SUCCESS Points
In this book you’ll learn:
• How to tap into your own deep well of knowledge
• Why you may feel as if you have a powerful and yet unidentified purpose
• How to find solutions without overthinking the problem
• Why being still and practicing Wordlessness is valuable
• How to use your unique gifts to prosper

QUICK OVERVIEW

If you’ve long felt out of place in the 9-to-5 race or as if you’re crammed uncomfortably into a life that just doesn’t fit, the reason probably has something to do with what Martha Beck calls your “true nature.” Specifically written for people Beck refers to as “wayfinders,” her book Finding Your Way in a Wild New World identifies a pattern of intuitive behavior that comes naturally to some—even if they’ve suppressed that behavior to fit within cultural norms. In ancient times, these people would have been referred to as healers and shamans. But don’t worry, you don’t have to be a mystic to benefit from the practices she outlines for helping you get back in touch with your true self. You will, however, have to let go of concrete ideas and known quantities (at least for a time) and allow your mind to open to new, creative ways of being (not thinking).

Admittedly, this book is less about doing and more about tapping into a new state of consciousness. Not everyone is a “wayfinder.” But those who feel lost just might find themselves in this wild new world of uncertainty and opportunity.

APPLY AND ACHIEVE

The only way to make a real change in life is to take action. Unfortunately, many people plan and think and deliberate—and do nothing differently. Martha Beck says that her years of life coaching have taught her that people can’t think their way out of problems caused by thinking. Adopting new patterns of behavior (and even thought) requires practice. Lots of it.

This week, practice stillness for at least five minutes a day. Giving your mind an activity, like the “Follow Your Bloodstream” path to stillness (explained in the summary), makes it easier to give your brain a break from conscious thought and allows your subconscious mind to work freely.
The imminent possibility of being killed by a rhinoceros isn’t bothering me nearly as much as I would have expected. True, my heart fluttered when I first saw her, but from awe, not fear.

Well, maybe a little from fear.

Until this exact second, my friend Koelle Simpson has been so focused on the rhino’s footprints that she forgot to look up—a common mistake for people who, like both of us, are just learning to track. By the time Koelle raises her eyes and leaps backwards six inches, nearly bumping into me, we’re within twenty feet of the rhinoceros.

Trust me on this: observing an animal in a zoo, particularly an animal the size of a Subaru Forester, is very different from encountering it on foot in its own neck of the woods. I can be startled into a cardiac emergency by a reasonably robust spider, so realizing that I’m close enough to spit on a mountainous animal who has two enormous pointy horns is… disconcerting. I open my mouth to yip like a wounded poodle. But then the awe kicks in, and I simply stare.

She is huge. She is nervous. She could kill me as easily as I clip my fingernails. But my mind is filled only with wonder, distilled into two basic questions.

Question 1: How the hell did I get here?

Question 2: What the hell should I do now?

Both issues seem equally mysterious. It occurs to me, as I tiptoe sideways into a thorn bush, that I have been asking these questions all my life.

It all seems clear to me now—it was my uncivilized four-year-old self, with her passion for animals and love of running around in places with few humans, who dragged me ten thousand miles to this wild, magical place and people. Right now, I’m creeping into a bush with an African tracker, a conservationist, and a woman who really can talk to animals. The reality hits me as hard as any rhinoceros: the world I believed in, back in my most innocent, uninformed, childish mind—the world I long ago stopped hoping to find, the one I’d buried under decades of thankless work toward “civilized” goals—is real. That’s why right now, I could die happy—happier than I’ve been in forty years. My life will have been worth living for this one moment, with these friends, in this place, those primordial animals, this joyful pounding heart. I’m finding out what it feels like to reclaim my true nature. It’s one of the most wonderful things I’ve ever experienced. And because ecstasy loves company, I want you to experience it too.

The wild new world of the twenty-first century is the perfect setting for reclaiming your true nature.
Finding Your Way in a Wild New World

Mender’s Methods

I learned all I could about wayfinders from books, experts, and people who still practice the ancient ways. These methods included ways of understanding the physical world, connecting and communicating with other beings, anticipating the future, and bringing comfort or healing to any situation. Often, they were viewed as outright magic by the societies where the wayfinders were trained. But the menders themselves tended to see their activities as pragmatic skills that could be empirically learned and evaluated. I called them “technologies of magic.” Whenever possible, I actually tried the technologies of magic I learned about in my research. Probably because I was bad at this (especially at the beginning), many of the “magical” techniques I tried just seemed weird, or at best ineffective. But to my astonishment, some of them worked.

This is how wayfinding works: you begin practicing certain skills just to feel better, but this seems to benefit other things too, until quite unintentionally you end up working to mend things you thought were far beyond your small scope. Whatever way you find through the wild new world (and your way may be nothing like mine), you join the team that’s ultimately working to make astonishing changes, in their own lives and in countless complex situations.

