

PO-LING POWER



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Betty Ng and Po-Ling Ng

**Propelling Yourself and
Others to Success**

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CHAPTER 1

The Genesis of PO-LING POWER: *A Decision-Making Framework for Life*

by Betty Ng

"I feel so guilty," Mom said, as she tried to fight back the tears. "I feel guilty about your dad dying so suddenly, for the poor childhood you had, and for not being able to give you what you wanted."

It was Mother's Day, 2016. My brother, sister, and our mom, Po-Ling, were making their inaugural visit to our new home in the Poconos. I really wanted to make it a point to share more stories about our family with my children, Moorea and Jasper, who were eight and six years old at the time. I wanted to help them learn some important life lessons, appreciate what an incredible woman their *Po Po* (grandmother in Chinese) is, and cherish what they have.

So, I was dumbfounded by my mom's reaction to what I had thought was a powerful story to demonstrate the importance of always being your best, even if you get dealt a bad hand. The tears then started to well up in my own eyes too. I said, "Are you kidding me, Mom? We may not have had much growing up, but you gave us everything we needed."

"Yeah, Mom," my sister, Jeannie chimed in. "We were happy kids."

"And we had each other," added my brother, John.

"The intention of that story was not to make you feel guilty. Quite the opposite, Mommy," I said. "Yes, at first, I was upset when you made me get a temp job instead of letting me go to Taiwan to learn Chinese for the summer. The point of the story, though, was that I faced up to my practical obligations. I had to get a paid summer job, and I made the most of it. With the support of a senior executive, I transformed a temporary receptionist job into a

meaningful opportunity to develop something great for the community and the company. It also turned into an opportunity to make a presentation to the CEO of RJR Nabisco and to line up a real summer internship for the following year.”

Moorea and Jasper were visibly confused about why we were all suddenly so emotional. Yet compassionate tears rolled down Moorea’s face as my husband Darin gently rubbed her back. Jasper was quiet, clearly trying to absorb what we were saying.

Instead of holing herself up after my father died in January 1975 leaving her to raise four very young children, my mother tirelessly devoted herself to the community. Four decades later, having faced many challenges and earned recognitions along the way, she was invited back to Beijing by the Chinese government and received an award for the impact of her work on overseas Chinese. While she still lives in the same small, 450-square-foot apartment I grew up in, my mom is one of the most successful people I know. Not only has she been able to propel her communities forward, but she has also been able to do so while managing what matters in her life, including raising four successful children as a single mother. She is a role model and a hero not just to me, but also to the many people whose lives she has touched.

“This is a wonderful home, and I love it,” I said to Moorea and Jasper as I spread my arms to point around our new 3,000-square-foot home—small relative to neighboring houses, yet palatial relative to my childhood home. “But you know, you don’t need any of this to be happy and to be successful.”

I knew at that moment that I needed to stop procrastinating and to start documenting my mom’s story, her influence on me, and the legacy I know she will leave behind—what we now call the PO-LING POWER legacy, which we hope will help propel many individuals, organizations, and communities to success.

It was only in the fall of 2015 that writing a book with my mom even became a twinkle in my eye. While I had grown to appreciate my mother more over the years, my epiphany was the direct result of preparing an acceptance speech for the Chinese-American Planning Council’s inaugural Corporate Trailblazer Award. As I reflected, I realized that every letter of my mother’s name, Po-Ling, represents a very important aspect of success and impact.

- **P:** Persevering for your priorities and passions; being true to your vision of who you want to be—your authentic self
- **O:** Others—helping others to succeed and addressing real pain points
- **L:** Lead—taking the initiative to drive change and not just waiting for others to act
- **I:** Inspire—inspiring others to follow you and exuding that confidence and conviction for what you believe in
- **N:** Network—establishing and leveraging your network to make things happen and to help others
- **G:** Grow—embracing adversity, diversity, change, failure, and constructive criticism by taking every opportunity to improve, challenge, and reinvent yourself

As a result of receiving the award, I became obsessed with sharing the PO-LING framework and writing a book with my mother. I wanted to honor her for what she has done for me and the world at large; to recognize, before it's too late, what a wonderful legacy she will leave behind; and to uncover the common threads between our successes, even though our lives, while entwined, have led us down different paths, but with the common purpose of persevering for our priorities and passions while helping others to succeed, propelling us all toward what matters.

