



Handbook to a Happier Life: A Simple Guide to  
Creating the Life You've Always Wanted

by Jim Donovan

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As the author informs us, this is not a self improvement book; it forces you to take an introspective look at what is preventing your own happiness, and gives suggestions toward self-discovery.

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#### Back Cover

When Jim Donovan's successful career in video and broadcast television led to a personal meltdown, he went through rehab, pulled himself up from the bottom, and started his life over. He then began giving seminars on "how to change your life" based on the simple, yet effective, ideas that had worked for him in recovery. From these seminars evolved the stories and advice in this book.

Don't make big changes, Donovan suggests; just start slowly and move bit-by-bit toward your goal. In addition to goal setting and goal keeping, Donovan discusses writing personal affirmations that work, cultivating gratitude, disciplining the mind, and helping others to achieve their dreams.

### **About the Author**

Jim Donovan speaks regularly to sales organizations, small business managers, and multilevel marketing groups, including Amway.

# **Handbook to a Happier Life—A Simple Guide to Creating the Life You've Always Wanted**

Jim Donovan



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*Dedicated to Georgia, my wife and best friend. Without her patience, support, and encouragement, this book would never have been written.*

*If you advance confidently in the direction of your dreams, endeavor to live the life which you've imagined, you will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.*

— Henry David Thoreau

### **Acknowledgments**

I offer my most heartfelt thanks to my mother, Marguerite Donovan, for first teaching me to read and instilling in me a love for the written word. It has been my most cherished gift. And to my mother-in-law, Jean Policastro, for her faith in me and her constant encouragement. I miss them both daily.

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Most of all, I want to thank the many readers who took the time to write and share their dreams with me. It's their dedication to creating a better life that motivates me to be the best I can be.

I especially want to recognize and thank all the mentors and teachers, too numerous to mention, who have gone before me. Their teachings have enabled me to walk my path and assimilate the knowledge and information I now pass on to you.

### **About the Author**



For more than twenty-five years, Jim Donovan has worked with individuals, companies, and organizations to implement strategies for personal and professional growth. Jim is a frequent speaker to businesses, trade groups, and associations, and his seminars have benefited hundreds of audiences nationwide. His seminars inspire individuals to take charge of their lives, provide them with transformational ideas and strategies for their success, and inspire them to achieve peak performance.

Jim's coaching programs employ a proven step-by-step process that synthesizes some of the most effective information, tools, and methods from the fields of marketing, sales, quantum physics, and universal spirituality. They are uniquely designed to identify the strengths within an organization and build on them. His focus is on helping clients produce significant, explosive results and to take quantum leaps well beyond what is expected.

As an internationally recognized author, his books, including *This Is Your Life, Not a Dress Rehearsal*, proven principles for creating the life of your dreams; *Reclaim Your Life*, how to regain your happiness through challenging times; and *Manage I. T.*, for new and aspiring IT managers, co-authored with Joe Santana, have been translated into four languages and distributed worldwide.

Since 1991, he has published an internationally syndicated newsletter for personal and professional development, aimed at business executives, entrepreneurs, and individuals. Jim is a popular guest on radio talk shows and TV stations, and a regular member of the "brain trust" for the Small Business Advocate syndicated radio show. His articles regularly appear in newspapers and magazines as well as on the Internet.

Visit [www.jimdonovan.com](http://www.jimdonovan.com) to sign up for a free subscription to the *Jim's Jems* e-zine for personal and professional growth. Published since 1991, *Jim's Jems* is read by people throughout the world.

## Introduction—Welcome to Your Life

This is not a self-improvement book. You are fine, right where you are, doing just what you are doing. You can, however, grow and develop further. This book is intended as a handbook to your personal growth and development.

You are entitled to live a long, joyous, abundant, exciting life. It is your birthright. If you are experiencing less, you are shortchanging yourself. While I cannot provide you with this kind of life, throughout this book I will share with you some of the concepts, techniques, and tools that have helped me and countless others to improve the quality of our lives and to begin reaching our full potential as human beings.

This is not a theoretical treatise. I have used the ideas presented in this book in my own life: I have, as they say, "walked my talk." The techniques I'm sharing with you may be simple, but they are not necessarily easy. Easy things require no effort. Implementing the ideas presented in this book will require some effort, but the result — living a happier life — will be well worth the effort.

## Question Everything

Some of the ideas in this book will be new to you, and some you will be familiar with. Some you will embrace, and some you will reject. Take nothing at face value. If something does not feel right to you, skip over it. Throughout our lives too many people have told us what to do and what to think. The time has come for us to make our own decisions based on what feels right to us.

