

SERVE AND PROTECT

— Every Man's Duty to Take Action —

KAREL COSTA-ARMAS

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ACTION

KAREL COSTA-ARMAS

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I have tried to recreate events, locales and conversations from my memories of them. In order to maintain their anonymity in some instances I have changed and or omitted the names of individuals and places, I may have changed some identifying characteristics and details such as physical properties, occupations and places of residence.

Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

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First Edition

To all the men and women out there becoming the heroes this nation and their families need them to be.

To all those serving in uniform protecting this country and their communities.

And to my children, Daniella, Roman, and Ryder. May you gain a better understanding of my life, my feelings, and why I took the actions documented throughout this book. Go on now and blaze your own path.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I must acknowledge that the Creator of the universe Himself played a part in every moment of my life. I am blessed. It is difficult to see the silver linings in the clouds while the storms are present. Eventually, the sun does shine through and the purpose of the storm is revealed. God's plan for my life definitely far exceeds my own. It takes discipline to hear His message clearly through the chatter of voices in our own consciousness telling us otherwise.

Of course, I extend a huge and humble "Thank You and I Love You" to my wife, Nicole, for she was gifted with the patience to endure my daily rants, endless monologues, and crazy ideas. So many times she sat still while I went bananas on some motivational kick. Nicole, I thank you for your endless hours of listening and knowing when to, and when not, to give your opinion. You have maintained a true and steady course of support throughout this journey. You have exceeded the expectations of our wedding vows, and I am truly grateful every day to have you accept me as the man I was and the one I am becoming. Tough times come and go, but only with a spouse hand-picked by God will a marriage survive. I am eternally grateful for your dedication to our family and outstanding efforts to always stay incredibly beautiful.

My three children Daniella, Roman, and Ryder are the reasons I strive to improve my life daily. Daniella, thank you for showing me, through your actions, how a child strives and works so hard for perfection in life, approval from others, and love from her parents. Roman, thank you for demonstrating to the world how being a golden-hearted, charismatic, and persistent young man can move mountains as well the stubborn ways of a headstrong dad such as me. Ryder, even at your young three years of age, your energy, strength, and creativity light up a room in a way that attracts every ounce of affection and attention. Thank you, children, for teaching me the most important lessons in life in such a short period of time. I am sure there are many more invaluable memories to come. I will always do my best to enjoy every day with you, and I will never give up on you. No matter what the challenge, please know I will be here for you. God willing, the best is yet to come.

I am also grateful to my mother, father, and brother for their actions, decisions, and shared events in my life. Without your presence, love, mistakes, arguments, and drama, my life may have been a bit boring, and I wouldn't have had enough material to write a book. You can pick your friends but not your family; there must be a strange but God-ordained reason for it. Thank you and know that I love you with all my heart.

I give a heartfelt "gracias" to those who have served and are currently serving in our military and police forces. Without your dedication and sacrifice, our communities would be overrun with crime and our country would be easy prey to enemies, both foreign and domestic. Thank you for your service and dedication to duty. God bless you and your families.

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FOREWORD

I have been an entrepreneur for 30 plus years. I've coached over 10,000 clients equaling over 50, 000 hours of one on one coaching in sales, marketing, branding, procrastination, and addiction recovering. Karel Costa-Armas is one of the top clients and students that I have received the privilege of coaching and one-on-one mentoring. Karel brings to the table many years of law enforcement service, personal physical training, coaching, mentoring, and spirituality to this exceptional book. He will give you great insight by taking you through a soul searching process that will lead you to take action, understand you past experiences, and understand the meaning of their events. I absolutely endorse this book as a must own, must read, and must share for anyone who is serious about business, life, recovery, and spirituality. This book has my highest endorsement.

Jeffery Combs

President of Golden Mastermind Seminars Inc.

1

REFUGEE TO AMERICAN

Cuba, January 28th, 1979

I was only five years old, and for months, there was a great deal of secrecy surrounding what was to happen on this day. My entire family had packed our life possessions into one small suitcase. My younger brother and I were warned not to reveal to anyone in the neighborhood that we would be leaving Cuba for good. Good people were susceptible to being ratted out by locals loyal to Fidel Castro and The Revolution. Unless one has lived in a third world country run by a merciless dictator and rampant corruption, it's difficult to comprehend just how life-threatening a simple rumor can be. Fidel Castro carried one of the most notorious and ruthless reputations for the actions taken when he felt crossed. It was common for some locals to turn on others simply out of frustration or jealousy over not being able to leave as well. My family wanted to take along any item of value. My grandmother had even sewn silver coins into the fabric of her clothing in attempt to avoid leaving them behind in the country. Although we felt the temptation to take along with us anything perceived as having any mone-

tary value, the risk of being detained or having our belongings immediate confiscated by airport authorities was far too great.

Nevertheless, despite the odds against us, my father, mother, brother, maternal and paternal grandmothers, my grandfather, three aunts (one of them pregnant), an uncle, one cousin and I made it onto a plane sent by the King of Spain to transport Spanish citizens should they wish to leave the island. In retrospect, I recognize the guts it took to leave a country with nothing but the clothes on our backs. As Cubans and others oppressed in other countries have done for decades, there was no other option but to leave and seek out better lives. My father's side of the family is from Spain. He was born and raised dirt poor until my grandfather decided to leave Spain and head to Cuba. As fate would have it, their plans did not pan out seamlessly and changed a number of times as well.

“Nothing in the world is worth having or worth doing unless it means effort, pain, difficulty... I have never in my life envied a human being who led an easy life. I have envied a great many people who led difficult lives and led them well.”

— Theodore Roosevelt

As the plane took off, transporting us toward what was to become our new lives, nausea set in and I threw up. My brother cracked up and made fun of me for the next ten years or so. What else would a four-year-old do watching his big brother vomit? He was probably still angry at wanting the window seat. We made it to Spain with freezing weather awaiting our arrival. It was wet, nasty, icy rain that went beyond the typical bitter coldness of winter. Being from the tropics, we didn't have much exposure to any environment below 75 degrees. It never even occurred to us to pack clothing for cold weather; it doesn't exactly snow in Cuba. In Spain, the local churches helped us for weeks to find shelter and appropriate clothing. I still remember the faces of some most

helpful souls. One hotel manager even arranged for my brother, my cousin and me to receive some donated toys. For us, it was like Christmas! In Cuba, toys cannot be purchased. They are rationed on a first-come, first-served basis. I have memories of how my grandmothers would wait in line for hours to make sure we could get a toy each year. It seems unbelievable these days to think of a system where toys are rationed. Most children in the U.S. have such an abundance of toys and electronics that it almost seems excessive. My mother managed to bring only one or two of our toys with us. After seven months in Spain, our entire family decided to head to the United States and seek "The American Dream." At the time, Spain was under terrorist attacks from ETA of the Basque National Liberation Movement. Naturally, our family decided that the United States was a safer and more promising venture than the risk of getting blown up randomly by terrorists. At that point in our lives, it was a dream to simply eat decent food and not freeze throughout the night.

I can only imagine the risk that was involved in my parents' decision to take their two small children to a different country with a language barrier and virtually no resources. We settled in Miami as most Cuban immigrants have done for decades. Anyone who has visited Miami can clearly see that it barely seems to be part of the United States. My father, a ship engineer and mechanic, was able to quickly land a job working on ships' engines and such. He had attended Cuba's naval academy where he learned his trade. He worked long hours to be able to provide for us; putting food on the table was his sole concern. He did not waste time worrying about being liked, admired, or resting once in a while. He had a clear vision of what had to be done as a newcomer to this country. Now that I have the responsibility of providing for my own family, I am more grateful than ever for the example of my father's work ethic and sacrifice. It's funny how that works; we truly do become our parents. The appreciation for their efforts tends to set in only after

we have busted our own rumps providing for our own. In hindsight, my father's efforts and actions had a great deal to do with the standards of sacrifice I set for my own life.

People can have positive or negative effects on your life. Some of these people will affect in you both negative and positive ways. It is up to you as you mature through life, to learn how to retain the positive effects and discard the negative baggage to avoid carrying around an unnecessary load. It's a learning process you must master to live a balanced life.

Reflect back on your life and meditate on your personal challenges, adversities, and the hardships you've endured. Who was there setting a good example? Who was setting a bad example? You can learn from your past and how it has affected you your entire life up to today. Your life and most of your actions stem from mentors and influential people you have encountered and with whom you have connected and built bridges. These experiences and the feelings from these relationships are like a collective compass, guiding you to your next course of action. Throughout your life, you have built memories and feelings that may suddenly rise to the surface. You must face the task of investigating why they have been hidden for so long. Many people have false beliefs about themselves. At this point, life becomes an adventure of self-discovery.

Abrupt changes and inconvenient misfortune cause the human soul to act in one of two ways: persevere or perish. Life does that to all of us. If you're a Christian, then you are already quite aware that persecution and trials are sure to come. Do you have the will power, faith, and tenacity necessary to be more than a conqueror? That "do or die" mentality is what gets us through the hardships. The tenacious fortitude that is within most immigrants and American entrepreneurs is not automatic and instinctive. So how can someone endure so much and their next door neighbor appear to break down at the slightest sign of an oncoming trial? How can you learn to apply certain behaviors? How can you too become tena-

cious and climb the ladder of success in your individual journey? Many books and great programs have been written on this topic. Which ones have you read?

One strategy is to ask yourself introspective questions about every demanding situation you face. I first learned this tool of self-analysis through personal development programs and seminars. Motivational speakers' methodologies have impacted many for decades. True students of success will seek out inspiration from experienced speakers. They possess a special gift of presenting subject matter in a very powerful way. Many insightful speakers say that if you want better answers to your situation, then ask yourself better questions. Early in life, just about any new situation can be somewhat intimidating. Imagine you encounter a bad situation and it stuns you. One of the ways I deal with it is to first ask myself, "*what can I learn from this?*" Simple, right? It may not prove to be so simple if you don't get into the habit of constantly seeking significance from your experiences.

The point is to seek out meaning from every event. Find out what it means to you, not your mother, friend, cousin, neighbor or anyone else. Everyone perceives things differently and a vast number of feelings and associations are anchored to each event. That is why certain memories are conjured up when you smell a familiar scent or hear a song that played during a special time in your life. I am always inquisitive as to why each event, trial, good situation, bad situation, and person I meet has come into my life. The process of writing allowed me to ask friends and family about their views on certain events common in our lives. I didn't know what I was headed for but as they told me about their versions of these events, I realized that these people perceived the events from totally different perspectives from my own recollections. Why? I was there and they were there, yet each experience meant something totally different to each of us.

Despite my story of leaving a poor, communist, and barren land with no opportunities, I have been blessed with opportunity at every turn in my life. However, I have not always recognized it. Most of us go through life worried about how to pay the bills at the end of every month. The “American way” has become a debt-ridden, frustrating life where both parents are working full-time and seek only to enjoy a week or so of vacation each year. It is human nature to tend to concentrate on the negative obstacles in the way; I am not excluding myself from this group. I have had many challenges when it comes to creating an income I could be proud of that would give my family a good sense of stability. I know, however, that you get to choose the ending to your story. If you had the courage to change your life, would you? Would you seek out a better opportunity? Do you believe right now, on this day, that you are worth more than what others say?

We all go through hardships, and this book is just another tool you can use to overcome and take life to the next level. My message to you will be brief and simplistic. Why complicate things? I read new books constantly. When life slows down and I begin to sense a stagnant period, I move on to digging deeper and finding out how I can get excited again. I will share with you personal experiences to which you might relate and find ways to engender positive lessons from them. This country of ours has endless resources for even the poorest and most unlikely individuals to lead successful lives. You’ve read about endless rags-to-riches stories. Why not make such a tale a reality for yourself? All you need is desire and the commitment to act.

Think of ten goals you would like to achieve within the next five years. You can list a dream job you would like to have, the car you would want to drive, a description of the perfect spouse you seek, the ideal characteristics you would like attain for yourself, the type of home you would want for a residence, etc. You must be open to dreaming. You must believe you can achieve the dream. Sure, it’s

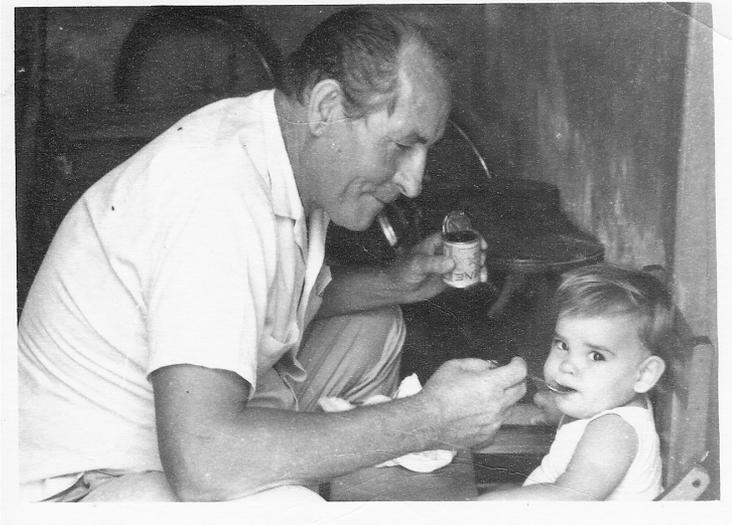
nice to have others believe in you, but it is paramount that you first believe in yourself. Once that faith in yourself is set, you will possess total faith that your works will produce the desired fruit. A movement will begin in you, and that new energy will motivate you daily.

TIME TO ACT - ANSWER THESE MOTIVATORS:

1. Do you have a deep desire to change something in your life?
What is it?
2. What is keeping you from making that change?
3. What would it mean to you a year from now if you actually mustered up the courage to move forward?
4. Who has been a positive role model in your life?
5. What advice would that person give you right now?
6. Do you have some false or limiting beliefs you have been holding on to?
7. Has anyone said hurtful words to you in the past that you have held onto and now realize it's time to let go of that memory and move on?
8. You are good enough and you do have what it takes to make positive changes; what will be the one thing you change beginning today?
9. What podcast can you listen to a few times a week to get you in the right mood? Is there motivational speaker you have been meaning to explore for inspiration? A personality such as Joel Osteen or Joyce Meyer? What about a business and finance mentor such as Dave Ramsey?



Cuba 1974, I am standing with my father and my brother is on my mother's lap



My Grandfather, Pepe feeding me

2

THE FAT KID

“Healthy citizens are the greatest asset any country can have.” — Winston S. Churchill

I was in the second grade and it was time to get weighed in. Yes, back then, apparently, schools took students’ health a bit more seriously than in today’s time. The seven-year-olds were lined up and weight was being documented. As I stepped on the scale, I was a bit nervous, but I truthfully had never paid attention to whether or not I was in the appropriate weight range. I knew I was heavier than most kids, but this particular day was the day I would begin a love-hate relationship with “the scale.” If you struggle with the daily battle of the bulge, you can probably relate and may be sweating right now just reading this experience.

125? Yes, at seven years of age, I weighed in at 125 lbs. I was embarrassed. Some of the kids laughed and others were in utter amazement. Back then, it was uncommon to have a “fat kid.” It had been decided and there was no turning back; I was branded as “the fat kid.” I focused my energies on schoolwork and became a straight-A student. I was happy to do my work ahead of time and

draw on my free time. I would actually do all of my schoolwork for the year within the first two months, and then I was able to draw and go to art class because I already completed everything. That tactic opened the door for my enrollment into magnet schools for fine arts both in junior high and high school.

Like most parents of studious children, my parents were proud of my good grades. My father, however, was very displeased at my weight and lack of physical activity. One time when I decided to hang out in my room instead of outside playing with friends, he forced me outside just to get me moving and out of my room. Of course, I forgive him for the forceful action. He did the best he could with the parenting style that he knew. Communication was never his forte. It still isn't. His strength was and still is that of an unrelenting work ethic. He was no Steve Reeves or great physical specimen, but he was busy all the time. He wanted his kids to be just as physically active. My brother was the epitome of outside play. What he lacked in grades, he made up for in wreaking havoc around the neighborhood. He was as thin as a rail; he could eat a horse and not gain weight. He always had lots of friends to play with and help him to look for trouble. Dennis the Menace had nothing on my brother. That kid knew how to have fun. I, on the other hand, had one friend and was more into lining up all my toys just right on the shelves and making good grades.

Ever since the age of six, I have awakened at 4am on a daily basis. Back then, Spiderman and Speed Racer cartoons were on very early, and I was not going to miss them. I would wake up, heat up whole milk (on the stove- there were no microwaves back then), add sugar and chocolate, and pour in half a box of Cocoa Puffs. Nutritious breakfast? I think not. It was a terrible sugary habit, and no one saw it or thought to correct it. This one little bad habit set me up for a few years of self-programmed failure. My breakfast alone must have been 2000 calories. Back in the 80's, calorie and carb-counting was not in vogue and nutritional informa-

tion labels were just beginning to catch on to the everyday consumer. Besides, after leaving Cuba, we were just ecstatic to be eating abundantly. It must have been a bit of a relief for my parents to go from “what will my child eat today?” to “well, the kid has plenty to eat and won’t starve.” That poverty mindset would affect me for life.

Many of those who have made it from “rags to riches” or simply found more abundant lives often live in fear that someday, it will all be taken away. It’s a deep-rooted issue, and becoming aware of it is the first step to resolving it. To this day, I cannot leave a scrap of food on my plate. I find it to be a waste of hard-earned money. The trick is to order the right foods and in the appropriate amounts. These days, I estimate my calorie intake efficiently. For example, if I go out to eat with my wife and children, I do not order an entrée’ for myself. *Why?* Because kids don’t always eat all of their food, and I will end up finishing theirs whether I ordered an entree or not. This is a learned habit that should be adopted as early as possible to avoid one’s weight from spiraling out of control. Unfortunately nowadays, it is very common to see overweight youngsters. Our idea of what falls under the “umbrella” of overweight has shifted. Some parents even justify children being overweight, blaming it on genetics or claiming that the media has got it all wrong and nothing is wrong with the extra weight. There is no excuse for a young child to be overweight. An overweight child is more susceptible to health complications and to being bullied and mocked. While a bully’s actions are not justified, why put your child in such a compromising position?

Today’s children are more accustomed to staying indoors and playing video games than they are about going outside and throwing a ball around. Maybe my dad had the right intentions when he kicked my butt and forced me to go outside. It doesn’t mean his manner of expressing his wishes was correct, but he got the point across real quick. As the parent, you must take the initia-

tive to research ways to help your children maintain healthy lifestyles. You may have to get creative and sign your kids up for outdoor sports to get their metabolism going. Maybe you, as a model parent, should lead by example. Sign up for a fitness class where you can learn specific exercises that can be passed onto the other members of your family.

