

THE
IMPOSTER
IN
CHARGE

MIKE KITKO



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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my three main ladies, the most important gifts I've ever received—Angie, Katie, and Meagan.

Angie, because of you, I was broken down and built back up as I was designed to be, not who I thought I had to be. Because of you, I'm the most powerful and loving version of myself. You make me show up when I don't want to. You make me step into the divine masculine I was created to express. You're my strength, safety, and comfort in any storm. We agreed to this journey long before we met, and there will be many more journeys together after this one. You and me. Me and you. Always. I love you with my entire soul.

Katie, the first time I set eyes on you was the most magical experience of my life. I'll never forget the moment I realized what true, unconditional love feels like, and the second you were born, I knew that feeling. I love you to the edge of the esrevinu and back, infinite times. If I had it to do over again, it would always be a beautiful day outside, no matter how hard it was raining. Maybe we'll get that chance again. Make others rise to your level of magnificence; shrink to no one. The world is better because of your strength and presence. You'll always be my right butt-cheek. Forever.

Meagan, when you were a baby, we knew you were special. You're intelligent, creative, analytical, thoughtful, considerate, kind, loving, and playful all at the same time. You light up a room with your laughter and amazing presence. Whenever I was down, I could always count on you to beat me at chess, take all my

cards when we played war, or play any other game until you beat me. Your birth was premature, but that's because the world was ready for your magnificence. The world is better because of your love and leadership. You'll always be my left butt-cheek. Forever.

I've also had countless guides, mentors, teachers, and healers. You know who you are. I honor each of you for your contribution to my life and to the experience I get to embrace. You are each playing a leading role in this universal game we play. I love and honor each one of you.

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You're Never A Victim

The first breath you ever took was an inhale.
The last breath you take will be an exhale.
These are involuntary and happen automatically for you.
You can't control your first or last breath.
What you do in between...
The happiness you create...
The relationships you discover...
The health you establish...
The wealth you build...
The love you feel and share...
Are all decisions.
They are all created by you.
You own your circumstances, outcomes, and direction.
You have full ownership, responsibility, and creative
authority over them all.
The first step is complete and absolute accountability.
You're NEVER a victim.

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INTRODUCTION

Before I rebuilt my life, I chased happiness, peace, comfort, and love outside of myself. The next promotion, salary increase, vacation, car, house, or material possession would cure all the pain, suffering, doubt, fear, and darkness embedded in every neglected cell in my body, in my chaotic mind, and in my uncontrolled emotions.

I thought the next accomplishment would make me feel validated, verified, capable, credible, and adequate.

From a young age, I sought confirmation that I was somebody. After years of abuse, neglect, and torment, I wanted to feel valuable. So I spent my life chasing wealth, titles, houses, cars, vacations, and external status.

I chased because I didn't feel worthy and valuable. I never possessed confidence, courage, and clarity of purpose or felt that I could show up as myself, which led me down a path of destruction that caused me so much pain and destruction that I was forced to rebuild.

I felt like an imposter in every leadership position I held. The imposter in charge. This caused my eventual collapse, like a self-fulfilling prophecy. I failed and needed to rebuild my life from the ground up.

The rebuild exceeded every expectation I could ever imagine.

I thought I had a good childhood. Some parts were good, but other parts contained traumas that required discovery and resolution. I was the chubby kid who was athletic enough to be good enough to pick for a team but was fat enough to humiliate

in school and on the playground. I didn't have many friends, and those friends cast me aside when their other friends came along. My closest friend was another kid who didn't have anyone else to hang out with either.

I gained a lot of weight and had no girlfriend, true friends, or social life. When I was seventeen, I made some changes and lost about sixty pounds in three months on a crash diet. That got me some friends, and soon after, a girlfriend. But I still felt alone.

I graduated high school in 1990 and joined the Marine Corps in 1992 in hopes of finding confidence, strength, and courage. I hoped the abuse and the pain would stop, even though the villain and the victim were both in my head. I was a good Marine and, ahead of my peers, I was promoted to sergeant after around three years, fast by the standards of that time. I was effective in my duties and was decorated with a Navy Achievement Medal for performance. I never served in combat, so regardless of my achievements, I felt like I hadn't proved myself. I never felt like I deserved the title of "Marine."

Before they could figure out that I wasn't worth the rank of sergeant, I exited the Marine Corps in 1997, and I accepted a position as an electronic technician in a Fortune 500 company. Over the next thirteen years with Tektronix and after a cross-country move, I had a management role and had earned a company-sponsored MBA. I was recognized as a high-potential candidate for a future executive role.

The label of "High-Pot" was scary to me because I was afraid that my leaders would figure out that I wasn't very good at my role. I survived a downturn cut in 2007 that shrunk my management team from seven to two. I had survived because of my effectiveness and abilities, but despite that, I feared they would figure out I was inadequate and fire me.

In 2010, I fielded a recruiter's call from Stanley Black & Decker and soon accepted a plant manager role, responsible for a \$65 million plant. I was thirty-seven and held the keys to an organization I could've never imagined. Over the next three years,

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I led a team that increased performance in every key dimension, including safety, quality, delivery, inventory, cost, and sales.

The operations team I built was the best in the business, and I'd measure them against any other operations team in the world. We could overcome any challenge. We were best-in-class in all of Stanley Black & Decker for working capital turns, an important measurement for the health of a manufacturing plant. We were powerful. I participated as an Executive Level Leader in the smallest division in the company but worked with a leadership team that established the vision and strategic direction. We had fun and grew the division to company-best performance.

After three years, I figured it was time to move on. It was only a matter of time before the gig was up, and they discovered I was a fraud. Even though the plant I ran was a top performer, I didn't feel it was due to my leadership. I ran again.

I was recruited by an energy company, SunCoke Energy in Illinois, and named as operations manager, the second in command of a \$350 million energy plant. Again, I was an executive level member of the plant and the company. The operations manager was considered to be the heir-apparent to the general manager position. I intended to survive in the OM role, get promoted to GM, and build a world-class team as I had at Stanley Black & Decker.

I'd grown up in high-tech and light industrial manufacturing, but heavy industrial manufacturing was a new world for me. It was a difficult transition, and this increased my fear tenfold. Because of my fear, I showed up with bravado and outer strength I didn't possess. It was a facade. I was lost in the processes, how to lead my three teams of eighty people, and how to maintain or improve performance. I showed outer strength, optimism, and hope as I deteriorated on the inside.

So I could increase my personal performance, I was assigned an executive coach, and I survived the process. I was told that the company considered me to be the general manager-in-waiting, driven by my humility and development. I worked hard to show

a stronger aptitude, but inside, I played survivor until I could be promoted and build a leadership team to protect me.

Promotion day never came. On a regular Friday in August of 2014, the GM pulled me into his office and fired me. For the first time since high school, I was unemployed. I got a severance, a few hugs and handshakes, and was sent home.

On the drive home, my head swirled, my mind raced, and anxiety skyrocketed. I was near tears. I walked into my house at around 11:00 a.m.

My wife, Angie, was at the kitchen table and asked, "Why are you home?"

"I got fired," I said.

She replied, "Oh my God! Wow." She looked at her watch, saw the time, and said, "We can make happy hour!"

And we did. We went to one of our favorite bars in the area where happy hour started at noon. We drank as many beers as we could before we picked up our girls from the bus stop.

