THE STAIRCASE TO SUCCESS

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PREFACE

Why take my word for anything? I have had enough successes in my life to learn a thing or two. Two of those successes, et al, came in the form of careers. This ebook details what I have done differently if I knew then what I know now. If after reading this a person *chooses* to reinvent the wheel it is certainly their decision, but there *are* metaphorical wheels already available.

I have learned through experience that if I don't know how to do something I should find someone who DOES know how to do it and learn from them. I also began to study the habits of successful people across all aspects of life. Aside from the truly rare cases of people literally born with a gift (e.g. a world record holder for freediving being born with unusually large lungs) I have found that most successful people got that way by design. They learned, either via trial and error or with help, *what* to do. That research, combined with my own life's experiences has, in my humble opinion, qualified me to reach the conclusions herein. I truly feel that someone may learn from my mistakes.

INTRODUCTION

You know how some people try to assemble something *without* reading the instructions first, then have the nerve to get upset when the thing they were trying to assemble didn't work? Or a recipe says to carefully measure the ingredients but the person just makes guesstimates about amounts yet get angry that the dish turned out horribly? To make matters worse the person ends up blaming the *recipe* and not themselves for how things ended up? Well, I am one of those people. Or at least I'm a recovering fixaholic. I am presently in a self-imposed 'mental rehab' from doing those things. The lesson I have learned via experience: READ THE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST! There's a saying somewhere along the lines of "pride goeth before a fall" or something to that effect. It really does save time and trouble by following the instructions whenever they're available. Subordinate your ego and you will thank yourself later.

STAIRCASE STEP ONE: MAKE A GOAL

I use and call my method of achieving a goal my Four-Step Staircase. It's a system that I think is simple, yet becomes more challenging with each step. You know how each step of a flight of stairs gets harder the higher you go? Yeah, it's kind of like that.

My suggestion to you is to aim high when crafting your goal. The worst that can happen when attempting to achieve your goal is that you don't hit the mark. The best that can happen is that you might mess around and actually **achieve** your goal. How many times have you heard about someone taking a chance on something that was seemingly out of reach yet they actually succeeded? More than a few times, right? Great things happen to people all of the time. Underdogs grasp the limelight by having the gall to aim high, that's why we make such a big deal out of them when they succeed. It has happened to me quite a few times.

Think as far back as grade school where the teacher you may have had gave students the option of choosing to solve one of two problems. The first problem had an average degree of difficulty and, if answered correctly, earned an average number of points. The *other* problem, however, was significantly more challenging and came with a lot more points if answered correctly. Which problem did most of the class select to answer? More often than not the majority of students will choose the easier of the two problems. On the other hand the students that chose the harder problem would score *big* if they answered the more challenging problem correctly. I even recall an incident where the

teacher gave students extra credit simply because they merely *attempted* the more challenging problem, ascribing the appropriate credit if they also answered it correctly. Aim high because you might be pleasantly surprised by the outcome.

The beauty of taking on a challenging goal is that, in one respect, you have everything to gain and comparatively less to lose. I look at it that way for this reason: if you fail it won't come as a huge surprise because the task was daunting to begin with. On the other hand if you *succeed* you will have accomplished something really significant. Of course circumstances may dictate that a person take the reasonably calculated route as circumstances dictate. Obviously common sense should usually prevail.

I'd advise making the goal *specific* rather than stating general terms. Whenever I made a goal in vague terms I knew deep down that I was giving myself an easy 'out' if I anticipated failure and that was a mistake. I subsequently learned to make goals specific. By doing that you are more likely to hold yourself accountable. For example, saying you want to lose weight or save more money are really vague goals and are not a whole lot of help. Making your goal vague makes it either too easy to accomplish and almost meaningless yet making it too vague may make it difficult to determine when you achieve it. On the other hand saying you want to lose ten pounds in one month or save ten more dollars a week makes it easier to pinpoint tasks needed to get there.

As I began realizing the deaths of loved ones it made me think about my own mortality. I began to wonder if I was living my life but overlooking something which included

establishing lofty goals. That made me research the lives of others in the hope of learning from their experiences. That took me to finding out the regrets of the elderly and dying. On every list of the regrets of the elderly and/or dying I encountered one common denominator: the regret of failing to go after some goal they really wanted but neglected to attempt because of their fear of falling.

