



*Making the very complex...**awesomely simple***

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS



Introduction

Before we begin, let me share the story behind this workbook.

Many people would call me “successful.” I’ve owned and managed several companies, traveled the world, written books, co-hosted a TV show, met famous and influential people, and lived an extraordinary life. But it wasn’t always this way.

There was a time when I was struggling, unhappy, and heading in the wrong direction. Then, something happened that made me stop and reflect on my life. That moment pushed me to realize that if I wanted to turn things around, I needed to become an “expert on success.”

I read over 300 books, listened to countless audiobooks, and attended seminars, all in search of how to build a fulfilling life. But the sheer volume of information overwhelmed me. I needed something simple and clear to keep myself on track—a way to gather and revisit the best ideas I’d found, along with a few I created on my own. That’s how my “Success Handbook” came to be. What you’re holding now grew from that early tool.

I never intended to share it with others. But while I was in college, a friend noticed my workbook and asked about it. When I explained that it was my guide to building a life plan, he asked for a copy. A few weeks later, he told me his friends wanted copies too. Then he suggested I teach a short class about it. We rented a small hotel conference room, and 14 people attended.

That was over 35 years ago. Since then, I’ve taught this material to more than 250,000 people—from college students to Fortune 100 executives. I’ve traveled the world, helping others apply these ideas to their lives and careers. The notes and emails I’ve received about how this guide has changed lives have deeply humbled and inspired me.

Let me be clear—these ideas aren’t mine alone. The principles it contains are timeless truths about living a happy and successful life.

I don’t claim to be the world’s leading expert on happiness or success. My life isn’t perfect, and it never will be. No one’s is. But I’ve learned this: life doesn’t have to be harder than it needs to be. There are steps you can take to make things better. When you put these principles into practice, your life can change.



As you begin this book, I want to suspend your normal way of thinking. Question everything. Challenge assumptions you've carried for years, and approach this with an open mind. Accept only what feels meaningful and true to you.

The exercises and workshops in this book are designed to help you reflect deeply on your life and uncover what truly matters. Some of the questions may feel challenging or push you out of your comfort zone, but that's part of the process. The more effort and honesty you bring to this work, the more impactful it can be. You will get out of this what you put into it.

Many of the ideas and tools here have transformed lives—including mine—and they hold the potential to do the same for you. Take this seriously. It's not just about your growth. The work you do here will have a positive ripple effect on the people who matter most to you. With thoughtfulness and dedication, this could be the beginning of something extraordinary.

Do not believe what you have heard.

Do not believe in tradition because it is handed down many generations.

Do not believe in anything that has been spoken of many times.

Do not believe because the written statements come from some old sage.

Do not believe in authority or teachers or elders.

But after careful observation and analysis, when it agrees with reason and it will benefit one and all, then accept it and live by it.

— *Buddha (563 B.C.–483 B.C.)*

It is one of the great human absurdities, that just because we have a life, we think we know how to live.

PLAN

I've spent decades studying success and developing various models, theories, and systems. Yet, one of the most effective frameworks I've encountered comes from my good friend Tom Morris in his book *True Success*. Tom's PLAN model is simple, memorable, and highly effective. It provides an excellent framework for understanding what it takes to build a successful life.

To achieve success, you need a PLAN:

Prepare for the journey

Success doesn't come from chance, fate, or good luck—it comes from having a clear vision of what you want to achieve and creating a plan to get there. Take the time to analyze, visualize, prioritize, and strategize. Carefully study your aspirations and become an expert in your own success. Just as you wouldn't build a house without blueprints or take a long journey without a map, achieving success in life requires preparation and intentional effort.



Launch into action

There are two kinds of people in this world: those who watch things happen and those who make things happen. If you want success, happiness, and achievement, you must take action—because no one is going to do it for you. The success you experience will be directly proportional to the effort you invest in your plan. While many people desperately want their lives to improve, only those who take focused and consistent action will see the results they desire.

Analyze and adjust as you go

Life is unpredictable. Even the best plans encounter challenges, setbacks, and surprises. The key is not to let these derail you. Instead, expect the unexpected and embrace the twists and turns as part of the journey. It is supposed to be this way.

The moment you stop expecting life to be simple, fair, and easy, it becomes simple, fair, and easy.

Flexibility is essential. Monitor your progress regularly and reflect on what's working and what isn't. When necessary, adjust your plan to get back on track. Success is rarely a straight line—it's the result of persistence, reflection, and course correction.

Network with those who know

Surrounding yourself with the right people is one of the most important things you can do for your success. Seek out those who have already achieved what you aspire to. Their knowledge, insights, and experience can save you time, effort, and frustration.

The network of people you spend time with influences who you become. But in today's world, your "network" extends far beyond those you interact with in person. Whether they're friends, mentors, colleagues, or people whose insights you gain through books, audiobooks, blogs, YouTube, or podcasts, make sure they inspire and support your growth. With so much knowledge available at your fingertips—often for free—you have unprecedented opportunities to learn from some of the brightest minds in history and connect with experts from around the globe. The world is your classroom, and everyone is a potential teacher.

Building a network of individuals who can guide, encourage, and assist you will make your journey easier and more enjoyable. Life is too challenging to navigate alone, but with a strong team on your side, success becomes far more attainable.

Why this matters

Throughout this workbook, you'll explore what success means to you, clarify your values, and define your vision for the life you want to create. The PLAN framework provides a practical way to approach this journey, helping you take meaningful steps toward your goals.

Let this serve as your guide as you work through the pages ahead.



What Does Success Mean?

We've just started this workbook, and I've already used the word "success" a few times. Before we move forward, let's take a moment to define what success means as it will be used in this book.

When I ask people what success means to them, the most common answers I hear involve money, fame, and power. While there's nothing wrong with desiring these things—and it's perfectly normal to want them—they alone don't guarantee a fulfilling or meaningful life.

In this book, success is not defined by external achievements or material possessions. Instead, it's about living a life where your values, sense of purpose, and vision of your "Ideal Life" are in harmony with your daily actions. Success is about becoming the person you truly want to be and creating a life that reflects what matters most to you.

If wealth, fame, or power are truly part of your ideal life and they align with your values, that's fantastic! But even if you don't achieve those things, as long as you live a life true to your values and aligned with your personal goals, you are a success. You don't have to pretend to be someone you're not, and you can go to bed each night feeling fulfilled and thankful for the life you've created.

This concept of success can be difficult for many people in our culture to embrace. We've been conditioned—by society, advertising, social media, school, family, and friends—to believe that success means having more of everything, wanting for nothing, and achieving it all effortlessly. That's not the way it works.

The Two-Part Lie About Success

The First Part: Wealth, status, or power will bring you happiness and fulfillment.

They won't.

Over my career, I've worked closely with four of the richest men in America at the time. For fun, I once calculated how much one of them earned during an hour at his desk: \$780,000.

Despite his incredible material success—private jets, a fleet of luxury cars, helicopters, and even his own mountain—I wouldn't describe him as truly successful. He had been divorced multiple times, lost a child to suicide, and was estranged from a daughter who came out as gay. Despite all his wealth, he moved from one problem to the next.

In contrast, another billionaire I worked with embodied true success. He was healthy, loved by his family, and kind to everyone around him. Generous and good-humored, he approached life with a smile and a light heart. To me, he represented what success really means: living a life aligned with your values, full of purpose and joy.



The Second Part: You can have everything you want without effort, failure, or hardship.

No, you can't.

If you want to achieve more than others, you need to work harder, smarter, and longer than they do. While rare cases exist—like selling a startup to Google for \$4 billion—they are exceptions, not the rule. You're more likely to win the lottery than stumble upon effortless success.

The truth is, most “overnight successes” spent years, if not decades, behind the scenes honing their skills, building relationships, and preparing for opportunities—or creating their own luck. For example, here's how long it took some of the most iconic entrepreneurs to reach a personal net worth of \$1 billion.

- Steve Jobs (*Apple*): 39 years
- Bill Gates (*Microsoft*): 31 years
- Phil Knight (*Nike*): 32 years
- Howard Schultz (*Starbucks*): 20 years
- Oprah Winfrey (*Harpo Productions*): 17 years
- Elon Musk (*PayPal, SpaceX, Tesla*): 14 years
- Sara Blakely (*Spanx*): 14 years

Their journeys demonstrate that real success takes time, effort, and perseverance. Sustaining it requires discipline and hard work. There's no shortcut.

