

TAKE 100% RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR LIFE

*You must take personal responsibility. You cannot
change the circumstances, the seasons, or the wind,
but you can change yourself.*

JIM ROHN
America's foremost business philosopher

One of the most pervasive myths in the American culture today is that we are *entitled* to a great life—that somehow, somewhere, someone (certainly not us) is responsible for filling our lives with continual happiness, exciting career options, nurturing family time, and blissful personal relationships simply because we exist.

But the real truth—and the one lesson this whole book is based on—is that there is only one person responsible for the quality of the life you live.

That person is *you*.

If you want to be successful, you have to take 100% responsibility for everything that you experience in your life. This includes the level of your achievements, the results you produce, the quality of your relationships, the state of your health and physical fitness, your income, your debts, your feelings—everything!

This is not easy.

In fact, most of us have been conditioned to blame something outside of ourselves for the parts of our life we don't like. We blame our parents, our bosses, our friends, the media, our coworkers, our clients, our spouse, the weather, the economy, our astrological chart, our lack of money—anyone or anything we can pin the blame on. We never want to look at where the real problem is—ourselves.

There is a wonderful story told about a man who is out walking one night

and comes upon another man down on his knees looking for something under a streetlamp. The passerby inquires as to what the other man is looking for. He answers that he is looking for his lost key. The passerby offers to help and gets down on his knees and helps him search for the key. After an hour of fruitless searching, he says, "We've looked everywhere for it and we haven't found it. Are you sure that you lost it here?"

The other man replies, "No, I lost it in my house, but there is more light out here under the streetlamp."

It is time to stop looking outside yourself for the answers to why you haven't created the life and results you want, for it is you who creates the quality of the life you lead and the results you produce.

You—no one else!

To achieve major success in life—to achieve those things that are most important to you—you must assume 100% responsibility for your life. Nothing less will do.

ONE HUNDRED PERCENT RESPONSIBILITY FOR EVERYTHING

As I mentioned in the introduction, back in 1969—only 1 year out of graduate school—I had the good fortune to work for W. Clement Stone. He was a self-made multimillionaire worth \$600 million at the time—and that was long before all the dot-com millionaires came along in the '90s. Stone was also America's premier success guru. He was the publisher of *Success Magazine*, author of *The Success System That Never Fails*, and coauthor with Napoleon Hill of *Success Through a Positive Mental Attitude*.

When I was completing my first week's orientation, Mr. Stone asked me if I took 100% responsibility for my life.

"I think so," I responded.

"This is a yes or no question, young man. You either do or you don't."

"Well, I guess I'm not sure."

"Have you ever blamed anyone for any circumstance in your life? Have you ever complained about anything?"

"Uh . . . yeah . . . I guess I have."

"Don't guess. Think."

"Yes, I have."

"Okay, then. That means you don't take one hundred percent responsibility for your life. Taking one hundred percent responsibility means you acknowledge that you create everything that happens to you. It means you understand that *you* are the cause of all of your experience. If you want to be really success-

ful, and I know you do, then you will have to give up blaming and complaining and take total responsibility for your life—that means all your results, both your successes *and* your failures. That is the prerequisite for creating a life of success. It is only by acknowledging that you have created everything up until now that you can take charge of creating the future you want.

“You see, Jack, if you realize that you have created your current conditions, then you can uncreate them and re-create them at will. Do you understand that?”

“Yes, sir, I do.”

“Are you willing to take one hundred percent responsibility for your life?”

“Yes, sir, I am!”

And I did.

YOU HAVE TO GIVE UP ALL YOUR EXCUSES

Ninety-nine percent of all failures come from people who have a habit of making excuses.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

Chemist who discovered over 325 uses for the peanut

If *you* want to create the life of your dreams, then *you* are going to have to take 100% responsibility for your life as well. That means giving up all your excuses, all your victim stories, all the reasons why you can't and why you haven't up until now, and all your blaming of outside circumstances. You have to give them all up forever.

You have to take the position that you have always had the power to make it different, to get it right, to produce the desired result. For whatever reason—ignorance, lack of awareness, fear, needing to be right, the need to feel safe—you chose not to exercise that power. Who knows why? It doesn't matter. The past is the past. All that matters now is that from this point forward you choose—that's right, it's a choice—you choose to act as if (that's all that's required—to act as if) you are 100% responsible for everything that does or doesn't happen to you.

If something doesn't turn out as planned, you will ask yourself, “How did I create that? What was I thinking? What were my beliefs? What did I say or not say? What did I do or not do to create that result? How did I get the other person to act that way? What do I need to do differently next time to get the result I want?”

A few years after I met Mr. Stone, Dr. Robert Resnick, a psychotherapist in Los Angeles, taught me a very simple but very important formula that made this idea of 100% responsibility even clearer to me. The formula is:

$$E + R = O$$

(Event + Response = Outcome)

The basic idea is that every outcome you experience in life (whether it is success or failure, wealth or poverty, health or illness, intimacy or estrangement, joy or frustration) is the result of how you have responded to an earlier event or events in your life.

If you don't like the outcomes you are currently getting, there are two basic choices you can make.

1. **You can blame the event (E) for your lack of results (O).** In other words, you can blame the economy, the weather, the lack of money, your lack of education, racism, gender bias, the current administration in Washington, your wife or husband, your boss's attitude, the lack of support, the political climate, the system or lack of systems, and so on. If you're a golfer, you've probably even blamed your clubs and the course you played on. No doubt all these factors do exist, but if they were *the* deciding factor, nobody would ever succeed.

Jackie Robinson would never have played major league baseball, Sidney Poitier and Denzel Washington would have never become movie stars, Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer would never have become U.S. senators, Erin Brockovich would never have uncovered PG&E's contamination of the water in Hinkley, California, Bill Gates would never have founded Microsoft, and Steve Jobs would never have started Apple Computers. For every reason why it's not possible, there are hundreds of people who have faced the same circumstances and succeeded.

