



IGNITE YOUR BEACON

Uncover Truth, Live With Intention, and
Contribute Your Gifts to the World

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Joshua Gablin, Sr. - Foreword

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“With how many things are we on the brink of becoming acquainted, if
cowardice or carelessness did not restrain our inquiries.”
- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

This book is dedicated to my mother Cindi. For all of the agonizing experiences that we have gone through over many years, I am inexplicably glad that we are now best friends.

F O R E W O R D

BY JOSHUA GABLIN, SR.

“Perseverance is the foundation of all actions.” – Lao Tzu

This book will not change your life. It will not give you your dream job or a promotion at work. It will not make you incredibly skilled in your field. It will not give you a degree or any kind of certification. It will not give you prestige or make you well respected. It will not give you a flashy car, a huge estate or the newest clothing. It will not perfect your relationships with your family, your friends and your spouse. It will not give you superpowers. It has no special magic or trick that will give you everything you want. It will not make all of your wildest dreams come true.

But don't put it down just yet.

What my long time friend, business partner and frequent co-conspirator Brad Johnson has put forth with this effort is a workbook that will help you accurately assess your life, your goals and aspirations. *Ignite Your Beacon* contains, among other things, tips for success, inspirational quotes, a collection of ideas and thoughts from people who have achieved greatness in their lives all synthesized with Brad's unique perspective, and a fantastically organized structure for laying out your own personal plan for success.

This book is a tool designed specifically to help you compare where you are now with where you want to be. It will assist you in laying out in explicit terms every obstacle standing in your way and finding ways to overcome them in

small, tangible steps. As it is a workbook, you must put forth the effort to see the results. It can be an incredible asset in realizing the life you want. If you as the reader don't get anything from this book, it will almost surely be because you didn't fully put yourself into its application.

Our generation is one plagued with cynicism. I expect many young people, like myself, to look through these pages with an initial response of, "I already know this" or "This is nothing new to me" or "These questions are easy" and many of them will be right, simply because if you're reading this book you probably already have an idea of what you want. If you are reading this book, you have dreams, goals and aspirations. You want something more for yourself from life and that is an incredible starting point. If this is the case, the questions will be easy to answer, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't answer them.

As the writer of these opening words, I would urge you the reader to not only read this book with an open mind, but to take the prompts and questions seriously if you truly want to take something away from this. Don't skip sections because you already know what you want, but use them as an opportunity to make your goals more concrete and to build further upon them. Writing down what you want and organizing it is an incredible way to evaluate your current position. *Ignite Your Beacon* provides a magnificent structure for this. I encourage you to take the ideas in the book seriously and to use them to your advantage, because by doing so you can change your life. (And besides that, you've already purchased the book so you may as well use this to your advantage. Get your money's worth!)

There are many things this book cannot do and simply having a copy is not enough to make a change. It is very possible for you to read through these pages from cover to cover and take absolutely nothing away from it. This is true of any book. The limitations of a book end at its pages, but once you have read these words and learned the techniques within, the possibilities for application are limited only by your capacity to dream. This book will not change your life for you, but it can absolutely help you change it.

P R E F A C E A N D I N S T R U C T I O N S

As you progress through this book you will notice it is a collection of words that seeks to be a journey alongside you, more so than what most people would call a "book". Being non-fiction, its central plot is *your life*, its characters are *you and those you interact with*, its highs and lows are those which *you encounter*, and the protagonist is *you*.

This book is meant to be a continual guide and collection of reference points; more than a book you buy, read and never look at again. It is interactive and dynamic. Most sections will have hands-on questions and "Action Prompts," different practical advisory notes that will help you turn what you just read into a veritable tool for enhancing your life.

Please understand, the more you choose to flow with this book, the more it will flow with you. I want to personally thank you for picking up a copy and I hope with diligent and honest effort this book yields great dividends for you and helps you along your journey of life.

Before you dive into the actual content of the book, an important point must be addressed. In order to get the most you can out of this book; the appropriate environment and physiological stature must be considered. Stated more simply, **the way your body is positioned is how your mind is positioned, and how your mind is positioned is the way your emotions will embody themselves.**

If you are sitting comfortably, but uprightly with clear lighting and a quiet surrounding you will experience optimal mental reception of this book. If you do not believe this, try a simple experiment. Take both hands and ball your fists tightly. Keeping your fists clenched you will sense rigidity in your mentality, and you will not want to move from your current seated position.

Now, open both hands, palms facing up, and hold them there. You will sense a feeling of peace, perhaps be able to reach agreements with people, look for solutions, and frankly, openness. You will feel more able to love and to hope. It may even encourage you to stand up. As you can see, your physical state reflects your mental state. With this being said, to get the most out of this book, sit comfortably but uprightly, with clear lighting and a quiet surrounding.

Furthermore, I am truly grateful that you are reading this book and I want you to know how valuable you are. You may have heard this a thousand times over, but despite that, I am going to repeat it in a way you may not have heard yet. *There is no one who has ever breathed a breath of precious life who was quite like you.* You are your own person, complete with your own dreams, hopes, longings, desires, choices, styles, strengths, views, and experiences.

I want to take a moment to validate that point. You are human and you deserve to be recognized for the fact that you have been given life. Life is a delicate gift, so please treat it accordingly. You aren't any better, nor any worse than anyone else. I hope you receive guidance, help, and inspiration from the pages. Thank you for reading this book.

There are many ways readers will perceive this book, but one thing is certain, **you will get out of it what you put into it.** Your attitude in relation to your reception of this book will determine how much you actually learn, what you walk away with, and what you feel led to take action upon. For your benefit, I encourage you to continue reading this book with an emboldened, courageous, persistent, and patient attitude.

I welcome you on this heart-filled journey! Prepare to begin what may be one of the most unusual travels in a book you have yet to experience.

P R O G R E S S I O N

- In order to live a full life, you must face the truth.
- You must face *all* of the truth, not just sections of it, or the parts you like.
- In order to have a fulfilling life, you must strive for excellence.
- When seeking excellence, it is not what you do, it is who you are.

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act, but a habit.” – Aristotle

- A meaningful life is not one where blind chances are taken left and right, but a life that is lived on purpose.
- Having duties and responsibilities in life aids in the expedition of fulfillment.
- Life largely centers on learning how to receive and give in greater and deeper proportions.
- Life is not about what you can obtain, but what you can experience, and what you can give back.
- Giving back to others is one of the most grandiose and consummate experiences you will ever know.

“Live life fully while you’re here. Experience everything. Take care of yourself and your friends. Have fun, be crazy, be weird. Go out and screw up! You’re going to anyway, so you might as well enjoy the process. Take the opportunity to learn from your mistakes: find the cause of your problem and eliminate it. Don’t try to be perfect; just be an excellent example of being human.” - Tony Robbins



UNCOVER TRUTH

CHAPTER 1
INTROSPECTION

She and her mother were on a trip to see her father. They had left a day or two earlier than planned, but if anything, they were both happy to leave sooner. It would be a brief trip, reuniting the three of them and allowing them to celebrate her high school graduation that much earlier.

Juliane Koepcke was flying with her mother from Lima, Peru to Pucallpa, Peru on December 24, 1971. During that time of year, the Amazon rainforest and its surrounding areas typically experience heavier precipitation and colder weather. A number of flights out of Lima had already been cancelled, and Juliane and her mother Maria were considerably lucky to still have a flight with unchanged seats.

The plane took off right around noon. Juliane and Maria were in the second to last row of the plane. The flight was expected to be an hour or less and the passengers were served a light breakfast.

Roughly two thirds of the way into the flight and without warning, the plane entered a thick and unrelenting thunderstorm. Where there was sunlight and calm air just seconds ago, there was now utter darkness, pierced by streaks of lightning.

The entire plane was thrust into violent shaking and unpredictable motion. Maria muttered a few things under her breath to Juliane, hoping the flight was not entirely lost.

As overhead bins started breaking open and complete unrest erupted among the passengers, Juliane noticed a flash of white above the right wing of the plane. Then, as time lost its meaning, Juliane started floating through darkness, realizing bit by bit what had happened.

The immense gale of the plane's engine and the thunderstorm disappeared.

Part of the plane had broken off. There were no passengers around her anymore.

Her mother was not by her side.

Juliane was still strapped into her seat, and the seats within her bench were still connected. She was flying through the air in complete darkness, falling rapidly, barely sure if she was still cognizant of anything.

Her seatbelt had now pressed her so tightly against the seat that she faded from consciousness and continued falling. Some time later, she was somehow awoken, able to see the Amazon rainforest slowly approaching. Juliane was now falling upside down, and passed out again.

By her next moment of consciousness, she awoke and was looking up at the trees and foliage surrounding her. Juliane fell all the way out of the plane and into the jungle, and survived. She recognized that the bench of seats braced her fall, and, already covered in mud and water, moved further into the shelter of the seats to lie there for the next day and night.

The next day, some sunlight was fading in through treetops, giving her at least some ability to gather her surroundings. The injuries Juliane had sustained were remarkably insignificant, compared to the rest of the passengers and crew. She suffered a broken collarbone, a number of gashes around her body and an eye swollen shut.