It takes attentive parenting and lots of work to get the right nutrition into our children. I have three children right now, and it's a challenge to get them to be active outdoors. I do, however, wrestle with them indoors, and I set a good example by staying in shape myself. My wife works out daily and mostly from home. Our garage is a makeshift gym for the entire family. They watch my wife and I sweat, jump, punch bags, and just about everything else. We are also sure to let them know that we do it for our health and to be active with them. Sometimes when my kids want to play with electronics, I make them earn that reward by doing push-ups or squats. Being or becoming fit is a family affair.

My wife is really the food disciplinarian and closely manages how we eat. I was disciplined before I met her, but it helps to be partnered with a spouse who is on the same page. As a matter of fact, a sure way to lose control of your fitness standard is to live with someone with polar opposite habits and standards for fitness. A spouse who is not helping you stay healthy will sabotage your plan and ultimately your results. I am not saying you both must be Olympic athletes, but an agreement to exercise a few times a week helps a great deal even if you exercise individually.

I bring my lunch to work for many reasons. The first is to save money. It is astounding how many people buy their lunch daily with the price on a simple sandwich being at about \$10. The second reason I pack lunch is to ensure I am getting the right nutrition. Do I cheat and veer off course? Yes, of course. But for the most part, I stay on track.

Are you setting positive examples for your children to follow? If you don't have children, then you have an advantage for controlling events and temptations. Think of what your current habits have done for you or how they have worked against you. There are many options out there to get in the best shape of your life. Have you tried meal replacement shakes to get your weight loss jump-started? What about preparing your meals on Sunday night so they are ready to go into your lunchbox for work each morning? Do you even own a lunchbox? There are a number of meal preparation companies that will deliver your meals to you daily. This is the time to really look in the mirror and ask yourself if you have truly been giving it all you have. You know the answer. Many people continue to tell themselves lies to justify why they have not taken control of what they consume. They can't do one thing or another because they claim to be too busy and have no time. Everyone is given the same twenty-four hour period each day. If you want better habits for better health, you will have to start one habit at a time. You must start somewhere, so decide today. What one thing can you commit to changing today? Can you completely cut out sodas or potato chips? Can you commit to an exercise program for thirty minutes a day?

Do you have a gym membership? What is your stance on exercising? Simply visiting a gym and having your membership barcode scanned does not equate to you actually having put in the effort to get results. Even if you are not a gym member, or you cannot afford one, working out at home can be an alternative option. There are thousands of free YouTube and OnDemand workouts for beginners. Are you willing to make a commitment to a company that provides meal replacement shakes for a 60- or 90-day period to change the rest of your life? Some of these companies offer multiple products and at-home workout programs that provide fantastic results. Start somewhere. Use the gym, free videos, commit

to a company with a good track record, or simply move more on a daily basis.

Diet and exercise go hand-in-hand. There is no other option for long-term results. Your habits today will affect the way your body functions decades from now. If you are fifty pounds overweight, losing twenty of them would provide you with a totally different life. If you simply want to fit into your clothes more comfortably, then put a plan together to lose ten pounds. Get a group of friends to accomplish this goal with you. There are “weight loss challenge” groups everywhere if you desire more of a competitive or team spirit through the process. Groups are great because you hold each other accountable when doubt is high and momentum is low. Keep track of your progress and continue to set the bar higher. Each person is different, depending on body structure, gender or level of conditioning and may require different types of workouts, so make sure you begin with an activity you can handle and can grow to enjoy.

Have you ever daydreamed about having a totally ripped abdomen? Most people do but truly believe it’s unattainable. But it can be accomplished. Anyone out there can get really lean in a couple of weeks. The question is, do you really want it? Are you willing to work for it? My wife and I have both competed in body-building competitions. We both have participated to simply do our best. The goal was to see what we were made of if we put our minds to it. We didn’t do it for a trophy or attention. The journey you will undertake in getting really lean will ingrain in you a heightened level of discipline. From that point on, you will know exactly what you need to eat to stay in shape and your instincts will tell you when you have passed the line in consumption.

They don’t call it the “battle of the bulge” for nothing. It really is a daily discipline you must incorporate daily until it just becomes an intuitive and enjoyable lifestyle.

TIME TO ACT - ANSWER THESE MOTIVATORS:

1. Do you recognize negative habits that have stuck with you ?
2. Should you cease believing these were ever positive habits?
3. Which of your current negative habits must you change to succeed?
4. When will you commit to those changes?
5. What is the new habit you will have in place?
6. Are you committed to a healthier lifestyle? Why?
7. What exercise routines do you consider to be fun?
8. Do you have a friend who may share the same goals and wish to partner with you for accountability?
9. Have you ever considered hiring a trainer? If so, what's keeping you?
10. Will you commit to healthier eating habits at work?
11. Are you willing to prepare your food for work from now on rather than allowing yourself to be tempted by nearby restaurants?
12. What is your ideal weight? Why?
13. How much will you commit to weighing 60 days from now?
14. When you achieve your fitness and dietary goals, who benefits?
15. What will the process you go through teach others about your spirit and will power?
16. How will you feel after achieving your goals?
17. How will your family perceive you once they have witnessed your success?

For tips and advice seek out the following:

On Instagram: www.instagram.com/karelcosta [<http://www.instagram.com/karelcosta>]

For options and products: www.KarelCosta.com [<http://www.karelcosta.com>]

3

FERVENT EFFORT

If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.

— James 1:5 NLT

It was almost 7pm and I was still out on my bicycle. I rode a blue and white GT Performer. Oh yeah, I was proud of my cool bike. At twelve years of age, I was quickly growing up and had shed some serious fat off my bones. I had reached a point at the end of seventh grade where I said “enough is enough.” I began to eat better and become much more active. Part of my daily routine after school was to ride my bike over to my buddy’s house and hang out until the sun went down. Well, the sun was about to go down and I made my routine stop at the 7-Eleven to get a snack before the final fifteen-minute pedal ride home.

There he was. A Jewish kid about my age with curly hair and freckles. He was standing there approaching customers while holding a leather notepad with a stack of carbon copy forms the size of an envelope. He appeared a bit nerdy but confident. We

started talking and he told me he was actually working at that moment and waiting to be picked up by his boss. He was selling subscriptions to the Miami Herald. He claimed he was making pretty good money. I was in. I wanted to know more about this magical car that picks kids up after school and drives them places to make money. Little did we both know, we would be in constant competition for the top sales position every week. I met his boss and was hired.

Money was at the top of my priority list. My parents had recently begun their divorce process. Something had to give in their relationship. The stress from my parents' constant arguing was more than anyone could handle. The news of the divorce was initially great for me. I was big enough by then to interfere when things got physical between them, as they often did. A divorce signified the end to my self-imposed obligation to interfere in their quarrels. Separating fighting parties is not much fun, especially when it's family that needs protecting and defending. How did my parents ever get together? Well, I was informed that my mother got "knocked up" unexpectedly, and therefore, my old man tried to do the right thing and married her. Later in life, a snide remark here and there made me believe I was to blame for their horrible marriage, since I was the product of that "unplanned" pregnancy. My brother and I constantly felt that we were a nuisance more than a joy to their lives. I had subconsciously taken the role of "man of the house" and generating income had been weaving its way through my mind in a strong enough way that it manifested itself in this opportunity at the 7-Eleven. If you focus on something long enough and add some fervent prayer, God will respond in ways you never thought possible.

Unfortunately, divorce is common these days. I was put into a situation where I felt a need to begin working very hard at the age of twelve. I have never stopped working since. Divorce also sets up children for learned behavior. They live it and accept it as the

norm. Later in life, when trouble brews in their own marriages, they are programmed to respond with divorce rather working things out. I've got one divorce on the books myself and do not plan on another one. My first marriage was at the young age of twenty-five and was done out of haste. I believe we were both in it for the wrong reasons and we failed miserably at communicating and respecting one another. Although it was difficult to live through that experience, much was learned from it. Tough times are what make you stronger and wiser. There are three children whose lives and well-being are at stake if I were to ever consider divorce in my current marriage.

Am I against leaving a bad or abusive relationship? Absolutely not. There are times when the end is necessary for the sake and well-being of everyone involved. However, it does not help the fact that today's divorce rate is astronomical and marriage is much less revered than ever. Leaving a dating relationship is not the same as ending a marriage. Some modern youngsters these days prefer to not marry at all. That would be fine if those people were not cohabitating for years on end. It is astonishing how many couples have children together and live together, but fear marriage so terribly that their children have to deal with the embarrassment that their parents are not married. Men have to own up to their responsibilities. Man up, own up, step up to the plate and do the right thing. If you had a child with the lady, marry her. She was good enough to sleep with, carry your child, and live with, right? Let your children know you cared enough to give it a real shot. Some would rather not even try out of fear of true commitment. "Commitment" is not a bad word. It's a challenge, but it shows a vow to taking each other seriously enough to see things through both in good and bad times.

How would you describe your outlook on marriage? Is your marriage a bit rocky right now? What would you do or what resources would you turn to should things get a bit shaky? A good place to start is your local church. There are many men's and

women's groups to join before trouble begins. These groups are there to help you see the signs before the storm hits. Our church has proven to be invaluable to our family. My wife and I get great inspiration and our weekly dosage of God's purpose. The lead pastor is real and down-to-Earth. He is also transparent about his shortcomings and challenges. I don't know about you, but most of us need relatability when taking advice. Church is not mandatory, but neither is bathing daily. No one is forcing you to visit or participate, but what is the harm in trying? God's divine wisdom will surely help guide you in the right direction.

A strong relationship takes effort on both sides. It is not a negotiation of equality. It does not thrive on the mentality of "if they do this, then I'll do that." It's an all-in deal. It is putting down all the chips on the table and loving and caring one hundred percent no matter what. What if your partner does not reciprocate? That should not be the focus. If you do not receive reciprocity, at least you know you did your part.

TIME TO ACT - ANSWER THESE MOTIVATORS:

1. Do you have a positive outlook on relationships?
2. If relationships scare you, what has occurred in the past that may have programmed you to think negatively about committing yourself to someone else?
3. Is “commitment” an uncomfortable word for you? Why?
4. Do you feel that you are a compassionate listener and good communicator?
5. What can you do to improve your interpersonal skills with your spouse and family members?
6. List ten character improvements you could apply to your life that would have a major impact on your family’s future.
7. Do you have a group of friends or a support group of some type that meets to discuss life? If not, think about how you can make this happen.

4

EVERYDAY INFLUENCES

“The measure of intelligence is the ability to change.” — Albert Einstein

There was going to be a fight after school and everyone knew about it. A black student and a neighborhood rich kid were going to meet and have it out. I was friends with the black kid and wanted to watch the fight along with another fifty or so junior high students. I didn't think my friend would have a problem getting this over with quickly. I don't know where they came from, but a sea of bicycles carrying much older kids showed up from another neighborhood. There was no mistaking whose side they were on, my buddy's for sure. I didn't know anyone could have so many friends and cousins show up as back up for a fight. It didn't matter to me though; I knew him and there was nothing to worry about. At least I thought there wasn't.

All hell broke loose and a bunch of people started fighting. This was new to me. It was a melee of swinging fists and people running. I was still a spectator until I saw something odd cast a shadow to my right. At the time, it was as if it occurred in slow motion. At first

I thought it was a large animal flying at my head's level, but then it hit me. It literally hit me. That flying shadow had been my friend's cousin or someone assuming that I was on the other side of the fight. His right hand forcefully connected with the left side of my jaw. I was stunned for a second. There was no pain, but my tooth was shattered into half a dozen sharp particles. It wasn't the typical front tooth either. This guy cracked me across the jaw so hard that one of my molars burst into pieces.

Finally, I looked up to see this flying, swinging, hard-hitting guy standing in front of me. He was mean-looking, definitely a few years older than me and about a foot taller. He was ready to swing again but my friend stepped in and straightened him out as to whose side I was on. I didn't care about sides anymore; I had just been introduced to the "sucker punch." It didn't hurt physically. It was just embarrassing to have been caught off guard like that. Who won the fight? No one, in my opinion. I realized that simply being there as a spectator put me in a very compromising position. I had been influenced by the crowd mentality that it was "ok" to be present and watch. "Being present" at an unruly event or during the commission of a crime will often get you in trouble.

Fights rarely have winners anymore. Back in the day, kids would fight, shake hands and turn out to be lifelong friends. Nowadays, fist fights suddenly become gun fights. If a gun isn't pulled, something will usually occur to make it very unfair for one of the participants. Just look at the news and the violence captured on cellphone footage by young teens.

Other than that spectacle, eighth grade was the first real fun year for me. I was semi-popular and girls were on my mind constantly. I was also new to the whole "who's in and who's out" popularity contest. I had been an outright nerd up until this point. I was laser-focused on my artwork and my grades. Once puberty kicked in, my priorities shifted to having girlfriends and hanging out with cool friends. I usually had a diverse company of associates. Some of

them wouldn't have gotten along with others so I had to make time for different groups. For example, most of my art buddies would never have gotten along with my athletic friends.

The one thing that we nearly all had in common was music. Rap and hip hop were pretty popular and gaining ground very fast, and we hung out in groups listening to the latest jams. Having good mix tapes was a must. Run DMC and The Beastie Boys were big deals. I've always had an assorted taste for music. I like country just as much as I like hip hop. As odd as that seems, I have always felt that there's a class of music for every occasion. Tupac could be just as effective as Hank Williams Jr. or Sinatra. There's a time and a place for everything and everyone.

As a parent, I listen to some of those same lyrics I memorized ages ago and can now see the brainwashing effect that those repetitive phrases had on me. Many of those songs were about violence, shooting, and using women as objects. Words carry meaning, and if you continuously listen to the same words (aka lyrics), you'll believe them. The same strategy suggested for reprogramming yourself into an "improved you" is what most kids do all day by listening to persuasive lyrics. They subconsciously consume the messages behind the words. What words are constantly feeding your child's brain?

It was cool back then to blast that music, memorize the lyrics, and even wear clothing printed with vulgar phrases. I remember going to a Beastie Boys concert and coming to school the next day wearing their t-shirt. The school officials made me turn it inside out. I knew I was wrong to wear it, but I wanted everyone to know I had been to the concert and that I was cool. I guess we have all been a little guilty of this type of behavior to get attention or impress friends. Now, years later and being much wiser, I see the value in explaining these things to my children. If I don't, who will?

I believed I was still doing well as a young kid of fourteen. My parents' split had taken a bit of a toll on me, but my busy life

between school and working with the local paper kept me moving. I had a chance to interview for another magnet school. I was moving on to the ninth grade, making the transition from junior high to high school. South Miami Senior High School had a commercial arts magnet program and I was accepted.

Magnet programs are often implemented in problematic schools to attract more diverse types of students. I didn't see myself as very "diverse." I just needed a school to attend. In my first days as a puny freshman at this school full of older, tougher kids, I was outside waiting for my school bus when the unthinkable happened. All of a sudden, one kid said something nasty to another, pulled out a knife and stabbed him in the belly just a few feet away from me. I couldn't believe it. The thug just walked away as if he did nothing. The victim fell to the floor as a bunch of other witnesses screamed in a sea of confusion and chaos. The culprit was a gang member settling a dispute from an earlier incident. That level of violence was definitely a traumatizing experience to witness. It was the first of many to which I would be exposed throughout my time in high school. The victim survived and the gang member was caught later by police. Again, *who won?* No one.

I witnessed many violent fights and gang-related "rumbles" in my early school years. Many involved weapons such as bats, sticks, brass knuckles, and knives here and there. Sure, guns existed, but they were not commonly used. With new generations, it has become more acceptable for kids and teens to turn to firearms for their everyday intimidation. Drive-by shootings have become much more common to see on the news, and the local police have increased their gang unit detail with more funding.

Cops and teachers have always struggled in handling juveniles. In this day and age, however, respect for authority is basically non-existent. This responsibility should not lie solely on our civil servants and officials. We all need to do our part in educating young adults about doing the right thing.

TIME TO ACT - ANSWER THESE MOTIVATORS:

1. Do you recall a specific song or class of music that had an influence on your life? Was it a positive influence or a negative one?
2. What do you listen to day in and day out? Talk radio, music, inspirational speakers?
3. What could you listen to that would better focus your thoughts on the life you seek?
4. One of the approaches I used to change my habits was listening to motivational, Christian, and personal development CDs and podcasts. Do you have positive messages on CD or maybe podcasts that would better serve you and your time?
5. Do you watch movies with inappropriate scenes or language while your children are present?
6. Do you listen to your old jams with inappropriate lyrics? Who else is affected by that?
7. I have been guilty of all of the above. However, I get better every day. Some of the music that pumps me up does have negative lyrics. Sometimes, the effect is that I am motivated to hit the heavy bag for an hour. I am aware of it. Are you aware of the effects your music and television programs are having on you and your family?
8. Do your kids walk around wearing headphones? What are they listening to? It would behoove you to find out.
9. Did you witness any traumatic circumstances in the past that may have anchored a certain belief in you?
10. Think about that situation for a few minutes and analyze if those beliefs still hold true or if you can now recognize a positive reason why it occurred. What good has come out of that bad experience?

5

SERVING YOUR COUNTRY

“The soldier is the Army. No army is better than its soldiers. The Soldier is also a citizen. In fact, the highest obligation and privilege of citizenship is that of bearing arms for one’s country”

— George S. Patton Jr.

It was mid-1991 and my high school years were coming to an end. My senior year was less than stellar at South Miami Senior High School. I had been working nearly full-time since the age of twelve. My parents were divorced when I was twelve, and little did I know, the effects of that would last the rest of my life. I was eighteen at this point and no one seemed to care about my future. If they did, no one told me. My mother was still too busy grieving over the divorce, and my brother had dropped out of high school and was facing health challenges. I surely didn’t want to continue onto the “thirteenth” grade, as most would call it at the local community college. What for, anyway? So that I could see the same people and do the same things over and over? I had once been very

hopeful of pursuing a career in art. I was and probably still am a bit talented in the fine arts department. I attended magnet schools for art in both junior high and high school. Working all the time, joining the wrestling and football teams, and dealing with the drama at home distracted me enough to the point where thoughts of a career in the art world went south, and so did my grades.