If something in this book does strike a chord in you, make it yours. Work and play with the concepts presented. Complete the exercises that you will find throughout the book. These exercises are meant to help you make the concepts you encounter more concrete. You may even want to refer back to them from time to time to gauge your progress. Add your own ideas and experiences. Let your imagination run free. Have fun. And above all, be true to yourself.

## Why I Wrote this Book

As you read through *Handbook to a Happier Life*, you may wonder who I am and how I came to write this book. As I mentioned, I've walked my talk, and perhaps a bit of my story will serve to demonstrate how all the ideas here work.

After many years of living in a downward spiral, I had hit rock bottom. I was spiritually, emotionally, physically, and financially broke. I was out of control. My own family did not even want me around. I had only one friend left who would tolerate my behavior, Charlie Blackmore, but even his patience wore thin. Through the grace of God and help from a lot of people, I was finally able to begin getting my life back on track. During this time of rebuilding my life, I became a student of personal growth and self-help. I read everything I could get my hands on, listened to countless tapes, and attended numerous seminars.

I began applying what I had learned in my own life, and before long, I started seeing results. Wanting to share my newfound knowledge, I began writing. I started with a newsletter, and after several years and a lot of positive encouragement, I wrote *Handbook to a Happier Life*, which I self-published in a previous version. I was overwhelmed by the response to this simple little book. The sales of my book were terrific, and the letters and e-mails I have received have been both gratifying and humbling. After all, who am I to write a book? I'm just an ordinary guy. I don't have impressive educational credentials. Truth be known, I barely finished high school.

One thing I do have, however, is experience. I know the principles in this book work; I am living proof of their effectiveness. I have used the simple ideas in this book to make major changes in my life and continue to use them daily. The fact that I live what I consider to be a dream life today is all the reason I need to keep applying these principles. They have worked for me, and they'll work for you if... you use them! It is now up to you. If you're serious about making your life everything you want it to be, don't just passively read through this book. Apply the ideas you find to your own life. Do the exercises, and keep track of your progress.

When you're ready to take charge of your destiny, turn the page and begin.

## Chapter 1: Happiness

How many times have you said, "All I want is to be happy"? So many of us get caught up in looking outside ourselves for happiness when, in fact, happiness is something that you can choose at any time. The old saying "Happiness is an inside job" does not refer to working indoors. It means that it is we who choose whether or not to be happy.

*There is no way to happiness. Happiness is the way.*

— Wayne Dyer

I chose the title *Handbook to a Happier Life* because that is what it all boils down to. Most of us just want to be happy. A wonderful spiritual study, *A Course in Miracles*, states not only that you should be happy, but also that you should *make* yourself happy. Although this book offers tools to assist you in your quest for happiness, it is important that you realize that, in the end, it is you who holds the key to a happier life.

*Remember: This is your life, not a dress rehearsal.*

In any situation, you can choose how you represent what is taking place. You can give away your power and let outside circumstances take away your happiness, or you can claim your God-given birthright to be happy, regardless of what is going on around you. Think about it. How many times have you become unhappy because of something completely out of your control? How many times have you let other people's opinions of you or even the weather control how you feel? There was a time in my life when I thought that if I just bought enough "stuff" I would be happy. I thought a new car or a better stereo or bigger house would do the trick. I also used to look to other people to provide the happiness that was lacking in my life. When these methods didn't work and I was still not happy, I would be devastated. I now realize that all the material things and all the people in the world cannot, in and of themselves, make me happy. Only I can.

I wrote this book to help you discover what is preventing you from being happy right now in this moment. You are about to embark on a wonderful journey toward self-discovery. Approach this book with a light heart and a gentle hand, for what you find may surprise and delight you beyond your wildest dreams.

## Chapter 2: The Beginning: Acceptance

### Overview

If you want to achieve happiness and live your life to the fullest, the first step is to accept where you are and who you are, right now. This is where change begins.

All too often we look at a situation, decide how we think it should be, and then act on our perception of it. The problem with this approach is that it is based on pure fantasy. If all we do is wish things were different, we will wind up being constantly frustrated. How many people are in relationships that are not working, telling themselves everything is fine when, clearly, it is not? Instead of living in denial, face the reality of what is happening, accept it, and decide do something about it. Perhaps your relationship would benefit from seeking a marriage therapist or maybe something as simple as scheduling special time together.

We must learn to accept circumstances as they are, not as we would like them to be. How many times have you said, "If only it wasn't raining, then I would be happy"? A happy person will accept the rain and go on with her life.