Juliane was the only one to fall from the flight, LANSA Flight 508, and survive.

Mustering all of her strength, Juliane made the decision to press forward and do whatever it took to make contact with rescuers. The blessing of having parents that taught her just about everything there was to know about the jungle now came in handy like never before. Juliane began making mental notes of her surroundings as she searched for any body of water.

Her father, Hans-Wilhelm Koepcke, had instructed her that streams and rivers eventually lead to civilization, if one followed them far enough. Making her way through the forest, she came across a bag of candy from the flight and took it with her. Continuing to move forward, Juliane eventually heard the faint trickle of water. Feeling a new surge of hope, she kept following this trickle as it turned into a stream.

The stream gradually built into a small river, and Juliane knew her quest was worth continuing. She pressed forward in her push to find someone, anyone.

As the days passed, Juliane fought mosquitoes, flies, sea creatures and other pests simply to keep herself alive. She rested on the side of the river each night, using any semblance of shelter to squeeze out ounces of warmth.

Juliane kept moving but had used up the entire bag of candy after a few days. Left with nothing else to fuel her, she drank from the river, knowing there would be no concern of infection from adequately running water. The small river had turned into a large one.

Since larger rivers are more difficult to travel along on foot, Juliane moved into the center of the river, swim-floating whenever she could. This expedited her progress. She kept her hope up to find any sign of other humans.

By day six or seven, Juliane had used every last drop of strength she seemed to have simply to stay alive. Drinking only river water, she felt the weakness taking over. Without anything reliable to eat, all she could do was stay sheltered at night and keep floating down the river during the day.

When it came to day 10, Juliane had been forced into using her emergency reserves of energy to push herself over logs that she bumped into while floating down the river. This happened for nearly the whole day before she found a riverbank made of gravel to lie down on.

Waking up at some point later, she saw what she could not believe to be a physical object: a boat sitting at another point on the riverbank. It seemed entirely unbelievable, so Juliane swam over to touch it. Sure enough, it was real, and she started taking stock of what was around the boat.

She saw a worn path leading further up the bank into the land. Knowing she must head up the path, it took her hours to get from the riverbank to a small shack at the end of the path.

Finding no people, she saw that the shack was open. Juliane waited around for anyone to show up, but no one did. It had grown dark again and she stepped inside the shack. Juliane fell asleep, the flame of her hope still lit.

She woke up the next morning and nothing had changed. Finding a tarpaulin sheet to use for warmth, Juliane told herself she would rest one more day before moving on again.

Towards the end of that day, she heard voices coming from somewhere. Thinking it could only be a hallucination, she discredited it, but they only grow stronger. Moments later, she was met by three forestry workers, and was transported to a pilot that would take her to the nearest hospital in Pucallpa. Her father was also waiting for her there.

After falling 10,000 feet from a flight that would kill all other 91 passengers, Juliane Koepcke survived 11 days in the Amazon rainforest with nothing but a small bag of candy, riverwater to drink, her survival knowledge and the will to press on.

Most stories that can even compare to this one do not have anything near such a happy ending. For the type of story that would normally unfold in a movie to have taken place in this way – in reality – leaves one speechless.

This is a story of unparalleled courage. Few people would decide that after such a nightmarishly tragic occurrence that it would be worth pressing on. Juliane Koepcke decided that things had to be different. Boiling the entire story down to its most raw elements, there is no telling what would have happened had Juliane not determined to find some resolution.

THE SIX ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR AN IDENTITY CHECK

WHO AM I?

This is a question we repeatedly ask ourselves, from the moment we can conceive super-sentient thought until our dying day. This is also a vital question to ask often, for the answer to this question can and does change for every individual throughout life's many peaks and valleys.

Despite the fact that it is a healthy and regular experience for one's answer to periodically develop, this question still requires a firm foundation when being asked. It is a question that demands entering deep into one's persona and soul.

This question demands that you address your purpose. What were you built for? Why are you here on this Earth? You must answer that question for yourself. Take some time to write down your thoughts.

Be 100 percent intentional about these questions. Answer them fully and do not hold back. Use them to your advantage, rather than as a handicap. Allow yourself to be vulnerable, and know when you gather fuller knowledge of yourself you are able to act in greater strength than those who refuse to face themselves.

“You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.” – Jim Rohn

WHERE AM I?

The answer to this question has two different parts: the geographical and the metaphysical. The geographical side, while important to address, is not as vital to one’s existence and guidance as the bigger picture.

The metaphysical portion carves out a space even deeper. We must address the larger implications of a communal Earth, as well as the point in life at which we presently stand.

What does it mean for me to share the Earth with other humans?

What responsibilities do I have as a “renter” here on Earth?

Am I doing a good job of sharing this Earth with people who are currently alive and those yet to be born?

How would I live if I were the last person alive on Earth?

Where am I right now in life? Am I happy where I am?

What obstacles am I facing?

Where Have I Come From?

Part of what makes success taste so sweet is having surmounted the struggles placed upon your path during trying times. It is critical that we view past mistakes as fuel to defeat our fear and empower our dream-chasing skills, rather than the opposite.

What obstacles have I faced in my life?

Which ones have I overcome?

How am I proud of the dark moments that I have vanquished?

What are three distinct strengths I have as a result of the unique obstacles I have conquered?

WHERE AM I HEADED?

Even though all of these questions are absolutely critical, this one stands out. It is utterly essential to know where you are headed. This does not mean you need a full, decade-long plan, with every day mapped out, but there is no doubt that you need to have written and clear details on what is coming up next for you.

If I stayed at my current job or vocation, what would be coming up next for me within the next year?

If I left my current job or vocation, what would be waiting for me? What would be my next step?

What do I want my next step to be?

What is causing me to take my next step?

If I am not looking forward to my next step, what is the first step I need to take in order to change that?

WHO AM I HEADED THERE WITH?

No one can accomplish great things alone. Every successful goal was – on some level – reached through a team effort, and yours will be no exception. Take some time to think about who has joined you on your journey towards excellence; who you can count on to encourage you when you are down in the dumps; and who will be an authentic friend every step of the way.

Who are friends I can count on to stick with me when the joys of life are challenged?

Who is cheering me on with the goals I am striving towards?

Who will be with me at the top when I reach my goals?

If I do not have many (or any) people like this in my life, whom can I talk to or where can I go to start building these types of friendships?

“I’m convinced that I won’t succeed alone. I need brilliant people beside me, positive self-belief within me, and God all around me.” – Mark Brown

WHAT WILL IT TAKE?

In addition to the right focus and the right people, all goals take massive and consistent amounts of action. This question must be faced in order to create a clearer picture of the sacrifices that will be made on your journey.

Some people are under the impression that dreams only take time, but sooner than later, they also require monetary investments. It is very important that you address some of the initial purchases you will be making for your dreams to come true.

How much time per week do I need to start (or continue) setting aside in order to merge my dreams with my reality? When is the earliest I can work this into my calendar?

Am I spending that time well, or do I need to become more disciplined in this area? Am I just doing “busywork” or am I actually crafting my skills as I hack away to complete what needs to happen?

What purchases do I need to make in the primary stages of my dream? Do I have any of these items or products already? Are there any that I can make use of with the help of a friend or family member? Are there any quality purchases I can make at a discount or less than the retail price?

ACTION PROMPT:

Use the questions you already answered to plot out some of your actions this week. Pick the question or the area listed above that you need the most work on, and take two hours out of your week to actively tackle problems in that area.

3 LEVELS OF TRUTH

“Truth is rarely popular or very much liked, but when it is communicated with a loving heart, it is worth the cost of reputation and sacrifice of status.” – Susanna Schultz

Tertiary Truth – There is truth in your day-to-day activities, which help to shape ordinary decisions. This type of truth involves what clothes you wear, what you eat, and the physical world.

Beyond childhood, we do not often think about tertiary truth. After we find out the answer to simple truths, such as the fact that coffee comes from beans or

that clothes are often made out of cotton, we usually do not give them further thought.

As long as we are able to retain knowledge like this on a daily basis, it is of no consequence that we don't periodically contemplate tertiary truth.

Secondary Truth – There is truth that can teach you which friendships to maintain, where to go in life and what to pursue.

This type of truth requires steadier attention if we are to live fulfilling, authentic and whole lives. There are many leaders and businesses that dedicate themselves to assisting people in the pursuit of many kinds of truths. The pinnacle of absorbing truth properly is to act on it, and the aforementioned leaders and businesses create goods and services to help people act on these truths.

These truths and their respective industries range throughout all of the following: relationship advice, the consumption of whole foods and hearty nutrition, developing the mindset of a professional, acting with compassion towards fellow citizens, keeping oneself in shape, and working to make a legacy.

Primary Truth – Finally, there is a universal truth, sometimes unspoken, but always undeniable and always life-changing. This type of truth is what people live and die for. It is immutable. Whether or not we choose to address it in our lives has no effect whatsoever that this truth exists, and exists to its fullest extent.

This is the type of truth that can keep someone up at night. The truth is built up of facts that can be ignored, but not removed; facts that can be suppressed, but not destroyed; facts that can be side stepped, but not stepped on.