That said, when your work aligns with your values and passions, the effort doesn't feel like a burden. It feels like living a life of purpose, fun, and adventure. That's when success stops being just a goal and becomes a fulfilling way of life.

Values: The Foundation of True Success

Success built solely on external achievements is fragile and fleeting. True, lasting success comes from personal values—the principles and beliefs that guide your decisions and give your life meaning. Without clear values, it's easy to feel lost or frustrated, no matter how much you achieve. Your values act as a compass, helping you navigate life's toughest decisions and ensuring your actions align with the kind of person you want to be.

Take a moment to reflect on the values that matter most to you—the principles that shape your identity and influence how you live. While these values may be inspired by your family, friends, religion, or society, this exercise is about identifying what you personally hold most dearly.



Approach this workshop with sincerity. Identifying your values is one of the most powerful steps you can take toward living a purposeful, meaningful life. These values will become the foundation for your decisions, helping you live with clarity and intention. Let's begin.

Possible Values

The following list is not exhaustive, nor is it meant to limit your choices. It's simply here to help you start thinking about what truly matters to you. If any of these resonate, feel free to include them. If your most important values aren't listed, write them down. This workshop is about discovering what's meaningful to you.

Values Rooted in Personal Character

Honesty, Truth, Kindness, Empathy, Humility, Respect, Honor, Responsibility, Discipline

These values define how a person interacts with themselves and others, reflecting integrity, moral character, and ethical behavior.

Values Focused on Relationships and Connections

Love, Family, Friendship, Generosity, Contribution, Service, Faith

These emphasize meaningful relationships, a sense of connection to others, and active participation in the community or broader world.

Values Emphasizing Growth and Exploration

Learning, Curiosity, Discovery, Imagination, Adventure, Exploration

These values highlight personal development, intellectual growth, and the excitement of exploring new possibilities.

Values Linked to Enjoyment and Positivity

Fun, Laughter, Beauty, Serenity, Gratitude, Nature, Art

These represent ideals that bring joy, creativity, and a sense of contentment or peace to life.

Values Grounded in Stability and Order

Security, Safety, Independence, Balance, Conformity, Tradition

These values reflect the importance of structure, predictability, and maintaining harmony in life.

Values Driving Achievement and Ambition

Accomplishment, Success, Achievement, Perseverance, Dedication, Boldness, Resilience, Recognition

These focus on striving toward goals, overcoming challenges, and celebrating personal or professional milestones.



Values Reflecting Broader Ideals

Spirituality, Faith, Diversity, Contribution, Generosity

These represent beliefs about one's connection to the world and how they can make a positive impact on something greater than themselves.

This workshop is designed to help you define the values that matter most to you and understand their significance in your life. Let's focus on identifying your top five values—those guiding principles that will shape your decisions, priorities, and vision for success.

List Your Top 5 Values Below

Write your top five values in the spaces provided, prioritizing them if possible.

_____ 1.

_____ 2.

_____ 3.

_____ 4.

_____ 5.



Deepening Your Commitment to Your Values

Now that you've identified your top values, it's time to connect more deeply with them by articulating why they are so important to you. This step is about giving them personal meaning and making them central to how you live your life.

For each value, write a sentence explaining why it is fundamental to who you are and the life you want to create. Use any of the following sentence starters to guide your thoughts:

_____ is a core value in my life because _____

I must live the value of _____ because _____

The value of _____ is essential to me because _____

For example: "Honesty is a core value in my life because it helps me build trust and maintain strong relationships with the people I care about."

Be as specific as possible. This is your chance to reflect on why these values matter and why you must embody them every day. Completing this exercise will create vivid reminders of what truly guides you, helping you stay aligned with the person you want to be.

Take your time and approach this process with sincerity. The clarity and commitment you build here will serve as a foundation for living a life that reflects your values.

*An additional page has been provided for extra space, so feel free to take your time and write as much as you need.





Self-Rating: How Well Are You Living Your Values?

Throughout this workbook, you'll be asked to rate yourself in key areas of your life. Some exercises may leave you feeling proud and inspired as you recognize where you're thriving and living in alignment with your values. Other exercises might reveal areas where you're struggling, which can feel uncomfortable or even painful.

Please remember, this process isn't about judgment or criticism—it's about growth. I'm asking you these questions because I want you to see how your actions and behaviors align with your values and intentions. Complete honesty may feel challenging at first, but it's the only way to uncover opportunities for improvement and create meaningful change in your life.

To complete this workshop, refer back to the section where you identified your values. Next to each value, you'll see a small line in front of the number. This is where you'll write your self-assessed rating for how well you are currently living that value.

To assess yourself, use the following rating scale:

- **5:** Fully aligned—I live this value every day. It's central to my decisions and actions.
- **4:** Mostly aligned—I live this value regularly, but there's room for improvement.
- **3:** Partially aligned—I sometimes live this value, but not consistently.
- **2:** Rarely aligned—I rarely live this value in my daily life.
- **1:** Not aligned—I've identified this value, but it's not reflected in my actions.

How to Use Your Ratings:

1. Reflect on your actions and rate yourself truthfully.
2. Celebrate the values where you rated yourself highly. These are areas where you're thriving!
3. For values where your score is a 3 or lower, write down one small step you can take to bring that value into greater alignment with your daily life.



A Story of Transformation

This values workshop can bring powerful moments of insight. Let me share a story of one such transformation.

Many years ago, I was teaching a class of executives, guiding them through this very section on values. As we reached the self-assessment portion, where participants scored themselves on how well they were living in alignment with their values, I noticed a woman in her early fifties begin to cry. At first, her reaction was quiet and restrained, but soon her emotions overwhelmed her, and she became visibly distressed.

Concerned for her well-being, I gently asked if she was okay. She looked up at me, tears streaming down her face, and said, “My top two personal values are God and family. But I haven’t been to church in three years, and I barely see my kids. No wonder I’m in so much pain. I’m not living my values at all.”

Her words were like a lightning bolt—a moment of raw clarity that cut through years of stress, sadness, and anxiety. For the first time, she recognized the disconnection between her actions and her deepest beliefs. It wasn’t that she lacked love for God or her family, but her daily life had drifted so far from what she held most dear that it was causing her immense emotional pain.

A few months later, I received an email from her. She shared that after the workshop, she’d committed to realigning her life with her values. She and her family began attending church together every weekend. They also created a family rule to sit down for dinner together at least three nights a week, no matter how busy life got.

She told me the values workshop had completely changed her life. By having the courage to face the truth and the discipline to follow through on changes, she rediscovered a sense of peace, connection, and purpose.

Her story serves as a powerful reminder: when we live in alignment with our values, we can rediscover a sense of peace and purpose. Take a moment to reflect—what changes might you need to make to align your life with what matters most to you?

Reflecting on Your Purpose

Let’s take a moment to consider one of the most profound questions we can ask ourselves: *Why are you here?* What is the deeper reason for your life? This isn’t about your job, daily routines, or the goals you’ve set for the next year. It’s about what drives you at your core—the impact you want to make, the legacy you want to leave, and the meaning you want your life to have.

Discovering your purpose is deeply personal and requires honest reflection. Think about the moments in your life when you’ve felt the most fulfilled. What were you doing? Who were you helping? What values were you living out? Don’t worry about finding the “perfect” answer right away—this is an exploration of what truly matters to you.



Your purpose doesn't have to be grand or complex. It's the principle that gives your actions direction and helps you stay focused, even during difficult times. Now, take some time to write down what you believe your purpose is. It may be only a sentence or two, but make an effort to articulate it clearly. Use the space below to express your thoughts.

Write Your Purpose Below:



Personal Definition of Success

Defining Your Success

Now that you've reflected on your values, it's time to craft your personal definition of success. This isn't about anyone else's standards or society's expectations—it's about what success means to *you*. Take your time with this exercise, and write in as much detail as possible. Think of your definition as a guiding principle for how you want to live your life and measure your achievements.

You may find that one page isn't enough space for everything you want to express. If so, don't worry—there is additional space on the next page for you to continue writing.

Example:

"To me, success means living a life that aligns with my core values of kindness, growth, and connection. It's about making a positive impact on the people around me and the world at large, while also finding joy in the small moments of daily life. Success isn't about wealth or status, but about feeling fulfilled and proud of the person I am becoming.

I'll know I'm successful when I wake up each morning excited to face the day, when my relationships are strong and supportive, and when I've created a balance between pursuing my goals and enjoying the present moment. Success also means embracing challenges as opportunities for growth and staying true to my values, even in difficult times."