What is an eighteen-year-old to do with such a bleak outlook? Well, lucky for me, there was a war getting started in the Persian Gulf. Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm had been launched, and that sounded a lot more exciting than math at the local college. I also felt a deep-seated obligation to join the military. This country had provided my family so many opportunities. Why would any able-bodied young American not join? I was naturalized as a U.S. citizen around the age of ten, so I fit the bill. Recruiting for the military must be as frustrating as many sales jobs. In the years prior, I had been called and courted a dozen times to see a local recruiter but that never fancied me. I never had any interest in it. However, with graduation approaching, and my lack of options looming, joining the military began to appear more appealing. This would be one of the first “opportunistic” decisions I made. It gave me something to look forward to and a sense of purpose.

Initially, I had bought into the whole *Semper Paratus* concept with the Marines. After all, they had the coolest commercials back then. No one knew who the Army Rangers, Special Forces, and Navy SEALs were. I just wanted to join the military. I wanted to feel like I belonged to a special group and that I was doing my part for this country. The idea of going off to shoot big guns and possibly getting killed in action was (and still is) exciting. Maybe I watched too many Chuck Norris and Rambo movies that made it all look so glamorous.

I told no one about visiting recruiter offices. I had it all planned out. I would have the best summer of my life and head out in the fall of 1991. I was sold on the Army’s proposal. It was the only

branch that would guarantee me a specific MOS (military occupational specialty). All the other branches took in new soldiers and then assigned them to whatever job (MOS) they needed to fill. I didn't want my fate to be writing back home about being a cook or toilet scrubber. No offense to the cooks and toilet scrubbers, of course; everyone needs a job. I wasn't aware of how much cooks are appreciated in the military. You would know if you were fed by crappy ones with a limited budget for food in their unit. Anyone wanting a near five-star dining experience could find such a spread at the Air Force chow hall. Those guys must budget at least fifty percent of their funds into their food.

Soon enough, I had my test results back and the MEPS station personnel gave me a list of jobs for which I would qualify. Apparently, scoring high on the military assessment exam disqualifies a soldier for grunt work (infantry). They were offering me medical and computer jobs. I was ticked. No, I was fuming mad, and I started to walk away from this supposedly great idea. One quick-thinking recruiter pulled me aside and began to ask me what happened that made me walk off. I had my little hissy fit and told him that I just wanted to go infantry and shoot stuff like any other young guy in this world. He read over the results and began to close the sale. He said, "Hey man, look here. It says you can be a medic. A medic goes to basic training, then over to Fort Sam, Houston, where all the women are training, and then you can get assigned to the infantry from there." Of course I only heard, "where all the women train." It didn't take much for me to walk back in and finish the paperwork. I'll never forget that "caring" recruiter looking out for my best interests. Just about every guy in basic training dreams about wringing their recruiter's neck. I don't know if basic training is still as harsh as it was back then, but there are films from that time period that depict the brutality of the basic training program in the past.

I had completed all of the logistics and finally let my mother know that in a few short months, I would be off to a new adventure with the U.S. Army. She didn't take it very well at first but later accepted it and became very proud of my service. My mom wrote often and visited me at Fort Benning when I graduated jump school. The rest of my family disagreed with my decision as well. Their reactions were expected; they weren't familiar with American customs and certainly did not feel the allegiance to this country that I had implanted in my soul. Their governments had always betrayed them, so they probably had a hard time trusting our government with my enlistment. I don't remember my father being present at all during my last years of high school. He was off with his own struggles and making a new life for himself. He had remarried and was starting a new family. I did not fault him for moving on; I wasn't a child any longer, and if anything was to be, it would be up to me.

What are you doing these days to give yourself a sense of purpose? At the time of my military enlistment, I was searching for a purpose. I wanted to be part of a special group. I still search today for new things to do simply to stay creative and feel productive. Life can get really boring and monotonous if you do the same things every day and do not enjoy any of it. I'm sure you've heard the advice to find something you love to do and make it your life's purpose. So what is it that makes you purpose-driven?

Now in my early forties, I am astounded at how common it is to hear men complain about how much they dread their jobs. A great majority of hardworking men in society literally despise their jobs. Countless movies have been made touching on this subject. I'm not counting myself out either. My wife has had to endure hours of griping and complaining from me about traffic and boring hours at work. Our mission as men is to find something we enjoy doing and earn a living from it. Most, however, feel it is too late in life to embark on something new. It isn't too late. There's hope for us all.

Is there something you've wanted to do for a long time? What's on your "bucket list?" If you are unfamiliar with this term, know that a "bucket list" is a list of things you would like to do before you "kick the bucket" (or die, to be more direct). Don't get involved in the monotony of performing a daily routine or type of life that simply repeats itself over and over each day with no new experiences, challenges or new lessons learned. That makes for a dull existence. God made you to create and produce.

Becoming a more active and healthier person will require some work. Some items on your bucket list may require you to be fit and in shape. You can't wish to bucket list a hike all over Europe if you have high blood pressure. Taking a long vacation in the Caribbean would be much more enjoyable if you are able to snorkel, swim, pedal a bicycle, etc. Preparing yourself appropriately will make events much more enjoyable and memorable.

An effective book to start with to understand a man's nature is *Wild at Heart* by John Eldredge. There are many others, of course, but this is an easy read that gets to the point promptly. Women should also read it to better understand a man's inexplicable insanity and wild tendencies. If you are the mother of a son, it could benefit you greatly.

TIME TO ACT - ANSWER THESE MOTIVATORS:

1. How do you feel about your current employment or business?
2. Do you feel there is a purpose to what you do daily other than just paying the bills?
3. Who benefits from your work?
4. Do you enjoy your daily experience making a living?
5. What purpose would you like to serve in this world? Helping others, protecting this country, working with animals, assisting the homeless?
6. What steps can you take to make your desired purpose a reality?
7. Are you making enough money or living check to check?
8. Do you believe enough in yourself to be an entrepreneur? Invent something, write a book, or maybe teach a skill on your “off-time” to earn more money?
9. Is there a hobby you would like to get back to doing but haven’t found the time?
10. Did you play ball, a team sport, or do some type of activity long ago that would really be cool to get back into?



Above: Camp Hialeah in Pusan, Korea 1992 Below: 82nd Airborne Division 3/505th P.I.R.



6

KOREA

“Hey get up. It’s your turn.”

Oh Lord, who is trying to wake me up? Oh, back to reality; it’s my turn for guard duty. Holy Jesus! It’s about 2am and about 30 degrees outside. Outside? I am outside. I’m outside in a sleeping bag. On the Korean DMZ (demilitarized zone) no less. How am I supposed to get my uniform back on in this weather? I can barely move. In order for body heat to work itself up properly in a sleeping bag, it’s best to undress and sleep in fewer clothes. The trick is putting it all back on while still in the sleeping bag. As I stepped out for my special night guard shift, I began to write home. There was so much snot running down my frozen face that I had to chuckle thinking of how the letter’s recipient would react had they known all of the mucus I had generated to write that letter. My feet were frozen to the point of pain. I swore I had actually been victim to frostbite a number of times, but it never really set in. The military boots we had issued back then may as well have been wet socks with Lego blocks on the inside. I don’t know if the military now issues cold weather Gore-tex boots, but back then, it was strictly a layer of leather with no insulation. For comfort, we, of course, had the G.I. wool green

socks that, for some reason, contradicted their main purpose because it caused our feet to sweat so much. Whether cold or hot, your feet were sweating.

The military had a way of making sure you grew up fast. I was just nineteen when I arrived for my duty station in Korea. I had not been assigned to the Persian Gulf as I had originally “planned.” Thinking back now, it was crazy for me to think and assume I would have had anything to do with “planning” my experiences. This night would not be forgotten. I was freezing near the DMZ on the border with North Korea. I swore to myself that if I should ever run into a tough time later in life, I would recollect my feelings of this night. I was hungry, sleep-deprived, freezing and miserable. It gave me a great reference point in my life to look back to during tough times. I would be able to say, “Well, at least it’s not as bad as freezing my butt off a stone’s throw away from North Korea.”

Anytime you leave home for a life on your own, everything will be different. Camp Hialeah, Korea was special for medics. We got to live in Quonset huts instead of regular brick buildings. Quonset huts were the Gomer Pyle type barracks used in the 1940’s and 50’s. There were plenty of regular barracks available, but the medics were assigned to the Quonset huts with no air conditioning or heating capabilities most of the time. I use the phrase “most of the time” because the military did install air conditioning in the winter of 1992. What better timing to get fresh cold air inside than when it’s snowing outside? There were other Army units in newer five-story buildings. There were also the Air Force guys down the street with the five-star version of military barracks. Yep, I was jealous.

I did a one-year tour in Korea. Most soldiers seem to enjoy that tour, but for me, it was less than pleasant. Based on my background and experiences, Korea was not my cup of tea at all. It is, of course, a beautiful country rich in culture and history. I endured it grudgingly and I am better for it. It wasn’t easy, but it could have been. I

look back now and recognize my mistakes and lack of having a positive outlook. I see now how it could have actually been a great time. I just didn't know any better. I was very young, inexperienced with having my character tested, and mostly, just plain old ignorant. I was not willing to bend. I was so focused on what I was not getting that I was blind to all other possibilities before me. I had specific expectations and none were presented.

I have made thousands of mistakes in my life. There will be countless more, frankly because there is much more to be learned. I am human and very prone to sticking my foot in my mouth. The lessons are not hidden in the pleasant times. You will learn and forge the strongest bonds in the face of adversity. Sugar can't be sprinkled onto that fact. It is best to ask God for a spirit that can overcome a struggle and triumph at the end. I believe it was the great Bruce Lee that stated, "Do not pray for an easy life; pray for the strength to endure a difficult one."

With most unpleasant times in our lives, we are disgruntled at the time we are going through them, yet reminisce of fond memories in hindsight. I actually laugh at the memories of some of my worst times. Your difficulties today will be the highlights of your memories in years to come. I need to remind myself of that constantly. I learned a long time ago to remember the phrase, "this too shall pass."

What can you appreciate about what you are going through today? How can you use today's experience to improve your day tomorrow? What did life try to teach you today? Did you learn it or will God conveniently place the same lesson before you tomorrow?

It's like the familiar adage that we need those rainy days as a reminder to enjoy the sunshine on the good days. Rainy days and painful events are necessary evils in life. That's when we learn. Getting through the tough times lets us enjoy the good times all the more. Tough times give us points of reference in life. Learn from each trial and take mental notes of what you did right and wrong to

persevere. You'll need those skills for the times the boat of life starts a-rocking.

The military is an excellent way for a young man or woman to learn discipline, teamwork, and sacrifice, to truly learn what it takes to keep America free. To be a part of that history and know, that at the very least, you were willing to pay the ultimate price. I never got to pay that ultimate price. I am still around, thank God. Guilt does streak through me at times when I see images of soldiers serving. I wish I could be there as well, but I come back to the fact that my time for that has passed and I have another purpose now.

When I joined the Army, my perspective was that I would have preferred to go down valiantly in battle than to sit idle at home while the country was at war. Is that the right way to think? Maybe, maybe not. I am very proud of it to this day. I thank veterans often for their service. Vietnam veterans hold a special place in my heart because they endured the war overseas and the war at home upon their return. Thank God that that type of unpatriotic rejection and humiliation those returning soldiers endured has not occurred since.

Are you grateful for what others have done for you? It's pretty amazing to live in a country where you don't have to hunt or fish for your own food. You can simply walk into a supermarket and buy thousands of items from dozens of countries. You didn't have to plan the importing of the food or negotiate contracts to get the food. The food is even inspected for your safety. Think about that miracle you get to experience daily.

If you haven't served in our military, it does not make you less patriotic. You simply chose a different route in life. In many countries, military service is mandatory. I personally believe every male in this country should serve at least one mandatory year in one of the branches of our military. Of course, it would be highly unlikely that such an idea would be implemented in this free land of ours. There just appears to be so many benefits to having that experi-

ence. What experiences have you had that have given you a point of reference to use when the going gets tough? How many obstacles have you overcome thus far? I have a few, and yet new trials seem to top the old ones. Life is about graduating from one trial after the other. Each time you triumph over one, you grow stronger and are able to tackle the next level of hardship.

“Fire tests gold, suffering tests brave men.”

— Seneca

TIME TO ACT - ANSWER THESE MOTIVATORS:

1. Are you currently experiencing a hardship? Describe the best possible outcome.
2. Is this trial before you testing your patience, love, compassion, courage, or all of them?
3. What lesson can you take from this point in your life?
4. Ask yourself: will this situation matter in a month, a year, or even five years from now?
5. How will it feel when you conquer this current trial?
6. If there was something you could do right now to improve matters, what would it be?
7. You may have tunnel vision going through a rough patch in your life. Step back and analyze what resources, friendships, and counsel you have readily available to assist you. A conversation with a trusted friend can make a huge difference and give you an opportunity to decompress. Who can you reach out to in the next couple of hours that can help you in one way or another?

7

JUMPING OUT OF PERFECTLY GOOD AIRPLANES

“Ten minutes!” yelled the jumpmaster at the rear of the plane.

Oh thank God, only ten more minutes before we get to jump out into an unknown experience. I could smell the piss from the guys who couldn’t hold their bladder. Not to mention the vomit from those two other guys a few feet away. Now I know why cabins are pressurized in commercial flights. These planes fly with all the turbulence of a hurricane.

“One minute!”

Oh Lord, is this really happening? Are we all about to jump out of an airplane?

“Get Ready!”

I was ready. Ready to get out of there. That plane felt like a sardine can in a blender. I didn’t care by then whether or not the chute would open. The nausea was much worse than death by now.

“Stand Up!”

Oh crap. How am I supposed to get up with all of this equipment on and everyone so close to one another? The parachute on my back, parachute on my belly, rifle on my side, and an ever-increasing weight on my head from the helmet weighed me down.

“Hook Up!”

Ok, this is where I grab that little hook at the end of the yellow rope and attach it to that wire above me. Ok, got it. Done. Oh wait a second, is this fear setting in? I was so gung-ho one minute and then adrenaline, fear, anxiety, and who knows what other hormones began to rush at me.

“Check static line!”

I gave it a few yanks. It was secure.

”Check Equipment!”

It was just as secure.

”Sound off for equipment check!”

“Ok!, Ok!, Ok!” was sounding off through the whole plane successively from the front to the rear of the plane towards the Jumpmaster. And there was the final, “All okay, Jumpmaster!” directed at the man in charge yelling the commands.

“Shuffle to the door!”

Everyone began to take baby steps towards the back of the plane where the open doors were located.

“Stand in the door!”

Did that Jumpmaster guy just tell me to stand in this open door? It's loud. Maybe he's mistaken. Nope, not with that look in his eye and evil grin. There I went, one foot on the edge of the door and my hands on each side of the opening. Man, everything looked pretty cool from that altitude, but a nagging feeling kept telling me this was not natural.

“Go!!!!!!!”

There I went. Chin tucked in, knees together, and prayers constantly in mind. I felt the hard yank of the static line opening my chute and there I was in the air. I was floating peacefully for a minute until I remembered we had only jumped from about 800 feet and the ground was coming up very fast. This was not a fun skydive. This was a military jump, with a very strategically designed and quickly descending parachute. Do not confuse a military jump with skydiving. Skydiving is done from about 10,000 feet and you can free fall. In skydiving, you can open the chute at just about any time you want. A military static line jump is where the parachute has a fifteen-foot rope attached to the interior of the plane. When you jump, the line extends out as your body drops below the plane and pulls the parachute open automatically.

When I arrived at the Fort Bragg processing center from Korea, my group was asked if anyone would consider joining the 82nd Airborne Division and be willing to go through jump school. A streak of fear raced through me at lightning speed and my hand shot up. I had already planned a change of my orders to a hospital and this was the perfect opportunity. There were countless unknown factors, but I was young and did not have time to weigh out these pesky issues. I volunteered and felt good about potentially filling the much needed medic positions they sought at the 82nd. A little voice did remind me of some good advice learned in basic training: “Don’t volunteer for anything.”

Have you ever been in this type of situation where you must make a decision right there on the spot? These are the gut checks of life. This is where you must be in tune with your intuition, your sixth sense, your Creator, and with the universe. Always go with your gut. If deep down inside, you feel it’s right, then do it. Do it with a “no regrets, no looking back” attitude. The best decisions are made like that. Once you have made the decision, don’t cower and backpedal. Stay the course and see it through, because for some reason, you were brought to that moment. Truth be told, I had

been afraid of heights my entire life. Jumping out of planes fulfilled the need to face that fear head on. I knew that I wouldn't back out of a commitment to the 82nd. I would have rather been splattered on the ground from a parachute not opening than retreat in fear of heights. I also had lofty goals to go through Special Forces training, and getting those jump wings was a requirement.

I was assigned to a type of purgatory in the 82nd while awaiting jump school. This is where "legs" (those in the military without airborne qualifications) were to perform all sorts of daily details. The details weren't too bad, but the exercise was torture at times. The sergeant in charge was a lanky, coke bottle glasses wearing staff sergeant ready to retire. This guy was about fifty-five and loved to run. You couldn't tell by looking at him that he could outperform just about anyone in long distance running. And since he liked to run, he made sure we liked it too. We ran anywhere between ten to sixteen miles a day. Uphill, downhill, in the sand, through water, in the rain, in one hundred-plus degree weather - any condition was a perfect running scenario. Running in basic training was nothing compared to this special treatment. I actually did develop an excellent habit of running all the time. Even today, I can easily run five to six miles in about an hour at a leisurely pace. The training was a bit extensive, but it made jump school much easier. It would be a few weeks before I got my spot at the school to earn those coveted jump wings.

I had done it. I graduated the U.S. Army's Airborne School (aka Jump School) at Fort Benning, GA. I got my jump wings and was elated. My mother and my brother came up for the graduation and my brother pinned my wings on me. It was a sentimental moment because I know he looked up to me and was planning his own life. He had been diagnosed with kidney problems at the age of seventeen and later would require a kidney transplant. We all have our battles and demons to manage and conquer. I handled mine and he

has handled his. I then returned to Fort Bragg for my permanent assignment.

I was assigned to the 3rd battalion of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division. I felt better than ever. I was part of that elite group ready to be deployed anywhere in the world at a moment's notice. I became familiar with carrying around a beeper (no cellphones back then) in case we were called out for deployment. Many times, we were called out for practice deployments. They were not announced as a "practice run." If your beeper went off, you had better get back to the barracks and get ready to jump out of an airplane real quick. These practice drills were not so much fun then but serve as excellent memories now.

The U.S. Army has a few specialized and elite units to choose from should you choose to step up your game. There are the Special Forces, Rangers, 101st Airborne Division, 82nd Airborne Division, and the non-existent Delta Force fellas. There are many more units that specialize in cold weather operations, tanks, choppers, mountain operations, and much more. If you are bored at home and want a few challenges, join the military. There is sure to be a bit of hell waiting for you to enjoy. Don't forget the benefits too.