Primary truth, just like secondary and tertiary, has multiple components. There is truth about the food we eat, the way we treat each other, our past as a global community, the future we are facing, life, death, and God.

Usually, what an individual will die for is directly related to what they are living for. This topic frequently makes certain people uncomfortable. When they think about it, they realize that A, they are living for nothing, or B, what they are presently living for is not truly compelling enough to die for.

I find the story of Jesus, who lived for 33 years, worthy of investigation. Upon discovering that He died for me so I might get to know him better and live with

Him forever one day, my world was changed. Having paid a price so great as laying down His life for another, I became aware of how living for Him would give me true life.

To read more about the reasons for which I hold my beliefs about primary truth, please read the *Believing in God* section.

ACTION PROMPT:

Tertiary Truth – With your knowledge of the fact that the sun rises and sets, and that each person has 24 hours in a day, use these truths to your advantage and live each day as your last.

Secondary Truth – Enrich your relationships, daily interactions, and personal choices with the power and freedom that comes from further knowledge. Love people. Be sacrificial. Develop your health. Choose excellence.

Primary Truth – Do not hold back when seeking truth. The amount you hold yourself back from increasing your knowledge of truth is the extent your life will remain in darkness. Truth seeking is not a quest towards ultimate comfort. Rather, it is due to embracing truth that freedom becomes tangible.

FOUR POINTS ON LIVING FOR TODAY, INSTEAD

OF WORRYING ABOUT MISSING IT

“We avoid taking risks in life, so we can make it safely to death.” – Unknown

If you were suddenly faced with only one year left to spend with your spouse, nuclear family and most beloved, would you lie about placidly, leaving time to tick away, perhaps hoping that they would take the initiative towards engaging with you? Keeping the finish line in focus is the only way to not only keep one's purpose and motivation in mind, but to waste no time giving anything but the utmost given to each of us. Is there any other sensible way to live?

Take a moment to picture yourself at the end of your years. Would you really want to experience the sorrow and pain of not having taken action on the short list of strivings that really mattered to you in the end? As you read this list, lay aside all your fears of rejection, pain, loneliness, dissatisfaction, neglect,

dispassion, loss, uncertainty, and risk. Similarly, lay aside all of your desires for comfort, ease, conformity, immediate social acceptance, and surface-level security.

1 – Be mindful of how much time you spend working, what your hard earned money gets spent on and how both should be adding value to your life.

Generally speaking, by the time people reach the end of their life, they wish they had spent their money on more meaningful things. But these things are not necessarily “things,” in fact they are rarely ever *possessions*. Can you think back to a time that you legitimately enjoyed receiving a gift that was material, more so than spending time with someone you love? Perhaps you can. I know I cannot.

The majority of the time, most of us cherish the time spent with those we love over any other gift we could give or receive. This is largely because time cannot be stopped, taken back, or altered in any way. It is also because it involves relationship building, which I see as one of the main reasons we are all here on Earth.

If you have had the opportunity to spend time as a volunteer helping those less fortunate than you, you understand that you leave that sphere of experience forever touched by the moments contained within. There are automatic relational ties forming in moments such as those. Those experiences teach us what is truly essential in life and what is not. It breaks us down so we can witness the core of ourselves laid bare, and only for the better.

For once we have seen that **love** is the only answer to life’s many problems, we can finally begin to build ourselves and those in our life up. Love requires that we deny the desire we have to put ourselves first, and to give our gifts away for others to be edified, so that the recipients eventually do the same themselves.

Another crucial thing to understand about life is something that we forget rapidly, and understandably so: we were born with nothing and we will die with nothing. There was not a wallet, bank account, checkbook, or credit card in our hand as we emerged from the womb, nor will there be any of those items in our clutch as we descend back into the Earth.

As we are approaching the final years and stages of our life, we must remember that there will be no need for bank notes once our final day has come. There is a fair chance that this prospect has brought a chuckle to your lips, because once we are considering our own death, we realize how meaningless it is to hoard up physical currency or to protect a number on an electronic screen as though it were our very blood.

2 – Do not willfully hurt people, but tell them how you really feel. Do not hold your feelings back – both when you need to speak some hard truth, and also when you are overflowing with joy or gratitude.

We withhold our honesty from people because we do not want to hurt their feelings. Unfortunately, this mindset means we often miss opportunities to help others grow – and to grow ourselves. Sometimes we are feeling a positive emotion but we do not know how to adequately express it. Occasionally there are other factors at play:

- Wanting to remain as secure or comfortable as possible
- Not wanting to take a risk
- Wanting to protect oneself from hurt
- Not feeling sure if one’s thoughts are worth expressing

At least one of these, if not most, we can resonate with and pick out from our own created pattern of living. The fact that we have issues with these simple life moments is completely understandable. We are, after all, humans. We are imperfect beings by nature and will fail readily, every step of the way.

The reason we gravitate so heavily towards comfortable, simple, and easy tasks or ways of life is that due to a lower risk of failure, we will likely succeed, and therefore receive the most gratification the soonest for our accomplishments.

The oddity of the situation fully reveals itself in a (hopefully) commonplace observation, however. **If we feel the most happy and satisfied when we complete simple tasks, how come we cannot master simple disciplines that yield so many rich and worthwhile dividends?** These also invariably lead to greater success. Those who we admire for their success, timeliness, richness of character, influence, charm, acquisitions (material or otherwise), free time,

goals, and sophistication¹ are really not leading as complex lives as we may believe. In fact, quite the opposite. Most of the time these people have **mastered the basics**, as we may have previously heard throughout life, and been encouraged to apply to ourselves.

Being sidetracked from the truth or sold a false story, we maintain that the answer to all of the aforementioned, desirable traits will forever remain an aerial enigma, a code that only a fortunate few will ever crack. The truth is far simpler – laughably simple.

If we were to take one of the aforementioned role models of society and rewind a few years, we would see that early on in this person's life, they made a choice to enact these disciplines every day, no matter how uncomfortable it was in the beginning. When things looked bleak, they knew that if they persisted long enough, it would be worth it.

For example, we all know that it is important, nay crucial, to earn more than you spend, but we still are not capable as a society to do this. It is largely because we struggle so candidly with delaying gratification and being willing to transform ourselves from the inside out.

We already know that life is not optimal when we avoid disciplines such as the delaying of gratification, but another part of the sad truth is that **we as a people do not want to push the limits of our capabilities**. We are far too often satisfied right where we are. Sometimes this is due to a misunderstanding (or lack of understanding) of who we are and what we were built to have the capability for, but more often than not, it is simply a rotten complacency with the status quo.

3 – Have the courage to stay in touch with friends – especially those that need it most.

Would you love it if a friend from 10, five or even two years back sent you a detailed email or gave you a call, especially if they were not looking to leverage you somehow? You would feel like they genuinely cared about you. Whether they were someone who was that sincere and generous earlier in life would not matter, because now, you would understand that their heart and mind had changed for the better and they were acting upon it.

1. "Sophisticated," being built off of "sophist," was a pre-Socratic word having meant "one who is wise," or an intellectual who gave specific and critical instruction for pay.

As you are likely well aware, there is something called Facebook and it aids this purpose greatly! In addition to Facebook, there is Google+ and a host of other messaging apps that make it as easy as clicking the message button on someone's profile to contact them.

Be that person! Be the type of person to reach out to (at the very least) friends of yours who were at one time very significant. Some of us keep in contact with those who have meant a great deal to us ever since they entered our life, and others let things slip a little more as life plods forward.

Whether you are someone who keeps good track of people who need to hear your words and encouragement, or you are someone who has admittedly been a touch too reclusive, send some authentic inquiries and encouraging words to someone who you know could really use it.

With all of this coming from me, an introvert, if you are a fellow introvert, you have no excuse! No one is expecting you to suddenly be in a dozen lengthy talks with old high school acquaintances, but people *would* really appreciate hearing from you. Find someone's contact information who you have not heard from in years, and reach out to them.

They will greatly appreciate the fact that *you* would love to know how *they* are doing. They will love the re-initiation of connection even more than you! How can you deny being able to give someone's day that extra boost that will shift it from typical to extraordinary?

There is such an incredible surge of energy that both people experience when an amount of valuable time is shared cheerfully between friends. Not to mention you never know what will happen until you try! There is potential for an engaging conversation of unprecedented enthusiasm to arise!

4 – Afford yourself the generous freedom that comes with choosing to be happy.

This can appear difficult to unravel on the surface, but ultimately, it is about as clear as day. It can be easy to believe that change takes time, and that you have to master something step by step, such as with learning an instrument.

Fortunately, this is not the case at all! **Change happens instantaneously.** Think back to a moment in your life when something so painful or inconvenient happened, and you swore to yourself you would never again allow it to happen. It could have been something small such as forgetting an ice scraper and needing to wait for your car to warm up, or as painful as overdrawing your checking account for a significant purchase, and needing to attend to the mess that was a result of not keeping track of where your funds were going over time.

Ultimately, how did you react? You made your decision right there and then. You did not necessarily know each step that your new habit or choice would require, but you held fast, regardless. It meant that much to you and you *needed* it to happen. As the great Tony Robbins has often said, it was no longer a *should*, it became a *must*. It is the same for any character change we may want to enact. We conceive that a given development will take too long, so we are confronted with two choices.