Now it's your turn. What does success mean to you? Use the space below and on the additional page if you need it to write your personal definition of success.





Now that you've written your definition, take a moment to reflect on how aligned your current life feels with it. Use the scale below to assess how closely your actions and decisions reflect the success you've just defined:

- **5:** I feel completely aligned with my definition of success.
- **4:** I feel mostly aligned, with some areas needing improvement.
- **3:** I feel partially aligned, but there's room for significant growth.
- **2:** I feel disconnected from my definition and need to make major changes.
- **1:** I feel completely unaligned and need to start focusing on my definition.

Write your score on the line below:

Score: _____

By defining success in your own terms, you create a foundation for living a life that feels meaningful and fulfilling. This clarity allows you to make decisions and take actions that align with your definition, helping you move closer to the life you want to create.

A Vision of Your Ideal Life

Take a moment to imagine your ideal life ten years from now. What does it look like? In as much vivid detail as possible, write a clear statement of your vision. This is your chance to describe the kind of life you want to live—a life aligned with your values, purpose, and personal definition of success.

Crafting a vision of your ideal life is a powerful exercise, but it's important to approach it thoughtfully. Having a life vision doesn't guarantee that everything you imagine will come true. Life doesn't work that way. Wishing alone won't make it happen—if it did, we'd all be gorgeous billionaires. However, having a clear vision can help you make better decisions and take meaningful actions that bring you closer to your goals.

Here's a personal example to illustrate this idea: I'm allergic to mayonnaise and mustard. If I walked into a sandwich shop and told the person behind the counter to make me whatever they wanted, there's a good chance I'd end up with something I couldn't eat. Most people like those condiments, so they might assume I do, too. But if I specifically ask for a turkey and Swiss cheese sandwich with lettuce, tomato, and onions—but no mayonnaise or mustard—I'll likely get what I want.



Life doesn't work exactly like ordering a sandwich, but the principle is the same. When you're clear about what you want, you can better direct your choices and actions to create the outcomes you desire.

As you craft your vision, be honest with yourself. Make it exciting, compelling, and motivating—but also realistic. Goals that challenge you can be inspiring, but goals that are nearly impossible may leave you feeling discouraged. Focus on creating a vision that stretches you to grow while remaining achievable.

Consider these areas as you craft your vision:

- **Career:** What kind of job or career will you have? Will you be thriving in your current role, running your own business, or exploring a new field?
- **Relationships:** Will you be single, married, or in a committed partnership? Will you have young kids at home, or will the kids finally be out of the house?
- **Living Situation:** Where will you live? Will it be a bustling city, a quiet suburb, or a home by the beach or in the mountains?
- **Vacations:** What kind of vacations will you take, and how often? Will you travel to new countries, explore local destinations, or enjoy restful staycations?
- **Lifestyle:** What will your hobbies, fitness routine, and spiritual practices look like?
- **Finances:** How much income will you earn? How much will you have in savings and investments?
- **Community and Contribution:** What contributions will you make to your community? Will you engage in charity work or volunteer efforts?
- **Daily Life:** What kind of car will you drive? Will you have a pet?
- **Social Connections:** Who will your closest friends be? Will you stay connected with extended family?
- **Free Time:** How will you spend your leisure time?
- **Career Stage:** Will you be preparing for the next phase of your career, or transitioning into retirement?
- **Legacy:** What kind of legacy do you want to leave for your family, community, or profession?
- **Well-Being:** How will you maintain your mental and emotional health?

This exercise should be fun, exciting, and maybe even a little scary! Take your time and use the space on the next two pages to bring your vision to life in as much detail as possible.







On a scale of 1 to 5

Once you've written your vision, take a moment to reflect on how well you're currently doing at making it a reality. Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5:

- **5:** I am absolutely on the right track. It's just a matter of time.
- **4:** I'm doing very well. There are a few areas for improvement, but I'm well on my way.
- **3:** It's sort of mediocre. I've accomplished some things, but there's still a lot I need to work on.
- **2:** Things are not going well. I have a lot of improvements to make, and if I don't act soon, I won't achieve my goals.
- **1:** I am completely off track. I'm not doing anything I need to do. I need to make significant changes to achieve my vision.

Score: _____

A Personal Story: How a Vision Shaped My Life

I've been using this workbook since I was in college, and it has been instrumental in shaping my life. One of the first times I used it, I was making important decisions about my career. The exercises helped me clarify what I wanted and gave me the confidence to pursue a path that aligned with my values and goals.

When I met my future wife, I introduced her to the workbook. We went through the exercises together, crafting a vision of what we wanted our life to look like as a couple. It was exciting to imagine our future and put it into words. That year—back in 2000—we wrote out what we envisioned for our careers, our home, our family, and the kind of life we wanted to build together.

Looking back at what we wrote, it's incredible to see how much of our vision has become a reality. Other than a few things beyond our control, like unexpected health challenges, much of what we dreamed about is exactly how we're living now.

If I were to score us on how aligned our life is with that vision, I'd give us a 4+ out of 5. I truly believe that if we hadn't taken the time to write out what we wanted our life to look like, it wouldn't have turned out this way. Having that vision gave us a roadmap.

Over the years, we've used our vision as a guide to make all the major decisions in our life. Every time we faced a crossroads, we asked ourselves, *Will this move us closer to the life we envisioned together?* When circumstances changed or we realized we wanted to adjust parts of our vision, we did so thoughtfully and intentionally.



We didn't just hope for a great life and leave it up to chance. We created a vision of what we wanted and worked to make it happen. It hasn't always been easy, but having that shared vision has been one of the most powerful tools for building a meaningful and fulfilling life together.

Learning to Say No

Now that you've written out your vision, let's talk about one of the essential skills you'll need to make it a reality: learning to say no.

To achieve meaningful success in life—success that aligns with your values and vision—you must have the courage to say no. This isn't just about avoiding obvious bad choices or harmful behaviors. It's about identifying when something, even if it seems like a good opportunity, doesn't truly support your priorities. Success requires the discipline to let go of things that don't move you toward your ideal life.

Warren Buffett, one of the world's most successful investors, captured this idea perfectly. Known as the "Oracle of Omaha" for his disciplined investing and decision-making, Buffett famously said, "The difference between successful people and really successful people is that really successful people say no to almost everything." His words remind us that extraordinary success requires extraordinary focus. Saying no isn't just a refusal; it's a deliberate choice to protect your time and energy for the things that truly matter.

Of course, saying no isn't always something you can do immediately. If you're in a situation that doesn't align with your long-term goals—such as a job you dislike or a commitment that no longer serves you—walking away today might not be practical. Instead, create a plan to work toward your no. For example:

- If you want to leave a job, start by saving enough money to cover your expenses for a short time in case you need to leave before securing a new position. Ideally, you'll have a new job lined up first, but having savings provides a safety net if your current situation becomes untenable. You can also gain new skills and build your professional network to improve your opportunities.
- If you're overextended with commitments, such as taking on a leadership role as a volunteer for a charity, evaluate the time you're spending and how it impacts other priorities in your life. While you may not want to leave the organization in a bind, you can create a plan to step down responsibly, ensuring that your time is spent on what supports your vision and long-term objectives.

The strength to say no comes from knowing what you deeply want to say yes to. When you're clear on what matters most—whether it's your priorities, goals, or guiding principles—it becomes much easier to recognize what doesn't belong in your life.

*At the same time, remember that every yes comes with a cost. When you say yes to something less important, you are, by default, saying no to something that truly matters. Your time, energy, and focus are limited, so choose your commitments carefully.



The Story Behind This Book

Let me share with you the story of how this workbook came to be.

I started college in 1983 at the University of Miami (UM) in Florida. I grew up in a wealthy family, attended one of the top prep schools in the country, and graduated high school with excellent grades. I was accepted to several prestigious universities but chose UM for two reasons: it was close to the beach and my girlfriend. Not the best reasons to pick where you will go to school.

When I got to UM, I didn't take college seriously at all. I didn't attend a single class until midterms. I bought the books, grabbed the syllabi, and then did everything except study. If it was sunny, I was at the beach. If it rained, I went drinking. By the end of my first year, I had a great tan, knew all the bartenders in town, and had never met a single professor. Unsurprisingly, my GPA was 1.6, and I was officially kicked out of the University of Miami.

But here's where it gets worse. My father was one of UM's most famous alumni. He had attended both college and law school there and was a proud member of the Order of the Iron Arrow, the highest honor UM can bestow on its graduates. At the time of my expulsion, my father was serving on the university's Board of Directors. To top it all off, there was a building in the law school named after him. It takes a special kind of failure to get kicked out of a school where your family has a building named in their honor.