So, you may be wondering, what are these “technologies of magic”? What the hell should I do now? I thought you’d never ask.

The Four Technologies of Magic

If you expect wayfinder ways to be all voodoo spells and wacky rituals, I should let you down easy right now. The true technologies of magic don’t look all that impressive.

Every credible wayfinder tradition I’ve studied uses just four basic techniques, shaped by their separate cultural traditions, to chart a course through the wild new world. I call these skills Wordlessness, Oneness, Imagination, and Forming.

If you do jump in and practice these skills for a while, all kinds of interesting things will happen. You’ll feel compelled to take a bus you’ve never ridden, and meet your new best friend. You’ll contemplate the trip you’ve always longed to take, and within a few days someone will invite you to accompany her or him on just that journey. A new career will create itself around you like a living thing. These events will chart a way through the wild new world that I can’t possibly predict, but they’ll all have one common effect: they’ll heal you. Then you’ll notice you’re developing the strength, the insight, and the desire to heal other beings as well. Without even meaning to, by simply finding your own way, you’ll become a wayfinder writ large.

Wordlessness: Finding the Way Into the Heart

The majority of my clients don’t have a clue what’s happening inside them or in their relationships with others. When I ask them, they respond with a concept.

“What do you feel when you’re with your grandmother?”

“That she’s had a hard life and I should treat her well.”
“What do you feel about your job?”
“That I have to pay the rent.”
“What do you feel about your son leaving for college?”
“That he’s building a solid future.”
Such answers have nothing to do with feelings; they’re all verbal thoughts. They’re socially grounded and socially acceptable; they make sure we won’t rock any boats. Lord knows what would happen if you actually realized, for example, that you feel tense and angry around your grandmother, that your gut churns every time you hit the office, or that you’re drowning in empty-nest grief as your son moves away. These feelings might take you off the smooth, paved roads of behavior you find normal and appropriate, but they’re also your guides through life, the signals that tell you where to find what your soul is seeking.

Deep-Practicing Wordlessness

There are several methods for dropping into Wordlessness. But you can’t learn them by reading about them. Trying to understand Wordlessness by reading is like trying to understand skydiving by drawing parachutes. Please, actually try the exercises. You’ll know they’re working when you begin feeling flickers of peace, calm, and safety. You’ll become more aware of subtle clues informing you about your surroundings and about other people’s feelings and intentions. You’ll want to make choices according to your own perceptions rather than whatever people are telling you. You don’t have to start acting differently—not all at once—but you’ll begin to figure out how you wish you could act. Persist long enough, and you’ll be able to stretch the moments of total clarity into minutes, and eventually hours.

ONE TECHNIQUE FOR DROPPING INTO WORDLESSNESS

The paths of stillness: Follow Your Own Bloodstream

This method is supposedly an Apache technique for putting the mind in a state of Sacred Silence. It’s my personal favorite way for dropping into Wordlessness.

1. Take a few deep, full breaths.
2. Exhale completely, and pause before inhaling.
3. In the space before you need to breathe again, focus your attention on your heart until you can feel it beating.
4. Take another breath and exhale. Along with your heartbeat, find the sensation of your pulse moving through your hands, feet, scalp, entire body.
5. Stay focused on the feeling of your entire circulatory system as it channels your lifeblood to your head and extremities.
6. Perform one simple task—walking, washing the dishes, making your bed—while continuing to feel your heartbeat and overall pulse. You’ll find the activity becomes strangely blissful.

Fully reclaiming your true nature means sustaining a Wordless connection to your environment and inner condition no matter what’s going on. This means replacing thoughts about events with authentic sensations that track whatever’s occurring in the present moment. Because thinking is the most familiar state of being for most of us, dropping thought and feeling our sensations and emotions may be frightening, even painful. But in the end, it’s far less painful than typical human behavior, which is to become lost in thoughts and unavailable to anything real.

WHAT WE HEAR WHEN THE STORIES STOP

I suggest you deep-practice Wordlessness at least twice a day, for as little as five minutes each time. You may begin to savor stillness so much you extend these practice sessions until you’re meditating for an hour or checking into Wordlessness at every traffic light.

If you do this, Wordlessness will begin subtly changing your inner life, and through it your outer life as well. As for me, the more I coach, the less I talk. I’ve learned that my clients can’t think their way out of problems caused by thinking. If I can get them to experience Wordlessness even for a few minutes, their anxiety drops, their creativity increases, and they become natural wayfinders, even in the most challenging of life circumstances.

At five o’clock on a not so typical morning at Londolozi, a group of guests are climbing into Land Rovers, but they are not like most safari-goers. Each one has a strong streak of Team, and they’ve come here with me—lucky, lucky me—to learn the ways of the wayfinders. They’ll spend this game drive in silence, focusing on their physical and emotional sensations in
every moment. I’ve also asked them to hold in their minds a problem that’s been dogging them, a situation they really need to resolve during this seminar in the African bush.