In all my books I always include a short, simple prayer called the Serenity Prayer, which dates back to the fifth century. While its origins are unknown, it was rediscovered by a theologian named Reinhold Niebuhr, who gave it to the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, because he thought it was a fitting little prayer reminds us to be more accepting:

*God grant me the  
Serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
Courage to change the things I can,  
Wisdom to know the difference.*

You cannot change the fact that it is raining, but you can change how you react to it. It is important to know the difference between these two viewpoints.

We must also learn to accept ourselves as we are in the moment. We sabotage ourselves by saying things like, "If only I had more money" or "If I were ten pounds lighter, then...." We cannot change what is. We can, however, accept everything about ourselves, warts and all, right here and right now. Only then can we begin to make the changes we desire and become the person we are capable of becoming. By accepting ourselves right here and right now, we will be less likely to allow occasional setbacks to divert us from our goals.

Once we have learned to accept ourselves, we can then identify those areas we want to change. For example, if I am fifty pounds overweight and telling myself it's because I have "big bones," I am living in denial. If I am overweight, it's because I probably eat too much and don't exercise. Once I accept the fact that I have a weight challenge, I am empowered to begin taking action to change it. Until I get out of denial, I am stuck.

Acceptance is the first step in making any change.

A good exercise to assist you in developing acceptance is to take a personal inventory. This is similar to a grocer who, when she wants to know the state of her business, will take an inventory of the store's contents. She will count and itemize the good, sellable merchandise, then separate out the unsellable merchandise and get rid of it.

We can do the same, metaphorically, to determine our personal state of affairs. Here is an exercise to help you do just that.

## Exercise

### *Taking Your Personal Inventory*

What physical traits are you less than pleased about?

What steps can you take to become physically fit (exercising, eating better, and so on)?

How are your relationships with your family and loved ones? What would you like to improve about them?

Do you like your job? What do you like about it?

If you don't like your job, what would you really like to do?

What skills do you have?

What are your hobbies?

What activities do you enjoy?

What do you like most about yourself?

What do you like least about yourself?

Don't forget to list the things you like about yourself along with those things you want to change. We have a tendency to list only the "bad" and overlook the good parts of ourselves. We all have attributes we like, and it is important not to forget about these. Sure, there are probably lots of characteristics you would like to change, but give yourself a pat on the back for the parts you are satisfied with. You may want to come back to this list



from time to time to gauge your progress. As you work on yourself and make some of the changes you want to make, your list will look different. It's kind of like peeling an onion. As we begin to make positive changes, we find more things we want to work on. We are constantly growing and evolving toward a better life.

## Chapter 3: Taking Responsibility

Now that you have taken your personal inventory, the next step in creating the life you want is taking responsibility for your "stuff," that is, whatever baggage you're still carrying around with you.

All you need is to listen to any group of people talking, and you immediately realize we live in a society built on blaming outside forces for the conditions in our lives. We point to the government, our bosses, our spouses, our education, the economy, the school system, and, the ever-popular dumping ground, our dysfunctional families. We point to everyone but ourselves.

The problem with this kind of attitude is that it completely takes away our personal power to make changes. Think about it. If the cause of my unhappiness or lack of prosperity is something outside my control, then how can I possibly expect to change it? If I am broke because of something the government did, like not raising Social Security payments, then I am stuck being broke! I can blame the government all I want, but I still pay the price.

*Responsibility is the thing people dread most of all. Yet it is the one thing in the world that develops us, gives us manhood or womanhood fibre.*

— Frank Crane

But if I take complete responsibility for my problems, I then have the power to do something about them. This may sound like an oversimplification or a mere play on words, but it is a critical distinction. We are always 100 percent responsible for our lives. Whether or not we "caused" our problems in our conscious or subconscious minds is irrelevant. The fact is, these situations are present in our lives, and if we see that we somehow contributed to their being there, we are then empowered to change them.

If, for instance, you blame the fact that you don't have the kind of job you would like on your lack of education, then you are stuck right where you are. But if you accept responsibility for this lack of education, you can do something in the present to change it. You could go back to school, take a correspondence course, study on your own, and so forth. The point is that once you take responsibility, you are empowered to change. Author Louise Hay once stated, "The point of power is always in the present moment." At any given time, we can choose to change. It is good for us to recognize that while we may move forward and backward in the course of changing, at least we do not remain "stuck" in the powerless position of blaming. Begin now to take responsibility for creating the life you want. As Wayne Dyer suggested, "Make your life a work of art in progress."

*If it's to be, it's up to me.*

## Chapter 4: Willingness

### Overview

If you talk to anyone who has overcome an addiction, you will learn that he or she first had to be willing to go to any lengths to get help. In some cases, this meant moving to another state, changing jobs, or, in extreme cases, leaving their families. Whatever it took, those who succeeded were *willing*.

