

YES is a Promise

Honoring Commitments in a Chaotic and Uncertain World

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Good evening. I'm grateful to you for inviting me to speak with you on the topic of **commitment**. It's a big, scary topic for many people, as it somehow seems to evoke all kinds of emotional response. So mostly we tend to avoid it - (both the talk *and* the commitment). Based on personal experience, as well as my work with clients, the issue of **commitment** seems to be at the heart of the stress, frustration, lack of meaning, soullessness and loss of spirit so pervasive in our lives ... and in our society today.

I want to paint a picture this evening, depicting two views of commitment – one that gets us *into* trouble and one that brings us *out* of it. My promise to you is this: if you become a regular student and practitioner of what commitment means to you, you'll experience less frustration & stress, greater sense of peace and meaning in life, more fun, *and* higher productivity. Big promise. I believe in transformation, and I've both experienced it myself and seen it in others. **Are you up for the challenge?** It's a *challenge* because it embodies the choice to take 100% personal responsibility for how your life goes. In that sense, commitment marks the end of "the language of judgment and blame."

Here's another element of that challenge: My message is deceptively simple – **simple** in the sense a 6-year-old can get it; **deceptive** in the sense that everything you've learned *since* you were six will tell you not to listen to a word I say. Which path you take is a choice - *yours*.

### Introductory Topics: Learning, Listening, Context

A few crucial background topics to keep in mind: now, later, forever:

**Learning:** To step into big new challenges requires learning something new, something that is not yet part of you. (If you already know it, it isn't new, right?) But anytime you're confronted with something new and different, you're **disrupted** in some way – pushed out of your comfort zone. The issue here is that we humans are creatures of habit - we **like** our comfort zones, and tend to guard them with vigilance. It's why we call them **comfort zones**. Similarly, we **don't like** being disrupted – it's **UN**comfortable. *New* ideas *push* us into new

territory, while *old* habits *pull* us back. So mostly, we don't learn all that much. The fact is that we learn only when we expand the edges of our comfort zones. **The larger your comfort zone, the more resilient you'll be in the face of a chaotic, uncertain and unpredictable world.** So, if you want to change **anything** about your life, you must be willing to be **disrupted**. You *could* think of this as the reason I'm here – to be a disruptive influence on how you see and think. So perhaps another good question to ask yourself is this: are you willing to be disrupted?

**Listening.** Are you aware that you **choose** how you listen? It's uncommon to simply listen; instead you listen **for**. And what you listen *for* is whatever will support the way in which you already believe, see and think about your life and the world. This is one way in which you maintain your comfort zone. So, listening is far less about the message itself than it is about your **interpretation** of the message. You choose your interpretation – whether you're aware of the choice or not. I ask each of you to stop for a minute now and check in with your **listening**; **notice** how you're listening to me. If you discover you're listening to me with the question: "What can I find wrong with what he's saying?" I promise you won't be disappointed. If you discover you're listening with the question: "What possibility might he offer me today?" I promise **you** won't be disappointed either. You hear what you listen for. I'm not telling you **how** to listen. I'm suggesting that you **know** – for yourself – how you **are** listening, so you might see for yourself how listening defines the way you experience the world. How you're listening to me is reflective of the edges of your comfort zone are. So just notice your listening. "Listening for possibility" instantly expands your comfort zone. ... By the way, it's not too late to change.

**Context:** You'll also notice that far more of my message deals with the **context**, or framework, in which we live & work than it does with the **content**, or details, of life & work. This is both intentional and significant. No matter how you've thought about it before, or what you have come to believe up until now, the fact of the matter is this: the "**stuff of life**" rarely causes you problem or holds you back; it's the **way you look** at the stuff of life that's the issue. The way you see, think and speak is part of your life **context**, not part of the situations & events themselves. This is why two people presented with the same information often arrive at two very different conclusions. Their ways of seeing and believing differ, so their interpretations differ. Example: how differently people manage **stress**. Wayne Dyer said it well: "When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change." As you learn to choose the framework, or **con-**

*text*, from which you live, with both clarity and intention, you'll find you can create anything you want. Life simply "unfolds" into the framework you've defined; you won't have to fight or manage the details again. As a matter of fact, if you catch yourself managing details, trying harder, or worrying about things, it's a sure sign you're off track. When that happens, stop, then revisit the *framework* in which those details are happening; as you re-clarify the context, you'll get back on track – without stress or effort.