A fear of failure has prevented *lots* of otherwise capable people from going after something they really wanted. Is there a career objective you wanted but failed to pursue because you thought you were not up to the task? Was there someone special that you would have loved to get to know but you allowed fear to stop you from meeting them? Was there an objective that you wanted to pursue but managed to talk yourself out of? I've been there too so if your answer is yes to any of those questions then you are not alone. Seriously consider taking action regarding a goal because once time has passed you can never get it back. Keep in mind that once time has passed none of us has do-over opportunities with regard to time itself. Consider taking the leap because you may not get another opportunity. If you are going to dream anyway, why not dream big?

STAIRCASE STEP TWO: CREATE A PLAN

Okay, the first Step was somewhat easy because it is hard to know where you're going without having a destination in mind, that destination being your goal. Once you have selected a goal you then need to create a roadmap to get there. I used to get the goal part down but failed to pay enough attention to the creation of a plan. I just thought I was bright enough to just wing it. Looking back I realize that the areas in which I failed were usually due to a faulty plan, if I even had one. My 'plans' were inherently flawed and had no hope of succeeding (unbeknownst to me at the time). I learned through experience that the better the 'roadmap', i.e. your plan, the better the result. That's common sense, you say? Well, let's take myself as an example. Even though I initially had no formal plan of action I thought that *my* way of attracting patients to my budding practice was good enough. Boy, was I wrong! I really didn't have much of a plan other than to place some garden-variety cookie cutter advertising in the local media. The result? Next to nothing happened! I had to go through plan after plan until I finally began to get something that approximated footing. Had I spent the time to learn how to create a good *plan* I could have saved myself a lot of time, money and aggravation.

The world is full of examples of failures wherein the individual *thought* they had a good plan wherein having another pair of eyes review the plan of action might have pointed out the glaring red flags. By the same token don't expect to create a perfect plan because you'll always find something wrong in it. Do a reasonable amount of *well-researched* planning, then run it by someone you think can give you a decent

opinion. You might even want to consider running your plan by even a few people. In my opinion the bigger the stakes the more opinions you should get.

If your plan doesn't include systems or some sort of routine you may find yourself doing things less efficiently than is necessary. Winging it is *not* a system. You might get lucky every now and then by winging it but if your entire plan consists of doing things on the fly you are likely setting yourself up to be disappointed. No, change that: you are *definitely* setting yourself up to be disappointed. Performing tasks pertinent to achieving your goal on a predetermined, well-coordinated basis in an organized, well thought-out manner is a system; winging it is not.

New *goals* don't deliver new results, new *lifestyles,* or routines as it were, do. Without some sort of well thought out routine or system in place, preferably something you have **written down**, you are more likely to increase your odds of success. Once I started writing things down instead of keeping them in my head I began to notice the difference in my levels of success.

In crafting your plan also highly recommend that you do your best to get a mentor or someone who has been where you want to go, to help you. I didn't, at least at first, and looking back I wish I had, bigtime. Unless I'm already an expert in the area in which I am operating I now have mentors regarding things that REALLY matter. Getting an expert opinion, or at least gaining more insight into a matter, can benefit you more than you can imagine.

Mentoring doesn't have to be expensive or even formal. A book on an area that serves your purpose can serve as your mentor, at least for starters. Library books are free to borrow and the seven hours or so it'll take you to read even one book has the potential to make attaining your goal significantly easier. If you think you can do things all alone without input from anyone that is always your choice. On the other hand if you research the lives of successful people in almost any aspect of life they acquired the services of a mentor at some point, very often when creating their plan.

If you are in an industry where you work with vendors consider asking them for advice or for just a fresh pair of eyes pertaining to your project. It can't hurt and can often help. For example, if you have the occasion to do business with me please feel free to ask me for my opinion and I'll be happy to give you my input. If time allows I may even help you do some of the research for you. I want you to succeed and I'll do what I can to help you get there.

Once I stumbled onto the notion that I should ask vendors for opinions on a regular basis I began to experience much less grief than by doing things on my own. A fresh perspective on your plan is almost always beneficial. That extra pair of eyes might point out things you might have overlooked or never considered in the first place. Furthermore, there are a lot of people who *want* to help others when asked. When creating your plan don't make the same mistake I did by trying to do things alone. Ask for at least one other opinion before moving forward. I think you'll be glad you did.

STAIRCASE STEP THREE: START!!

Now, pulling the trigger on your plan is trickier than it seems. Actually putting your plan into action can be intimidating. This is the point where self-doubt tends to kick in. This step is where people start *creating* reasons to delay the start of their project. Yes, I've been there and done that. The reasons created to *not* start your project are often not *real* reasons, they are merely excuses cloaked in euphemisms. "Later", "one day" and "tomorrow" seem to get put off a day at a time until those days turn into weeks, months, and years. Think about the last time you were going to do something significant only for something else to come along and delay the start of that significant matter. Then you put off again. And again. You continued to do it until the project fell conveniently onto the back burner or disappeared into the abyss, right? Start TODAY, even if only to write down your goal and plan of action. If you wait until "tomorrow" that "tomorrow" may never arrive.