While you may not have an addiction, no doubt there are some changes you wish to make. The key is *willingness*. This does not necessarily mean that you will have to take drastic steps, but it does mean that you must be willing to do whatever is necessary to change your life.

If, for instance, you want a new career or a better job, perhaps you must become willing to go back to school to get the necessary education. If you would like a better relationship with your family, you may have to be willing to become more flexible in your demands. If you want to be able to take walks on the beach and you live in Kansas, you must be willing to move or to accept a different type of experience to give you pleasure.

The following exercise will help you to think about what you want to change in your life. I have broken this process down into four steps: Write down one or two things you want to change, then ask yourself what you must become willing to do, what you must become willing to learn, and what you must become willing to change to make these changes.

For now, you just need to be willing to complete this exercise!

### Exercise

#### *Making Changes*

Take out your journal and respond to the following:

1. Based on your personal inventory, list one or two changes you want to make in your life.
2. What are some of the things you can do — right now — to make these changes?
3. What must you learn to implement these changes?
4. What needs to change for you to progress? For example, what changes do you need to make in your daily routine? What lifestyle changes do you need to make?

## Chapter 5: Purpose: A Reason to Expend Energy

### Overview

Many years ago I read a statement made by Benjamin Disraeli: "The secret of success is consistency of purpose." Since then, I've been amazed at how often I have seen the effectiveness of this attitude. Why, for instance, do people age differently? What keeps some people going strong, while others seem to have given up on life and are just waiting for it to be over? I am convinced the difference lies in having a purpose. We

need a reason to get out of bed in the morning. We need something outside ourselves to keep us going.

There is a wonderful story about a priest who goes to his doctor because of stomach pains. The doctor informs him he has a terminal illness and suggests that he go home and put his affairs in order, as he does not have long to live. Having done this, the priest decides to make his final pilgrimage a visit to a church in Mexico he had always wanted to see. As he is approaching the church, he sees a young boy running off with the poor box. Grabbing the youngster by the scruff of the neck, he demands to know why he is stealing from the church. The priest learns that the boy, and many of his friends, is an orphan and has no food. He had stolen the poor box, the boy says, to buy something to eat. The priest is very moved by the boy's story and goes off into the village to see the poor conditions for himself. To make a long story short, the priest is so moved by what he sees that he begins an orphanage, and today, twenty-five years later, he is still running it. He had found a reason to keep going. The following exercise is designed to help you gain a sense of your purpose. It will help you understand what's important in your life.

*The secret of success is consistency of purpose.*

— Benjamin Disraeli

## Exercise

### *What Is Your Purpose?*

In your head, or perhaps in your journal, answer the following questions:

- What gets your juices going? What makes you want to jump out of bed in the morning?
- What is important to you?
- What would you like to be remembered for?
- What do you stand for?
- What would you defend with your life?

## Chapter 6: Keep on Keeping On

*Never, never, never, never give up.*

— Winston Churchill

Coco Chanel began her life in abject poverty, being raised in an orphanage. She taught herself how to sew and went on to become the first woman fashion designer, changing the style of women's clothes from Victorian to casual in the process. Her perseverance in overcoming enormous odds resulted in her building a fashion empire. Today, some eighty years later, the Chanel brand remains one of the benchmarks of quality and style. Thomas Edison tried almost ten thousand times before he succeeded in creating the electric light. If he had given up, you would be reading this book by kerosene lamp!

The original business plan for what was to become Federal Express was given a failing grade on Fred Smith's college exam. And in their early days, the company was struggling so much that their employees cashed their paychecks at retail stores rather than at banks. This meant it would take longer for the money to clear, thereby

giving FedEx more time to cover their payroll. Sylvester Stallone was turned down a thousand times by agents and was down to his last \$600 before he found a company that would produce *Rocky*. The rest is history!

*Don't quit before the miracle happens!*

To truly succeed requires total commitment to your goal. Too many people make the mistake of quitting when they're just short of success. Keep going, no matter what. If you really believe in what you are doing, give it all you've got, and don't give up. You will succeed.

There is actually no such thing as failure. Every action produces an outcome. It may not always be the outcome you are looking for, but it is an outcome nonetheless. If you monitor the results of your actions and keep correcting what is not working, you will eventually produce the outcome you are looking for.

Be persistent. Ray Kroc, the late founder of McDonald's, put it best when he said, "Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful [people] with great talent. Genius will not. Unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not. The world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence, determination, and love are omnipotent."