Lots of people overcome these so-called limiting factors, so it can't be the limiting factors that limit you. It is not the external conditions and circumstances that stop you—it is you! We stop ourselves! We think limiting thoughts and engage in self-defeating behaviors. We defend our self-destructive habits (such as drinking and smoking) with indefensible logic. We ignore useful feedback, fail to continuously educate ourselves and learn new skills, waste time on the trivial aspects of our lives, engage in idle gossip, eat unhealthy food, fail to exercise, spend more money than we make, fail

to invest in our future, avoid necessary conflict, fail to tell the truth, don't ask for what we want—and then wonder why our lives don't work. But this, by the way, is what most people do. They place the blame for everything that isn't the way they want it on outside events and circumstances. They have an excuse for everything.

2. You can instead simply change your responses (R) to the events (E)—the way things are—until you get the outcomes (O) you want. You can change your thinking, change your communication, change the pictures you hold in your head (your images of yourself and the world)—and you can change your behavior—the things you do. That is all you really have any control over anyway. Unfortunately, most of us are so run by our habits that we never change our behavior. We get stuck in our conditioned responses—to our spouses and our children, to our colleagues at work, to our customers and our clients, to our students, and to the world at large. We are a bundle of conditioned reflexes that operate outside of our control. You have to regain control of your thoughts, your images, your dreams and daydreams, and your behavior. Everything you think, say, and do needs to become intentional and aligned with your purpose, your values, and your goals.

IF YOU DON'T LIKE YOUR OUTCOMES, CHANGE YOUR RESPONSES

Let's look at some examples of how this works.

Do you remember the Northridge earthquake in 1994? Well, I do! I lived through it in Los Angeles. Two days later, I watched as CNN interviewed people commuting to work. The earthquake had damaged one of the main freeways leading into the city. Traffic was at a standstill, and what was normally a 1-hour drive had become a 2- or 3-hour drive.

The CNN reporter knocked on the window of one of the cars stuck in traffic and asked the driver how he was doing.

He responded angrily, "I hate California. First there were fires, then floods, and now an earthquake! No matter what time I leave in the morning, I'm going to be late for work. I can't believe it!"

Then the reporter knocked on the window of the car behind him and asked the second driver the same question. This driver was all smiles. He replied, "It's no problem. I left my house at five AM. I don't think under the circumstances my boss can ask for more than that. I have lots of music cassettes



and my Spanish-language tapes with me. I've got my cell phone. I have coffee in a thermos, my lunch—I even brought a book to read. So I'm fine.”

Now, if the earthquake or the traffic were really the deciding variables, then everyone should have been angry. But everyone wasn't. It was their individual *response* to the traffic that gave them their particular *outcome*. It was thinking negative thoughts or thinking positive thoughts, leaving the house prepared or leaving the house unprepared that made the difference. It was all a matter of attitude and behavior that created their completely different experiences.

I'VE HEARD THERE'S GOING TO BE A RECESSION;
I'VE DECIDED NOT TO PARTICIPATE

A friend of mine owns a Lexus dealership in Southern California. When the Gulf War broke out, people stopped coming in to buy Lexuses (or Lexi, for any fellow Harvard graduates and Latin students out there). They knew that if they didn't change their response (R) to the event (E) of nobody coming into the showroom, they were going to slowly go out of business. Their normal response (R) would have been to continue placing ads in the newspaper

and on the radio, then wait for people to come into the dealership. But that wasn't working. The outcome (O) they were getting was a steady decrease in sales. So they tried a number of new things. The one that worked was driving a fleet of new cars out to where the rich people were—the country clubs, marinas, polo grounds, parties in Beverly Hills and Westlake Village—and then inviting them to take a spin in a new Lexus.

Now think about this . . . have you ever test-driven a new car and then got back into your old car? Remember that feeling of dissatisfaction you felt as you compared your old car to the new car you had just driven? Your old car was fine up until then. But suddenly you knew there was something better—and you wanted it. The same thing happened with these folks. After test-driving the new car, a high percentage of the people bought or leased a new Lexus.

The dealership had changed their response (R) to an unexpected event (E)—the war—until they got the outcome (O) they wanted . . . increased sales. They actually ended up selling more cars per week than before the war broke out.

EVERYTHING YOU EXPERIENCE TODAY IS THE RESULT OF CHOICES YOU HAVE MADE IN THE PAST

Everything you experience in life—both internally and externally—is the result of how you have responded to a previous event.

Event: You are given a \$400 bonus.

Response: You spend it on a night on the town.

Outcome: You are broke.

Event: You are given a \$400 bonus.

Response: You invest it in your mutual fund.

Outcome: You have an increased net worth.

You only have control over three things in your life—the thoughts you think, the images you visualize, and the actions you take (your behavior). How you use these three things determines everything you experience. If you don't like what you are producing and experiencing, you have to change your responses. Change your negative thoughts to positive ones. Change what you daydream about. Change your habits. Change what you read. Change your friends. Change how you talk.

IF YOU KEEP ON DOING WHAT YOU'VE ALWAYS
DONE, YOU'LL KEEP ON GETTING WHAT
YOU'VE ALWAYS GOT

Twelve-step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous define *insanity* as “continuing the same behavior and expecting a different result.” It ain’t gonna happen! If you are an alcoholic and you keep on drinking, your life is not going to get any better. Likewise, if you continue your current behaviors, your life is not going to get any better either.

The day you change your responses is the day your life will begin to get better! If what you are currently doing would produce the “more” and “better” that you are seeking in life, the more and better would have already shown up! If you want something different, you are going to have to *do* something different!

YOU HAVE TO GIVE UP BLAMING

All blame is a waste of time. No matter how much fault you find with another, and regardless of how much you blame him, it will not change you.

WAYNE DYER

Coauthor of *How to Get What You Really, Really, Really, Really Want*

You will never become successful as long as you continue to blame someone or something else for your lack of success. If you are going to be a winner, you have to acknowledge the truth—it is *you* who took the actions, thought the thoughts, created the feelings, and made the choices that got you to where you now are. It was you!

You are the one who ate the junk food.
You are the one who didn't say no!
You are the one who took the job.
You are the one who stayed in the job.
You are the one who chose to believe them.
You are the one who ignored your intuition.
You are the one who abandoned your dream.
You are the one who bought it.
You are the one who didn't take care of it.
You are the one who decided you had to do it alone.



You are the one who trusted him.
You are the one who said yes to the dogs.