We either deny the possibility of change altogether, or we inch away at instituting the new habit until it either starts asking too much of us or changing our lives to the point that we miss the small, silent, drab and comfortable world that we once called home. **Change happens today and now, or else it happens tomorrow and never.** There is no such thing as putting off change or taking it carefully, so as to preserve our mediocre and convenient habits that we still relish so greatly.

Let us say you see yourself as too frugal and would like to improve your generosity. There is not much sense in waking up one day and simply saying, “I *feel* generous today!” If you have had a history of *feeling* unwilling to give, your feelings will likely persist until your course of action changes, meaning you must institute a new course of action. Simply take action on the matter regardless of your feelings, and the emotions and innate ability will follow.

Even the most disciplined and successful athletes may not want to train every day that they are scheduled to. They do it anyways, because they know the payout and emotional high from having spent worthwhile time getting closer to a goal will generate an indescribable feeling. They are acting on their goal or habit whether they *feel* like it or not, and fundamentally, even if they had temporarily felt “out of it,” the feelings will return at a greater magnitude. It is the

exact same dynamic for anyone. The right feelings will come if the right actions are taken.

Sometimes the people who we never thought would (or could) improve themselves go far and beyond our furthest expectations, and achieve astonishing success for themselves. Most of the time, two reactions compose the entirety of the reaction catalog: we either resent these people and ignore them further, or we are in disbelief and think, “As soon as I can talk to or interact with that person again, they will prove to be the exact same person they have always been.”

Sadly, this is a terrible way to look at things and is usually not the case. People will always act consistently with the way they see themselves, but if someone changes the way they see themselves, this will translate readily to their behavior, and before you know it, there is a different person standing before your eyes.

Do not be afraid to take the steps that will lead to the fulfillment of your dreams. You only have one life; use it to the absolute fullest capacity you possibly can! Once you get going, it becomes easier and easier, as well as more fun. Live *in* the day, but not *for* it. Reach out to other people, and love what you do so that you can do what you love!

ACTION PROMPT:

Who can I talk to that would help me shape a clearer idea of what I can do or where I can go to pursue my dreams?

When was the last time I felt I had nothing to lose and what was I doing?

DELIBERATE INTROSPECTION

“The visionary starts with a clean sheet of paper, and re-imagines the world.” – Malcolm Gladwell

Is there anyone I have not reached out to in a long time, and know I should contact this person? Who is it?

Am I holding back when I communicate to someone? Why do I feel the need to reserve?

“Take a chance! The person who goes farthest is generally the one who is willing to do and dare. The ‘sure thing’ boat never gets far from shore.” – Dale Carnegie

“Decide what you want, and decide what you are willing to exchange for it. Establish your priorities and go to work.” – H. L. Hunt

Introverts often have an easier time performing introspection with themselves, simply because we already spend more of our time alone and it helps us feel “filled up” or refreshed. Therefore, this section is geared more towards extroverts and anyone who is learning that the opportunity to soak up peace, quiet, and reflection is underrated these days.

Most people would rather encounter pure noise than silence. This is because the silence would force them to be contemplative; to address their problems and be real with themselves and for most people, being real with themselves is a much higher and broader challenge. Consequently, it’s a painful experience. Honesty requires one to admit their life is not the way they would like it to be. We all want to believe we belong, are significant, missed, appreciated, and loved. And for certain lucky people, some of these may be true at one given time, sometimes all of them simultaneously true.

However, most of the time, whether consciously or subconsciously, we create more ways to make ourselves attractive to other people, large or small. This ties in with wanting to avoid silence, because silence would mean we have to address the “less easy” parts of ourselves.

Another part of this silence avoidance phenomenon is that the seeming pressure to do something or to complete some small task becomes rapidly apparent. We have become so adapted to living and reflexing in our lightning-paced world that when things are not happening, we feel the need to fill in the gap and make use of our time. But simply because you are doing *something* does not automatically mean that the thing you are doing is useful or worthwhile.

Some people are so unacquainted with circumstances of pressure in life that when pressure arrives, they crumble upon impact. I am sure you can think of one or two people in your life who have had a lot of valuable and deeply needed things provided to them at a young age, and how today they may still

be conflict- and struggle-averse. There are people who do not have any “life” foundation. They flit to and from each new refuge on a regular basis.

What lies at the core of this predicament is that **people who struggle to maintain a foundation for themselves, in part through regular silent contemplation and self-reflection, are those who do not squarely look themselves in the heart to acknowledge what is there, and what is missing. These are the types of people who are not willing to look into the depths of their being and acknowledge what they are grateful for, the types of growth they are going through and what they have yet to go through.**

When approaching silence, many people simply do not want to **think**. It requires work. Going into one’s head can be an uncomfortable task (and even a foreign place) because it could have been weeks, months or years since they last gave an important topic prolonged and honest thoughts. **It is just like cleaning a room or taking out the trash – the less often you do it, the more the junk starts to consume a space that was originally intended for beautiful furniture or making memories.** Make a commitment to only take on what you can handle in terms of busyness and work; keep parts of your days and weeks reserved for quiet reflection time.

ACTION PROMPT:

What is the best time of day (every day) for me to reserve 5-10 minutes out of my schedule to take a notebook and do some journaling and contemplation?

Where is a good place for me to do this? Is it in my residence or should I find a place that is more conducive to reflection?

Do I find myself more of an introvert or an extrovert? Am I filled up by silence and aloneness, or am I filled up being active with others?

Do I find myself silence-averse? Do I enjoy silence? For both of these questions ask why or why not.

Do I ever get headaches from the noise and clutter that surrounds me in life? Can I tell that I want and need a break from this type of lifestyle? What action steps am I taking to foster healthy space in my residence and my life?

What is taking up space both physically and in my heart? Based on a perceived notion that it will somehow continue to add value to my life, is there anything I am not willing to give up, even when it does not give up?

If I have too much “noise clutter” or actual clutter in my life, who can help me remove some of it until I am able to work on the rest myself?

(Quick Hint: the best tip for de-cluttering is this ... if it does not make you smile, throw it out. If there is not any current use for it, if it is not important information and there isn't any sentimental value, then it will not be critical to have in 5 or 10 years).

EMOTIONAL STUDIES

Happiness is a Tougher Emotion than Sadness

People are too busy with fleeting matters to really soak up their own emotions and probe the underlying significance of their experiences.

We drive right past our desperately sought, poorly attained plateaus of experience and then wonder where they were when we return to our homes. We

smother the surfaces of our lives with attractive, convenient “truths” so we do not have to give up an inch of our comfort, and can hustle forward on our aimless road. We reach out for what is placed before us by those, who, by all means, do not have our best interests at heart, and then complain later that we did not get what we wanted.

C.S. Lewis himself rarely traveled in cars because he felt they forced one to experience portions of life at a speed that was too much to handle. If that was a decision made by this highly esteemed man, it is certainly worth giving some thought.

Due to certain careers or livelihoods, it may not be possible to discontinue all automotive travel such as he, but we could all benefit from a break from car travel. The point is: **Yes, we must make the decision to undergo an experience in order to grasp it fully, and we must purposefully take our time. Living in the moment is absolutely and wholeheartedly encouraged. It is living for the moment that is not only cheap and risky, but foolish and barren.**

Happiness is a challenging emotion to deliberately pursue, retain, and arrive at. On the surface, this sounds silly and laughable, but it is a far more complex dynamic than most people give it credit.

It is so difficult because we do not have many opportunities outside of our own head and choices to find it. Largely, the best way to remain happy is to take personal responsibility and this is precisely why we primarily (albeit somewhat inadvertently) avoid it or come up dry on happiness. We want to avoid work at all costs, even when it involves making, or allowing, ourselves to be happy.

So many folks turn to people other than themselves for their “happiness fix”, and whenever they can, they keep themselves pointed in this direction as long as possible. This allows them to keep themselves moving and motivated without having to do any of the work. Yet, it becomes difficult to handle life this way over time, because of the lack of efficiency that it proves to hold.

Being creatures of comfort by nature, in order to legitimately comprehend and experience the intended purpose of our existence – to fully grow – we must consciously be at ceaseless war with ourselves. On the surface this

sounds harsh, impossible, laughable; however, we are truly only more free, more capable and more alive when we embrace this as the undeniable truth.

The way this comes into action with happiness is repeatedly reminding ourselves that our parcels of happiness will rarely arrive from other people, or their choices. We must battle our inclinations to settle for convenience and comfort in the attempt to take advantage of someone else's resources. We must use our own resources and ability to make choices to bring ourselves happiness.

The reason we cannot look to others as the unfailing source of our happiness is because they will, at some point, fail us. There will be a letdown, there will be a shortcoming, there will be a need to amend, there will be a mistake, or there will be a frustration. When we bind our emotions and choices to any fixed object or person, that object or person is free to do as they will with them.

“If you want to live a happy life, tie it to a goal, not to people or things.”- Albert Einstein

An inanimate object can fail, fall to ruin or fade away. Then our entrusted emotions will be dashed to pieces, only to be salvaged by our courage and patience – if we possess those virtues. A human can depart from the framework of our existence, become corrupted, use gifts and external sacrifices for personal gain, and any stretch of similarly unfortunate and selfish actions.