I was consumed by shame and wanted to hide rather than face my daughters. I walked to the corner, and after a few minutes, the brakes squealed as the bus slowed to a stop.

"Dad!" my girls screamed as they got off the bus. They ran to give me a hug. "What are you doing home?" They were excited and surprised. That excitement made me feel worse.

"Girls, I've got some bad news."

Meagan, who was nine years old, looked at me with tears in her eyes and said, "Did you get fired?"

"I did, but we'll be okay, I promise," I replied.

Katie, eleven years old and with anxiety issues caused by years of trauma in our home, went into a panic. With tears in her eyes, she asked, "Are we going to lose the house? Are we going to have to move?"

My girls had hated it when we moved from Portland, Oregon to St. Louis in 2013, but once they got settled, they loved our new home, their friends, and their new school. They knew that our lifestyle was now in jeopardy.

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My severance package was generous, and it kept our finances in order while Angie and I hit happy hour four to five days a week, then picked our kids up from the bus stop intoxicated. Sharing time together with chemicals was what bonded our marriage.

I searched for a job about two to three hours a day before we hit the bars and even went on a few interviews. I was the runner-up a few times, and in the sixth month, I found another executive position as the general manager of a small firearms component manufacturing company in St. Louis.

The entire fifteen months I was responsible for the firearms plant, I was in active alcoholism and worked hung over many days. Like I did at the energy company, I showed false strength and bravado, while I shrank to my strong manager, the president of the company. He demanded performance, and with all of my marriage and family problems, I couldn't commit my full attention to a demanding position and his expectations.

I was now a three-hundred-pound alcoholic with failing health and a train-wreck of a marriage. I physically, mentally, and emotionally abused my kids and wasn't capable or adequate to lead a company or a team. On March 18, 2016, I was fired again.

On the drive home, I opened the car windows so that I could breathe. The air was a brisk fifty degrees, and the smell of spring was in the air, but I felt like I was a character in a dream. The thirty-minute drive home felt like two hours, and during that time, I reflected on how all this had happened. I replayed the past two years over and over in my head. I was angry at myself, and my mind was in chaos. I tried to figure out how to avoid the pain of being a disappointment to my family. Again.

I walked in through the garage door. Just like last time, Angie was at the kitchen table. I was surprised to see that my daughter

I was now a three hundred pound alcoholic with failing health and a train-wreck of a marriage.

Katie, now fourteen, was home. She suffered from extreme anxiety and at times, stayed home from school.

“Did you get fired again?” Katie asked.

Slumping my shoulders in disgust, I said, “I did.” I tried to be as calm, strong, and confident as a broken man could appear.

“Dad, how could this happen again?” Katie asked, her own shoulders slumped to mirror mine. My first-born was disappointed with her dad. I couldn’t take my eyes off her, and I honestly forgot that Angie was in the room.

In an excited voice, Angie said, “Hey! We can hit happy hour!”

A few hours later, I met Meagan at the bus stop. I saw the tears in her eyes before she even got off the bus.

In less than two years, I’d been fired twice from two significant six-figure positions, and my bright future and executive runway were over. My resume looked like swiss cheese, and I felt unemployable.

We looked good on the outside. We owned a beautiful house and nice cars and had accumulated substantial savings. We’d vacationed so much that our girls had their own passports and had flown out of the country nine times. On the outside, we were living the dream, but inside our home, we were in toxic chaos.

I was suicidal. The things I valued were my income and title, and they were gone again. It felt like I had nothing and realized that I had to make some changes. On April 1, 2016, I began healthy physical habits. On April 7, 2016, I took my last drink of alcohol. By the end of April, I had hired a life coach. I adopted a new lifestyle, habits, and perspectives, which created an additional disconnect in my marriage. As I rebounded physically, mentally, and emotionally, my wife remained in active addiction and attacked my new choices. In June, I filed for divorce.

As I improved, Angie’s attacks increased. In June, I met with a lawyer to begin the process of divorce. I wrote a big check and retained the law firm’s services, which amplified my pain, fear, and uncertainty.

Back at home, Angie was upstairs on the phone with a friend. “Please get off of the phone,” I said. “I need to talk to you.”

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“Wait a minute,” she answered with dismissive frustration.

“It’s important and urgent,” I said.

A few minutes later, Angie, intoxicated from a cocktail of pharmaceuticals and alcohol, walked from the dark of the hallway into the light of the spare bedroom where I’d been sleeping for months.

“I filed for divorce today,” I said.

“No you didn’t,” she said and laughed.

“I did. You’ll be served papers in two to three days,” I said.

Angie left my bedroom, disappeared back into the dark hallway, and went back into the master bedroom where she slept. I heard her get back on the phone and laugh to a friend that I’d filed for divorce. She didn’t believe me. It was routine for both of us to threaten each other anything imaginable.

The next morning, I watched the news in our spacious family room and searched for jobs on my laptop. At 8:00 a.m., Angie came downstairs with tears rolling down her cheeks.

“Did you file for divorce?” she mumbled through tears.

“I did,” I answered with clarity, strength, and confidence.

“I don’t want to divorce. I’ll do anything!” she said.

At first, I resisted Angie’s pleas for another chance. Over the next three to four hours, we discussed the past seventeen years. We reflected on the highs and the lows and then focused on the trauma and pain of the past two to three years. Maybe it was because we touched on some happy memories, but after hearing her ask for forgiveness and another chance with every ounce of ownership and accountability, we agreed to begin Narcotics Anonymous together that night.

In that discussion, we each asked for forgiveness and accepted responsibility for all the pain our actions and decisions caused the family. We started the journey that led us to where we are now. We’ve experienced relapse and struggles, but we’re better because of my decision to file for divorce. Everything changed that day.

Today, I wake up at 4:30 a.m. every day. I carry out an intentional morning, a routine that builds incredible personal power,

momentum, enthusiasm, confidence, and purpose. I perform breathing exercises to connect to my body and my breath. I meditate. Instead of avoiding emotion, I intentionally feel a range of emotions and connect to my humanity. I listen to audiobooks or read to connect to new knowledge. I journal to anchor this knowledge into my body because knowledge only becomes wisdom with integration. I do some form of exercise to keep energy moving in my body and to strengthen myself physically.

When my daughters, Katie and Meagan wake up, I'm in my full power, ready to provide the love, encouragement, and support they deserve. I affirm them and make sure they understand how important they are in my life.

After they leave for school, I turn my attention to Angie. I'm present with her. We have coffee. We reconnect. I affirm her and show her that she's important in my life. We discuss family topics. We discuss our coaching business. We discuss household topics. We plan our day and sync up schedules. We're in control of our lives.

Whenever the girls are home, we have dinner as a family. I reconnect with them each night, listen to their day, and again affirm their importance in my life. I once lived to work. I no longer work. Instead, I give my talents and gifts to the world on my terms and my schedule. My family comes first.

Through my new life and business as a certified executive coach, leadership advisor, and speaker, in my first full year in business for myself, I exceeded my highest executive salary I earned in corporate America. Every day, I connect with hundreds of people through messages and videos. I light souls on fire. People are drawn to my message of life reinvention, and when they need hope, inspiration, and an example of possibility—I deliver. It fuels and energizes me and energizes others. Giving everything I have each day is both draining and fulfilling.

