would come, they’d move to an older age group, and they’d find themselves at the bottom of the heap all over again. Allison had been close to qualifying for the Junior Olympics a couple of times, but had always just missed before she “aged up.” She never gave up trying, though!

Finally, Allison made it! In my last summer as a coach, she qualified for the Junior Olympics in one event, the hundred-meter butterfly. She hit the time standard on the nose— one one-hundredth of a second slower and she would not have qualified. I was sure this was the pinnacle of her swimming career. All of us were thrilled that she had made it and would finally have a chance to participate in this prestigious competition. I was especially pleased because this was to be my very last meet as a coach. I had announced to the team that I was leaving swimming to attend graduate school at UCLA, so it was a very emotional time for the kids and me.

Many people have the mistaken impression that swimming is an individual sport. After all, once you dive into that water you’re seemingly alone. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. My many years as a coach taught me that swimming is an extraordinary team sport.

Every day, these kids trained together, pouring their hearts out, challenging, encouraging, and supporting one another.

> ***The sense of unity this created connected them in spirit and energy level.***

At some workouts and competitions, it was as if the pool flowed downhill. Each athlete gathered strength from the others and everyone flew! On other days, however, everyone seemed to catch an identical case of "slow-motion sickness."

Our team focused on Junior Olympics as our top team competition. In the strongest age-group swimming region in the world, we perennially finished second to mighty Mission Viejo in California. We had a huge contingent of swimmers who had qualified for the older age-group Junior Olympics and, on paper, we looked like a strong second place finisher once again. Since this meet was my last, the kids wanted to send me out with a special performance. Emotions ran high as the meet approached.

Allison's event turned out to be the first of the meet. What's more, as the slowest qualifier, she would compete in the first heat of the event. With sixty-four girls in the 100-meter butterfly, that meant she would be in heat one, lane eight, right next to the edge of the pool.

We always warmed up the same way at competitions. First I sent the kids off on a long, easy loosen-up swim to stretch their muscles and get the feel of the pool. After they had sufficiently warmed up, I timed the kids in short sprints. They were fresh and psyched up, so they usually turned in some excellent times.

As Allison approached the starting block for her sprint, she shined like a beam of light. She was so excited about finally being at Junior Olympics that she was super-charged. As the slowest qualifier in her race she felt no real pressure— just pure, unabashed joy at being there. I signaled her to step up on the block and called out, "Ready, ho!" She exploded toward me with more speed and power than I had ever seen from her before. I clicked my stopwatch as she plowed by me at the 25-meter mark, and watched her face light up with a huge grin when I read her sprint time to

her. It was by far the best she had ever done, and she absolutely bubbled with enthusiasm.

I don't know if it was the shock of her terrific sprint time or the look of excitement in her eyes, but something shook loose in my brain and a new idea burst forth. Remember, for seven years I had said the same exact thing to Allison over and over: "One of these days you're not going to die." But this time she looked so phenomenal in that sprint that I bent down close to her and put my hands on her shoulders. "Allison, that was fantastic! Do you remember how you just felt? Great! Remember how high you were on the water and how light and powerful you were?"

She could hardly keep her feet on the ground as she looked up at me and nodded excitedly. "Yeah, Coach. I felt awesome! I can't wait for my race!"

I looked straight into her bright green eyes. "Allison, when you dive into the water for your 100-meter butterfly, I want you to remember just how you felt in that sprint. I'll be standing right here, at the 75-meter mark. When you get to me with 25 meters to go, I'll yell one word to you!"

She cried out, "What's the word, Coach?"

"The word is the word, NOW! As soon as you hear me, I want you to pretend that you just dove in to do that exact same sprint all over again. Can you see it?"

"Yes, Coach!"

"Can you feel it?"

"I got it, Coach!"

"Great!"

Sometimes the difference between mediocrity and unleashing the greatness inside you is very slight. As a leader,

you may be right on the edge of becoming the catalyst to bring out the very best in your people.

The possibility is there in every moment. Often the single most important action you can take is to help people focus on what they want— not what they don't want. When they become crystal clear and extremely specific about what they are shooting for, look out!

I sent Allison off to check in for her event and gathered the rest of the tam together. Typically we'd send all our kids to the end of the pool to cheer for their teammates as they approached the turn. The sight of these crazy kids, yelling and screaming their lungs out, was often enough to ignite an extra burst of adrenaline. This time I decided to something special, though. I instructed half the kids to head down to the end of the pool to cheer Allison on. But then I gathered the other half of the kids around me and showed them the 75-meter signal I had set up with Allison.

I told them that when I gave the signal, I wanted them to let out the loudest NOW in history! I wanted that place to shake. We'd be right next to Allison so she would definitely get a jolt. If nothing else, we'd *scare* her into finishing stronger.

As she stepped up onto the blocks, I could feel the hope and excitement of all her teammates. In a very real sense, they were right up there on the blocks with her. These kids had prepared for this meet under the exact same system. If she did well, their confidence would soar. If she didn't, the kids would search for rational reasons, but for many, a little bit of their emotional edge would be lost.

Allison had never felt so completely supported before. As she looked down to the end of the 50-meter pool, she saw at least fifty of her teammates enthusiastically clapping and cheering or her. Little red-haired Allison was ready to go!

When the gun fired, she took off like a shot. She looked terrific! By 25 meters she had opened up almost a full body-length's lead on the rest of the heat. As she closed in on the turn, every stroke seemed to pump up her teammates more. They went crazy, waving her on and cheering their

lungs out. She exploded out of the turn and headed home with 50 meters to go. I checked my watch for her 50-meter time and thought, “This is great! She can die and still do her best time!”