I believe that this step, Step Three, is actually the most difficult of the four steps because it is so easy to avoid addressing. A person can come up with a gazillion reasons to *not* start and in their mind every reason for not starting will be a valid one, at least to *them*. The person would be unlikely to fool anyone else, though. When the person's loved ones ask how things are going the person will state their "reason" for not starting. The friend or loved one will probably, yet politely, nod in agreement yet on the inside they'll likely be thinking "sure,that excuse is not fooling anyone". I have been on both sides of that equation. Protect your dignity by setting an actual date to start, then

actually **start**. I can't count the number of times "later" never happened. What's worse is that I often, if not always, later wished I had actually *started*. By actually starting I could have at least fooled myself into saying I tried. Not even starting towards your goal doesn't give you that luxury.

Now, you can *try* to blame everything and everyone for your failure to start towards your goal but deep down you will always know the truth. Just take a deep breath and **start**. Trust me, you'll feel better. Besides, do you really want to look back on your life with regret? Like I said, take a deep breath, then start. You will thank yourself later.

STAIRCASE STEP FOUR: FINISH!!

This Step is easier said than done. We *all* have every *intention* of finishing or people wouldn't bother starting in the first place. Now, If you create ground rules...***in advance***... by which you are allowed to quit you are more likely to finish because you'll be forced...by yourself...to abide by rules YOU established. It would be one thing for someone else to determine the circumstances by which you are allowed to quit but it is another matter altogether if YOU are the one to establish those ground rules.

If you think this aspect of the Step isn't important look back at the times you chose to quit on something that was important to you. At what point did you make the decision to quit? Did you make the decision to quit *during* an uncomfortable period in the life of the project OR did you establish the parameters by which you'll quit in advance? I'm willing to bet that you quit when things became uncomfortable or inconvenient, right? I highly advise establishing ground rules about quitting in advance. By doing that you'll be less likely to quit.

Having a support system can help you to stay on track when a bit of discomfort starts to materialize. An accountability partner works very well in this regard. Is there someone in your camp that truly wants you to succeed that will help to keep you honest and on track? If not, consider making *me* your accountability partner. Seriously.

Another tool you can utilize to help to keep you from quitting while dealing with the days where you want to quit is to utilize the two-minute rule. What is the two-minute you ask? Work on something pertaining to your goal, anything at all, for *at least* two minutes. Set a timer if you have to but go for at least two minutes. By doing this you can *honestly* tell someone that you worked towards your goal that day (even if it was for just that two minutes). More important than that is the notion that you are likely to work beyond the two minutes. It is kind of like a dentist telling you to brush at least *one* tooth before bedtime. Are you *really* going to stop at brushing just one tooth? Not likely. You will probably end up brushing all of them. The same replies to the two-minute rule and working towards your goal. Sure, you may come across an occasional day where you *really* want to put in only two minutes before calling it a day but those occasions will be fewer than you think. And even if those two-minute periods begin to become commonplace you will still be making progress. Remember, skyscrapers are not built in one fell swoop. They go up one floor at a time. I *promise* you that if you implement the two-minute rule on those days where you don't feel like doing *anything* regarding your goal you'll feel better.

An excellent motivational speaker on leadership and teamwork, author Jerrie Dean, used the two-minute rule to complete her book. She was kind enough to acknowledge me in the 'Thank You' section of her book, "A Crown For Your Ashes", for recommending the technique. She would have finished the book at some point in time with or without the two-minute rule but the two-minute rule helped to expedite the process and keep her from getting around to finishing the book "one day".

Yet another tool to help reduce your odds of quitting is to keep a journal of your efforts. By keeping a journal you'll have in-your-face evidence of what you are actually accomplishing. When you occasionally pick up your journal you will see what you are actually doing rather than what you **think** you are accomplishing.

Please do not make the mistake of committing your journal data to memory. If you are writing down your results on a regular basis there will be entirely too much for you to commit to memory. Additionally, it is very difficult to critically evaluate your progress from memory. Having hard copy data staring you in the face is *much* more impactful than what you *think* you have accomplished. Think about it: do you do your taxes from memory or do you keep physical records of some sort? When you look at a physical record of your progress it will tell you if you are truly doing your job or just kidding yourself. At the end of the day your progress is yours and yours alone.

