

Slaying The Dragon

...The Journey from the Dungeon to the Ivory Tower

...an autobiography

David J. Koch



Slaying the Dragon

The Journey from the Dungeon to the Ivory Tower

PUBLISHING HISTORY

First edition published March 2005

Warrior Publishing

Library of Congress Control Number: 2005921963

I S B N-10: 0-9766606-0-1

I S B N-13: 978-0-9766606-0-6

Second revised & expanded edition published June 2009

First Printing - June 2009

Second Printing - December 2009

Imacaulae Media

Library of Congress Control Number: 2005921963

I S B N-10: 0-9766606-1-X

I S B N-13: 978-0-9766606-1-3

Third revised edition (*first digital edition*) published April 2013

ISBN-10: 0976660628

ISBN-13: 978-0-9766606-2-0

Copyright - David J. Koch - 2005 - 2013

All Rights Reserved

Cover Illustration, Brandon D Hunt o/c

Published in the United States of America

Proteaegis Publishing

5477 Blue Cloud Ln.

Westerville, Ohio 43081



Table of Contents

This book and its chapters are written in a manner in which each chapter uses parts of previous chapters to make or emphasize important points.

If you “chapter-skip” through this book, you will likely lose a good part of its important messages.

This book should be read from cover to cover, skipping nothing.

[Dedication](#)

[Proviso](#)

[Forward to the 3rd edition](#)

[Chapter 1 - Conquering Challenges](#)

[Chapter 2 - Author's Note](#)

[Chapter 3 - Reentry Challenges](#)

[Chapter 4 - The Crime](#)

[Chapter 5 - The Incarceration Experience](#)

[Chapter 6 - Understanding Yourself](#)

[Chapter 7 - Be Honest with Yourself](#)

[Chapter 8 - Civilized Society](#)

[Chapter 9 - Understanding Culture](#)

[Chapter 10 - Understanding Your Culture](#)

[Chapter 11 - The Magic of Culture](#)

[Chapter 11 - Part A - Harley Davidson](#)

[Chapter 11 - Part B - The Guardian Angels](#)

[Chapter 11 - Part C - Alcoholics Anonymous](#)

[Chapter 11 - Part D - Promise Keepers](#)

[Chapter 11 - Part E - The Dot-Com Culture](#)

[Chapter 12 - What is Rehabilitation](#)

[Chapter 13 - Making the Decision](#)

[Chapter 14 - You do not believe that it is possible](#)

[Chapter 15 - Working the system and seizing opportunity](#)

[Chapter 16 - Who are your friends](#)

[Chapter 17 - It doesn't hurt enough](#)

[Chapter 18 - Patience is required to take the small steps](#)

[Chapter 19 - You do not believe in yourself](#)

[Chapter 20 - Peel off the Labels](#)

[Chapter 21 - You do not know where to begin](#)

[Chapter 22 - You are dealing with incredible anger](#)

[Chapter 23 - You have no Definitiveness of Purpose](#)

[Chapter 24 - It seems like it's a totally different world](#)

[Chapter 25 - It was easier 33 years ago](#)

[Chapter 26 - You're too old to get started](#)

[Chapter 27 - Don't swing at a pitch in the dirt](#)

[Chapter 28 - Where do you start your journey?](#)

DEDICATION

There are many people who have had a positive impact on my life during the past quarter of a century. Some influences were small and some were great - all were significant, without which any of them, my life today would be different.

Every hour of every day I faced choices and met people who somehow influenced my future. Opportunities and temptations presented themselves, some good and some bad, any of which could have, and many that did, alter the course of my life.

There is a theory commonly discussed in aviation meteorology called the Butterfly Effect, which insinuates that the almost imperceptible amount of wind created by the flapping of a butterfly's wings can affect the weather on the opposite side of the planet. Global weather is delicate and indeed, it can be influenced in one region by very small variations that occur in an entirely different part of the world.

Like weather, life is delicate and its paths and destinations can also be influenced many years later by the almost inconspicuous choices we make today. Some of the choices I made had been good and some had been poor. No person's life path is ever one-dimensional or a straight line.

Whether a person wants one or not, they are going to have a journey. Where their journey and path leads them is contingent upon the choices they make throughout that journey. Over the past thirty-plus years, my life path has evolved in a generally good but nonlinear direction - it has incorporated much good fortune, with a plethora of potholes and deviations.

My life was dramatically influenced by those significant relationships with such people as my Mom and Step Dad, certain employers and friends, my dear friend Ellie, Janice Merrill - my parole officer, Richard Michaels and Ned Wilkins who were among my greatest mentors, Chris Myers who has been the inspiration of my life, Dennis O'Brian who was the FBI Special Agent to whom I turned myself in, and special people who celebrated with me the victories, but who also gave me strength and encouragement during the many periods of challenge.

One cannot however measure how much influence, or the significance of that influence, which was created by the innumerable people who individually were analogous to the wind from a butterfly's wings - influence without

which, may have dramatically altered my path and the place where I have arrived today as I set forth on other new journey's.

All of the people who have had any positive influence in my life, great or small, have an equal share of my heartfelt gratitude. They all know who they are.

In consideration of the foregoing, and not to diminish my appreciation of the many people whose influence, both enormous and minuscule, had in my life, this book is dedicated to

Chris



PROVISO

This book is intended to be gender neutral in all respects. The terms; he, she, his, her, man, woman, etc. are intended to be gender neutral, except where explicitly stated, or when by the sense and context in which they are used, are gender specific.

This book does not contain any intentional favoritism or indifference to any person based on age, citizenship, color, creed, physical or mental disability (including HIV status), ethnicity, family responsibilities, gender identity and expression, marital status, matriculation, national origin, physical appearance, race, religion, political affiliation, sex, sexual orientation, union membership, veteran status, socioeconomic class, education, profession, criminal history or other unlawful factors.

People are people and the richness of diversity is among life's most savored treasures. The author recognizes no difference as all people have dreams.

The opinions and ideas contained and expressed in this book are those of its author. The author's opinions are intended to cultivate inspiration, insight and to be helpful and informative. Neither the author nor the publisher, or any of their proprietors, owners, officers, shareholders, directors, successors and assigns, associates, affiliates, contractors, representatives, producers, editors, employees, agents, legal representatives, licensees, and all parties acting under their permission, or with authority from them, or those from whom they are acting is engaged in providing or rendering professional services or counsel, and no representations to the contrary are intended in this book.

If the reader of this book seeks or requires professional or personal assistance, counsel or advice, the reader should seek consultation from a competent professional who is specialized in providing such assistance, counsel or advice.

The author and publisher, along with their proprietors, owners, officers, shareholders, directors, successors and assigns, associates, affiliates, contractors, representatives, producers, editors, employees, agents, legal representatives, licensees, and all parties acting under their permission, or with authority from them, specifically disclaim any responsibility for any liability, and for any liability, loss, or risk, personal or otherwise, which is incurred as a consequence, directly or indirectly, of the use and application of any of the contents of this book.



FORWARD TO THE THIRD EDITION

Who is this book for? Who can benefit from reading this?

This book is for any person who has experienced a setback. Perhaps a bankruptcy, a home foreclosure, job loss, career change, the loss of a business, or any of the many situations people face each and every day.

Some people recover and some don't. Recovery is a choice, and this book clearly delineates how those choices are made, and it demonstrates the reality that your future can be whatever you want it to be regardless of what challenges you are facing today.

The person who has experienced a dramatic life change, or who is hoping to dramatically change their life is going to face some significant challenges.

The pages that follow are a journey that spans over thirty years and includes the attainment of such positions, recognitions and certifications as; Airline Transport Pilot, Certified Flight Instructor, Training Officer, FAA Accident Prevention Counselor, President, Chief Executive Officer, Entrepreneur of the Year finalist, Best in Business and twice distinguished on the *Inc 500 List* of America's fastest growing companies. All of these achievements were attained post-conviction and post-incarceration.

Many books have been written by individuals who served time in prison, were released, and then wrote a book, purporting to know the path and have the answers for making a successful reentry into mainstream society.

Additionally, many people are released from prison who attempt to embark upon a crusade to purportedly help people who are released from prison make a successful reentry into mainstream society - even though the teachers have not reentered mainstream society themselves. My interactions with such individuals suggest to me that we humans have a tendency to cling to that which is familiar.

Despite having talked with numerous individuals who seek government and foundation grants, and other funding and charity for the purpose of providing assistance to ex-offenders, no one has been able to provide a coherent answer to the question regarding the elephant in the room - the fact that the person(s) pursuing the endeavor and expect to provide the assistance to help others reenter into mainstream society have not done so themselves.

A person can effectively only teach that which they have actually done. I question the veracity of those who purport to know the path, having never actually integrated into, and become a working member of, mainstream society post incarceration. If an individual's stated motivation to help is because of a passion to support the ex-offender demographic, then there is really no need for grants or other funding. There are already plenty of organizations with an objective of helping ex-offenders. If the motivation is genuinely based upon passion, go volunteer.

I suspect that there are many people like myself, who after having served time in prison, experienced 30-plus years of success in mainstream society. Ironically, I believe that the primary reason that many of the most qualified individuals have not written books is because they continue to remain very busy with their career.

I spent almost three decades forming the material for this book by focusing on my career. My career focus and my goals never included writing this, or any similar book. It was not until almost two years after selling a company, which provided for my retirement that I even considered the laborious task of writing a book. The only motivation to write this book was to produce a work with a main theme and focus on helping others achieve substantially similar results as I have during my career.

I have received hundreds of positive letters from offenders who read the first and second editions of this book, which was initially published in 2005. Those letters reaffirmed the fundamental reason for having invested the time.

I had received some input from a couple of college professors who read the first edition. They suggested that I "*Dumb-it-Down.*"

The syntax of the book really isn't too far above the 8th grade level. The concepts however are probably a little more advanced. If I Dumb-it-Down, the message is lost.

Depending on what a person wants to achieve, it is their responsibility to step-up through the various levels of literacy that are prerequisite to arriving at their desired destinations. If people are not willing to invest adequately in themselves to increase their literacy to a level whereby they can comprehend the content of this book, then attaining some of the more rewarding destinations that are available to all ex-offenders would not be feasible, even if I wrote this revision in crayon.

If an individual wants to achieve life destinations similar to mine, they will need to follow a similar path, at least in principle. Among the most important messages of this book is that a very rewarding life is very

definitely attainable after prison, if an individual is willing to put forth the effort.

If a person is unwilling to bring themselves to the level of basic literacy, it would be difficult for them to comprehend the fundamental concepts that are required to negotiate the competitive path to success in mainstream society irrespective of this or any other book.

Slaying the Dragon is intended for those individuals who genuinely want to take a different life path, but have difficulty believing that a different path is available after having been convicted and incarcerated. This book will clearly demonstrate that a different path and subsequently, a better life are very definitely available to you. It won't be easy - it will be hard, but I can assure you that your efforts will not be an exercise in futility.

If you are an offender, you need to champion your cause. Only you can run your race.

This book is written for *YOU* ! And it is written to show you that yes, you can recover from whatever challenges you may have faced in the past, or that you may be facing this very minute.

I wrote this book so other people could realize that the future does not equal the past. The same college professors who suggested that I dumb-it-down also suggested that I consider hiring a ghostwriter or at least an editor to correct any grammatical errors. Hiring talent is only a function of money. I certainly could have hired a ghostwriter and an editor. The end result would have been a book that had perfect grammar and English. However, the end result would not have been *my* book.

This book could have had perfect English and grammar, but then it would not reflect the fact that I do not have perfect English and grammar, yet that did not prevent me from achieving some fairly lofty goals. Having perfect English and grammar is not prerequisite to achieving any level of success you want, and it is certainly not a necessary requirement to digging yourself out of whatever hole you find yourself in. It's simple, you don't need to be perfect in anything to recover from your challenges, or to achieve a very comfortable level of success. Use what you have and simply build from there.

What I also believe is that many people sit around and wait until someone else makes their success for them. If that is you, I promise, you will die waiting. But, if you are at a point in your life where you are ready and willing to put forth some genuine effort, then recovery from any challenge and success can be yours.

This book is somewhat of a nuts-and-bolts, how-to succeed book. It is however written in a manner that is somewhat entertaining. That was

necessary not only for the reader, but it was also necessary for the author. Writing a vanilla and boring how-to-succeed book or memoir just seemed to be a very laborious and dreary task. Conquering your challenges does not need to be a painful drudgery. It can indeed be exciting, fun, fulfilling and exhilarating.



Take Control of your future

A person who has had a conviction or who has been incarcerated is held to a higher standard, and their future opportunities and success are directly dependent on meeting that standard.

Rise to the occasion.

*Records are broken by those
who dream beyond the barriers.*



Chapter 1

CONQUERING CHALLENGES

Successful people clearly understand the concept of waking up each morning, donning their suit of armor, sheathing their sword, brandishing their lance and shield, mounting their horse and venturing into the forest of opportunity, pursuing the journey toward their dreams, passions, aspirations and goals.

As the warrior trots into the forest, he maintains his guard for those evil Dragons who will surely attack, create obstacles and adversity, and fight viciously to steal the warriors' dreams, goals and aspirations.

Dragons are magical creatures that possess powers almost beyond comprehension. They frequently breath fire, are capable of transformation, and they can overwhelm you with pain, sorrow, discouragement, disappointments, set-backs, anxiety and hopelessness. Among their most mysterious attributes is their uncanny ability to surprise.

By nature, Dragon's tend to be bloodthirsty, battling, and evil and mean creatures that create obstacles and barriers to anyone attempting to pursue their journey through the forest of opportunity in search of any positive objectives and goals. A Dragon's primary objective is to limit an individual's pursuit of their dreams and aspirations by causing the warrior to feel overwhelmed, by creating confusion and disorganization, barriers, obstacles and ultimately, total devastation. Dragons want nothing more than for the warrior to give up his dreams and spend his days as an empty and hopeless carcass. A person without a dream is a person without life.

Dragons come in many sizes and forms however, their objectives are the same. They want to steal the warrior's dreams, rob him of hope, and cause him to give up his journey and quest for achievement and success.

As a warrior ventures into the forest in search of his treasures, the pursuit of his dreams and life's rich rewards, the forests' perimeter is protected by small dragons, not much bigger than a house cat. However, despite their size, these vicious creatures are extraordinarily fast and agile, and they have devastated many apprentice warriors at the very onset of their journey. These creatures are not to be underestimated. They tend to attack in groups and their defeat requires immediate, fast, organized, decisive and focused action.

Dragons survive on a steady diet of human dreams, and aspirations, goals and ambitions. Over the millennium, their bellies have remained full, leaving behind victims filled with defeat, discouragement and hopelessness.

It is astounding how Dragons can sniff out those ripe dreams that are on the brink of attainment and realization. When a warrior is just inches away from the attainment of a dream or goal, Dragons are certain to launch their most ferocious attack. Dragons will go to extraordinary lengths to trip-up the warrior and cause him to simply abandon his dreams and goals - to regress to an existence without a journey - a life of mediocrity.

Dragons will attack a warrior when he is most vulnerable - when he's tired, in a state of disorganization, feeling overwhelmed, sick, frustrated or angry. Like fruit on a tree, it is the ripe dreams that are the most delicious, and Dragons will stop at nothing to steal these dreams. Dragons form squadrons and launch coordinated vicious attack waves - striking the warrior with compounded assaults from multiple directions.

Many of a Dragon's targets, in fact the majority are easy prey - those who choose to lie down and quit. But occasionally, a Dragon will pick a battle with a true warrior. A true warrior is a determined individual unwilling to give up his dreams, and who is driven to continue the journey irrespective of the price - a Dragon Slayer - one who also receives inspiration, strength, counsel and guidance through alliances with other Dragon Slayers.

Learning to slay Dragons is not unlike learning any of the many techniques of battle. It takes a lifetime of dedication to become a Master in any of the various forms of combat, and Dragon slaying is no different. To achieve any significant and worthwhile goal in life, one must learn the innumerable Dragon slaying techniques, moves, maneuvers and postures of Dragon slaying. And, if any individual ever hopes to achieve their greatest potentials, their dreams, their aspirations, goals and the extraordinary treasures that life has to offer, they must first face the fact that Dragons will forever make every ferocious attempt to prevent the warriors' pursuit of his journey toward attaining anything good.

If you ever want to achieve anything in your life, developing your ability to slay Dragons is simply a prerequisite, and you must be prepared to get bloody, singed, burnt scratched, bit, broken, injured, overwhelmed, discouraged, frustrated, knocked down and set back but, never defeated!!!

No matter how much pain, you can never allow the Dragon to slay you and feast upon your aspirations, dreams and ambitions. No matter how tired, injured, frustrated and defeated you will feel from time to time in your journeys through the forest of opportunity, and your many battles with Dragons, you must never accept defeat!!! Never negotiate the price of

success. Get some rest, lick your wounds and fearlessly charge the Dragon, engage it in battle head on, and emerge victorious. Be a warrior!

Acquiring the many skills and techniques of Dragon slaying requires a great deal of effort, discipline, focus, practice, patience, and intestinal fortitude. Dragon slaying is perhaps among the most noble, yet difficult disciplines and forms of combat to master. However, along the way and through the warrior's journey toward mastering Dragon slaying, he will experience many victories, achieve many of his goals and dreams, collect treasures and leave in his wake many a slain Dragon.

It is important to note that Dragon's possess enormous stashes of gold, silver and jewels. Once slain, the Dragon's hordes of treasure are the warrior's to keep. More importantly, with each victory, the warrior keeps his dreams and moves that much closer to their realization.

Dragon slaying requires a lifetime of dedication, effort, patience and discipline, but the rewards are the inexhaustible stockpiles of gold, silver, jewels and treasures, and the fulfillment of the warrior's greatest aspirations and dreams. Success is not an entitlement - it is achieved through a never-ending series of battles and victories, but also with a sprinkling of setbacks and injuries.

The longer the warrior holds his dreams and the more goals that he achieves, the more caustic the battles will become. Many battles will be long and will drain substantial resources and energy. The warrior will experience injury and setbacks. The deeper the warrior ventures into the forest, the larger, stronger, meaner, and more vicious and wicked the Dragons become. But also, the larger are their stockpiles of gold, silver and jewels, and the more delicious is the fulfillment of the warrior's ripened dreams, aspirations and goals - all of which become the Warriors' rewards of battle.

As the warrior slays each Dragon, he will learn greater Dragon slaying techniques that he will apply to the next battle. A wise Dragon slayer builds defenses, an arsenal of appropriate Dragon slaying weapons, and formulates insulations that will become impenetrable barriers to many Dragons. A warrior will learn where, and where not to venture, certain behaviors and habits, and set policies that will avoid or foil many attempted Dragon attacks.

The Forest and the Dragon are metaphors for the creature of life, its journey's and its challenges. Life breathes fire. It is full of surprises. It will challenge you every day. And, if you do not deliberately and consciously "Slay the Dragon," by default, it [life] will slay you. Slaying each Dragon is a step closer to attaining your greatest dreams and aspirations.

The warrior's suit of armor, sword, lance and shield are its weapons and insulations. In life, the greatest weapon a person can acquire for conquering challenges and achieving goals is education. Your shields are formed from experience and an ability to forecast how your decisions today will affect your tomorrow. Examining your behaviors, habits and activities today and the benefits or consequences those behaviors, habits and activities will produce will give you the power to control your paths and destinations.

Life is a dynamic series of challenges and problems. Conquering challenges and solving problems is fundamental to moving forward in life. But, who ever said that facing and conquering challenges - slaying Dragons - has to be a dreadful and painful drudgery? It is an attitude whereby you approach every challenge envisioning yourself as the victor and focusing on the treasures that await you after you slay each of your Dragons. Slaying Dragons can and should be embraced as a sport, albeit with an abundance of benefit or consequence, depending upon whether you win or give up and quit.

Life, and Dragons, will continuously challenge you, place obstacles in your path, knock you down, set you back and attempt to cause you to surrender. You must develop the attitude of a true warrior - never let the Dragon beat you - never let it become your master. Control it, slay it, build defenses and barriers, accumulate a fortress of Dragon slaying weapons, learn from each battle to form insulating policies, and never, never quit.

There are several levels of Dragon warriors, ranging from the Apprentice, to the Dragon Hunter, Dragon Warrior, Dragon Slayer, Master Dragon Slayer and ultimately, The Dragon Lord - the person who has mastered the Dragon.

A Dragon Lord is that person who has transitioned from survivor, to warrior, to healer, and whose achievements, visions and dreams are so extraordinary and of such magnitude so as to have created a legacy for the good of mankind that imparts a profound, positive and progressive change that endures eternally. Such dreams and visions therefore become eternal, which no Dragon can steal. Transformative figures such as Mother Teresa, Christopher Reeve, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., John F. Kennedy, Bill Gates, Mahatma Gandhi, John Walsh, Nelson Mandela, Warren Buffett and Lee Iacocca are a few examples of Dragon Lords.

The art of Dragon slaying is acquired through a close association with others who share a commonality of interest, and are similarly situated and face comparable challenges, which forms unity and camaraderie, a success oriented fraternity, stimulates a collaborative support structure and sphere of influence, and it establishes a noble forum for recognition and commendation of extraordinary achievement and distinction. You have only lost when you quit. All the things you want to be, you already are.

Chapter 2

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I have lost count of how many times during my career I have heard someone say to me, "Dave, you should write a book." From the time I first got my private pilot certificate until I founded a corporation that built and operated a national Internet backbone network, countless people have suggested that I write a book - a rags to riches story, because I had risen from the ashes of adversity.

I never had a reason to write a book. Most memoirs are written for ego and a few are written for some kind of historical record. Writing a book for ego provided zero motivation, and I wouldn't flatter myself by thinking that I altered history in any significant manner.

