

*“The Promise of a Pencil”*  
*How an Ordinary Person Can Create Extraordinary Change*  
*Adam Braun*  
*Book Note Dave Kraft*

Through exploration of the unfamiliar we stop focusing on the labels that define what we are and discover who we are.

True self-discovery begins where your comfort zone ends,

Listening intensely is a far more valuable skill than speaking immensely.

As Marcel Proust wrote, “The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.”

Asking for permission is asking for denial

People think big ideas suddenly appear on their own, but they’re actually the product of many small, intersecting moments and realizations that move us toward a breakthrough.

Big dreams start with small unreasonable acts

And since I was turning twenty-five years old that month, I saw it as a karmic sign. I gave Debbie \$25, received a deposit slip dated October 1, 2008, and walked out with a checkbook that read, “Adam Braun DBA Pencils of Promise.”

Her energy was infectious, her work ethic was unmatched, and she produced real results.

Most ventures fail in the early stages because people stop trying after they’re told no too many times.

The difference between a lunatic and a leader is that only one of them has others who join in his or her pursuit.

We wanted to break the rules that others put in front of us and bring about a better world than the one we’d inherited.

Practice humility over hubris

Happiness is found in celebrating others

“What do you love doing most?”

Branding can make or break a company, and a great brand creates legitimacy and trust, both of which are essential in the nonprofit world.

I didn’t have deep pockets behind me at the start, I had a far more potent weapon—conviction in a set of unique beliefs.

Focus on one person in every room

This led to our early PoP slogan, “A generation empowered will empower the world.”

Reid Hoffman, the founder of LinkedIn, has said that an entrepreneur is someone who will “jump off a cliff and assemble an airplane on the way down.”

Most had been told no, but they refused to give up. They were confident and unflappable, but they weren't afraid to ask for help. And they had all failed at times. But they learned more from their mistakes than their successes.

A strong website should be the flagship asset of a good organization,

Sometimes you have to show someone that you're willing to run through a wall before they'll open the front door.

Stay guided by your values, not your necessities

Nothing is more potent or deceptive than the competing interests of another great opportunity.

The two things I cared most about were passion and talent.

“Hopeless idealism in things that are utterly impossible is required to work here. If you want to be realistic, please work elsewhere. This is a place for dreamers.”

Creating a company means you're going to go through hell and high water along the way. You need to know the character of the people at your side. Trust is everything.

Creating something new is easy, creating something that lasts is the challenge.

What seemed like an overnight success was actually years in the making.

“The most powerful thing in the world is an idea whose time has come.”

Leadership isn't just about telling people what to do. It's about doing the right thing even when it's not written in the rulebook.

We all make mistakes; it's the weak who make excuses too.

“Here's my best advice: make the little decisions with your head and the big ones with your heart. Do that, and you'll be just fine.”

While I once thought the best measure of accomplishment was monetary wealth, my path over the past few years had shown me that real value comes from investing in the well-being of others.

By changing the words you use to describe something, you can change how others perceive it.

We wanted to work with people who had a hand up, ready to participate, not those who simply had a hand out.

A goal realized is a goal defined

Weak speakers look down at the floor, good speakers look up but scan the room, great speakers make eye contact selectively, and exceptional speakers deliver every complete thought directly to one person in the audience, making that person feel like the center of the room—and then they move on and do it again.

Surround yourself with those who make you better Bliss does not come from materials or possessions, it comes from fulfilling one's purpose in this existence."

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

Vulnerability is vital

How many times do you have thirty things to do and you focus on the twenty-five that matter least? How many times do you check your email and deal with what's easy, but not necessarily what's important?

The difference between good leaders and great leaders is in the details. You need to find a deliberate system so that you are relentless with your follow-up. Nothing should slip through the cracks. This is where I excelled, and it's going to become integral to your ultimate success."

"At first I was playing around with the idea, but the more that people told me that I couldn't do it, the more committed I became."

If an idea grows, it expands far beyond the confines of any one person's control.

It had taken just over four years to break ground on the first hundred schools.

"If you think education is expensive, try ignorance."

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first female elected head of state in Africa, said, "If your dreams do not scare you, they are not big enough."

Purpose is found when you stop thinking about how you exist in the world and start trying to figure out why you are here. Once you solve that question, everything else will fall into place.

The single most powerful element of youth is that you don't have the life experiences to know what can't be done.

The key is to think big and then take small, incremental steps forward day by day.