After UM, I decided to apply to the University of Florida (UF). I'll never forget walking into the Registrar's Office to submit my transcripts. The woman behind the counter took one look at my records, chuckled, and said, "We don't take people like you." I tried to explain how important it was for me to get in, but she just smiled, shook her head, and said two unforgettable words: "Next, please."

Devastated, I walked out of the office, sat down on the curb, and cried. In that moment, I realized I was on the verge of throwing everything away. I had always dreamed of running companies, traveling the world, making a lot of money and being "successful." But instead, it felt like my future was headed toward working at a fast-food restaurant, asking customers, "Would you like fries with that?"

I knew something had to change. My failure was no one's fault but my own, and if I wanted to live the life I dreamed of, I had to take full responsibility for my actions. Getting kicked out of college was the wake-up call I desperately needed.

To get my college career back on track, I enrolled in a small community college in Gainesville, where UF is located. At the time, the college would accept just about anyone with a pulse—and even then, I was admitted on probation. One day, I was talking to a friend about how badly I needed to get straight A's so I could transfer to UF. A professor, Roger Strickland, overheard me and told me to meet him after class because he wanted to share the secret to getting straight A's.

I was waiting outside his office before he even arrived. When he sat down, he said, "There are three things you need to do to succeed in college."



1. **Read the books.** In college, 99% of the answers are in the books. In life, the answers might not be there, but the information to find them usually is. That's why I still read over 100 business books every year. It does not make me a genius; it just means I have access to more information.
2. **Ask for help.** Ask anyone and everyone for help—professors, teaching assistants, classmates, the career center, anyone. A funny thing happens when you ask for help: you get it! Many people think asking for help is a sign of weakness, nothing could be further from the truth. The most successful people I've ever worked with are fantastic at asking for help, input, and suggestions.
3. **Form study groups.** Surround yourself with people who are talented, focused, and driven to excel academically—but also people of integrity, whom you admire and genuinely enjoy spending time with. It's not just about getting great grades; it's about building connections with individuals who inspire and uplift you.

Armed with this advice, I completely changed my approach to school. At the start of each semester, I would stand in front of my class and say, "Hi, my name is John, and I want to get an A in this class. I'm forming a study group. Anyone is welcome to join as long as you have a 3.6 GPA or higher."

My first group started with about 20 people, but by the end of the semester, it was down to six. We studied together, went to class together, and worked on projects as a team. College became much easier—and far more enjoyable—because I had five friends who were just as focused and motivated as I was.

Thanks to my grades at the community college, I was admitted to the University of Florida. When I graduated, the Public Relations Society of America named me the top public relations student in the Southeastern United States and one of the top four nationwide. While many of my classmates were still sending out résumés, I already had multiple job offers.

Before I even graduated, I accepted a position as the Director of Public Relations and Marketing for one of the Rockefeller Foundations. By the age of 26, I was named Executive Director/CEO, reporting directly to Winthrop P. Rockefeller and overseeing projects in 20 countries. Within two years, I was named one of the top CEOs in Florida under 40, and *Inc. Magazine* recognized me as one of America's up-and-coming business leaders.

In addition to these career milestones, I've been deeply honored by the recognition I've received from my alma maters. I was named a distinguished alumnus by both the community college I attended and the University of Florida. I was even nominated for the community college Hall of Fame as one of the best students in the history of Florida—a remarkable turnaround from being a student on probation.

Over the years, I've had the privilege of working as a consultant, executive coach, and corporate trainer for some of the world's leading companies, including Microsoft, Apple, IBM, GE, and Coca-Cola. I've also lectured at more than 90 universities worldwide, including Stanford, Harvard, MIT, and the Wharton School of Business. Internationally, I've spoken at prestigious institutions like the University of Kraków in Poland and the University of Canterbury in New Zealand.



Throughout my career, I've been fortunate to receive numerous awards recognizing my contributions to business and leadership. The American Management Association named me one of America's Top 50 Leaders to Watch, alongside Sergey Brin and Larry Page of Google and Jeff Bezos of Amazon. Thinkers50, the global ranking of management thinkers, shortlisted me as one of the top eight in the world for their Distinguished Achievement Award.

But what's more important than the awards or recognition is the lesson I've learned:

If I can do this, so can you.

I'm living proof that even someone who failed out of college can turn their life around. What made the difference for me was focus. I knew what I wanted, created a plan, and surrounded myself with people who supported my goals.

The Most Important Thing I've Ever Learned

You become what you focus on and are shaped by the people you surround yourself with.

Whatever you focus on—what you watch, read, study, listen to, and fill your mind with—and the people you choose to spend your time with will directly determine the life you're living a decade from now. These influences might seem small in the moment, but over time, they shape your decisions, habits, and ultimately, your future.

This is why it's so important to pay attention to where your time, energy, and attention are going, and to be intentional about the people you allow into your life.

Focus Workshop

Now it's time to explore these ideas more deeply and reflect on how they apply to you.

Identify Your Focus Areas

Start by listing the top five areas in your life that currently receive the majority of your attention and focus. Think about the activities or tasks that occupy most of your time.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



Evaluate Your Focus Areas

Now, evaluate whether these areas represent the best use of your time and attention. Are they adding value to your life? Do they contribute to your personal growth, happiness, success, and fulfillment? Or are you spending significant time on activities that don't enhance your life in a meaningful way?

Assign a score from 1 to 5 for each area of focus:

- **5:** Excellent use of your time.
- **4:** Good, but room for improvement.
- **3:** Average—neither good nor bad.
- **2:** Not a good use of your time—you should focus on other things.
- **1:** A very negative use of your time that could lead to serious problems.

If you've scored any area below a three, it's worth considering whether that activity is serving you. Use this opportunity to reflect honestly on whether these activities are helping you create the life you envision, or if they are distractions pulling you off course.

Identify Your Influencers

List the five individuals who have the strongest influence on your life. These aren't necessarily the people you spend the most time with. For example, coworkers may be part of your daily routine, but they might not shape your thinking or behavior significantly.

Instead, think about the people you choose to spend your time with—the ones whose opinions, advice, and actions influence your life the most. For number six, include yourself.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. **Yourself**



Evaluate Your Influencers

Think carefully about the individuals you've listed. Do they bring positive value to your life, or do they hold you back?

- Do they support and encourage you, helping you move closer to your goals?
- Do they criticize or discourage you?
- Do they genuinely want you to succeed, or do they add stress and negativity to your life?

Assign each person a score from 1 to 5:

- **5:** A great influence—this person supports and helps me achieve my goals.
- **4:** A positive influence—they try to help me succeed.
- **3:** Neutral—they neither help nor hinder me.
- **2:** A negative influence—they do not contribute to my improvement.
- **1:** A toxic influence—they treat me poorly and bring stress or harm to my life.

Score Yourself

In space #6, evaluate yourself. Are you your own best friend or your worst enemy? How do you treat yourself?

I didn't always ask people to rate themselves, but during one class, I noticed a student had written their own name on the list and given themselves a zero. That's when I realized the most important person on this list is you.

If you give yourself a low score, remember—it's okay to ask for help. Everyone struggles at times, and you don't have to handle everything on your own. Reach out to people who care about you, or seek professional guidance. There's absolutely no shame in asking for assistance. I have, many times.

Use Your Scores to Make Changes

The goal is to have as many people as possible in the **4 and 5** range in your life. These are the individuals who help you grow and succeed. If someone scores lower but is improving—meaning you have a positive influence on them—it may be worth investing in that relationship.

However, if someone consistently scores **2 or lower** and shows no signs of improvement, it may be time to remove them from your life. This can be a difficult decision, especially if the person has the same last name as you or signs your paycheck. But by keeping them in your life, you're allowing them to create pain for you. You're choosing to give away your valuable and limited time to someone who doesn't support your happiness or success.



Some people say they have no choice—that they must stay in the relationship. But you always have a choice. It might be a difficult and uncomfortable choice, but it’s still a choice. Choosing to keep someone in your life means accepting their behavior and its impact on you. You deserve better than that.

Why people do things that hurt you

Years ago, I read a book that profoundly impacted me. It introduced a simple but powerful idea: whenever someone is rude, mean, prejudiced, or nasty, it’s not about you—it’s about them. Their actions stem from one of two things: either a cry for help or a loving response.