At the end of the day, I'm exhausted, and I've left everything I have in the world. I'm asleep by 9:30 p.m. My physical, mental, and emotional energy has been spent engaged and invested in activities I enjoy that are fun and entertaining. If I don't enjoy

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it, I don't do it. I refuse to live a life of sacrifice or pain or out of alignment with my values, vision, and mission. I lived out of alignment for forty-three years, and I refuse to live another day like that. I no longer feel like an imposter.

I spend every day in service to those who need my talents, gifts, time, and energy. However, I do this from a place of power, not a place of sacrifice. I learned from my mistakes. I suffered so that I could learn what I needed to learn, to teach others before they hit rock bottom.

In this book, I share stories and help you understand “the imposter syndrome” as well as strategies, stories, and actions that'll help you step into your power from where you are right now. When you're caught up in your own story you tell yourself about your inadequacies or feelings of being an imposter, and you give others your basic rights and powers without resistance. You sacrifice yourself for others who you perceive as superior and worthy. You give away and grant others what you desire most: respect, dignity, and freedom. You give up more and more of your power over time. These are basic principles and concepts you concede, and when you take them back, you regain your power. When you regain your power, you regain confidence, courage, and clarity and take back even more of your basic rights and powers.

You can take back control of your life, your worth, and your value with shifts in beliefs and perspective and with a rebuild of your sense of significance. When you rebuild your confidence, courage, and clarity, you'll take back the power you've given up and will be committed and dedicated to your own happiness and well-being.

When you rebuild your confidence, courage, and clarity, you'll take back the power you've given up and will be committed and dedicated to your own happiness and well-being.

Everything you read here might seem elementary. I believe that simple is best and that you cause the most pain to yourselves and your family when you overlook or refuse to understand and execute the basic and foundational things in life. If you will learn

from my pain, connect with yourself, connect with those who are supportive and champion your success and happiness, and implement these basic elements, you'll move from a life of pain into a life of purpose. The journey can be magical. You'll realize that you're as important as everyone else but no more important than anyone. It begins when you put yourself first.

Introductory Work

Are You Showing Up For Yourself?

1. Do you feel that if you showed up in the world as yourself, you'd be rejected by everyone?
2. Do you feel like an imposter, a fraud, in how you're showing up on the outside compared to how you feel on the inside?
3. Do you feel like you're constantly on the brink of collapse?
4. Do you expect things to go favorably or unfavorably for you?

Try This!

1. Name all the people you feel comfortable being around and all the people that you're not comfortable around. List the common threads of each group.
2. When do you feel adequate? When do you feel inadequate? List the common threads in these scenarios.
3. Name three times when you expected failure and failure happened, and three times when you expected failure, but things turned out favorably. List the common threads in each group of scenarios.

Daddy Needs A Beer

“Daddy needs a beer!”

When I said those words, my seven- and five-year-old girls jumped out of my lap, ran to the refrigerator, and raced each other to get me a beer.

It was fun. I couldn't wait to finish that beer so I could see who won the next race.

That was a typical Saturday afternoon...

...and the fun had just started.

My little girls meant everything to me. They were always in my lap.

In fact, I raised them in my recliner.

We were always together.

I was their hero.

They were either on my lap or right beside me.

They couldn't get close enough.

I call them both “butt” because they might as well have each been one of my butt cheeks.

They were never away from me.

They loved me, and I loved them.

They were everything to me. The only light in a dark world.

Throughout a typical Saturday, we played games, watched cartoons, they danced for me, they put on a show...

It was the best of times...

I never wanted it to end.

“Daddy needs a beer!”

And they raced to the refrigerator again, about to kill each other to please their daddy.

They always pleased their daddy.

Until that certain point.

As they continued being perfect little beings full of love and happiness...

I became a monster.

“Daddy needs a beer..”

And they hesitated to fetch another beer.

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They'd seen it too many times.
In an instant, the same things that made daddy laugh
and the same words, dancing, and laughter that made
daddy fill up with joy...
Made daddy frustrated... angry...
Violent.
Screams. Punishment. Blame.
Things thrown across the room at his perfect angels.
They hated that daddy.
I hated that daddy.
The next morning I apologized, and the fun began again.
And since happy daddy was back, there was laughter,
games, and love...
Until later that night
Then the monster was back.
As they grew older, after the first been they hid in their rooms.
I knew why.
I dismissed it as them growing up.
But they grew tired.
Their trust dissolved.
They'd seen it too many times and made changes to avoid
the hurt and pain.
The pain that I caused them.
My beautiful girls.
It still hurts when I think about the pain I inflicted.
If I were granted one wish, I'd do it all again.
"Daddy needs a hug!"
And I'd cherish every race.
And I'd cause them no pain.
I love my butt cheeks.
Please forgive me for the pain I caused.
You were my greatest teachers.
You endured what you should never have had to endure.
And I now cherish every sober day with you.
You're my heroes.
And I appreciate every teenage giggle, laugh... and hug.

CHAPTER 1

PUT YOURSELF FIRST ALWAYS

My father was a union steelworker. He came home after work, and my mom served dinner. When Dad sat down at the table, his responsibility ended. We lived in a 100-year-old, small, Baltimore row home; what's called a townhome in the rest of the country.

Our kitchen was ten-feet by fifteen-feet and was covered in brown and green 1970's-era wallpaper. The seams showed, the edges peeled and bubbled. We didn't own a dishwasher or a clothes dryer, and our washing machine was in the cramped kitchen. Mom hung laundry on outside clotheslines to air-dry our clothes.

"Babe, get me some milk," my dad asked my mom as he ate what she cooked and served him.

My dad's seat at the table was about four feet from the refrigerator, and mom's seat was three feet further than his. Mom dropped her fork, got up, walked to the refrigerator, and poured my dad a cup of milk. In our family hierarchy, it was dad first, the kids second, and mom was at the bottom. Mom's purpose was to sacrifice everything for everyone's well-being.

It was a strict, religious household, and I attended Catholic school until high school. Sacrifice was the primary message I received at home, at school, and in the German-Catholic neighborhood I grew up in. I was indoctrinated with the idea that doing things for yourself was a sin, and self-respect, self-care, or self-acceptance were reasons for punishment.

These poisonous beliefs taught me to sacrifice my own well-being. Sacrifice was never easy or fun, and it didn't make sense most of the time. We all had roles to play and a set hierarchy in the family, in the classroom, and on the playground. The higher you were on the hierarchy, the less sacrifice was required, and the more you could express yourself, but everyone preached sacrifice.

People who expressed their needs, wants, and desires were labeled as selfish and self-centered. Kids could be kids at Christmas and birthdays, and selfishness could be expressed at those accepted times, but overall, you only had that privilege if you were in a place of status or power. Because of this indoctrination, I shrank from my family, friends, coworkers, and leaders. I felt the pain

Leaders with imposter syndrome often sacrifice themselves and their well-being for the good of others and for the team. You'll allow—even force yourself—to become depleted for the good of the team.

of being unworthy and not valuable enough for my needs to matter, and I didn't feel adequate until my collapse decades later.

The imposter syndrome causes you to feel less valuable and worthy and that you deserve less than others. Leaders with imposter syndrome often sacrifice themselves and their well-being for the good

of others and for the team. You'll allow—even force yourself—to become depleted for the good of the team. Teams are as strong as the weakest link, and when you're depleted, or you live from a deficit, in time, the neglect shows up in your results and the results of the team. When the leader gets better, the entire team gets even stronger. To heal, you need to recognize your own worth, practice radical self-care, and prioritize your own interests. Over time, the power you feel inside you will match your external power.