We can choose to close our hearts and deny the openness that will draw us to life and love again. Or we can maintain our steadfastness for the pursuit of a worthwhile life in the wake of nightmares; pushing beyond the areas of reality that seek to weigh us down.

Anger and sadness are easier emotions to approach and fuel than happiness because they do not require that we travel or leave our comfort zone. (These emotions are not wholly undesirable, as I discuss elsewhere in the book. The type of sadness I am referring to is that which willingly debilitates, can be avoided and is only detrimental.)

They are emotions that validate what we have tasted and want to taste, because they satisfy us in the here and now. And with these emotions there isn't a need

to change our perspective, alter our ways, remove what has been constructed, or build something new. We do not need to be exemplary or upstanding when we are angry or sad. Also, it is easier to garner attention when we are boiling or dejected, which happens to feed our contentedness on a base level, in a twisted sort of way.

For happiness, we must leave the comfort that runs so readily in our veins. We must face the fact that every day we are dependent upon our own “know-how”, experience and choices to lead us to happiness. Above many other aspects, we must have a desire for it. Too many people sit back and wait for happiness to show up as though it were a shipment still tracking towards its delivery.

There will be events in one's life that yield a direct result or reaction of happiness. Yet on the flip side, there are no guarantees in life other than death. Many of us mope around and complain that happiness has not arrived when we can simply choose it for ourselves and have it.

ACTION PROMPT:

Am I someone who is easily made happy? If so, why is this? If not, why is this?

What am I usually happy about? Is there something that always seems to put me in a good mood? Is this a healthy thing? Is there something that always seems to put me in a bad mood?

Who is the happiest person I know? Why are they usually happy? How often does their happiness affect me? Have I ever seen this person unhappy, and if so, for what reason? What are they happy about? What can I learn from them?

Who is the least happy person I know? What makes them so unhappy? How often does their lack of happiness affect me? Have I ever seen this person happy, and if so, for what reason? What can I learn from this person?

“Be happy for no reason, like a child. If you are happy for a reason, you’re in trouble, because that reason can be taken from you.” – Deepak Chopra

SORROW REFINES AND DEVELOPS

We avoid sorrow, deep contemplation and solitude because it means all grows quieter, questions from one’s innermost depths must be answered (or at least confronted once again) and pain is easily felt.

This goes hand in hand with deliberate introspection, the attraction or aversion to silence that each individual has, and the dynamic within us all that is constantly avoiding pain or seeking pleasure. **The pursuit and refining of our emotions towards beneficial sorrow is another step in creating self-discipline, the delaying of gratification and deeper “personhood”.**

Sorrow is avoided by many because it requires stillness (not being able to move around usually does not feel fun); a calming of the emotions (also does not feel as fun); and focusing one’s mental energies on places that do not automatically provide easy or convenient answers. Pensive sorrow creates the opportunity for life-altering truths to surface, which is the last thing many people would call convenient, fun or easy.

But the mastery of sorrow lies upon this premise: **When we make the choice to fine-tune and redirect our emotions to uncover further facets of reality that we were once oblivious to, it allows us to appreciate the areas of reality that we have long been more familiar with more strongly.** In other words, through allowing sorrow to run its full course within our spirits, our bright days are brighter, our gratitude is deeper and our joy is more joyous.

A clearer example is when we lose a dearly loved one. It hits us like a train, and parts of us that have never felt grief or sorrow (emotionally and physically) suddenly start to plunge into a pit of seeming emptiness and absence from light.

But it is *through* this experience that we are able to stand taller and stronger than ever before. It creates in us a new and fresh appreciation of who this person was, what this person did, and how they affected all of those around them. We end up seeing them for who they truly were, capturing their aspirations in the light of how they always hoped life could be.

After going through such a difficult time, it provides us with a perspective and an attitude of wanting to make the most of every day, and making every day count. It transforms supposedly menial and mundane occurrences into fantastic opportunities to hold nothing back.

ACTION PROMPT:

Who is someone I know that is sorrowful, but maintains and carries this emotion in a way that builds up and hones, rather than simply tears down and creates depression?

Do I consider myself a sorrowful person? Do I consider myself a happy person? Which am I more bent towards? For each question, why or why not is this?

Have I ever lost a loved one, whether a dear friend or a family member? How did I cope with it?

What did I learn from that sorrow? Did I learn anything new?

Did something once foreign seem familiar, or vice versa?

Do I know someone who recently lost a loved one? Have I let them know that I am there for them?

What does sorrow create in me? Do I want to run away from it or do I usually invite it? Is there a place in my heart I do not want to go back to because it would be too painful?

STUDIES ON INTERPERSONAL DYNAMISM

HEART OF A CHILD, MIND OF AN ADULT VERSUS

HEART OF AN ADULT, MIND OF A CHILD

There are different balances and transitions that we undergo from our transformation from a child to an adult. Our hearts, minds, attitudes, beliefs, relationships, choices, and habits all encounter different pieces of information, whether they stand in congruence or conflict to our current positions, that end up shaping and forming us further into our personalities.

As these transitions take place, a common imbalance becomes too frequently observed. During the steps from childhood to adulthood, **it is a major effort to try to retain the heart of a child as well as fostering the mind of an adult, rather than succumbing to growing the heart of an adult and the mind of a child.**

Here is what I mean by all of that. **It is natural for our tastes, desires, and longings to change stylistically as we grow from children into adults, but the cores of our desires and wants almost always stay the same.** We want sex and physical intimacy as adults, but our longing to be deeply accepted for

who we are on an individual level is at the core of sexual desires, a core that has remained since childhood.

This is precisely why pornography does not fulfill – it represents merely a fraction of one segment of sexuality and intimacy – nowhere near the entire spectrum or scope of what intimacy through sex was designed to be. Pornography is a portrayal of people using each other as objects purely for animalistic and mechanistic pleasure, rather than two individuals being enveloped in the qualities, characteristics, and affections of one another.

We want to have friends who like and respect us for who we are, who will back us up when we need it, and can be a shoulder to cry on or vent to. We may buy expensive things, dress a certain way, act or talk a certain way, or have a type of hobby that speaks to the person we are underneath, and this could often be our attempt to surround ourselves with people who will accept us. This has its roots in the equally childhood-era desire and longing to have friends and counterparts who will value us for who we are underneath, regardless of any earthly, tangible behaviors or objects.

So here is where the struggle comes in: We end up trading our healthy, childlike-faith desires and inclinations for more selfish, reserved actions and gestures that our adult world tries so hard to impose on us. We decide as long as we have enough money, we can make any type of choice we want, without any negative repercussions, and anyone affected in the meantime will just have to suck it up and deal with their own problems. The imbalances that we start to create end up causing more pain than we thought they possibly could.

Here are a few examples of each temperament. They are not meant to act authoritatively; they are just initial illustrations.

True sexual desire is *wanting the person* you are with, and being wanted in return, not simply going after it like animals. The physical side of it is sure to create excitement and add a thrill to your interaction, but it is not a substitute for authentic, emotional, and mental intimacy. When sex is truly fulfilling it is because both individuals find themselves captivated by the other, turned on by *who* the other person is, not *what* they are.

Acting with a child's heart: inviting someone into your life without holding their personality to a preconceived rubric of "worthiness", and forgiving them after you have been hurt, even repeatedly. (This is not to say that only forgiveness is needed, or that justice plays no part in the world. Forgiveness and justice must work together in order for the world to thrive – as it ought to.)

Acting with an adult's mind: understanding that it is prudent not to overspend; therefore, not charging more to a credit card in a given month than you know you can afford by the time payment is needed.

Acting with an adult's heart: pursuing someone for their sexual or otherwise materialistic appeal, and having your wishes granted, without acknowledging or fulfilling their needs as a person and a human.

Acting with a child's mind: hurting someone by accident, whether it be physical, verbal or emotional (due to not wanting to leave one's comfort zone) and not apologizing.

The core of a child's heart is a lot of the values, characteristics, and principles we have been taught, coincidentally, from childhood. A lot of these characteristics come from Galatians 5:22,23 as well:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

Except for the virtues of patience and perhaps self-control, most children would often be reliable examples of these virtues.

The idea behind not giving in to our more selfish desires as we grow older is to **focus on others**. When we keep in mind that other people are in this game of life as well, healthy perspectives and choices land in front of us much more easily.

At the same time, the path of falling into destructive cycles is equally slippery if we do not remain vigilant within our own lives. It takes a lot of courage to build and retain habits that will serve us for the rest of our life. If we want to have any ounce of satisfaction or fulfillment within our relationships it is up to us to work on keeping the **heart of a child** and the **mind of an adult**.

ACTION PROMPT:

Is there someone I am holding a grudge or an unforgiving spirit against – someone I need to forgive? Who is this person? How did they hurt me? How am I able to look past this hurt and resolve the relationship?

Is there someone I need to ask for forgiveness? Who is this person? How did I hurt this person? What can I do to help rebuild the trust and fluidity of the relationship?

Are there healthy childlike qualities I could foster more strongly?