These accounts are examples of the type of experiences that make us stronger. What seemed like daily torture back then became a daily pleasure later in life. In my twenties, I maintained being in phenomenal shape by running daily and reminiscing on my physical triumphs at the 82nd. As life has progressed, I have learned to incorporate many other activities, but I always recommend running for those that are still strong enough for it. Do my joints bother me? Yes. Do I have some of the same and some much worse physical ailments? Yes. Do they keep me from my daily workouts? No.

Keep your eyes on the prize and keep yourself in the best shape possible. You must incorporate exercise into your daily life. God designed you to be active and move around. It is a myth that you

can be in great shape without exercising in some way. Those that are physically able to move about and yet do not, are doing themselves and their family a disservice. Get up and get motivated. Be inspired (in-spirit).

“The reason fat men are good natured is they can neither fight nor run.” — Theodore Roosevelt

TIME TO ACT - ANSWER THESE MOTIVATORS:

1. Such as the discipline required in the military, what are some positive habits you can think of from your past?
2. Can you incorporate those disciplines back into your life now?
3. Can you share these experiences with your spouse or your children?
4. Were you once an avid runner, swimmer, cyclist, martial artist, lifter, etc.?
5. What can you do today to regain that inspiration?
6. Are there any physical ailments keeping you from doing some of the fun things you once did? How can you overcome them physically and mentally?
7. What is your gut telling you about the action you need to take?
8. What past success can you recall that helps you make it through today's chores?

8

TO SERVE AND PROTECT

“It is not enough that we do our best; sometimes we must do what is required.” — Winston S. Churchill

My ETS date was approaching. That is the date of the Expiration for the Terms of Service. My time was up. I was sincerely reconsidering reenlisting, but only if I would be assigned overseas somewhere in Europe. I was so hoping to be assigned to the 325th in Italy. That didn't happen. The powers at that time had put a hold on my MOS being transferred out of the 82nd. Apparently, there was a shortage of medics. I decided that I would be better off trying my hand at something else. On April 1st, 1994, I packed my things and said goodbye to Fort Bragg.

The first few months outside of the Army were rough. It wasn't easy getting accustomed to civilian life again. Everyone seemed to have a sense of entitlement to question authority and speak their mind without consequences. *What was that?* I had been in a world where you simply followed lawful orders and dealt with any problems internally. If you had a gripe of some kind, you simply fol-

lowed a process up the chain of command, and eventually it would be heard. There was order. Things made sense.

It had been about a year since my time in the military had expired. I was working with my dad as an A/C technician during the day, and at night I was working as an emergency room technician at a local hospital or as a bouncer at a local club. I was busy, to say the least. I had filled out applications to every fire and police department that was accepting them at the time. It seemed like a natural transition to go from my military service to serving the people of my community.

The process for getting hired was and still is tedious and can take more than a year. There was tons of paperwork to be turned in, interviews of all sorts, physical fitness tests, psychological assessment exams, background investigations, and lots of waiting around for the next step in the process. I was determined to get hired and wear a uniform again. I felt like everyone would naturally respect the police and fire uniforms. *Why wouldn't they?* I was living in an “efficiency” apartment for about a year after getting back home. An efficiency apartment is a converted garage. A garage would be converted to a small living space with a tiny bathroom so it could be rented out. I had made a brief attempt to live back at home with my brother and my mother, but that was very short-lived. My standards had changed and I definitely needed my privacy. Although I had absolutely no assets, I was happy. I worked long hours and came back to a tiny but peaceful home. My life's belongings, aside from my awesome Jeep Sahara, all fit in one tiny closet. I had no kitchen, only a small refrigerator and a microwave. All was good. My income was double my expenses and things were moving along nicely.

One year later, I received calls from the Florida Highway Patrol and the Miami Dade Police Department. Both were finally interested in offering me a position. I chose the MDPD because they called first and it wouldn't require traveling out of town for a

month's long academy. I had experience with them as well. I had been a Police Explorer at the age of fourteen and was familiar with police codes, vehicles, and the department's culture in general. I was stoked. I couldn't contain the excitement. I was going to start a career in law enforcement. This was a long-term commitment and I was brimming with optimism and pride. I just knew my family would be happy for me.

I had been working with my father when the department called about the job offer. He had just launched his air conditioning business, Costa Air Conditioning, and was focused on success. My old man was determined to serve Miami's air conditioning needs better than anyone that ever set foot in Dade County. After all, he was an entrepreneur now. He and I were the only two working the business at the time. My brother rotated in once in a while when he needed some extra work. I shared the news about the department hiring me with my father but there was no emotion from him. I might as well have told him my butt itched or that the sky was blue. As I knew from my childhood, he is not an open communicator with concerns about emotions. I didn't realize then that eccentric fathers expect their children to read their minds. I wish I could have had a hint. Later in life, he would tell me that he had planned for my brother and me to work alongside him and build his air conditioning company. How was I supposed to know his expectations for me to work with him if he never talked to me about it? He was disappointed in my decision to leave his side and become a cop, but I wasn't.

On April 25th, 1994, I began to work at the MDPD. I was initially hired as a gofer until the Academy actually began. A gofer is a junior employee or trainee tasked to do whatever is necessary at a job site. Whether it was administrative work or moving police cars around in the parking lot, I was happy to be "in." I would daydream about taking down the bad guys and looking cool in uniform, you

know, the same type of stuff little boys do at five years of age when playing Cops and Robbers.

The police academy quickly taught me I needed to change my attitude. I had to realize that although this was a paramilitary organization, it would require more discretion and the ability to make decisions in very “gray” areas of life. Things were no longer black and white. Being a police officer required a great deal of common sense and strong verbal skills. I learned about affirmations and reprogramming myself to be the person I desired to be. I wrote out three by five cards and even recorded affirmations on cassette tapes. I listened to them on my way to and from the police academy. In addition to the required courses in state laws, the academy teaches trainees how to adapt to many situations and think quickly on their feet. As in the military, I also had to adapt to the many differing cultural backgrounds and personalities in the class. I had to learn to be more empathetic and soften up a bit to better understand those I was to encounter on calls.

You must recognize that everyone is different and we all have our own paths to travel. If someone has hurt you or disappointed you, they may not even be aware of how they made you feel. People make bad choices every day. I still do. Forgive them in person or just within yourself. Move on and recognize there is no longer a need to carry that weight around with you.

Most people are currently fighting their own major battles. Many conceal these internal struggles well. For many decades, it has been the norm to conceal emotions and not allow others in to your private world of pain. I believe this is changing for the better as more people are becoming more open to discussing their problems and discovering possible solutions. I personally hid a lot of resentment and anger for years. I was just too proud to accept my shortcomings. So proud that I didn't even realize I was resentful. Finances, a troubled marriage, health concerns, and problems with raising children are just some of the areas that can cause a person a

mountain of distress. You will face some, if not most, of these in life so keep it in mind that others deserve a second chance, including yourself.

I had to learn in the academy that by the time a police officer is called to a situation, that officer will have to determine very quickly what may be the underlying problem to the actual event at the scene. Most crimes officers respond to stem from anger, rage, resentment, greed, abandonment issues, or other emotions that have spiraled out of control. Bad guys were usually good guys at one point. Lack of understanding or a weak will at an opportune moment can cause the good guy to break. Greed or just plain old stupidity may set in and they act on it. Even though the individual may be remorseful after the fact, that battle on the inside needs a resolution.

As tough as you may believe yourself to be, you will have to become very vulnerable at some point in life to get through occasional tough times. You will often have to take two steps back so you can jump ten steps forward. Think of it like working out to achieve bigger stronger muscles. You can only build the muscle after first breaking it down in an intense workout and then rebuilding it with proper nutrition. The process of healing emotional scars works in a similar way. It's especially difficult for men, I think, to admit mistakes and begin the process of healing. Emotional awareness and self-reflection are some of the toughest parts of the process; pride gets in the way. Men don't want to admit they're hurting. Men don't like to admit they need help. Men are wired differently; society's expectations for men differ than the expectations for women. But that's okay. For me, reading books and going through self-help initiatives works best. There is a method for everyone, and you may need to search for that special way that can help you to move forward.

TIME TO ACT - ANSWER THESE MOTIVATORS:

1. Does your goal to start a business or change employers require a long process? Are you willing to commit to that process no matter what?
2. Think of a time when you were really happy. What is it about that time that makes you feel good inside today? Was it the simplicity of your life back then? Your environment? The fresh air? The freedom? List all the details of that that specific time and compare them to your current state. What can you incorporate into your current lifestyle regain those feelings?
3. Have you ever been proud of an achievement but were never recognized for it by someone you cared about? How has that affected your life?
4. Is there someone on your mind you've been meaning to contact but haven't because of unresolved issues?
5. When will you commit to contacting them, saying hello, and starting all over?



Miami Dade Police Department, 25 years of age

9

A RAINY NIGHT

“Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear - not absence of fear.” — Mark Twain

I had just finished my last Field Training Officer phase. There are four phases a rookie experiences after the academy. In each phase a different training officer evaluates the rookie's performance and scores them accordingly. Four field training officers had approved me to move forward. I would still be in the probationary period for a few months to come, but I was on my own. It was surreal. I was 22, driving my own police car, toting a gun on my side, and ready to save the world. I think back now and wonder how a 22-year-old could possibly relate to the problems faced by others. It didn't matter to me back then because I had fit the requirements by the state, passed all the tests, and was wearing that same badge most young boys only pretend to wear when acting out their games. There was no more acting, however. This was real and it was about to get real serious.

A typical thunderstorm had rolled in and the rain was pouring down so hard, I had to pull the car over. I was in Area 2 of the

Cutler Ridge district. This was the department's largest district. As usual, we were understaffed for such a vast area of coverage. At times, the closest back-up unit could be more than half an hour away. The shift-changing hours were also an altered alert state of the daily shift. This is when the one group of officers was ending their shift while their replacements were in roll call preparing to hit the road. At these times, the remaining two squads on the road had to cover three very large areas. The area in shift-change would usually experience delayed response times for about 30-60 minutes. Already at scarce numbers, the shift changes required about twenty officers doing the job of forty.

I was dispatched on a signal 214, possible fireworks or shots fired in the area. I took the call and my sergeant went as the backup unit. The rain was still pouring down, which made me wonder who on Earth would be setting off fireworks in the area. The threat of the "shots fired" didn't really set in. I figured we would have received more calls via dispatch if the situation was actually a threat.

As I arrived in the area, I looked out into the field in front of a school. It was adjacent to the call and something looked very odd. There was a guy in the middle of the field walking very slowly. Red flags went up everywhere inside me. He was wearing a yellow rain-suit, overall pants, a jacket, rubber boots and a hat. This guy looked like the Gorton's Fish Stick model. I didn't know people even owned rain-suits that complete. I shined my lights on him and asked him to walk towards my police car. He ignored me; the audacity.

I was a good distance away, but I was not about to leave the pavement and get my police cruiser stuck in the mud. I noticed this guy was nearly knee-deep in water. He began to fidget around in his jacket all the while pretending I was not there. Something told me that there was definitely something "off" about him, and I needed to get out of the car. It was not the most delightful thought

to get out into knee deep water in a rainstorm, in my long raincoat, with this person who was deaf, setting off fireworks, a maniac with a gun, or all of the above.

I approached him with my hand on my gun, and he began to fidget a little faster as he turned his back to me. I yelled a number of times for him to show me his hands but to no avail. I had my gun out by now and pointed at him. Both his hands were inside of his jacket and something told me to put my gun away and get physical real quick. I reached out with my left hand towards his abdomen where his hands appeared to be. He was holding something and tried to shove me away with his shoulder. In all of the rain, adrenaline pumping, and physical contact, I heard a very distinct and familiar noise. It was a tic-tic-click noise made by revolvers when being dry fired. My right hand came up lightning fast and gave him an open palm strike to his head. He was stunned for a brief second, and I was able to subdue him after tussling around the foot of water surrounding us. I discovered a very large and heavy revolver concealed in his waistband beneath the overalls. The rain began to subside and my sergeant pulled up as I was placing the cuffs on the guy.

I hadn't yet familiarized myself with many handguns at the time. I was carrying the department-issued, six-shot standard police revolver at that time and had never seen a 44 magnum shell. I unloaded the gun to get it ready for impounding. As I was removing the remaining rounds, I saw something that made me turn white with fear. The only bullet that had not been fired had a dent in its primer. I realized that this bullet's primer damage may have been the tic-tic-click noise I heard earlier. Was it that this fine young citizen in handcuffs had tried to shoot me during our dance in the rain? *Did he really just try to kill me?* There was no doubt in my mind about it.

I knew God had spared my life that night. It wouldn't be the first or the last time either. This young man in the back of my cruiser

had apparently been involved in some type of domestic dispute earlier with his girlfriend and decided he wanted to go shoot off his gun in the rain on school grounds. That was his plan until some people got on their phones and called the police. Lucky for him, I am the one that showed up. I was extremely fortunate that night to have survived what I believe to have been an attempt on my life. If you look at this story from his side of the gun, he was fortunate I did not put a few bullets in his head. Had I shot him, it would have been a perfectly justified, police-involved shooting scenario. In police jargon, we would have called that a “black and white” shooting. God saved us both.

More than twenty years have passed since this happened. My memory is not perfect and I am sure to have left out a few details. I do, however, remember vividly what I felt that night. I felt God wink at me. I felt relieved. As if He looked down, smiled, and said, “In case you forgot, I’m still here looking out for you.” If that bullet had gone off, I probably would not have felt a thing. A 44 Magnum is the same caliber bullet Dirty Harry used in his famous movies, powerful enough to cut a man’s head clean off his shoulders. I never took my job personal. It was always business; never personal.

Most bad guys knew better than to act up when I was present. There was a silent communication between us; not to say some didn’t get the message the first time we met. Daily experiences allowed me to learn and build better communications and a more meaningful rapport with local criminals. I would tell those I arrested that their legal problems weren’t the end of the world. It just meant they got to play the game over the next day. At times, I would see patrons at the gym that I had arrested in the past. It was uncomfortable to run into them but we both understood our roles. I was always fair in performing my duties and they knew it. Had I been abusive, the streets know how to take care of such behavior. If they were breaking the law, they were at risk of being caught. If they ran, I chased. If they assaulted me (or thought about it too

much), they'd usually get the surprise first. *In what confrontational situation would you allow yourself to be hit first before acting on a threat?*

Law enforcement officers are not trained to stand there and get hit first. They are trained to avoid being harmed and making sure they see their family at the end of their shift. They are men and women, moms and dads, with sons and daughters just like everyone else. The police is not in place to be abused by anyone. This may be a common misconception these days. Some of the more liberal minded tend to believe the police should allow for intimidation and threats by the criminally inclined. Police officers are trained to enforce the laws of their state while simultaneously avoiding being harmed themselves and still protecting the public. Those are a whole lot of things to juggle at once. They serve and protect you.

TIME TO ACT - ANSWER THESE MOTIVATORS:

1. When has God gotten you out of a sticky situation? Have you experienced it more than once?
2. Are you sincerely grateful for coming through a difficult situation you first thought was insurmountable?
3. Without a “mess,” there is no “message.” How can your story help others overcome adversity?
4. How can you share that story with others? Can you get involved in a ministry of some type, start a book you may need to write, find opportunities to motivate others as a speaker, or maybe just become available as a good friend to those in need?
5. Are you going through something now that requires divine intervention? Have you prayed about it?
6. How is your outlook on local law enforcement? If it is indeed positive, consider thanking the next police officer you see for their dedication to your community.

10

THE MEAN GUY AND THE NERD

“People sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf.” — George Orwell

We were “affectionately” dubbed the mean guy and the nerd. It was funny. The locals in Miami’s neighborhood of Naranja decided that’s who were to be. Guess which one of us was the mean guy? Yep, me. And the nerd? That was my partner. Was I really mean? I wouldn’t say that; well, maybe sometimes I could have been. My partner was a good-looking, curly-haired, 24-year-old father of two. He was married and was an overall good guy. He wore glasses and had an innocent rounded face. I guess we all have our attributes - his was looking innocent while dishing out justice. He was no pussy-cat though, I can assure you. This guy had played college football and packed on more muscle and power than one would perceive at first glance. He was tough as nails but had the gift of humbling himself with perfect timing. He was (and still is) well-educated and had

a strong family background. I, on the other hand, was fresh out of the military with a high and tight haircut and more of an aggressive demeanor. Humility was nowhere in my repertoire of traits. I just didn't know any better. I wish I had learned better interpersonal skills throughout life. Things would have been much different if I could have only utilized a little finesse.

We made a good team. Still on probation, we took to the streets like bats out of hell. Our sergeant allowed us to make special patrol-type takedowns and set up on drug dealers in our area. We would even come up with our own undercover work using unmarked vans in the carpool. This is unheard of when having only completed six months on the job. The other supervisors didn't agree so much with two rookies doing so much work and causing a big ruckus every so often. There were times that serious brawls broke out because of our proactive initiative. We were calm and fair but wouldn't take crap from any ill-willed citizen.

When the complaints from citizens hit our supervisors or Internal Affairs, I was more easily issued the blame. There could have been twenty other cops doing the same thing at the same time and in the same place, but I normally received the invite from Internal Affairs for a private chat. Nearly all the complaints were completely unfounded. It didn't matter back then. My partner was married and had more at stake than me. I wasn't married and was under the impression that I was untouchable. Why would I think any differently? I was doing my job and wasn't violating any rules. The military had accustomed me to take the blame for others' actions should it prove to be for the greater good. It just seemed simpler to take the heat, get it over with, and move on. I did that a few times for several people, failing to realize that the police department wasn't the military, and if serious issues arose, my job could be at stake.

At times, fists began to fly and we would have to call for emergency backup units. Backup would usually arrive in the form of a

sea of police cars from all directions. The bad guys had their backups as well. The hood has their own dispatch system in place when things are beginning to “go down.” The police didn’t always win either. The old timer cops had shabby holsters, and at the end of a melee, it was not unheard of for some guns to be thrown about or missing.

There were plenty of other officers displeased with our preoccupation with proactive arrests. The experienced cops already had their fill of fun when they were rookies themselves and knew better than to beat the bushes too often looking for “perps” (perpetrators). This was their time to coast until retirement, and we were disrupting their pre-retirement plans. Looking back, I completely understand. With the public constantly complaining about one thing or another, the best policy seemed to be just to handle calls and go home in one piece.