ONE THING

Instead of having a to-do list as long as your arm (like I *used* to do but rarely completed) pick at least *one* thing towards your goal that would make your day a success. The one thing doesn't have to be huge so long as you consider it being significant enough to call the day even a modest success.

I try to make the decision on the one thing the night before, that way when I begin on it the next day I am working from a place of objectivity rather than subjectivity. If I wake up feeling lousy I am more likely to 'cheat' (a euphemism for 'skip') regarding the one thing versus making the decision the night before when I am likely to be more objective. Whatever the case *please* accomplish at least *one* thing each day that results in you feeling like the day was a success as it pertains to your goal. You'll thank yourself later.

You might be pleasantly surprised at how those 'one things' start to add up and move you closer to your goal. Sounds *too* simple, right? Well, look at your life today and compare it to your life two years ago. If you are GENUINELY pleased with the progress you have made in that time, great. On the other hand if you started two years ago and took just one step each day towards a particular goal how much closer to achieving your goal would you be?

Here is another way to look at putting the two-minute rule and accomplishing just one thing that day is this: what could you accomplish if you devoted three solid days to a

task? I'm not talking about the ordinary eight-hour day where you take a ten minute break in the morning, an hour for lunch and another ten minute break in the afternoon. I am talking about three days of pure, focused work. You'd probably make quite a dent towards your goal, right? Well, let's do the math: two minutes a day times three hundred sixty-five days a year times two years equals fourteen hundred and sixty (1460) minutes or twenty-four hours of **pure** effort. No breaks, no water cooler conversations, nothing but pure effort. You would have accomplished a lot, right? There are people that can literally hold their breath that long, let alone apply the time to accomplishing a goal.

Consider this as well: if you worked towards your goal on weekdays *only*, even taking off national holidays, you are *still* looking at about two hundred and fifty days in one year. If you hung in there for four years you would have taken a whopping one thousand steps towards your goal! If you put one thousand efforts towards pretty much *any* one thing you are likely to be *far* along in your journey towards your goal. Additionally, at two minutes a day your journey will be almost painless.

If you need additional "fuel" to do even that one goal-building task each day consider the satisfaction you'll get from crushing your naysayers, keeping that bully at bay, showing up someone you have secretly wanted to say "take that!" or the mere pleasure from a sense of accomplishment. Living well is the best revenge of all, right?

ANYONE CAN BE A SUCCESS

Successful people have the same twenty-four hours in their day as everyone else. They just use their time in a different way than others. I used to make the mistake of always thinking that I had plenty of time to get things done...until I didn't. I now use my time much more wisely. Guard your time and use it judiciously. Once it's gone, it's gone. Warren Buffett made more than ninety percent of his approximately eighty-one billion dollar net worth *after* age fifty. He's ninety-three years old as of this writing and still works five days a week. He reportedly spends most of his time at the office reading. If you think age is a barrier to achieving a goal then Buffett failed to read that memo.

J K Rowling was a single mother on welfare and endured a dozen rejections by publishers before her wizardry at creating Harry Potter ultimately made her a billionaire. If being a single mother on welfare was supposed to be an obstacle to success someone must have failed to tell her.

I suppose that being homeless and living in his car kept Tyler Perry from missing the day in school that taught students that having a high school diploma was necessary to become a movie mogul and billionaire. Oh, and if you believe you simply cannot accomplish a particular task then you probably don't have the same positive mindset as the late Sir Roger Bannister. Nobody, I mean NOBODY, thought *any* man was capable of running a measured mile in under four minutes...except Roger Bannister. Once he did it more men *each year* thereafter began to accomplish the feat. Grown men couldn't

accomplish the feat for decades, but now even elite high school kids are doing it. If you believe you can or can't do something, you're probably right.

Please do not make the same mistake I did of assuming that just because you are working hard that you are simultaneously working smartly. If working hard was the primary contributor to success then coal miners and farm workers would be better off financially than many of them are. For example, a person can work diligently looking to the west for a sunrise (assuming you're in the Western hemisphere) yet never experience one. It is not until they learn to look eastward will they find that coveted sunrise. They may have been working hard but not as smartly as they could have until they changed direction.

Learning from the mistakes of others is very, very helpful. I have made plenty of mistakes of my own and I have tried to learn from each of them. I have also tried to not make the same mistake twice. Working smart may, at first, be uncomfortable but given enough time it has the capacity to become the new normal. For example, when I moved from the relatively uncrowded Inland Empire to the much more densely populated Los Angeles county I had to adjust to rush-hour traffic and longer lines. It was uncomfortable at first but I eventually made the adjustment. The tons of people I encountered became my new normal and no longer a distraction. Hang in there long enough and you, too, are likely to make the necessary adjustments on your journey to success.