In short, you thought the thoughts, you created the feelings, you made the choice, you said the words, and that's why you are where you are now.

YOU HAVE TO GIVE UP COMPLAINING

*The man who complains about the way the ball bounces
is likely the one who dropped it.*

LOU HOLTZ

The only coach in NCAA history to lead six different college teams to postseason bowl games, and winner of a national championship and "coach of the year" honors

Let's take a moment to really look at complaining. In order to complain about something or someone, you have to believe that something better exists. You

have to have a reference point of something you prefer that you are not willing to take responsibility for creating. Let's look at that more closely.

If you didn't believe there was something better possible—more money, a bigger house, a more fulfilling job, more fun, a more loving spouse—you couldn't complain. So you have this image of something better and you know you would prefer it, but you are unwilling to take the risks that would be required to create it.

Think about this . . . people only complain about things they can do something about. We don't complain about the things we have no power over. Have you ever heard anyone complain about gravity? No, never. Have you ever seen an elderly person all bent over with age walking down the street complaining about gravity? Of course not.

But why not? If it weren't for gravity, people wouldn't fall down the stairs, planes wouldn't fall out of the sky, and we wouldn't break any dishes. But nobody complains about it. And the reason is because gravity just exists. There is nothing anyone can do about gravity, so we just accept it. We know that complaining will not change it, so we don't complain about it. In fact, because it just is, we use gravity to our advantage. We build aqueducts down mountainsides to carry water to us, and we use drains to take away our waste.

Even more interesting is that we choose to play with gravity, to have fun with it. Almost every sport we play uses gravity. We ski, sky-dive, high-jump, throw the discus and the javelin, and play basketball, baseball, and golf—all of which require gravity.

The circumstances you complain about are, by their very nature, situations you can change—but you have chosen not to. You can get a better job, find a more loving partner, make more money, live in a nicer house, live in a better neighborhood, and eat healthier food. But all of these things would require you to change.

If you refer to the list found earlier in this chapter, you could

- Learn to cook healthier food.
- Say no in the face of peer pressure.
- Quit and find a better job.
- Take the time to conduct due diligence.
- Trust your own gut feelings.
- Go back to school to pursue your dream.
- Take better care of your possessions.
- Reach out for help.
- Ask others to assist you.
- Take a self-development class.
- Sell or give away the dogs.

But why don't you simply do those things? It's because they involve risks. You run the risk of being unemployed, left alone, or ridiculed and judged by others. You run the risk of failure, confrontation, or being wrong. You run the risk of your mother, your neighbors, or your spouse disapproving of you. Making a change might take effort, money, and time. It might be uncomfortable, difficult, or confusing. And so, to avoid risking any of those uncomfortable feelings and experiences, you stay put and complain about it.

As I stated before, complaining means you have a reference point for something better that you would prefer but that you are unwilling to take the risk of creating. Either accept that you are making the choice to stay where you are, take responsibility for your choice, and stop complaining . . . or . . . take the risk of creating your life exactly the way you want it.

If you want to get from where you are to where you want to be, of course you're going to have to take that risk.

So make the decision to stop complaining, to stop spending time with complainers, and get on with creating the life of your dreams.

YOU'RE COMPLAINING TO THE WRONG PERSON

Have you ever noticed that people almost always complain to the wrong people—to people who can't do anything about their complaint? They go to work and complain about their spouse; then they come home and complain to their spouse about the people at work. Why? Because it's easier; it's less risky. It takes courage to tell your spouse that you are not happy with the way things are at home. It takes courage to ask for a behavioral change. It also takes courage to ask your boss to plan better so that you don't end up working every weekend. But only your boss can do anything about that. Your spouse can't.

Learn to replace complaining with making requests and taking action that will achieve your desired outcomes. That is what successful people do. That is what works. If you find yourself in a situation you don't like, either work to make it better or leave. Do something to change it or get the heck out. Agree to work on the relationship or get a divorce. Work to improve working conditions or find a new job. Either way, you will get a change. As the old adage says, "Don't just sit there (and complain), do something." And remember, it's up to you to make the change, to do something different. The world doesn't owe you anything. You have to create it.

YOU EITHER CREATE OR ALLOW EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS TO YOU

To be powerful, you need to take the position that you create or allow everything that happens to you. By *create*, I mean that you directly cause something to happen by your actions or inactions. If you walk up to a man in a bar who is bigger than you, has obviously been drinking for a long time, and say to him, "You are really ugly and stupid," and he jumps off the bar stool, hits you in the jaw, and you end up in the hospital—you created that. That's an easy-to-understand example.

Here's one that may be harder to swallow: You work late every night. You come home tired and burned out. You eat dinner in a coma and then sit down in front of the television to watch a basketball game. You're too tired and stressed out to do anything else—like go for a walk or play with the kids. This goes on for years. Your wife asks you to talk to her. You say, "Later!" Three years later, you come home to an empty house and a note that she has left you and taken the kids. You created that one, too!

Other times, we simply allow things to happen to us by our inaction and our unwillingness to do what is necessary to create or maintain what we want:

- You didn't follow through on your threat to take away privileges if the kids didn't clean up after themselves, and now the house looks like a war zone.
- You didn't demand he join you in counseling or leave the first time he hit you, so now you're still getting hit.
- You didn't attend any sales and motivational seminars because you were too busy, and now the new kid just won the top sales award.
- You didn't take the time to take the dogs to obedience training, and now they're out of control.
- You didn't take time to maintain your car, and now you're sitting by the side of the road with your car broken down.
- You didn't go back to school, and now you are being passed over for a promotion.

Realize that you are not the victim here. You stood passively by and let it happen. You didn't say anything, make a demand, make a request, say no, try something new, or leave.

YELLOW ALERTS

Be aware that nothing ever just “happens” to you. Just like the “yellow alerts” in the old *Star Trek* television series, you almost always receive advance warnings—in the form of telltale signs, comments from others, gut instinct, or intuition—that alert you to the impending danger and give you time to prevent the unwanted outcome.

You are getting yellow alerts all the time. There are *external* yellow alerts:

He keeps coming home later and later with alcohol on his breath.
The client's first check bounced.
He screamed at his secretary.
His mother warned you.
Your friends told you.