### Prevailing Wisdom on Commitment

We live in a complex, chaotic, uncertain world, pulled in many directions by competing pressures. We *want* to stay focused and honor our commitments, but it seems that life conspires to ensure we don't. We unconsciously believe that if we say "yes" to everything, we really *can* win the battle of competing pressures, that somehow it will bring the meaning and peace we want. Yet when we invariably find we *can't* do it all, we commonly respond only by finding someone or something to blame "failure" on. Possible targets for blame: (1) time – I never have enough time; (2) others – anger, blame, i.e., they're a villain; (3) ourselves – guilt, resentment, i.e., we're a victim.

I don't buy any of this. We're not *overcommitted*; we're *lost*. If we were to stop and examine, perhaps for the first time, the unconscious process we call "thinking," we'd expose how it has led us astray, which would open us to a new sense of truth. I like the way Mark Twain said it: "It ain't what you *don't know* that gets you into trouble. It's what you *know for sure* that *just ain't so*." ***One of the greatest dangers we face in our lives & our society today is this: much of what we "know for sure" ... "just ain't so."*** It's our *thinking*, not life, which has *prevented* us from getting what we want. It's an issue of context, not content. Let's look at three common elements of background for the problems we have with commitment:

- We lack *intention*. The reason we don't *have* what we want is that we don't *know* what we want. Think of it as "intention deficit disorder." We're always committed to something, but rarely do we know consciously what that something is. In the absence of this knowing, what really motivates us is not getting things done, but what happens to us if we *don't*. That's fear, not intention. If we were honest, we'd see that our behavior indicates we'd rather be *assured* of confirming our *limitations* than take the *risk* of achieving our *potential*. Q: Can you clearly name your life's intention?

- We lack *awareness*. Even if we knew what mattered most to us, we're not aware enough in each moment to know either what we are actually doing *or* if it's getting us where we want to go. So we get sidetracked a lot. Example: We don't know what we really do with our time, yet blame time for our problems. *Time* is never the culprit. All we *have* is time. It's *energy* that's in limited supply, and we're unconsciously choosing to expend it on things that don't take us where we want to go. Q: Can you confidently name where you focused your energy in the 168 hours of last week?
- We lack *courage*. We say we're doing things to get ahead, but we're too busy making *someone else's* life work to take action needed to make *our own* work. We're giving away our life power. If you don't take charge of your life, society offers plenty who will ... take charge of your life. Q: Can you name one building block you've added to your life's legacy in the past 30 days? Q: Can you name one "guru" from whom you've taken your power back?

Clarity, awareness and courage of any depth are uncommon in our society, a society that prefers you stay numbed out and distracted, keyed into life's drama rather than into its truth. (It's all a way to make you easy prey for an obsessive, consumer culture). But there *is* more to life!

### A New Way of Seeing an Old Reality

How do we get beyond this dysfunctional dilemma? I see four steps to making and keeping commitments that matter: (1) discover what *matters*, (2) learn to say *no*, (3) learn to say *yes*, (4) listen & learn. ***Discovering what matters***: Until you know consciously what truly matters for you, chances are that what you're 'committed to' is some form of upholding your outdated & unconscious beliefs. "What truly matters" is not only unique to you (you won't find it in the Cape Cod Times), but it has always been inside you. The way you discover it is to *look*! That takes practice. Just like yoga or sports, you show up every day and practice. The practice here is personal inquiry & reflection – looking inside for what's there. You'll find it. The practices suggested in the handout are ones that, if done regularly, with intention, will lead you to your own path. (*Let's do one now*.) As you practice, you'll begin to sense not only discovery, but *expansion* – of how you see yourself, others, the world. Because the process of self-discovery changes the discoverer, "you" change continually throughout life. A growing sense of clarity holds amazing power. As you

look more and more deeply, you will see that the idea of commitment offers a path to freedom – achieved by choosing to live your own truth ... in a world that would prefer you didn't. Because when you **stop listening** to the demands and opinions of a society that has lost its way, and **start listening** to the life pulse of your own inner truth, your commitment to that truth becomes the only path you **can** follow. Bottom line: if you **know** what you want, nothing can stop you. If you **don't**, nothing can make you.

**Saying NO:** Remember the book, "Getting to YES?" (about getting people to agree to say "yes"). I'm thinking about writing a book called, "Getting to NO." It's about how to say **no** to the stuff in life that doesn't matter (which, as it turns out, is most of the stuff in life). Stuff that doesn't matter only holds you back from the stuff that **does**. When you say **no** to what **doesn't** matter, you create a huge amount of space for what **does** matter to show up and materialize. All you need do then is to step into the space you've created. Without that, life is so full there's no room for anything new (or good). **And** ...once you **know** what matters & what doesn't, saying **no** becomes easy anyway.