The bad guys know very well how to make a complaint about an officer just to get the case thrown out. It didn’t matter to me back then how many complaints I received. I learned in the military that you have nothing to worry about if you know you’re in the right. The more experienced officers that had been very proactive their early days, told us that if you’re not receiving complaints, then you’re not working hard enough. It was math again; the more contacts you make, the higher the probability of ticking someone off.

I loved my assignment. It was fascinating to be in law enforcement. Just about every day, I would get dressed in uniform, already prepared to work two hours before my shift. The station was only five to ten minutes away, but I was raring to go hours before my scheduled time. Sometimes I would go to my assigned patrol area a few minutes before roll call, nab me an arrest, and show up to roll call with a prisoner already in hand. Yes, most thought I was a bit too enthusiastic about my career. To me, it was fun and I was sure that my performance was perfectly in line with what I had been hired to do - take bad guys off the streets.

Well, catching bad guys is not what most departments truly have on their list of priorities for the normal uniformed officer. Supervisors at the uniform patrol level are usually concerned with the calls for service being called in by the general public. The public's opinion on how quickly a cop responds is of paramount importance. The public's perception and being politically correct became *the* priority. It was very difficult for me to grasp that concept back then. I was just using simple math; I figured that if fewer criminals were on the street, then fewer crimes were being committed. Wouldn't the public be satisfied with that? Calls about loud barking dogs, car alarms, and traffic accidents were not as exciting.

Being a police officer, or any law enforcement officer for that matter, has always been difficult. I can only imagine how frustrating it is in today's technologically-advanced era. Everyone over the age of five has a cellphone that is camera equipped, ready to record. People don't even attempt to help one another when witnessing a crime. They're too preoccupied with recording the incident for social media. It kills me to see a victim getting pounced on while others are just watching and recording with hopes of the footage going "viral."

Most of the anti-cop sentiment that exists in our day and age is sorely exaggerated. Are there bad cops out there? Yes, there are, but there are very few. From my experience, I would say there's one bad cop for every three thousand. How many fantastic cops would I estimate? Well, that number would be close to twenty percent. What category do the other officers fall into? I would say that most police officers are hardworking, honest men and women doing what everyone else does, working their chosen career to make ends meet. They have been trained properly and perform their jobs well. They have their families, responsibilities, struggles, personal trials, and life events just like everyone else. The main difference in their line of work is that they get to see very bad people every single day. Dealing with thugs, victims, suicides, homicides, and a plethora of

other harsh situations daily makes it difficult to go home with a smile.

Law enforcement officers do not sit at desks and see the same people every single day. They may see several domestic disputes one day and get stuck on a triple homicide the next. Most 911 calls they respond to involve some type of unpleasant situation where two or more parties do not agree on a matter. This constant uncertainty coupled with lack of the public's trust makes for a very stressful job.

We all have rough days. We all have duties to fulfill at work. Some of us are misunderstood for trying to do the right thing. Have you ever been in a similar situation where you were reprimanded rather than rewarded for what you believed was the right thing to do? It may have made you stronger. Did you learn from it? As I look back on experiences, I admit that quite often, I was in the wrong. I become a better man every time I take ownership of past mistakes. A burden lifts off of my soul when I accept the truth and hold myself accountable. We have all made mistakes and they are best dealt with swiftly and honestly. Don't lie to yourself about a situation. Admit the truth, especially to yourself.

After a few years of constant proactivity, I had to alter my style of police work and eventually simmer down. I had to conform to answering the calls from dispatch and perform proactive work in a very limited fashion. It was fine; there's a time and place for everything. I began to see the bigger picture and keep my supervisors happy. Most police movies tell the same story - the story of the hot dog rookie that eventually chills out and takes his or her assignment at a slower pace. I worked alongside some very brave men and women. Most of them are still serving today and with a whole lot of brass on their lapels to show for their loyalty to the department. Good for them. They have no idea how proud I am of them and their dedication to their families, their community, and the badges they wear. Law enforcement officers everywhere walk a

very thin line when protecting the public from a criminal element that desires chaos.

Has there been a time in your life when your hard work was not recognized? You are not alone. Most of the time, it just means you need a new angle on your energy. Shifting the focus a few degrees can make the difference between frustration and validation. Get in front of your boss (or yourself, if you're self-employed), and discover the real objective. How is it that you will achieve the results while being lined up with the company's goals? If you're out of alignment, you'll be rocking the boat and not making friends anytime soon. You must always remember what the desired outcome should look like. If you have been hired to bake cakes, don't try and reinvent the recipe before producing what's been asked of you. A superior loves a motivated employee with initiative but usually only after the fundamental priorities have been accomplished. You can get creative and pitch new ideas once the basics are taken care of.

**“Folks who never do any more than they get paid for, never
get paid for any more than they do”**

— Elbert Hubbard

11

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

“Unfortunately, there seems to be far more opportunity out there than ability.... We should remember that good fortune often happens when opportunity meets with preparation.” — Thomas A. Edison

I had asked the Police Department for a leave of absence. It was denied. I just wanted a break from the politics of the law enforcement world and try my hand at a new massage therapy business I had started on the side. While working with the police department, I remembered the military benefits I had originally been promised for an education. I decided to take advantage of the G.I. Bill benefits and complete some courses in anything that would truly interest me. Since I had been a medic in the military, I thought massage therapy would be familiar enough since it dealt with the human body. I was also very interested in knowing more about human physiology and just how the body was structured. This would prove to be an excellent asset in the world of personal training and body building. I signed up and classes began.

Scheduling my time was quite the task. I was still a full-time police officer and was able to get on a day-shift squad. I worked until 5pm, went to school from 6-10pm four nights per week and then again on Saturday mornings. This went on for about nine months. It was time-consuming and I was deprived of sleep, but I was already accustomed to sleeping in my squad car and getting very little rest. I simply traded in my overtime pay for school work.

God's hand was in this as well. I was curious as to how a massage therapy business would be set up. I had never considered having my own business. I believed at the time that being a business owner would require a major business loan. I was inspired to check if there were local massage therapists online with professional websites; there were none - at least none that seemed reputable. One thing led to another and I made my own website through my AOL account. I researched domain names and purchased Massage-Miami.com. I knew absolutely nothing about having a website. The military made sure its soldiers knew how to follow instructions down to the last letter, so after reading a few online articles, I got the job done. If you have ever thought about owning your own business, fear not. There is probably an abundance of how-to information that will assist you in every step of the process.

The domain name alone was a key factor in my success. I had acquired a domain name that was simple to spell and easy to remember. Common sense led me to the simplicity behind it all. I was able to advertise in print, on t-shirts, and just about anywhere in the most elementary manner. I was new to this new internet thing and my curiosity about the competition in the massage therapy field led me to research similar companies. There were plenty out there, but not online. I discovered so many ways to get the word out about my business for free. It was all very exciting. I remember sacrificing much needed sleep just to surf the web for more free advertising opportunities. If Facebook or Instagram had been in existence back then, success would have been nearly over-

night. If you put in the time and search for ingenious ways to advertise, you may just find many of the options are free.

Calls started coming in, and I wasn't even licensed yet. My little one picture and one-paragraph website drew lots of attention with all those free ads. I knew I couldn't perform the service without a license so I had to stall by telling customers I was booked and would get back to them. I finally got my state license and began making out-calls for massage therapy. It was very lucrative. I was professional and punctual. Apparently, back then, those two qualities in massage therapy out-call service were rare. I capitalized on that. I quickly found myself making more money on my two days off from the police department as a massage therapist, than on my two weeks' pay as a police officer. I was at a crossroad and it was time to make a choice. It was very obvious that my passion for growing this business surpassed enduring the politics at the department.

I spent those two days off per week testing the business to see if it was all just a fluke. I wanted to make sure that more potential clients were out there before I made any hasty decisions. Mondays and Tuesdays were my typical days off from the department, so I would spend those days with as many massage clients as possible. Unless I had court dates set from the police department, I would begin my scheduled appointments after my workout and breakfast at about 8am. I would make my last appointment at about 9pm and end up back home by 11pm those two nights. I was exhausted, but I was bringing in approximately a grand a day. The waters were tested and I felt secure in what I needed to do. Not only was this new career lucrative, but it was also a twelve-hour workout. I was burning calories all day.

A very loud voice inside was screaming "OPPORTUNITY" at me. I sought counsel from everyone. The straw that broke the camel's back was a massage client telling me one night during his appointment, "There have never been any stories written about

cowards.” With that one statement, it was as if he had just drawn a line in the sand! The gauntlet had been thrown down. A challenge was staring me in the face. As I look back, I recognize that the real question I had to ask myself was, “Do I have what it takes to be an entrepreneur?” The internet defines an entrepreneur this way: *“Entrepreneurship is the process of starting a business or other organization. A person who organizes and manages any enterprise, especially a business, usually with considerable initiative and risk. The entrepreneur develops a business plan, acquires the required resources, and is fully responsible for its success or failure.”* Did you read the part where it states that the entrepreneur is “fully responsible” for success or failure?

Again, as a man, I was faced with making a final decision. I did just that the very next day. Since my Leave of Absence had been denied, I resigned from the Miami Dade Police Department. I was going to miss a lot of the officers I had worked with for so long, not to mention the take-home police car I was accustomed to for so many years. I would have to buy myself a car and pay for my own gas from then on. I gave the department a three-month notice letter. My last day would be in January of 2003. It was a bittersweet experience. I had dedicated eight years to the department and this was the beginning of a completely new chapter in my life.

I loved being a cop at the time. The red tape and bureaucracy, however, is not fun in any corporation. The police departments are no different. In fact, they may be even worse because of the constant contact with the public. I had to look at my options and my relationships at the time.

How many chapters can you recognize in your life? Can you recall how it felt during those decision-making moments? Has anyone ever challenged you to take action? If not, then I am throwing down the gauntlet before you. I am drawing that line in the sand and challenging you to step up and play the game with all your might. Risk, after all, is risky, isn't it? But if you don't try, you

will never know if you could have made it. Look around you and notice how many friends of yours are making a living doing the strangest things. Is there something you would rather be doing today other than what you are currently doing?

What's holding you back from starting your own business? What's holding you back from switching employers or careers? If you live check to check and have few options, I can certainly understand and relate to you. I will, however, tell you that if you seek it, you'll find it. If you decide to find extra income, a promotion, or an opportunity, it will present itself. It may take a while, but if success came quickly without risk and perseverance, everyone would be successful.

My decision to leave the police department was not easy. I had recently been divorced and could have sat there having a pity party for myself. I could have played the victim of a failed marriage and continued to kick myself. That grieving process was brief and I chose to move on in big ways. If you have children, risk can be more difficult, but you may certainly have a bigger "why" for your success. My personal reasons for desiring wealth, stability, and an exciting life are evolving as I enter these new stages. In my twenties, I was motivated by toys and having an exciting night life. Now I want to be mortgage-free and have my children's prepaid college tuition paid off. I want a few nest eggs around for my daughter's wedding and maybe to celebrate special occasions in extravagant ways.

Desiring affluence and the ability to have better options is allowable in life. Actually, I would say it's even preferred. Broke people will tell you that "money is the root of all evil" or that "you shouldn't want to be rich because it makes you greedy." These philosophies are absolutely incorrect. Greed is a whole different animal. The Bible states that "the love of money" is where the problem lies. There are endless amount of books and programs out there explaining this principle. Money is to be used just as you

should use your talents. Falling into the trap of hoarding money and hurting others because of it has no purpose.

I do what I do daily for my children, for my wife, for God, and for this great country. I pay it forward whenever possible to strangers as well. *Do you?* I noticed in my time as a massage therapist that I was truly interested in helping others. I was really putting their needs before mine. My focus shifted from me to the client. Universal laws applied themselves, and in return, others did things for me. How are you helping others these days? Are you being compassionate? Helpful? Are you lending an ear or a shoulder for someone who simply needs to feel that someone cares?

Do you know why you seek to improve yourself? Most of the time, the “why” is much more important than the “what.” Is it recognition you seek? Is it respect from your peers?

TIME TO ACT - ANSWER THESE MOTIVATORS:

1. If you could own your very own business, what would be the nature of it?
2. Is there an innovative idea or product inside you just waiting to be manifested?
3. How passionate would you be about performing the daily tasks in your new business?
4. Would you need specific licenses or certifications to pursue and practice occupation?
5. Would your business require employees or could you start it on your own?
6. Would you need a location or could you work from home?
7. Would your family be proud?
8. How would you feel if your new business was a success and covered all of your expenses and more?
9. How much does the typical business owner in that field generate as an annual profit? Is that enough for you?



Massaging client 2003

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PAYING IT FORWARD

“You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you.” —

John Bunyan

There is a boot-camp I like to run once in a while for men and women. It’s mostly a cardio exercise boot-camp with punching bags. I also hold the mitts for participants to hit and move about. Currently, I am setting this back up at my house in our makeshift gym. What I like most about doing this is seeing those engaged, dig down deep inside and show their confidence. There’s a lot of fun and stress relief in hitting things. Punching bags are an awesome tool for getting in shape. If you ever get a chance to join a cardio boxing class or have a trainer hold mitts for you, do it. I offer this for free for my group and it’s my way of paying it forward in helping others.

These exercises develop reflexes and self-confidence. Many men these days walk around harboring insecurity about too many things. As if bills didn’t get enough of our attention, we have to

worry about protecting our homes and families. While I am a devoted supporter of the 2nd Amendment, a gun cannot replace quick reflexes and the ability to defend yourself adequately in non-life threatening situations. I have an ongoing pattern here about making your health a top priority. You can buy all sorts of things in life, but not your health. I am all for expensive toys and total success, but without the ability to move comfortably and share experiences with your children, grandchildren, or friends younger than you, what is the point of all the financial success?

I was blessed with a new life in my massage business. I had a real interest in my clients achieving their desired results. Sometimes they just wanted to relax. Most of my clients, however, were athletic and needed a stronger massage. Deep tissue work is taxing on the therapist. They were grateful for the treatment, and I was grateful for the business and these new friends. Many friendships developed and I began to get connected with some real characters. Some were fun, others very business-like, and others were the celebrity types. The more I did for them, the more I received. Some call it Karma, others call it the Law of Giving and Receiving, and some just know that's how the universe works.

Immediately after my official retirement from the police force, I was offered a job with a celebrity singer. A local bodyguard for a celebrity in Miami knew me from the gym on South Beach and knew of another singer in California at the time that was looking for a massage therapist, trainer and bodyguard for her upcoming tour. Well, it just so happened that I could definitely perform all three vacant positions. One thing led to another and I was in Beverly Hills for a month-long interview. I got the position and was scheduled to go on tour with the band throughout Europe. I couldn't believe it; I had acquired the position I once detailed in one my personal development programs. I reached my goal of serving only one client and at a rate of about \$1000 a day. All other

expenses were paid throughout the tour, so I got to save nearly every penny.

We traveled and performed in countries such as Iceland, Russia, France, Spain, Italy, England, Germany, and Austria. Each country had several venues in different cities. My favorites were Sicily, Verona and Monaco. It was madness. It was exhausting. I really developed a whole new appreciation for artists and entertainers after a few months of that lifestyle. These celebrities seen in the media making millions of dollars put in quite the workload. There are an infinite amount of tasks to be scheduled, rescheduled, confirmed, and double-checked over and over to get from one city to another when performing. The coordination of flights and equipment traveling is a serious undertaking. I am not a performer, but I got to see firsthand the entourage of assistants, make-up artists, lighting engineers, and all other trades involved and required to make a profession like that happen.

Good fortune had come directly to me. I did not seek it out other than by simply helping others achieve their goals. I had set my intentions on it and also worked on my personal self-development. I followed the advice of putting myself in the environment I wanted to experience. I did that by moving from the suburbs to an island in downtown Miami. The type of businesspeople I sought to connect with lived there. They were not in the suburbs. The women I desired to date were there as well. I had a long list of goals, dreams and wishes. I took the time to write down the exercises my books laid out for me to complete. Are you the type to go through the proper steps and do all that is required? You cannot expect complete results if you are not willing to put in your complete attention and efforts. I'll go a step further and enlighten you in this: If you are not completely committed to changing a specific area, you may not see any results at all. Be all in or get out.

Once you develop your confidence and begin to have a better outlook on life, good things come to fruition. There is no other

option other than positive changes if you are committed to them. Make sure you become the type of person that follows through. Even if you experience setbacks (which are almost guaranteed to occur), you must decide to see things through.

We all have talents. God has given you a unique talent that no one else possesses. There is something you can do better than anyone else. What is that talent? Like mining for gold, oil, or diamonds, you must work at discovering your talent. It may be to sing or dance. It may simply be reading to small children. Your gift may be the gift of compassion and caring for others. I believe myself that my calling is more for healing than it is for all of the uniform-wearing macho stuff I have mentioned. I do what I have to do in life as I seek out how to live my gifts more every day. I cannot give up and neither can you.

TIME TO ACT - ANSWER THESE MOTIVATORS:

1. Who are you currently helping to achieve their dreams?
2. Are you sharing the experiences of your accomplishments with others so that they may benefit from your story?
3. Are you surrounding yourself with positive friends and making a presence in positive places?
4. What type of daily environment would you like to experience?
5. What special talent or gift do you possess? Do you see yourself making a living from it?
6. What group of people or which person in particular, do you know of that can use your talents?
7. If you knew of someone that can mentor you in your desired occupation, would you have the courage to reach out to them and have a conversation? Do it - you would be surprised at how quickly they may be willing lend you a hand.

Check out my Facebook and Instagram
feed for quick tips and videos.

Go to www.KarelCosta.com [<http://www.karelcosta.com>]



Sicily, Italy and Monte Carlo in 2003; traveling abroad as a trainer / massage therapist for celebrity singer on tour in Europe.



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PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

“Life isn’t about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.” — George Bernard Shaw

I am big believer in personal development. If I had not taken the initiative to begin reading dozens of books on my own, I would still be as stubborn and resentful as ever. Without self-initiated soul-searching and a hunger to be more in life, I would never have experienced all that I have. I know there is more to learn and I have a very long way to go in developing a better me.

By now some may wonder if I have some type of business degree or credentials to give advice or even the audacity to write this book. I do not have an official college degree. I opted to serve in the military rather than attend to college. Although I do recognize the limitations in not having a formal degree, I will never regret my choices. I have never allowed this to limit me in any way. What I have learned on my personal journey would be impossible to learn as a student at a university. Chances are that I probably have enough college credits scattered throughout to equate to some type of four-year degree or higher. I doubt any educational institu-

tion would put together my records and simply recognize my credits and accomplishments as a formal degree without money exchanging hands. However, what I do have is first-hand experience at overcoming a number of obstacles. Most of the time in life, all it takes is action and a deep-burning desire to succeed. So long as you are open to learning and don't think you already know it all, you should be fine.