As she approached the 75-meter mark, she continued to move strongly. She had well of two body lengths on the nearest competitor. Then, something magical happened.

Spontaneously, without any coaching from me, the fifty or so kids who had been cheering for her at the turn became so inspired by Allison’s performance that they sprinted around the edge of the pool and joined the other kids gathered around me at 75 meters. We had almost one hundred wildly excited kids squeezed together waiting for my signal: 80 meters…77…

As she moved her head forward to breathe at 75 meters, I whipped my arm down. Together, one hundred voices joined in a window-rattling

“NOW!”

I will always remember what happened next.

You see, 75 meters is the same line that every one of our children is going to face in their lives…maybe today. It’s the same line you will face in your career, your health, your family, your life…maybe today. 75 meters for Allison was the line between fear…and freedom; between failure…and faith. And for the first time I realized that I, more than anyone else, had taught her to fear and to fail, because of the way I saw her at that 75-meter mark.

But when she heard that, “NOW,” from those crazy kids at the tops of their lungs, something shook free inside of her. This little girl, who had died in race after race at that 75-meter mark, and who I simply adored, suddenly climbed up on top of the water like a hydroplane! She exploded toward the finish with more speed and strength than I thought possible. With eight strokes to go she took her last breath. Head down and every muscle driving, she blasted to the finish. As she touched the wall, she looked over to her right but didn’t see any other swimmers. She told me later that she thought they had already finished and climbed out!

I looked at my watch and froze. She had dropped her time over 12 seconds! For years I had watched her struggle out of the water, totally exhausted as he finished her races. Now, though, as she heard her time, she leaped out of the water like an Olympic gymnast. She bounded over to me with a hug grin and more than enough energy to swim the race all over again! Her teammates buzzed with excitement. It was my peak moment as a coach.

Something almost magical happens when people break through the obstacles that hold them back and discover what is truly inside them.

> **At this moment, they move from hoping to knowing.**

It is the most electrifying and empowering of all transformations. The impact on their teammates is no less dramatic. The experience of seeing one of their own achieve what they are truly capable of awakens a heightened belief in their own potential.

As Allison bounced over to the warm-down pool, her father walked shakily toward me with a stunned look on his face. I had known him for years. He was a very calm, soft-spoken man. I knew how much he loved Allison because he attended every event, quietly supporting her. But I had never seen him express much emotion, either verbally or physically.

When he reached me, he threw his arms around me and hugged me tightly. Tears streamed down his cheeks. I felt my eyes mist over as he looked at me with astonishment and gratitude. “What did you do to her?” he asked.

I responded with something brilliant like, “I have no idea.” Then I said something that did make sense.

> ***“She did it. It was in her all along. I just didn’t see it. She’s incredible!”***

He squeezed me again and wobbled off.

Allison's remarkable swim had taken place in the first of eight qualifying heats. Only the top eight of the 64 girls entered would return that night for the finals. When the last of the eight heats finished, Allison had moved from sixty-fourth to first!

That evening, Allison came back and swam a whale of a race. She went even faster, better than two-tenths of a second below her unbelievable morning performance. She was touched out on the very last stroke and finished second. But there has never been a truer winner.

As the meet progressed, our kids seemed to be ignited by what I have since come to call the "Allison factor." Race after race, Allison's teammates sped to tremendous improvements over their personal bests. When the final team points were totaled, we had pulled an upset and won the older age-group Junior Olympics.

Later, when I had a chance to sort out this remarkable event, I realized that some amazing truths had been revealed.

Until then, I had prided myself on knowing exactly what my swimmers were capable of.

If I had been asked to pick the one swimmer on my team least likely to be our leader at the Junior Olympics, it would have been Allison. After all, she had only one event and was seeded dead last. I had been sure that just qualifying for the meet would be the pinnacle of her swimming career and with luck, she might be able to improve her time a few tenths of a second. But there was no way on earth I would have believed she could drop twelve seconds in a 100-meter race.

Allison taught me to never underestimate what we have inside. Through her incredible performance I began to wonder how many other Allison's I may have missed because of my limited expectations.

There is an Allison Factor in every one of us.

Just like those Yield signs we *thought* we'd seen clearly, the people we think we know the best are the ones who can most surprise us when they surpass the limitations they—and we—have set for them.

There are no overachievers; we all have an almost infinite supply of potential. Believing this creates great openness, flexibility, and sensitivity in the way you look at the people you work with and serve. What you look for in others and yourself, you will find. And what you find, you will unleash. It is an extraordinary WOO that is possible in every precious moment!

Brian D. Biro is ***America's Breakthrough Coach!*** He is one of the nation's foremost speakers and teachers of **Leadership, Possibility Thinking, Thriving on Change, and Team-Building**. A major client who has had Brian back to speak several times offered the best introduction about Brian's impact when he said, "Brian Biro has the energy of a ten-year-old, the enthusiasm of a twenty-year-old, and the wisdom of a seventy-five-year-old." A former vice-president of a major transportation corporation and the author of 6 books including internationally acclaimed bestseller, *Beyond Success!* which climbed to #71 on the Amazon.com top 100 — from over 2 million titles, Brian was **rated #1 from over 40 Speakers** at 4 consecutive INC. Magazine International Conferences. With degrees from Stanford University and UCLA, Brian has appeared on Good Morning America, CNN's Business Unusual, and the Fox News Network and as a featured speaker for several of the top Network Marketing companies worldwide.

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