After reading an article in a local newspaper regarding the challenges that some people face after being released from prison, I began examining the programs and the support that is available to assist people with making a successful transition from prison into mainstream society.

Indeed the challenge of reentering mainstream society after incarceration is formidable, however it really is not indifferent then many of the other challenges people face - a bankruptcy, home foreclosure, loss of career, dramatic change in lifestyle and on and on. Life is full of challenges no matter who you are.

Although reentering mainstream society after incarceration was among my challenges, throughout these pages you will see that I also faced and conquered many of the other challenges people face every day. If a person wants to continue to move forward in life, then they must continuously be receptive to self-reinvention at any time.

After reading that newspaper article, I invested over a year of research, talking with people in prisons and reflecting back upon my own experience. I realized that the greatest challenge for most people is simply believing that life after incarceration is possible - the fundamental belief that it is possible for someone to have a life of legitimacy and normalcy after having served time in prison. The challenges that people face when they are released from prison provided the motivation and definitiveness of purpose to write this book.

The purpose of this book is not to expound upon or provide any great detail regarding the crimes that I committed. Rather, its purpose is to provide the reader with the hope, inspiration, encouragement and indisputable evidence

that a happy, healthy, prosperous and legitimate future is attainable, irrespective of the enormous challenges an individual may face - even after an individual has served time in a federal or state correctional institution, or both. To expand a little further, this book is intended for anyone who feels that they have arrived at the bottom of the barrel, for whatever cause or reason.

I was released on parole on August 7, 1980 after serving both federal and state time. After my release and during the past quarter of a century, I have earned my Private, Commercial and Airline Transport Pilot certificates, Basic, Instrument and Advanced Flight and Ground Instructor certificates, type ratings in three jet aircraft and I have enjoyed a long and rewarding career as a professional pilot.

During my aviation career, I learned several computer programming languages and developed customized computer software packages.

I have owned and operated several businesses. During 1995 I co-founded and served as President, CEO and Chairman of Fiber Network Solutions, Inc. The organization was one of the companies that built the infrastructure of the Internet in North America - a tier one Internet backbone operator. The company reached over \$35 million in revenues, achieved #68 on the *Inc 500 List* of Americas Fastest Growing Companies, was awarded *Best in Business*, *Entrepreneur of the Year finalist*, and numerous other accolades. I sold the company during first quarter of 2003.

The foregoing distills my achievements down to a few paragraphs that are rather vanilla. This is pretty much true for anyone. The resume of a person's life only delineates the pinnacles of their achievements. Which is genuinely more interesting - the singular bullet points of someone's life or the full-length movie? The achievements are only a snapshot view of the very tips of the mountains I have climbed. It is hardly representative of the enormous gratifications I have experienced throughout my various journeys.

The best part of climbing a mountain isn't arriving at the top. The actual attainment of a goal is generally anticlimactic. The parts that I cherish are the challenges I conquered during the climb, gathering the small but accumulating treasures, and the innumerable memories. Albeit the destinations have been good, the real prize is the journey itself.

After selling my company in 2003, I took six months to recuperate from working literally 24x7 for eight years.

I considered opportunities with turnaround management groups, providing business consultation, and contemplated executive positions in aviation and several of the emerging technology industries.

I reflected back over the previous twenty-plus years and realized that perhaps I could now help other people who have similar challenges as I did during my reintegration into mainstream society - my climb back out from the bottom of the barrel. Indeed, this had become a passion and definitiveness of purpose for writing this book.

When contemplating a new career chapter at 50 years of age, one must consider the following: In a few generations, who will care about where I've traveled, the size of my bank account, the number of, or size of my houses, or the cost of the cars I've owned? No one! However, if a person can touch the lives of others, it is eternal. Whether a man wants one or not, he will have a legacy - it will be indelibly written by his last act.

During November 2003, I made a few contacts with government and community organizations that were involved in reentry initiatives designed to facilitate a successful community reintegration for individuals who had experienced a conviction or incarceration event, thereby reducing recidivism.

Despite the hundreds of millions of dollars being spent on rehabilitation and reentry, I have come away with a singular concept.

Self-reinvention, rehabilitation and reentry are fundamentally the decisions of an individual. Your self-reinvention, rehabilitation and reentry are your choices. If you *genuinely*, consciously and deliberately choose to reinvent yourself, rehabilitate yourself, make a successful reentry and become a member of mainstream society, you can and will succeed.

David J. Koch



Chapter 3

REENTRY CHALLENGES

A man named John was walking down the street and fell into a deep hole. He tried for hours to climb out but couldn't. He could see people walking by and even though he yelled and screamed for help, no one would stop. Then, he saw his doctor passing by. "Doc!!!" he yelled. His doctor stopped and peered down the hole as John yelled, "Doc, it's me, John. Can you help me?" His doctor looked down the hole and yelled back, "Of course I can help John, after all, I'm a doctor." The doctor promptly wrote out a prescription for anti-anxiety medication and threw it down the hole.

After a little while longer, and still no one stopping to help, John noticed his attorney walking past. "Counselor!!!" he yelled. The attorney stopped and looked down the hole as John yelled, "Counselor, it's me, John. Can you help me?" The attorney looked down the hole and yelled back, "Of course John, I can help. After all, I'm an attorney." The attorney promptly wrote out a lawsuit against the city for the danger created by the hole in the sidewalk, filed it in the courthouse across the street, came back and threw a time-stamped copy of the complaint down the hole.

After a little while longer, and still no one stopping to help, he noticed his minister walking past. "Reverend!!!" he yelled. The minister stopped and looked down the hole as John yelled, "Reverend, it's me, John. Can you help me?" The minister yelled back, "Of course son, I can help. After all, I'm a minister." The minister promptly wrote out a prayer on a piece of paper and threw it down the hole.

John continued to try climbing out of the hole, but to no avail. Finally, he noticed a friend walking by. "Bob!!!" he yelled. His friend stopped and looked down the hole as John yelled, "Bob, it's me, John. Can you help me?" His friend yelled back, "How the heck did you get down there?" John replied, "What difference does it make! I just need your help getting out."

To John's surprise, his friend then jumped down into the hole. Now, with both men at the bottom of the hole, John looked at his friend and said, "You idiot, why did you jump down here? Now we're both stuck down here in this hole!"

John's friend looked back at him and calmly said, "Yeah, I know. But, I've been down in this hole before, and I know the way out."

...Original story author unknown

I was released from prison after serving both federal and state time, and successfully reentered mainstream society, among the many challenges that I have conquered. I have had several successful careers in diverse professions, and I have achieved financial independence. I was released when they opened the gates. However, I got “out” when I closed the chapter of crime and prison, and opened a new chapter that had nothing to do with crime, prison or the system. I got out of the system when I got the system out of me. I closed the chapter, I moved on, and I never looked back. You can do the same.

When I was first released on parole during August 1980, I had a conversation with my Mother as to what I wanted to do with my future. I told her that I wanted to help other ex-offenders who are getting out successfully reenter the community. Her answer was pretty pointed and painfully honest. “How can you teach them to successfully reenter society when you haven’t done that yourself? You have done nothing that you can teach them,” she said. “At this juncture, you are hardly qualified to be the teacher - you are the student. You first need to achieve some success and credentialing in the mainstream of society, and then you will have something to offer.”

That stung! But, she was right. When I first got out, working with other ex-offenders was just a continuation of staying in the same system. My Mother explained that I could not effectively teach someone how to do something that I have not actually done. I needed to break from the system totally, reenter mainstream society and make a successful career in a profession that had nothing to do with the prison and corrections system. Then, if successful, I would have something worthwhile to share with other’s facing similar challenges.

I’m not going to coddle you, offer you prayers, medical advice or legal counsel. Rather, I’m jumping down in your hole with you. We’re at the bottom of the hole - together. *I’ve been down in the hole you’re in before and I know the way out.*

I have something to teach you. It only requires that you open up, *be honest with yourself* and be willing to consider an alternative life and direction.

The term recidivism is frequently used within the judicial, rehabilitation and corrections communities. It is defined as an individual who served time in prison, was released and then subsequently returns to prison on an administrative or parole violation, or as the result of a new case.

Although state and federal governments universally define recidivism as the statistical rates that only include individuals who return to prison for a variety of reasons, I personally define recidivism as it pertains to behavior. If an individual serves time in prison, alleges to have become rehabilitated, is

released and then engages in criminal behavior, then the individual has recidivated irrespective of whether or not they have been re-arrested, re-sentenced or re-incarcerated. The same holds true for any other relapse into a poor habit pattern.

If you have spent a little or a lot of time in prison, there is a good possibility that you have seen people who were released and subsequently returned. What you don't see while in prison are all of the people who didn't come back. Statistically, it is an enormous number - between 32 and 44 percent of people released from prison move on with their life, in a different direction, and they never return.

Given the challenge, I think that the percentage of people who successfully reenter mainstream society is a remarkable success rate. Compare that success rate to the success rate of other endeavors. For example, most people who enroll in college expect to earn a degree, yet only 17% of students who enroll in secondary education graduate.

The difficulty of successfully navigating a challenge is dependent upon a person's prior experience in conquering challenges. Adding a column of single digit numbers does not challenge most of us. There was however a time that we were, and it seemed at that time to be an all-consuming challenge.

The challenge of being released from prison and reentering mainstream society seems like an all consuming and overwhelming challenge. It certainly seemed that way to me when I was first released. However, as I look back on it today from a different position, with greater experience, and a different perspective, when compared to the many other Dragons I have slain over the past thirty-plus years, reentry to me is not dissimilar to the challenge I faced in the first grade - adding a column of single digit numbers. Today either would be simple.

The difficulty in conquering challenges and slaying Dragons is relative to where you are in life, and what Dragons you have slain before. At the time you are slaying the reentry Dragon, it is a formidable challenge. It was overwhelming to me at the time, and seemed an impossible obstacle.

I'm here to tell you that the reentry Dragon is a Dragon that can be conquered, and I am the living, breathing evidence. I'm not saying that it is, was or will be easy. It won't be easy - it will be hard. But, yes, you absolutely can slay the reentry Dragon and enjoy the rich rewards that life has to offer. Conquering challenges and slaying Dragons becomes easier with time and experience. Given the Dragons I have slain over the past quarter of a century, comparatively, slaying the reentry Dragon is like blowing out the candles on my birthday cake. But, that is because I have battled much bigger

and far more vicious Dragons since slaying the reentry Dragon. It's all relative.

If you are facing a battle with the reentry Dragon, then it is the only Dragon. That holds true for whatever battle you might be facing. My hope is that this book will help you walk into the forest of opportunity, hunt that Dragon, slay that Dragon and drag its carcass back to your cave where you will feast and celebrate.

The challenge of reinventing yourself and/or reentering mainstream society is not difficult in and of itself. The challenge just has a large volume of idiosyncrasies. Individually, each element of reentry is pretty simple. However, when they are all jumbled together in an unorganized heap, it becomes overwhelming. I'll draw upon a personal experience to further illustrate this point.

I first developed an interest in flying when I was nineteen or twenty years old. I went to a flight school located at Freedom Field in Medina, Ohio and spoke with an instructor. After an hour of discussion, I bought the Cessna Private Pilot course materials.

When I got home, I unpacked the materials, began looking through the various items in the package, and browsed through the private pilot handbook. I was quickly and thoroughly intimidated by all of the charts, graphs and calculations in the book, as well as some of the other items that appeared to me as something that would give Albert Einstein a good case of heartburn. As far as I was concerned, there was no way I could ever understand these materials and learn to fly.

It wasn't until a month before my 25th birthday that I revisited the aviation challenge. My first flight lesson was on January 15, 1981, 161 days after I was released from prison. It was the same intimidating materials. But, this time I broke it down to manageable parts. I broke it down to sections and then broke the sections down to even smaller elements.

I can tell you today that learning to fly and understanding all of the theory is not difficult. None of the information is that complex. There is just a large volume of information to learn.

Although I have earned my private, commercial, flight instructor, and airline transport pilot certificates, my instrument and multi-engine ratings and several jet type ratings, the first certificate - the private pilot certificate, was the most difficult. The private pilot certificate was the most difficult because I had to go from a point of knowing nothing to the point where I could competently act as pilot-in-command of an aircraft carrying passengers. All of the subsequent certificates and ratings built upon that foundation, and were easier to obtain as a result of having a thorough understanding of the

fundamentals. Once you form your foundation, which is not easy, but hard, the rest of your journey's become easier.

I've met a lot of pilots over the years that love to bask in the perception, which many people have that you need to be profoundly gifted to learn to pilot an aircraft. Bologna! A monkey could learn to fly. There is no mystery and nothing so complex that any average person could not learn the material. It is just a matter of learning a whole bunch of little things, one step at a time.

I'll give an example of how difficult it is to learn to fly and how just about anyone could get a pilot's license.

I had a charter flight departing from Chicago to Phoenix, Arizona for an affluent gentlemen and his family. My co-pilot, Stanley, was fairly new to the Learjet, but he had several thousand hours total time. With that much time, one might assume that Stanley had a generally good idea of what he was doing in an airplane.

The trip to reposition the airplane from Cleveland to Chicago was empty and I always let new co-pilot's fly the empty legs as a part of their training toward earning captain status. It was pretty uneventful other than the normal challenges all pilots face when they are new to the Learjet - myself included.

The trip from Chicago to Phoenix was also a very routine flight, other than a couple of inspectors from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) were waiting in Phoenix when we arrived to give us a ramp-check. A ramp-check is a random procedure that the FAA performs. It amounts to the inspectors verifying that the paperwork is in order, the weight & balance is on-board, aircraft logs are in order, proper certification of the flight crew, etc. Basically a ramp-check is like a mild root canal. It was uneventful.

The next day, our customer called and asked if we could fly him and his family to the Grand Canyon. Stanley had been to the Grand Canyon before and enthusiastically spoke of the beauty of flying over the canyon and landing at the airport on the opposite edge. I had never been there, but I looked forward to this perfect day and the sites that lie ahead.

When flying high performance aircraft under FAA Regulations, Part 135 - the regulations that govern aircraft charter or aircraft for hire, all flights are conducted under instrument flight rules (IFR) as opposed to visual flight rules - even when the weather is perfect.

When flying under visual flight rules (VFR), the pilot uses charts that depict the topographical and geographical features, and there are requirements that the weather be favorable for visual reference. When flying under instrument flight rules (IFR), we use low altitude and high altitude instrument flight

charts that have no topographical information. Instrument flight charts only display information for the various electronic navigation facilities.

Flying by reference to the flight instruments allows a pilot to safely fly an aircraft in poor weather conditions, even with zero visibility. When a person first begins flying lessons toward earning their private pilot certificate, they learn under visual flight rules. After a private pilot has accumulated some additional flight experience, they can then begin a rigorous flight and classroom training curriculum toward earning their instrument rating. Instrument flying is a far more precise type of flying. Again, it isn't that difficult, it is just an additional and voluminous quantity of information to learn.

The flight to the Grand Canyon was conducted under instrument flight rules and therefore, the charts do not depict the topographical outline of the Grand Canyon - just the location of the airport with reference to latitude and longitude, and the various electronic navigation facilities.

Several times during the flight, Stanley commented how beautiful the flight over the canyon would be, and that the airport was directly on the other side. It was a crystal clear CAVU (*Ceilings and Visibility Unrestricted*) day and I began seeing the outline of the canyon from roughly fifty miles south. The airplane was equipped with numerous navigation systems, all of which I had set to the coordinates of the Grand Canyon Airport.

As we got a little closer and the Grand Canyon came into clear view, I was trying to visually judge the distance across the canyon to the north side, where Stanley said the airport was located. I compared my visual judgment to the distance that my navigation equipment was indicating. There was a substantial discrepancy between the distance displayed on my navigation equipment and the distance as I judged it to the opposite side of the canyon.

I double checked all of the equipment and the coordinates for the airport. The equipment was correct and the airplane was heading directly toward the coordinates for the airport. Approaching from the south, it just seemed that the north side of the canyon was much further away than the distance indicating on the navigation equipment.

When we were within 25 miles and at an altitude of 26,000 feet, I could see an airport on the south edge of the canyon. This couldn't possibly be our destination, I thought, because Stanley had been here before, and he said that he flew over the canyon before landing on the opposite side. According to this logic, the airport would have to be located on the north side of the canyon.

I radioed center air traffic control and had the following dialog.

KOCH: Center, Learjet, November Five Three One Charlie Whiskey.

CENTER: One Charlie Whiskey, Center.

KOCH: One Charlie Whiskey has visual contact with an airport, twelve o'clock and twenty-five miles. Is that the Grand Canyon Airport?

CENTER: Affirmative One Charlie Whiskey, that would be the Grand Canyon Airport ...located there on the edge of the Grand Canyon.

KOCH: Okay, is there another Grand Canyon airport on the north side of the canyon?

CENTER: Not unless they built one since my shift yesterday, One Charlie Whiskey.

KOCH: One Charlie Whiskey, we're going to need a couple three-sixty degree turns for the decent.

CENTER: One Charlie Whiskey, descend and maintain one zero thousand, descending turns at pilot's discretion. Contact tower, one, one niner point zero.

KOCH: Leaving two-six-zero for one zero thousand, tower nineteen zero, good day.

Well, I sure felt like a horses' ass, and the air traffic controller managed to diplomatically amplify the feeling. At this point we were less than twenty miles from the airport and still cruising at 450 knots.

As I was reducing the power to idle and deploying the spoilers to create some drag, I calmly turned to Stanley and asked, "Stanley, when you flew to the Grand Canyon Airport, where did you depart from?" Without even comprehending what had happened, he simply answered, "Denver." (Denver is north of the Grand Canyon airport).

I would not have been critical of Stanley except that he did have several thousand hours and the location of the airport - whether it is on the approaching side or the opposite side of the canyon is obviously relative to what direction you are approaching the canyon from. This is pretty basic.

Only a month before, I was scheduled on a trip with Stanley to the Grand Bahamas. Regulations require that life preservers and a life raft be on board for extended over water flights in the unlikely event it becomes necessary to ditch in the Ocean. Stanley should have been aware of these regulations. However, as we were preparing the aircraft and flight plans, I had to take

him by the hand and walk him through the required equipment - even remind him that we needed the navigation charts for the area.

As we were flying over the southern coast of Georgia, I went through my routine safety check list that included such basics as checking engine performance and all systems parameters, navigation systems, etc. As a habit, I also always turned around to make sure the raft was sitting by the door. In the event we would have to ditch, I wanted to hold the inflation strap on the raft, open the door, push the raft out and have it inflate immediately.

I turned and looked back by the door. No raft in sight. I turned to Stanley and asked, "Stanley, did you remember to put the raft on board?" Stanley looked at me and answered, "Yep." With a touch of irritation in my voice, I asked, "Okay, then where is it?" Stanley gave me this look like *no one is home* and said, "I put it in the baggage compartment."

Locating the life raft in the baggage compartment is pretty much like having a mechanical deployment switch for the air bags in your car that you have to physically trip, and the switch and airbags are located in the trunk. If you see an accident coming, you need to get the air bags out of your trunk, install them, and trip the switch to deploy the airbags before impact.

I cannot imagine trying to get a seventy-pound raft out of the baggage compartment of an aircraft while it is sinking in the ocean. Contrary to perfect smooth water landings and the floating airplanes depicted by Hollywood, I suspect that an 18,000 pound Learjet, after completing an Olympic gold medal performance of cartwheels, would float like an 18,000 pound brick. The exception is the masterful landing made in the Hudson River by US Airways Captain, Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger on January 15, 2009.

The last I heard, the company had promoted Stanley to captain on a King Air turbo prop. Like I said before, a monkey can learn to fly. It isn't that the information is that complex - there is just a large volume of information to learn. Seems some can even squeak by without even learning the difference between north and south. There are clearly some aspects of the aviation career that I just don't miss.

Reentry into mainstream society has many sections and each section has many elements. As a whole, it seems bigger than life and extremely complex. Like learning to fly and earning that first certificate, I am going to break it all down to the easy and manageable elements as I experienced them. As you too conquer each challenge, you will be adding yet another brick to a strong foundation upon which you can continue to build.

I refer to “mainstream” society throughout this book with a certain emphasis. I define mainstream society as any honest and legitimate endeavor, occupation or avocation that is not related to criminal activities, or the judicial, rehabilitation, reentry, corrections or prison systems in any way. Mainstream is just what the name implies. Becoming a part of mainstream society means that you are making your living by engaging in any of hundreds of possible income producing endeavors that are a part of mainstream society. It can include any number of different directions from general labor to business, to a technical vocation, to entertainment or becoming a rap star. It is discovering your gifts, honing your skills, finding your passion and pursuing your journey - and doing it honestly.

It is my opinion that a prison experience is among the most powerful character building events in the universe. If I were sent into a war zone and had my choice of going with a dozen guys from the Marines or a dozen guys from a penitentiary, I would take the guys from a penitentiary hands down. I have thought for many years that the military is missing the boat on the human resources available in our prisons. If you’ve experienced prison, then you have an advantage over many people. You have already tasted devastation. Now it’s time to learn recovery.

The challenge of being in prison and getting out is probably among the greatest challenges known in American culture. Yet, the success rate is astounding when compared to other statistics.

People don’t appreciate what they have until they lose it. And, even if a person has worked in the corrections system for their entire career, they cannot fully understand how incomparable working in the system is to actually losing your freedom. As an employee and as an employer, I had learned the same lesson regarding employment. Many of us forget how much we have with our employment ...until we lose it.

People who have never had freedom and immigrate to the United States frequently have a greater appreciation for the opportunities in our country than people who were born and raised in freedom.

People from oppressive foreign nations believe that the streets in the United States are paved in gold. They are! The endless opportunities available to U.S. citizens are second to none. Albeit, some of the collateral damage that accrue to a person convicted of a felony may include certain restrictions and prohibitions from engaging in a few professions, or obtaining certain licensure, but you have not lost your US citizenship. Opportunity abounds!