And there are *internal* yellow alerts:

That feeling in your stomach
That inkling you had
That fleeting thought that just maybe . . .
That intuition
That fear that emerged
That dream that woke you up in the middle of the night

We have a whole language that informs us:

Clues, inklings, suspicions
The handwriting on the wall
I had a feeling that . . .
I could see it coming for a mile.
My gut feeling told me.

These alerts give you time to change your response (R) in the $E + R = O$ equation. However, too many people ignore the yellow alerts because paying attention to them would require them to do something that is uncomfortable. It is uncomfortable to confront your spouse about the cigarettes in the ashtray that have lipstick on them. It is uncomfortable to speak up in a staff meeting when you are the only one who feels that the proposed plan won't work. It is uncomfortable to tell someone you don't trust them.

So you pretend not to see and not to know because it is easier, more con-

venient and less uncomfortable, avoids confrontation, keeps the peace, and protects you from having to take risks.

LIFE BECOMES MUCH EASIER

Successful people, on the other hand, face facts squarely. They do the uncomfortable and take steps to create their desired outcomes. Successful people don't wait for disasters to occur and then blame something or someone else for their problems.

Once you begin to respond quickly and decisively to signals and events as they occur, life becomes much easier. You start seeing improved outcomes both internally and externally. Old internal self-talk such as "I feel like a victim; I feel used; nothing ever seems to work out for me" is replaced with "I feel great; I am in control; I can make things happen."

External outcomes such as "Nobody ever comes to our store; we missed our quarterly goals; people are complaining that our new product doesn't work" are transformed into "We have more money in the bank; I lead the division in sales; our product is flying off the shelves."

IT'S SIMPLE

The bottom line is that you are the one who is creating your life the way it is. The life you currently live is the result of all of your past thoughts and actions. You are in charge of your current thoughts and your present feelings. You are in charge of what you say and what you do. You are also in charge of what goes into your mind—the books and magazines you read, the movies and television shows you watch, and the people you hang out with. Every action is under your control. To be more successful, all you have to do is act in ways that produce more of what you want.

That's it. It's that simple!

SIMPLE ISN'T NECESSARILY EASY

Though this principle is simple, it is not necessarily easy to implement. It requires concentrated awareness, dedicated discipline, and a willingness to experiment and take risks. You have to be willing to pay attention to what you are doing and to the results you are producing. You have to ask yourself, your family, your friends, your colleagues, your managers, your teachers, your coaches, and your clients for feedback. "Is what I'm doing working? Could I

be doing it better? Is there something more I should be doing that I am not? Is there something I am doing that I should stop doing? How do you see me limiting myself?"

Don't be afraid to ask. Most people are afraid to ask for feedback about how they are doing because they are afraid of what they are going to hear. There is nothing to be afraid of. The truth is the truth. You are better off knowing the truth than not knowing it. And once you know, you can do something about it. You cannot improve your life, your relationships, your game, or your performance without feedback.

Slow down and pay attention. Life will always give you feedback about the effects of your behavior if you will just pay attention. If your golf ball is always slicing to the right, if you're not making sales, if you're getting C's in all your college courses, if your children are mad at you, if your body is tired and weak, if your house is a mess, or if you're not happy—this is all feedback. It is telling you that something is wrong. This is the time to start paying attention to what is happening.

Ask yourself: *How am I creating or allowing this to happen? What am I doing that's working that I need to be doing more of? (Should I do more practicing, meditating, delegating, trusting, listening, asking questions, keeping my eye on the ball, advertising, saying "I love you," controlling my carbohydrate intake?)*

What am I doing that's not working? What do I need to be doing less of? (Am I talking too much, watching too much television, spending too much money, eating too much sugar, drinking too much, being late too often, gossiping, putting other people down?)

What am I not doing that I need to try on to see if it works? (Do I need to listen more, exercise, get more sleep, drink more water, ask for help, do more marketing, read, plan, communicate, delegate, follow through, hire a coach, volunteer, or be more appreciative?)

This book is full of proven success principles and techniques you can immediately put into practice in your life. You will have to suspend judgment, take a leap of faith, act as if they are true, and try them out. Only then will you have firsthand experience about their effectiveness for your life. You won't know if they work unless you give them a try. And here's the rub—no one else can do this for you. Only you can do it.

But the formula is simple—do more of what is working, do less of what isn't, and try on new behaviors to see if they produce better results.

PAY ATTENTION . . . YOUR RESULTS DON'T LIE

The easiest, fastest, and best way to find out what is or isn't working is to pay attention to the results you are currently producing. You are either rich or you are not. You either command respect or you don't. You are either golfing

par or you are not. You are either maintaining your ideal body weight or you are not. You are either happy or you are not. You either have what you want or you don't. It's that simple. Results don't lie!

You have to give up the excuses and justifications and come to terms with the results you are producing. If you are under quota or overweight, all the great reasons in the world won't change that. The only thing that will change your results is to change your behavior. Prospect more, get some sales training, change your sales presentation, change your diet, consume fewer calories, and exercise more frequently—these are things that will make a difference. But you have to first be willing to look at the results you are producing. The only starting point that works is reality.

So start paying attention to what is so. Look around at your life and the people in it. Are you and they happy? Is there balance, beauty, comfort, and ease? Do your systems work? Are you getting what you want? Is your net worth increasing? Are your grades satisfactory? Are you healthy, fit, and pain free? Are you getting better in all areas of your life? If not, then something needs to happen, and only you can make it happen.

Don't kid yourself. Be ruthlessly honest with yourself. Take your own inventory.

BE CLEAR WHY YOU'RE HERE

*Learn to get in touch with the silence within yourself and
know that everything in life has a purpose.*

ELISABETH KUBLER-ROSS, M.D.
Psychiatrist and author of the classic *On Death and Dying*

I believe each of us is born with a life purpose. Identifying, acknowledging, and honoring this purpose is perhaps the most important action successful people take. They take the time to understand what they're here to do—and then they pursue that with passion and enthusiasm.

WHAT WERE YOU PUT ON THIS EARTH TO DO?