Recognize Your Worth

It was 8:00 a.m. on a chilly spring day, and Dad and I headed to the baseball fields for tryouts. It was an annual Saturday morning

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ritual. Still nearly asleep on the drive, I dreaded showing the coaches how much weight I'd gained and how I'd slowed over the winter. I'd failed to strength-train over the winter, as my dad had suggested. I was a failure, headed to the ball fields where an unfortunate coach would be forced to put me on his team because all the kids had to be picked.

I bombed the tryouts. It was awful. I struggled to hit, throw, run, or any other test they threw at me. I knew I'd receive a call the next Saturday from the coach who'd been forced to pick me. He'd call, and I'd pick up the phone. He'd tell me what team I played for and what position I'd likely play. The call came early.

"Hey, Mike. It's Mr. Gus."

"Hi, Mr. Gus."

"Mike, you're on the Giants. I'll be your coach for the season. I picked you first overall in the draft. Last year, my team needed a catcher. I need your arm and skills behind the plate. I'm counting on you," Mr. Gus said with a slight lisp and an older, crotchety, raspy voice.

"Thanks, Mr. Gus. I appreciate that," I said, stunned.

I thought Mr. Gus had made a mistake and confused me with another kid. That was the explanation for his kind call, and I was angry at myself for being such a disappointment.

I couldn't accept the fact that I had value. I believed that others were more talented, more important, and more valuable than me. Even when I was in positions of authority and responsibility, thoughts that others were better and worthier swirled inside my head.

As time went on and life came at me faster and faster, I dove deeper into my external challenges and didn't create adequate space to take care of the most important part of each of those challenges—me. It wasn't until I rebuilt myself that I realized the impact that neglecting my body had on my health, wealth, and the amount of love I felt.

I felt like an expendable commodity—valueless and worthless. And these feelings caused me to neglect myself further so that I disregarded my importance in any of the roles I served. I

made life as difficult as I could for myself and dug a deeper and deeper hole each day.

Sometimes my feelings of inadequacy masqueraded as arrogance, ego, defensiveness, and aggressive behavior, but whether I was speaking with my leader, a follower, or a family member, I covered up the fact that I felt disposable. When I later reassessed what I'd learned, I realized that any need to sacrifice my well-being was a false belief, and that, when challenged, the belief collapsed under the test of truth.

Sometimes my feelings of inadequacy masqueraded as arrogance, ego, defensiveness, and aggressive behavior, but whether I was speaking with my leader, a follower, or a family member, I covered up the fact that I felt disposable.

The truth is that you were born with the same 99 percent composition of oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, calcium, nitrogen, and phosphorous as everyone else. You're made of the same elements found in the earth, stars, and universe as a whole. We're all born equal. There's no unworthy or worthless human being. Think about a new-

born baby. Have you ever felt that a newborn wasn't valuable or worthy? Of course not.

When I realized that my belief that I was inferior or disposable wasn't rooted in truth, everything I'd learned about myself up to this point was open to examination. I explored why I thought I wasn't valuable. It was because I dismissed every accomplishment as being in the right place at the right time. Now I saw that wasn't true.

When I was a kid, every year I was selected for the Little League All-Star team because of my performance. I played trumpet in the school band and was selected to play in a "by invitation only" area band because of my talent. Because of my ability to learn, I was picked to attend the best magnet high school in Baltimore City. And because of my own merit and performance, I was promoted to corporal even though other Marines had been in the Marine Corps three times longer than me.

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My military occupational specialty was 6492, Avionics Electronics Calibration Specialist. As a sergeant, I led a squad-sized (twelve to fifteen) team of technicians who ensured that the aircraft were mission-capable with accurate functionality. As a non-commissioned officer, I received regular fitness reports that assessed my performance and combat readiness.

“Gunny Griffin wants you,” one of my junior Marines informed me.

I squared away my camouflage uniform, dusted off my boots, and made my way through the green interior of the mobile, deployable vans that smelled like mildew.

When I got to his office, I said, “Gunny, you called for me?”

“I did,” said the salty, leathery Gunnery Sergeant Robert L. Griffin from Waco, Texas. “Let’s review your fitness report. First, let me say you’ve done an outstanding job, Marine. Because of your leadership, military presence, and mission capability, you’ve been ranked the number one non-commissioned officer in the avionics division. That’s shit-hot, Marine!”

Shocked and in disbelief, I replied, “Thanks, Gunny.”

That’s all I could choke out because I’d thought I was one step away from being deemed not equipped to lead.

Later, I was dubbed a high potential leader in two Fortune 500 companies, and my MBA was funded because of my high-pot designation. I assumed leadership for a \$65 million manufacturing plant for Stanley Black & Decker at the age of thirty-seven, built a superstar team with the best talent I could find, and created the best working capital performance of any plant in the company. I was promoted many times above peers.

But I never felt good enough. I excused my accomplishments as being in the right place at the right time, and my internal chatter convinced me that “anyone could have done that.”

I’d been taught that it was sinful to look for or embrace your strengths, talents, or accomplishments. A God-loving person measured their life by how much they gave of themselves for the benefit of others.

Let me tell you about fifth grade. Mrs. Anita Rostek was my amazing teacher. She's still my favorite teacher in the history of favorite teachers. That year, I nearly got straight As, and this was after I'd struggled and scraped by in my accelerated gifted and talented class the previous year. Fourth grade had been a grind from start to finish, and my father criticized me the entire year.

My first report card in fifth grade was all As and one B. I walked in the house excited and relieved, and I counted down the minutes. I was proud of myself and couldn't wait for my dad to get home so I could show him my grades. I was always trying to win his attention, praise, and love.

"What happened with this B?" Dad said, looking me straight in the eyes, totally serious.

"But look at the As, Dad," I said.

"I expect As, Mike. What do you plan to do about this B?" he pressured.

It was interactions like this that taught me that perfection was the goal. I believed that I was only as good as the thing not accomplished. Exceptional, but imperfect, the performance was average. So, I struggled to recognize my value and talents, which caused me to accept positions and roles while being blind to my strengths. I actually possessed exceptional talents but was numb to them. I believed that none of my achievements were worthwhile, and what I brought to the table was inadequate. I could recognize talent in others but could never recognize it in myself.

Three or four months after I started my improvement journey, I took inventory of all my accomplishments and the results I'd achieved. It was a remarkable list, and I saw that I'd been successful when I enjoyed what I was doing.

Then I shifted my attention to other people. I thought about every person I'd worked with and identified their strengths. I noticed what set them apart, made them valuable, and recognized their uniqueness that benefited the whole.

I realized that since I could take inventory for others and identify their gifts, and since I was made of the same collective stardust as everyone else, I also possessed talents that set me apart.

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Those talents had created the successes I experienced. And since I could see strengths in others, it finally made sense that others could see strengths in me too. This was my epiphany; for the first time, I finally *knew* that I was talented.

Following my inventory of accomplishments, I listed the role I'd played in each instance and the qualities I'd demonstrated that brought about the results. I noted the qualities that showed up throughout: leadership; a relentless desire to absorb knowledge; the ability to spot talent and fit on a team; results orientation; the ability to motivate, inspire, and influence higher levels of achievement; and a commitment to constant growth.

I contacted a handful of people with whom I had worked and spent a great amount of time, and I asked them what they thought my strengths were. These were people I trusted and who valued truth over comfort.