Many of those prohibited professions and licenses have waiver procedures. For example, I decided to earn my real estate license in the early 1990’s. My convictions were considered as a part of my application. The approval was

not based upon what I had done that resulted in felony convictions, but rather, it was based upon what I had done since. During the preceding ten years, I had built many bricks on that foundation that was bare bones the day I was released on parole. The application was approved. I took the courses, sat for the exam, and received my real estate license.

Focus on what you can do. Don't focus on the few things that you can't do and can't change, or even worse, use those few restrictions as an excuse to throw in the towel and quit. A felony conviction does incorporate a certain amount of collateral damage. However, it does not prevent you from achieving anything you want in life via legitimate agendas.

If you genuinely want to change the direction of your life and your destiny, you need to break the cycle you are in, and to achieve that, you need a *plan* that will take you from point A to point B. You can only achieve new destinations if you first define point A and point B. Most importantly, you need to clearly define exactly where point A is, and how it is that you find yourself at point A. If a person does not take the time and effort to define Point A and how they arrived at Point A, it would be analogous to taking an advanced accounting course without first learning basic arithmetic. You probably will not get as much out of the accounting course as you would if you started with a fundamental understanding of arithmetic.

Yeah, it takes a little effort to genuinely affect any kind of change, and it isn't what I would call easy. Just grit your teeth and bear it. Remember the Grand Canyon trip with *Stanley the Genius*? You need to know where you're starting from before you can plan where you're going.

Being released from prison and making a successful reintegration into mainstream society is a process that requires a very deliberate plan. Making a successful reentry is not an accident or luck.

The core challenges of reentry are economic and cultural. Despite some good educational and vocational programs offered within our nation's prisons, which can act as a catalyst for "rehabilitation," the judicial and corrections systems are really not designed to facilitate community reentry.

Many ex-offender re-entry programs are attempting to facilitate "re-entry" of a person into a culture (*the culture of civilized society*) that is many times foreign to the culture of the person. Because of the barriers to re-entry (real or perceived), the person is branded as foreign to the culture into which they are expected to re-enter. Ex-offenders need to follow a path whereby they become culturally synchronized with mainstream society. The process is more fully explained in this book.

This book helps to provide the guidance to circumnavigate many of the obstacles and barriers, and conquer the challenges necessary toward

achieving a life of legitimacy and normalcy. Only you can limit the level of success that you achieve during the rest of your life.

Although there are many challenges created by the fact that an individual has a felony conviction, it does not by any means limit an individual from achieving substantial success and enjoying life's rich rewards.

This book is non-fiction. The core story is true and presented with absolute fact. It is wrapped in a metaphor of Dragon Slaying for a couple of reasons. First, most memoirs are bits and pieces of interesting information interrupted by hours of boredom. And secondly, many memoirs are written to serve the ego of the author.

My motivation and intent was to write a book that inspired other people to reach for their dreams, goals, aspirations, achieve their very highest potentials, and to know by evidence that their greatest dreams are attainable. This book is particularly geared toward individuals who have been knocked down for any variety of reasons, such as the ex-offender who is facing the challenge of reentering society with what he or she perceives to be a major barrier - one (or several) felony conviction(s).

Although your felony conviction(s) loom large initially, as it did for me over a quarter of a century ago, it begins to pale and fade with the attainment of each minor and major goal. The significance of what you perceive as today's catastrophe eventually becomes dust in the wind.

Although my motivation in writing this book is to help individuals reinvent themselves, and to help ex-offenders break the cycle and make a successful and final reentry, most people in our society are imprisoned in some fashion or other. You may be a prisoner to your job, to an unfulfilling family life, or a prisoner to a life of disparity or mediocrity.

Many people are imprisoned in their own minds. I have experienced many prisons in addition to those operated by the federal and state governments. Irrespective of your personal prison, this book can lead you from prison, or whatever bonds you have, to your dream destinations.

My experiences over the past thirty-plus years are not necessarily presented in chronological order. Rather, they are organized and presented in a manner where my real-life experiences provide support to the concepts I have learned. I hope to share my experiences with the reader so he or she can embrace similar behaviors and habits, which will result in the realization of similar successes.

As I have walked through the forest of life this past quarter century and battled many a Dragon, my battles, my setbacks and my victories are presented to provide the reader with a guide through the forest, and the

armor, insulation, weapons, strategies and techniques necessary to slay a variety of the many diverse Dragons you are certain to encounter - *should you too decide to take the journey.*

Over the past quarter century, post release from state and federal prison, I have mastered the aviation technologies and enjoyed a career as a professional pilot, a certified flight, instrument and ground instructor. I had earned the highest attainable FAA certification, Captain status in the Learjet, Israeli Westwind and Cessna Citation jet aircraft as well as several turboprop aircraft. I served as a Senior Flight Officer, Chief Pilot and as a FAA Accident Prevention Counselor. I had achieved success in management and administrative capacities, built a successful multi-divisional two-time *Inc 500* corporation from scratch, earned the Entrepreneur of the Year finalist and Best in Business awards, earned a real estate license, a teacher's license, developed computer programming skills and a thorough working knowledge of automation, and gave a start in life to countless individuals.

I have attained a good many of my goals, conquered all of the statistical odds, slain many a wicked and ferocious Dragon and attained what I feel has been a respectable place in society and in my professions. During the journey, it was a lot of work, but as I reflect back today, it was really a blast - a lot of fun. I savor every victory, and every challenge.

The place where I have arrived is all the result of a single decision I made some thirty-plus years ago. I stand today a proud man - not because of what I have accumulated from all of my toil, but rather, because of what I have become through the process. The triumphs that I have made are only validated because of the ideals and principles to which I have adhered while striving toward the attainment of my goals. I conduct my business and personal affairs with deliberate and conscious honesty and integrity. This is the singular and ultimate decision one must make if they want similar results.

I am not attempting to reach every ex-offender or every person who has gone off course. I do not have any delusions that I will be able to influence any more than a very small minority of ex-offenders to embrace concepts and life choices that will lead to legitimacy and the rich rewards life truly has to offer. I'm looking for that percentage of individuals who are prepared to invest in themselves, make the sacrifices, endure the pain and conquer the challenges that are inherent to achieving anything worthwhile. *This journey requires very real bravery.*

This book is not for those who would just rather continue through life, directionless like a ship in the dark without a rudder. I deal with reality and this is not a book filled with sugarcoating where we will suck our thumbs together and sulk as to our lot in life. It is those thumb-sucking cowards who

blame their lot in life on everyone and everything except he who stares back in the mirror that will offer the most caustic criticisms of this book - criticisms that I wear like a badge of honor.

While those individuals who continue to criticize that which will lead to a good life and point the finger of blame for their misfortune on everything except their own choices, the few warriors I reach and myself will continue to strive toward achieving our greatest dreams and highest potentials. During the journey, we will be filled with character, wisdom, joy and happiness, and perhaps one day we will look back and notice that our critics are exactly where we left them.

I invest my time in assisting those individuals who are prepared to suck it up, be brave, and make the investment in themselves. I do not rob time from those who are making the genuine effort toward legitimacy to try to convince anyone of the rich rewards that are compensatory for the hard work, focus, sacrifice and dedication that are integral components of a life of freedom and happiness. You can lead the horse to water, but you can't make him drink.

The Dragon Slaying metaphor provides a forum that arouses the imagination of both the reader and the author. It causes the reader to think and apply analogies to his or her own life experiences, and the whole warrior allegory has been an integral component to my success.

The events depicted in this text are accurate. In some instances, the names of characters have been changed or omitted.

I receive a number of letters and telephone calls from people I meet during my speaking engagements at prisons and other forums. It is common that many of these individuals want to do what I am doing - help other ex-offenders reenter mainstream society. I tell them what my mother told me when I was released and I announced that I wanted to help other ex-offenders reenter society. She said that I could help others reenter mainstream society after I have successfully reentered mainstream society and accomplished something in my life. Until then, I had nothing of value to contribute. I probably wasn't happy with her answer but it was accurate.

There are many books that have been published by people released from prison - suggesting that they know the way to success. The problem with many of these individuals is that the only thing they did was commit a crime, serve time in prison, walk through the gates when they were released and then wrote a book. They never conquered the challenges and achieved any goals or significant events in their lives within the mainstream societal structure that all ex-offenders are expected to reenter. There are a few however that were released from prison and achieved a life of normalcy,

became a professional in one trade or another and genuinely reentered mainstream society. *The difference is profound.*

Incidentally, my first job after being released on parole was scrubbing hanger floors, washing small airplanes, pumping gas and cutting grass. It wasn't my ideal glamour job, but taking those initial small steps does lead to great rewards.

Of all of the trophies I have received, none are as gratifying as knowing that I directly participated in molding people who perceived that they had limited opportunity, teaching them to stretch and reach for their very highest potentials, embrace challenges, conquer obstacles, and set and achieve goals, resulting in a future as productive contributors to society and benefactors of life's rich rewards. This is the predominant motivating factor for me to write this book. Nothing could be more satisfying to me than for you to become the best that you can be.

This book is for those individuals who are ready to slay Dragons and reap the rewards. If you are reading this, I congratulate you. You have probably reached an important realization about your life. Yes, you absolutely can achieve any dream that you can dream. Within these pages, my intent is to show you a path, and to offer myself as the concrete evidence that it can be done.

No place in these pages will you read even the most remote suggestion that it is easy. Be patient but persistent, one step at a time and one day at a time. And above all, enjoy the journey.

"The greatest discovery of any generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitude."

- William James

In my opinion, community reentry is way overrated. My writings and speaking engagements seem to touch those people who are ready to embrace a new path. There are a few people who are skeptical. It is certainly understandable that an individual might be cynical if they have experienced a pattern of reentry failure, and have not identified or admitted that they them self are the primary barrier, or at least a major contributor to their own reentry failure.

When we experience a pattern of results from our own behaviors, good or bad, many of us have a psychological mechanism that accepts those results, and our psyche protects our fragile ego by placing the blame for bad results on everyone and everything, *except ourselves.*

There are also some who have internalized that they them self are indeed the major barrier to making a successful reentry, but refuse to embrace the

changes necessary to realize better results. For this group of individuals, it is important to point out that their expressed skepticism is a disguise for their inability to fabricate new excuses and rationalizations *not to try*, thereby justifying why they continue to fail.

Making excuses is the easy way out. Trying and working toward a better future is hard, and it is frequently painful. Most of the excuses to justify not trying are addressed and cancelled in this book. The *excuseist's* need new excuses that sound logical, rational and intelligent. Many of those excuses and rationalizations are addressed in this revision of *Slaying the Dragon*. Nevertheless, those individuals who have identified that they are the cause for their own demise, but choose to continue making excuses are not the demographic I hope to reach.

Change is difficult, especially after an individual is released from prison. All of the temptations and the old friends are readily available. It is harder to get out than it is to be in, but not because of the "*barriers*" to reentry. I think that the reentry "*barriers*" are overrated, and largely propaganda that is perpetuated by recidivists.

It is always someone else's fault when someone recidivates. The police were targeting them, their parole officer had it out for them, the judge had a burr, etc. This group of recidivists refuses to accept personal accountability, and they justify themselves to everyone else by placing blame on everyone except he who stares back in the mirror.

The reentry propaganda is now exacerbated by a growing reentry "*industry*." The industry is about money, and it is to its advantage to propagate the belief that reentry cannot be achieved without assistance from one of the many organization's participating in the industry - assistance that they provide and are paid for providing.

How can I say this diplomatically? "It's a load of crap." If a person wants to become a card-carrying member of mainstream society, it is simply a choice. The person who has made that choice to successfully reenter mainstream society will do it with or without any assistance. I didn't say that it is an easy cake-walk. It's hard. Life is hard. Conversely, if a person has not made the conscious choice, there is no amount of assistance that will cause them to successfully reenter mainstream society.

Many people who are released from prison are fundamentally brain washed to believe that becoming a card-carrying member of mainstream society is an almost impossible task. I remember hearing all of that rhetoric myself when I was in prison. That is utter propaganda, and the propaganda is frequently proliferated by those who have been in, got out, and then came back - the recidivists.

I have met people who seem to think that they can continue to play games on the side while functionally faking reentry. Reentering mainstream society is not something that you can be lukewarm about. Either decide to reenter mainstream, or decide not to reenter. Just make your choice and go with it. But also realize that the benefits or consequences of your choice are your choice.

If you “*sort-of-try*” to reenter, you’re probably not going to be very successful. Conversely, if you genuinely make the commitment, your likelihood of success is just about guaranteed. I am absolute proof that if a person makes the genuine commitment to legitimacy, they can have a healthy life of normalcy, and the rewards will be representative and directly proportional to the effort they put forth.

Many of the people who fail at reentry are unsuccessful because of their own impatience. They want instant gratification and are unwilling to do the work to get the prize. No matter what you want out of life, or who you want to become, there is work, and that holds true whether you are starting on even ground or from the bottom of the barrel. Additionally, as you embark upon climbing your mountain, each new step generally has prerequisites. Before I could become an Airline Transport Pilot, I first had the prerequisites of becoming a private pilot and a commercial pilot with an instrument rating. And frankly, before I was able to get through the basics of private pilot theory, I had to take a few fundamental arithmetic courses.

If you don’t have your high school diploma or a GED certificate, you might want to invest the time to form the requisite foundation upon which you can build. No matter where you are in life, you must always begin from where you left off.

Why is education so vitally important? The planet is populated by an almost endless variety of animals. Virtually all of these animals have a few basic instincts for survival. Animals will search or hunt for food, many will build shelters, they will defend themselves from predators, many instinctively dominate, and they will reproduce. These are pretty reptilian level instincts.

Most of these animals will only kill other animals for food or to protect their territory and domain. I cannot think of any that hunt or kill for sport or entertainment. Fundamentally, most animals are peaceful and bother no one if not provoked. They have but a few instinctive desires in life - eat, sleep and make little animals. Beyond that, they pretty much stick to themselves.

One animal however is starkly different - the human animal. This is an animal that has many of the same fundamental instincts as does its cousins. It will instinctively search for, or hunt for food, it will seek or build shelters and it will reproduce.

A major difference with the human animal verses other animals are that the human animal has desires that have evolved well beyond the basics of food, shelter and reproduction. I have never heard of a tiger or bear that wants a BMW, a Mercedes, an Escalade, the latest clothing fashions, jewelry, etc. Yet, the human animal has developed these extraordinary desires, and given no other obvious means or tools, it will use its reptilian level instincts to acquire them.

During its evolution, the human animal has developed a societal structure to maintain civil order. We call this structure “Civilized Society,” which is indeed a structure that is manufactured by the human animal. In some ways, this structure is in opposition to nature, and the nature of the core human animal.

This societal structure has many benefits and comforts that provide the human animal with an easier life. It has also developed mechanisms and sets of tools that a human animal can use to acquire all of the available comforts and benefits.

The greatest of all of the tools is education. With education, a member of the human animal kingdom learns how they can acquire the BMW, Mercedes, Escalade, and any of the other comforts and conveniences that our society has to offer. Without the tools intrinsic with education, a person is left with only their reptilian level instincts to fulfill their desires.

Actively participating within the guidelines of the civilized societal structure that man has manufactured clearly inures to the benefit of both that structure, and to each individual participant.

When a member of this human animal kingdom does not acquire the tools (education), they still develop the desires for all of the comforts and conveniences that the societal structure has to offer. Without the civilized tools and mechanisms to acquire these conveniences and benefits, the human animal resorts to its reptilian level instincts of hunting, killing and acquisition through nefarious methods such as stealing.

As I mentioned, man manufactured this societal structure. In some cases, the structure may be in opposition to the essence of our nature and our reptilian level instincts. And, nature will occasionally break through.

When we see corporate or political corruption, it is simply the nature of man attempting to pierce this manufactured structure, but breaking through by employing sophisticated methods. Even the highest levels of education cannot force a person to embrace fundamental honesty, morality and ethics. We human animals seem to have an instinctive need to dominate others of our species. The powerful desire for more money, more cars, more power, a bigger cave, etc. is so pervasive, it almost seems to emanate from instinct.

Because the human animal develops wants and desires that are well beyond the fundamental instincts for survival, the uneducated human animal is by far the most dangerous animal on the planet. The uneducated human animal wants the BMW. However, without the tools necessary to acquire it within the civilized societal structure, it will nevertheless still acquire it using reptilian level methods - killing, stealing or some other dissolute method.

A large percentage of crime today is the direct result of a failed education system. Many criminologists believe that a person who is in prison should be released when they have demonstrated and evidenced their rehabilitation, the ability to operate within the guidelines of our civilized structure, and they have developed a plan to do so. Further incarceration beyond that pinnacle will only debilitate the individual, who will be released later, but will be less prepared to reintegrate into mainstream society.

Conversely, some criminologists believe that there is no reason to release an individual from prison until they can demonstrate the ability to function within the structure. If a person cannot demonstrate that they have the tools to operate within civilized society, and they know how to use those tools, then releasing them is asking for more crime. Releasing people who have no tools is a disservice to every member of civilized society, and it is also a disservice to the individual.

Like crime in general, prisoner recidivism is largely a symptom of our failed education system. Some recent statistics indicate that prisoner recidivism has reached seventy percent. It is not just a problem anymore - it is a chronic epidemic condition of our nation.

I do not attempt to address the demographic of persons who have a genuine medical or clinical diagnosis, whether physical or mental, that prevents them from pursuing a legitimate and healthy life.

I do not offer criticism of either the corrections system or of the constituency of convicted persons and their families. Rather, I simply offer observations and suggestions that could effect positive change that would produce quantifiable results. Identifying problems without conterminously offering possible solutions amounts to little more than bellyaching.

If a school had a failure rate of seventy percent, would we be blaming the students, or would we be examining the curriculum and the instructors? My observations of human nature suggest that clearly, the one would blame the other. Perhaps we would consider examining both the students, and the curriculum and instructors.

In the scenario of a school that is producing a seventy percent failure rate, what possible solutions will develop if the students only blame the curriculum and instructors, and the instructor's only place blame on the

students? It would only result in infinite finger pointing and arguing that can never result in the much-needed outcome - solutions.

We do not need an argument. We need to have a debate and a productive discussion. There is a need for a conversation. The foundation of this productive conversation must be accountability.

People are quick to complain and voice their dismay about problems. A few realize that identifying problems without suggesting solutions accomplishes little more than creating noise.

As the analogy of a school with a 70% failure rate relates to the corrections system and its students (prisoners), I would consider that there is culpability on both sides. The system clearly needs to be rehabilitated. However, if people are unwilling to embrace rehabilitation, even a perfect system will make little difference.

The concept of rehabilitation suggests that an individual can make a mistake, pay their debt and regain a productive direction. Rehabilitation is an attitude, a desire and a series of decisions that are distinct of the system or any programs.

Rehabilitation requires deliberate and conscious choices to change habits and behaviors. It requires that the individual do those things that one might not necessarily want or like, but must do in order to reach fulfillments and positive conclusions. The person with adequate desire to change will triumph irrespective of any available programs.

The concept of rehabilitation, whereby an individual can experience a setback and subsequently regain a productive direction is solely dependent upon the individual's attitude and a definitive decision to change.

Irrespective of any available rehabilitation programs, the concept of rehabilitation only evolves to a functional agenda based upon an individual's commitment to methodically embrace, internalize and follow a disciplined strategy with a clear path to definitive objectives. Rehabilitation exists only within the individual, and its genesis is the desire.

There are many rehabilitation programs within the nation's correctional institutions that provide education and vocational training, counseling and prerelease preparation. The effectiveness of those programs cannot be exclusively measured by the excellence of the curriculum. If the student does not make a conscious decision to embrace the concept of rehabilitation toward pursuing a life of legitimacy, then educating that person to the level of a doctorate degree through a curriculum designed by the finest Ivy League college would be an exercise in futility. The fundamental prerequisite of desire must be present.

I observe a great number of people who seem to think that the corrections system owes them something. The corrections system has completed its obligation when the term of incarceration is completed.

If a person is sentenced to prison, the corrections system is obligated to provide a service to civilized society - not to the individual serving the time. That service is maintaining in quarantine, persons who have demonstrated an inability to interact within our societal structure for whatever term the court has adjudicated. The obligations and accountability of the corrections system is fundamentally to the community - not to the person incarcerated.

You really need to get your mind wrapped around this fundamental fact, internalize it, and take responsibility for yourself. Anything you are receiving from the correctional system such as counseling, education, etc. is a gift that can help you move forward. Whether you express any appreciation is up to you, but accept the gift for what it is, and take advantage of the opportunity you have.

When a person is released from prison, it is their obligation to determine the path that they choose for the rest of their life. If they have done nothing during their term of incarceration to plan for their release and reintegration into mainstream society, then the non-decision and resultant lack of planning will likely form the basis for the path that their unguided life will follow.

Many crimes, whether committed by a first offender or by a recidivist are rooted in a reactive desire to achieve instant gratification pursuant to the resolution of a problem. Reactive measures generally only attempt to treat a symptom, but not the problem that actually causes the symptom.

Proactive, not reactive action is required to treat the underlying problem. For example, if a person is released from prison and has not spent at least their last year of incarceration deliberately planning for their community reentry, it is likely that they will face a great deal of difficulty dealing with many of the problems they had before they entered prison - what I call life baggage. Irrespective of length of sentence, pre-release must begin the day a person arrives in prison - not the month or year of their anticipated release.

Many problems revolve around an ex-offender's economic situation. Many people are released today with the same life baggage they carried into prison xx years prior, i.e. child support and consumer credit delinquencies, tax compliance issues, civil litigation and judgments, driver's license suspensions or expirations, etc. If a person's life baggage is not deliberately reorganized with specific solutions to resolve each individual issue, these individuals are instantly overwhelmed upon release. I provide some guidance within this book to resolve your life baggage before you are released, or at least have a very definitive plan to get it resolved expeditiously upon your release.