I discovered long ago what I was put on this earth to do. I determined my true purpose in life, my “right livelihood.” I discovered how to inject passion and determination into every activity I undertake. And I learned how purpose can bring an aspect of fun and fulfillment to virtually everything I do.

Now I'd like to help uncover the same secret for you.

You see, without a purpose in life, it's easy to get sidetracked on your life's journey. It's easy to wander and drift, accomplishing little.

But with a purpose, everything in life seems to fall into place. To be “on purpose” means you're doing what you love to do, doing what you're good at and accomplishing what's important to you. When you truly are on purpose, the people, resources, and opportunities you need naturally gravitate toward you. The world benefits, too, because when you act in alignment with your true life purpose, all of your actions automatically serve others.

SOME PERSONAL LIFE PURPOSE STATEMENTS

My life purpose is to *inspire and empower people to live their highest vision in a context of love and joy*. I inspire people to live their highest vision (see Principle 3, “Decide What You Want”) by collecting and disseminating inspiring stories through the *Chicken Soup for the Soul*® series and in my inspirational keynote speeches. I empower people to live their dreams by writing practical self-help books like this one, *The Power of Focus*, and *The Aladdin Factor*; designing courses for high school students; and conducting seminars and workshops for adults that teach powerful tools for creating one’s ideal life.

Here are the life purpose statements of some of my friends. It is important to note that they have all become self-made millionaires through the fulfillment of their life purpose.

- To inspire and empower people to achieve their destiny¹
- To uplift humanity’s consciousness through business²
- To humbly serve the Lord by being a loving, playful, powerful, and passionate example of the absolute joy that is available to us the moment we rejoice in God’s gifts and sincerely love and serve all of his creations³
- To leave the world a better place than I found it, for horses and for people, too⁴
- To create and inspire one million millionaires who each give \$1 million to their church or charity⁵
- To educate and inspire people to live their highest self based in courage, purpose, and joy, versus fear, need, and obligation⁶

*Decide upon your major definite purpose in life and then organize
all your activities around it.*

BRIAN TRACY

One of America’s leading authorities on the development
of human potential and personal effectiveness

1. Robert Allen, coauthor of *The One Minute Millionaire*.
 2. D.C. Cordova, cofounder of the Excellerated Business School.
 3. Anthony Robbins, author of *Personal Power* and *Get the Edge*, entrepreneur, and philanthropist.
 4. Monty Roberts, author of *The Man Who Listens to Horses*.
 5. Mark Victor Hansen, coauthor of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul*® series.
 6. T. Harv Eker, CEO of Peak Potentials and creator of the “Millionaire Mind” seminar.

Once you know what your life purpose is, you can organize all of your activities around it. Everything you do should be an expression of your purpose. If an activity doesn't fit that formula, you wouldn't work on it. Period.

WHAT'S THE "WHY" BEHIND EVERYTHING YOU DO?

Without purpose as the compass to guide you, your goals and action plans may not ultimately fulfill you. You don't want to get to the top of the ladder only to find out you had it leaning up against the wrong wall.

When Julie Laipply was a child, she was a very big fan of animals. As a result, all she ever heard growing up was "Julie, you should be a vet. You're going to be a great vet. That's what you should do." So when she got to Ohio State University, she took biology, anatomy, and chemistry, and started studying to be a vet. A Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship allowed her to spend her senior year studying abroad in Manchester, England. Away from the family and faculty pressures back home, she found herself one dreary day sitting at her desk, surrounded by biology books and staring out the window, when it suddenly hit her: *You know what? I'm totally miserable. Why am I so miserable? What am I doing? I don't want to be a vet!*

Julie then asked herself, *What is a job I would love so much that I'd do it for free but that I could actually get paid for? It's not being a vet. That's not the right job.* Then she thought back over all the things she'd done in her life and what had made her the most happy. And then it hit her—it was all of the youth leadership conferences that she had volunteered at, and the communications and leadership courses she had taken as elective courses back at Ohio State. *How could I have been so ignorant? Here I am at my fourth year at school and just finally realizing I'm on the wrong path and not doing the right thing. But it's been here in front of me the whole time. I just never took the time to acknowledge it until now.*

Buoyed by her new insight, Julie spent the rest of her year in England taking courses in communications and media performance. When she returned to Ohio State, she was eventually able to convince the administration to let her create her own program in "leadership studies," and while it took her 2 years longer to finally graduate, she went on to become a senior management consultant in leadership training and development for the Pentagon. She also won the Miss Virginia USA contest, which allowed her to spend much of 2002 speaking to kids all across Virginia, and more recently she has created the Role Models and Mentors for Youth Foundation, which teaches kids how to be better role models for one another. By the way, Julie is only 26 years old—a testament to the power that clarity of purpose can create in your life.

The good news is that you don't have to go all the way to England for a year

abroad to get away from the daily pressures of your life long enough to create the space to discover what you are really here to do. You can simply take the time to complete two simple exercises that will help you clarify your purpose.

YOUR INNER GUIDANCE SYSTEM IS YOUR JOY

It is the soul's duty to be loyal to its own desires. It must abandon itself to its master passion.

DAME REBECCA WEST
Best-selling author

You were born with an inner guidance system that tells you when you are on or off purpose by the amount of joy you are experiencing. The things that bring you the greatest joy are in alignment with your purpose. To begin to home in on your purpose, make a list of the times you have felt most joyful and alive. What are the common elements of these experiences? Can you figure out a way to make a living doing these things?

Pat Williams is the senior vice-president of the Orlando Magic basketball team. He has also written 36 books and is a professional speaker. When I asked him what he felt the greatest secret to success was, he replied, "Figure out what you love to do as young as you can, and then organize your life around figuring out how to make a living at it." For young Pat, it was sports—more specifically, baseball. When his father took him to his first baseball game in Philadelphia, he fell in love with the game. He learned to read by reading the sports section of the *New York Times*. He knew he wanted to grow up and have a career in sports. He devoted almost every waking moment to it. He collected baseball cards, played sports, and wrote a sports column for the school newspaper.