From the beginning, this game drive is unusual. The Shangaan tracker, and everyone in the vehicle, looks relaxed, with soft eyes and quiet faces, breathing very deeply. Occasionally they point at things most safari guests ignore: the light on the dew, a golden spider web, the clouds. Perhaps because they’re so highly attentive to nature, nature also seems highly attuned to them.

We see an unusual number of babies on our silent drive. A mother elephant nurses a calf so tiny he can still run under her body. A little zebra, fuzzier than its elders, gallops along with the Land Rover for a while. When we reach a hyena den, several pups too young to know what we are come up and sniff the vehicle, their huge eyes, black noses, and big round ears making them look like children’s toys.

After four hours of Wordless communion with nature, we return to camp. It’s time to do some life coaching, dammit, to address the problems I asked the guests to hold in their minds. But as it turns out, no one managed to hold onto the problem. I knew they wouldn’t. By gently pushing them into Wordlessness, I saved myself a world of useless talking. Though they are no longer clinging to their problems, all these Team members feel more capable of solving them. Some of them are surprised to realize they’ve come to their solutions while they weren’t thinking: Robert sees how he can delegate a project at work; Connie has decided to pull her children out of a prestigious private school where they’ve been miserable; and Suzanne realized that instead of doing major renovations on her creaky old house, she wants to sell it.

But these concrete plans are byproducts of a deeper solution: the reclamation of each person’s calm, present, vastly resourceful true nature. As the poet David Whyte wrote, “What you can plan is too small for you to live. What you can live wholeheartedly will make enough plans.”

Wordlessness is like logging on to the universal web of pure intelligence, discovering the energy that has allowed menders to find their way through complex areas of both the widest world and the deepest self for as long as humans have existed. As you learn to gain access to this energy, your own true nature, and nature itself, will conspire to calm and assist you. As the thirteenth-century wayfinder and poet Rumi wrote, you will “close the language door and open the love window.” From there you can see your way to anything.

**Common Attributes of Wayfinders (aka the Team)**

While very different in terms of demographics, some people share a querying, relentless, urgent need to connect with their true nature. As more people told me their stories, I realize they shared clusters of characteristics, though not anything demographers record. These virtually always include the following:

- A sense of having a specific mission or purpose involving a major transformation in human experience.
- A strong sense that the mission, whatever it is, is getting closer in time.
- A compulsion to master certain fields, skill, or professions in preparation for this half-understood personal mission.
- High levels of empathy.
- An urgent desire to lessen or prevent suffering for humans, animals, or even plants.
- Loneliness stemming from a sense of difference, despite generally high levels of social activity.

In addition, these people shared clusters of the attributes below. Only a few individuals possessed every single trait:

- High creativity; passion for the arts.
- An intense love of animals.
- Difficult early life.
- Intense connection to certain types of natural environments.
- Love of plants and gardening.
- Very high emotional sensitivity.
- A sense of connection with certain cultures, languages, or geographic regions.
- Disability, often brain-centered, in oneself or a loved one.
- Apparently gregarious personality contrasting with deep need for periods of solitude.
- Persistent or recurring physical illness.
- Daydreams (or night dreams) about healing damaged people, creatures, or places.
About the Author

Martha Beck is a writer and life coach. She holds a bachelor’s degree in East Asian Studies and master’s and Ph.D. degrees in sociology from Harvard University. Before becoming a life coach, Beck taught sociology, social psychology, organizational behavior, and business management at Harvard and the American Graduate School of International Management. Her nonacademic books include the New York Times best-sellers Expecting Adam and Leaving the Saints, Finding Your Own North Star and Steering by Starlight. Beck has also been a contributing editor for many popular magazines, including Real Simple and Redbook, and is a columnist for O, the Oprah Magazine.

Action Steps

Get more out of this SUCCESS Book Summary by applying what you’ve learned. Here are a few questions, thoughts and activities to get you started.

1. Review the sidebar on the PDF titled: “Common Attributes of Wayfinders (aka the Team).” Do you, or does someone you know, possess these traits?

2. Do you ever feel that although people like you, there is no one like you?

3. What is your rhinoceros? What is the one thing that you would do despite any physical or social risk?

4. Have you given up on a dream—perhaps something you were told was unrealistic or impractical?

5. Have you ever tried to think your way out of a problem but just ended up more stressed or frusterated?

6. Have you noticed that if you are relaxed, your creativity and ability to devise solutions becomes almost effortless?

7. Practice Wordlessness today for at least five minutes.

Recommended Reading

If you enjoyed the summary of Finding Your Way in a Wild New World, check out:

The Language of Emotions by Karla McLaren
This Year I Will… by M.J. Ryan
A Whole New Mind by Daniel Pink

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