Let’s start with the idea of a cry for help. I travel a lot, and it’s not uncommon to see someone at the airport yelling at a gate agent or being rude to a waiter in a restaurant. When I see that, I remind myself of a powerful truth: **hurt people—hurt people**. When someone is in pain, they have a hard time being kind or loving. It’s as if they’re saying, “I’m really unhappy, and I can’t stand to see you happy, so I’m going to do something to take your happiness away and make you feel as bad as I do.” Their behavior doesn’t make it right or easier to endure, but it’s a reflection of their own internal struggles. People who lash out in anger or cruelty are often carrying pain, frustration, or unhappiness they don’t know how to handle. By understanding this, we can find a bit of empathy and wonder, “What’s going on in their life that makes them act this way?”

Now consider the other side: a loving response. Imagine you’re a parent, and you see your child crawling on the floor, about to pick up something dangerous—maybe a sharp object or something dirty—and put it in their mouth. You quickly step in and say, “No! Don’t do that!” The child looks at you with frustration and shouts, “I hate you!” How do you respond? Most parents would smile and calmly say, “Honey, I’m only doing this because I love you.”

A personal example

Many years ago, I was grossly overweight, weighing over 330 pounds. One day, a good friend of mine, the chief financial officer of the local hospital, called to tell me that he had announced me as the keynote speaker at the American Heart Association’s Heart Healthy Living Conference for CEOs. I couldn’t believe what he was saying. I was the opposite of heart healthy living, and I told him flat out, “I’m not doing it.”

He calmly told me it was too late—he had already started selling tickets. I showed up to the event and faced hundreds of executives in the audience. When I got on stage, I told them, “I am completely out of integrity here. There is no way I can stand up here and tell you to live a heart-healthy life when I am doing just the opposite. So, I’m going to make a commitment to all of you today: I will come back next year, and I will be 100 pounds lighter.”

By the time I returned the following year, I had lost 78 pounds—not quite my goal, but close enough that I felt like a different person. Over time, I lost the rest of the weight. At the time, I hated my friend for putting me in that position. I felt embarrassed and humiliated. But now, I look back and realize it was one of the most loving things anyone has ever done for me. He pushed me into a corner where I had no choice



but to face the truth and change my health habits. That act of friendship—and tough love—didn't feel like love at the time, but it saved my life.

When someone lashes out or treats us poorly, it's often a reflection of their own pain—a cry for help. On the other hand, when someone challenges us in ways that feel uncomfortable or even upsetting, it may actually be a loving response—an act of care meant to push us toward something better.

When I learned this concept, it changed how I saw people and how I reacted to difficult situations. Instead of taking things personally, I started asking myself, “Is this a cry for help or a loving response?” It's a small shift in perspective, but it can transform how you navigate relationships—especially with people who may not be supportive or positive influences in your life.

A Broader Life Assessment

Before we move into the Current Life Assessment workshop, let's take a moment to check in on a few broader areas of your life to get a well-rounded perspective.

Using a scale of 1 to 5, rate how well you feel you're doing in the following areas:

- 5:** Thriving—this area is consistently strong and fully supports my well-being and happiness.
- 4:** Doing well—this area is generally positive, but there's some room for improvement.
- 3:** Neutral—this area is average; it neither strongly helps nor significantly hinders my well-being.
- 2:** Needs improvement—this area is weak and detracts from my overall well-being or happiness.
- 1:** Critical—this area is severely lacking and urgently needs attention to avoid negative consequences.

Emotional Well-being

I effectively manage stress, maintain a positive outlook, and have healthy coping mechanisms for challenges.

Score: _____

Time Management

I make efficient use of my time, prioritize well, and maintain a balance between my responsibilities and personal time.

Score: _____

Relationships

I have meaningful, supportive relationships with friends, coworkers, and others outside my immediate family.

Score: _____



Environment

My physical environment (home, workspace, etc.) is organized, comfortable, and supports my productivity and happiness.

Score: _____

Fun and Recreation

I make time for hobbies, relaxation, and fun activities that bring me joy.

Score: _____

Physical Health

I maintain a healthy lifestyle through proper nutrition, regular exercise, and sufficient sleep.

Score: _____

Financial Health

I live within my means, save for the future, and feel secure about my financial situation.

Score: _____

Personal Growth

I actively seek opportunities for learning, self-improvement, and developing new skills.

Score: _____

Community and Contribution

I give back to others through volunteering, mentoring, or contributing to causes I care about.

Score: _____

Spiritual Well-being

I engage in practices that connect me to my inner self, spirituality, or a greater purpose (e.g., meditation, prayer, reflection).

Score: _____

What's Going Well and What Needs Improvement

Now that you've completed the check-in on key areas of your life, take a moment to reflect on all the scores you've given yourself throughout the book so far. Look for patterns—both the areas where you're thriving and those where you may be struggling.

Use this page here for any additional thoughts or reflections that come to mind, but know that the next two workshops will guide you more deeply into this process.

You'll begin by celebrating what's going well, focusing on the habits and decisions that are supporting your success. Then, you'll turn your attention to the areas that need improvement, identifying meaningful opportunities for growth.

When you're ready, move on to the next page to continue this important work.



Celebrate What's Going Well

Start by focusing on the areas where you're thriving. These are the aspects of your life where you've built strong habits, made good decisions, or created positive outcomes.

Instructions: Write down the areas where you've scored the highest and take a moment to celebrate them. Think about the actions, choices, or circumstances that have contributed to your success. Acknowledging what's going well is just as important as addressing areas for improvement—it builds confidence and motivation to keep moving forward.

What's Going Well:



What Needs Improvement

Next, shift your focus to the areas where your scores are lower than you'd like. These are the parts of your life where you might feel stuck, dissatisfied, or out of alignment with your values and vision.

Instructions: Write down the areas where you'd like to improve. Think about what might be holding you back and what changes could help you grow. This isn't about criticizing yourself—it's about identifying opportunities for meaningful progress.

What Needs Improvement:



Goal-Setting: Two Powerful Approaches

Now that you've reflected on what's going well and where you'd like to improve, it's time to turn your insights into action. Setting clear goals is one of the most effective ways to create meaningful change in your life. In this section, you'll learn two distinct approaches to goal-setting: **SMART Goals** and **Checklists**.

Both methods have their strengths:

- **SMART Goals** provide a structured framework for setting precise and measurable goals.
- **Checklists** offer a step-by-step process for tackling larger objectives.

Read through the explanation of each method and decide which one fits your style and preferences. Then, complete the workshop to begin working on either setting SMART Goals or starting a checklist for one of your most important goals.

SMART Goals: A Structured Framework

The SMART Goal framework is an excellent choice for people who thrive on clarity and measurable progress. This method ensures that your goals are well-defined and achievable within a specific timeframe, making it easier to track your progress and stay on course.

What Does SMART Stand For?

- **Specific:** Your goal should be clear and well-defined. For example, instead of saying, "Get healthier," say, "Exercise for 30 minutes three times a week."
- **Measurable:** Include a way to track progress. For instance, "Save \$500 in the next three months" provides a measurable outcome.
- **Achievable:** Set realistic goals within your current resources and constraints. Stretch yourself, but avoid setting goals so lofty they become discouraging.
- **Relevant:** Ensure your goals align with your values, vision, and priorities. A goal that doesn't support your life's direction will feel hollow.
- **Time-bound:** Attach a deadline to your goals. For example, "Read one new book on personal development by the end of this month."

SMART Goals are ideal for people who like to measure their progress and see clear milestones along the way.



Checklists: A Simple Tool for Big Goals

A checklist is exactly what it sounds like: a list of the steps you need to take to achieve a specific goal. It's a way to break a big goal into smaller, actionable tasks so you can stay organized, track your progress, and hold yourself accountable.

Checklists are especially useful for major goals that require consistent effort over time. They keep you focused on what needs to be done and give you a sense of accomplishment as you check off each item.

For example, if your goal is to lose 50 pounds, your checklist might look something like this:

Checklist to Lose 50 Pounds

- **Exercise**
 - Go to the gym at least three times per week.
 - Do 30 minutes of cardio or walking every day.
 - Keep multiple gym bags (in your car, office, or home) so you're always ready to work out.
 - Find a workout partner to stay disciplined and accountable.
- **Diet and Nutrition**
 - Limit daily calorie intake to 2,000 or less.
 - Drink at least eight glasses of water per day.
 - Keep no unhealthy food in the house.
 - Spend time reading fitness magazines for meal ideas and motivation.
- **Mindset**
 - Shift your mindset from "I can't eat this" to "I choose not to eat this."
 - Remember that nobody puts food in your mouth—you are accountable for what you eat.
- **Support and Environment**
 - Spend time with people who support your weight loss goals.
 - Join a sports league, walking group, or fitness class to stay motivated.
- **Tracking and Rewards**
 - Weigh yourself every day and keep a log to track your progress.
 - Celebrate weight loss milestones by buying yourself a non-food reward.