Pat went on to have a career in the front office of the Philadelphia Phillies baseball team, then with the Philadelphia 76ers basketball team. When the NBA considered granting an expansion team franchise to Orlando, Pat was there to lead the fight. Now in his sixties, Pat has enjoyed 40-plus years doing what he loves, and he has enjoyed every minute of it. Once you are clear about what brings you the greatest joy, you will have a major insight into your purpose.

This second exercise is a simple but powerful way to create a compelling statement of your life purpose to guide and direct your behavior. Take time now to complete the following exercise.

THE LIFE PURPOSE EXERCISE⁷

1. List two of your unique personal qualities, such as *enthusiasm* and *creativity*.

2. List one or two ways you enjoy expressing those qualities when interacting with others, such as *to support* and *to inspire*.

3. Assume the world is perfect right now. What does this world look like? How is everyone interacting with everyone else? What does it feel like? Write your answer as a statement, in the present tense, describing the ultimate condition, the perfect world as you see it and feel it. Remember, a perfect world is a fun place to be.

EXAMPLE: *Everyone is freely expressing their own unique talents. Everyone is working in harmony. Everyone is expressing love.*

4. Combine the three prior subdivisions of this paragraph into a single statement.

EXAMPLE: *My purpose is to use my creativity and enthusiasm to support and inspire others to freely express their talents in a harmonious and loving way.*

7. There are many ways to approach defining your purpose. I learned this version of the life purpose exercise from Arnold M. Patent, spiritual coach and author of *You Can Have It All*. His most recent book is *The Journey*. You can visit his Web site at www.arnoldpatent.com.

STAYING ON PURPOSE

Once you have determined and written down your life purpose, read it every day, preferably in the morning. If you are artistic or strongly visual by nature, you may want to draw or paint a symbol or picture that represents your life purpose and then hang it somewhere (on the refrigerator, opposite your desk, near your bed) where you will see it every day. This will keep you focused on your purpose.

As you move forward in the next few chapters to define your vision and your goals, make sure they are aligned with and serve to fulfill your purpose.

Another approach to clarifying your purpose is to set aside some time for quiet reflection—time for a period of meditation. (See Principle 47, “Inquire Within”). After you become relaxed and enter into a state of deep self-love and peacefulness, ask yourself, *What is my purpose for living?* or *What is my unique role in the universe?* Allow the answer to simply come to you. Let it be as expansive as you can imagine. The words that come need not be flowery or poetic; what is important is how inspired the words make you feel.

DECIDE WHAT YOU WANT

*The indispensable first step to getting the things
you want out of life is this: decide what you want.*

BEN STEIN
Actor and author

Once you have decided why you are here, you have to decide what you want to do, be, and have. What do you want to accomplish? What do you want to experience? And what possessions do you want to acquire? In the journey from where you are to where you want to be, you have to decide where you want to be. In other words, what does success look like to you?

One of the main reasons why most people don't get what they want is they haven't decided what they want. They haven't defined their desires in clear and compelling detail.

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMMING OFTEN GETS IN THE WAY OF WHAT YOU WANT

Inside of every one of us is that tiny seed of the "you" that you were meant to become. Unfortunately, you may have buried this seed in response to your parents, teachers, coaches, and other adult role models as you were growing up.

You started out as a baby knowing exactly what you wanted. You knew when you were hungry. You spit out the foods you didn't like and avidly devoured the ones you did. You had no trouble expressing your needs and wants. You simply cried loudly—with no inhibitions or holding back—until you got what you wanted. You had everything inside of you that you needed to get fed, changed, held, and rocked. As you got older, you crawled around and moved toward whatever held the most interest for you. You were clear about what you wanted, and you headed straight toward it with no fear.

So what happened?
Somewhere along the way, someone said . . .

Don't touch that!
Stay away from there.
Keep your hands off that.
Eat everything on your plate whether you like it or not!
You don't really feel that way.
You don't really want that.
You should be ashamed of yourself.
Stop crying. Don't be such a baby.

As you got older, you heard . . .

You can't have everything you want simply because you want it.
Money doesn't grow on trees.
Can't you think of anybody but yourself?!
Stop being so selfish!
Stop doing what you are doing and come do what I want you to do!

DON'T LIVE SOMEONE ELSE'S DREAMS

After many years of these kinds of sanctions, most of us eventually lost touch with the needs of our bodies and the desires of our hearts and somehow got stuck trying to figure out what other people wanted us to do. We learned how to act and how to be to get *their* approval. As a result, we now do a lot of things we don't want to do but that please a lot of other people:

- We go to medical school because that is what Dad wanted for us.
- We get married to please our mother.
- We get a "real job" instead of pursuing our dream career in the arts.
- We go straight into graduate school instead of taking a year off and backpacking through Europe.

In the name of being sensible, we end up becoming numb to our own desires. It's no wonder that when we ask many teenagers what they want to do or be, they honestly answer, "I don't know." There are too many layers of "should's," "ought to's," and "you'd better's" piled on top of and suffocating what they really want.

So how do you reclaim yourself and your true desires? How do you get

back to what you really want with no fear, shame, or inhibition? How do you reconnect with your real passion?

You start on the smallest level by honoring your preferences in every situation—no matter how large or small. Don't think of them as petty. They might be inconsequential to someone else, but they are not to you.

STOP SETTling FOR LESS THAN YOU WANT

If you are going to reown your power and get what you really want out of life, you will have to stop saying, "I don't know; I don't care; it doesn't matter to me"—or the current favorite of teenagers, "Whatever." When you are confronted with a choice, no matter how small or insignificant, act as if you have a preference. Ask yourself, *If I did know, what would it be? If I did care, which would I prefer? If it did matter, what would I rather do?*

Not being clear about what you want and making other people's needs and desires more important than your own is simply a habit. You can break it by practicing the opposite habit.

THE YELLOW NOTEBOOK

Many years ago, I took a workshop with self-esteem and motivational expert Chérie Carter-Scott, author of *If Life Is a Game, These Are the Rules*. As the 24 of us entered the training room on the first morning, we were directed to take a seat in one of the chairs facing the front of the room. There was a spiral-bound notebook on every chair. Some were blue, some were yellow, some were red. The one on my chair was yellow. I remember thinking, *I hate yellow. I wish I had a blue one.*

Then Chérie said something that changed my life forever: "If you don't like the color of the notebook you have, trade with someone else and get the one you want. You deserve to have everything in your life exactly the way you want it."