Do you have friendships with the “know it all” types? You know, the kinds of people that tell you they know all of the psychology behind success and they've studied everything on the subject but their own lives don't show that they've applied any of it? Don't be that person. If all you do is get one golden nugget of information from every book you read or course you take, you win. Be sure, however, to apply most, if not all of what you learn. No it's not easy; it's a habit you must practice. Raising your standards means you must be open to learning throughout your life. You must keep an open mind. With the technological advances alone, it would be silly to shut down your options to learning. Think of how many phone apps alone are developed daily. Chances are that we will all be using totally different technology in the near future to drive our vehicles, watch TV, and communicate on the phone. It isn't easy to consistently search for the right opportunity to improve your life, but you must stay the course. There are opportunities everywhere waiting for you. Are you able to recognize them and seize them?

There is a Vince Lombardi quote that is so simple to understand success: “The man on top of the mountain didn't fall there.” The man (or woman) at the top climbed his way up there. He reached the peak by doing what others were not willing to do. Some people do make it seem easier than others, but nevertheless, they all paid the price. No one at the top of their game in their business ever just fell into that spot. Anyone “falling into” or “inheriting” a position of a high income and immense success without experience, usually falls very quickly flat on their face.

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. — Matthew 7:7

The main priority for most men is usually the responsibility of provision for their family. Most men attach their self-worth to their occupations and their income. Do you doubt that that's the case? Look at the mental state of any unemployed man with integrity. It's usually a state of frustration. Most are out there doing everything within their power to make ends meet and get hired. The more rejections they receive from potential employers, the less self-worth they may begin to feel. The downward spiral of emotions can easily be triggered. A good sense of awareness is crucial during hardships. This is a major reason why we must always be open to learning and discovering why we do what we do. We must always seek to understand more and more about ourselves and others. Growth is a key factor for your success. You mustn't dwell on the past or on the negative circumstances. It is essential to implement new ideas and act in new ways to achieve better results. You must begin to know yourself very well and seek out the knowledge necessary to overcome any situation. You may have heard that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. Become aware of what hasn't worked and look to new strategies that will get you moving forward to winning.

Here are some books that can give you all you may ever need to take action and learn a great deal more:

Unlimited Power by Anthony Robbins. This is one of the first jump-start books you should read if you are serious about putting a plan together for your life. Once you read this one, you'll surely

drift into Tony's CD programs and will want to attend one of his live seminars.

Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill. This is a classic. Well, maybe this is *the* classic. The book is about being rich in life overall. It has sold millions of copies and has been read by just about every successful person I've ever met.

The Millionaire Mind by Thomas J. Stanley. This is an inspirational book detailing why millionaires do what they do. It lets readers know that a high IQ is not required to be a success. If you have ever dreamed of having your own business, this is a must-have, must-read book. You'll feel a surge of confidence that will remain with you.

Wild at Heart by John Eldredge. This is a great book explaining some of the psychology of why men do what they do. You will recognize many of your own traits, and it will help you understand male behavior in general.

The Procrastination Cure by Jeffery Combs is a wonderful book that will assist you in discovering the reasons why you have put off taking action. Procrastination is a common bad habit and this book can help you recover from it.

The Total Money Makeover by Dave Ramsey is an absolute must read. In this book, respected financial expert Dave Ramsey offers a comprehensive plan for getting out of debt and achieving financial health. Many truths are revealed here that are hiding just under our noses.

The Bible by divine inspiration of God. Many of the books above have biblical principles. Many of the greatest success books are based on scripture. If you don't own a bible, get one. Get one that appeals to you. Get one that you feel would be easy to read and learn from. My wife uses a children's bible because of its simplistic format. The scriptures are the most important and effective means you will ever have to succeed in all areas of your life.

I could give you a list of about fifty more books, but once you've got a good hold on these, the rest will come into play in your life. If you are a true student of success, you will become a lifelong learner and reader of tried and true principles as well as current strategies.

One other personal development avenue to consider is actually hiring a coach. Professional athletes hire coaches; why shouldn't you do the same? Nowadays, it seems that everyone on social media is some type of life coach, health coach, or a combination of both. I would not recommend just hiring anyone. Take time to do your homework prior to choosing one and ask around for a referral. I have had both good and bad experiences with being "coached." I was once very active in real estate seminars and signed up for monthly coaching and materials. The real estate coach was useless. He turned out to be a "certified coach" with no real estate experience. This guy was basically reading a script of questions and dishing out pre-prescribed recommendations from a template. I could hear him eating in the background and walking around. I felt absolutely zero value and advised him of such. On the other hand, I recently hired a coach that made a huge difference during a very difficult time. He was very direct, held me accountable, and was not afraid of asking the necessary tough questions that would offend most people. At the end of these sessions, I decided to take a completely different path than the one I was expecting from the coaching. It was worth it.

Make sure you have referral sources and recommendations because chances are that an effective coach will not be cheap. On the low end, they may charge a hundred dollars per session and may go into the thousands. Consider this expense a major investment. A great coach will not be afraid to ruffle your feathers a bit and challenge you. In essence, I perceive value in a coach when the sessions require digging deep and discovering new things about personal character that will be catalysts for action. That action may be to implement improved procedures or it may be the act of let-

ting go of psychological baggage that you did not even realize was holding you back. One usually receives richer results than expected when truly on a dedicated road to personal development.

“A room without books is like a body without a soul.”

— Marcus Tullius Cicero

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TAPPING OUT

“The best fighter is never angry.”

— Lao Tzu

Are you familiar with the term “tap out?” It’s not just a clothing line these days. It’s a term used in submission grappling or Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. It’s a technical term similar to yelling “uncle.” In grappling, one “taps out” when they realize they have been caught in a technical move from which they cannot escape. Failure to let go of your ego and continuing to resist can lead to your joint being dislocated, a bone or two being broken, or you may just be put to sleep unwillingly from the choke to which you have been reluctant to concede. Your ego should always be checked at the door of a dojo (martial arts training academy). A big ego will get you hurt. Most men and women realize in the fighting arts that you should never underestimate anyone’s potential.

There are many styles of martial arts out there. I am not here to promote one or the other. Most of them have excellent techniques and are well worth studying if your intentions are honorable. Most people do not understand why a martial artist trains. It is not to

learn how to destroy your opponent as much as it is learning to control your own abilities, power and focus. A true martial artist will always do his or her best to avoid confrontation. A true warrior realizes that most physical altercations are meaningless, and therefore conserves his or her power. However, when the time comes to act, there is usually hell to be unleashed and it rarely turns out well for the opponent.

I mention this topic for a few reasons. One is that martial arts can provide much needed discipline in one's life. A good dojo with the right sensei can change your life. Not only will you learn how to defend yourself and your family, but you will be getting your much needed exercise. The connections made at a dojo ordinarily turn out to be trusted friends. You will depend on each other for success in class as well as provide formidable opponents sharpening each other's skills.

My parents put me in karate when I was about eight years old. I was still overweight and wanted nothing to do with such an activity. It was against my will. The catalyst for the enrollment was a recent fight at school. It was nothing major that I remember, but I did have a shiner on one eye. That was enough to begin a lifelong journey for me in martial arts. I started in a Tae Kwon Do class, but due to the turnover in instructors at the location, the styles changed frequently. I finally ended up in U.S.A. (Urban Systems of America) Goju Ryu, which later became Sansei Goju Ryu.

I was very young and karate was very popular in the 80's because of movies such as The Karate Kid and actors like Chuck Norris. I have never been a fan of fancy high kicks or anything with too much spinning around. I learned enough back then to hold my own. I was just enough of a threat to most bullies in school that they left me alone or were actually friendly to me. My sensei from childhood is still my friend today. I learned so many lessons in those classes that I have been able to apply throughout life.

When I was very young in my karate class, there was a point that I began a small business. Perhaps it was already in my blood to capitalize on sudden opportunities. I had seen advertisements in the back of the karate magazines advertising weapons such as nunchakus, swords, and Chinese stars for sale. I was only eight or nine years old, had no checking account, and no idea of the purpose of a money order or credit card. I don't think my parents even had credit cards yet. I took the common sense route of any nine-year-old boy and began sending cash with my cut-out order forms from the magazines. It worked. I sent cash to the listed address, and this big brown truck would pull up at my house about four weeks later with my cache of weapons and updated color catalogs from the supplier.

I got so accustomed to ordering and receiving items that I would wait outside my house just to hear the familiar noise of that big brown truck. It was a very distinct diesel motor sound and I could usually pick up the "vroom, vroom" from its engine from about four blocks away. Sometimes I was so anxious that I would actually anticipate its route and stop the truck dead in the street to get my stuff. I began stalking that truck daily. Back then, there was no such thing as leaving items on the doorstep if no one was home. It had to be signed for or it would get sent back. The driver recognized me and knew I was always waiting. The driver was impressed whenever I would open the five-foot long, four-inch wide boxes in front of him. I wonder what he was thinking when these long shiny metal swords were delivered to me.

Why was I ordering so often? Because I was making money. I was ordering Chinese stars at fifty cents apiece and selling them at five bucks. I was popular and wasn't aware of any laws I could have been breaking. I figured that if a company sold it to me, then I could sell to someone else. I wasn't the only one in the Chinese star and sword business. Sensei had set up a small glass case displaying his own weapons for sale. It seemed odd to him that the students

had the same items but that they had not been purchased through him. With a little detective work, he discovered I was undercutting his price by about two bucks. He didn't think it was appropriate, but I had a business too. We were, after all, in the great U.S. of A - the land of opportunity. We made a deal. Sensei would buy from me at two dollars per star and then resell at five dollars and still make a handsome profit. I was making a three hundred percent profit and he was making his one hundred percent cut of the sale. It was business - nothing personal. We all have to put bread on the table, right? Oh wait, I was only nine; my dad put the bread on my table.

Years came and went. After the age of twelve when my parents divorced, funds for karate ceased as well. What I had learned never got me any trophies or adulation, but it did give me enough confidence to know a few moves well. You would be surprised at how destructive a low front kick to someone's belly or knee can be. I did realize that my ground fighting skills were atrocious, and if I ever had to grapple in a real fight, I was doomed. I took care of this concern the only way there is to resolve any fear. I faced it and joined the wrestling team in high school.

I wrestled for one season in high school. I wasn't great, but I ended with a good season. The basic holds and escapes I learned in wrestling literally saved my life as a police officer. Many times when there was no backup and I was in fight, I would resort to some type of chicken wing or choke hold that would buy me enough time for backup to arrive. *How much time?* Well, let's just say that in a life-and-death situation, any amount of time will feel like an eternity.

Although I have exercised religiously most of my life, I was pretty bored with the gym scene by my mid-thirties. Miami's crime rate was increasing, as usual, and I was living downtown in a highly targeted neighborhood. A Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu school had opened two blocks from my house and I wanted to check it out. Jiu-Jitsu is truly a thinking man's sport. Think of it as a chess game. For those

that do not understand the game, imagine a chess game played at the highest level of your cardiovascular activity. The fighters are the pieces. The moves you make and the moves you can foresee from your opponent determine who “taps out”. It is not referred to as sparring. In Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, fighters “roll.” It was very addictive. It got to a point where I was training six days a week and hitting the weights on those same days. Getting stronger, faster, and more confident became fun once again. Also known as “the gentle art,” Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu works the mind as well. Egos are checked often. With the right training, the smallest guy can defeat the biggest fighter in the room.

Training with other men in sports such as these produces a great surge of that “machismo” feeling that guys display. Perhaps it is because a man’s soul connects to the action and rejoices in becoming a warrior of some type. I’m fairly certain that testosterone levels surge as well. You no longer feel like a loud couch potato criticizing the players on television. You are the player. Suddenly, you become the man in the arena facing the foe.

**“Fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once.
Fear him who has practiced one kick 10,000 times.”**

— Bruce Lee

TIME TO ACT - ANSWER THESE MOTIVATORS:

1. How is your self-esteem these days? Do you feel good about your abilities?
2. Is there a jiu-jitsu academy, karate class, yoga, or spinning studio near you that you've been considering visiting? What's kept you from walking in and experiencing something new?
3. What activity have you desired to enroll in but haven't mustered up the courage to do so?
4. What's holding you back? Time, money, excuses?
5. Are your children at an age where a martial arts discipline will benefit them by teaching them focus and respect?
6. If your children were in a martial arts class, could you also possibly join them in the activity to set a good example?
7. Isn't about time you had some fun while improving your health? How will you make this happen?

15

ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERCEPTION

“What you see and what you hear depends a great deal on where you are standing. It also depends on what sort of person you are.”

— C.S. Lewis

Once upon a time, there was a non-conforming sparrow who decided not to fly south for the winter. However, soon after the weather turned cold, the sparrow changed his mind and reluctantly started to fly south. After a short time, ice began to form on his wings and in his near-frozen state, he fell to Earth in a barnyard. A cow passed by and crapped on this little bird. The sparrow thought it was the end, but the manure warmed him and defrosted his wings. Warm and happy, the little sparrow began to sing. Just then, a large Tom cat came by, and hearing the chirping, investigated the sounds. As Old Tom cleared away the manure, he found the chirping bird and promptly ate him.

There are three morals to this story:

- (1) Everyone who craps on you is not necessarily your enemy.
- (2) Everyone who gets you out of a bad spot is not necessarily your friend.
- (3) If you are warm and happy in a perceived pile of crap, keep your mouth shut.

Author Unknown

I love this story. I know it's a little corny, but it's easy to understand and apply to countless areas of life. I first read it while in the military, and boy did it stick. I wrote it down and photocopied it to give it away. There was no email, texting, or Facebook back then. It was one of the first times I ever realized that I had a choice in defining the experiences and those around me. I would usually take things at face value without reading between the lines. Due to my ignorance, I shunned many friends and fell into traps set by others. But this short proverb about the sparrow helped me to open my eyes in an introspective way.

I cannot count how many people I misjudged throughout my life thus far. I look back and realize that some of those people I categorized as "enemies" (or those crapping on me) were really just viewing circumstances from their own perspectives and didn't mean any harm. Most of them actually were trying to help me see things differently, simply so I could achieve my next step in life. Being a good judge of character is a learned skill. We can all use a little discernment to avoid pain and wasting time with the wrong people. You should be aware of what is influencing you. That means that you should pay attention to those with whom you hang out, converse, listen to and take advice. Here are two old sayings you surely must have heard in the past:

"You are the company you keep"

"Tell me your friends and I'll tell you who you are"

There is absolute truth in that concept. Who is around you and your family that is or is becoming an influence? Is this a person or group of persons that is bringing you down or raising your standards? Think carefully, because chances are that negative people need to be cut out of your life immediately. This is important not only for yourself but also if your family and children are susceptible to the influence of your friends. There is a time and place for everything. For every relationship, there is a season. As you move and progress through life, there are people you will have to leave behind. It is not always easy to cut ties, but if you don't, you'll just be holding yourself back.

How many times have you been in a destructive relationship or know someone else who has been? The same old record keeps playing in your head: "I should get out but it'll be so hard...", "I know this is going nowhere, but I'll hurt their feelings...", "What if they get angry that I don't want to be with them anymore?" My favorite comparison to this dilemma is between my divorce and my current marriage. I used to date women and end the relationships quickly. I was called a "player" and many other not-so-wonderful names. I was labeled with all sorts of womanizing stereotypical references. The truth is that I was looking for a quality woman and not a waste of time. I had already been through a marriage and was sure of what I didn't want in future relationships.

All the personal development books I had read clearly outlined ways to focus on what you want and also to be very clear in knowing what you don't want. I was also clear on the past mistakes that I didn't want to repeat. So in the dating process, when a red flag went up, the relationship was over. I used the typical "it's not you, it's me" line. It was indeed *me*. It was *my* search. Were these bad women? Absolutely not. They were beautiful, smart, loving, and all with wonderful personal qualities. At the time, however, timing was off between us or the level of compatibility was low, so I quickly moved on. Moving on doesn't exactly sit well with the

other party if they are not ready to do the same. You will need to stand by your decisions.

Be willing to apologize for hurting someone's feelings if the situation warrants it. If you feel like a heel and recognize you have made a mistake or said the wrong thing, apologize. Clearing the air and expressing remorse may do more good for you than for the victim of your negative actions. There was a movie back in 1990 called "Flatliners." The premise was that a group of young students have "near death" experiences, and all of a sudden begin to be haunted by their past mistakes. This happens to a lot of people without having to go through a "near death" experience. Personally, I have about a dozen or so people from my past to whom I would love to apologize. Only now, after decades, I realize I may have hurt their feelings with words or actions. It is your conscience that needs redemption. That's why that haunting feeling comes around. However, on most occasions, you need only recognize what occurred, learn the meaning you've had attached to it, and determine who needs to be forgiven. You'd be surprised how often you are the one that must forgive yourself and move on.

You must proactively seek to surround yourself with a better quality of social influences. You must consciously become aware of the places you are visiting and the patterns you are setting up in your social life. Do you have friends that are truly interested in seeing you succeed? If you went broke, would these "friends" be able to help you or would they vanish? Believe me, when the crap hits the fan, you'll find out real quick who your real friends are. There won't be many. Ask around and seek out those who have already experienced setbacks. Ask them how they were able to rebound to being better than before their ordeal. Ask them directly if the people they thought would be around during adversity actually stuck around and offered support of some kind.

When I retired from the police department, most of my old friends ridiculed me. There was all sorts of name calling and

jeering. That's typically what guys do to one another when they can't communicate their true feelings of loss and separation. It may have been all fun and maybe a tinge of jealousy. I didn't waste much time analyzing their reactions; I was making four times as much money and was enjoying the view from the top. I didn't recognize their efforts to poke fun at my new business. What did they know about business anyway? I was too busy looking forward and onward. They didn't know what I was doing. I barely knew what I was doing either, but I knew I had to keep moving forward. I maintained a clear focus on constant and never ending action. Action kept my mind on important matters.

I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. — Philippians 3:12-14 NLT

It's good to be in the flow and focused on the task at hand. Had I stepped back to sit and ponder the insults and jabs, I would have been too distracted to keep moving forward. Did my old buddies mean any harm? Absolutely not, but I could have perceived it that way and really internalized their negative comments. My friends simply were in a different phase in life than me. I had to mentally cut ties with my past and focus on the road ahead. I missed their camaraderie then and now as well. Most of them are now high-ranking supervisors in their departments and have probably gone through the same process I went through. Moving up in a company or moving on to a new business venture may require leaving behind old influences. It's just life. If you want new results, you will

have to seek new relationships. You want a better income in the position where you are today? You'll need to first do more to show your employer you are worth more than your current pay.