The ex-offender reentering the community needs income. However, if they have open consumer credit, judgments and liens, Bureau of Motor Vehicles fines, or child support delinquencies, despite working hard and securing gainful employment, their income can be garnisheed. In such circumstances, an individual is left with inadequate income to provide for their own subsistence. When the ex-offender's need is immediate, the reaction might be to treat the symptom with an instant gratification action - a criminal act. Conversely, if proper planning took place well in advance of release, the person's life baggage would be identified and each issue would have a planned and approved solution.

The instant gratification impulse should be seen as a danger signal. Only symptoms are treated with instant gratification actions, but the problems that are the root cause of the symptoms are rarely eradicated.

Our desire for instant gratification is an interesting phenomenon. The American culture has been influenced substantially by corporate America to accepting instant gratification as a lifestyle, almost an entitlement, and it has certainly become an expectation. Visa, MasterCard, technological advances, the Internet, microwave ovens, instant mashed potatoes, fast food, and on and on. These all provide instant gratification.

As a society, we have become very accustomed to expecting everything instantly. You can go to a car dealership, give them your Social Security number and within an hour, drive out in a new car. Over the past several years, if you could steam a mirror, you could get a mortgage on a six-figure house. Clearly, some of this loose credit has contributed to the economic challenges facing the nation during 2008 - 2009. But, my point is, our entire culture has become impatient, and generally unwilling to invest time and hard work before getting the prize. Albeit, we enjoy many conveniences from the technologies and services that offer instant gratification. However, we have become a very impatient society as well, and in many respects, this is detrimental to many people.

As people (*you and me*) who have served time and have the conviction label to conquer, the instant gratification syndrome can create a formidable internal challenge. We are subject to, and influenced by, the social conditioning that is inherent to our membership in the aforementioned impatient society. We have come to expect everything instantly, and we need to recognize that this can be a big influence on how we choose our paths toward achieving our goals and objectives.

Moreover, we also need to overcome our own habits and experiences. If a person has had a life of crime, then substantially everything they have accumulated has been by employing criminal or otherwise nefarious methods. Here is where you need to be brutally honest with yourself. Look at

everything you have accumulated in your life as a whole. What percentage of that whole was accumulated via honest hard work - work that would be considered acceptable within the guidelines of mainstream society? If that percentage is less than 100%, then simply recognize that you have developed a habit and methodology for achieving objectives, or accumulating the things that you want via mechanisms that serve the instant gratification syndrome.

If you are serving the instant gratification syndrome, then you are not in control of your path or your destiny. Indeed, the instant gratification syndrome is controlling you. If you genuinely want a life of legitimacy, then this is a habit that we will need to modify, which I address in more detail in this book. For now, just internalize the realization that a habit does exist that is controlling what you do and how you do it, and that you are serving the habit as opposed to having a habit that serves you. As long as a person continues to serve their desire for instant gratification, they will likely continue to experience havoc in their life.

With respect to making a successful reentry into mainstream society, success is clearly enhanced for the person who has made the conscious choice to embrace legitimacy toward a life of normalcy, and has organized their life, and life baggage, and made a deliberate plan to follow upon release. The person who is just going to walk out the gate and *wing-it* is likely to chase after the instant gratifications to resolve the symptoms that are chasing after them.

If you are released from prison, the system owes you nothing. An incarceration event is not a valid reason to expect entitlements. You have simply been given a new opportunity to change your life path. The direction of that path and its resultant destinations are your choice.

If you work in the corrections, rehabilitation, reentry or judicial systems, you may have been feeling a certain sanctimonious righteousness from the preceding oratory, perhaps even hoping that ex-offenders are reading this and immediately accepting their share of responsibility and accountability.

The last time I checked statistics, the national recidivism rate was almost seventy percent. That figure is pretty much carved in granite. The report card is in and there has been a systemic systems failure, if the system is expected to be an effective influence in reducing recidivism. If your system is lower than the national average, wonderful. If it isn't below ten percent, then it is still a failed system as it pertains to rehabilitation and the reduction of recidivism. The good news is, the system is improving. Today's statistics are the result of failed programs for decade's prior.

There is enough blame to go around however. The corrections system is frequently unjustly blamed for the recidivism statistics.

I frequently read statistics that report the number of people in U.S. prisons. Recent Department of Justice statistics report that the population of prisoners in federal and state prisons and local jails is a little over 2.3 million. Even more frequently, I read how the United States has the largest prison population, and the greatest number of persons incarcerated per capita, than any other civilized nation. In-fact, the U.S. prison population exceeds the combined prison populations of several other nations.

Blame for the U.S. prison population seems to include the failed war on drugs, elected judges running on a “tough on crime” platform that forces them to give out harsher sentences, mandatory sentencing guidelines, recidivism resulting from the corrections systems’ failure to prepare people for release, the prison industrial complex, allegations of racism because of the disproportionate racial composition of incarcerated persons, and other similar influences.

The statistics are probably fairly accurate. Compiling statistics is valuable for determining trends and whether the solutions implemented to resolve a problem are achieving their desired objectives. However, recording or citing statistics does nothing to identify the core cause of the problem, or for discovering solutions that directly resolve the problem. Given the fact that the prison population continues to increase disproportionately in relation to the population of the nation, we might conclude that the core problem is still elusive, and despite the efforts and capital being spent on our corrections system, the numbers suggest that we are funding symptoms as opposed to resolving core problems.

Many people might conclude that the corrections system is to blame, particularly for the high rate of recidivism. I argue that we are blaming the messenger, since it is the Justice Department and the corrections system that are reporting the statistics. Perhaps more importantly, we tend to place blame on whoever had last possession in the chain of custody.

Some career professionals working within the DOJ and corrections system suggest that the blame lies with our failed education system. If our education system is such a failure, how do we explain the tens-of-thousands of kids each year who graduate from public schools and are accepted in colleges and universities that have substantially high entrance standards? Albeit there is always room for improvement, calling our public education system a failure is a red herring with regard to this discussion.

It is impossible to solve a problem by treating symptoms. Yet, when a problem arises, it is the symptoms - not the problem - that jumps out and slaps us in the face.

I would propose that the core problem that continues to exacerbate our expanding prison population is not a failed correction or education system, or mandatory sentencing guidelines, or the war on drugs or racism. The core problem is constitutional and the misinterpretation or adjudication of the Constitution and Bill of Rights by our legislature and judiciary, in many respects yielding to the pressure of the liberal left.

As a card-carrying member of the ACLU, I subscribe to many of the fundamentals of the liberal left. However, I have also concluded that the very people who shout the loudest about our expanding prison population may have contributed to its cause.

During a trip a few years ago to New York City, I visited the observation deck of the Empire State Building. I found it interesting that there are fences surrounding the observation area with the top two feet of the fence leaning inward. My suspicions were confirmed by the individual working at the facility- the barrier is to prevent people from jumping off of the building - anti-suicide fencing. I had noticed similar fencing at observation areas in the Grand Canyon and various other scenic areas around the country. Evidently, our government has determined that making suicide unlawful is not enough - it has erected mechanisms to help prevent violations of that law.

Over the past several of decades, there has been public debate regarding a person's right to end their life, most notably with regard to doctor-assisted suicide for which Dr. Jack Kevorkian had sacrificed himself as the ambassador for the crusade.

Do you have the constitutional right to jump off a cliff and end your life? Again, the question is clearly a debate that continues - with both sides providing zealous and coherent arguments. What is clear, and there is likely consensus, is that you do not have the constitutional right to jump off the Empire State Building into a crowded street below. Irrespective of your arguable right to end your life, you clearly do not have the right to endanger other people in the exercise of your rights - hence the reason for the laws banning suicide, and the fences.

Our laws and regulations, and the mechanisms invoked or erected to enforce various laws theoretically may infringe upon an individual's rights, but rather are weighed against the potential violation of the rights of others.

There is one more component to briefly discuss before summarizing my conclusions from this brief discussion.

All mammals share the reptilian-level instincts to acquire the fundamental things they need for survival, which include food, shelter, and security, and reproduction of the species. Most mammals are born with the tools they require to hunt for food, build their shelters, and provide for their security.

They practice using their tools and instincts during adolescence while still under the umbrella of a teaching parent. For example, if we look at lions, tigers and bears, their fundamental tools are claws and teeth, along with a certain level of intellect.

If we examine the human mammal, we are also endowed with instincts that are similar to our mammal cousins, and the same fundamental needs for food, shelter, security and reproduction.

Many mammals, including humans, are instinctively social, and form communities and societal structures within which there are rules and hierarchies. We humans have evolved a societal structure that we commonly refer to as civilized society. All societal groups work to serve their respective needs, utilizing the tools that they have available.

The needs of lions, tigers and bears are satisfied with the tools they have - teeth and claws. It would be an aberration for any of them to develop extraordinary needs or desires that would require tools beyond that which they have, or the skills that they acquire with experience.

However, we humans seem to develop additional needs that extend far beyond our fundamental survival requirements. We live in a society that promotes instant gratification, and in a capitalistic culture where it is fundamental to create a need that previously did not exist. Our needs have evolved to include the need for a new iPhone or a new Cadillac Escalade.

Corresponding to the teeth and claws that are the primitive tools of our mammal cousins are guns and knives, which by analogy are equally primitive when compared to other tools available to achieve substantially the same objectives.

Among our many gifts as humans is our almost limitless ability to learn. We have the unique ability to add tools to our tool chest through the process of education and experience. Education is what separates us from our Neanderthal ancestors and from all of our mammal cousins.

Education provides us with the many tools necessary to navigate our societal structure and achieve the fulfillment of the innumerable extraordinary needs and wants we have developed as a species and as a culture.

Without the additional tools that are the by-product of education, we still have the desires for the iPhone, the Cadillac and a plethora of other products. However, without the tools that we acquire through education, we are left with a struggle to fulfill these needs by utilizing the only tools we have - teeth and claws - guns and knives, or other nefarious mechanisms.

Education is available from a variety of sources. We can refer to the public and private education system in the United States as a formal education. However, an individual can also acquire an education on the streets and in prison. In either scenario, the fundamental purpose of education is to increase an individual's collection of tools - the tools that they utilize for acquiring their needs and fulfilling their desires.

I believe that it is reasonable to conclude that a formal education is more beneficial to the welfare of the individual and to society as a whole. Our society and world economy have become extraordinarily competitive environments. Navigating our civilized society using socially acceptable methods requires a bare minimum of a high school education. Further, some people argue that because our culture has become so technically advanced, it might be time to consider increasing a minimum high school education from 12 to 14 years.

All states have compulsory-attendance laws. However, the truancy departments charged with enforcement of these laws are frequently understaffed and over-worked. Students cannot drop out of school until they turn 16 in most states and 18 in a few. A few states have imposed penalties that include driver's license revocation for minors who drop out, and they also can impose sanctions on the families of those students such as reduced welfare benefits. Despite these penalties, these consequences have had a negligible effect on dropout rates. The laws have been ineffective, and some civil liberty advocates suggest that forcing an individual to complete high school is an infringement on their civil rights.

Where individuals do not have the mental capacity to make informed decisions and sound judgments for themselves, a guardian must make these decisions for them. Persons incapable of exercising sound judgment would obviously include individuals who suffer a mental handicap. Where a guardian is unavailable or is incapable of rendering assistance, the government steps in. As a society, we do not allow people to jump off a cliff, and the very desire to do so suggests a mental impairment.

The cliché, "if I only knew then what I know now," clarifies why our culture should not allow anyone the option of dropping out of high school. From the standpoint of survival within our societal structure, allowing an individual to drop out of high school is not much different than allowing them to jump off a cliff. Giving an individual the option to simply decline a basic education functionally deprives them of the tools that are prerequisite to navigating our expanding and complex economy as necessary to satisfy their basic needs, or to provide any of the other comforts available within our culture.

An individual of sixteen years does not have the capacity or judgment to make a decision that will have catastrophic consequences. At that age, a

person simply does not know what he or she does not know. Their civil liberties are not being infringed because society decides that they will not wallow through life suffering the consequences of illiteracy.

For the sake of debate, I will concede that perhaps it is a violation of an individual's rights to force him or her to complete a high school education. Such individuals will still have the basic needs for survival, and they will still develop the desires for many of the comforts available within our culture. They will still want the iPhone and Cadillac Escalade, and they will utilize the only tools they have to acquire it - teeth & claws / guns & knives. Under this scenario, the individual is not jumping off of the cliff at the Grand Canyon to an empty valley, but rather they are jumping off of the Empire State Building into a rush-hour crowd of people. Many of the people below are going to suffer the consequences of an individual's poor judgment - a person whom they had never even met.

The plethora of individuals whose rights are infringed because a person elects to drop out of high school is substantial. Everyone else pays for the social programs to support these individuals. In an increasing number of instances, we all pay for their incarceration in a prison system that places severe economic strains on many state budgets, not to mention the incalculable cost to victims.

Depending upon where an individual attends high school, the dropout rate ranges from 21% - 50% according to statistics released by the state Departments of Education.

Sentencing laws, record numbers of drug offenders and high crime rates have been contributing factors to the expanding prison population in the United States, which play a role regarding the United States having the largest prison population in the World. These factors are only symptoms of an underlying systemic problem that, if it continues unresolved, will eventually cause a pivotal shift in our entire culture.

Drugs are sold and consumed predominantly by individuals who have no other tools to exploit to acquire their needs and fulfill their desires. Consumers of drugs lack the tools to acquire the money necessary to maintain their habit, which accounts for a great deal of increasing crime rates.

Irrespective of drug-related crimes, with dropout rates hitting 50% in some areas, simple arithmetic projects that within a generation or two, our nation will have jumped off of a cliff.

Neither our corrections nor our education systems are to blame for our nation's robust prison population. The corrections system is doing the best it can with what it has to work with - 2.3 million people, of whom a substantial

majority are functionally illiterate when measured against the literacy standards necessary to operate within the guidelines of our civilized society.

A high school education must be as mandatory as any of our most important and enforced laws. Completion of a high school education must be demonstrated through a series of tests, not just because an individual has demonstrated the endurance to make it to the 12th grade.

The United States is becoming an increasingly illiterate culture when compared to just a couple of generations ago. And, with high school dropout rates hitting 50%, it is only going to get worse.

Arguably, responsibility lies with parents. However, when illiteracy is second, third and fourth generation, it is unreasonable to entrust the parents with the responsibility of ensuring their child's education.

If not the parents, then who is going to accept responsibility to ensure that the current and subsequent generations of the nation's children receive adequate education and tools to navigate a lifestyle in civilized society - orphanages or more social services? The cost of an uneducated individual to society is far greater than any of the alternative options to ensure that all children become educated.

The solutions to the prison population, which will only continue to grow, can only come to fruition through public debate, followed by conclusions and difficult decisions in our legislature and judiciary.

I've toured a number of prisons since the time I sold Fiber Network Solutions. As I was touring the Richland Correctional Facility located in Mansfield, Ohio, I was thoroughly impressed with the availability of educational and vocational programming. I asked what percentage of the population was participating in the programming, fully expecting the answer to be at or near 100%. I was astounded to learn that it was less than 25%. If a person isn't willing to help them self, how can we place blame on the corrections system?

So, here we are, gone full circle, and we are back looking at the offender, and it is the offender him or herself that is the only real factor that determines whether or not he or she makes a successful reentry into mainstream society.

Recidivism is not the problem. Recidivism is a symptom. The problems that contribute to crime and recidivism are much deeper. Education and family structure have deteriorated substantially during my generation, and I would argue that these issues are at the very core.

I have noted that the media has created certain hysteria by sensationalizing the most heinous crimes, and turning them into what almost amounts to a

reality TV series for the sole purpose of pumping up their Nielsen ratings. This kind of media sensationalism creates a public perception that all offenders are of the same fabric.

The prison and correction systems need to stop tripping over themselves to buy the latest and greatest repackaged dysfunctional symptom-treating programs that contributed to the seventy percent recidivism rate, and start having a conversation that clearly identifies the problems.

The system and legislators need to stop the panic and hysteria for want of instant gratification. If they don't, the recidivism rate will continue to escalate and gain additional momentum. We need to examine the core contributors, and we need to be willing to accept the fact that resolving these systemic problems will probably take at least a generation.

Rehabilitation and punishment are diametrically opposing concepts that cannot effectively coexist. You cannot affect rehabilitation by the same hand that punishes. The recipient is simply not going to embrace the hand that punishes them as the hand that is helping them. Furthermore, you cannot rehabilitate someone and then continue to punish him or her without that continued punishment resulting in debilitation. Put simply, people do not operate at their optimum level when you're peeing on them.

Having said that, if you are currently incarcerated, you really need to separate and compartmentalize the functions of the facility you are in, and the staff working there. The prison is required to quarantine you from society by the court. That is the punishment part, and it carries a certain amount of pain for you. However, as a totally separate function, the facility and staff have programs that are designed to genuinely help you. You need to separate these responsibilities that they have, endure the pain, but compartmentalize and take advantage of the help that is available. As strange as it may seem, prison can be embraced as an opportunity.

During the Iraq war, the media was flooded with the expert opinions regarding the enhanced interrogation techniques used at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay, which arguably amounted to torture. The consensus of the experts is that relationship building is the only effective option for obtaining credible and actionable results. I have no delusions regarding offenders who are, never have been, and never will be reachable. My discussion here is limited to those offenders who have the capacity and the desire, and are prepared to make the commitments necessary to achieve positive objectives.

The concept of restorative justice has proven successful. However, once again, it clearly succeeds only if the individual has the prerequisite desire.

If a governmental department or agency has the responsibility for incarcerating people, the essence of its responsibility is to protect the public.

If that department is attempting to modify behavior (corrections) by way of punishment, that agenda is probably going to continue to produce results similar to what we have seen, which has resulted in a roughly seventy-percent national recidivism rate. With respect to protecting the public, many of these governmental agencies have an outstanding record, but only for as long as it has custody of the individual. If the individual is not prepared to reenter mainstream society as a contributing and productive member upon release, then this government agency has failed in the long term, as the public is again at risk once the unprepared individual is released back to the community. This is why I previously emphasized in my statistical oratory that the record for successful rehabilitation has failed, if rehabilitation is the intended objective.

As a civilized society, we simply cannot have people running our streets who refuse to comply with the rules that form the basis of a civilized nation. The alternative is chaos.

I'm not sure where the concept originated that charges the prisons with the responsibility to rehabilitate. However, the rehabilitation business has become an industry that absorbs a substantial percentage of the correction departments' budget. As a nation, we are spending well into the tens of billions for rehabilitation and reentry, and despite its failing record, we continue to spend.

There is all variety of non-profit social and community organizations that serve the demographic of ex-offenders. After President Bush announced his faith based initiatives, the number of organizations increased dramatically. As the buzz-word of "reentry" gained popularity, even more people formed non-profit organizations.

Help is clearly available if you genuinely want to become a productive member of mainstream society. There are social organizations for literally every ailment a person might have. You may need to visit dozens of organizations, as I did, in order to find the specific help that you need. But, it is definitely available.

The problems that contribute to prisoner recidivism will only be solved as we continue to coordinate the efforts of government, our education system, social organizations and the ex-offender constituency with a clear plan and path to quantifiable results. For certain, there is no instant gratification for such a systemic disaster as the recidivism dilemma. The solution is one that requires a generation-long dedication.

The fundamental theme that is paramount to making a successful reentry is; Inspiring and empowering the people who are a part of the problem to become their own solution.

You, and only you, can facilitate your successful community reentry. Yes, there is help available for the asking. However, only you can create your new most recent significant event.

Unless you have a dream job lined up, you can begin creating your new most recent significant event by ***accepting the job that no one else wants***. That will give you a start at rebuilding a resume and collection of work references. You can climb from there.

During a visit I had at London Correctional, I spent the better part of the day with a group of offenders who were slated for release within the next six months. We conducted mock interviews.

During each interview, I always threw out test questions to determine a person's flexibility. I told several individuals that the only position we have available right now is janitorial - keeping the facilities and bathrooms clean.

After the interview, these individuals told the class instructor that they were insulted and thought my questions and offer of janitorial work was disrespectful.

Flexibility test questions are very common during interviews. Employers do not want to hire someone into a position who is going to give them grief if asked to do something that deviates from the strict construction of their job description. These same individuals that complained to the instructor would not accept a position unless it was upper management, because while in prison they had earned a college degree. That's a great accomplishment, but they're competing with roughly 40,000 other college grads that I can pluck right out of my back yard.

I think many ex-offenders subconsciously set the expectations bar so high that they know there is no employer who is going to offer them the vice president position. Then, when they are turned down, they are justified in their failure, and they can blame it all on everyone and everything except he who stares back in the mirror.

As an employer, I recognize an ex-offender's credentials much the same as a recent graduate. I judge them on the basis of their most recent significant event - going to school or going to prison, and on their attitude. The only thing that is going to get either of them the break they need is their attitude. Their attitude can get them in the door. Once they're in, what they do with it is up to them. Whether a person was recently released from prison or recently graduated from college, they have a mountain in front of them. It's up to the individual to decide whether or not they have the courage to make the climb.

The concept that a felony conviction, or three of them in my case, will prevent a person from achieving a healthy life of normalcy is utter propaganda that is perpetuated by those who have failed to embrace necessary change and endure the pain that is an integral component of change.

For offenders who would contact me for employment, or any other assistance, I should mention that I am not a prisoner advocate. Until a person decides to change their path, there is nothing that I, or anyone else, can do for them except stay on my path and observe.

I am a card-carrying member of mainstream society. I have no positions or sympathy for practicing criminals, or those who think they can be partially legitimate, but still play the game by taking an occasional opportunity where they can realize a quick gain via illegitimacy.