Do I scoff at people who have high hopes and big dreams? What is it that makes me uncomfortable, or view these people as unrealistic?

Why do I think these people's thoughts do not seem reasonable? Do their word-paintings and ideas strike a chord within me that is unsettling? What is inside me that gets ruffled up when other people talk about grandiose goals? Why do I clam up or become disapproving?

If I had children, would there be things I would not let them do because I thought I was incapable of such things?

What do I let hold me back from reaching freedom, and are these barriers legitimate? Do I want the freedom to spend more time with my family? Do I want the freedom to spend more time doing what I love? Do I want the freedom to launch my own business? Are these things wishes or *musts*?

Do I view people as inherently valuable, as “creatures of worth” simply on their individuality alone? Why or why not?

Do I hold prerequisites for the type of people I consider valuable? Why or why not?

Do people need to be sexy, smart, wealthy or influential (or all of these) in order for me to consider them worth my time? Why or why not?

How can I increase my spirit of love? Today, who is the one person I should tell that I love them?

How can I increase my spirit of joy? What helps to get me excited and how can I extend that energy to my interactions with other people more often? What ways can I use my existing energy and passions to build others up?

How can I increase my spirit of peace? Do I seek peace out regularly? What I can I do to re-encounter peace on a regular basis?

How can I increase my spirit of patience? Am I a patient person? Are there certain instances when it is difficult for me to be patient? What can I wait for, with a deep hope, that will result in the strengthening of my patience?

How can I increase my spirit of kindness? Is it easy for me to be kind? Am I usually kind to some people but not to others? Is there anyone I am not kind to? How can I reach out to this person in kindness the next time I interact with them?

How can I increase my spirit of goodness? Is there someone I can serve? Can I do a small favor for someone that will impact him or her in a big way?

How can I increase my spirit of faithfulness? Who do I have faith in? Do I have healthy faith in myself – the type that keeps me working hard and enthusiastically? Do I know someone who could use a boost of faith?

How can I increase my spirit of gentleness? Do I react in anger without reasonable cause? What am I harboring that feeds into this reactionary characteristic? Who can I be gentle with more often? How can I learn from the gentleness of certain animals?

How can I increase my spirit of self-control? This relates to anger often as well – what can I do to keep myself calm? Is there something I do on a regular basis that stresses me out, whether I admit it or not? Do I regularly engage in activities that help me to decompress from the daily distresses of life? Am I aware of my eustresses as well?

COMPLIMENT TO HEART AND CRITICISM TO HEAD VERSUS
COMPLIMENT TO HEAD AND CRITICISM TO HEART

This ties in directly with the heart of a child and mind of an adult concept. It is the challenge we face when we receive a compliment; the challenge to appropriately file away the compliment in our hearts without letting it affect our heads in an inflated way.

Compliments are great. I do not want to diminish the beauty, significance, power or meaning behind someone offering a few encouraging words to another. We need to be verbally lifted up in our world; it is a worthwhile occurrence.

The caution we must take finds its roots in the practice of humility and self-discipline. It is having the raw guts and follow-through to accept a compliment, but not let it create a sense of entitlement or bloated importance.

This happens when a well-regarded person compliments someone they don't know personally. The latter can end up using it as a bragging right with their friends or family. There are few things more damaging than taking the words of someone you do not know that well and twisting them to be different than the intent.

So how do you keep yourself impervious to the toxic effects of a compliment that could go to your head? **Thank the person who gave you the positive words and remember that the people who build you up will help to bring your dreams and goals to pass. The ones who encourage you and who have your back can be the lifeblood of your aspirations more than you realize.**

The other side of this experience is when we receive criticism. As we go through life, critiques of our personhood and our worth will become just as common, if not (unfortunately) more common than the compliments we receive and it is just as much up to us to file those comments appropriately as it is with compliments and verbal boosts.

The most common way we react to criticism and harsh words is the opposite of how we receive compliments, and that is for criticism to go to our hearts. Verbal attacks and emotional barraging hurts, but since we usually take it personally, it is hard not to place such comments in our hearts.

This is the natural occurrence because we can understand that when we are attacked, something is not right. Our hearts automatically want to set it right, and so it weighs down heavier upon us during the time the problem has not been resolved.

The key to handling criticism smoothly, or to not allow it to affect us at all, is **to not take it personally**. Just let it roll off your back and move on with your day, understanding that the person who was selfish enough to attempt that attack with you was only wasting their time.

Now, constructive criticism is a different story entirely. **If it is constructive criticism, do not take it to heart in a negative way. Allow it to be the proper boost you need to improve your performance and be thankful for the person who was willing and able to give you feedback in this balanced (and rare) way.**

If sole criticism comes from someone you know and respect, there are already different factors in play. Hopefully if they out-rank you, they handled the matter in a professional and courteous manner using the "sandwich" technique of constructive criticism. If not, it is completely healthy and advisable to talk to a trusted individual in private about what happened, and make a plan for how you will proceed in getting the problem resolved.

ACTION PROMPT:

How can I be more accepting of compliments in my heart, rather than in my head? Do I file compliments in different parts of my psyche based on who delivered the compliment?

How can I be more accepting of criticism in my head, rather than in my heart? Am I someone who is easily disturbed in this regard? Do I need the approval of all of those around me in order to feel like I belong, or am worthwhile?

Is it difficult for me to believe I have room for improvement? Are there certain people I can take advice and encouragement from on this topic, but others I cannot?

BE PROUD TO TELL YOUR UNIQUE STORY

As we transition and grow from children to adults, it frequently poses as a challenge to determine where our individuality ends and where our place in society begins. For those who have attended public school, it can be an even larger and more complex barrier to overcome when experiencing trial and error in regards to relationships. Early on we can struggle frequently, feeling unable to ascertain where we belong in life.

Being bombarded by societal pressures and cues, both at large and in our relational microcosm, we sense that our personal goals and preferences are being threatened and quelled, even by those who claim to have our future prosperity at the bedrock of their intentions. Yet, since we still crave societal acceptance, we cave and allow those around us to continue molding us.

The predicament that unfolds: our story begins to become muddled or warped. One day we had a clear sense of where we were going; and the next day we've done a near 180. We begin to feel we have lost control and do not know where to turn next.

Often the best way to prepare for the future and make better decisions is to reflect on the past. I know this method has helped me to create space for more powerful decisions regarding my future. Take a few moments and write down some key reflections of your past.

Where I was 10 years ago. (If 10 years isn't quite far back enough, try 20 or even 30.)

How I was feeling about life in general.

The biggest lesson I learned.

A mistake I made in the past that allows me to see how I want to do things differently in the future.

The closest friend I had.

The person I wanted the least to do with.

The person I most looked up to.

With these questions answered and reflections made, you can start to uncover your story once again, and prepare yourself to live in greater confidence and optimism towards the future. Keep these observations and insights handy, for throughout the rest of this book you will be putting them to major use – perhaps in ways you never experienced before.

Your story is not the mistakes you have made or the wrong turns you have taken, it is the obstacles you have overcome and the person you are because of it.

ACTION PROMPT:

For this section, simply keep handy the thoughts and reflections you just wrote down. Write them down on a new piece of paper or mark this page so that you can easily reference them.

TAKE ONE HARD, LONG LOOK IN THE MIRROR

Who stands before you? Perhaps it is someone afraid of those who have entered his or her life in the past few years, damaging and stealing what was not theirs to lay hold of so disapprovingly. Perhaps it is someone downcast because he or she has been struggling to prove they can provide for their family. It doesn't matter where you are at right now, I want you to take a moment to look yourself in the mirror and remind yourself of who you are and what you are capable of creating.

Life gets tough. Life is tough. There can be times when it seems the pressure is unrelenting and tomorrow will not arrive as a bright, full-of-hope occasion. You have traversed paths you thought you would never set foot upon, and have struggled to stay awake and alive in this sometimes horrific state of existence called life.

I know what it is like. But it is time to remind yourself that **the story is not over yet.** You have been given a chance to stand tall, proud, and breathe life into your lungs. There is no “you” outside of you. **You** are the only *you* who can be **you**. You have been given two eyes, a body, a mind and heart that are willing and able

to live. So tomorrow morning, stand tall knowing you have been given the gift of life, which is the greatest gift of all.

There may have been lost battles, but while the war is still waging, your side is that of the victor's, if you **stand and fight**. Carry on my friend.

“Today you are You, that is truer than true. There is no one alive who is Youer than You.” – Dr. Seuss

ACTION PROMPT:

Are there songs that help to motivate me in the morning? What are they? How can I make sure to play them more often?

Do I eat breakfast every morning? If not, how can I go about changing this? Who can give me the tips and pointers I need?

Am I getting as much sleep as I should each night (for most adults, seven to eight hours)? If not, what do I need to remove or change in my schedule so sleep comes easier and more plentiful?

(Quick Tip: Whenever possible, go to bed by 10 or 11pm. This allows the body to absorb the maximum amount of deep, quality sleep that it can, rather than simply entering a “doze” or “nap” phase.)

When I wake up, what do I tell myself? Am I ready and able to face the day, or do I put off what is inevitable for as long as I can? Do I use positive self-language or negative self-language?