"Rene, this is Mike," I said. "I need some help."

"What do you need?" he responded.

"This sounds strange, but I'm building a list of things I do well and the qualities you see in me. I need you to tell me my best qualities. I also need to know what needs improvement," I said.

"You're an energetic, enthusiastic, passionate, optimistic leader," he said. "You relate to and inspire others to achieve what they can and want to achieve. Your knowledge and wisdom set you apart, and you help others move into action and achieve what they thought was impossible. But you try to be all things to all people, and you're too hard on yourself."

Each person I contacted acknowledged that I'd made them better in our time together. That felt like home. It felt aligned with how I wanted to show up in the world, with the things that made me the happiest.

Most importantly, the things people mentioned as my strengths were effortless. They were the result of me simply being myself. What they said made me valuable felt like average skills to me

Most importantly, the things people mentioned as my strengths were effortless. They were the result of me simply being myself.

because they came easy and were the things I do because I enjoy them, not because they were part of my job.

The same is true for you. The talents and skills that make you the most valuable to the world are innate. The things that make you valuable aren't what you sacrifice to do. They're already part of your design and are effortless. By being yourself, you contribute unique value and talents. You get paid to be you. When your talents are used to complement the talents of others, your true value is appreciated. When you focus on your weaknesses and what's left to do, it demoralizes and minimizes your true nature and value.

You don't have to sacrifice to achieve, and you don't have to do things you hate. When you move past a life of sacrifice and struggle to find happiness, you can make the decision never to do things you don't want to do. When you perform in your zone of genius, you create a lot of fun and enjoyment—once you get past the guilt of having an easy life.

And if something's outside your zone of genius, delegate it or hire it out. There's somebody out there who loves to do the things you hate. And don't worry about it being too expensive to hire someone. It will take them a lot less time to do the same task it took you hours to do.

Live within your own zone of genius. This is how you create maximum value for others, which in turn generates maximum value in time and income for yourself. Your value lies in what's effortless for you, that which you enjoy. Find what makes you unique and what you enjoy, stay in that lane, and watch as your life becomes more successful, free, and effortless.

Boundaries

It was well after 6:00 p.m., and I was nearing home after being at the office for over twelve hours. I smelled like the plant, an energy refinery that converted coal to metallurgical coke, which is mixed with pig iron to make steel. The smell of coal was embedded in my pores, and I saw the slight residue of powdered coal on my skin.

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On the ride home, I decided that, even though I was tired, I'd exercise at home. I was done with the neglect. I was close to three hundred pounds and was disgusted at how I'd let myself slip.

I walked in the garage door, and my family was in the kitchen. Dinner was almost ready. I was hungry, but I decided to get in a fifteen-minute treadmill session before dinner.

"I'm gonna grab fifteen minutes on the treadmill," I said somewhat like a question.

"Dinner's almost ready," Angie replied.

"How long?" I asked.

"Fifteen to twenty minutes," she said, tension in her voice.

"Then I'm gonna hit the treadmill for fifteen to twenty minutes, and I'll be up for dinner," I fired back.

"Really, Mike?" she said. "Dinner is almost ready."

"And I'll be up in time. Call me when it's done, and I'll come right up," I assured her.

I changed clothes and began a slow jog on the treadmill. I listened to some heavy rock music to keep myself energized and motivated. I was on the treadmill for five minutes when Angie stormed down the basement stairs.

"You've been gone all day, and now you're going to take even more time away from the family?" Angie screamed at me.

"Is dinner done yet?" I asked.

In an irritated tone, she replied, "No, that's not the point. You've been gone all day. Now, you take even more time for yourself. Thanks for thinking only of yourself!"

"Angie, I want to get some quick exercise in. I'll be right up," I said.

"Thanks for all your help with dinner, Mike."

"Can I finish up my session?" I asked again.

"That's selfish, Mike, just like always!" Angie screamed.

"For fuck's sake, Angie! I'll get off the goddamned treadmill," I said with anger in every cell in my body as I gave in yet again to Angie's temper and lack of willingness to understand that I was committing slow suicide through neglect.

I was an overweight alcoholic in an emotionally, physically, mentally, and sometimes sexually abusive marriage. I wanted to be a great husband, a great father, be physically fit and free of alcohol, be mentally and emotionally strong and courageous, and get spiritually connected. I already felt guilt and shame when I put myself or my own needs first.

I knew deep down that each drink, each day without exercise or without proper nutrition, was sucking the life from me. I knew that I needed to make changes. I tried. I didn't always try hard, but I was trying.

"What do you think about us eating better, slowing down our drinking, and not going out as much?" I asked Angie.

"Then we'll have nothing in common," she said. "We might as well separate because the only time we connect is when we watch a game, drink beer, or grab a bite," she said.

I replied, "I didn't say stop; I said slow down. I'm tired of the way I feel."

"Selfish Mike again; it's always about you. Fine, but when we have nothing to do, remember whose idea it was to have nothing in common," Angie snapped back.

The guilt and shame I felt in childhood showed up often. When Angie said I was selfish, I felt the same emotions as I did as a child in religion class where I heard that self-love and self-appreciation were sins. Every time, I gave in to her because I feared her attacks; she attacked because she was in active addiction. She also attacked because I was doing something I'd never done before. I set boundaries. With her first challenge, any boundary that I'd established collapsed. I felt weak, which created even fewer boundaries.

I'm a morning person. I love to wake up before sunrise, drink my coffee, catch up on sports news, or enjoy my patio. My wife prefers late-night hours. I get tired between 8:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., and that's when her attacks heated up. Because of my body clock and sleep schedule, she threw words like "Old man" and "Grandpa" at me. Because I didn't want to deal with her attacks, I sacrificed what I wanted and succumbed to her pressure. I felt

that peace and harmony in my marriage were more important than what made me healthy.

The irony is that I didn't experience peace or harmony or good health until I established firm boundaries that allowed me to practice radical self-care.

My first life coach's name is Paul. We began our friendship in 2007 when we sat next to each other on the first day in our MBA cohort, which we did almost every day after that for the next two years. Paul is also from Maryland, and we'd both moved to Portland, OR. Because of our connection and roots, we connected fast. When my family moved from Portland to Saint Louis in 2013, we maintained a connection, but our interactions weren't as intense or as frequent as when we both lived in Portland. I still spoke with Paul from time to time, and I followed him on social media.

"Own your day; own your life," Paul's Facebook post said.

Paul's belly overlapped his shorts, his shirt bulged out because of the pear shape he'd grown into over his forty years, and he posted a picture at the gym with him on a weight bench with a barbell in his hands. I laughed out loud because of the disparity between his message and the picture. Over time, Paul's belly shrunk, his waistline narrowed, and his pictures became more focused and intense.

"How you begin your day is how your day will unfold," his message read—showing a tight frame and muscle definition where there was once flab. The video that accompanied his post was of Paul navigating a circuit course with other cross-fitters. It was impressive as he climbed ropes, flipped tires, and carried sandbags for distance and speed.

When I began work with Paul, he talked about boundaries—a concept that seemed foreign, hurtful, and scary to me. I was sure that establishing boundaries in my marriage would be painful. I learned that when you begin to set boundaries after years of having none, it creates a shock to everyone involved, even when those boundaries are good for everyone.