When a person decides that they genuinely want to become a member of my world, I have nothing but time for them. But, there is zero chance that I am going to become a member of theirs, and I can spot the one's who are giving lip service long before I make any significant investment of my time. Be willing to accept the job that no one else wants! ...*I did.*



Chapter 4

THE CRIME

It seems that we felons just love to brag about our crimes. Everyone's crime is by far among the most spectacular, astronomically clever, witty, gutsy and worthy of praise in some fashion or other. Felons have written entire volumes about their crime. It dominates conversation within jails and prisons and serves as admission to membership within that fraternity.

Among the primary reasons that felon's brag about their crime is that it represents the most significant event in their life. It is based upon our need for recognition, acceptance and respect among our peers. We romanticize our crimes in an effort to fulfill our need to belong and be a part of a group.

When talking with individuals of similar circumstance whose achievements in life are limited to trying to attain stature, financial success or just survival via an agenda of cutting corners or selfishly attempting to gain by the demise of others, it is easy to gain acceptance and respect in this criminal fraternity - however false and shallow that acceptance and respect truly is. Of course this group will give you the perception of acceptance and respect. In reality, they are only attempting to support the societal structure that gives acceptance and respect to themselves. They have certainly not achieved anything in life that would command the respect of the masses of mainstream society.

Is this really the group from whom you want respect - the societal structure that you want to identify with - the congregation in which you want to maintain membership? It is certainly your choice.

Your rewards in life will be representative of the group with whom you identify. This is not a criticism of any particular societal structure - it is simply an observation. All organized societies have rules, challenges and benefits. Personally, I am able to draw the contrast between criminal activities and prison life, and life within the guidelines of our civilized society in the United States.

My personal opinion is that the challenges in civilized society are far greater. However, the rewards far exceed anything that any prison or criminal society could ever hope to offer. The easy way leads to a really harsh life. The hard way leads to a really comfortable and sustainable life.

Give this some thought when you are considering who you will choose to associate with when you are released from prison, and with what groups you will be a participant. A cherry tree will not survive in a patch of thickets. The thickets will suck the life out of the cherry tree, and the result is obviously, no cherries.

If you are enthusiastic about making a successful reentry, which you should be now that you have the indisputable evidence that your success is attainable, then don't plant yourself in a patch of thickets that will suck the enthusiasm out of you. The cliché, 'Life is a bowl of cherries' is true, but you're the cherry tree. The cherries can only come from you.

Examine your friends and those groups you associate with. Decide realistically if they are cherry trees or thickets. Are they going to support your new direction, or are they going to effectively sabotage it? Examine what your loyalties are to your friends or groups, and more importantly, why you have these allegiances. Associate yourself with those people who are going to encourage you to reach your highest potentials and who will fertilize your cherry tree. Don't ever hesitate to make new friends...

It astonishes me the loyalty that many people have to their alma mater. People donate money to their college or university for life. Why? Why do so many people feel such an allegiance to these institutions? There are many I'm sure, but one major reason is that those college years represent the first, and in some cases, the most significant event in many people's lives. It was a time in their life that their wits were exercised, and where they interacted with other young, thinking spontaneous minds. They were the most stimulating years of their life. Without question, anyone who completes any degree program has earned bragging rights. They certainly slay many a Dragon during that journey.

What is your most significant event? What would you like it to be? I have had a better life by consciously and deliberately pioneering events that have been far more significant than the event of my crime, my convictions or my prison experience. Those new "most significant events" also brought many great benefits and rewards in my life.

A goal of this book is to assist you in making achievements that mark events in your life that are far more significant than the events of your past - to redefine your life's most significant event.

If you want a new life that is full of rewards, start today by setting goals that will result in events and achievements that have recognizable and quantifiable significance and bask in the subsequent glory and bragging rights that come contemporaneously with those achievements. You will soon

realize that what occurred in the past fades, and becomes diluted and pales in comparison.

With a conscious and deliberate effort and plan, your most recent significant event will change, and it will continue to evolve and change as you continue to climb your mountain and slay those Dragons that challenge your progress. Many individuals and far larger groups will genuinely respect you, and you will become a welcome member of many groups and organizations.

As you slay more and more Dragons and achieve greater goals and achievements, you will see a striking contrast between the individual that evolves versus the person you are today. Through the process of changing behaviors and habits, you will indeed evolve into a completely different individual. You will eventually define the behaviors and habits of your sorted past as a “*behavioral aberrations*” that are completely foreign to the person you have become through the process.

What is important today is for you to define, to the best extent possible, that person you are to become, and envision yourself as that person - not the person you are, or the person you were in the past. The future does not equal the past.

I have a few felony convictions - all of which arose from the same set of events, and for which I served time in both federal and state correctional facilities. My convictions happened to be of the white-collar variety, essentially amounting to schemes to defraud banks, savings & loans and other financial institutions. It wasn't because I had any spectacular intellect or sophistication, but rather, because it was the opportunity that was presented.

At the time, my crimes and subsequent prison experience were clearly the most significant events in my life. However, as I have achieved greater goals, conquered greater challenges and slain bigger Dragons, the significance of the incarceration event, and the subsequent felon label, have diluted to nothing. When compared to the person I am today, the behavior of my past is an aberration.

The person I am today is not even capable of thinking about such behaviors. I am indeed such a different individual today that when I look back, it is almost difficult to believe that I actually served time in prison, and even more impossible that I actually engaged in criminal activities.

When I earned my private pilot certificate, that milestone became my new most significant event, substantially diluting my previous most significant event. Earning my commercial pilot certificate, airline transport pilot certificate, receiving raises and promotions, and securing new employment opportunities were all, at each respective time, my new most significant

event. Today, none of those are my most significant event because they have all been continuously superseded with new most significant events.

I will not devote any considerable time to my crime. It doesn't matter what I did and it doesn't matter what you did. What does matter is what I did going forward and what you will do from this point forward in your life.

The past thirty-plus years of my life have been orchestrated through a process of conscious and deliberate decisions to move in a precise direction. The rest of your life, your paths and destinations are also based upon your conscious and deliberate decisions. Alternatively, you can make no decision and you will likely continue on the same path, which leads to the same destinations. It's your choice.

Your future can be a continuation of the same results you have had in the past, or today - right now - can be the first day that establishes a new beginning that will produce a new life with different and positive results, and your first of many new most significant events.

I reiterate this reality throughout this book: *"The future does not equal the past."* Today can be your own personal Genesis. Dream dreams, set attainable goals and formulate realistic plans to achieve those goals. Then, don your suit of armor, mount your horse, sheath your sword, grasp your lance and venture into the forest of opportunity prepared to battle the Dragons, slay the Dragons, accumulate their stashes of gold and jewels, and most importantly, realize and live your dreams. But also be prepared to endure a little pain and get a little bloody in the process. All of your wounds will heal.

It may have some value to understand why you and I committed our crimes. In simplistic terms, crimes generally involve one or more elements that include; emotion, passion, opportunity, revenge, need, greed and justification. I will discuss various motives throughout this book.

Understanding our motives can go a long way toward identifying our habits and behaviors that were instrumental to arriving at our current position - Point A. Remember, we do need to define how we arrived at Point A before we can venture to Point B. Once we have identified Point A, and how we have arrived there, we can affect the necessary changes and subsequent direction in life toward envisioning a sensible strategy and path to arrive at Point B.

If you are reading this because you have a felony conviction, then we share a commonality of interests. There exists a certain bond that is largely based upon the fact that we both understand that a felony conviction presents certain challenges. This bond is common with many people who have risen

from the ashes of adversity, and such individuals are frequently drawn to help those people who are still in the flames.

If you are about to be released or have recently been released within the past twelve months, chances are your felony conviction looms large. You may perceive it to be an insurmountable barrier. You're not alone here - I did too. However, with each new achievement, irrespective of how big or small, the significance of the felony conviction label continued to shrink until eventually, it was dust in the wind.

As I look back over the past quarter century, my post conviction achievements are probably greater than the achievements of most people with no conviction history. So can be your achievements.

You might say that your conviction presents greater challenges than mine because my conviction was non-violent and perhaps yours was. We all have our crosses to bear. You cannot compare my challenges to yours. The challenge you are facing is the greatest challenge in the universe - because it is your challenge. So was mine.

My conviction had its own unique challenges. The economy was a mess. Employment in a bank, insurance company, or other financial institution was probably not among the opportunities that would have been easy to pursue upon my release. That is to say, each of our convictions presents certain realities as to what employment or career choices would present a path of least resistance.

I do not say "limitations" because I have learned through my career pursuit that limitations are generally only self-imposed. Even where strict prohibitions exist, there are waiver processes that you can pursue to achieve whatever you want - provided that you are willing to put forth the work and effort and establish a track record which proves that you achieve the goals and objectives that you set, and that your *most recent significant event* is not that you were in prison.

If you need to seek a waiver as I have a few times, keep in mind that I was evaluated based upon my most recent significant event. If a person gets out of prison, applies for a restricted job, and is evaluated on the basis of their most recent significant event, they may not get the waiver. It might be best to build some credibility in an unrestricted job first. That first job is only temporary, but it will build a reference provided that you perform conscientiously.

You will always be evaluated on the basis your most recent significant events. Put another way, people only remember you, and evaluate you, for your last act. If your most recent significant event is your crime and conviction, that will form the basis that people will use to evaluate you. Only

you can change that by achieving significant events after your conviction. Only you can establish your most recent significant event.

My crime and convictions are no longer even dignified by considering them as an event of any significance. This is only true because they have been so totally diluted with other positive and significant events. You can do the same.



Chapter 5

THE INCARCERATION EXPERIENCE

In 1978, I appeared in United States Federal District Court and pled guilty to two charges in accordance with a plea bargain arrangement.

I received sentences of five years on each felony charge, said sentences to run concurrently. During sentencing, the judge also indicated to my counsel that he may be receptive to entertaining a motion under Rule 35 for reduction or modification of sentence.

My activities over the previous couple of years that had led to these charges incorporated multiple jurisdictions - several states, and numerous counties within the State of Ohio. All of the jurisdictions had agreed that as long as I was charged and sentenced in Federal District Court that they would not pursue separate prosecution. There was one exception, that being Summit County, Ohio.

During my federal incarceration, I was transported to Summit County to face multiple felony charges. Through negotiations between my counsel and the county prosecutor, a plea agreement was reached whereby I would receive a sentence of 18 months to five years, and the sentence would run concurrently with my federal sentence. However, because of timing issues of when sentences were imposed and Ohio's sentencing guidelines, there remained an overlap of time that would be due to the state upon release from the federal institution.

After having been sentenced in federal court, I was transported from county jail to the Robert F. Kennedy Federal Correctional Institution in Morgantown West Virginia.

I can vividly remember the day I arrived in Morgantown. After processing, I was placed alone in an isolation room where I would remain for three days. I recall having had a feeling of relief, a feeling that an enormous burden had been lifted off of me - that now was a time to make choices about the direction of my life.

I was assigned a caseworker who explained the various opportunities that would be available to me during the time that I would serve in Morgantown. All inmates were required to work. However, there was also opportunity to go to school, and there were excellent exercise facilities, a well-provisioned

library, and other programs that could facilitate learning new skills that could be applied upon release.

I took advantage of as many of the programs as I could fit into my allotted time. Work wise, I began my sentence scrubbing, mopping, waxing and polishing floors, washing restrooms, and overall janitorial duties of the unit in which I lived. I also took a few college level courses and an industrial class where I learned basic welding. My most noteworthy learning experience from the welding class is what a profound sunburn you get on your arms if you weld without protective sleeves. Ouch, I didn't see a future as a welder.

I eventually accepted a work assignment in the kitchen where I developed a good dialogue with the Food Service Administrator and subsequently became his administrative or clerical assistant.

My evenings were predominately spent exercising. Without question it was this period of my life that I was in the greatest possible health and physical shape. Every night I ran several miles, lifted weights, worked for a minimum of an hour on a heavy bag and did general calisthenics.

Roughly a year into my sentence, I had developed a medical issue in my right lower jaw. Although the condition, fibrous dysplasia, was not necessarily threatening to my health, the growth did cause a distortion of my lower jaw, so elective surgery was scheduled.

It was scheduled that I be flown in a private airplane with three other inmates and one of the administrators to the federal medical and hospital facility in Springfield, Missouri. I was not aware at the time the trip was scheduled that Springfield was also one of the main federal facilities that house the criminally insane. What a treat it was learning that *after* I had arrived.

After being examined by the doctors at Springfield, I was scheduled for surgery. However, after having had an opportunity to observe the results of some of their surgical prowess, I didn't relish the possibility of being someone's experiment. I decided that if I were to have this surgery, I would wait until after I was released.

The other thing that I was not aware of when I was taken to Springfield was how I would return. I assumed that I would be flown back to Morgantown in a private plane - the same method that was used to transport me from Morgantown to Springfield. This was not the case.

The federal prison system has a fleet of buses that are used for prisoner transportation. It is not unlike other bus systems. There are very few direct trips, and a journey from point A to point B frequently requires transfer to a different bus. One major difference between the prison bus system and

Greyhound is that rather than staying at a Holiday Inn awaiting transfer to a different bus, the Feds simply use other federal prisons. And, the next bus is not scheduled for the continuation of the journey within hours or days, but rather within weeks and months.

The first bus that I rode out after spending a couple of months at Springfield took me to Leavenworth, Kansas. I spent several weeks in Leavenworth penitentiary, which seemed like an eternity. From Leavenworth, the next bus I rode took me to Terre Haute, Indiana where I spent close to month. From Terre Haute, Indiana my next bus trip took me to Columbus, Ohio where we were housed in the Franklin County jail, but only for a few days. The next bus took me to Louisburg Pennsylvania, which by far ranked among the most caustic environments that I had experienced during this journey. After several weeks in Louisburg, I finally made it back to Morgantown. In all, I had been away from Morgantown touring the federal prison system for close to five months. It was an interesting journey, which probably served as a good sampling of where I knew I did not want to go.

Upon returning to Morgantown, I quickly reengaged myself back into my routine of work, study, school and exercise.

Upon my release from Morgantown, I became aware that the State of Ohio would still require that I serve time in Ohio institutions because the state sentence had been imposed at a later date than the federal sentence. Although the sentences were to run concurrently, upon release from my federal sentence with good time applied, I would not have served an adequate amount of time to meet the state's minimum guidelines for parole.

The environment at Morgantown was in stark contrast to the environments of the other prisons I had seen during my tour of the federal system. I knew that the state correctional facilities probably resembled the atmosphere of Leavenworth or Louisburg, and given the choice, I would clearly prefer serving the remainder of my time in Morgantown.

I spoke with my caseworker and asked if I could have my good time removed thereby increasing the time that I would be required to serve in Morgantown. Short of an infraction, this was not possible.

During my federal sentencing hearing, I recalled that federal Judge Thomas Lambros stated that he would be receptive to entertaining a motion under Rule 35 for reduction or modification of sentence.

I filed a motion Pro Se to have my sentence *increased*, which would clearly be a modification - the strategy being that an increase in the federal sentence would satisfy any additional time required by the state, and I could just complete that time at Morgantown. I had hoped to be released from the federal sentence without owing any time to the state. The court denied my

motion citing that the time for the court to consider said motion had elapsed and therefore, the court was without jurisdiction.

I was released from Morgantown after completion of the federal sentence to the custody of two Summit County Deputy Sheriffs. The deputies transported me to the Ohio State reformatory at Mansfield Ohio.

The Mansfield reformatory had since been closed and replaced with a modernized facility - The Richland Correctional Facility. However the main Castle still stands and has become a museum where tours are offered. The old Mansfield Reformatory is the same facility where the movie, Shawshank Redemption and parts of Airforce One were filmed. It definitely is a prison right out of the minds of Hollywood that fits the paradigm to a tee.

Mansfield was quite an experience. The facility was built in 1886. When I arrived it was nearing a century old, it was filthy, utterly infested with cockroaches, the food was substantially inedible, and because it was a reformatory, the population was males between 18 and 25 years of age. Essentially, it was the biggest concentration of testosterone-driven misfits in the state. The maturity level was way below that which I had experienced in any of the other institutions.

As I mentioned, the food was inedible. About the only thing I found that I could tolerate eating was the one or two slices of bread that I got with each meal.

It took weeks for my commissary account money to be transferred from Morgantown to Mansfield. I can recall waiting in line one day at Mansfield and starting to feel dizzy to the point where I was trying to hang on to the wall. Some of the other prisoners helped me over to a set of steps and sat me down. The next thing I remembered was waking up on the floor with blood gushing out of my nose. Apparently, as I sat there, I had passed out and fell forward flat on my face.

During the next couple of weeks, I experienced several other episodes where I was overcome by dizziness - almost passing out. Although I may not have realized it at the time, in hindsight it is apparent to me that this was caused by malnutrition. Once my commissary money had arrived, I survived on a diet of cookies, peanut butter, crackers, potato chips and various other packaged items that I was able to purchase at the commissary.

After several months at Mansfield, it was determined that because I had a prior felony conviction for which I served the federal time at Morgantown, I was not eligible to serve time in a reformatory. I would therefore be transferred to the Ohio penitentiary located in Columbus Ohio. I have to say, I wasn't heartbroken to leave Mansfield.

Built in 1834, the Ohio Penitentiary was closed in 1984 and subsequently sold to the City of Columbus in 1995. It was completely torn down during the late 1990's. The facility was located in the heart of downtown Columbus.

When I arrived, the Ohio penitentiary was 146 years old. However, despite its age, it was a remarkable contrast to Mansfield. The facility was clean, the food was decent and the population was far more mature. The time I spent in the Ohio penitentiary in contrast to Mansfield was like checking in to the Ritz Carlton.

While I was in the Ohio Penitentiary, I met Craig Arfons who was serving a very short sentence on allegations of VIN [number] manipulation. He insisted that he was innocent, and based upon his story, I believed that he really was.

Craig Arfons was well known in the car racing circuit as the man who invented the jet powered dragster, and he held numerous speed records. His father, Art Arfons had pioneered the jet-powered tractor.

I made contact with Craig shortly after I was released. During the first couple of years that I was flying and earning my various pilot certificates and ratings, I would fly Craig and his wife to his race events. It worked out great for him, and I needed to build flight time anyhow.

Craig was a really genuine individual, honest as the day is long, and he was an absolute genius with respect to building race cars and jet engines.

I recall visiting with Craig at his home in the Cincinnati area where he had a large workshop located behind his home. He showed me a jet engine that he bought through a surplus dealer. It had been attached to an airplane that crashed and was pretty torn up. It appeared to me to be nothing but scrap. Only a few weeks later during a subsequent visit, he had that engine completely rebuilt and installed in a car.

Craig gave me an APU (auxiliary power unit) that he bought as surplus. The APU had a small gas turbine engine that powered a generator. An APU provides power to an aircraft's electrical and hydraulic systems while it is on the ground. If I recall correctly, it was off of a C-130 transport. We managed to fit it (barely) in the back of a Cessna 172 and I took it home. It took me six months and a lot of telephone calls to Craig, but I eventually had a pretty nifty jet powered go-cart. I was the envy of all the kids on the block.

Craig was a person who believed in doing the work first, setting the record, and then figuring out how he would capitalize and make money. Craig and his family became very good friends.

On July 9, 1989, Craig was upholding his custom when his jet-powered boat, the Rain-X Challenger, reached 263 mph on Jackson Lake near Sebring, Florida. The boat began to cartwheel and disintegrated, and snatched him from the life he loved so dearly. A friend I will forever miss...

While still a guest at the Ohio Penitentiary, I received notice that I would be scheduled for parole hearing in July 1980. The anticipation leading to a parole hearing is indescribable.

I met with the parole board. After a brief question and answer period, and after waiting outside the hearing room during their deliberations, I was called back in before the board. The board informed me that I would be granted parole and released within the next 30 days. Only someone who has experienced this could understand and comprehend the all-consuming feeling of that moment.

I choose not to spend a great deal of time on the day-to-day experience of incarceration. There is really nothing to be gained by writing or reading about the experience of being in prison. Suffice to say, it wasn't a party.



Chapter 6

UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF

Understanding yourself involves the deliberate recognition of your prior habits and behaviors, and the results that have occurred from those habits and behaviors. In other words, as previously mentioned, how did you arrive at Point A, which is where you are now? It isn't because of "*Bad Luck*" either. That excuse is a cop-out. At any given time, you are in life exactly where you choose to be.

If an individual proactively and consciously develops and forms his behaviors, then those behaviors will shape the individual. It is those behaviors and habits that will determine your path and your destinations. Conversely, if there is no deliberate and proactive effort to shape behaviors, the consideration to the results of those behaviors is reactive. It is better to proactively work toward a destination as opposed to react to the destination after you have arrived, probably unexpectedly, since your arrival wasn't planned.

A critical component to life change is examining the results you have had and identifying the behaviors that caused those results. Subsequent change of habits and behaviors will produce different and predictable results. If a person wants to arrive at Point B, they first need to define where Point A is, and how they arrived there.

Success is not luck and success is not a respecter of persons. Success, as many barometers measure it, is a function of patterning one's habits and behaviors after another who has achieved the desired objective. The disciplined practice of patterning similar habits and behaviors will produce substantially similar results.

A large part of self-awareness is changing the mind to think success. You are your mind and your mind is you. Your mind is what has been programmed into your brain. You are what you think. Your brain is an organic computer that is not dissimilar to a PC computer, and your mind is the operating system and software programs that are installed and running on that computer. Our software is installed on our brain from birth by parents, teachers, counselors, television, friends, acquaintances, groups we interact with, peer groups and to a large extent, by the culture in which we are raised and live.

It is interesting that many people are more cognizant of what software and programs they install, and allow to be installed, on their PC computers than those installed on the computer between their ears. To quote Cher Sarkisian [Cher Bono], *"People are more concerned with what they put in their car than what they put in their body."* My point is similar.

