

DREAMERS
who

DO.

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DEDICATED TO

Justine, Louis, Margot, Camille and Jef

— *the next generation*

'I was part of Hilde's team at Kemira, until both of us were forced to leave in 2008. The years I worked with her sowed the seeds for my further growth, both as a business leader and as a person. The way Hilde shaped the team was light years removed from the standard business culture of the time and – if I may be frank – from the culture in the majority of organizations today. Hilde not only sees the potential in you before you can see it yourself. She also gives you the confidence to make your way in the business world, while still remaining 100% true to your own deepest drivers. For Hilde, personal growth and business growth go hand in hand. She teaches you to follow your own star. I have been telling Hilde for the past ten years that she should write a book about her approach. And now she has finally done it. The model that she develops in the following pages gives concrete form to what she has been doing intuitively all her working life: helping people to unlock their dreams.'

PHILIPPE COGNET, Sales Director at Italtollina

CONTENTS

Foreword — The model 11

DREAM, 17

1 YOUR DREAM IS CLEAR —
THE WAY TO ITS REALIZATION IS OPEN 25

2 YOUR DREAM IS NOT (YET) CLEAR —
WHAT THE HELP OF OTHERS CAN MEAN
FOR ITS VISUALIZATION 32

3 YOUR DREAM IS NOT (YET) CLEAR —
HOW YOU CAN START TO VISUALIZE IT
FOR YOURSELF 36

KOEN VANMECHELEN
Fertility comes from the outside. 45

How to practice ‘Dreaming’ 48

STAND, 53

1 THE IMPORTANCE OF ‘SECURE BASES’ 62

2 THE INFLUENCE OF YOUR ATTACHMENT STYLE 72

3 THE POWER OF NON-VIOLENT (EMPATHIC)
COMMUNICATION TO UNLOCK LOVE 75

KOEN VANMECHELEN
Truth depends on the unexpected
moment of change. 81

How to practice ‘Standing up and speaking out’ 84

PUSH, 89

1 'PUSHING' YOUR OWN DREAM 98

2 OPENING YOUR DOOR TO HELP FROM OUTSIDE 110

3 HELPING TO PUSH OTHER PEOPLE'S DREAMS 113

KOEN VANMECHELEN

Every organism needs another organism to survive. 119

How to practice 'Pushing and perseverance' 122

LET LOVE RULE 127

1 LOVE FROM AN UNEXPECTED QUARTER 132

2 LOVE 'FROM WHERE YOU CAN EXPECT IT' 139

KOEN VANMECHELEN

The global exists only through the generosity of the local. 147

Acknowledgements 151

Literature 157

About the author 159

FOREWORD THE MODEL

This book is the result of a longing, of a deep desire in me. It is rooted in a message I want to share with as many people as I can. People who are close to me, but also people I have never met:

A DREAM LIVES IN EACH OF US.
I BELIEVE THAT EVERYONE POSSESSES AN UNRIVALLED POWER,
AN OFTEN UNKNOWN POTENTIAL TO REALIZE THAT DREAM,
WITH THE HELP OF OTHERS.
WHEN PEOPLE REALIZE THEIR DREAM, CIRCLES OF SAFETY
ARE CREATED THAT INSPIRE OTHERS TO DO THE SAME.
IF MORE PEOPLE ARE ABLE TO REALIZE THEIR DREAMS,
THE WORLD WILL BECOME A BETTER PLACE.

I needed useable tools to inspire people with my belief and prompt them to take action. And so I went in search of a model. But let me first tell you a story or two.

My Lenny Kravitz story

JUST AFTER I GRADUATED, I fell head over heels – not that I was such a hip chick, but it happened anyway – for Lenny Kravitz and his music. The first of his numbers I ever heard was ‘Let Love Rule’. I was gripped, blown away. That song expressed so powerfully the drive that had always made me want to stand up for the weakest people around me. The message, packaged in marvellous music that not only suffused my mind but filled my entire body, cemented my resolve: ‘Together, we can change the world’. I followed Lenny Kravitz throughout that period. Not just for his lyrics, but above all for his music and for the sheer artistry of his playing. The more I got to know his music, the more I learnt about the man – and the greater my admiration became. His grandfather had taught him that no goal is unachievable if you climb the stairway that leads to its realization a step at a time. Lenny Kravitz writes nearly all his music himself. And he has learnt to play all the instruments in his songs, apart from the wind ones. He is a perfectionist when it comes to the things he creates. For the things he can’t do himself, he surrounds himself with experts, the very best in the business: from the horn player to the backing vocals, even the photographer... and everyone else.