Wow, what a radical concept! For 20-some years, I had not operated from that premise. I had settled, thinking I couldn't have everything I wanted.

So I turned to the person to my right and said, "Would you mind trading your blue notebook for my yellow one?"

She responded, "Not at all. I prefer yellow. I like the brightness of the color. It fits my mood." I now had my blue notebook. Not a huge success in the greater scheme of things, but it was the beginning of reclaiming my birthright to acknowledge my preferences and get exactly what I want. Up

until then, I would have discounted my preference as petty and not worth acting on. I would have continued to numb out my awareness of what I wanted. That day was a turning point for me—the beginning of allowing myself to know and act on my wants and desires in a much more powerful way.

MAKE AN “I WANT” LIST

One of the easiest ways to begin clarifying what you truly want is to make a list of 30 things you want to do, 30 things you want to have, and 30 things you want to be before you die. This is a great way to get the ball rolling.

Another powerful technique to unearth your wants is to ask a friend to help you make an “I Want” list. Have your friend continually ask, “What do you want? What do you want?” for 10 to 15 minutes, and jot down your answers. You’ll find the first wants aren’t all that profound. In fact, most people usually hear themselves saying, “I want a Mercedes. I want a big house on the ocean.” And so on. However, by the end of the 15-minute exercise, the real you begins to speak: “I want people to love me. I want to express myself. I want to make a difference. I want to feel powerful” . . . wants that are true expressions of your core values.

IS WORRYING ABOUT MAKING A LIVING STOPPING YOU?

What often stops people from expressing their true desire is they don’t think they can make a living doing what they love to do.

“What I love to do is hang out and talk with people,” you might say.

Well, Oprah Winfrey makes a living hanging out talking with people. And my friend Diane Brause, who is an international tour guide, makes a living hanging out talking with people in some of the most exciting and exotic locations in the world.

Tiger Woods loves to play golf. Ellen DeGeneres loves to make people laugh. My sister loves to design jewelry and hang out with teenagers. Donald Trump loves to make deals and build buildings. I love to read and share what I have learned with others in books, speeches, and workshops. It’s possible to make a living doing what you love.

Make a list of 20 things you love to do, and then think of ways you can make a living doing some of those things. If you love sports, you could play sports, be a sportswriter or photographer, or work in sports management as an agent or in the front office of a professional team. You could be a coach,

a manager, or a scout. You could be a broadcaster, a camera operator, or a team publicist. There are myriad ways to make money in any field that you love.

For now just decide what you would like to do, and in the following chapters I'll show you how to be successful and make money at it.

CLARIFY YOUR VISION OF YOUR IDEAL LIFE

The theme of this book is how to get from where you are to where you want to be. To accomplish this, you have to know two things—where you are and where you want to get to. Your vision is a detailed description of where you want to get to. It describes in detail what your destination looks like and feels like. To create a balanced and successful life, your vision needs to include the following seven areas: work and career, finances, recreation and free time, health and fitness, relationships, personal goals, and contribution to the larger community.

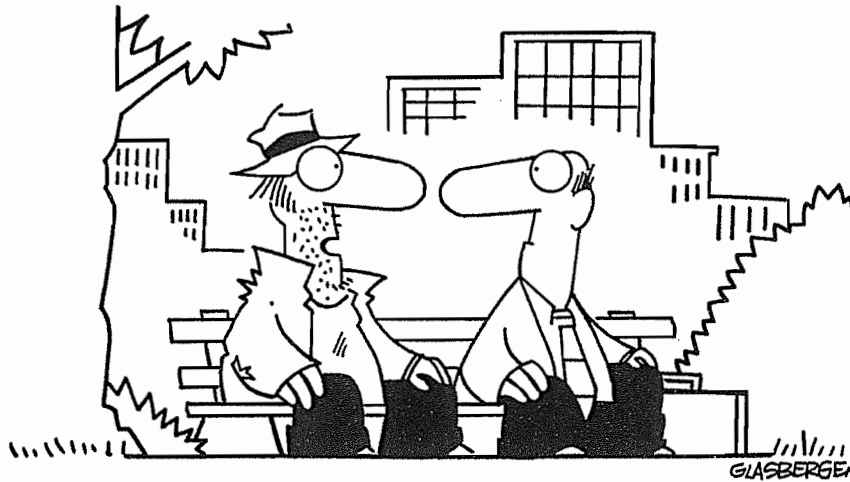
At this stage in the journey, it is not necessary to know exactly how you are going to get there. All that is important is that you figure out where there is. If you get clear on the what, the how will be taken care of.

YOUR INNER GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM

The process of getting from where you are to where you want to be is like using the navigational system with GPS (Global Positioning System) technology in a newer-model car. For the system to work, it simply needs to know where you are and where you want to go. The navigation system figures out where you are by the use of an onboard computer that receives signals from three satellites and calculates your exact position. When you type in your destination, the navigational system plots a perfect course for you. All you have to do is follow the instructions.

Success in life works the same way. All you have to do is decide where you want to go by clarifying your vision, lock in the destination through goal-setting, affirmations, and visualization, and start moving in the right direction. Your inner GPS will keep unfolding your route as you continue to move forward. In other words, once you clarify and stay focused on your vision (and I'll be teaching lots of ways to do that), the exact steps will keep appearing along the way. Once you are clear about what you want and keep your mind constantly focused on it, the how will keep showing up—sometimes just when you need it and not a moment earlier.

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**"I'm wealthy beyond my wildest dreams!
Unfortunately, my dreams were never very wild."**

HIGH ACHIEVERS HAVE BIGGER VISIONS

The greater danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it.

MICHELANGELO

I want to encourage you not to limit your vision in any way. Let it be as big as it is. When I interviewed Dave Liniger, the CEO of RE/MAX, the country's largest real estate company, he told me, "Always dream big dreams. Big dreams attract big people." General Wesley Clark recently told me, "It doesn't take any more energy to create a big dream than it does to create a little one." My experience is that one of the few differences between the superachievers and the rest of the world is that the superachievers simply dream bigger. John F. Kennedy dreamed of putting a man on the moon. Martin Luther King Jr. dreamed of a country free of prejudice and injustice. Bill Gates dreams of a world in which every home has a computer that is connected to the Internet. Buckminster Fuller dreamed of a world where everybody had access to electrical power.