Think about how you may be perceived by your employer, your friends, and maybe your family. What would your best friend say about you? Can you improve on that? If you have a close friend or two, you may want to interview them and ask those questions relating to your image. This may sting a little - well, maybe a lot. True friends will tell you the truth if you ask them with sincerity. If your employer cares about your endeavor to improve, then he or she may also give you the sincere answers you are seeking.

Your spouse can, of course, assist in this department. I would recommend you first work on yourself so that your spouse gets a glimpse of how serious you are beforehand. Your efforts will be noticed without saying a word. Make all the big adjustments and then let your spouse's feedback fine-tune the rest. This is, after all, the person you feel is your soul mate, right? You do want your spouse proud of you, right? Your spouse will probably have the next highest stake in your development, so allow your counterpart to participate and also hold you accountable when you're slacking. For example, if part of your self-improvement plan is getting in better shape, your spouse is critical for this process. You don't want your husband or wife buying doughnuts for the home when you are doing your best to drop some weight.

TIME TO ACT - ANSWER THESE MOTIVATORS:

1. Who can you count on to hold you accountable to a goal?
2. Who in your past did you improperly categorize as unfriendly? What do you realize now was the true intent behind their actions?
3. Who in your life right now should probably be removed because of their negative influences?
4. What areas of your life need some tweaking?
5. How can you begin to improve those areas today? How will you commit to it?
6. Have you always made decisions based on what others might think?
7. Are you ready to move on with life and make definite decisions with purpose?
8. Decide today to change or improve one thing about your character. What can you do daily to hold yourself accountable?

16

TRAPS AND TEMPTATIONS

Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts.

— 2 Timothy 2:22

I was flying high on life. I was twenty, in the Army, driving my brand new ride, and headed to Miami for the weekend. It was Friday afternoon, and the drive from Fort Bragg to visit Miami would take exactly twelve hours. I figured I could travel between 7pm that night to 7am the next day. *No sleep?* No Problem. I had been trained to stay awake. I had been up since 4am that Friday and I could easily hold on for another twelve hours.

The trip down I-95 at night was not much fun. The worst was making it through South Carolina and Georgia. Those two states have quite the reputation for having serious State Troopers hiding in the sneakiest of places. Not only that, but a Cuban headed to Miami in the middle of night was sure to raise several red flags for

any officer of the law. Especially in a southern Bible Belt state. The 80's had given birth to Miami Vice and just about every negative stereotype about anyone from Miami.. My high and tight haircut and military ID usually did the trick of dispelling most doubts, but the process of convincing these hard-ass troopers was nerve-racking.

The Florida State line was my mid-mission point. It made the rest of the trip much more enjoyable knowing I was halfway there. It was similar to being near the end of a long jog and seeing the end point in the distance. I was well into Florida and was waiting to pick up reception for Dade county radio stations on my car's radio. Once those stations came in, I knew I was about an hour away. Miami radio stations play music that you usually wouldn't hear anywhere else. There's always party mixes and dance music playing at all hours every day. The city of Miami never shuts down. When a club closes there at 6am, another one opens next to it to begin the day shift party. I saw many newcomers to Miami become entranced in the nightlife and totally destroy their original objective of having moved to a big city.

As my arrival approached, I got prepared to the beach before anything else. I would actually find a parking spot at about 7am and get some Z's on the beach. I would tan for an hour or two and head to my mom's house. This time around, I did just that. I made it to my mom's house at about 11am and began to call friends. By this time, I was only able to get about two hours of sleep at the beach. I had a great time all day visiting friends and family and reminiscing at my local hangouts. The club-hopping began at about midnight. A bunch of us went out and had an awesome time. We had all grown up together and knew the club-hopping drill well. Our entourage always managed to have memorable nights out.

This night would not end well for me. I was surviving on two hours of sleep in a 48-hour period and we had all just gone out and partied hard. I drove everyone home as I had grown accustomed to

doing in the past. Maybe I was more responsible or simply wanted more control of who drove at the end of the night. I was about two blocks from my mom's house when I fell asleep and crashed. The car went out to the grassy swale and through a brick wall. My brand new car was totaled, I was in total shock, and blood was running down the top of my head. I had crashed through a wall, nearly hit a house, and as my head swung to the left, it broke the window. It wasn't pretty. I guess things could have been much worse. Fire trucks and police cars arrived within minutes. It was a miracle that I walked away and was able to walk home after the tow truck picked up the heap of metal my car had been turned into. For some reason, I'll never forget the fireman puncturing the gas tank and letting the gas spill onto the floor. I had just filled it up before heading out and it appeared as if money was pouring out of a heap of junk.

I had neglected to see the warning signs. I had been so focused on having fun that I was blinded to the consequences of my ignorance. Too many hours awake, too much partying, and women on my mind did me in. Once again, it took a negative incident to teach a valuable lesson I will never forget. I could have gotten somebody else hurt. My stupidity potentially endangered others on the road or even near the road.

I was lucky, *very* lucky. I got another car that weekend and drove back to Fort Bragg. I kept silent on the details of the incident. It was not easy, considering I had stitches in my head and was suddenly driving a different car. My superiors knew it was better not to know too many details involving young soldiers off post. After all, no harm no foul.

Creating positive goals has been the theme thus far, but there is a subject that must not go unmentioned: Traps and temptations. You must avoid obvious traps and tempting situations to maintain your integrity and bearing. I know firsthand how easily one can be seduced into participating in less-than-honorable actions. It is not complicated to stumble and fall. A little flirtatious look, one drink

too many, staying out late at the wrong place, continuing unproductive relationships - so many seemingly harmless actions can lead to regret if you are not on guard. Minding your business and your level of awareness plays a huge role.

Are you able to discern a potentially disastrous situation? How many famous people have you witnessed on television rise to fame only to be shot down in a scandal or die from an overdose of some kind? Complete failure does not happen overnight. It is usually a slow progression of giving up discipline. You may be giving your attention to the wrong person or group of people. You may be giving up hope that things will turn around for you. You may have given up on the goal to be healthy and sober. Bad habits are instilled in the same fashion as good ones; one day at a time.

What are the most tempting situations that play on your weaknesses? Do you lose control once you've started drinking? Does sex stay on your mind all day to the point of watching pornography? Is it the after work happy hour that tempts you to be a little flirtatious with a coworker? What about gambling and frivolous spending? We all have our demons to battle, and they are relentless when they get ahold of you. Knowing yourself well and gaining insight into what your weaknesses are is the first step in knowing your enemy. Be true to yourself. Don't minimize or dismiss the danger of your weakness. Temptation won't come to you in areas that do not interest you. They will sneak up on you quietly and slap you in the face after you have stumbled and submitted to them.

There are three serious matters you must be aware of and avoid. Excessive alcohol consumption, debt, and pornography should raise huge red flags in your soul's early warning system. Yes, there are many more dangerous subjects we could discuss such as hard drugs, gambling, infidelity, etc. These three, however, are gateways that lead to horrible consequences. Like most bad habits, these begin innocently at first and then take control.

Alcohol is a drug. If you have doubts, research the effects of it. It is a depressant. Alcohol and drugs are the most common things that place good people into bad situations. Why is it so common? Many times, it's the familiarity of a household family member drinking all the time. This gives a subconscious "okay" for its presence, and eventually, its consumption. If you believe you have a problem with drugs and/or alcohol, discuss it with a sober friend and seek help. Personally, I know I need to get back in control when any amount of alcohol becomes a habit. Flags go up when I even have one beer for more than a few consecutive days. You don't have to become a binge drinker to realize there's a problem. If you can come to the conclusion that you cannot be without that one drink on a consistent basis, you've got a problem.

Alcohol leads to all sorts of abnormal behavior one may not normally participated in under regular circumstances. I am throwing myself into this group as well. I haven't been an angel throughout my entire life. I have made many mistakes in this category and speak from experience. Good people, both young and old, act out violently or embarrass themselves when drinking. Sometimes it can be funny, but most times it becomes costly in terms of your reputation. Debt is a strategic trap set up by banks for you to waltz into unknowingly. It is one of my biggest pet peeves. Owing money should be avoided as much as possible. It has been a long road to being debt-free but I know that the *real* "American Dream" does not lie in a pool of debt. I still have my mortgage to pay, but with diligence, that too will be a thing of the past very soon. Do not fall for the common ploy to finance anything. Look for bargains, used stuff, anything, but don't be a slave to the lender. There are endless books and programs on repairing your finances. Make this a priority in your life. There are so many resources out there these days with programs that have been proven to work very well. Many churches offer financial peace courses for getting out of debt and

learning new habits for your money. You cannot have true peace of mind while you spiral aimlessly in debt.

Financial stress is one of the top reasons couples argue and marriages fail. You would do yourself and your family a great service by learning all you can about financial freedom. It may be an elusive goal at times, but the rewards along the way will make up for the sacrifices.

Pornography addiction is rampant in society. It is a silent and very deadly internal disease that strikes so many. It's an international epidemic. When I was a young boy, getting your hands on a Playboy magazine was difficult, risky, and shunned by most adults. Now anyone can jump on the internet and have complete access to all the pornography they never thought they even wanted. It's easy to access and nearly impossible to control that access online. Men are not the only ones looking at porn online. The broad availability has piqued women's interests as well. As the addictions grow, men and women both become less satisfied with reality because it doesn't match up to the expectations in their fantasies built around pornography.

Pornography sets you up for failure. It's addictive. Like alcohol and drugs, porn makes you come back for more every time. It gives the viewer unrealistic expectations from their sexual relationships. This habit also escalates and opens the door to a demand for more graphic material. What would have normally been unattractive or repulsive a few months ago, all of a sudden fulfills your need for more. The worst part of a porn addiction is when the images are no longer enough. Many addicts will act out their fantasies after becoming desensitized. If you think this isn't serious, research the subject and look into how some rapists and other sexual predators began their downfall into criminal activity.

In police circles, there is a saying: "Not all peeping Toms are rapists, but all rapists have been peeping Toms." Pornography is a gateway into more serious problems. Not everyone will become a

criminal from it, but it will more than likely set the viewer up for some serious problems in their future relationships. It may be very difficult to sever the instant gratification you get from porn, but it is crucial if you want a successful marriage or simply realistic expectations from your significant other.

“Never open the door to a lesser evil, for other and greater ones invariably slink in after it.”

— Baltasar Gracián

TIME TO ACT - ANSWER THESE MOTIVATORS:

1. Do you have some bad habits you need to part with once and for all? List them all and why they weigh on your conscience.
2. How have these habits held you back?
3. How much better could your life be if these habits were removed and replaced with positive ones?
4. Do you believe there is an alcohol problem in your life? If so, how will you commit to changing that?
5. Have you financed too many things and find yourself drowning in the monthly bills?
6. What is it that you are fulfilling by buying those things? Your ego? Trying to keep up with the Jones's?
7. If you could eliminate half of your debt, how would you feel?
8. Do you believe enough in yourself to be better disciplined with money?
9. What book will you buy this week to begin learning about financial freedom?
10. Has porn become a part of your daily pattern? Don't feel bad about it. Admit where you think the problem lies. One great book to help with this is *Every Man's Battle* by Stephen Arterburn.

17

GOD'S GOT A PLAN FOR YOU

Do you know Jesus?

You may be already sweating from reading that question. Or maybe you have a more typical response like rolling of the eyes and an “oh brother, another born-again Christian trying to change my ways.” Well, no need to sweat or roll your eyes. There’s no pressure here for you to believe in anything other than where your spirit leads your heart. Trust me, if God chooses you to believe in His son, you’ll know. You won’t be able to escape the pull towards getting to know Him better. We all have a free will but God chooses those who will believe in Him. We all have the ability and free will to choose, should you feel that lead to do so. God is not in the business of forcing anybody’s hand.

It was all planned out. I was set to go to this four-day motivational and goal-setting event and plan out my new life outside of Miami. My massage business was flourishing, and I was through with this dating insanity and all the superficial nonsense in Miami. I had been dating this Nicole girl for a few weeks, and although

something was different about her, I was determined to see it through my way. My plan was to attend this seminar for a few days, break up with this Nicole girl, set my goals, get really psyched up, sell my condo, and move to another state. I was looking forward to a fresh, new beginning. Yep, that was it. This was my plan and no one would be able to stop me.

Let's step back a few months. It was my 31st birthday and I was throwing myself a hell of a party. My income was soaring and my life seemed pretty awesome. I planned my birthday party at my new ocean front condo on Biscayne Bay. It was a spacious 1100square feet with floor-to-ceiling windows and doors facing the ocean. I'm surprised my ego fit in that place. I was riding high. I had already been living on the exclusive island of Brickell Key, but this place was mine. It was the second home I had purchased in my life at that point. My birthday party, a.k.a. housewarming soiree, would be out on the pool deck with a DJ, drinks a-flowing, and my dad cooking his signature paella for about forty guests. The invitees, of course, would be mostly attractive women and my massage clients.

It was all fun and games until she showed up. A stunning, Jessica Rabbit cartoon-type with huge green eyes and a fantastic figure to match, walked in to the party. She had long black hair and a bright smile so big it would make Colgate throw money at her for endorsements. I thought a cartoon had come to life at my party.

"And who might you be?" I asked.

"Oh, my name's Nicole and the DJ invited me. I live in the building next door so I walked over."

The DJ invited you? I thought. I knew the DJ personally, and I remember thinking that he was sadly mistaken if he thought I was going to let that one pass me by. I knew the DJ already had a girlfriend anyway, so I didn't really see it as taking anything that belonged to him.

Besides, by then I was lit like the Fourth of July, and in my best Rico Suave, Antonio Banderas voice said, "Oh you are mine girl. I

am going to hit you like a hurricane.” Yes, go ahead and laugh, I said that. I’ll have to admit it for the rest of my life.

I was informed that she worked at the Sports Club LA gym on Brickell Avenue where I just happened to be a member. It was the same athletic club where the DJ and ten other party-goers worked as trainers. My peers at the time were pretty much all into fitness in one way or another. I was a massage therapist and my friends were mostly trainers and athletes. There was lots of partying to be done and that was a good group to share those wild experiences.

The day after the party, I applied my best salesman follow-up skills and called this beautiful lady at work to simply thank her for her presence. I had to take the initiative. She was new in town and I knew the local Casanovas, especially at the gym, would be working diligently to woo and conquer her. I set up our first date a day or two after meeting her. She was a bit different. I felt no pressure from her to commit, and she acted as cool as the other side of the pillow. I had no idea she was using her best “puppy dog close” on me. It was kind of like a car salesman letting you test drive the Corvette and then telling you not to worry about buying it because there were plenty of buyers in line itching to take it off his hands.

She was, and still is, very patient. I had never experienced falling for someone that wasn’t pressuring me constantly. She was killing me with kindness. I wasn’t worried though because I had sworn to myself that I would never remarry. I was jaded and there was no need to have a piece of paper committing me to anyone. My mentality was that I was, after all, in control of my life and everything in the universe. The more I fell, the more I would employ a break-up tactic. The break-ups wouldn’t last long. My weak attempts at ending our relationship were akin to quicksand. The more I fought to get out, the deeper I sank.

I had begun my real estate business by then. She purchased her first condo. Who sold it to her? Why me, of course. What better way to cut ties with someone than to do business with them?

Where was the condo, you ask? In the same building where I lived. How convenient. It was impossible to resist seeing her and sharing life with her. We were visiting church together and I began to develop a peace of mind. Pieces of the puzzle from my past and my potential future were falling into place. Nevertheless, I insisted on resisting.

Now that I was launching my new real estate business, I planned on creating momentum by attending a live seminar. The seminar included much more than I expected. There were so many exercises in goal setting, dreaming and meditating. It taught methods to truly digging deep within you to get the juices flowing. I was doing great. I set a goal for a seven-figure income, the mansion, the fantastic cars, and all that dreamy “lifestyles of the rich and famous” stuff. I felt like I was in control of my destiny and would be the captain of my ship, the master of my fate, and the steadfast brilliant author of my own story. I was absolutely sure now that I would break up with Nicole upon my return to Miami and reclaim my freedom. I was deep in meditation at the seminar when a clear message came to me:

“Marry the girl. Your needs will be met and your goals will be achieved. You will have a better life with my plan for you than you could ever imagine.”

I couldn't believe what I was hearing in my head. It wasn't just a voice; it was a presence. With this command came a vision - a promise. It is a promise that is not yet fully fulfilled, but one that I believe wholeheartedly will come to pass. God was telling me in the middle of this life-changing seminar that I was to do exactly the opposite of what I had planned. *What? Change my plans?* I had different expectations. Again, my expectations of the seminar were not lining up with the apparent outcome. One way to live to a ripe old age is by recognizing the hints along your journey.

By now though, I was smart enough to know when to listen to someone who knows more. God is pretty much the highest

authority, so I decided that His advice - or command - was something I should follow. Even if I had not, I am certain that He would have worked it out somehow to get me to see His way as the only way. There are plenty of biblical characters that ran away avoiding their calling. I decided then and there to learn from those characters. I opted for the shortest route to success; I decided to do it God's way.

I exited that session of the seminar, pulled out my cellphone and called my best friend, Joe. Joe was the only person I trusted. He also just happens to be a jeweler. How's that for God lining things up? I told him to pick out a few choice diamonds because I would be proposing to Nicole as soon as I got back. I think he was more excited than I was. He was sincerely happy for me. Or maybe he just wanted me to be in the "married guys" club along with him. In any case, he got the job done. He explained all the mumbo-jumbo of diamonds and I picked the out the ring. I proposed and she said "yes."

There may be plenty of resisting and rebelling that you are doing now. Most rebellious teenagers and young professionals simply continue to deny their problems. Trying to stay cool on the surface while issues get buried deeper is a bad recipe for your future. It may be something hurtful someone did to you or a lack of validation from someone you care about. If you take this struggle into your mid-life, the issues and baggage will be more difficult to undo. Scars from past relationships and experiences usually weigh people down. If some symptoms persist, mental illness can develop. God's plan for your life is not one full of guilt and condemnation.

No one is perfect. My imperfections far outweigh my attributes. I do know for sure that God is on my side. He is on your side as well if you will accept His son. I do everything I can do as a being on this Earth while resting on the fact that He is working his ways behind the scenes. I get frustrated and impatient just like everyone

else. I am just as human as the next guy. You must be proactive, however, in your pursuit for a connection with your Creator.