Here's a short list of things I've discovered **don't** matter (to me):

- TV, news, media of any kind
- possessions
- my old beliefs, assumptions and stories, including my "resume"
- the shopping experience
- parenting adult children
- trying to save the world
- searching for that perfect relationship
- worrying about the opinions of others
- being right

Here's a short list of things I've discovered **DO** matter (to me):

- my heart
- nature (wilderness, sunrises, the rhythm of the seasons, the miracle that life is)
- friendships/community (ones that are 2-way and unconditional)
- silence
- divinity (everywhere I may find it)
- serving others
- seeking truth

"What matters" is deeply personal. My list is what's true **for me**. I'm not asking you to adopt **my** list of what matters; I'm asking that you adopt **your own** list of what matters – to **you**. Your list is unique to you. You create that list from the inside out, through personal reflec-

tion and discovery. This is why quiet space and practice are crucial. Again, personal practices contribute greatly to your search for truth.

**Saying YES:** By knowing consciously what matters, and by saying "no" to all that doesn't, you will have created phenomenal space and energy to say "yes" to what **does** matter. The curious thing here is that you won't have to **try** to say yes. You'll find that it comes for free, showing up spontaneously as a result of (1) clarity and (2) the space you've made. **"Yes" is a natural & effortless outcome of clarity and perspective.** Isn't it curious that what would have seemed to be the most difficult step in the process of making and holding commitments is actually the easiest. You need not even "try." Saying "yes" to what matters deeply to you, even only once, is powerful, empowering, life affirming. It's called taking a stand for your own greatest potential.

Another curious result: you don't have to **remember** to do things. Inately, you know what's important, and naturally devote your energy to its creation. A side effect: you don't have to set goals. I've never bought the idea of setting goals anyway. We set goals when we don't know what we want. They're a way to kick us in the ass to do things we really don't want to do. Did you ever have to set a goal to **have fun** on vacation? If you find that you're still setting goals – anywhere in your life, I suggest you take a look and ask yourself if you really want it. If the answer's still yes, ask why it hasn't happened naturally. The issue here is this: if goals are big enough to truly matter, then by the time you achieve the goal, **you** are not the same person who you were when you set the goal; so it won't have the same meaning as it did then. Bottom line: goals divert attention from what matters. Commitments are something else. A commitment is a promise you make. Ideally, it's a promise toward something **big & scary**; (if you already knew it all, it wouldn't be much of a commitment.) Big commitments require big promises – "promises into the unknown," for you will not know **how** you're going to make good on them, only that you **will**. So, yes, there will be things to figure out (such as how you're actually going to show up each day, stepping into the unknown). There will be obstacles along the way. It's been said that obstacles are there for those who don't really want it that much – kind of a way to weed out the inauthentic commitments of life. If you mean it, you'll find a way to deal with obstacles. If you don't, obstacles serve to stop you before you get in too deep.

**Listening and Learning:** We struggle with the need to "know more, try harder, stay busy." We believe they are the ticket to creating results. It's all so unnecessary. None of these work, because the issues

we face have nothing to do with knowing, trying or busyness. Our issues are ones of *perspective and clarity*. (Context, remember?) With clarity, you become in touch with your environment in a new way. As in nature, your environment offers what nature calls *feedback*, an information flow inherent in all living systems. This feedback “tells” you all you need to know about what to do next. You no longer need to *try*; you just need to listen. As you do, you learn. As you learn, you grow. As you grow, life becomes easier and easier. When confronted with new requests from others or new possibilities from life, you know instantly, without thinking, if it’s a “yes” or a “no.” This kind of information is available to you all the time – in imagination, intuition, dreams, body sensations. Up until now, you may have become rather expert at ignoring these messages; it’s part of what we’re taught early in life. Feedback, however, is part of your life *context*, not its *content*. When you define, then listen to, a life context, the content “unfolds” naturally, into the space created. And when your commitment and context, everything is not only possible, but easy. (That doesn’t mean without problem, but that you see obstacles as a challenging, welcome part of your commitment.) And the details take care of themselves.