Just a few months before receiving the Corporate Trailblazer award, I had been asked to speak at a conference on “Juggling It All.” I remember preparing my talking points the weekend before the panel discussion and looking at the central themes in my notes. Suddenly, words just jumped out at me from the page, and I realized that POWER was a fantastic acronym for the main considerations regarding managing what matters in your life (not necessarily “juggling it all”). Namely, it's about asking yourself whether the things you're managing are aligned with your:


- **Priorities** (same *P* as for PO-LING): Is what you're doing aligned with your priorities and your vision for who you want to be?

- **Obligations:** Are you still able to meet your obligations regarding for whom and for what you are responsible? Are you seeking opportunity within your obligations?
- **Worthwhile activities:** Is what you're doing the best use of your time and energy to meet your priorities, goals, and obligations? Are you having the impact you are seeking?
- **Energy:** Is what you're doing energizing you to make the juggling act sustainable?
- **Resources:** Do you have access to the resources you need to execute the things you're managing? Don't be a martyr and expect yourself to do everything. Tradeoffs are expected.

The POWER acronym clearly resonated with the panel audience and participants, many of whom were taking copious notes. It became obvious, too, that the POWER considerations have also been key in my mother's life and her success in managing what matters. Particularly with my corporate development experience and mindset, it further became clear that the POWER considerations apply to all organizations which seek to be successful—whether for-profit or nonprofit.

Until the spring of 2017, I had viewed PO-LING and POWER as two independent frameworks. One night, as I lay awake contemplating life and how happy I was as the founder and CEO of Inspiring Diversity LLC (iD for short), I thought about how I was living according to all the principles in both frameworks. It suddenly hit me that the two frameworks actually come together to form a matrix—the PO-LING POWER matrix—and that I can check off every single box in the matrix at this point in my life.

Figure 1-1: My PO-LING POWER Matrix as iD CEO

|  | P riorities | O bligations | W orthwhile Activities | E nergy | R esources |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Priorities <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Others <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Lead <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Inspire <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Network <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Grow <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Founding iD was aligned with the personal vision I had set and documented more than sixteen years ago when I graduated Harvard Business School in 2001. I had put my personal vision at the bottom of a closet for many years as I pursued a more traditional career, rising up through the corporate ranks. Happily, I am now the CEO of iD, which is perfectly aligned with my personal vision of being a successful social entrepreneur. iD has a mission to inspire, empower, and elevate people to achieve their goals while propelling organizations and communities to success. We aim to build inclusive, collaborative, and high performing communities. Particularly as attractive job opportunities have come my way since founding iD, knowing that I check off every one of the thirty boxes in the PO-LING POWER matrix


gives me the further conviction that leading iD makes sense for me at this point in my life.

Having interviewed numerous successful and inspirational people to build iD's library of videos, I know that PO-LING POWER is also helpful to people of varied backgrounds and abilities. PO-LING POWER is a truly universal framework that transcends time, geography, and many other factors. As the diverse persons featured on inspiringdiversity.com have confirmed, PO-LING is a great way to think about impact, leadership, and success for both individuals and their communities. To be truly successful, though, we all need to manage what matters in life.

The key question, then, is, how can you follow PO-LING when you are busy and pulled in many directions? By integrating PO-LING and POWER, the PO-LING POWER matrix serves as a simple and powerful evaluation and decision-making tool. You can use it to evaluate what you are currently doing, as well as what you are contemplating doing, as you propel yourself and those around you upward and forward.

Using the PO-LING POWER Matrix to Evaluate Life and Professional Situations

Figure 1-2: The PO-LING POWER Matrix

|  | P riorities | O bligations | W orthwhile Activities | E nergy | R esources |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Priorities <input type="checkbox"/> | | | | | |
| Others <input type="checkbox"/> | | | | | |
| Lead <input type="checkbox"/> | | | | | |
| Inspire <input type="checkbox"/> | | | | | |
| Network <input type="checkbox"/> | | | | | |
| Grow <input type="checkbox"/> | | | | | |

Step 1: Think about and jot down thoughts on your:

- Personal vision statement
- Priorities
- Passions
- Obligations
- Resources

We know this can seem intimidating if you have not reflected on and articulated these before. It may be helpful to engage a professional coach to assist you. Whether or not you have a professional coach, please rope in your allies—your friends and others in your trusted network. We recommend that you form a Peer Accountability and Coaching Team (PACT) with a couple of other people. By doing so, you can help each other think through, define, and articulate personal vision statements, etc.