This is an example of what a personal checklist might look like. Your checklist can include anything you think is necessary to achieve your goal. The key is to write it down, keep it somewhere you'll see it often, and use it daily to stay on track.

Why Checklists Work

Checklists are simple but powerful. They give you clear steps to follow, help you stay organized, and keep you accountable. By focusing on small, actionable tasks, you'll build momentum and make progress toward even your biggest goals.

Whether your goal is to lose weight, save money, start a new career, or improve a skill, a checklist can guide you every step of the way.

The Power of Checklists: My Personal Example

In my early thirties, I decided to change the direction of my career. I wanted to become a professional speaker, executive coach, and corporate trainer. But I didn't just want to do it—I wanted to be the best I could possibly be.

At the time, Tom Peters was the world's number one business expert. He had written the groundbreaking book *In Search of Excellence*, which was the most popular business book of its time. He traveled the world giving speeches on business excellence and leadership, and coached the world's leading CEOs. I thought to myself, *"That's what I want to do"*.

I started by learning everything I could about how Tom Peters had become number one. I read all of Tom's books and listened to his audiobooks. Several times, I flew across the country to attend his seminars so I could see firsthand what made him so impactful. I studied the industry, examined what made the top speakers and consultants successful, and analyzed what I would need to do to reach that level. And then I made a checklist.

The checklist I created wasn't easy to tackle. It included things like reading a minimum of 100 business books every year, improving my public speaking skills, building a reputation for delivering value to clients, and developing unique ideas that could make a real difference in the business world. Some of the items were daunting, but I committed to doing the work and checking off each step one by one.

Seventeen years into working on that checklist, I received an incredible honor: I was nominated as one of the top eight business thinkers in the world for the Distinguished Achievement Award from Thinkers50, the most prestigious organization in my industry. Thinkers50 recognizes the top leadership and business experts globally, and being shortlisted for one of their awards was an incredible milestone.

My wife and I traveled to London for their annual black-tie awards dinner. The room was filled with the most respected and accomplished business thinkers in the world. Many of them were people who I had been studying for decades.



As we sat down at our table, I looked over and who do you think was sitting next to my wife? Tom Peters! He was there to receive their Lifetime Achievement Award. I had done it. The checklist I had started all those years ago had guided me to this moment.

That is the power of checklists. They give you a clear path forward, keep you focused, and help you take consistent action toward your goals. I still use checklists today, and I can tell you this: when you stick to them and do the work, amazing things can happen.

Goal-Setting Workshop

Now that you've explored both approaches, it's time to put one into action. Choose the method that you like most and complete the corresponding exercise below.

Option 1: SMART Goals

Write three SMART Goals based on the areas you want to improve:



Option 2: Checklists

Choose one important goal and begin creating a checklist:

- **My Goal:** _____
- **Checklist Steps:**



Staying Focused on Your Goals

No matter which method you choose, staying focused is key to achieving success. Here are some tips to keep your goals front and center:

- **Visual Reminders:** Use your goal or checklist as your phone wallpaper or screensaver.
- **Daily Review:** Write your goals on a sticky note and place it somewhere you'll see often, like your bathroom mirror or desk.
- **Digital Alerts:** Set reminders on your phone or calendar to revisit your goals regularly.
- **Celebrate Progress:** Acknowledge and celebrate small wins along the way to stay motivated.

Congratulations

You've just completed some of the most important work you'll ever do for yourself. Take a moment to recognize what you've accomplished so far. You've identified your core values, clarified your purpose, and defined your personal vision of success. You've created a vivid picture of your ideal life, examined where you spend your time and focus, and completed a comprehensive assessment of your current life. You've also identified what's going well, where you need to improve, and set clear goals or a checklist to guide your progress.

This is no small feat. Very few people take the time to reflect this deeply on their lives. Based on my three decades of teaching this material and a massive amount of research, less than 1% of people in the world ever complete a process like this. You are now part of that rare group—someone who has taken the time to prioritize clarity, intention, and self-awareness.

But here's the truth: what you've learned will only matter if you put it into practice. The insights you've gained and the goals you've set are a foundation—but it's your daily actions and decisions that will build the life you want. I encourage you to revisit these exercises regularly, at least twice a year. Life will change, as it always does, and taking the time to reflect on your values, vision, and progress will help you stay aligned with what matters most to you.

Keep this work at the forefront of your mind. Use your values as a compass for every major decision. Refer to your goals and checklists often, and let them guide your actions. If you do this consistently, you will start to notice real changes—not just in your achievements, but in your overall happiness and sense of fulfillment.



Congratulations on completing the main part of the workbook! Before we wrap up, I'd like to share a few additional ideas and tools with you. Think of this as a "bonus section" designed to enhance your journey. I hope you find these extra resources both valuable and inspiring.

The Happiness Workshop

This workshop is designed to help you identify the activities and experiences that bring you the most happiness and evaluate how often they are part of your life right now.

When you understand what truly makes you happy, you can intentionally incorporate more of these activities into your routine. This process will help you create a life filled with moments of joy, connection, and fulfillment.

Identify Your Top 10 Sources of Happiness

Take a moment to reflect on the activities, people, or experiences that make you feel happiest. These might include hobbies, spending time with loved ones, relaxing in nature, or pursuing a passion project.

List your top 10 sources of happiness below:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.



Step 2: Rate How Often These Occur in Your Life

Using the scale below, rate how often each activity is part of your life right now:

- **5:** This is a regular part of my life—I make time for it often.
- **4:** This happens fairly often, but not as much as I'd like.
- **3:** This happens sometimes, but it could happen more.
- **2:** This happens rarely, and I'd like it to happen more.
- **1:** This doesn't happen at all right now.

Reflecting on Your Happiness

Once you've rated your top 10 sources of happiness, take a moment to reflect on your scores. The goal is to have as many activities as possible in the 4 or 5 range. If an activity is rated lower, ask yourself: *How can I bring more of this into my life?*

It's important to focus on things that are within your control. Sometimes, we tie our happiness to external factors or other people's emotions. For example, I once had a gentleman in my class who said, "When my kids are happy, my wife is happy, and my dad is happy—then I'm happy." I asked him, "How often are all those people happy at the same time?" He sighed and said, "Never."

A Story About Finding Happiness

Many years ago, one of my friends married a woman who had a young son, about seven or eight years old. Not long after they got married, she left. She just disappeared, leaving my friend to raise the boy on his own. He wasn't prepared to be a single dad, but he had adopted the boy and decided he would do his absolute best.

One day, he and I were chatting, and he told me about his daily routine. "I get David up early in the morning to get him ready for school. I make sure he showers, eats breakfast, and then I drive him to school before hurrying to make it to the office on time. At the end of the day, I pick him up, take him home, help him with his homework, make sure he practices for the band, cook dinner, get him to bed, and then finish all the chores around the house. Then it all starts again the next morning. What I wouldn't give for just 15 or 20 minutes to sit on the back deck, drink a cup of coffee, and watch the birds on the bird feeder."

I looked at him and said, "Why don't you ask your boss if you can come in 30 minutes later?"

He laughed and shook his head. "That'll never happen," he said.



“Just ask,” I told him.

So, he did. And to his surprise, his boss said, “Absolutely. In fact, if I see you in the office before 9:45, I’ll be upset! Take some time for yourself in the morning. You’ll come in more refreshed and focused anyway.”

My friend was amazed. He couldn’t believe his boss had said yes so easily. A few weeks later, when we talked again, he looked at me and said, “I wonder what else I could get if I just asked for it?”

Identify Your Top Stressors

Take a moment to reflect on the things that cause you stress, anger, or anxiety. These might be related to work, relationships, health, or other areas of your life. Think about the situations that make you feel uncomfortable or unhappy.

Write down your top 10 sources of stress below:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.



Understanding Control, Influence, and Letting Go

One of the most powerful skills you can develop is the ability to distinguish between what you cannot control, what you can influence, and what you can fully control. Let's break it down:

Things You Cannot Control

These are events or situations completely outside your ability to change. Worrying about these things drains your energy and takes time away from the things you can change. Examples include:

- The weather.
- Traffic.
- Other people's behavior or opinions.
- Natural disasters.
- The past.