One thing I noticed regarding the more significant successes that I've had in life is the happiness I experienced with the smallest of achievements. For example, simply letting calls go to the answering machine (we didn't have voicemail in my pre-historic days) allowed me to get a solid night of studying which subsequently led to better grades. So, not answering the telephone every time it rang was a big deal? Well, I began to see each time as a 'win' and those wins began to add up. Those little 'wins' did a lot for my state of mind. Rather than waiting for the big win, consider some of the smaller ones. The positive effects of doing so can add up over time.

Bear in mind that no matter what your *intentions* may be, it takes *action* to get things *done*. I have had some great intentions but never followed through on many of them and I later regretted that. As I have encountered many times, and as the saying goes, the only place you'll find *success* before *work* is in the dictionary.

WOMEN ROCK

What I have learned through experience is to consider the opinions of women I respect in some of my more significant decisions. I was one of those guys that had Mom on a pedestal and, all the way up until the time of her passing, I was not convinced that she could not walk on water. I don't even think she even set foot onto a college campus until my big brother went to college yet she had to actually convince people she never attended college. She was that well-read and insightful of a person.

There are lots of really bright women out there whose thoughts should be given a second look, if not digested entirely. I recently read an article that stated that three hundred and forty companies that had women as their CEOs all were profitable. Coincidence? I doubt it. If a woman is in charge, or has a significant amount of say in a matter, then I'm listening. The facts simply bear it out. Women are less likely to let their ego cloud their business decisions as are men. So-called 'machismo' may have its place but not in the business world. Objectivity beats ego every time. It may be because I simply include some really sharp, intuitive and caring women in my circle, or just fantastic luck, but whenever I have run an idea by a respected woman the project turned out well at a FAR higher rate than when I received only the opinions of men.

I have ascertained anecdotal that women appear to pay much more attention to detail and consider objective data than do men. I am not at all disavowing the input of men but I am absolutely involving the opinions of sharp women in the mix. Interestingly, and

entirely coincidentally, one of the most successful men on the planet and one of the top four hundred wealthiest men on the planet with a net worth hovering around forty billion dollars (yes BILLION, with a 'b') is Jack Ma. Mr. Ma is a co-founder of the Alibaba Group, a multinational technology conglomerate. Mr. Ma believes in having LOTS of women in positions of power in his organization. In 2015 Ma spoke at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. During his speech he gave what he feels is one of the most important ingredients in his recipe for success and it was WOMEN. In his address he explained one of the secret sauces of his company, Alibaba, is he has a lot of women. Forty-seven of his staff complements are women and thirty-three senior positions are held by women, *much* higher than the usual paltry figures we hear of at other big companies. The special 'flavor' he thinks that women bring to the business is that women think about others more than themselves. Mr. Ma believes that is the key value of Alibaba and how it's able to serve it's users.

If I had been smarter and listened to the woman I respected most in the world, my late Mom, I would have achieved more and experienced less frustration than I have. If you consider involving women more in your more significant projects you will likely get truly objective feedback.

MOTIVATION IS OVERRATED

Counting on my motivation to get me through a project was a huge mistake. I found that I was simply not motivated often enough to get many things done, at least on a consistent basis. Once in a while I might have gotten lucky enough for mere motivation to see me through in a single shot but that didn't happen as often as I would have liked. Being disciplined enough to stick to a schedule of hitting milestones on time was much more effective. Doing things that way was not nearly as comfortable as doing something when it 'moved me' but way, way, way more effective.. If you count solely on starting and completing a task when you're motivated (like I *used* to do) you are inherently setting yourself up for failure.

I have found that motivation comes and goes, as in waves, but sometimes it just doesn't come at all, and I mean AT ALL. There will be periods where the necessary motivation simply is not there.. So what happens when that motivation fails to materialize often enough? The job doesn't get done on time, if at all, is what happens! I learned that scheduling tasks, actually making appointments with yourself, sees that the tasks get done. If motivation occurs at the same time, great, but if it doesn't it pays to stick to the schedule *whether you feel like it or not*. THAT is where success truly happens.

 Another way to look at things is that if you're involved in a competition to get a job done your competition also feels similar waves of motivation and they may elect to take days off. While they are taking days off you should stick to the schedule knowing that your

chances of success increase because you are putting in the work on those lazy days that the competition is taking off. When creating my schedule I tend to throw in a 'cushion' day to account for unexpected situations that rob me of the time that might otherwise be dedicated to working towards the goal. If nothing unexpected occurs I then have some extra time to go back and review what I have done. On the other hand if something comes up that attempts to derail my time I have backup time on which to fall and remain on schedule.