To help you organize your thoughts as well as to assess and build your PO-LING POWER, please download the PO-LING POWER app; you will find instructions at the end of the book.

Step 2: Complete your PO-LING POWER matrix.

Based on the vision, priorities, passions, obligations, and resources you have documented, assess the situation you are in or the decision you are facing.

- Ask yourself which of the PO-LING principles apply to your situation.
- Check the applicable PO-LING boxes on the left axis so that you can keep track of which PO-LING elements apply (some may not).
- For each applicable PO-LING principle, ask yourself each of the POWER questions, considering what makes sense for you to do to achieve the respective PO-LING element. If you answer “Yes,” you can check the relevant box in the 6×5 matrix.

For example, if you are helping others (the *O* in PO-LING), check the *Others* box in the far-left column of the matrix. Then, ask yourself, while you are helping others in this situation:

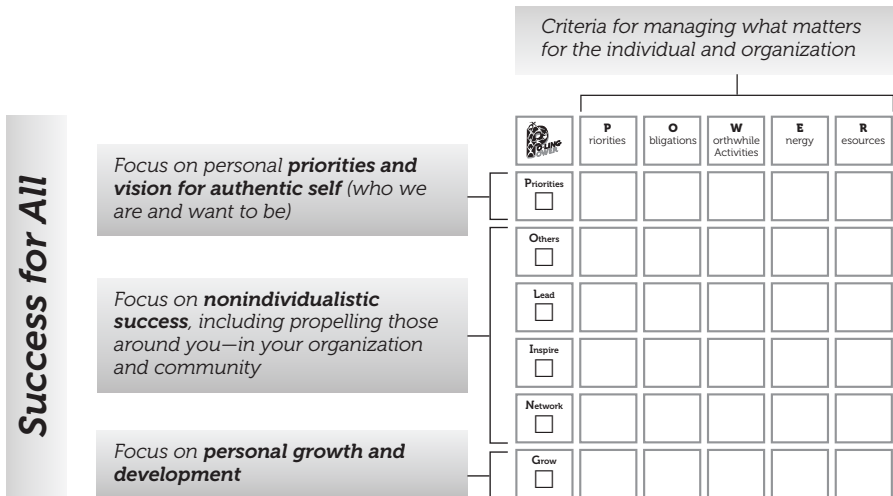
- Is what you’re doing aligned with your *Priorities*?
- Are you meeting your *Obligations*?
- Is what you’re doing *Worthwhile* in light of your priorities and obligations, and is it creating the impact you’re seeking?
- Are you *Energized*?
- Do you have the *Resources* to do what you’re doing and to manage what matters?

You can repeat this process for every PO-LING row to see how many boxes in the matrix apply, either to your current situation or something you are contemplating doing. Please engage your PACT whenever you need.

It is important to note that everything always starts with a focus on your individually-defined *Priorities*, which should also take into consideration your personal vision and passions. It is critical to align what you do or plan to do with your priorities and your personal vision for who you want to be—your authentic self.

While you focus on becoming your best self and realizing your personal vision, you should also think about how your personal success can and should be tied to the success of your community, organization, and more broadly, those around you. *Others, Lead, Inspire, and Network* are all nonindividualistic elements of PO-LING which reinforce how individual and community success can and should go hand-in-hand.

Figure 1-3: *The Individual, Community, and Organizational Aspects of the PO-LING POWER Matrix*



As I’ve shared the integrated PO-LING POWER framework with leaders in both nonprofit and for-profit organizations, it has become clear that the principles represented in PO-LING POWER are important for all organizations that strive to succeed. To be sustainable and successful, it is important for

organizations to remain focused on *Priorities, Others, Lead, Inspire, Network, Grow, Obligations, Worthwhile activities, Energy, and Resources.*

How do you measure your PO-LING POWER? As noted above, the PO-LING POWER matrix results in a 6×5 grid (thirty boxes) that becomes a tool which helps individuals and organizations to assess, measure, and track how well they are performing according to the PO-LING POWER criteria.

You can compute your PO-LING POWER Index as follows:

$$\text{PO-LING POWER Index (expressed as a percent)} = (\text{number of PO-LING POWER boxes applicable} \div 30 \text{ boxes}) \times 100$$

Reflecting on what I am doing now, as the founder of iD, I love that I can check every single one of the thirty boxes in the matrix and that my PO-LING POWER Index is, therefore, now 100 percent.