## Chapter 7: Commitment

### Overview

Once you have gained a sense of purpose, the one trait that will keep you going in the face of obstacles is your commitment to what you want to accomplish. With a strong commitment, you can overcome anything. Without it, you are doomed to fail.

A friend of mine left his job and started his own business. When he began, I asked him how he felt about his new challenge. "I'll give it six months," he replied, "and if it doesn't work, I'll get another job." As you may have already guessed, he went out of business in about four months. Fortunately, the story has a happy ending. Recently, he and his wife opened a new venture. This time when I asked him how he felt, he said, "Great." He told me they had everything on the line and were going to make it succeed. His level of commitment to the second business has enabled him to build a successful enterprise.

When things do not go the way you want, and that will certainly happen, your level of commitment is being tested. If your commitment is strong, you will get through whatever is going on. Whether you are in a new relationship, starting a business, or wanting to lose a few pounds, the same principle applies. You must be totally committed.

*Concerning all acts of initiative and creation, there is one elementary truth — that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves, too.*

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Suppose for a moment that you want to start your own business. With the changes in the global economy, this has become an increasingly popular practice. You must first get committed to success. In his classic book *Think and Grow Rich*, Napoleon Hill talks about "burning all your bridges." The reason he suggests you do this is that if you have no other choice, you will use all your resources to accomplish what you want. Be wary of the trap of fence-sitting, the downfall of many well-intentioned people. Of course, you want to do this

intelligently. This does not mean telling your boss off because you've started a part-time business. As a matter of fact, it's a good idea never to close doors when it comes to people. Those relationships, if properly nurtured, can become your most valuable resource. Rather, it means going wholeheartedly into whatever you're committing to. You must be committed. Remember the story about my friend? When he finally got serious, he succeeded.

One way to increase your level of commitment is to ask yourself why you are making this change in the first place. What will you gain from it? What will you lose out on by not doing it? The following exercise is designed to help you become clear about your commitment.

## Exercise

### *What Motivates You?*

Refer back to the "Making Changes" exercise above. Choose one or both of the changes you want to make and write down all you will gain by taking these actions.

Be sure to reach deep within your soul to come up with the things that motivate you the most. If you are starting your own business, perhaps it is because you want more time with your family or to be your own boss. If your goal is to lose weight, perhaps it is because you want to live longer or attract that special someone.

Write as many reasons as you can think of for committing to taking the necessary steps. Next write what you are giving up by not taking these steps now. Really get tough with yourself. The idea is to get truly committed to what you desire to accomplish. Think about what you are losing out on right now as well as what you will lose in the future if you do not get serious now.

## Chapter 8: Developing a Positive Attitude

A magazine once reported that 22 percent of its survey respondents said the economy was in the early stages of a depression. An equal number said they thought an economic recovery was under way. They're all right! To quote the late personal development pioneer Earl Nightingale, "The mind moves in the direction of your currently dominant thoughts."

If you do not believe me, try not to think of the color red. Think of anything but the color red. Do you see my point? You automatically followed your thoughts, even though you are trying not to.

If we are looking for a depression, we will find it. However, if we continually seek the positive and ask ourselves how we can improve a situation, we will, I am certain, discover the silver lining in the cloud. I am not asking you to deny that there are difficult situations, and I am not asking you to take my word on this. Try it! You will draw your own conclusions based on your own experience. Yes, there is depression and, yes, there is recovery. It is up to us to choose where we want to play the game.

*Whether you think you can or you can't, you're right.*

Later we will discuss ways in which we can learn to focus more on the positive in our lives through the use of questions, but for now try this simple technique. The next time you are faced with a situation that can be perceived as either positive or negative, instead of asking, "Why me?" (or some equally disempowering question), refocus your attention and ask instead, "What's good about this?" or "What can I learn from this situation?" (Hint: Try writing down the answers that come and keeping a journal of them.) You will begin to realize that we are in control of what the events in our lives mean to us.

## Chapter 9: "As a Man Thinketh in His Heart, So Is He"

This idea from the Bible appears in writings that date as far back as the beginning of recorded history. The same message is repeated over and over through the centuries: "The destiny of man is in his own soul," Herodotus (fifth century B.C.); "Our life is what our thoughts make of it," Marcus Aurelius (121–180); "A man's what he thinks about all day long," Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882); "A man is literally what he thinks," James Allen (1849–1925); "We are what we believe we are," Benjamin N. Cardozo (1870–1938); "Our self-image, strongly held, essentially determines what we become," Maxwell Maltz (1899–1975); "All the resources we need are in the mind," Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919). "We are spiritual and mental beings and live from the inside out through our minds" Catherine Ponder.