Most people unconsciously allow programming of their mind, but they are very conscious of what software they install on their PC computer. Most people who utilize their PC computer as a tool have antivirus, firewall, spyware detection, directory washing, and various other software programs installed to ensure that the computer operates at its optimum performance. They do not allow the installation of any software that could cause the system to produce undesirable results, or that diminish its functionality or operating capacity.

When a dysfunctional program is installed on a computer, it produces dysfunctional results. *Garbage in - Garbage out.* Successful people filter what they allow into their mind (firewall and virus protection) by scrutinizing what they read and watch on television, with whom they interact, the cultures to which they belong, and how they spend their leisure time.

Changing dysfunctional software on a PC computer is simple - you delete it. Changing software in the mind is more problematic and requires a good deal more effort than a few keystrokes. Experiences cannot be deleted. They can however be diluted.

The greatest benefit from reading self-help books is that the content of those books dilute negativity with positive possibilities. When people read such titles consistently, the change it causes becomes apparent in their attitude.

There are truly only two things that a person has direct control over - their attitude and their action. I realized this when reading a book regarding the treatment of POW's during the Vietnam conflict. Many of the prisoners were tortured to extract information. Some prisoners gave information and others did not. I recognized that in either case, it was an action - a choice to either give information or simply endure the torture. If they endured the torture, it was also a matter of attitude.

If I held a gun to your head and told you to give me your wallet, it would be your choice as to whether or not you gave me your wallet. Albeit, it might be a bad choice if you did not give me your wallet however, it is clearly your choice. Your actions and the choices you make can yield great benefits or dire consequences. Your attitude plays a pivotal role in your actions and the choices you make.

When a person can master control over the two fundamentals of action and attitude, which are a person's behavioral essence, they will achieve success.

A few recommended books are:

- Think and Grow Rich - Napoleon Hill
- Believe and Achieve - W. Clement Stone's 17 Principles of Success - Samuel A. Cypert
- How to Win Friends and Influence People - Dale Carnegie
- The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People - Stephen R. Covey
- Rich Dad Poor Dad - Robert T. Kiyosaki
- How to get Control of Your Time and Your Life - Alan Lakein
- The Magic of Thinking Big - David Schwartz
- The Magic of Believing - Claude M. Bristol
- In the Company of Giants - Eama Dev Jager
- Master Key to Riches - Napoleon Hill

I do recommend reading these books in the order above.

You can control and change the way you think and how you perceive the world around you - your attitude - by simply changing what programming you install, and allow others to install, on the computer that inhabits the space between your ears.

There is a great deal of negativity in the world. The media sensationalizes negative news because that is what increases their ratings and sells advertising. Our society has been conditioned to negativity and therefore craves these sensationalized stories. Continuous watching of these events only feeds your own negativity. Conversely, a person who has deliberately and consciously conditioned him or herself to the positive craves positive stimulus.

If you don't make the conscious and deliberate effort to program your computer, it is analogous to setting a PC computer in a public place and allowing anyone and everyone to install whatever programs they wish.

Eventually, the computer will become dysfunctional, inoperable, and probably crash.

IT'S ALL IN WHAT YOU THINK.

One evening an old Cherokee Indian told his grandson about a battle that was going on inside himself.

He said, "My son, it is between two wolves." "One is evil - full of anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority and ego..."

"The other is good - filled with joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith..."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf wins?"

The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one I feed."

Original Author unknown

I list the books above because they can be life changing. If you read them, it can have a profound affect on the rest of your life. If you feed the positive, then the positive will win.

I developed the book list during my aviation career. As a Learjet Captain, I had the opportunity to interact with many people who could afford to fly around in a six to eight million-dollar private airplane - people who had achieved substantial financial success. On long trips, I frequently had conversations with these passengers and discussed their secrets of success. Invariably, control of one's attitude topped the list.

I noticed that virtually all financially successful people read books and over time, I noted that they all read many of the same books. Although I had a great front window seat in the Learjet, I realized that it was the people sitting in the back who had the best position in life.

I was inspired by several of my affluent passengers. One of them gave me a book that had a major impact on my life. The title is Think and Grow Rich. I began asking my passengers what books they read, and from those suggestions, I developed my book list. The full list is much longer. However, the books that I have listed can get you started in a new direction. They will

change your mind and your attitude, which is prerequisite to moving forward with your life. You will reprogram your computer by feeding a different wolf.

When I started my company, Fiber Network Solutions, in 1995, I could not afford to hire people with vast amounts of experience. I hired young inexperienced people because that is all I could finance. I distributed my book list to our employees. Some read the books and others didn't. Those who became readers excelled, and those who did not are still struggling to this day. I can say with confidence that the company grew as a result of those people who read the books. I did not grow the company - I just grew the people and they grew the company.

When I meet someone, I can generally tell within a few minutes if they are readers. The attitude of a person who reads regularly is conspicuous. If a person has the attitude, helping them with any challenges they face is a walk in the park.



Chapter 7

BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF

Honesty is an interesting concept. It is selective and tends to change to suit our self-serving needs. It is a behavior that is many times only practiced if it is convenient to the situation.

I recall a survey that was conducted during the early 1980's where people were asked two questions. 1) "Will you answer the following single question absolutely honestly?" If the response was not immediately affirmative or had any hesitation, the call was terminated, and the person was not included in the survey. If the response to question number one was affirmative and absolute, the second question was asked. 2) "Are you always honest?" Almost 90% of people said, "No."

Honesty and dishonesty are not necessarily directly corresponding opposites and the terms "lying" and "dishonesty" is not necessarily one and the same. Lying has different degrees and rise to a level of dishonesty when the lie has the intent to deceive for the purpose of facilitating an agenda that is harmful to one or more persons, generally for the gain of the person telling the lie.

The other end of the spectrum is the lie to avoid unnecessary conflict. For example, your mother asks if you took out the garbage - *for the fifth time*. Rather than tell her "no" and suffer her wrath, you say "yes" and then sneak out and proceed to take it out. No harm - no foul. In this respect, we often tend to lie to ourselves as well, almost unconsciously.

Shortly after I was released, I was having some dental work done at Case Western Reserve University School of Dentistry in Cleveland. The day of one of my appointments, my Mom and I also had a few other errands to run and we decided to drive together. Parking at the university is at a premium. The parking garages charge a fortune and the parking meters were limited to an hour, which almost guaranteed an expensive parking ticket.

As we drove around the area, I noticed a parking lot for a speech and hearing impaired organization. The signage at the entrance to the parking lot was conspicuously displayed - ***No Parking - Violators will be towed!***

I pulled into the lot as my Mom zealously protested. We could see a security guard walking briskly toward the car. I looked at my Mom, winked and said, "Get out and follow my lead." We both got out of the car. The security guard

was within fifteen feet and was motioning with his hands repeatedly stating, “You can’t park here! This is a private lot.” When the guard was within about five feet of me, I exaggerated a cocking of my head to the side, pushed my bottom lip out with my tongue, looked a bit cross-eyed, and in an animated manner just looked at him and made a sound similar to what a cow might sound like if it were saying, “Whhhaaaaat? Huuuuuuh? Whhhaaaaaaat?” It certainly appeared that I might have some, or all of the requisite hearing, speech impairments, or even some other mental incapacity. The security guard immediately stopped in his tracks and said, “Oh, I’m sorry, never mind.”

My Mom looked as though she might have some handicap as well since I had to walk around the car and help her stand upright so we could walk away. From the view of the security guard, he couldn’t tell that she was literally doubled over laughing.

So, was this dishonest? It probably was. However, as I mentioned, the lot was almost empty, both when we arrived and when we left. I didn’t arm-wrestle someone for a parking space who was more deserving of that space. Did I know at the time it was dishonest? Yep, I did. Did I rationalize my choice? Yes. Am I still to this day rationalizing that choice? Of course I am. There was no harm and no foul.

There are many instances where we convince ourselves that we “can’t” do something because of some perceived obstacle or limitation. Often, the reality is that we are not willing to put forth the effort or make the sacrifices, or we’re just too lazy. We rationalize and justify why we “can’t” do something with a myriad of excuses.

Personally, I just level with myself. I’m ambitiously lazy. If the reward doesn’t correspond to the effort, I don’t give myself all kinds of reasons why the prize isn’t attainable - I just admit to myself that I’m too lazy to chase after it. I’m honest with myself. At this juncture in my life however, I’ve earned the luxury. It wasn’t always so.

You too can place yourself in a position where you can be selective in the Dragons you engage in battle - the challenges you want or need to conquer. Getting to this point in life did require that I chase after challenges and slay Dragons that I did not particularly want to tackle, but by doing so, it opened up additional doors of opportunity and brought me one step closer to the top.

It’s perfectly okay to accept a position in life that might be less than the expectations that are placed upon us by others. The only expectations that are really important are the expectations that we place on ourselves through an honest self-evaluation of our capabilities. Honest self-evaluation! In other words, do not say you can’t achieve something just because you are unwilling

to embrace the associated challenges of a particular achievement. Accept the honest reality that you're unwilling - not that you can't.

Peer pressure to attain social status can be powerful. The car you drive, the clothes you wear, and the houses you live in are frequently choices that are driven by the need to gain social respect from our peers. In reality, no one really cares about your new car - because it's not his or her new car.

Social status only exists in our own minds. No one else really cares - except for when you attain success, other people flock to you because of their desire to be seen and recognized as part of the success congregation. They still don't care about you, or the successful person they flock to. They only care about how it makes them look by being in that person's company.

Why do people want their picture taken with the President, Senators, business leaders, celebrities, musicians and other prominent people? It is predominantly because they want their peer group to recognize them as being a member of those same social circles - not that any of their friends really care except that they then have bragging rights that they know the person who knows the President, Senator, business leader, musician, etc.

It is almost amusing to observe this self-indulgent behavior in many social circles. That is not to say that it isn't important to give yourself nice things that add comfort and convenience to your life. However, I have found that the appreciation I have, and the value I place upon the presents I give myself is directly proportional to the effort it took to earn them. The things you earn are far more delicious than those acquired without effort, or by other than legitimate methods.

During my corporate flying career, I worked for a firm that chartered jets to companies and affluent individuals. Chartering a jet is basically the same as renting it for a trip. I recall flying charter for an individual who frequented Las Vegas. We would arrive in Las Vegas and this guy would give each of the pilots \$1,000 in cash to gamble with, and when that ran out, he would refill the till. This guy threw money around like it was worthless paper.

The company I was working for was young, small and struggling as it grew. I spoke with the president and vice president of the company, both who knew of my felony convictions. I expressed my sense that this customer was not legitimate. It seemed to me that this customer did not place a value on money like people customarily do when they have earned it.

I emphasized that this customer threw money around exactly as I did when that money was obtained via illegitimate agendas. My managers listened, but they didn't take my advice to get paid in advance of each trip. After the guy was arrested for whatever it was he was doing, he owed the company over \$50,000, which never got paid.

Perhaps only because of my personal experience, because I have eaten of the forbidden fruit, I can generally sense when a person has actually earned something. Because I know the difference, I can tell you that life in general is just far more fulfilling when you earn it.

If you really think about the things you have earned through your hard work versus the things that you didn't earn, there is a stark contrast about how you felt about the prize and how you felt about yourself.

People in general rationalize why they have not achieved more than they have. It seems to be a natural defense mechanism to place blame for our lot in life on everyone and everything, except ourselves. We blame our parents, the government, our teachers, the system and a variety of other influences. Our shortcomings are because we are of a particular race, because we were raised in a particular neighborhood, because we look different, because of our age, and on and on.

Life definitely does dish out its challenges. We all suffer various injustices. But, we either find and embrace the silver lining in each injustice and conquer those challenges, or we lie down and accept the consequences of injustice, and those challenges conquer us. When you face the Dragon, someone is going to win, and someone is going to lose. I choose to be victorious. When facing *your* challenges, that choice is only yours.

The list is long of people who have suffered extreme adversity and triumphed. Christopher Reeve certainly comes to mind. He was on top of the mountain with the promise of a great life. In seconds, it was shattered. Nevertheless, even with every justification to fade into obscurity, Christopher Reeve took on new challenges and led noble causes to victory. Many people throw in the towel under such adversity and quit. He sucked it up, evaluated what he still had and gave it his all. He may have played the part of Superman as an actor, but in my mind, he genuinely was Superman. You only lose when you quit. So, just don't give up and quit!

Walking through life and convincing ourselves that society owes us something never produces positive or productive results. Rather, it embitters us and is a form of accepting defeat. It's a cop-out and a lie to yourself. It's a rationalization for an unwillingness to put forth the effort.

It's easier to just say, it's not my fault for my lot in life. I'm under privileged and society owes me. The only thing society owes us is the opportunity to contribute. When I was released, I had the decision and choice whether or not to embrace the opportunities available on the path of legitimacy.

Here is a reality that everyone needs to think about each and every day. You are in life exactly where you choose to be. Put another way, your current situation is a direct result of the choices you have made. Internalize this and

think about it often. If you're not happy with where you are in life, start making different choices. It has been said that one definition of insanity is continuing to make the same choices, and practice the same behaviors and habits, but expecting different results. If you do the same things, you will continue to get the same results. If you want to change the results, change what you are doing.

This is all a great deal easier said than done. It's easy for people to give advice, tell you to make different choices, change your direction, etc. Living it takes a whole lot of guts, blood sweat & tears, sacrifice, patience, dedication, determination, pain and persistence. There are disappointments, set backs, downfalls, challenges and obstacles. Making it in life is not for the weak of heart. I have often said that it is easier to be in prison than it is to get out. Getting out has its own set of fears, which probably include the fear of going back, of not making it in life, and the fear of failure. There is also the challenge of feeling angry and the culture shock of moving from one societal structure to another.

When I was released in August 1980, I considered it to be a new and fresh start. I genuinely wanted a legitimate life and decided that I would put forth every effort and exhaust every possible resource toward the goal of achieving success by totally legitimate means. Admittedly, during those early months and years, I considered the alternative and reconsidered it every time I got knocked down or came up against what seemed like a brick wall. I figured that if the system did not work - if it placed insurmountable obstacles that prevented me from pursuing and achieving an acceptable lifestyle by being legitimate, I could always go back to less legitimate endeavors. But, I also had to be honest with myself. I couldn't throw in the towel just because my first job interview didn't go very well, or the 25th interview for that matter, or because I faced challenges and obstacles that I didn't particularly want to conquer.

I received a lot of "No's" with regard to job interviews and assistance to pursue an education. But, I told myself that the "No's" didn't matter. I was only looking for one "Yes."

Survival is one of our reptilian level instincts. However, I also understood that I needed to be honest with myself and continuously evaluate whether or not I was putting forth the genuine effort - not just copping out and taking the easy road by making excuses that the system doesn't work because situations became difficult and challenging. I was ready to give it my all.

For the record, the system works if you work the system. There are no insurmountable obstacles that preclude the attainment of success - other than our own excuses, self-manufactured justifications and self-fabricated rationalizations. If you're breathing, you can form your future.

Every morning, I envisioned myself a warrior, a machine, a conqueror, getting up and donning my suit of armor, mounting my horse, sheathing my sword, brandishing my lance and shield, riding into the forest of opportunity, hunting the dragon, slaying the dragon and dragging its carcass back to the cave to feast on the tasty beast.

Is life really any different for a convicted felon than for anyone else? Not really. All achievements require good old-fashioned work and sacrifice. Everyone has to hunt and slay the dragon. Every day, we have to do something to merely survive, and even more to move the ball forward.

Success is not a respecter of persons. It is the result of certain behaviors and choices. If you practice similar behaviors and choices as someone you identify as successful, you will get similar results. It doesn't matter who you are - it matters what you are - a collection of behaviors. If you pattern yourself after a person who is following a path to prison or some other disaster, guess what you'll get - the same results.

People who make excuses and play the blame-game look at achievers and say, "they're lucky." Well, then, I suppose I'm lucky. But, I've noticed an astonishing correlation between luck and hard work. Miraculously, it seems that the harder I work, the luckier I get.

If I am lucky, it is an unprecedented three decade run of luck that should probably be recognized in the Guinness Book of World Records. If it has all been luck, then certainly Las Vegas would want to put me in their Hall of Fame.

If life success is based upon luck, then the odds of achieving success by playing the lottery are far greater than the chances of achieving success by pursuing a goal without a plan. Conversely, if a person invests the time and effort to create a genuine and realistic plan to achieve a goal, the probability of success is almost 100 percent. It really is that simple.

There are opportunities to generate income that are obvious and apparent, and there are opportunities that require some time, effort and planning.

For example, it is obvious that a person can generate income from selling drugs. Drugs are readily available and there will always be a market. Pursuing income legitimately can be just as simple. If you just invest some time and effort, you can develop a plan - a road map - that will generate an abundance of income. Once that plan has been made, the opportunity to generate income is just as obvious and apparent through that plan as any other opportunity. It only requires a little time and effort to create the plan.

No matter what, you will do something that involves work every day just to survive. I define work as the act of doing something that you would otherwise choose not to do but for need of compensation.

In society, you need to work to eat - either doing legitimate work or otherwise, but you still have to work. The animals in the jungle have to work to eat as well. If you are in prison, there is work to attain a status that grants you certain additional comforts. The question is, in which societal structure you choose to work, survive and stake your claim?



Chapter 8

CIVILIZED SOCIETY

The prison system is a societal structure. It provides housing, clothing, food, medical care and the basic necessities for physical subsistence. It incorporates two systems of rules - those imposed by the authorities and prison facility, and those imposed by the population of prisoners.

Living within the rules of any societal structure has certain benefits, and living outside of the rules has definite consequences. As with any society, there exists a hierarchy of authority. However, in the prison system, there are two hierarchies and two authorities. Virtually, the entire prison population is subservient to one or both of the existent authorities. Consequently, everyone is obligated in some form or another to do those things that they may not necessarily want or like to do, but must do in order to serve their authority and receive the benefit of having served (worked). Put simply, everyone has a boss.

Adapting to the prison society is really no different than adapting to any other society that is foreign at the time we are placed in that environment. It is a matter of learning the rules, customs, structure and authority, developing or choosing your own agenda, and either blending in or rebelling - either of which has its resultant benefits or consequences.

Our civilized society in the United States is a society based upon laws. The fundamental concept of a society of laws is what provides us with a “civilized” society. Without the laws, society would not only be uncivilized - it would be chaos.

Every day millions of people drive to and from work, all generally in compliance with the traffic laws. Everyone stops when the light is red and goes when the light is green. What happens when one person decides not to obey the traffic laws? What would happen if no one obeyed the traffic laws? Chaos.

The majority of people comply with the traffic laws, and they enjoy the benefits of a system because the majority obeys the laws. When one does not obey the laws, it infringes on the benefit expected by those who do obey the laws. Therefore, the masses demand that the person who is not playing by the rules is bared from driving.

When a person is in compliance with the laws of our civilized society, and their interactions are with other people who also subscribe to an adherence to the laws, their journey from point A to point B is streamlined. It becomes just as simple as driving from point A to point B when you, and all of the other people on the road, are obeying the traffic laws. It really is that simple. I consciously choose to obey the laws and I avoid those who don't.

I was frequently amused, and occasionally perplexed, with some of the shenanigans that transpired in the Dot-Com space during my tenure as president & CEO of a fast growing Internet backbone operator.

My aviation education, particularly the advanced training I had received in jet aircraft was designed to prepare a pilot to meet every conceivable emergency. Aviation is a pretty exact science. Therefore, irregularities can be anticipated and a pilot can be academically trained to address almost every possible abnormality. To some extent, the training is practical as well, since most of the emergency procedures training is conducted in a flight simulator, which operates and feels remarkably identical to the actual aircraft.

An aircraft type rating is a specific rating that a pilot must receive to be qualified to fly each specific type of jet aircraft. If a pilot already has at least one jet aircraft type rating, then he or she can be type rated (certified) in a different type of jet in the simulator, without ever flying the actual aircraft.

When I was Chief Pilot for The Gentry Company, we were operating a Turbo Commander 900 - an eight-passenger turboprop. The company decided to purchase a nine passenger long-range jet - an Israeli Westwind II.

I already held a type rating in the Cessna Citation fanjet when I went to school for my type rating in the Israeli Westwind II. After I completed the two week long academic classroom and simulator training curriculum, I was given my FAA check ride in the simulator. I had never even seen the inside of the actual Westwind aircraft.

The day my co-pilot and I finished training, we had a flight scheduled in the Westwind with passengers. I remember taxiing out to the runway and completing all of our preflight checklists. The control tower cleared us for take off. As we taxied into take-off position on the runway, I remember looking at my co-pilot and saying, "I sure hope this fly's like the simulator." It did - it was identical. It's almost spooky. I continue to be amazed at how the operation of the aircraft and the simulator is utterly indistinguishable.

There is a stark contrast between my aviation and business education. Aviation training taught reactionary procedures to address emergencies or idiosyncrasies. My business education never prepared me for the idiosyncrasies I faced as President & CEO of a company.

Without question, business education was helpful in terms of fundamental business management. However, the variables and dynamics in operating a business are so numerous, no academic curriculum can possibly address every contingency. Starting and growing a company was to a great extent, OJT - *On the job training*. Colleges and universities do a good job of teaching business mechanics. However, business dynamics are only learned on the battlefield.

Much of an education simply provides an individual with the ability to engage in meaningful communication with other people of diverse backgrounds. It does not ensure the success of an individual.

Starting a new business holds a whole host of daily surprises. Many of the surprises and problems I dealt with are not addressed in any textbook. It is somewhat like parents having their first baby. Despite the volumes of books available on raising children, no amount of education can fully prepare a parent for the bounteous variables they will face.