Upon coming to the PO-LING POWER epiphany, I now feel incredibly liberated and empowered. I now have a simple tool I can use to evaluate what I am doing and to help assess whether or not something makes sense for me to pursue. It's an evaluation and decision tool that I strongly believe can help propel individuals, organizations, and communities upward and forward—similar to how vault “poling” (which sounds like PO-LING) propels people upward and forward. The key, though, is that this is about propelling us for what matters—however we personally define “what matters.”

While I am certainly proud of my degrees from Stanford and Harvard, as well as my overall uphill trajectory in the corporate world, my journey has had its share of bumps in the road. As I think back to the times in my life when I “failed” or didn't do as well as I had hoped to, there were substantial holes in my PO-LING POWER matrix. So, perhaps if I'd had the tool earlier in my life, at different decision points or stages, I could have predicted earlier on what was worth pursuing and what would not lead me to where I wanted to be.

Over the course of my and my mom's lives, we have learned from all of our experiences—both good and bad. This speaks very much to our *Grow* principle. So, we are not trying to prevent people from making mistakes or failing, which is ultimately about learning to succeed sooner. Rather, we

hope that PO-LING POWER will help propel everyone toward what matters instead of spending an undue amount of time on what doesn't matter.

Without realizing it at the time, I applied PO-LING POWER, even as a high school student. When people ask me how I got into every college I applied to, I can now confidently say that it was because I applied PO-LING POWER, even back then. So, I hope that students will also apply PO-LING POWER, as it is truly a life framework—not just a professional framework.

To spread the PO-LING principles to a younger audience, my daughter (Moorea) independently came up with the idea of writing and illustrating a book about diverse animals, each representing a PO-LING principle, who ultimately wind up coming together and must rely on each other to succeed. Moorea, Jasper, and Emma (their cousin) are having fun not only writing about but also trying to live according to these principles.

Our family also hopes to reinforce and leverage the power of community through the iD PO-LING POWER app and platform, a collaborative multimedia suite that enables individuals and organizations to engage allies to help set, execute, and track goals to achieve their vision and mission while leveraging the PO-LING POWER framework, tools, and resources.

On an individual level, it's rewarding to see the tangible difference PO-LING POWER has already made. It warms my heart when friends tell me how they have started using the framework to guide their own decisions—how simple, yet powerful it is. When I conduct PO-LING POWER training at organizations, I also enjoy watching the faces of participants light up when they reach their own epiphanies regarding the framework's power. I am energized by how I am tangibly helping others while being true to my personal vision, leading, inspiring, networking, and growing. I also feel ecstatic about doing all of this while managing what matters to me.

On an organizational level, iD has engaged with corporations, nonprofits, and other organized communities. We're excited about the feedback we have received regarding how PO-LING POWER is a thoughtful community-building and professional development suite of tools. PO-LING POWER empowers organizations to achieve their goals by fostering increased employee/member engagement, inclusion, success, and retention. Organizations can leverage PO-LING POWER to create and instill a culture

of employees/members helping each other to succeed on a day-to-day basis instead of relying solely on one-off training or development plans which often go untouched between reviews.

We are further confident PO-LING POWER will help propel organizations and individuals while seamlessly advancing diversity and inclusion initiatives within an organization. By helping to foster an environment where everyone helps each other to achieve goals aligned with personal vision (i.e., each person's authentic self), an organization can build a genuinely inclusive community that will better attract and retain diverse talent.

Figure 1-4: PO-LING POWER Catalyzes a Virtuous Cycle



PO-LING POWER builds inclusive, collaborative, and high performing communities. PO-LING POWER emphasizes how we are all unique individuals and reinforces a culture and belief:



Anything is possible, regardless of your background, as long as we all help each other to succeed.

By sharing our life stories, my mom and I hope you will wholeheartedly embrace this belief too—no matter who you are and what your background is. We hope you will better understand the genesis of and real-life application of PO-LING POWER. It is not simply a tool which cobbles together a bunch of random words. It is essentially the executive summary of what has mattered in the collective 120+ years of life experience my mom and I have had. It is also validated through the stories of successful people from many backgrounds and their thousands of years of collective life experiences.

We hope that our life stories will inspire you to strive for more than you ever thought was possible and to persevere for your priorities and personal vision every day of your life. We hope you will finish the book armed with meaningful tools and stories to build your own PO-LING POWER to propel yourself and others to success.