Key Insight: I see a lot of pain in people's lives trying to control things that will never be in their control. Letting go of what you cannot control is one of the most freeing things you can do. The more you release these stressors, the more energy you'll have for the things that matter.

Things You Can Influence

These are areas where your actions can have an impact, but you don't have total control over the outcome. Examples include:

- Your health (influenced by diet, exercise, and sleep).
- Relationships (influenced by communication and effort).
- Your career (influenced by skill development, networking, and work ethic).
- Your finances (influenced by budgeting and saving).
- Your home environment (influenced by organization and upkeep).

Key Insight: Focus on reasonable actions to exert influence in these areas. While you can't guarantee the outcome, consistent effort can lead to meaningful changes over time.

Things You Can Fully Control

The only things you have absolute control over are your **thoughts** and **behaviors**. No matter what happens around you, you always have a choice in how you think, react, and act.

Key Insight: It's not the events that happen to you—it's how you decide to respond to them. By mastering your thoughts and behaviors, you take back control of your life.



Now, go back to your list of stressors and for each one, decide whether it's something you:

- **Cannot Control (NC):** Let go of these entirely. There's nothing you can do, so don't waste energy dwelling on them. Whenever you feel yourself getting anxious about one of these items, remind yourself that it's outside your control. Take a deep breath, and let it go.
- **Can Influence (I):** Develop a plan to exert reasonable influence over these stressors. Focus on what you can do, not what you can't. Ask yourself, *What is one small step I can take today to influence this situation?*
- **Can Fully Control (C):** Take ownership of these. Use your thoughts and behaviors to tackle these stressors head-on. Remind yourself that you are in charge of how you respond to challenges.

Taking Better Control of Your Emotions

No matter what happens in your life, there is always a GAP between the event and how you choose to respond. This gap might last a fraction of a second or several minutes, but it is always there. The GAP is where your power lies—the chance to pause and decide how you will react.

Many people create unnecessary stress and pain because they let their emotions control their reactions. But here's the good news: reactions are just habits, and habits can be changed. You can train yourself to respond thoughtfully instead of reacting impulsively.

The first step is to recognize that your thoughts—not the events themselves—create your emotions. How you think about a situation shapes how you feel and respond. For example:

- No one can make you angry; you anger yourself.
- No one can offend you; you take offense.
- No one gives you stress; you create your own stress.
- No one causes frustration; you frustrate yourself.

Everything comes from within your mind.

To change your responses, you need to question the negative thoughts and assumptions that drive them. Often, these thoughts are based on habit, past experiences, or false assumptions. When you master your thoughts, you master your emotions.



Define Your Ideal Me

Take a moment to write a short list of words or phrases that describe the Ideal Me. In tough times, how does the Ideal Me think, speak, react, and interact with others? Not the person you are now, but the person you strive to become—how would that person behave?

Keep your list concise so it's easy to recall in the heat of the moment.

Examples: Calm, empathetic, thoughtful, supportive, reasonable, patient, kind, loving, gentle.

Write Your List Below:

Rate How Often You Act Like Your Ideal Me

Using the scale below, rate how often you act like your Ideal Me in challenging situations:

- **5:** I consistently act like the Ideal Me—I'm in control of my thoughts and behaviors.
- **4:** I act like the Ideal Me most of the time, but I occasionally lose control.
- **3:** About half the time I act like the Ideal Me, but the other half I don't.
- **2:** I rarely act like the Ideal Me. I often lose control in stressful situations.
- **1:** I never act like the Ideal Me, though I wish I did.

Score: _____



Practice Acting Like Your Ideal Me

The next time you're in a challenging situation, try this:

1. Pause. Create a gap between what just happened and your response.
2. Ask yourself, *"What would the Ideal Me do here?"*
3. Respond in a way that aligns with the words you wrote.

Acting like your Ideal Me isn't about being perfect—it's about making a conscious effort to respond in a way you're proud of. The more you practice, the more these traits will become part of who you are. Remember: in every situation, you have the power to choose how you respond.

Rules, Mental Maps, and Assumptions Workshop

Let's start with a quick exercise. Answer the following sentences as fast as you can. Don't overthink your answers—just write down the first thing that comes to mind. Be honest, and don't worry about whether your answers are "right" or "wrong."

Complete the Sentences Below:

1. In order for me to feel loved, I must see, feel, or hear...
2. A true friend is someone who...
3. People are...
4. I am really good at...
5. I will never be any good at...



6. I am the kind of person who...

7. When I think about my future, I believe my life will...

8. One thing I will always do is...

9. Family is...

10. Life is...

11. If people really knew me, they would think...

Understanding Rules, Mental Maps, and Assumptions

What you just wrote provides a glimpse into your personal **rules**, **mental maps**, and **assumptions**—the deeply ingrained beliefs that guide how you see yourself, others, and the world.

Rules

Rules are the “shoulds” or “musts” we live by. These are the expectations we impose on ourselves and others.

- *"I must always be productive, or I'm wasting my time."*
- *"I should put others' needs ahead of my own."*
- *"If I ask for help, it means I'm weak."*
- *"Good parents sacrifice everything for their kids."*
- *"I have to finish what I start, even if it makes me miserable."*



Mental Maps

Mental maps are the frameworks we use to interpret how the world works. They shape our understanding of relationships, success, and behavior.

- *"If I don't make the first move, people won't reach out to me."*
- *"Success means climbing the corporate ladder."*
- *"People who don't agree with me don't respect me."*
- *"If I avoid conflict, everything will eventually work out."*
- *"To be happy, I need to keep everyone else happy."*

Assumptions

Assumptions are beliefs we take for granted as truths, often without questioning them.

- *"If someone is late, it means they don't care."*
- *"Everyone else seems to have it all figured out."*
- *"If I try something new, I'll probably fail."*
- *"People should treat me the same way I treat them."*
- *"If I don't succeed immediately, it's not worth trying again."*

Inhibiting Rules vs. Empowering Rules

Not all rules, mental maps, and assumptions serve us well. Some hold us back, while others encourage growth and happiness.

Inhibiting Rules

Inhibiting rules create stress, frustration, and limitations. They often sound like this:

- *"I must always be liked by everyone, or something is wrong with me."*
- *"I have to do everything perfectly, or it's not worth doing."*
- *"If I don't succeed right away, I'm a failure."*
- *"I can't relax until everything on my to-do list is done."*
- *"If someone disagrees with me, it means they don't respect me."*



Empowering Rules

Empowering rules, on the other hand, create flexibility, resilience, and growth:

- *"I focus on progress, not perfection."*
- *"It's okay to say no to things that don't align with my values."*
- *"I can ask for help when I need it, and it doesn't mean I'm weak."*
- *"Mistakes are opportunities to grow, not reasons to give up."*
- *"I'll do my best and trust that it's enough."*

Analyzing Your Answers

Now, go back and review your answers from the sentences you completed earlier. These responses reveal some of your personal rules, mental maps, and assumptions. Take a moment to reflect:

1. Which of your answers reflect empowering rules or assumptions that help you?
2. Which of your answers reflect inhibiting rules or assumptions that hold you back?
3. Are there any answers that surprise you?

Rewriting Your Rules

The good news is that you can change your rules, mental maps, and assumptions anytime you want. If a belief isn't serving you, replace it with something more empowering.

Breaking the Cycle: Negative Self-Talk, Fixed Mindsets, and Learned Pessimism

Have you ever caught yourself thinking, *"I can't do this,"* or *"I always mess up"*? That's **negative self-talk**, the critical inner voice that judges, doubts, and undermines you. Negative self-talk can lead to a **fixed mindset**, where you believe you can't improve, and even to **learned pessimism**, where you expect failure and stop trying altogether.

The good news? These habits of thought are learned, which means they can be unlearned.

Negative Self-Talk

Negative self-talk is the constant chatter in your mind that focuses on what's wrong instead of what's right. It highlights your flaws, exaggerates your mistakes, and ignores your successes.

How It Shows Up

- *"I'm not good enough."*
- *"I'll never figure this out."*
- *"I always fail."*



Here's the harsh truth: many of us speak to ourselves in ways we'd never allow anyone else to. We say hurtful, ugly, and painful things about ourselves—words we'd never say to a friend, a loved one, or even a stranger. Over time, we become our own worst enemy.

The Cost of Negative Self-Talk

Left unchecked, negative self-talk can chip away at your confidence, lead to self-doubt, and even contribute to serious mental health challenges like anxiety or depression. But the great thing is, you have the power to change this.