Early in my second year as CEO of the company, I had hired a 40-year-old gentleman to work in our engineering department. Our engineering and technology department fell under the responsibility of my partner, Kyle, who was in his early twenties. All of the other employees in his department were between 18 and 22, including a friend of Kyle's with whom he had gone through college.

Kyle's friend was named a senior network engineer, and although he was exceptionally gifted technologically, his emotional maturity level was somewhere in the area of a fourteen or fifteen year old. I felt a need to bring in a little maturity and experience.

The company was still very much in its infancy and was still struggling financially. The average annual salary for the network engineers was only \$18,000, which wasn't too bad for a kid in his late teens to early twenties.

Since Jim, the 40-year-old gentleman I hired, had substantially more experience in a variety of areas, I provided him with a salary that was substantially more than his co-workers.

I was confronted one morning by Mark, one of our nineteen-year-old technicians, who complained that Jim was receiving a higher salary than he for the same job. I explained that Jim had a great deal more experience, and he had greater financial obligations since he also had a wife and three children. I told Mark that it really wasn't quite the same job because I was able to give Jim greater responsibilities, and I had greater expectations because of his experience.

Mark was agitated to a level of total belligerence. Aside from questioning the justification for Mark's confrontational attitude, I was curious as to how he found out that there was any difference in payroll.

When I asked Mark for the source of his information, he just admitted that he had accessed the payroll records through the network that were on my computer. Given that we were utilizing a certain level of security for such confidential information, this suggested that Mark had deliberately *hacked* into my computer. Mark didn't accidentally stumble upon this information - he deliberately looked for it and deliberately broke through some fairly sophisticated security mechanisms. This was not a situation that I had ever experienced with regard to running a business, either academically or practically.

Mark decided to resign in protest, which was fine since I probably wouldn't have had much choice but to fire him - not necessarily for hacking into my computer, but rather, because of his obstinate attitude.

Shortly after the incident with Mark, one of our other technicians, Damek, had submitted her expense report, which included mileage reimbursement that we paid to employees when they used their own vehicle for company business.

Damek's expense report appeared to be a little on the high side and it was brought to my attention by our director of administration. The portion that appeared to be high was the mileage. Damek's mileage report included the beginning and ending odometer reading on her car for each trip she made. I walked out to the parking lot and looked at the odometer in Damek's car. The car's odometer reading was almost 1,000 miles less than the final odometer reading on her expense report.

Damek had falsified her expense report, which is simply a form of stealing from the company. I was disappointed, but I also knew that kids make mistakes. What was important to me was why she did it - whether it was out of some form of disgruntlement or some unknown need. It definitely was not a clerical error.

I met with a couple of my managers and we decided to suspend Damek and send her home. I just wanted her to take a few days to think about the opportunity she had, and whether or not it was really worth losing for a lousy couple hundred bucks.

A few days later, I had a conversation with Damek. Her demeanor was somber and I detected that she was genuinely remorseful. I asked Damek why she padded her mileage report. Evidently, she was late on a few credit card bills and was feeling the pressure, her eyes tearing up as she said, "I think they're [MasterCard] ready to send a hit man after me." I chuckled at

the inference and told her that all she ever had to do was ask, and we would give her an advance, a loan, or figure out some way of getting her the money she needed. Her attitude appeared to be in the right place, so her employment was continued. I gave her a check to pay off her credit card.

Within a few weeks, my business partner Kyle had mentioned that he had stopped by the office late the previous night. When Kyle pulled into the parking lot, all of the lights in the building had suddenly come on. The only person in the building was Calvin, another of our eighteen-year-old technicians.

I'm not sure that I had given any real consideration at the moment when Kyle was talking to me, as I'm sure I had other more important issues that we were dealing with at the time. But, Kyle reiterated that all of the lights were off in the building until the headlights of his car shined through the building's windows as he pulled in the parking lot, and that was when all of the lights in the building suddenly came on. I suppose I just dismissed the incident, because I was focused on other issues.

A week or so later, during our customary morning meeting, Kyle had mentioned that he had to come in to the office to address a network problem the previous night. He said that when he pulled in the parking lot, the building was dark - until his headlights shined in the front door of the lobby. Then suddenly, all of the lights came on. The only person in the building was Calvin. This was the second time that Calvin was in the building alone after midnight with all of the lights off.

During the preceding couple of months, we had an employee hack into my computer and review the confidential payroll records, and one who had padded her expense report by a couple hundred dollars. I don't think I was paranoid, but I had a healthy skepticism. Why was this kid sneaking around in the building late at night - in the dark?

I knew that we had implemented new network security that was pretty bulletproof. There was never any cash lying around the office, and I didn't think Calvin was walking around a dark building to steal any equipment. Nevertheless, he was definitely up to something. Given that I didn't feel that the company had any tremendous vulnerability, I didn't place Calvin's clandestine midnight activities very high on my list of priorities.

After watching the 11:00 o'clock news one evening, I decided to take a ride to the office. I deliberately parked in the lot of one of the other buildings located in the same office park. As I walked toward our building, I could see that the facility was dark, but Calvin's car was in the parking lot. The weather was lousy. It was getting cold, had started to drizzle, and the wind was picking up.

As I walked around the building, I noticed that all of the blinds on all of the windows were closed. The only light was that emitted by the exit signs and the computer monitors that were left on, dimly shining through the window blinds.

This building was two stories, and the entrance had a small lobby with a sofa, a few chairs, and a secretarial desk for our receptionist that was angled slightly and faced the all-glass front door. The desk was only about five feet from the glass door.

As I walked around the front of the building my concern grew. I looked over the parking lot to be sure that there were no other vehicles aside from Calvin's. I just couldn't imagine what kind of clandestine operation was taking place in my company. The only vehicles in any of the parking lots of the entire office park were Calvin's and mine. I suppose I was looking to see if there were a couple of U-Hauls ready to load up my entire business.

Arriving at the front door, I crouched down and peaked into the lobby. It was completely dark except for the faint light of the exit sign and the glow from the computer monitor that was sitting on the receptionist's desk. I then noticed slight movement behind the secretarial desk. A computer monitor obscured the view from my position outside the glass front door to the chair behind the desk. As I rose up slightly, I could see Calvin sitting behind the monitor, kind of slouched down in the chair. All I was able to see was from the top of his head to just slightly above his eyes.

I felt immediately relieved. All Calvin was doing was working late, and having all of the lights off seemed apropos for the *geek culture* of which he was a member. Many of the young technicians during the Dot-Com era preferred to sit in a dark room with the glow of a computer monitor as opposed to interacting with people. To each his own...

Within a few seconds of noticing Calvin slouched behind the secretarial desk, I noticed the top of his head was slightly bouncing up and down. "What is so funny," I thought. It appeared he was laughing about something - causing the up and down movement. As I stood up and put my hand on the door handle ready to walk in, and hoping to share a good laugh, I could see Calvin's face, down to about mid chest level. He wasn't laughing at all. However, he was intently staring at the computer monitor and briskly bouncing up and down in his chair.

Although the computer monitor obscured the view from Calvin's chest level down, the reality of what he was doing hit me like a four-by-four. As I stood straight up, I made a 180-degree turn and fell against the outside brick wall adjacent to the glass door. I remember saying to myself under my breath but audibly, "Oh God, I really don't need this shit."

I stood outside the front door, leaning my back against the wall for several minutes. I had no idea what to do.

Part of our business was providing web-server collocation services. We had customers who located their web servers in our facility. It was not at all infrequent that other employees or customers might be visiting our building during the late hours of the night or the wee hours of the morning, performing maintenance or programming on their servers.

Twice before, Kyle had stopped at the office when Calvin was alone there, and the lights came on as Kyle pulled into the parking lot. One would reasonably conclude that Calvin was doing this on a frequent basis. Evidently, he discovered the advent of adult entertainment on the Internet, which in the mid-1990's was just at its early stages.

I began walking away back toward my car. This was not a situation that I wanted to address - at least not at that particular moment. When I got about ten feet away, I then thought, 'what if someone else stops by the building some evening and Calvin doesn't notice them pulling in the lot?' That could be a disaster. If anyone else catches him in this rather compromising situation, it would likely cause so much embarrassment that he would never return to work.

Calvin was fundamentally a decent kid and aside from making a few innocent mistakes during his employment, he was a good employee. Selfishly, I really did not want to lose a good employee who was very helpful to the company. Additionally, I would not want to see Calvin suffer an embarrassment that would likely cause him to relinquish a good career opportunity.

As I walked back to the building and leaned against the wall next to the glass door, I turned and peered in the lobby. Calvin was still positioned behind the receptionist's desk, slouched down and bouncing in the chair.

Well, he is going to get caught eventually, I thought. At least if I catch him, no one else will ever know about it and maybe I can talk to him and preserve his employment. It was also a little self-serving because I was paying him around \$18,000 a year and it would probably cost \$35,000 to replace him, as the salaries during the Dot-Com era started to reach levels that bordered on ludicrous.

By this time, I was getting cold and wet from the misty drizzle. I had hoped he would finish, turn on the lights, and then I could open the door and have a chat with him. Exactly what I would have a chat about was a total mystery. I confess, I was at a loss for words.

I stood out in the cold drizzle for several more minutes. Geezzz, I thought, this kid is on a marathon. I was getting wet and cold and at some point, I needed to go home and go to bed.

I have had a number of jobs during my career, and as many people do, I occasionally deviated from doing the work that I was supposed to be doing. I never in my wildest dreams thought the term “jerking-off on the job” could be so literal.

Finally, I just pulled the door open and took the two steps to the front of the receptionist’s desk. As I stood in front of the desk, Calvin’s eyes opened to the size of quarters, his jaw dropped and he just sat there, completely frozen, one hand on the computers’ mouse and the other hand holding...

I could not imagine what was racing through Calvin’s mind as the President of the company was standing in front of him at that particular moment.

I wasn’t sure what to say. I must have missed the class during business and personnel management school that dealt with how to handle this episode. This was a whole new dimension in employee relations. I didn’t want to laugh or embarrass him, but I doubt that there was anything I could do or say that would exacerbate the mortification that he must have already been feeling.

As Calvin sat there, still in a state of frozen shock, I began taking steps toward my office and just said, “Hi Calvin. Why don’t you put that away and stop by my office.” I then just walked away, went into my office and sat in my chair, wondering what might be the right words, but just drawing a total blank.

Several minutes had passed. I figured Calvin was contemplating whether he wanted to leave or come into my office. I hoped he would not leave, because if he did, I assumed that he would never return.

Calvin appeared at my office door. “Hi Calvin, come on in and have a seat,” I said, motioning to the chair sitting at the side of my desk.

His demeanor was rather dismal. Calvin sat in the chair, staring at the floor. I tried to relate to how this kid must have been feeling at that moment. How would I feel if the tables were turned? I didn’t want to say the wrong thing and crush Calvin’s fragile self-image. To the greatest degree possible, I just wanted the conversation kept at a professional level.

A minute or two had passed as I tried to compose the most appropriate language to open a conversation. I looked at him and said, “Calvin, were a small growing company and our policies are evolving as we grow. I don’t think you have broken any rules, so you’re not in any kind of trouble. The

fact is, we really don't have a policy about jerking-off on company premises. However, I would really prefer that you don't jerk-off in the lobby, directly in front of the glass front door." Calvin acknowledged the logic of my on-the-fly policy pronouncement by slowly shaking his head in the affirmative and softly saying, "Yeah, I know."

I explained to Calvin that Kyle had stopped by the office a couple of times and noticed that the lights suddenly came on when he pulled up to the building. I didn't know if he [Calvin] was up to something that could be detrimental to the company and I thought it might be wise for me to look into the behavior.

I apologized for walking in at an inopportune time. I told Calvin that it was better that I walk in as opposed to a co-worker or a customer. "If someone else walked in tonight, I doubt that you would come back to work," I explained. I assured Calvin that the incident would not be shared with anyone else, and that I would never bring it up in the future either, which caused a visible sigh of relief. I said, "I just want your promise that you'll show up for work tomorrow." Calvin gave me his promise, and I stood up and said, "Good, let's go home." Calvin stood up and said, "Thanks, and I'm sorry."

Calvin extended his hand so as to consummate our agreement of secrecy with a handshake. I think it is a conditioned response that when a person extends their hand, that I extend mine and shake hands. As I was extending my hand, there was this split second hesitation as I recalled the visual in my mind's eye when I first walked in and Calvin was sitting behind the receptionist's desk.

My hesitation was similar to that less-than-a-second reaction you have as you're closing your car door, and almost simultaneous with the sound of the lock clicking shut, you suddenly realize that the keys are still in the ignition. It isn't really a conscious reaction - it is closer to a reflex action. The mental process is so immeasurably quick that it is almost instantaneous. My brain was processing information faster than my motor skills were moving my hand forward, causing a hesitation as I extended my hand.

My brain was processing one question - *which hand* had been holding *which mouse*? I continued extending my hand, moving it upward and putting my arm around Calvin's shoulder guiding him toward my office door. I gave him a pat on the back and said, "We'll see you in the morning."

Over the next several years, Calvin worked hard and earned several promotions and pay raises. He turned out to be a stellar employee who was reliable and accountable and made a real contribution to the company's growth and success.

Although the preceding experience is probably the extreme, it illustrates the fact that even a master's degree in business cannot possibly prepare a person for every possible scenario they might face when growing a business.

Don't get me wrong, I think education is the foundation and the initial key to succeeding or accelerating success. There is a contrast between theoretical business and practical business. An education opens the door. What happens once you walk through that door is dynamic and many times holds some interesting surprises.

When we first started the company in 1995, there were 162 Tier One National Network Operators such as AT&T, Sprint, MCI, WorldCom, UUnet and Fiber Network Solutions Inc. ("FNSI"). These are the companies that built large networks, which interconnect with one another to form the infrastructure of the Internet. By the time we sold the company, there were less than 25, and over half of those were in bankruptcy with more to come.

How is it possible that a privately held company founded in 1995 and headquartered in Columbus, Ohio continued to grow and prosper while billion-dollar giants such as Global Crossing, MCI/Worldcom, PSInet and Digex imploded?

You can't grow a baby in six months. Last time I checked, it still takes nine. You also can't grow a business from a weed in Mississippi, as is the case with Worldcom, to a global telecommunications provider in seven years - unless of course you're playing games with your books so you can keep raising public money from the widows and orphans and siphon it off at the top.

I predicted the collapse of Worldcom in 1997. It was apparent that it, and a whole host of other companies, were practicing a growth strategy that was fundamentally flawed, and their fiscal management suggested some real serious issues.

We had an account with Worldcom and we were leasing fiber optic lines all over North America. Worldcom seemed to have a pattern of billing for services that we were not receiving, and for failing to credit service credits and payments to our account. Even after providing copies of cancelled checks and a full reconciliation of our account, payments were not properly credited to our account. Whether this practice was deliberate or not, the result is that Worldcom had both the receivables asset and the cash asset on its balance sheet.

Our disputes with Worldcom led to a real David and Goliath scenario. WorldCom's creative accounting practices were among the issues that led to it filing one of the biggest bankruptcies in U.S. history.

During our conflict with Worldcom, it took the arrogant position that it was a big dog and we weren't, so they could do anything they wanted. A bit Neanderthal I thought. In some respects, it was bigger however, when we were first forming our company, I had read a book entitled, *In the Company of Giants*, in which I remember the quote: "A small team of A-Plus players will run circles around a giant team of B and C players." We had the small team of A+ players, and WorldCom's team was at best, a C-minus.

Worldcom began threatening to suspend services, which would have effectively taken down our network. I do not respond well to threats and extortion, so simultaneous with filing Reply Comments to the FCC and filing a complaint with the Ohio Public Utilities Commission, we deployed a parallel network.

Literally the day that we had our network covered with new parallel lines, Worldcom began shutting down all services in an obvious attempt to destroy our business. They lost that battle, and words cannot describe how I wallowed in satisfaction a few years later, seeing Bernie Ebbers, the CEO of WorldCom testifying before the Congressional hearings, taking the Fifth over and over and over again. I even used a snapshot of Ebbers from CSPAN as a post card with the caption, "*Having trouble getting straight answers from your network provider? You're not alone.*" We mailed out a couple hundred thousand of those postcards and our customers loved it. From a marketing standpoint, we had a return of over fifty percent. Thanks Bernie! The last I heard, Mr. Ebbers has a projected release date of July 4, 2028. He will be 86 years old.

Our marketing department created our own public service message that we played on our telephone systems' *on-hold* music. The message had a news moderator reporting the headlines, dates and events of the various companies that were imploding with the background music - "*Another one bites the dust*" by John Deacon. Getting my revenge in the marketplace was really rich.

"...Dateline, Monday July 22, 2002 - USA Today reports, Worldcom drops a bomb on telecom. After two years of economic malaise, diving stock prices and corporate scandals, the biggest bankruptcy ever feels like a cannonball to the gut. ...Dateline, July 31st 2002 - New York - The Associated Press is reporting that the Justice Department is investigating AOL's accounting, the latest round of bad news for the worlds largest media. The Justice Department is looking into the accounting practices of AOL / Time Warner, Inc. which is already under investigation by federal security regulators."

There were probably fifteen different headlines that the moderator was reading with the back ground music playing "*Another one bites the dust*" and the volume of the song increasing in-between each dateline announcement.

I wasn't the least bit bashful about the utter glory I felt. There is no sweeter justice than that which comes from your adversary's own actions.

Never seek revenge and always resist the temptation to facilitate a payback. It only diverts your focus, consumes your conscious, blankets you in negativity and wastes time. People who attempt to gain, and inflate their own ego by trampling over other people eventually self-destruct. You really do not need to do anything. The truth is buoyant and always floats to the surface. If you are dealt an injustice as I had been dealt many times, just be patient and justice will come. I wallow to this very day.

Many of the companies that saw phenomenal growth during the late 1990's collapsed when the available funding from the public markets began to dry up in early 2000. When there was no longer a steady flow of cash to fund the various schemes, a plethora of fraud and deception began surfacing in a growing number of those publicly traded companies - deception that was sometimes supported by their outside auditors.

The second half of the 1990's decade saw a business philosophy which provided substantial financial opportunity to anyone who had the ability to assemble tantalizing rhetoric with financial projections produced through the magic of Microsoft Excel, and call it a business plan.

The focus of many of the upstarts during this period was based solely on forming, launching and managing a "public entity" with a whole new set of rules. Many had a singular objective of acquiring massive amounts of capital irrespective of whether or not the public entity had any actual correlation to a bona fide business. The mandate was to drive revenues at any cost - even if the cost-of-sales resulted in a negative gross profit. It became common for companies to grow by acquiring revenue streams through merger and acquisition activities that included acquiring enormous operating deficits.

Many of these entities had less than a glimmer of hope of ever achieving earnings from actual operations. The main focus was raising capital on one hand and waste it with the other on expensive and ineffective advertising & marketing campaigns, and elaborate and irresponsible perks for the top executives. Many of these public companies hoped to generate a revenue stream and receive a valuation based upon a high multiple of revenues while practicing a total disregard for earnings and investment return. It was coined, "*The New Economy*."

My company was formed during the heat of the IPO craze (*circa 1995*) and became one of only 24 tier one Internet backbone networks in North America. We ranked as one of the leading networks in the country, and in the company of such giants as AT&T, Sprint, MCI and UUnet, but we remained privately held.

I had people drilling my kneecaps to make an initial public offering (IPO). We were well positioned to IPO. We had audited financial statements, we maintained excellent organization and compliance, and our growth was tremendous.

I had one of our law firms provide an opinion letter as to whether prior felony convictions of the President & CEO would in any way impede taking the company public, which it would not. Some regulations required disclosure if the conviction was less than ten years old and other regulations required disclosure if the conviction was less than five years old. At that time, my conviction was more than twenty years old so it presented no barrier.

Several of our attorneys suggested that I have my state convictions expunged and apply for a Presidential Pardon for the federal convictions. Given what I had achieved since my convictions, my attorney's assured me that I would be granted a pardon, stating, "Dave, you're the poster child for a Presidential Pardon." I declined the suggestion because I refuse to dignify the convictions by letting anyone believe that they present any real or perceived limitation in any corner of my mind.

I clearly did not want to expunge my record or apply for a pardon so I could take my company public. I simply could not get past my belief that the public markets appeared to be a balloon ready to burst, and I questioned the legitimacy of many of the companies that were operating on public market money. I did not want to be in that bubble when it burst.

Despite the concepts of the "New Economy," I suppose I am genetically predisposed to the "Old Economy" concepts, which stipulate that earnings are a material and integral component to a business plan. We may not have won the race to rapid revenue growth, but we practiced good fiscal management and we did not collapse under the weight of having deployed fifty locations in twelve months, as did a number of those companies that subsequently self-destructed.

When the Dot-Bomb finally came, everyone seemed shocked to learn of fraud and deception within companies like Worldcom. I wasn't shocked in the least. But, that may be because I have acquired that knowledge and perception that comes from having eaten of the forbidden fruit in my prior life.

I observed many of those companies over the years and saw that they were founded on concepts that amounted to vapor. Many of those companies had management teams that sported well-styled hair, perfect white teeth, enormous egos, personal larcenous greed, arrogance and a vocabulary that incorporated the latest Wall Street buzzwords. However, from a practical, operational, management and skill-set standpoint, many of them didn't have

much beyond a brain stem. How much skill and discipline does it take to spend a thousand dollars to generate a dollar in revenue? Such practices formed common business models during that era.

While the catchphrase during the 90's was "*We're going to IPO*," I deliberately focused upon the fundamentals that form a solid business foundation, and continued to operate with a bottom line centric agenda. I don't claim to be a genius - it's really just the Business 101 principles of the Old Economy that will never change. Companies need to have a clear path to profitability, practice managed growth and become self sufficient before the well of equity capital runs dry. And, here's a concept, *Be Honest!*

I knew that if I maintained a well managed company and a sound fiscal plan that we would be well positioned to provide service when some of our competitors went down in flames.