On April 1, 2016, I stopped flipping channels on my television, got up from my recliner (exposing the worn-out head spot from years of wear), opened the basement door, and walked down the stairs. I set the treadmill for a half mile on slow speed, and I exercised for the first time in about three years. That single day started the momentum that propelled my entire transformation.

I finished the half-mile run. My chest heaved from the pressure of my inadequate inhaled and exhaled breaths. Gasping for breath, I was covered in sweat. Self-judgment hit me hard as I attacked myself for my physical deterioration. I used to run six miles per day to keep myself in shape in the Marine Corps; now I'd let myself go to the point that a half-mile run was a struggle. I decided that, rather than berate myself, I'd establish a mindset that allowed me to maintain motivation for the next day, the next run, or the next workout. I also braced myself for backlash from my family.

"You know, we'd be better off if you'd look for a job instead of worrying about your weight," Angie attacked. "We need income, not your vanity."

I let Angie know that I wouldn't stop my physical exercise and that I was determined to get back into better shape. At the same time, I consumed lean protein, vegetables, and fruits.

"Now we're supposed to suffer because of your dietary restrictions?" she continued to attack.

I continued to cook all the same foods for the family that I'd always served, while I preserved my boundaries and ate what I chose.

On April 7, Angie and I were at an American Legion post, where we spent some time at the bar with other veterans. We'd joined the Legion as a means of building a network to find job opportunities. There were limited choices of beer. I enjoyed craft beer, but the selection at the Legion was awful. So, I had an awful beer to connect with my wife.

Right there, I made a decision at that bar over the sound of the Saint Louis Cardinals playing baseball. I finished my beer, and we left.

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It was our common practice that I'd drive to the bar, and Angie would drive home because I was always inebriated. But not tonight. The radio was on, and I sat in the passenger seat of Angie's Jeep Wrangler.

"That was my last beer," I said,

"You're done?" she said in disbelief.

"I'm done," I said with complete confidence. My nervousness gave way to relief. I'd made my decision and set a boundary.

Of course, this didn't sit well with Angie. She was, after all, an addict herself, and she fought to keep her partner in addiction with her. Her attacks were relentless.

Over the next two months, I carried out rigorous self-care, and I didn't waiver, even in the heat of attack. I never tried to convince my family to adopt my new habits, and I didn't try to change the course of our family's behavior because of my new lifestyle. My kids watched my health improve but said that I'd made too many changes. Boundaries are like that; even if the boundaries don't cause others to make sacrifices themselves, people can feel shocked and become paralyzed.

Angie's drug use increased, and our communication halted. She planned trips without me and didn't tell me where she was going. Our marriage crumbled. She detached from the family and her attacks on my new lifestyle increased.

Paul was my valued coach through all of this. He taught me to practice a line that would create positive results. Whenever Angie threw an accusing insult at me, I responded, "You might be right; I might be a *blank*, but I love you anyway." Her most common attack was, "Mike, you're a selfish asshole." And my most common response became, "I might be a selfish asshole, but I love you anyway."

That response frustrated Angie, but it also defused the situations. She wanted me to attack back or relent, and I did neither. In the past, her attacks caused me to shut down. This time, I didn't waver. In June, I filed for divorce, which began the next chapter of our beautiful journey. Over the next years, we became

two addicts who merged into a unified power-house marriage. The fact is that when one person gets better, everyone that person touches gets better as well.

Boundaries go beyond self-care. They must extend to who you allow in your life, how you allow others to treat you, what you give up for the sake of others, and how much you shift your own desires for the good of a person, a group, or an organization. No one else can decide what's healthy for you. They can make suggestions, observations, or recommendations, but no one has

Executive leaders with imposter syndrome feel incapable and inadequate to establish boundaries that serve their interests.

authority over you or can make decisions for you unless you grant them that power.

Executive leaders with imposter syndrome feel incapable and inadequate to establish boundaries that serve their interests. They

become depleted over time and train others to expect substantial self-sacrifice, which brings on more pain. When you're emotionally healthy, you never sacrifice yourself. Healthy organizations never encourage their employees or leaders to sacrifice as part of standard expectations. Routine self-sacrifice drives you to fade over time. The more you fade, the less you can contribute. This process ends in disaster.

When you take back your power and set boundaries, others around you will meet you where you are, at your new level of self-appreciation.

Prioritize Your Own Interests

It was a hot and sticky midsummer Sunday evening in Baltimore. I knew I'd be without my dad for the upcoming week. With tears in my eyes, I sniffled and tried not to cry. We walked home from a fun day at the park where we'd played baseball and hung out.

"Dad, why do you have to go to work tomorrow?" I asked in a seven-year-old voice, sad that my best friend wasn't around as much as I wanted him to be.

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“Because I’ve got to make sure you have everything you need,” my dad said as we walked home with our bat, a ball, and two gloves.

“But I don’t want you to go to work, Dad; I want you to stay home with me,” I begged and tried to get him to quit his job to play ball with me full-time.

He replied, “But then we wouldn’t be able to afford to live, Mike. I’d rather stay home too, but for us to have what we need, I need to go to work every day.”

He told me that sacrifice was just part of life.

Later in life, I found out that life is supposed to be easy and fun. My dad loved me, but the lessons he taught me were that life is hard, earning money is hard, and sacrifice is required to get anything. I learned that “the man” was out to get you, and that if you’re not careful, people will swindle and trick you out of everything you own.

My life was miserable when my beliefs aligned with those lies. Life *is* hard when you make it hard. But life is also fun when you approach every situation from a place of joy, love, and opportunity. When you look for the pain, you’ll find it. When you look for the joy, you’ll find that too.

I learned that I could squeeze the best out of my life when I prioritized my own interests. Interests and deepest desires are your compasses for happiness, and you’ll stifle your creativity, energy, and joy when you stifle your interests and desires. If you suppress what you like and want, you’re already dead. You’re just waiting for your heart to stop beating while you pretend to live.

When I wanted to do anything that aligned with my purpose or interests, my family and friends challenged me. I felt like I was expected to sacrifice my time or fall in line with what other people had planned for me. I felt smothered.

For example, I felt an innate urge to become an entrepreneur. I didn’t have fun or enjoy myself when I worked in corporate America. I didn’t like the pressure and constant stress, and I didn’t want to sacrifice for an organization that would replace me the second after I died from exhaustion or a heart attack. But I didn’t

have the confidence or courage to step out of the corporate world and take a chance on myself.

When I lost my jobs, I felt broken since my identity was wrapped around my titles and income. I felt like I'd lost it all. Of course, Angie expected me to look for a new job, so we could resume our lifestyle. So, I split my massive amount of free time between searching for a new position and creating a plan for a start-up business.

I knew our old lifestyle wouldn't make for a peaceful, happy family. We'd lived an unconscious life. I was employed and paid the bills, Angie did little for the family or herself, and the kids experienced two suffering and inadequate parents. But Angie expected to go back to that same lifestyle. It was all she knew and the only option she'd accept. Together, we were comfortable in our finances but miserable in everything else.

It seemed like the perfect time to launch a new life.

Over the next six months, I did a passive job search and went on some token interviews, but my heart was set on building a new business of my own.

I was soaked with sweat after a mid-day lift and run in my basement gym. I always gained tremendous confidence and clarity when I exercised. I walked up two flights of stairs and made my announcement.

"I'm going to start a coaching business," I told Angie as she was in bed for a mid-day, all-day nap.