These high achievers see the world from a whole different perspective—as a

place where amazing things can happen, where billions of lives can be improved, where new technology can change the way we live, and where the world's resources can be leveraged for the greatest possible mutual gain. They believe anything is possible, and they believe they have an integral part in creating it.

When Mark Victor Hansen and I first published *Chicken Soup for the Soul*[®], what we call our “2020 vision” was also a big one—to sell 1 billion *Chicken Soup* books and to raise \$500 million for charity through tithing a portion of all of our profits by the year 2020. We were and are very clear about what we want to accomplish.

*If you limit your choices only to what seems possible or reasonable,
you disconnect yourself from what you truly want,
and all that is left is a compromise.*

ROBERT FRITZ
Author of *The Path of Least Resistance*

DON'T LET ANYONE TALK YOU OUT OF YOUR VISION

There are people who will try to talk you out of your vision. They will tell you that you are crazy and that it can't be done. There will be those who will laugh at you and try to bring you down to their level. My friend Monty Roberts, the author of *The Man Who Listens to Horses*, calls these people dream-stealers. Don't listen to them.

When Monty was in high school, his teacher gave the class the assignment to write about what they wanted to do when they grew up. Monty wrote that he wanted to own his own 200-acre ranch and raise Thoroughbred racehorses. His teacher gave him an F and explained that the grade reflected that he deemed his dream unrealistic. No boy who was living in a camper on the back of a pickup truck would ever be able to amass enough money to buy a ranch, purchase breeding stock, and pay the necessary salaries for ranch hands. When he offered Monty the chance of rewriting his paper for a higher grade, Monty told him, “You keep the F; I'm keeping my dream.”

Today Monty's 154-acre Flag Is Up Farms in Solvang, California, raises Thoroughbred racehorses and trains hundreds of horse trainers in a more humane way to “join up” with and train horses.⁸

⁸. To learn more about Monty and his work, go to www.montyroberts.com or read one of his books: *The Man Who Listens to Horses*, *Shy Boy*, *Horse Sense for People*, and *From My Hands to Yours*.

THE VISION EXERCISE

Create your future from your future, not your past.

WERNER ERHARD

Founder of EST training and the Landmark Forum

The following exercise is designed to help you clarify your vision. Although you could do this as a strictly mental exercise by just thinking about the answers and then writing them down, I want to encourage you to go deeper than that. If you do, you'll get deeper answers that serve you better.

Start by putting on some relaxing music and sitting quietly in a comfortable environment where you won't be disturbed. Then, close your eyes and ask your subconscious mind to give you images of what your ideal life would look like if you could have it exactly the way you want it, in each of the following categories:

1. First, focus on the financial area of your life. What is your annual income? What does your cash flow look like? How much money do you have in savings and investments? What is your total net worth?

Next . . . what does your home look like? Where is it located? Does it have a view? What kind of yard and landscaping does it have? Is there a pool or a stable for horses? What color are the walls? What does the furniture look like? Are there paintings hanging in the rooms? What do they look like? Walk through your perfect house, filling in all of the details.

At this point, don't worry about how you'll get that house. Don't sabotage yourself by saying, "I can't live in Malibu because I don't make enough money." Once you give your mind's eye the picture, your mind will solve the "not enough money" challenge.

Next, visualize what kind of car you are driving and any other important possessions your finances have provided.

2. Next, visualize your ideal job or career. Where are you working? What are you doing? With whom are you working? What kind of clients or customers do you have? What is your compensation like? Is it your own business?
3. Then, focus on your free time, your recreation time. What are you doing with your family and friends in the free time you've created

for yourself? What hobbies are you pursuing? What kinds of vacations do you take? What do you do for fun?

4. Next, what is your ideal vision of your body and your physical health? Are you free of all disease? How long do you live to? Are you open, relaxed, in an ecstatic state of bliss all day long? Are you full of vitality? Are you flexible as well as strong? Do you exercise, eat good food, and drink lots of water?
5. Then move on to your ideal vision of your relationships with your family and friends. What is your relationship with your family like? Who are your friends? What is the quality of your relationships with your friends? What do those friendships feel like? Are they loving, supportive, empowering? What kinds of things do you do together?
6. What about the personal arena of your life? Do you see yourself going back to school, getting training, attending workshops, seeking therapy for a past hurt, or growing spiritually? Do you meditate or go on spiritual retreats with your church? Do you want to learn to play an instrument or write your autobiography? Do you want to run a marathon or take an art class? Do you want to travel to other countries?
7. Finally, focus on the community you live in, the community you've chosen. What does it look like when it is operating perfectly? What kinds of community activities take place there? What about your charitable work? What do you do to help others and make a difference? How often do you participate in these activities? Who are you helping?

You can write down your answers as you go, or you can do the whole exercise first and then open your eyes and write them down. In either case, make sure you capture everything in writing as soon as you complete the exercise.

Every day, review the vision you have written down. This will keep your conscious and subconscious minds focused on your vision, and as you apply the other principles and tools in the book, you will begin to manifest all the different aspects of your vision.

SHARE YOUR VISION FOR MAXIMUM IMPACT

When you've finished writing down your vision, share your vision with a good friend whom you can trust to be positive and supportive. You might be afraid that your friend will think your vision is too outlandish, impossible to achieve, too idealistic, unrealistic, or materialistic. Almost all people have

these thoughts when they think about sharing their vision. But the truth is most people, deep down in their hearts, want the very same things you want. Everyone wants financial abundance, a comfortable home, meaningful work they enjoy, good health, time to do the things they love, nurturing relationships with their family and friends, and an opportunity to make a difference in the world. But too few of us readily admit it.

You'll find that when you share your vision, some people will want to help you make it happen. Others will introduce you to friends and resources that can help you. You'll also find that each time that you share your vision, it becomes clearer and feels more real and attainable. And most importantly every time you share your vision, you strengthen your own subconscious belief that you can achieve it.