Unless all the people quoted above were crazy, our self-talk, the constant internal dialog we have with ourselves all day long, has more of an effect on us than we realize. We are continually having a conversation in our heads and, depending on what we are telling ourselves, it can either help or hinder our growth.

Here's a typical scenario: You've waited a long time for that special evening. The dinner turned out great, and your date was quite impressed that you were such a good cook. Everything was perfect until you began to serve the dessert and proceeded to pour hot coffee all over your date's designer outfit. If you were able to "freeze-frame" this moment, you would probably hear a conversation in your head that went something like this: "You dope! How could you be so stupid? Can't you ever do anything right? See, they were right when they said you were useless. Why don't you just go out and jump off a tall building?"

If you are like most people, your internal dialog is likely to continue in this fashion. This steady stream of dialog has been referred to as your chatterbox, your self-talk, your robot, your editor, and a number of other names, all of which describe that constant, usually negative, chatter going on inside your head.

I like the term *thought talk* because it seems a more accurate way of identifying what is actually happening. Thought talk is that internal conversation we sometimes mistakenly call thinking, when a more accurate description would be talking to ourselves. You cannot stop the internal dialog, but you can change what you are telling yourself. We all have these conversations with ourselves. The difference between people who have a healthy self-image and those who do not is that the former have learned to control their thought talk and use it for positive reinforcement. For instance, when you perform a task well, why not tell yourself you did well, congratulate yourself, and, by so doing, teach your mind to reinforce this desirable behavior? On the other hand, when you make a mistake, rather than beat yourself up about it, why not just see it as a mistake and nothing more? Affirm that you will do better next time, and move on.

Somehow, in growing into adulthood, we have developed an insane belief that we should do everything perfectly. That's nonsense! If you have a small child and he or she is learning to walk, how many chances will you give the child to succeed? After a couple of tries will you tell the child she is stupid and say, "Okay, that's enough. You'll just have to crawl for the rest of your life. I guess you just don't have what it takes to be a walker"? I doubt you would react in this manner. Let me ask you then, why do you do it with yourself? This

type of disempowering behavior is another reason people fear trying new things.

Fear of failure is probably one of the biggest obstacles to human progress. Again, we have this idea that we must be perfect right from the start. Think about anything you know how to do. Were you born being able to do it? (not hardly). Somewhere along the way you had to learn. I'll bet you were not very good at first, but with practice, you improved. All the things we take for granted, like tying our shoes, riding a bicycle, and driving a car, were skills we had to be taught. Give yourself permission to make mistakes. You will anyway, so you might as well allow yourself to. In so doing, you gain the freedom to experiment with your life. The philosopher Herbert Otto once said, "Change and growth take place when a person risks himself [or herself] and dares to experiment with his [or her] own life."

If we hold an image of what we want clearly in our minds and focus on it regularly (that is, daily), we will "move in the direction of our dreams."

## Chapter 10: Put a Little Gratitude in Your Attitude

One of the ways to remain positive is to develop an attitude of gratitude about your life. Whatever your present situation is, there are things you can be grateful for. What about your physical and mental health? Your family and friends? Look around where you live. Consider your possessions, your job, all the things we tend to take for granted.

Gratitude is one of the major keys to happiness. If you are feeling grateful for what you have, you will be a happy person. On the other hand, if you are constantly focusing on what you do not have, you will be miserable most of the time.

Remember that what you think about tends to expand. If you spend your time thinking about how lucky you are and how grateful you feel, then those thoughts will expand as well. Take out your journal and write down all the things you are grateful for, and when you're feeling down, take the list out and read it. When you feel great, add to the list. If you can't find anything to be grateful for, go visit someone in a hospital or homeless shelter and compare your problems with theirs.

## Chapter 11: Look Where You Want to Go

If you were to ask a race car driver how he is able to get through those tight places without hitting anything, what you would hear is, "Look where you want to go, not where you don't want to go." If you look at the wall, chances are you will hit it. We can use this metaphor in our lives as well. Focus on what you want in your life rather than on what you don't want.

All too often people spend most of their time and energy thinking about what they want to get rid of — or what they don't want: I want to lose ten pounds or I wish I didn't have these bills. Try instead to focus on what you do want. I was talking about this with a friend recently and learned that the way skydivers are able to "link up" midair is by looking into the eyes of the person with whom they want to connect. Their bodies then follow, and they automatically move toward each other.

I was thinking about this one day when our cat, Ming, came into my office. He likes to sit by the window ledge behind my desk and fantasize about catching a bird. I watched him as he began his ritual for getting to the window ledge. First, he sits looking intently at the top of my desk. It's like he is focusing on being there. He then jumps to the desktop, a distance twenty times his height, easily and effortlessly. I realized that this is the same principle in action. Advance confidently in the direction of your goals.