### An Invitation

A life of big, meaningful commitments is a world of adventure, exploration, chaos and uncertainty. Life in this world is more like playing a game than it is like “work” as we know it. My invitation is this: come to view your *life* as a *game*. (credit: Dave Buck). Here’s how:

- Choose the *game you* want to play. It’s your life, so who better to name how you want it to go? You might start with this game: *to be the very best at what matters most to you*. [That’s a cool game, because no one has the potential to be a better *you* than *you*.]
- Define the *rules* of the game you choose to play. If it’s your game, then you get to define the rules, right? You might start by using your own personal principles as game rules. If you’re not sure, The Four Agreements (now five) aren’t a bad set of game/life rules: don Miguel Ruiz.
- “Play” is what you do to master the *recurring processes* of your game. These could just be the four steps noted earlier – know what matters, say *no*, say *yes*, listen & learn. Think: if you really did master those processes, you’d indeed have a great life!
- You master the recurring processes of your game through regular *practice*, remembering to “always be your game rules.” (step 2) In fact, life is your practice. You practice by choosing to take the

field each day – doing what matters to you, loving to learn, enjoying challenge, doing your best – regardless of conditions in your external world, regardless of the win/loss record.

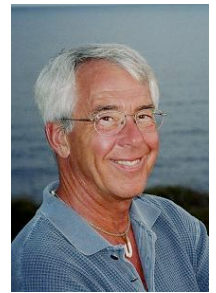
- Create a *game plan* – how you can make the most out of who you are. You might start with these bullets right here as a game plan, then revise them continually based on what you learn as you play. Everything about you changes continually – your game, the rules, your principles, etc. By being flexible and willing to learn, you grow into the life you create for yourself.
- Learn to see things “as they are.” The “way things should be” is a dead-end street. “Things as they are” is your natural feedback system. *Feedback* plus your commitment leads you to your next step.
- Have *fun* playing. You’re going to win some & lose some. That’s why you chose a game you *love* – because your love will sustain you when the losses don’t. Life is what you *put into it*, not what you *get out of it*. [By the way, you’ll get a huge amount out of it.]

Commitment creates freedom – the space in which your love unfolds.



For over 35 years, Bradford Glass has provided leadership for individuals, teams and businesses -- as a manager, as an educator, as a coach. He teaches the art of personal leadership to those with courage and desire to transform the way they see and think -- about themselves, others, life, work and the world. His promise: inspired leaders, thriving workplaces, and constructive conversations. Explore his website:

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Knowing, and then committing to, that which truly matters to you in life is an opening to freedom, peace and meaning. Like anything new, it requires learning – which pushes us out of our comfort zones. But we like our comfort zones, and we don't like being disturbed. Step #1 is admitting all this, and step #2 is to be willing to be disturbed. The larger your comfort zone, the more resilient you are in the face of an uncertain, chaotic and unpredictable world.

Keep in mind: the messages here are deceptively simple – *simple* in the sense a 6-year-old can get it; *deceptive* in the sense that everything you've learned *since* you were six will tell you not to listen to a word I say. Which path you take is a choice - *yours*.

It's time to shift your view from dealing with the details, or *content*, of life to defining and managing the framework, or *context*, within which those details occur. It is the context of life, not the stuff of life, that creates our stress and loss of meaning. Change the way you see, and a new world unfolds. Wayne Dyer said it best: "When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change."

We've come to believe we can't have what we want in life, so we've grown more attuned to our *limitations* than to our *potential*. We get lost in petty stuff so we'll believe we've accomplished *something*. Thinking and seeing this way is a choice, one that has left us lost:

- The reason we don't have what we want is we *don't know what we want* – we lack **intention**. Think of it as "intention deficit disorder."
- The reason we don't know what we want is that we're not looking – we lack **awareness**.
- The reason we act in counterproductive ways is we're afraid – we lack **courage**.

Keeping commitments in a world that would rather you didn't:

- Discover what matters – for *you*. A regular practice of personal inquiry and reflection leads naturally to your hearing the voice of your own truth. Learn to listen; learn to hear; learn to honor.
- Say **NO** – to all the stuff that you now know *doesn't* matter, thereby creating a huge amount of space, so you can:
- Say **YES** – to all the stuff that *does* matter. Saying yes is easy once you know what you want, and once you clear out space where *yes* can thrive. "Yes" to the right things becomes natural.
- Listen and learn – from the natural feedback your life offers.

It takes courage to be your own person. Nothing in society wants you to do this, so nothing will make it easy for you to be your authentic self. Yet when you *stop listening* to demands & opinions of a society that has lost its way, and *start listening* to the voice of your own personal truth, commitment to that truth becomes the only path you *can* follow, and the energy of your light is all you need to guide your way.