Planning ahead is another simple tool to help you move towards your goal. PLEASE do not count on 'being in the mood' to do things of importance. Do ,them when they need to get done, preferably via your schedule whether you feel like it or not. In the end you'll feel better *and* your reputation with yourself...and with others...remains intact.

GIVE IT TIME

I learned the hard way through experience that some things in life simply require time to come to fruition. Of the areas where I have failed in life there has been some significant component of time that I failed to respect. Though I wanted to get a desired result *yesterday* I wish I had simply been more patient regarding some things. Everything good requires some component of time to transpire. Think about this: insurance companies are big, powerful companies that have done their homework. For example, most of them have a two-year suicide exclusion in their life insurance policies. They learned, through experience, that most people that are considering that fateful event are less likely to still be suicidal and, therefore, less likely for the insurance company likely to be required to pay a settlement within that two-year period. Insurance companies have concluded that a set amount of time must pass before that policy may be honored. If they fail to respect that particular component of time their business would collapse.

Many employers have probationary periods of one to six months to determine if a new hire is a good fit. Mortgage lenders often require two years of tax returns to help them evaluate a borrower's credit worthiness. Some things simply take time, whether we like it or not. You can't plant an acorn on Monday and expect it to be a fully-grown oak tree by Friday. You'll likely need to give it twenty years to get to maturity, NOT the one WEEK in which you *want* for it to happen. Have you ever baked a dish but took it out of the oven way before you were supposed to simply because you were impatient? How did it turn out for you? Pretty horribly, right? If the appropriate amount of time is allotted for a

given task or issue then the odds of success increase. No matter how fast I have *wanted* things to happen I have found that when I have allowed the proper amount of time to pass things have almost always turned out well. If the recipe says four hundred degrees for twenty minutes I don't take the food out of the oven at fifteen minutes just because I'm being impatient. I simply wait until the twenty minutes have transpired or all ten repetitions of the exercise have been completed...or whatever is the issue at hand. If success means waiting a little longer than I want, so be it.

I have learned through life experience that speed tends to be overrated. Quality is almost always worth the trouble and speed often isn't rewarded. If the chef at your favorite restaurant gets your meal to you super fast but it is undercooked, where is the benefit of speed in that? That principle applies to a whole host of issues in life. Give things *time* to happen.

JOURNALING TO SUCCESS

Journaling is hugely underrated and often overlooked as a success tool. I started doing it as a child while imagining I was a professional baseball player. My Dad used to follow the statistics of the major league players. I was too young to understand the significance of statistics but I knew they were important for *some* reason. I figured out that keeping track of the 'home runs' I was hitting while playing in "Backyard Stadium" (the name my little brother and I gave to the imaginary 'stadium also known as our backyard) was very motivating. If the number of home runs stayed on a certain number for too long I worked hard to improve it. Had I not been journaling my progress would have stagnated, I would have gotten bored, then quit.

It is hard to improve on something without measuring your progress and journaling helps to address that issue. I used to make the mistake of just kind of eyeballing things before making a decision. Instead of actually measuring things and tracking data I'd just use my 'judgement'; big mistake! For example, instead of measuring the results of how my advertising dollars were bringing in business I just kind of eyeballed things. My 'journal' was kept in my head...a huge mistake. As a result I often *under*estimated the amount of advertising I needed to do to become successful. Alternatively, because I failed to track and evaluate data I *over*estimated outcomes. Again, not keeping written records was a big mistake. If you fail to keep records of data (e.g. the number of calories you consume or the amount of money you spend on non-essentials) you could find yourself in an undesirable situation before you know it.

The thing about journaling is that it doesn't have to be an elaborate affair. It could be as rudimentary as jotting down some figures and ***dates of the entry*** on a piece of paper that you can have easy, regular access to evaluate. For example, take just one issue in your life that is important to you right now. It could be health-related, an issue concerning your finances, the number of minutes you work on a special project at work or the number of times you called to check in on a loved one. Keep track for a couple of months before evaluating your results. You might be surprised at what you see. What has the potential of happening is that you will have spent about five or ten seconds to record each entry that might ultimately lead to positive changes that affect the rest of your life. Measure, record and evaluate stuff. You'll thank yourself later.