*What we need is more people who specialize in the impossible.*

— Theodore Roethke

This practice works whether your goal is to start a nonprofit organization or simply to jump to the top of a desk. The other element that cannot be overlooked, as was appropriately pointed out to me, is faith. Ming has faith and trusts that he will not fall flat on his face, and so should we!

## Chapter 12: Do it Now

Recently, while talking with a friend who expressed an interest in obtaining a master's degree in classical literature, she said, "Yeah but I'm too old. If I were younger, I'd go back and get my degree." It saddens me to hear such comments, especially in light of some of the facts below, compliments of the *University of California Berkeley Wellness Letter*:

Giuseppe Verdi composed his "Ave Maria" at age eighty-five.

Martha Graham performed until she was seventy-five and choreographed her one hundred and eightieth work at age ninety-five.

Michelangelo was carving the Rondanini Pietà six days before he died at eighty-nine.

Marion Hart, sportswoman and author, learned to fly at age fifty-four and made seven nonstop solo flights across the Atlantic, the last time in 1975 at age eighty-three.

*For of all sad words, of tongues or pen, the saddest are these: It might have been.*

— John Greenleaf Whittier

Grandma Moses had her first one-woman show when she was eighty.

If you think you are too old to do something you've always wanted to do, you may want to reconsider and just go for it! Ask yourself, "What is the one thing I have always wanted to do but have been putting off?" Then ask, "If not now, when?" Write your cut-off date for doing it.

A woman once walked up to Wally (Famous) Amos after a talk he had given and remarked, "If I go to law school at my age I will be fifty-five when I graduate." Amos replied, "How old will you be if you don't go?"



## Chapter 13: Action

### Overview

It is important to understand that whatever action you are now taking is producing a result. If you do not have what you want in your life it is because the actions you are taking are producing the wrong results. For example, if you want to drop a few pounds and have actually gained weight, you have produced a result. It was just not the result you were looking for.

*Every action produces a result.*

Following is a simple exercise to help you focus on your desired outcome and gauge the results of the actions you are taking.

### Exercise

#### *Matching Actions to Outcome*

Take out your journal.

First, list the outcome or result you want to achieve.

Second, ask yourself, What actions am I now taking toward this outcome? Write down your answer.

Next ask yourself, What is the result? Am I getting the results I want? If you are, great! If not, keep going.

Finally, ask yourself, How can I change or modify my actions to better reach my desired outcome? Record your answers.

## Chapter 14: Using Opposites to Change How You Feel

If you change your thinking, you can change your life. In a similar fashion, if you change your focus, you will change your feelings. It's pretty simple, really. What you focus on will determine your emotional reaction and therefore the way you feel.

If you are like most of us, you will occasionally slip into self-pity. Some people spend most of their lives there. You've seen them. No matter what they have, they always find something to whine about. They always manage to focus on what is wrong rather than what is right in their lives.

Some see the glass as half-full, and some see it as half-empty. We choose how we view the world. You can take control of your choices by employing a simple yet powerful concept called contrast. Using contrast is simply looking for references that are totally opposite of your current thinking. For example, I love to sit on the beach and write. One time I was writing while on vacation. We were in Antigua at the St. James Club, a

lovely, expensive resort, complete with three restaurants, two beaches, and every luxury you could imagine. This is where movie stars and famous people go to get away. It is magnificent. I was writing about my past experience. I was at a point where I was describing in great detail what it was like to be friendless, penniless, and hopeless. Lost in my writing, I began to feel depressed. I stopped, looked up, and was jolted back to the present. When I saw where I was and considered how much my life had changed, a deep feeling of gratitude overcame me. When I realized how far I had come, from being down and out to becoming a successful writer sitting on a beach in one of the world's most luxurious resorts with a wonderful, loving wife, I saw I had not a thing in the world to be sad about.

*I felt bad because I had no shoes and then I saw a man who had no feet.*

Although I created this extreme contrast quite by accident, you can intentionally do the same for any situation. If you are prone to bouts of self-pity or whining, you can always find someone whose problems dwarf yours. If you're complaining about something you do not have, go talk to a homeless person. That will help put things in perspective. You can also use contrast to motivate yourself to reach greater heights. It has been said that if you want to learn about wealth, hang out with people who are ten times wealthier than you are. If you want to motivate yourself to action, don't compare yourself to people who have less than you. It's too easy to slack off by saying, "I'm better off than him or her. I have a job and a home." That may make you feel good, but it won't help you grow. Instead, find people who have much more than you. Seek out people who have accomplished what you want to accomplish and use them as reference points.