Talk to God about your problems. You can do this at night by your bedside. There is no obligation there to do anything but talk to Him at your own pace. It's a simple conversation you can have with the Creator of the Universe. It's between you and Him. It should be a comfortable event. There is nothing you've done that God does not already know about. You won't surprise him with anything. There is a plan for you. It's designed only for you. Ask Him about it and you'll receive it.

I went through this spiritual process at a time when I believed I was happy. I thought I had it all, and yet I was completely empty. I would have days filled with "stuff" and "fun," but when the sun went down, I was alone. My life was turned around in a few short weeks all while I resisted the change. God basically turned all the bad into good for my life. The relationship with Him continues as it is an ongoing process. There are many levels of faith to graduate through; every trial and hardship endured prepares you for the next level. It's best to have Him with you than to go at it alone.

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

— **Genesis 50:20**

TIME TO ACT - ANSWER THESE MOTIVATORS:

1. Have you ever felt the urge to know more about Jesus?
2. If so, did you pursue that curiosity? If not, why?
3. Do you have any struggles that need attention?
4. Are there people in your life right now that you feel are a gift from God?
5. How are you honoring God in your relationship with those people?
6. Do you have children; do you see them as a gift from above?
7. Have you been attending church regularly? If not, why?
8. Is there a nearby church you've been invited to or feel drawn to?
9. How can you create a better relationship with your Creator?



Our wedding day in 2005

18

NEW CHALLENGE NEW LIFE

“Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all.”

— Helen Keller

It was late April 2007 in St. Petersburg, Florida. My wife and I were staying at the well-known Loew’s Don Cesar Resort and Hotel. This was the same hotel where we held our wedding just about eighteen months prior. It was a bit of a last “hoorah” for me. After two years of a successful real estate business, the market crashed and all my dreams had come crumbling down. I had been so close to earning a higher income than ever before. How could I be so close to nearly paying off my mortgage and then find myself completely lost with all of our savings depleted? Over two hundred thousand dollars in savings down the drain trying to stay afloat. Was this some type of cruel joke God was playing on me? I thought had done everything right. I had made all my moves according to God’s purpose and according to His will. I was now happily married with our first child about to turn one. A few real estate deals were still in play, but the market was so shaky that banks were denying loans on scheduled days of closing with no warning.

I kept wondering if I should return to being a massage therapist or re-apply to the same police department where I had resigned just four years earlier. The stress was unbearable. I was no longer single and responsible for just myself. I was now responsible for three of us, a mortgage, and two cars. What was I going to do? How was my God going to come through for me? He had promised me so much, and I just couldn't accept that He would forsake me in my time of need.

We were lounging by the pool and the sun was scorching hot. I was on my third margarita when my cellphone rang. I answered it in a sleepy and half depressed state.

"Can you start this Monday?" the man asked. We're ready now."

Whoa, what was this? I took a deep breath and had the audacity to ask about the salary. I was broke, but my business posture jumped right into action. I couldn't let them think I was in desperate times. I had to get my negotiator's hat on. It was a good thing I did, because his new offer was twenty percent more annually than when we had last spoken.

"I'll be there, thank you." I said.

It was a miracle. This call came in just as I was feeling at the end of my rope. God's timing was perfect. The timing may have felt too close for comfort, but it turned out to be right on time. It wasn't the first and it wouldn't be the last time God had thrown me a life preserver at the last minute.

The man on the other line was a former massage client. He and his family were some of the first massage clients I ever had. I had made a commitment there on the phone, at the pool's edge of the Don Cesar hotel. I would be starting my new position as a manager for a condominium association. What did I know about this line of work? Zip, zilch, nothing, nada. The man who hired me had been courting me for the position for a few months. Their association had been experiencing problems with the performance of their current manager and the board was considering a replacement. That's

where I came in. He assured me that he felt confident I was up for the task because he had been following my work ethic and patterns in life. I tried to convince him otherwise by explaining how unqualified and inexperienced I was for that position. I had vaguely heard of God “qualifying the called” rather than “calling the qualified.” This would be a prime example. I wasn’t yet “qualified” by earthly standards, but common sense, experience on the job, and God’s presence in my life resolved those pesky little requirements.

It felt pretty good to have someone believe in me. It’s funny how we quickly raise our standards to meet someone else’s expectations. It’s easier to “step up your game” when there is mutual respect with your superiors. Think of times when you decided to do whatever was necessary to not disappoint them. Perhaps we engage at higher levels so that our superiors don’t lose face and have to admit to others they were wrong in believing in us. We seem to never let them down when they have great faith in our abilities. I’ll admit that I went in expecting to be fired within a few weeks. That didn’t happen. I was praying deep down inside that my real estate business would be resurrected once again, but that was not to be my destiny. Sometimes I think that the real estate market crash of 2006 occurred specifically as God’s divine intervention to change my course in life.

I respected this man that hired me. He was about seventy-five years of age with a history of top corporate positions that would impress anyone. Of course he was no longer actively working, but his business mindset was still extremely sharp. His family has a respected reputation along with impressive academic achievements. I grew to trust him and another board member who was actively involved in the decision-making process. It was my job to take their decisions to task and get the job done right. I was not going to let them down. I sincerely believe God can bring you through any ordeal you face. I often quote the saying, “If God brought you to it, He will see you through it.”

Upon taking my position at the building, I continued to see resumes come in for the vacancy I had opportunely obtained. They were all from candidates with post-graduate degrees and years of experience. Many were willing to move from other states just to accept the position. I was a bit scared but confident. Here I was with no management experience and no formal college degree in hand. I was blessed to have been considered and offered the position. All it took was a three-day course and a passing grade on the state exam. Although I did not have a formal college degree, I had never failed a state exam, and that was all that I needed to get my license. What I lacked in formal credentials, I compensated for in confidence and perseverance.

I learned more as a condominium manager than I could have ever expected. Politics were at the top of the list for the on-the-job educational program. Most people live in some type of homeowners' association, but the business side of it was all new to me.. I was tasked with knowing building codes, safety standards, typical contractor pricing, interpreting bids and architectural plans, producing spreadsheets, preparing budgets, and learning about mold remediation, concrete restoration, plumbing problems, and dozens of other subject matters. It took some time, and appeared to be an impossible assignment to know such a variation of details in so many areas, but I managed to make it happen.

Management positions allow one to see many facets of the corporate structure. In association management, I saw a great deal of drama. This part is not fun and completely unnecessary. The condo commandos with insults being hurled at board members and between owners was pure insanity. I was caught between numerous battles and obligated to take sides on most. Luckily, I had a forty-plus-year-old, beachfront building to manage. It held 27 stories of luxury condominiums, and most of the owners were "old-money" folks. Although the dynamic began to change a few years after my arrival, most of the residents were retired or close to it. We

had multi-million dollar construction projects and dozens of employees to supervise. The association was self-managed, so I was technically *the* management company. I took this position with no experience and turned it into a well-oiled machine operating on the level of any professionally-managed corporation. The board was helpful and guided me with their knowledge. As a matter of fact, now that I have been able to compare associations managed by management companies, our operation was much more efficient. Yes, that is me patting myself on the back. The key was maintaining a high level of organization and treating the property as if it were my own. Taking ownership for results makes all the difference and that can be applied to many areas of life.

Other than the financial stability, one of the positive points was the ability to reconnect with my father on a different level. Since he was a mechanical engineer by trade, and had grown his air conditioning company, he provided much-needed advice to many aspects of the building I managed. He is an encyclopedia of knowledge. He may even know some things Google doesn't. I know that if I ever want to edify him, I just have to ask him a near-impossible question. He loves to ponder and discover answers no one else could produce. Although his response was usually lengthy and very detailed, in the end, he would usually present the perfect remedy and how to go about resolving it. His resourcefulness was priceless to me and the association. His advice was free. It would have cost the association thousands to get similar engineering advice on pump systems, air conditioning solutions, and all sorts of miscellaneous challenges.

This experience, as most others, brought many lessons with it. The first was seeing God come through for my family and me yet again. I had landed a well-paying job, close to my house, and right on the beaches of Key Biscayne. I was taught a new trade by some very knowledgeable board members and made friendships with dozens of owners as well. Wrapped up in that miracle was the

opportunity to reestablish a working relationship with my old man. The timing was so perfect that I was able to look back and realize what a mistake it would have been to refuse the police academy back when my dad had wanted me to stay and work with him. If I had I stayed and worked air conditioning with my dad twelve years prior, he would not have received the workload I provided for him later in this capacity.

For nearly eight years, I worked on Key Biscayne in this vocation. God again had another plan and we moved to my wife's hometown of Tampa, Florida. It was a major leap of faith. We had no idea we would all face some of the toughest times and most unexpected challenges. No worries though. To date, we keep moving forward and upward. We all have a choice to sink or swim. I'm swimming like an Olympian because I know my God is working on His next miracle in our lives.

Have you experienced a last-minute miracle? Have you looked back into your past and connected the dots to realize the divine timing in everything? Take a few minutes and put the pieces together. Think of a negative event from your past and find in it the positive effect it had later on in your life. Think of a time where you were challenged to do something new and you came through like a champ. Is it possible that right now, there is a challenging idea or opportunity lurking? Is there something you just can't stop thinking about? You may need to take action on that. If you don't, the thought will persist. Why not make the decision to pursue it? You just may surprise yourself with your results. Remember the advice I received years back when considering starting my own business? "There have never been any stories written about cowards." You'll need to summon your courage and a whole heap of faith when finally deciding to make a change.



*My Dad and I working together on replacing rooftop A/C units via helicopter
(www.CostaAirConditioning.com)*

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YOUR MISSION

“He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.” — Friedrich Nietzsche

Have you ever been part of a company with a mission statement? A mission statement is a summary of a company’s purpose, values and goals. For this purpose, your mission statement would be more like an affirmation that you read aloud several times daily. This is an effective exercise commonly used in most self-help and personal development books and seminars. Many corporations may also assist their employees in goal-setting exercises where a mission statement is generated. It provides self-confidence and hope in things to come. It reminds you of the foundational principles and priorities you must keep at the forefront of your mind.

What is success? That is for you to define. It means something different to everyone. It may be an occupation that supports your family and fulfills your basic needs. It may be to have a great relationship with your spouse. You may define success as having many friends or having the ability to help others. It may be to earn a six-figure income...perhaps even a seven-figure income. Anything is

possible should you live your life with passion and integrity. Regardless of how you view it, you will need to commit to achieving your definition of success. It will be a daily investment you make for yourself and your family, so don't think this is an overnight formula. You must be dedicated long-term for real results.

This is my personal Mission Statement:

God's Promise for My Life

My days are meaningful and positive - filled with God's grace and blessings. I dedicate devotional time to God daily. I consult with my Lord for every decision. He is my healer, my deliverer, my savior and my provider. I fix my thoughts and focus on Him coming through for me with His timing.

I am physically fit and exercise daily with intensity. I am responsible for my health and making myself strong, agile and fast. I know how to make the right decisions at every meal. My meals are healthy with consideration for nutritional value.

In all I do, I work diligently and directly for God. The Lord has entrusted me with the most wonderful wife and children. I am ever so grateful knowing the Lord's provision is always at hand. I love my family, I love myself, and I am constantly showing love and smiling.

I give my problems to God because He is responsible for bringing about solutions and miracles. I am humble. I am grateful to be able to support my family and save for our future through God's solemn promise for abundance and prosperity.

God guides my every move; therefore, I know I am being led towards miraculous results. I have 100% FAITH in God's plan for me.

I am a new man in Christ and fear nothing.

I earn \$250,000.00 annually. My income grows daily and with ease. I easily inspire others to be friendly towards me. I am a suc-

cessful and approachable friend. There are opportunities presented to me daily where I can improve my finances.

The Holy Spirit guides my tongue, my thoughts, my words and my actions. I am a master at asking questions, and I listen intently. It is important for me to understand the needs and aspirations of others. I ask many questions when speaking to anyone. I am genuinely interested in others. I love meeting new people and asking them about their lives.

I am a good man, an honest man, a compassionate person, a great father, and a dedicated husband. I am friendly, charismatic and courageous.

Within me lives the WILL and POWER of the ALMIGHTY
GOD.

I am living God's will for my life.

I read my personal mission statement every morning because I have it printed and laminated where I cannot miss it, propped up on my desk, where I drink my morning coffee. I read it while feeling the effects of the words. I read it, feel it and then pick up the Bible next to it and read more inspiration. The content of my mission statement changes as my goals change. This one is rather long, as most personal mission statements are four to five sentences, but it really depends on your own comfort. If you are comfortable with only two powerful affirmations, then so be it. It is yours and no one else's.

This is an exercise for you to make statements affirming your new beliefs and how you want your subconscious mind to interpret them. Your mind will begin to work quietly behind the scenes, bringing opportunities for you to demonstrate this new being. You are reprogramming your beliefs. If you're going to believe something, it may as well be a list of positive attributes and goals. Nothing is too lofty or unachievable.

Well, let's get to thinking - This is where a bit of dreaming, prioritizing, and awareness comes in to the process. Think of statements that would best describe the ideal personality that you would like to possess in the future, but write them in the present tense. Write the statements as if they have already occurred and you are living them today. You also want to state it in a positive manner. Instead of writing, "I hate bad foods and will avoid them," you should write, "I enjoy only healthy options at meal time" or "I feel great when I eat delicious healthy foods."

Here's an example, I stated above that "I earn \$250,000 annually." How much would you like to earn? If you are earning \$40,000 annually now, but have a goal of earning \$75,000, then simply state it as if were already a fact. You can write something like, "I am learning more every day and earning a \$75,000 salary." Simple, right? Make it a believable enough goal that your mind won't deny you dreaming it. You don't want to subconsciously sabotage yourself. If you are making \$40,000 this year, and all of a sudden, your affirmation is that you are making \$2 million, your ego may chuckle and subconsciously deny you the new belief. If it doesn't and you are truly confident, then \$2 million is just fine. You wouldn't be the first to astound the world with massive positive changes.

Now let's look at the category of exercise and diet. Your health is a priority. You can't buy a better set of lungs or new knees off a shelf. If you're new to a daily exercise regimen, then state your mission statement sentence as, "I am dedicated to improving my health, exercising four times a week, and desiring only healthy foods" or "My workouts bring me joy and a feeling of accomplishment every day." Your health and fitness should be of great importance simply because, without it, it would be a challenge for you to enjoy the other areas in life. It is your decision as to how you will describe the ideal habits in your mission statement. You could state that you will go to a yoga class a few times a week or that you'll do the work required to prepare for a bodybuilding show.

Your mission statement should come fairly easy after having read this book and answering the questions posed throughout. You should have by now, an idea of two to three areas of your life that you feel empowered to change for the better. Log in to your computer and start typing.

What better habits would you like to incorporate into your life?

Why must you incorporate these habits instead of remaining as you are?

What do you believe in? Why are these your beliefs?

What type of day do you wish to enjoy more often?

How would you like to be perceived? Why? What feelings would you sense in being perceived in such a manner?

What makes you happy?

Why does that make you happy?

What type of car would you like to own? Why?

Where would your children go to school? Why must they attend that school?

Write at least fifteen empowering statements. You can go back and tweak them later. Read them aloud so that you can hear the power of your words. Close your eyes and feel what you are saying. If you are affirming something that you have set as a goal, and obviously expect it to come to pass soon, then feel what it be like to have already achieved it. What would it feel like to be financially free? To be happy with your spouse? To share vacations in excellent health?

Write and keep writing until you have your mission statement perfected to your liking. You will more than likely change it as your aspirations take different forms. This is your story. There are no limits. You get to determine what happens from here on out.

CONCLUSION

“It is never too late to be what you might have been.”

— George Eliot

My goal for this book is to inspire action in you - to jar your memory and get you to act in different areas of your life. The intention is to get you thinking about where you are now and where you are going. The stories and anecdotes should show you how reflecting on the people who have been involved with you throughout your lifetime have actually helped you get to where you are now. Yes, even the negative experiences you've had assisted in getting you to where you are now. Whether you believe these interactions were good or bad, they have contributed to molding you, your character, or at least the way you think. Your parents, friends, teachers, coworkers, bosses, and just about everyone has had some type of influence on you. The negative influences should have taught you what to avoid and the positive ones should have taught you what you can be emulating. The choice is now yours to establish a positive effect on those you meet from now on.

The questions posed at the end of each section should have marked the path you must take to embark on this journey. If you answered everything, many options may have come to mind. Per-

haps you are now thinking more deeply about what you could be doing, eating, thinking about, listening to, etc. There are dozens of important choices you make daily. You can choose to listen to someone's negative rant or simply decide not to. You can edify someone with your words and your company or stay home in boredom, having a pity party. Whatever you decide will affect you. This is all simple and yet difficult for most to apply daily. It gets easier when you commit to a better life. "*Commitment*" changes everything. Daily action on your part will give you purpose. Discovering your purpose will build your character and your inner strength.

You should have made lists, set goals, and drawn up a mission statement by now. You should have a whole new set of places you would like to visit, new bucket list items, and new friendships you would like to make. All of these may keep you stay pretty busy. The choice is yours. You deserve the very best. You can earn more, do more, and be more. You can be the greatest mentor to someone should you decide to engage in it enthusiastically. All of these are daily choices we all make that eventually lead to a fulfilled life. You are enough and you can do it. Good luck and Godspeed.

**“Don't be too timid and squeamish
about your actions. All life is an experiment.
The more experiments you make the better.”
— Ralph Waldo Emerson**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karel Costa-Armas is a dedicated husband and father of three beautiful children. His successes and setbacks in life in are easily comparable to the struggles most of us are faced with. He possesses a straight-forward, “tell it like it is nature” with a heart for motivating others. His direct style of conversation demonstrates true sincerity during adversity. His experiences in the military, police, and in business have taught him lessons he feels he must share with others.



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Karel recognizes that everyone has a story to tell. He sincerely believes that anyone can write a book that will help others. All you need is faith and dedication. Karel feels most of us can teach one another many lessons. In the same manner that parents teach their

children to avoid certain pitfalls, adults can also show the same compassion and caring by sharing their personal journeys with headships.

By staying strong in his Christian faith, Karel and his family do their best daily to live God's will for their lives. Still on the road to reaching his own milestones, he continues to reach out and help others with their needs. Karel knows that one of the fastest ways to achieve success is to help someone else achieve their goals.

I welcome any positive feedback and questions you may have for me or about this book.

I can be contacted directly via my website at **www.KarelCosta.com** [**<http://www.karelcosta.com>**]