CARRYING ONESELF TO HELP CARRY OTHERS

“Speaking up has often been lauded as courage. But maybe quieting down and listening to others is courage, too - especially those you disagree with.” – Eugene Cho

If we are fortunate enough to have (or had) loving parents, early on we experience work and care done *for* us. There is nothing better than being freshly transitioned from infancy to toddlerhood still having everything done for you. For example, one parent gets up to go with you to the bathroom; you are fed and dressed; given plenty to keep you busy during down time or free time; and tucked into bed at night.

Naturally, as we grow older we progress into greater stages of adulthood's independence. Even if we gripe and complain about how we still want certain tasks taken care of for us, those of us who legitimately have our best interests in heart and mind will gently spur us onwards towards greater independence. Often, for those who struggle with obtaining genuine independence, it is a matter of not having witnessed what healthy, true, full and free independence really looks like.

Not all of us grow up in the same type of home, and financial matters fall directly in tandem with this subject. Money is not everything, but having a significant level of financial backing certainly aids one in approaching independence.

This is largely because **with more money come more choices**. Each person still has to pay close attention to their money and spend it appropriately, but this is a privilege and an opportunity that not everyone has. Having greater wealth in the financial sector is something worth striving towards so people understand how to use it properly and understand that **money is not an end, but a means to an end**.

“I hope everybody can get rich and famous and have everything they ever dreamed of, so they will know that it's not the answer.” – Jim Carrey

Aside from money, people can still learn to be more dependent on something than they should be. As creatures who inherently look for the “easy way out” (in as many pursuits and experiences as we can) we are truly setting ourselves up for failure the more we rely solely on other people for our success and happiness.

The healthy type of independence that we all should strive for as adult human beings is a truly magnificent, remarkable and exceptional reality to behold. When an individual takes it upon himself or herself to be independent in a healthy way, that individual is creating space for a few outstanding occurrences.

1- That individual is now open to fully experiencing what it is like to have freedom in one's adult life.

I do not believe it is possible to express the full extent of total adult independence until one arrives at that point through one's own hard work, and experiences it thusly. Otherwise, it is comparable to a close friend describing an

extremely powerful scene in a fantastic movie instead of going to the movie and seeing it for yourself. You would be very disappointed by your friend's description or reenactment after watching the scene and realizing your friend did a shoddy job of painting the picture.

Naturally, in real life it is not as simple as “going to the movie,” but there is no substitute for surmounting an achievement *yourself* instead of hiring or explaining to someone else how to do it. **Achievement is a gift in and of itself**. There is a blissful joy that arises when a seemingly impossible obstacle to overcome was vanquished in the name of persistence.

2- The individual is now capable of helping others who are less fortunate to achieve a greater level of independence.

The rush that you get from volunteer work is quite unlike anything else on Earth. To break it down even further, “volunteer work” is not even the correct terminology. When we are able to break past the typical barriers of “pity” and offer a helping hand on our own time (and our own dime) to our brothers and sisters who need it, that is what is called compassion as well as love and sacrifice. When authentic *loving* takes place, beyond cultural, racial and geographic borders, there is nothing that can stand in comparison.

I suppose the only reason the phrase “volunteer work” is used is because it is a technical term and does not automatically generate double takes from people. We have forgotten what it looks like and means to actually *love*, so we usher in more convenient terms to take the place of where brutally honest words should reside.

It does not take much time to experience a massive cash flow to understand that money cannot bring all of the satisfaction in the world, nor can it bring all of life's answers to the surface. **However, it only takes a small sip from the cup of generosity to understand that giving back is the most rewarding engagement through which we can spend our time.**

3- Friends and other people in the individual's life who may not necessarily be as driven as them now have a “front-row” opportunity to witness what it is like to have full independence.

We all get lazy at times. Even the best of us find days and moments where we would rather throw in the towel than keep pushing ahead. We have all had aspirations that started with high hopes and ended with sighs and regrets. We all know what it is like to start out on a difficult road and stop early or turn back because the air is only getting thicker, the trees are only growing denser and the sun is only fading faster.

We try to convince ourselves we knew it was not worth it in the first place, and if we had only been smart enough to talk ourselves out of it at the beginning we would not be on such an onerous journey.

We begin to wonder how close we are to the end, and if we are even going to make it to the end at all. All of a sudden, we hear a familiar voice cutting through the thicket: it is our friend, getting nearer and nearer. Our friend is calling out, telling us it is all right, that we *are* on the right path, that we *will* make it to the end.

We almost start to laugh about the possibility of being on the right path. How could this be? We have been fighting just to stay alive, much less have the energy or time to consider whether or not we made the right decision.

Such is the example when we noticed a friend has successfully made it to a level of life that we wish to be at, and we wonder how they got there and how we allowed ourselves *not* to get there.

If this is the case with you, take some time to get in touch with a friend you deeply respect for their accomplishments of independence and ask them a few questions in person. I can guarantee if you ask them politely and wholeheartedly, they will gladly find a time and place to share their struggles and successes with you.

If you are someone who has worked hard and made great sacrifices to get where you are, you may already know what I am about to say. If you are this type of person, it will serve you well to keep your eyes and ears open towards a select number of people who would be most willing to accept what you can offer them. Your honest and appropriate advice, coupled with your time, would be a precious gift.

It is so beneficial to be able to cultivate an environment of independence because it is the optimal level of being able to share and enjoy planet Earth with other adult humans. There is no greater prospect than having each adult on this planet be able to enjoy time, food, merriment and pleasure with other adults, after having achieved independence through tireless commitment. **The sacrifice of planting makes the fruit of success that much sweeter to taste upon its harvest.**

ACTION PROMPT:

Who is the most independent person I know? What can I learn from them? How have they affected me as well as other people?

Who is the most independent person I know from my age bracket or generation? What can I learn from them? How have they affected me, and other friends of mine, or people in my profession?

What is one thing I want to achieve by this exact day next year? (Mark the date down.)

What three areas do I want to be more independent in on this exact day next year? (Mark the date down.)

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Even if I am not as independent as I would like to be, whom could I reach out to talk about this?

In what way(s) did I find they are interested in the help I might be able to provide?

YOU ARE ONLY AVERAGE IF YOU CHOOSE TO BE

One of my favorite points to discuss and encourage people about is the topic of “being average”. Think about this one intently for a moment. The primary reason many people believe they are average is because **no one took the time to tell them otherwise**. There is a deeply habituated and terribly dangerous lack of affirmative words in our culture, and we are suffering daily because of it.

Few parents go out of their way to reiterate to their children that they are unique, above average and capable of achieving greatness through their choices; especially on a prolonged basis. Many people neglect to address this vital aspect of living even for *themselves*. Then, they continue to live their lives viewing themselves as all too similar to everyone else, subjecting themselves to similar life patterns, choices, and vocations.

The reason this is necessary to comprehend is because **mighty mental power resides in the way you see yourself. Many of your choices come from your self-perception. If you want to change your choices, it starts with changing your thoughts.**

This is a big reason why many people who say they are going to quit smoking try, but end up never following through with their words. Tony Robbins was the first author and speaker to really popularize this. The smoker was able to speak about how they wanted to remove the habit of smoking from their life, but they were not able to change their perception about smoking in relation to themselves.

If you want to remove a bad habit, or even start a good habit, the first step to take is rewiring your thoughts in relation to that subject. You must alter the very foundation of your personality in respect to the change you want to make. For example, if you wanted to begin eating healthier foods, and someone asked you if you still eat junk food, you would have to respond that that is not how you are anymore. It has absolutely nothing to do with your personhood.

Since average people do not see themselves as capable of certain changes or choices, they sit and live within the bounds that they think other people or other social constructs have put around them. They conclude themselves and never challenge the status quo about the world or even their own spirits because they do not recognize they have the capacity to make changes.

Here is a brief layout of a few pairs regarding the differences between the choices that “average” and “un-average” people make, and the thought processes that fall in line with each.

Average people do not make attempts at eating healthier foods because they think it will be too hard, and they do not want to give up the junky treats that they are currently consuming.

Un-average people take strides towards replacing their poor eating habits with newer ones, because they recognize that the benefit and enjoyment they will receive from fresh and whole foods will marginalize any pleasure they had from quick-fix junk food.

Average people do not go out of their way to take small, but meaningful, actions towards brightening another person’s day, because they are too busy complaining and grumbling about the bad day they are having and hoping someone will rescue them from it.

Un-average people take a few moments throughout their day to remind regular strangers, as well as loved ones, that they are appreciated. They may even offer up small compliments to brighten up someone’s day, because they understand the value that arrives through giving outweighs any sour moment.

Average people do not take chances and risks that could change their own life, because they are too scared about what they could end up losing.

Un-average people readily prepare themselves and others for the calculated and healthy risks they are going to take. They capture the reward that will arrive because of risks being taken, and know that what they are giving up to reach their new plateau of living will pale in comparison to what they will achieve through sacrifice.

To become an un-average person, you must see yourself as having the capacity to make the change. It may mean that you have to flip an entire circumstance or choice on its head in order to see different patterns than the ones you have been seeing all along.