## Chapter 15: My Ideal Day

Imagine that every day was perfect, that everything you did was exactly what you wanted to do, and that everything happened was according to your heart's desire. How would that make you feel? Pretty good, right?

Before you can expect your days to go according to plan, you must first develop an idea of what an ideal day would look like to you. In the following exercise, adapted from the book *You Can Have It All* by Arnold Patent, you are asked to design your perfect day. Think about the feelings associated with a day that you would consider perfect. Get out your journal and prepare to write about these feelings. As you write, pay particular attention to the feelings associated with your day rather than with actual activities. Of course, if there are certain activities you consider important, like walking in nature, then by all means list them. This exercise can be done daily. Soon you will establish a mind-set that will assist you in having great experiences.

### Exercise

#### *Designing the Perfect Day*

How does your job make you feel (ideally)?

See yourself happily interacting with the other people you encounter in your daily activities. As you write, see and feel yourself having wonderful experiences. Feel the joy in all your encounters and the pleasure you receive throughout your day.

Rather than focusing on a particular activity, consider the result of this activity. How do you feel when you engage in it? The actual activities can vary. The good feelings are what you are looking for.

The more often you perform this little exercise, the more control you will begin to have in your daily life and the more the quality of your experiences will improve.

# Chapter 16: Carpe Diem

## Overview

How many times have you said, "I wish I had \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank)"? How many of us have always wanted to do something new but hesitated because of a fear of failing or, worse yet, of not doing it perfectly?

*Remember: Fear is only false emotion appearing real.*

Maybe you've always wanted to change careers, go back to school, or learn to play the clarinet. Perhaps it's something more physical like jumping out of an airplane or learning to play tennis. What are you waiting for?

The only thing stopping most of us is the fear that we might fail. But is failing any more debilitating than sitting in a rocker twenty or thirty years from now and wondering what could have been if only you had taken a chance? Just go out and do it! One of the things stopping us is the quality of questions we ask ourselves.

*The truth that many people never understand, until it is too late, is that the more you try to avoid suffering the more you suffer because smaller and more insignificant things begin to torture you in proportion to your fear of being hurt.*

— Thomas Merton

All too often we ask poor questions like, "What if I fail, what if it doesn't work?" Instead, why not ask, "What if I succeed?" You may be pleasantly surprised by your answers.

## Exercise

### *What do I Fear?*

In your journal, answer the following questions:

- What do I fear doing?
- What is the worst that can happen?
- What is the likelihood of that happening?
- What am I missing out on by not doing it?
- What will I get if I do take this action?

Do it now!

## Chapter 17: Go for It!

We experience whatever we hold consistently in our thoughts. Many people spend their waking moments thinking about what they do not want rather than what they do want. I believe, and statistics bear me out, that one of our major problems is that we do not set concrete goals. How can you expect to achieve anything if you do not know what you want? If you don't know where you're going, how are you going to know when you get there?

We spend more time planning our vacations than we do designing our lives. Think about it. If you are going to take a vacation, you do not just show up at the airport and ask if there are any planes leaving, do you? Nor do you get in your car and start driving with no destination in mind, right? Then why make any less effort in deciding where you want to go in your life?

You may have heard of the Yale University Study that took place in the 1950s. A survey of the graduating class revealed that only 3 percent of the group had written down their goals. A follow-up twenty years later found that those 3 percent had a net worth greater than the other 97 percent combined! I am not suggesting that money is the only measure of success, but I'm sure you see my point.

*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.*

— Matthew 7:7

One of my mentors, Anthony Robbins, reminds me that we generally overestimate what we can accomplish in a year but greatly underestimate what we can accomplish in a decade.

Rather than merely making some powerless New Year's resolutions, which you may break anyway, why not get serious about what you really want to have in your life?

## Chapter 18: The Why of Goals

There are a lot of wonderful books and tapes that teach you how to set goals, what kinds of goals you should consider, even how to write them down and what kind of paper to use. Yet they overlook a very important ingredient — namely, why! *Why* do you want to accomplish a particular goal in the first place? Understanding this is one of the keys to achieving a goal.

You may want to work for yourself, as so many people are doing these days. Okay, that's a reasonable desire. However, you will surely work harder toward achieving that goal if you have some strong reasons for wanting to be self-employed. For example, you may want to have more time to spend with your family. That kind of motivation gives you a better focus and increases your likelihood of reaching the goal.

The more you focus on your "why's," the more likely you will be to achieve your desires. You can accomplish any goal if you have a big enough why.