"A what kind of business?" Angie replied with a skeptical smirk and holding back laughter.

"A coaching business. I'm going to help people improve their lives," I explained with confidence as the new vision for my life crept into my belief system.

Through her sleepy brain fog, Angie attacked. "We're going to lose everything because you can't find a job."

"No," I defended. "I'm not going back to work for another company. I'm starting a coaching business to help other people."

Not sure how yet, but the only thing I ever enjoyed in my corporate jobs was coaching people and building teams. I'm going to focus on that."

Since I'd first met Angie, this was the first major decision I'd made 100 percent on my own, for my own interests. I knew I'd have to enforce massive boundaries, employ courage, and resolve to make progress when I felt resistance from my family and friends. When you've had the habit of walking the path that others designed for you, there will always be resistance. But stand firm in your truth. People will panic when you make a stand, but they'll grow with you once they become comfortable with the changes.

And so it began. That conversation was the catalyst for launching my new business. Angie hated the idea, but I started a business anyway. I finally did something that aligned with my values, desires, talents, and purpose.

This time, I forged ahead. I secured an LLC. I bought a URL. Designed a website. I networked. The entire time, I included those around me in everything and demonstrated progress.

I also went on about eight to ten interviews for other jobs, but I never wanted any of the positions. My passion was for my new business, and the universe stepped in to help me along—at just the right time, every time.

I was introduced to and met with James Brinkmann right when I was beginning to doubt myself. At the time, James was a partner in a real estate team, and we'd been introduced by another individual who thought we'd hit it off because we were both Marines. I was looking forward to meeting him.

We met at a café as the dinner rush was beginning, and the smells of charred meat and sautéed vegetables made my stomach growl. I didn't have any income yet, so I didn't spend on food outside of my house. I was still in a mental state of scarcity.

"Tell me about your team," I asked James. I was curious because I get excited by building high-performance teams, and I love to develop them to gel as a unit.

James replied, "I co-lead with two other functional leaders. One leads the buyer's agents, one leads the seller's agents, and

I build and develop the team. We have an admin, two buyers' agents, and we're looking for more agents."

I told him how much I enjoyed the team-building process. "What challenges do you have with your business and your team?" I asked so that I could understand his pain points and see if I could add value.

"I'm struggling to motivate my team," James said in an optimistic, yet somewhat deflated tone. "We've got some talented people but motivating them has been a struggle," he admitted.

The walls were down, and we built some trust over a cup of coffee and our Marine brotherhood.

"What if I could help?" I asked. Those words flowed out of my mouth, almost by muscle memory, even though I'd never used them or practiced them.

"What would you do?" James responded.

An air of excitement built. Without hesitation, I said, "How about a workshop about high-performance people and high-performance teams?" The words came without effort. I'd never thought about leading any such session before.

"Sounds great. How long, and what's the price tag?" James asked as he braced himself, a look of apprehension on his face.

"Ninety minutes and \$150. I'll also pitch my one-on-one coaching services. I leaned in for the response. I'd negotiated for other people and other companies before, but never for my own business, which at this point didn't even exist.

"Done. Let's schedule it," he answered.

By the end of the meeting, I committed to leading two ninety minute workshops in one week at \$150 each. I felt victorious.

From those workshops, I signed two private clients to coach one-on-one. Over the next three months, I signed four more clients, led three speaking engagements, and built a reputation for my ability to establish trust and engage in direct and honest relationships with my clients. Results soared as I helped them find their inner confidence, courage, and clarity. The idea of a job in corporate America was fully put to rest.

In my meeting with James, I made a snap decision that aligned with my values, desires, talents, and purpose. When we do things that make us happy, more happiness moves toward us. The law of attraction is real, without a doubt.

Happiness creates happiness. Excitement creates excitement. Energy creates energy.

Happiness, excitement, and energy create results.

Leaders need to lead. Your inner compass tells you which way you need to move. You must learn to trust your intuition. If you fight your inner compass, you'll live a life of regret and pain. Leaders who suffer from the imposter syndrome shrink and recede into the comfort of predictable patterns in and out of the corporate environment. When you gain clarity about what you want and learn to ignore the fears of others—including your family and friends—you'll take back your power, one decision at a time.

If you feel like an imposter, you've given up your own authority to make simple decisions in your business, life, and marriage. When you take these back, you'll grow in confidence, courage, and clarity about what you want.

**If you feel like an imposter,
you've given up your own
authority to make simple
decisions in your business,
life, and marriage.**

When your professional and personal pursuits are aligned with your values, desires, talents, and purpose, the journey *is* the destination. Everything is possible and available to you. That's what happened for me, and you're just as capable.

Self-Care

I'm a Baltimore Ravens football fan. When asked how he found the time to fit a workout in every day, the team's old head coach, Brian Billick, replied that he didn't have enough time *not* to work out. He explained that there was so much to accomplish each day that if he didn't work out, he wouldn't have the energy he required to maintain his rigorous schedule. I'd heard this from

him but ignored it for years. It didn't make sense to me; I was too immature to understand.

I'd learned I could use a variety of tools to create more space and time in my life, but the first major impact came when I implemented the concept of O.W.N.E.R., an acronym that one of my mentors used to describe the ingredients needed to attain powerful physical health.

"Once you integrate these activities in your life," he said, "your physical health will improve."

With intention and effort, the body heals and becomes more powerful and energized. Expansion and improvement in each area will drive continued growth. The five areas are:

O - Oxygen

W - Water

N - Nutrition

E - Energy/Exercise

R - Rest

Oxygen

The body needs oxygen to survive. When you don't get enough oxygen, you become depleted, and your breath becomes more shallow. Anxiety and panic then ensue, and your vital organs begin to struggle for survival. If you are getting too little oxygen, you can experience fatigue, depression, and lethargy. It's important to keep the oxygen flow cycling into your body. You can practice breath work or deep-breathing techniques a few times per day for one to two minutes to help your body get the oxygen it needs to promote peace, harmony, and calmness.

Water

Your body is over 85 percent water, and you lose water to exertion, evaporation, and the cleansing functions of our excretory system. When you don't drink enough water to hydrate, your cells are on the lookout for water, and the focus and attention of your body

becomes survival rather than goal attainment. When you become dehydrated, you experience low energy and exhaustion, you crave excess salt and sugar, and you experience overall body inefficiency.

Nutrition

Food is fuel, not feelings. When you eat to sedate yourself, you risk weight volatility, toxicity, and improper fuel to manage the physical machine. When your nutrition is a source of fuel, and you ingest what serves to build and restore your energy, then you respect what proper nutrition brings to your lives—health.

We can overcomplicate nutrition, but it's simple if you select lean protein and fresh fruits and vegetables as your regular fuel. My family also incorporates high-quality all-in-one shakes with nutritional greens daily. Angie and I use shakes from our network marketing company, (Isagenix, for full disclosure), and the shakes provide all of the nutrition that's been stripped out of the food available in most supermarkets.

Energy/Exercise

When busyness sets in, exercise can be the first activity we toss aside. Exercise builds energy, motivation, and stamina, and if we continue to increase the intensity of our physical activity, each of these dimensions will increase as well. We overcomplicate physical exercise, too.

If you don't exercise now, start with twenty minutes of movement such as light jogging, swimming, or basic yoga. I advise my clients to perform some form of exercise every day—even for only twenty minutes—to get their heart rate up. Increase intensity, frequency, and duration as your energy, strength, and stamina increase. The goal of each workout is to remain motivated for the next session.