The second part (about being average or un-average) is your personal viewpoint of qualities or characteristics. As I had mentioned earlier, most people never truly receive legitimate highlights about their character or their inner gold, and they may not receive too many wrongful and critical remarks either. This leaves most people stuck in the middle, believing that they are not capable of reaching the heights of their ideals, but that they are also better than just living their lives in a gutter.

As you may see, this quickly becomes debilitating because it puts a roof and a floor on a room that was never meant to have either. Average people do not understand that they are born to shoot for the stars as well as fall (at times). The paralysis caused by trying to remain within “average bounds” makes people think there isn’t a bone in their body that can muster the strength for living out their dreams.

Right alongside this, they also believe if they somehow find themselves anywhere but their small room, that it must mean failure by default. However, true failure would be not taking the chance of stepping outside one’s room at all.

Be confident and know that you do have the capacity to push past your limits and live a life of “un-averageness”.

ACTION PROMPT:

Who can I offer up some encouragement to today? Who is extraordinary and how can I remind them so?

What is a small and encouraging thing I can do for a stranger today, or throughout the next week?

In what ways do I think I am average? What are the boundaries I believe I can't push? What limitations do I think are imposed on me? How legitimate are these limitations? Have I ever tried flipping this situation on its head?

Have I ever tried quitting a bad habit, and was not able to because of my persistent self-perception that was rooted in the bad habit?

Have I ever tried starting a good habit, but was not able to because of my continual self-perception that was rooted in my limitations?

Is there someone who frequently reminds me about how I am not average? How can I thank them?

Is there someone I know who voices that they see themselves as average? Do I ever speak up about this? How can I let them know that this is not true of them? What do I see in them that pushes past boundaries in a productive and paradigm challenging way?

Am I afraid of failure? What does failure mean to me?

Am I afraid of success? It sounds like a strange question, but is there anything in my life that would be challenged or uprooted due to losing its original bounds? What do I think about this?

If I fail with something, what am I afraid I will lose? Is it just my comfort within something, or is it graver and more serious?

If I succeed with something, what will I gain or become? How often do I contemplate this? Is this a regular mental space that I occupy, or is it a place that I laugh at?

PERFECTION AND AVERAGE ARE YOUR ENEMIES

As we just discussed, being average is to be avoided because it puts limitations on you. Perfection is an equally dangerous pursuit, for a number of reasons.

1- Unlike being average, it is unattainable. Try as we may, none of us will ever reach this point.

Perfection is deadly in this sense, because by nature of such a pursuit, anything less than perfection is inadequate, and therefore deemed a failure. Perfection cannot withstand anything that is not it, and so it therefore becomes entirely exclusive and elitist in its own right. It becomes a vacuum within itself.

2- It does not allow for mistakes to be made; for plans to be changed; or for anything or anyone to be truly human. Perfection is not within our blood, or the fiber of anything living on this organic Earth.

We were not born or built to be perfect. That is beyond our reach. For if we were perfect, we would be entirely foreign to ourselves. The human characteristics and qualities that we have come to know within ourselves do not have functionalities of perfection.

3- If you are pursuing perfection, it does not allow you to experience what is raw and human to begin with. Perfection is actually a limitation on what is enjoyable.

Many things that are seemingly perfect are really just excellent, or magnificent. As a parallel, many things that are excellent would not be enjoyable anymore if they were pushed to the brink of where perfection supposedly lies.

Furthermore, much of what we as humans enjoy is largely in the gray areas of life. Beyond such matters as morality, the weather, colors, numbers, letters, and other basic facets of life, the rest is really fields and mountains of gray. We can think we know how a date or even a friendship is going to pan out, but there are not any guarantees at the end of the day.

With this in mind, we can unravel why ice cream has the potential to be so enjoyable. We do not eat ice cream for every meal, every day, but we do not eat raw vegetables or grains every meal, every day either. Because of this, ice cream becomes a highly enjoyable treat and opportunity to seize. Since we do not (and necessarily cannot) want to eat it every day, the times that we get to appreciate it in full become marvelous.

“Perfection” would be eating ice cream every day. But since we are not built to work with such a dynamic, pleasure and fulfillment are found elsewhere.

Average is your enemy for a number of reasons as well.

1- Being okay with being average is being okay with being average. That is a scary and destructive thought within itself.

Some people are simply oblivious to the fact that they are not challenging their averageness. They are keeping themselves comfortable without addressing or thinking about how much it is actually costing them. Sticking in a field of being average quickly becomes far more costly than most people realize. Understand that it is better to be making mistakes and going places (that you would not normally go) than to be running the risk of holding the same circle of comfort down for too long.

2- Pitching your tent in “Camp Average” is a statement that you are throwing away the gifts and skills you have been given. Strengths are only meaningful when they are put to the test.

Maintaining your averageness and not activating the skills that you have been given is allowing those skills and gifts to rot. It is letting go of many opportunities that are crossing your path during the present day, and it is forfeiting many more opportunities that could cross your path in the future.

If you are not putting your strengths to the test, it means someone else is going to get the chance to do what you have been wanting to do from the start. It is far better to activate your strengths now and to hone them every day, than it is to just let them sit around and hope that you will get to use them someday. Life responds to those who are getting up today and using what they have been given.

3- There is nothing that differentiates you when you are average. And throughout many areas of life, this is a point that the brave elect to change, and the comfortable will leave alone.

Even though each person is different and unique, as we travel through life it is easy to act and appear more and more like our fellow humans. Despite this, we like to remind ourselves that we are one-of-a-kind, which we are. It is simply a challenge of acting in that way, and not simply talking or wishfully thinking in that way.

Take what makes you different, and use it! Be proud of it. Know that no one else was given what you were given, and make that your signature flag. Take it to the top, and do not apologize for being you, when you are living in love and being an example of sacrifice, honesty, and excellence for others.

4- Sticking with averageness keeps life unexciting, disengaging and mostly pointless.

Simply put, staying average is unexciting! It is boring. There is nothing to it – anyone can do it. Grab life head on and show that you are in for the ride. There is no thrill to staying in the same place or the same realm of existence for one’s entire life. Charge beyond what is expected of you, and what you expect of yourself. Push the limits, do not hold back and enjoy the results.

ACTION PROMPT:

Is there anything I am trying to be perfect at? How do I think I will reach this summit? Have I considered excellence as an acceptable substitute for perfection? Why or why not?

Am I afraid of making mistakes? What does it mean to me when I make a mistake?

What are the few things I enjoy that are not “perfect”? This can be anything in life: songs, books, people, places, meals, pictures, thoughts, experiences, objects and so on.

Am I okay with being average? Have I ever thought about whether or not I am average? What does this word bring to mind when I think of it in relation to myself?

Have I ever sought to avoid “averageness” or to pursue excellence? Why or why not?

What are some of my strengths? Am I using them regularly? Do I recognize that they have been given to me for specific purposes?

What are the ways I enjoy using my strengths? Can I think of any way I seek to avoid leveraging a specific strength of mine, even when I know I should be using

it? Or, are there recurring moments in my life organized for the usage of my strength?

What are three areas where I am different from most people, whether or not this is public knowledge? Am I proud of these differences? (You have an analytical mind, you have an unknown, underutilized passion, you have creative capacities that others do not know about ...)

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Do I want a dull, boring life or an exciting, full life? Do I charge beyond my limits or sit and wait for my limits to change?

WHAT GOES IN IS WHAT COMES OUT

This is another long-lost concept that has been abandoned for cheap pleasure, convenience, and an overall disregard for the discipline of delayed gratification. So many young people do not give attention to the fact that what and whom they surround themselves with on a daily basis is *what and whom* they eventually turn into.

Our choice of friends, music, movies, television, food, leisure, hobbies and physical activities (or lack thereof), mentality, and even clothes, all play into our daily lives and over time, add up to who we are. An easy way to forget this is to maintain your focus on the present and not on the future. Only looking at the present allows for dreams or disciplines to fall to the wayside.

It is all too easy to surrender any effort towards plans for tomorrow and simply collect pleasure from immediately gratifying other desires. I decry the altogether toxic culture of consumption that corporations and thieves have strewn together for us to face daily. At every turn there lies yet another opportunity to sacrifice pieces of oneself that took a great amount of effort to build, in return for some shallow satisfaction that will fade like a vapor.

Be watchful and mindful of what you pour into your life, for it will refine itself and pour right back into the lives of others. Fitness, health and motivational

guru Jack Lalanne once said, "What you eat today, you wear tomorrow." This is equally true of your personal and relational choices, whether they are destructive or constructive.

ACTION PROMPT:

What do some of my entertainment choices look like? Are my choices based on what *looks* fun or exciting, or am I more discerning and selective with my entertainment choices?

Are my choices based on what my friends are into? Do I tag along, or do I have a voice in what my friends and I will do?

What do I fill my free time with? Does it reflect who I am outside of my free time?

Do I find that my free time controls me, or do I control my free time? How does this make me feel? Do I ever feel lost or exhausted after I leave a period of free time?

Do I ever notice that downtime is plentiful, but I cannot seem to find enough time for what *needs* to be done? Why is this? What type of habits might be playing into this?

What type of people do I surround myself with? Do they reflect my values in life and the things I stand for?