What You Can Do About It

1. **Talk to Yourself Like a Friend:** Imagine your best friend came to you feeling defeated. Would you tear them down or offer encouragement? Replace *"I can't do anything right"* with *"I'm doing my best, and I'll get better."*
2. **Notice the Voice:** Pay attention to the thoughts that arise when you face a challenge or make a mistake.
3. **Replace It with Kindness:** Choose thoughts that build you up instead of tearing you down. Practice saying things like, *"I'm learning, and that's what matters."*

Learning to speak to yourself with compassion and encouragement is transformational. Your mood will improve, you'll be more optimistic, and you'll be happier.

Moving Beyond a Fixed Mindset

A **fixed mindset** is the belief that your abilities are set in stone—you're either good at something or you're not. This way of thinking often grows from years of negative self-talk.

A Story About Falling Down

Picture this: a baby is learning to walk. They wobble to their feet, take a step, and fall flat on their face. Imagine if that baby thought, *"I'm just not good at walking. That hurt. I'll never try again. Crawling is safer—I'll just stick to that."*

Ridiculous, right? Of course, that's not how it happens. Babies fall, cry, and try again. And again. And again. Eventually, with enough persistence and encouragement, they walk. That's exactly how you learned to walk.

When I see someone struggling, like a trainee behind a cash register for the first time, I always take the same approach. The trainee might be fumbling with the buttons, voiding transactions, or nervously looking at the growing line of customers. When this happens, I make it a point to put them at ease. I tell them, *"Don't worry, everyone struggles when they're learning something new. In a few weeks, you'll be great at this. Take your time; it's going to be okay."*

But how often do we extend the same patience and kindness to ourselves? Instead of saying, *"I'm new at this, but I'll get better,"* we think, *"I'm terrible at this. I'll never figure it out."*

Next time you're learning something new, remind yourself: *"In a little while, I'll be great at this. It's just going to take time. But it's going to be okay."*



Shifting to a Growth Mindset

A **growth mindset** is the belief that you can get better at anything with hard work and learning. It's not about being perfect—it's about progress.

1. **Embrace Challenges:** See them as opportunities to learn.
2. **Focus on Effort:** Celebrate progress, not just results.
3. **Reframe Failures:** Treat setbacks as lessons, not verdicts.
4. **Seek Feedback:** View constructive criticism as a tool for improvement, not as a personal attack.
5. **Cultivate Curiosity:** Approach new tasks with a desire to learn, rather than a fear of failure.

Shifting from Learned Pessimism to Learned Optimism

Learned pessimism is the habit of expecting the worst. It develops when past setbacks convince you that effort doesn't matter.

Dr. Martin Seligman and the Study of Optimism

Dr. Martin Seligman, a world-renowned psychologist and the founder of positive psychology, became curious about optimism because he noticed that most of the research in his field focused on people who were unwell, studying the causes of depression and anxiety. But Seligman wanted to take a different approach. He decided to study people who were thriving—those who were optimistic, resilient, and happy. His groundbreaking research revealed that optimism isn't a personality trait—it's a learned behavior.

Explanatory Styles: Pessimists vs. Optimists

Dr. Seligman found that the key difference between pessimists and optimists lies in their **explanatory style**—how they explain challenges and setbacks to themselves.

1. **Permanence:**
 - *Pessimists:* Believe that bad situations will last a long time.
 - *"This is terrible, and it's going to be this way forever."*
 - *Optimists:* View setbacks as temporary.
 - *"This is tough, but it's only temporary. Things will get better soon."*
2. **Pervasiveness:**
 - *Pessimists:* Think that one negative event will affect every part of their life.
 - *"This problem is going to ruin everything."*
 - *Optimists:* Recognize that challenges are specific and limited.
 - *"This is just one part of my life; everything else is still okay."*



3. Personalization:

- *Pessimists*: Blame themselves entirely for bad outcomes.
 - *“This is all my fault. I caused this.”*
- *Optimists*: Take responsibility where appropriate but also acknowledge external factors.
 - *“I made mistakes, but other things were outside my control.”*

Building Learned Optimism

Optimism isn't about ignoring challenges—it's about choosing to see setbacks as temporary and solvable.

1. Reframe Negative Explanations:

- Instead of: *“I failed because I'm not smart enough.”*
- Try: *“I struggled because I didn't prepare enough this time. I can do better.”*

2. **Look for the Positive**: Make it a habit to find one good thing in every situation, no matter how small.

3. **Focus on What You Can Control**: Shift your energy toward actions you can take, rather than dwelling on things you can't change.

4. **Celebrate Small Wins**: Acknowledge progress, no matter how minor, to build confidence in your ability to succeed.

How These Ideas Connect

Negative self-talk fuels a fixed mindset by convincing you that your abilities are limited. A fixed mindset, in turn, reinforces learned pessimism by making failures feel inevitable. Together, these patterns create a cycle that can hold you back from your potential.

But when you break one link in the chain, the rest begin to weaken. Replace negative self-talk with positive dialogue, and you'll start to see opportunities for growth. Embrace a growth mindset, and you'll become more optimistic about your ability to handle challenges.

A Workshop for Breaking the Cycle

Use this exercise to work through a current challenge:

1. **Describe the Challenge**: Write down something you're struggling with.
 - Example: *“I'm nervous about presenting at the team meeting.”*
2. **Identify the Negative Thought**: What is your inner critic saying?
 - Example: *“I'll mess it up and embarrass myself.”*
3. **Challenge the Thought**: Look for evidence against it.
 - Example: *“I've spoken in meetings before, and I did fine.”*



4. **Reframe the Thought:** Replace it with a positive, growth-oriented perspective.
 - Example: *“I’ve prepared for this presentation, and I’ll do my best.”*
5. **Take Action:** Write one step you’ll take to move forward.
 - Example: *“I’ll practice with a friend to build my confidence.”*

Your inner dialogue is powerful—it shapes the life you live. By addressing negative self-talk, embracing a growth mindset, and learning optimism, you can rewrite the narrative in your head. It will take time, but you will improve. Start today. Each small step brings you closer to the person you want to be.

Final Thoughts and Thanks

Thank you for dedicating your time, energy, and focus to this journey of personal growth and success. Working through this book is no small commitment, and I am deeply grateful you chose to invest in yourself through this process.

Please take these lessons with you, reflect on them often, and use them as a guide to navigate the opportunities and challenges ahead. You have within you the power to make meaningful changes and achieve extraordinary things. I am inspired by your courage to embark on this journey, and I am confident you will make the most of it.

Thank you for allowing me to be a part of your story.

With gratitude and encouragement, John



Quotes and Wisdom to Reflect On

Anne Frank

"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world."

Aristotle

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

"Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom."

Brené Brown

"Authenticity is the daily practice of letting go of who we think we're supposed to be and embracing who we are. Choosing authenticity means cultivating the courage to be imperfect, to set boundaries, and to allow ourselves to be vulnerable."

Charles Swindoll

"We are all faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations."

Cicero

The Six Mistakes of Man:

- The illusion that personal gain is made up of crushing others.
- The tendency to worry about things that cannot be changed or corrected.
- Insisting that a thing is impossible because we cannot accomplish it.
- Refusing to set aside trivial preferences.
- Neglecting development and refinement of the mind and not acquiring the habit of reading and study.
- Attempting to compel others to believe and live as we do.

Confucius

"Life is actually simple, but we insist on making it complicated."

Eleanor Roosevelt

"Do what you feel in your heart to be right—for you'll be criticized anyway."

Epictetus

"We are disturbed not by events, but by the views which we take of them. When, therefore, we are hindered, or disturbed, or grieved, let us never attribute it to others, but to ourselves; that is, to our own views."

James Allen

"People are anxious to improve their circumstances but are unwilling to improve themselves."

Jim Rohn

"Your life does not get better by chance; it gets better by change."

**Lao Tzu**

"When you are content to be simply yourself and don't compare or compete, everybody will respect you. Stop thinking about controlling everything, and the world will flow as it should."

Mahatma Gandhi

"Man often becomes what he believes himself to be. If I keep on saying to myself that I cannot do a certain thing, it is possible that I may end by really becoming incapable of doing it. On the contrary, if I have the belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning."

"Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony."

Marcus Aurelius

"The happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts. You have power over your mind—not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength."

Stephen R. Covey

"The key is in not spending time, but in investing it."

Virginia Woolf

"You cannot find peace by avoiding life."

Viktor Frankl

"Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose."

William James

"The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another."