When in a later phase of my life I wanted to explore ‘what makes people tick’, I returned to Lenny’s texts. In their deep wisdom I read my own beliefs, the entire message that forms the basis for this book. What an example he set of doing, of acting, of implementing! His words seemed to embody everything you need to know about how to start from an image of the way you would like things to be – your dream – and how you can make it come true through discipline, expertise and perseverance. Together with others. In short, Lenny Kravitz became my soul mate. As he once said in an interview, Let Love Rule is the core of his philosophy of life.

The more I looked at people in an analytical manner, the better I understood that we can all realize our dream in different ways and by different routes. Music, literature, philosophy, art, sculpture, religion: it doesn’t really matter. And that brings me to my second story.

My Koen Vanmechelen story

MY MOTHER HAS ALWAYS LOVED ART. Already as a young woman, she knew her Rodin and Zadkine. She hung around in Middelheim Park. She went to exhibitions in Antwerp. One year, she even followed evening classes at the art academy. Convinced that our true passions in life only become evident as we get older, she made sure that her children were likewise exposed to as much art as possible.

As the daughter of a chicken farmer, she also had a close affinity with chickens. Perhaps this explains why when the conceptual artist Koen Vanmechelen launched his 'Cosmopolitan Chicken Project' in the early years of the new century, a number of other pieces in my life's puzzle fell into place. The 'Cosmopolitan Chicken Project' (CCP) is a metaphorical project rooted in cultural and genetic diversity. The idea of creating a new cosmopolitan or hybrid chicken by cross-breeding all the different types of chicken in the world simply blew my mind. It still does. Started in 1999, the most recent crossbreed – the Mechelse Maatiaiskana – contains the genes of no fewer than 21 other breeds. And the end is by no means in sight.

Apart from the CCP, I was also deeply moved at that time by the story of the Cosmogolem. This four-metre tall wooden giant represents a figure from Jewish legend, who did what he could to help mankind. The enthusiasm with which I once heard Koen Vanmechelen talk about this project had a huge impact on me. The Cosmogolem – which has been erected at more than 30 locations worldwide – is a symbol of empowerment. Its aim is to make people – and particularly children – who live in unfortunate circumstances stronger. They can share their wishes and dreams with the giant, in whatever manner they wish. Some do it with a song or a dance. Others do it with a poem or a drawing...

Like Lenny Kravitz, Koen Vanmechelen has become a fellow traveller of mine. I have been to all his exhibitions in Belgium, our common homeland. I have read everything I can find about him. Not only about the artist, but also about the man and how he grew as a person through his art. I was impressed by the ambition of his 'Cosmopolitan Chicken Project' and the way in which he involved experts from dozens of different domains. When I began to see an overlap between the Cosmogolem symbolism and what I was also starting to tell people about leadership and self-leadership, for me the wheel had come full circle.

In the meantime, Koen Vanmechelen has been working tirelessly for decades to help people who are burdened by a difficult past to find a voice and a language of their own. For example, through his partnership with The Future of Hope, he participates actively in the dreams of people who want to exchange their role as victim for greater responsibility for their own future and for the future of others who have had the same false start in life as themselves. Together with founder Chido Govera (who also experienced a troubled past as an orphan), he dreams of creating a Future of Hope network, first across Africa and later across the entire world. The aim is to provide as many people as possible with an income and to eradicate hunger from the world by making better use of the resources that are available locally. The mother house in Harare (Zimbabwe) is a training centre where orphans learn how to grow edible mushrooms. But they are also taught crucial life skills, like social behaviour, dealing with sexuality, AIDS and hygiene.

What a wonderful way to give shape and form to your dream of changing the world! And what a marvellous effort to try and make that world a better place! Koen Vanmechelen: 'Art is never obligation-free. It opens your mind and broadens your perspective. It can free people from their chains. Art creates responsibility.' Koen Vanmechelen the man and Koen Vanmechelen the artist: two 'Dreamers who Do'.

Music, the visual arts, theatre: they all speak to different parts of the brain than a discourse in words. Art appeals directly to our subconscious. It moves first our hearts and only then our minds. First our intuition and then the brain. During the early first phase of *Dreamers who Do* a strong appeal was sent out by the songs of Lenny Kravitz and the projects of Koen Vanmechelen.

In particular, four songs by Lenny Kravitz grew almost organically to become the backbone for my model: DREAM, STAND, PUSH, LET LOVE RULE. The vision I developed on this basis is very simple:

TO REALIZE YOUR DREAM, THIS IS WHAT YOU MUST DO:
TAKE THREE STEPS: DREAM, STAND, PUSH.
KEEP ONE THING CLEARLY IN SIGHT: LET LOVE RULE.
THIS WILL LEAD YOU FROM YOUR AMBITION TO YOUR GOAL.

In the following four chapters I will take you on a journey. During this journey, we will tap into, strengthen and make active the dream-fulfilling potential that is in all of us. Koen Vanmechelen will offer his reflections on the different stages of our travels. In each chapter he will provide us with a work of art and a statement that serve as an oasis of rest and tranquility in my story.