EXPERIENCE VERSUS QUALITY

One mistake I made and corrected as soon as I recognized it was mistaking longevity, sometimes known as experience, with being good at something. Just because someone has managed to spend a certain amount of time in a given industry without being discharged does not necessarily mean that person is good at what they do. I have observed many instances of people claiming to have years of experience at their craft that I would never consider hiring for one or more reasons. Longevity simply doesn't necessarily equate to quality. A great example of this occurred on a cooking competition show I enjoy watching called Hell's Kitchen. The youngest competitor on the show, a twenty year old woman named Nicole, had been working as a chef for only two years. The other chefs were bragging about their *years* of experience, anywhere from five years to as much as twenty years in one contestant's case. Anyway, during one episode the host, chef Gordon Ramsay, was blown away by how well Nicole had prepared a particular cut of meat. Either his pause was well-scripted or he was genuinely impressed with the way she had prepared the cut. Moments after his pregnant pause in astonishment he pulled Nicole aside and summoned her into a nearby storeroom. At that time he told her how very impressed he was with her improvement since a gaffe she had made early in the competition. After the two walked back into the kitchen amongst the other chefs Nicole's aura was almost palpable. The more "experienced" chefs, clearly aware of how blown away chef Ramsay was by Nicole's performance, knew that the competition was now only Nicole's to lose. While everyone else was busy sniping at one another Nicole was spending her time upping her game. I'd be willing to

bet that instead of resting on her laurels she'll likely continue to spend her time improving her craft.

Whenever someone tells me they have been at their craft for a long time one of the first things that comes to mind is I wonder if they have gotten *better* at their craft over that time or are they still using the exact same skills they had at the beginning of their career. Someone using the same skills *today* that they possessed ten years ago is very experienced in chronological terms but essentially the equivalent of a newcomer with added years. I would much rather have someone with less time under their belt but has managed to upgrade their skills and knowledge base a little each month over time than a veteran stuck in their ways. A person that has been using a typewriter for the last three decades will easily be outdone by someone that upgraded from a typewriter to a computer only a few years later.

Having performed your craft for years doesn't necessarily make you *better*, it only guarantees that you are *older*. Do not make the mistake of confusing longevity with quality. Only *progress* results in improved quality. You'll have a hard time determining your progress without measuring it in some way, hence a journal. You can disregard this advice but if you fail to achieve your goal a failure to keep a journal may be one reason why.

MENTORS CAN BE DREAMSAVERS

I, like lots of others, think that I can do just fine on my own and without the help from other people...or so I thought. Though it is true that I can occasionally conjugate two complete sentences and eat without spilling food on myself most of the time I have found through personal experience that mentors can really shorten a learning curve. How can a mentor serve as a saver of dreams, you ask? The first thing a mentor can do to help save your dream is to keep you from quitting too early. Other than failing to start in the first place quitting too early has probably killed more dreams than anything else. Mentors can be helpful in keeping you from quitting. There have been countless people, myself included, that actually were on the right track but quit before reaching the finish line. A mentor might have prevented that from happening. I can almost guarantee you that you have quit on a project before a mentor would have allowed you to.

Another thing a mentor can do is to help you take steps to deal with plateaus you may have reached but wish to move beyond to avoid stagnation. A mentor can be the fresh, unbiased pair of eyes your project may need. Sometimes all you may need is a new perspective on the same data. You, yourself, can't possibly know all of the possible outcomes of a given set of findings. Having a mentor may help.

Mentors can be formal as in the ones you actually hire, or they may be informal such as bouncing ideas off a respected individual over lunch (on *your* nickel). If you can't afford to take a mentor to lunch, offer something you *can* give them. Offer to run an errand,

wash their car, walk their dog, I don't know, offer *something* to demonstrate your appreciation. If a mentor teaches you even *one* thing that moves your life forward it will likely have been worth your trouble. Second opinions aren't just for medical advice.

If your goal doesn't seem to be any closer today than it was two years ago a mentor may be able to point out why. Mentors usually have been there and done that so they know the obstacles you're likely to face. I made the mistake of letting my ego be my guide on far too many occasions. I don't make that mistake any longer. I now seek advice from mentors for things that really matter and am SO much better off because of it. I may have to invest time and/or money in mentoring that I hadn't planned on investing but the investment is always worth it.

 If you fail to achieve your goal and say that you've "tried everything" I would quickly ask you how many mentors you consulted *and* if you actually followed their advice to the letter. Unless you really *have* tried everything (which is extremely unlikely no matter how much you wish to believe it) you may not have given a mentor the opportunity to help save your dream. If your 'mentor' is nothing more than the author of the book you check out at the library or ten minutes of picking the brain of a vendor it will have been time well spent. When you feel that you have tried 'everything' determine, *objectively*, if you have tried doing the **right** things and ask yourself if you did those things *correctly*. Eating one carrot then expecting to have lost ten pounds the next day is an example of doing a 'right' thing but doing it *incorrectly*. Consider involving a mentor, even a potential vendor, for a second opinion. You might save yourself a lot of heartache while inching

closer to your goal. There is no shame in asking for help. Alternatively but there could

potentially be a lot of explaining to do if you fail to ask for help and the project blows up

in your face.