My invitation

Big commitments resemble *play* more than they resemble *work*. Come to see *life* as a *game*. Here's the way it can work:

- You choose the *game you* want to play. What if your game were "to be the very best at what matters to you?"
- Define the *rules* of your game. Personal principles, or "The Four Agreements," would be a great source for game rules. Live them.
- Play is what you do to master *recurring processes* of your game; these processes could be: know what matters, say **no**, say **yes**, listen & learn. If you really did master these, you'd have a great life!
- You become a master via *practice*. You take the field each day – do what you love, love to learn, enjoy challenge, do your best – all the time following your game rules (principles).
- Create a *game plan* – to make the most out of who you are. You might start with these bullets right here as your initial game plan.
- See things "as they are," not the way you "wish they would be." "The way things are" is your natural *feedback* system.
- Have *fun* playing. Life is what you *put into it*, knowing you can't control what you *get out of it*.

Commitment creates freedom – the space in which your love unfolds.

Practices for Personal Transformation

Practices for personal transformation: We rarely experience any dramatic change in life because we live largely on *autopilot*, unaware of our thinking, or the underlying beliefs that drive it. A *practice* is an exercise done repeatedly with the intention of *interrupting* this incessant flow of thought, creating a conscious shift in perspective. Awareness of your thinking allows you to make conscious new choices, naturally, causing new habits to replace old ones. Simple practices offer *felt experience* of bold, life-changing ideas.

Clarify your intention: Rushing as we are to “get somewhere” in life, rarely do we know – consciously, deeply, fully – what we truly *want* in life. Without that clarity, we can’t begin to create it. **The practice:** Bring life to a stop for an hour or more a few times a week. Listen to your inner voices. They’ve got messages for you, and are waiting for you to hear. Over a period of time with this practice, you’ll hear what your heart and soul want for your life – your greatest potential. It’s in there; all it takes is deep listening. (That’s different listening than you do with TV.) Write down what you hear, even if it makes no sense to you. Once you get used to quiet inquiry and listening, ask specific questions: What matters deeply to me, from the inside? How’s my life going now, compared to that message of truth? How does my thinking keep things just the way they are? Just listen. Over time, clarity will emerge – about your life, work, relationships, this week/day, even this very moment.

Observe your thoughts: As you *notice* your thoughts, you realize you not only *have* them, but have a *relationship* with them. **The practice:** *Stop* what you’re doing several times a day. During these moments of quiet reflection, replay in your mind thoughts you’ve had since the last time you stopped, as if a movie with you as its audience. **Listen** to what they tell you. Don’t try to change them. Just notice. With a *regular* self-observation practice, you will (1) come to know your own thoughts, (2) hear subtle messages of your inner truth, (3) see that only your thoughts determine your experience of reality, (4) separate life’s events from the *interpretation* of those events you created with your thinking, which releases judgment from your life, (5) see life from a far broader perspective, thereby *creating* a much bigger world, instantly, (6) make new choices easily and naturally (simply because you now *can*), (7) do this practice so often that you’ll come to see things *as* they occur.

Make conscious choices: More often than not, our choices are made by the un-conscious mind, driven by its autopilot, habitual thought forms. We’re so used to it that we think it’s who we are. **The practice:** As an adjunct to self observation practices, gradually add in the following during your quiet time. Ask: Of the hundreds of choices I made this day, how many were *conscious*? Of those, how many were made based on my *intention*? Just making choices *consciously*, all by itself, creates more time and opportunity for you, because you’re now *aware* of what you are doing (or not). You might make a choice to release your judgment and interpretation; these ‘stories’ you tell about life change nothing; only conscious action creates change. The power of choice in each moment is what makes humans unique upon this earth. Use this unique power to create a new relationship with self, your actions & your time.

Envision “what’s possible”: In addition to *seeing* “what is,” you can *create* “what isn’t.” The future hasn’t been invented; predicting tomorrow based on yesterday is like driving with your hands on the rear-view mirror instead of the steering wheel. You create a great future by *envisioning* it. **The practice:** *Stop* what you’re doing several times a day. During these moments of quiet reflection, create a vivid picture in your mind of how things could be now if you were living your greatest potential, the life of your dreams. Trust that your inner self knows what to do here. Over time, envision *every aspect* of life – your whole life, a year, a week, a job, a relationship, a conversation, a project. Just envision. Once you get used to doing this, you can then tap its greatest power – you can envision the *next* moment, in *this* moment, so that you see each belief, thought and word, *before you choose them*. With practice, you’ll be creating how your life goes, in each moment.