Music finds its own way to the heart. Images speak for themselves. I need words. But the message is the same. And together we will reach more people every day.

DREAM,

All men dream: but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act upon their dreams with open eyes, to make it possible.

T.E. LAWRENCE (1888-1935), prose writer, archaeologist
and soldier – better known as ‘Lawrence of Arabia’

GO IN SEARCH OF THE DREAM THAT LIVES WITHIN YOU

THERE IS JUST ONE CONDITION THAT NEEDS TO BE FULFILLED BEFORE
YOU CAN REALIZE YOUR DREAM. YOU MUST FIRST BE ABLE TO SEE IT!

We humans are visual animals. Simple neurological processes determine that our brains only begin to work if we can imagine ourselves in some other or some new situation. In that order. It is the seeing of something other or something new that prompts us into action. If we are not able to see it, nothing happens.

There was once a time when you went in search of your dreams free from all inhibitions; in which you constantly went looking for the biotope in which you were one with the deepest core of your being; in which, in other words, you were in direct touch with the things that made you happiest. This golden time was your childhood. Almost instinctively, you moved towards the things that made you complete and you made plans for later. Did you grow up in an environment that offered you support and stimulation? If so, you grew in fertile ground and perhaps you are already busy integrating your dream into your adult life. Perhaps, however, your life story has been more difficult, bedevilled by limitations, obstacles and disruptive factors that have distracted you and pushed you off course. In that case, you will need to travel a greater distance to achieve the fragile dream of your early years. But in the end, it doesn't really matter. It makes no difference whether your journey is short or long. At the end of the road, you will still reap the same reward: you will see that the tender shoots of your dream are still alive inside you today.

If I ask **my mother** what she used to dream about as a child, she says she has no idea. “In our family of eight children – I had two brothers and five sisters – only two things were really important: being well-behaved and getting on with each other. If we respected those rules, for the rest of the time we could pretty much do what we liked. We had a lot of freedom and I had no real need or desire to live inside my head. I didn’t have a real dream about what I wanted to be when I grew up or how I would live my life. As time passed, an urge gradually developed inside of me and I knew that I wanted to look after children. But a man didn’t really feature in that plan. Who knows? If I hadn’t met Staf, maybe I would have become a single mother!”

By the time she finished secondary school, my mother wanted to become a nurse, but you had to be eighteen to register for the training and she was too young (she had skipped a year at school). And so she decided to train as a nursery teacher instead. She wasn’t even twenty by the time she had finished her studies. Her entire career was devoted to fighting for the rights of children: in other words, making sure that children had everything she believed they needed to be happy. You could say that she found the way to fulfilment in her life intuitively, whereas more recent generations often need to search more explicitly for that fulfilment. Later, when she looked back on those years, she concluded that if she had a dream at all, it would be to care for neglected children. Or perhaps run an orphanage. But she never really stopped to think about it. My mother is a woman of action. Her motto is ‘carry on regardless’ and that is what she has always done. Her day is a non-stop succession of actions, with only an occasional pause for ‘a little dream’, something to look forward to.

DID I HAVE A DREAM AS A CHILD? I think that I already knew in my second to last year of primary school: I wanted to be a mother. I must have been about thirteen before a second image lodged itself in my mind. I no longer wanted to be ‘just’ a mother; I wanted to be a paediatrician. I could see it all in my mind: I would build a house from which I could run my practice,

with a glass partition wall that would allow me to see my children and their nanny while I was working. The glass wall idea gave me the feeling that I could manage everything all at the same time. I have always wanted to care for everyone and everything around me. Friends, the kids next door, classmates: I was ready to help and defend them all! I had a very open, almost boundless view of the world: I was brought up in a home where everyone was welcome and where there was always room for one more under my mother's protective wing. I thought that this was the way life worked and had no idea that it could be anything different.

From my teenage years onward, I systematically went in search of complex things. Simplifying those things gave me a kick. I always set the bar high for myself – as high as possible. When the time came to decide what I wanted to study at university, I was torn between civil engineering – to my mind, the most difficult discipline of all – and medicine. The pendulum very quickly swung in favour of the former. The entrance examination coincided with our six-form school trip to Rome, but I did the exam anyway: Rome could wait. I managed to scrape a pass – but only just. There were no more than a handful of girls in our intake and all the boys were really bright sparks. But I had no time to worry about that. The academic year was about to start. I wanted to show the world that everything is possible, as long as you want it badly enough.

Lenny Kravitz's song 'Dream' may have been inspired by religion – like the singer himself – but from start to finish it reflects the power and the persistence of the dream that lives inside each and every one of us, slowly taking shape before finally finding its own way out into the big, wide world.