DISCOMFORT IS PART OF ACHIEVEMENT

Pretty much everything that I have considered to be a success was accompanied by some degree of discomfort. I would much rather have slept or watched television or hung out with friends instead of studying but the 'discomfort' of studying paid off in the classroom. I would have rathered skip practice all week before performing on the athletic field but had I done that I would have failed miserably. If something is truly worth accomplishing I can almost assure you that some degree of discomfort will accompany you on your journey to getting there.

Do you think that Jack Canfield, the creator of the wildly-successful 'Chicken Soup For The Soul' franchise, *liked* the feeling of being rejected by book publishers one hundred and fourteen times before *finally* having one approve him? Of course not, but he had to deal with the rejection until he got what he wanted. Do you think world record-holding sprinter Usain Bolt enjoyed vomiting during workouts? Probably not, but that discomfort was part of the price he paid for becoming an Olympic gold medalist and international star. If you are planning on achieving success in something new be prepared to experience discomfort of even a modest degree along the way.

Making sacrifices to achieve a goal isn't always pretty or comfortable but almost always necessary. If anything I have found that having made such sacrifices seems to make the fruits of my sacrifice taste sweeter. Think about the things that you accomplished via sacrifice and discomfort as compared to those things that were simply handed to you:

which provided you with more personal satisfaction? I am guessing that the things for which you experiences discomfort through sacrifice meant more to you. Furthermore, much of what you may have sacrificed may not have been all that much of a big deal in the first place. Bypassing that sitcom on television may not have been all that comfortable but the thirty-minute walk you took in its place may have helped delay an even more uncomfortable health issue.

I don't care what aspect of life it involves there will be *some* degree of discomfort on the journey to accomplishing anything of importance. You want to lose weight? Be prepared for the discomfort of hunger pangs. So you want that pricey new object? Be prepared for the discomfort of forgoing your habit of splurging so you can save for it. Want to mend a damaged relationship by making the first move to repair it? The buildup to that awkward moment will likely be unpleasant. Ripping that bandaid off may not be pleasant, but necessary. Be prepared to deal with it.

I would even go so far as to say that if something is *too* easy then that means there is probably room to accomplish more or finish faster or something additionally beneficial is available *until* discomfort kicks in. If you get finished on a project earlier than anticipated you then have the luxury to go back and double check your work or do additional work to make the recipient even happier. In any case I *expect* that discomfort will kick in at *some* point and I am now prepared for it. I no longer freak out at the first sign of discomfort, I embrace it as part of the process.

TWO WORDS OF CAUTION

First of all, as you begin to make progress you *might* have a tendency to get a tad overconfident and that overconfidence has the capacity to derail your plans. On more than one occasion towards accomplishing a big goal I began to get cocky and figured that I could take time off and make up for it later. The problem is that once you break your 'flow', your rhythm, it's hard to get it back. Once you get back with the program things are not the same for some reason. You then start making excuses for your subsequent less-than-stellar progress and quitting slowly enters the back of your mind. It is kind of like getting the flu; small, seemingly innocuous but uncomfortable symptoms develop into something much more significant. Been there, done that. Don't get cocky at least until you get to the finish line.

Secondly, not everyone will be happy for you once you accomplish your goal. TRUST ME ON THAT. When you achieve your goal you will hear passive-aggressive comments masquerading as thinly-veiled jealousy. Knowing this in advance will prevent you from being hurt, surprised and disappointed when it happens, even if it occurs only once because, unfortunately, it is quite likely. I've experienced this phenomenon frequently enough to know this to be the case.

That may seem to have been an odd thing to mention but it is something many may not have considered. The first time I experienced a success that some may have considered to have been noteworthy I kind of hoped for a couple of pats on the back.

That was not necessarily the case. If achieving your goal includes receiving well wishes from people you consider to be your friends you might be a little disappointed. Work to achieve your goal for your own personal satisfaction and count the adulation from others as icing on the cake.

EPILOGUE

I am pulling for you. If you're reading this material I truly **want** you to succeed. I get genuinely excited at the success of others, even regarding people I have never . Please feel free to send me an email at nicholasharper@harpermotivationalspeakersagency.com regarding an accomplishment that you initially questioned would happen. I love that stuff.