Rest

Rest is the most difficult area to achieve for individuals who have developed a case of “the busies.” If you create a pocket of eight

hours without any devices, television, or work, your body will take the rest it needs. Some nights it might need six hours, other nights it might need eight. The most important factor in a good night's rest is to create your day around your pocket of rest, not rest around your day. Reduce your caffeine intake and set aside an hour to unwind or get frisky with your spouse, which will help your body take the rest it needs. This life is a marathon, not a sprint, so start where you are and improve the habits that create greater outcomes. Your rest will naturally increase as your deep breathing exercises, hydration, nutrition, and exercise improve and expand.

These simple steps are a great beginning; improve from there. Start small and increase the duration as your body develops. Begin with simple steps:

- Practice breathing exercises morning, noon, and night, or when you feel stress. Exhale slowly for ten seconds, inhale slowly for ten seconds, and hold your breath for ten seconds. This will flood your body with oxygen.
- Increase your water intake to one half of your body weight in ounces. (For example, if you weigh two hundred pounds, drink one hundred ounces of water.)
- Consume lean meats, fruits, and veggies.
- Minimize processed carbs and alcohol.
- Exercise for at least twenty minutes every day.
- Create a pocket for eight hours of rest without devices. Disconnect thirty to sixty minutes beforehand.

When starting off, don't over-exert yourself. Your goal is to keep your motivation high for the next day. With these simple steps, your weight will stabilize or begin to drop. Brain fog will clear, energy will increase, and productivity and motivation will improve. By following O.W.N.E.R. habits, you'll get more

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done in a single day because you have more energy. The sooner you implement these basic disciplines, the better.

Further, to enhance your mental clarity, do the following each day:

- Read or listen to material that expands your knowledge and mental capabilities.
- Journal about what you feel in your body, your emotions, your worries, concerns, and struggles.
- Journal about your wins and the critical tasks you need to accomplish that day.
- Meditate for twenty minutes every morning to increase mental clarity, mindfulness, and peace.
- Take one to three-minute “mind breaks” when you switch between activities during the day. Focus on your breathing and count your breaths.

After my crash, and before I started my journey, I didn't focus on my physical health. I wanted to make some money and go on another vacation—back to the comfortable life we knew. I had no idea that my physical health was a major reason I'd lost my income and, from there, my life spiraled. That's obvious to me now.

I didn't know that my breathing could impact my emotions. I drank little water, I ate whatever made me feel sedated, I hadn't exercised in three years, and I consumed large quantities of alcohol, which impacted my rest. As Jimmy Buffett sang, some people treat their body like a temple. I treated mine like a tent. I was forty-three years old, and when I look back at pictures of myself, I see that I was an overweight, worn out, unhappy man.

My family no longer attacks me for the changes I made. In fact, they allow me plenty of space, and they accept my self-care routine because that's what allowed me to take back ownership of my life, my health, and my ability to create wealth.

Meanwhile, Angie and the kids watched my reinvention, and Angie has adopted an intentional life as well. She meditates, exercises, and learns every day. Katie and Meagan have joined our health journey as well, and their nutritional and exercise choices have matured over time. Our marriage and family are stronger because I decided to set boundaries and refused to shrink when those boundaries were challenged.

If you're in an executive position of power, it's crucial for you to set aside time every morning and create a routine, so you can approach the day from a place of power. A powerful morning creates a powerful day. To feel powerful, you must own your day, your health, and your life—or they will own you. Practicing radical self-care and establishing healthy boundaries are essential to having personal power. A leader who suffers from the imposter syndrome might struggle feeling worthy of self-care and might ignore and neglect his or her physical, mental, and emotional work. The leader must take back power one day and one decision at a time.

As Jeff Olson states in his book, *The Slight Edge: Turning Simple Disciplines into Massive Success*, good habits are easy to do and easy not to do. You must implement and build the discipline it takes to remain consistent.

Chapter 1 Work

Are You Showing Up for Yourself?

1. What do you believe about putting yourself first? Do you believe that “putting your oxygen mask on first” is an act of service or an act of selfishness?
2. What boundaries do you have in place that you'll not flex regardless of external pressure?
3. Are you easily persuaded to give up things that serve your best interest for the interests of others?
4. Do you feel powerful, worthy, and valuable just because you're breathing? Do you feel that your worth is conditional?

THE IMPOSTER IN CHARGE

Try This!

1. List all the self-care activities you perform during the day. Hold yourself accountable for oxygen, water, nutrition, exercise, rest, and mental clarity practices. If you're lacking in any area, what's your plan to fill the gap?
2. Share your plan with your closest family and friends. Are they supportive? Are they encouraging and championing you to become the most powerful version of yourself? Your tribe matters. Make sure you only have people in your life who want the best for you and return the favor to all of those you love and support.
3. What passions and interests are you withholding from yourself? Why? Make a list of all of the things you'd love to do but aren't doing because of conflicting priorities. Make a plan to include these in your life, regardless of how much time you can devote to them. You deserve your desires and passions. It's time to get on with life!

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My Own Prison

I created my own prison.

Not the jail type of prison...

But the prison that I confined with worrying more about others' judgment than my own well-being.

I was guilty of this for many years.

I created my own prison.

I confined myself when I held back my words.

I confined myself when I shrank myself to meet others' desires.

I confined myself by not showing up fully because others didn't show up fully.

I confined myself by religion, theology, and beliefs that I didn't believe but tried hard to adopt out of fear of judgment.

I confined myself by believing I couldn't be happy in this life.

I desired more from life but remained confined out of guilt and shame.

The thought of my own worthiness, value, and importance created guilt and shame.

I felt insignificant because I forced myself to feel insignificant.

Those who were afraid to be themselves taught me that I wasn't allowed to be myself, not allowed to live happily, that self-sacrifice was the goal of life.

To seek happiness and fulfillment, to feel alive, to feel free was a sin.

To feel worthy and deserving of seeking happiness, love, success, fulfillment, joy...

Was shameful.

I believed that my mission in life was to sacrifice myself and make others more important.

But I realized that if we all do that, we will all be miserable together...

Are misery and sacrifice the purpose of life?

I reject that.

THE IMPOSTER IN CHARGE

I believe that the purpose in life is to seek and find happiness.

Your own happiness...

In yourself..

Happiness is inside, and the absence of happiness means
there's healing to be done to find that happiness.

It's in there.

Unbridled, absolute, unconditional love and happiness
that has so much love to give to the world.

When you appreciate yourself, you have more to give.

You can love more.

Once you feel this love, you see the hurt, pain, and
suffering that others live with...

You hear it in their words... their anger, their frustration,
their pain...

You see it in their fatigue.

Suffering isn't the purpose of life.

Finding happiness is.

Not in wealth, materials, vacations, relationships, sex,
chemicals...

But inside. In your connection to God and all things.

Suffering is unnecessary and not the goal.

To find the ease, the joy in life is...

It's there when you want it.

All you need to do is decide that there's more to life than
the pain, suffering, and struggles you're experiencing.

The current challenge you're facing is temporary... it's
not your identity.

Happiness is a choice.

Your choice.

It's all on the inside. There's no true, lasting happiness
on the outside.

Every ounce of lasting, permanent, unconditional
happiness and joy is within.

But you must be willing to release yourself from your
own prison.

The prison you've created for yourself.

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