We did not participate in the "growth through aggressive acquisition" strategy. Strategic acquisitions are always a sound business practice. The key word is *strategic*. Acquisitions for the sole purpose of building a revenue stream while simultaneously acquiring enormous operating deficits and planning to fund the deficit ad infinitum with public and private capital is a recipe for disaster.

My forecast suggested that no economy could indefinitely support the substantial cash burns that many companies were developing. Our decisions were based upon fundamental business principles - not the least of which was our concern that a practice of deception was emerging, and I just didn't want to be associated with that crowd in any way shape or form.

I always thought that there were at least some questionable practices with some of those Dot-Com companies, but I confess, I had no idea that there was such an enormous amount of conscious and deliberate corruption.

My business strategy had been simple from the start. It is the exact same strategy I practiced from the day I was released on parole. It is a strategy that took me through several successful careers and grew a couple of successful businesses.

Specific to Fiber Network Solutions, we first developed an extensive business and operating plan that was sensible, and then we implemented and executed on the plan. Set the goal, make a plan, and then work that plan.

Ours was a plan to develop a profitable regional business model and refine that model so it would be replicable throughout the United States. Some additional concepts that were practiced company-wide by all associates made my company successful while mammoth companies like Enron, Worldcom, Global Crossing, Northpoint and Rhythms imploded are:

1. Honesty - (without this, the rest doesn't matter)
2. Hard Work
3. Sacrifice
4. Discipline
5. Organization
6. Planning
7. Goal setting and achievement
8. Team participation

Many of the companies that were collapsing never had to think through challenges and develop solutions and efficiencies of operations. They wasted billions of dollars to Band-Aid problems and efficiency wasn't important. They *funded problems* as opposed to *solving problems*.

I started my company on what amounts to a shoestring when compared to the capital raised by other similar companies. We had to develop true and effective efficiencies in every aspect of our operation. This is fundamentally why we sat in the bleachers, eating popcorn and getting a suntan while watching Worldcom, *et al* battle it out with the Department of Justice. We were placing our bets on the DOJ.

As our competitors focused on their growing legal and financial issues, we acquired new customers by picking through the carcasses of those competitors that failed to execute on a sound business plan, got caught with their hand in the cookie jar, or otherwise became dependent on raising additional capital, but the well eventually ran dry.

I don't mean to sound arrogant, but we earned the position that we were in. We all made the sacrifices - our entire staff. We didn't provide our staff with the tanning beds, tennis courts, saunas, corporate espresso machines, foosball lounges, personal masseuse, treadmill machines and other perks common to the Dot-Com space. We came in every day and actually participated in this unique concept and exercise called *work*.

Despite the daily temptations to line my pockets, as did a number of executives in the Internet, telecommunications and dot-com industries, I remained a member of our civilized society.

You can achieve tremendous success in this civilized society by simply remaining honest.

I did not make as much money however, I'm not broke, and I am not facing criminal charges either. We hit roughly \$35 million in revenues, which I felt was pretty respectable. And, I cannot overemphasize how much more valuable the experience was than the payday.

The journey is a great deal more delicious than the destination. I would not trade that eight-year experience for any amount of money.



Chapter 9

UNDERSTANDING CULTURE

The power of culture is phenomenal. Irrespective of where a person finds himself situated, it is likely that he is a member of a culture, and absent a deliberate and conscious membership choice, that culture may be beneficial or detrimental.

I have personally been a member of numerous cultures, some which were deliberate choices and others that were not, and some that were beneficial and others that were clearly detrimental.

Cultures are the essence of our existence. It determines everything from clothing styles to automobile designs, career choices, the music we listen to, the movies and television programming we watch, the games we play and the sporting events to which we are spectators.

Culture drives entire industries and it is the foundation of ethical and moral standards, which are frequently in conflict based upon opposing cultures. One culture calls the other's music garbage and their body piercing repugnant, while the opposing culture finds a suit and tie a symbol of the evil empire.

Has rap music, rock-n-roll, disco or the blues created cultures, or have cultures evolved from these music eras? Either way, there is no denying the existence of these cultures.

Why does an eight-year-old want to become a police officer? Is it because he has studied criminology and all of the tabulated statistics? More likely, he is attracted to something much more allusive - culture.

Culture appeals to our innate need to belong, to our need for peers who share a commonality of interest, for recognition and adulation.

Absent of a culture that is fundamentally based in decency and wholesomeness that will accept a person as a member, a person will find admittance to an alternative culture that will give them the acceptance they innately crave. This is absolute.

There are existent cultures that readily accept individuals who have experienced an incarceration event. A few are extraordinarily good, many

are astronomically appalling and most are mediocre. Very few provide a structured, disciplined and methodical approach to closing a dark chapter and beginning a bright future that is based upon a life of legitimacy through cultural interaction, but they do exist.

The *Family Values* political platforms are attempts to capitalize upon the cultural desires of many people however, these political platforms are fundamentally disingenuous. Is the Family Values issue a cultural problem in our nation? Absolutely - of galactic proportions. However, what exactly can a politician do to genuinely and positively affect Family Values once elected? Almost nothing! Culture or cultural change cannot be legislated, but they can be influenced.

Family values will improve when parents are demonstrating accountability, earning the respect of their children and becoming a model by working, earning their income, owning businesses, paying taxes, contributing to their community, employing other people and doing those things that are necessary to support the family unit. These actions or the lack thereof are the result of culture.

Cultural change presents a whole set of unique challenges, not the least of which is slowing the existent cultural momentum. Family Values, as only one example, is on a slippery slope in a continually deteriorating direction and with substantial momentum. Creating a culture is substantially less problematic than changing an existent culture. It is easier to give birth than it is to resurrect the dead.

Whether changing or creating a culture, people who have a common goal facilitate cultural change or the birth of a new culture. Government or legislation cannot facilitate these changes or creations. If a problem is rooted in culture as is the problems that produce, contribute to and aggravate recidivism, a growing assembly of people who have a commonality of interest, experiences and challenges will only effectively resolve it. Only the people who are a part of the recidivism dilemma can facilitate the necessary changes to inspire their own solution.

Among the underlying problems that contribute to recidivism is illiteracy, which to a large extent is exacerbated by entitlements, but is rooted in culture. In its many forms, whether individual, institutional or corporate, welfare as a lifestyle is a malignancy to the human spirit.

Aside from, and perhaps substantially more important than academics, the need to proliferate real world practical and functional literacy is profound. The acquisition of academic and literacy skills or the lack thereof, is the result of membership in a culture.

Our government cannot mandate education. Even if our government could statutorily require every person complete high school, academic curriculum frequently lacks real world life skills, and operational, functional and practical material. Further, it would be impossible in this democracy to force learning. Fundamental to learning is the student's desire, and desire cannot be legislated.

Given over two centuries, the entity of government has not effectively solved the problems that underlie recidivism. The government's function in the justice, crime & punishment and corrections arena has substantially been security and quarantine, which historically has an excellent record, but has no positive effect on recidivism.

Our judicial process, from time to time, incorporates the concept of rehabilitation whereby an individual can make a mistake, pay his debt and regain a productive direction. Rehabilitation is an attitude, a desire and a series of decisions that are distinct of the system or any programs.

Rehabilitation requires that the individual make deliberate and conscious choices to change habits and behaviors. The person with adequate desire will triumph irrespective of any available programs.

The concept of rehabilitation, whereby an individual can experience a setback and subsequently regain a productive direction is solely dependent upon the individual's attitude and a definitive decision to change.

Irrespective of any available rehabilitation programs, the concept of rehabilitation only evolves to a functional agenda based upon an individual's dedication to methodically embrace, internalize and follow a disciplined strategy with a clear path to definitive objectives. Rehabilitation exists only within the individual, and its genesis is the desire.

There are many rehabilitation programs within the nation's correctional institutions that provide education and vocational training, counseling and prerelease preparation. The effectiveness of those programs is not measured by the excellence of the curriculum. As I have stated previously, if a person does not make a conscious decision to embrace the concept of rehabilitation toward pursuing a life of legitimacy, educating that person to the level of a doctorate degree through a curriculum designed by the finest Ivy League college would be an exercise in futility.

So many people have convinced themselves that the government or society owes them something. This is not limited only to people who have been incarcerated. However, some people who have served time in prison sometimes have an amplified feeling that they are somehow a victim of injustice. Injustice has no preference or prejudice. Everyone is subject to injustices in one form or another throughout life.

A part of moving forward in life is letting go of the notion that it is someone else's responsibility to provide for the necessities that you need to live. When a person is released from prison, the government has completed its job. Its primary function was to carry out the sentence imposed by the court. Once that sentence is completed, including any post release supervision, the government's job is done.

While I was incarcerated, I saw many people who did not participate in any of the educational or vocational programs that were available. In fact, there were some who criticized me because I did participate in several programs.

I realized one fundamental and paramount concept while I was contemplating where I wanted to go with the rest of my life. If I had to choose only one message to convey to a person who is in prison, it would be what I realized while I was still in prison.

My rehabilitation had nothing to do with the educational, vocational, counseling and rehabilitation programs. My rehabilitation had only to do with myself. The various programs that were available were like the bricks and mortar in a building - they first require a strong foundation. If a building is built on quicksand, it will crumble. Only I could decide the strength of the foundation upon which I would build my life.

Even if you still think that the government has some responsibility to ensure that you do not recidivate after you are released from prison, you do not have decades, years, months or even weeks to wait for government or any other entity to resolve the challenges that contribute to recidivism. This is among the reasons that I have been talking about culture, culture change, and the government's ability to legislate culture. It is a long way away, and you don't have time to wait. You need to take the bull by the horns and do it yourself.

You need to solve the recidivism problem by yourself, for yourself, immediately. You can change your culture and you can become a member of a culture yet to be fully created. In either scenario or both, you will be achieving your primary objective - closing a chapter and starting anew.



Chapter 10

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CULTURE

Culture is a phenomenon that we could write volumes about and debate for centuries. Human beings are genetically cultural. It defines civilizations, and individually, it characterizes our very essence. Cultures range from the micro-culture such as the cliques to which people belong, to macro-cultures that substantially define nations.

We are influenced by culture from birth and begin to actively seek our own cultural identity during pre-adolescence. We form our sphere of influence and our peer groups based largely upon the culture with which we elect to identify, or whatever culture will accept us and provide the membership identity we seek, or by default, the culture in which we are born and raised.

People seek culture and cultural identity. It is not unusual for a person to find them self a member of a culture by default and not by a conscious and deliberate decision. Nonetheless, once a member, people will strive for recognition within that culture.

Offenders come from a wide demographic of cultural backgrounds. Many are from economically disadvantaged environments and single parent households. Many formed peer groups and idolized icons before coming of age where such decisions were well-informed, intelligent and conscious choices. Many become members of a nefarious culture because they are accepted and granted admission, but not because they have analyzed different cultures and made a deliberate and conscious comparative.

In our societal structure, the *“Keeping up with the Joneses”* is a representation of cultural identity. There are arguments to both sides as to whether economic disadvantage is a result of a culture, or the culture is a result from economic disadvantage.

Cultures have rules and expectations. A part of the general culture in the United States is a respect for achievement, which is frequently exhibited by material possessions. The only functional difference between a Chevrolet and a Rolls Royce is that one is a trophy that demonstrates cultural achievement. Arguably, the Chevrolet is also a trophy however, its celebration is representative of a different culture.

A consequence of conviction is that it creates barriers to offender reentry, some that are real and others that are only perceived. I call this consequence "*Collateral Damage*." Many individuals who have a conviction feel that they are forced to default to a culture that is less than wholesome. Granted there are barriers that include statutory prohibition from various forms of employment and licensure however, you are not cut off from participating in our civilized society.

Don't allow yourself to fall into the trap where an employment or licensure prohibition becomes your excuse not to achieve success. I have met people who tell me that because they are prohibited from one specific occupation, they cannot achieve a normal life of legitimacy. In some instances, the person who claims to be barred from a specific occupation doesn't even have the education and skill-sets to pursue it anyhow. They are just trying to manufacture an excuse and rationalization for not having the intestinal fortitude to slay the reentry Dragon.

I also hear that reentry barriers are a form of double jeopardy because the individual has already paid the price for their crime, and prohibiting them from certain occupations is a form of double jeopardy. Whether I agree or disagree with that concept, *so what!* I faced the same dilemma and had to decide whether I would spend the rest of my life protesting and sucking my thumb, or spend it pursuing those things that would result in a life of comfort, security and normalcy. Start off by taking the path of least resistance - but make that a legitimate path.

For what it's worth, I do not perceive any of the reentry challenges or barriers as double jeopardy. However, the existence of a felony conviction does have a certain amount of collateral damage. Some scars never heal. I could have chosen to let those scars be my excuse to lie down and suck my thumb, or just deal with it and move forward. You can spend the rest of your life trying to change the system, which is fine as long as you have a voracious and eternal appetite for Oscar Myer wieners, macaroni & cheese and spaghetti-o's. Alternatively, you can focus on what you can do and move your life forward.

Ex-offenders are not prohibited from participating in a legitimate culture and mainstream society. I've done it for thirty-plus years - post conviction and incarceration. I also never dignified the convictions by applying for a pardon or having my records expunged. I'm not saying that the convictions are not totally accurate and legitimate. The convictions simply have not limited my ability to achieve the goals I have set. Has it been easy? No, it's been hard.

Many ex-offenders perceive that they have no opportunity in mainstream society, and because of this perception, they participate in groups and cultures that will likely cause them to return to prison.

I want to repeat a previous paragraph because I want to emphasize its importance.

People seek culture and cultural identity. It is not unusual for a person to find themselves members of a culture by default and not by a conscious and deliberate decision. Nonetheless, once a member, they will strive for recognition within that culture.

I have been a member of numerous cultures. In my early teens, I found myself a member of a culture that was involved in the movements of the late 1960's. I never made a conscious choice to join that culture, it was simply a place where I found acceptance. It wasn't necessarily a nefarious culture, but there did not seem to be many socially redeeming qualities, and experimentation with various mind-altering substances was widely practiced. Contrast that culture against the culture of aviation professionals. As a professional pilot, even smoking cigarettes is pretty taboo. Drugs and alcohol are intolerable to the point of just being unthinkable.

After being released from prison, I pretty much decided to put away all of my toys of the past and focus on my future. I suppose that my newfound involvement in the aviation industry also had a substantial influence. Simply being involved in a culture where a healthy and wholesome lifestyle is a major consideration to acceptance in the culture facilitated some change in how I conducted my life. I became somewhat conservative. As with membership in any culture, I wanted acceptance and recognition, which required that I conduct myself in accordance with the standards of that culture.

I had a trip to Key West with the owner of the Learjet I was flying who attended the offshore powerboat races each year. We generally stayed about a week for this event, and my co-pilot and I found various activities to entertain ourselves. After we landed and got the owner's transportation arranged, we stowed the airplane and called a taxi to take us to our hotel.

I'm not completely sure what the regulations were in Key West to operate a taxi, but it appears that it didn't require much more than a vehicle with a sign that reads, "Taxi."

A Volkswagen van pulled up that looked like it fell right out of a 1960's time warp. The van was painted with all of the paisley flowers, peace signs and the icons of the 60's era. I'm sure this vehicle took first prize at Woodstock.

As my co-pilot, Craig, and I stepped into the van, we were greeted by the driver who clearly looked and acted the part of the paradigm created by Cheech & Chong, complete with the tie-dyed t-shirt, wide bellbottoms and a variety of roach clips hanging from the rearview mirror. Like I said, I'm not sure how the taxicabs in Key West are regulated. From my many visits

however, Key West appears to be where the people ended up, who were in high school during the same era as me, but who didn't quit in time. It is an interesting culture.

Craig was only 21 years old so, he was amused, but he had only become aware of the 60's culture from literature of some type or another. I had lived it! For me, it was somewhat comical, but it was also sad to see a guy in his late 30's to early 40's stuck in a time warp that ended decades before. I thought, but for the grace of God, there go I. I was a member of his culture decades before and now, I am sitting in his van, in a professional pilot uniform, having just flown as captain on a Learjet from Cleveland in just a few hours.

In reality, this taxi driver and I were both faced with very similar choices at different times in our lives. There were times that I was unwilling to embrace the challenges and work that was associated with those choices that would lead to a comfortable lifestyle. After getting kicked in the teeth with a prison term, those choices became easier.

The drive from the Key West airport to the Holiday Inn located in downtown Key West was only about fifteen minutes. When we arrived, neither Craig nor I had any cash. I told the driver that I would run into the hotel and cash a check while Craig waited.

I couldn't have been gone more than three or four minutes. When I came out, I opened the passenger side front door, held up the cash and asked, "How much do we owe you?" Remember, we were in our pilot uniforms. It was pretty difficult not to immediately recognize that we were pilots.

The conversation went something very close to this. No exaggeration, this was how the conversation really transpired almost verbatim...

DAVE: How much do we owe you?

DRIVER: Uhhhhhhh, ummmmmmm, weeeelllllll.

The driver was scratching his head, twirling the hair of his beard and continued...

DRIVER: Uhhhhhhh. Hmmmmmm. Ummmmmmmm.

He looked right at both of us, and continued with the ummmm, uhhhhh for a solid three or four minutes. Then, looking at both of us, he said:

DRIVER: Ummmm, uhhhhh, ...uhhh, ...where did I pick you guys up?

Chuckling, Craig immediately responded, "What do you mean? ...we just got in." The driver gave a stoned sounding chuckle and said, "Uhhhh. Ha ha,

naw. Naw dude,” almost as though he wasn’t really sure if we had just gotten in his van, but for certain, he still had absolutely no recollection of where he picked us up.

I’m not sure what the clinical definition is for short-term memory and long-term memory. Given that the driver had just picked us up at the airport twenty minutes before, and there was that little hint that we were wearing pilot uniforms, whatever memory applies to the preceding twenty minutes of this guys conscious was completely shot like a reformatted hard drive - wiped squeaky clean. He definitely reminded me of some of the people with whom I went to high school who didn’t quit in time. That was a real cultural contrast.

Another example of cultural contrast occurred when I was scheduled to fly empty from Cleveland and pick up some passengers in Detroit. I arrived at the airport in Cleveland at 5:00 AM.

The itinerary was to fly empty to Detroit and pick up a group of executives with one of the large tire manufacturing companies. We would then take this group to multiple destinations throughout the Midwest. We were scheduled to depart from Detroit at 8:00 A.M. As I was preparing my flight plan and reviewing the trip sheet and passenger manifest, I read the name, *Andrew Zeigler* as the lead passenger.

I went to high school with a guy named Andy Zeigler. I knew Andy pretty well - we partied often. The last time I saw him was at a three-day-long marathon party while still in high school. That party included a wide variety of people. Many of the attendees were competing to see how much white powder they could pack in their nose and how much alcohol a person needed to drink before they would spontaneously combust.

Anyone who attended that party was pretty much guilty by association, me included. I smiled at the memory, but there was no way on God’s green Earth that the Andy Zeigler I knew had achieved a position in life where he would be flying around on a six million dollar private Learjet - *zero chance!* I figured that by now, Andy would have been a vegetable or dead, or at the very best, living in Key West driving a taxi. I’m sure his sentiments for me were pretty much the same.

My co-pilot and I departed Cleveland for the thirty-minute flight to Detroit a little after 6:00 AM. After landing, we were taxiing to the private aircraft terminal, which are called FBO’s - (Fixed Base Operators). The sun had not come over the horizon yet, but it was becoming lighter.

As we taxied onto the terminal ramp, I noticed a man standing by the building in a suit. I parked the airplane about twenty feet from where he was standing. He began walking toward the airplane. As he got a little

closer, I looked at him and audibly said, “Oh my God! It’s Andy!” A slightly older version but it was clearly him.

The passenger door on Learjet is called a clamshell door. It is split horizontally in the center and hinged on the top and on the bottom. As the bottom swings open and drops, it serves as the steps to climb into the airplane. The top part of the door swings up and out of the way.

As Andy was walking toward the airplane, I went in back and unlatched the door. Just as I was swinging the top half of the door open, Andy was within three feet of the airplane.

The top door swung open, I leaned forward, smiled and said, “Hi Andy, I’m your captain.” The only thoughts that could have been racing through Andy’s mind were the memories and the circumstances of when he had last seen me at the marathon party in high school. Andy literally stumbled backward and gasped, “No fucking way!” Andy was genuinely shocked. I just smiled and asked, “Andy, can I offer you some oxygen?”

Evidently, Andy had attended one of the more prestigious universities and became a chemical engineer, a doctorate no less. We enjoyed brief visits throughout the day between their meetings, and when we returned to Detroit, we spent several hours talking - reminiscing about our high school days and what had become of many of our friends from that era.

In particular, we spoke of one friend, Jeff, whose alcoholism had pretty much alienated him from all of his friends and family. “Jeff wasn’t the only one,” Andy said. “Some of them just never realized that it was time to put away their toys and move on with their lives.”

We had a long discussion about the culture in which we were both members and the contrast of the cultures that we were members today. The contrast between the two is quite profound.

You can become a member of any culture you choose. But, sans a conscious choice, you will be a member of a culture that chooses you. In many cases, you are chosen only to perpetuate the survival of the culture.



Chapter 11

THE MAGIC OF CULTURE

The most powerful aspect of a culture is its ability to create desire. This desire is many times manifested in the desire to belong, to find peer approval, community, unity and comradeship, the desire for acceptance and recognition - to feel a part of something bigger than one's self.

Ask yourself why you subscribe to the culture(s) to which you belong. Why do you hang with your friends? How did they become your friends? Did you consciously choose your friends or are your acquaintances the result of belonging to a group or culture?

Let's examine a few modern-day cultures.

HARLEY DAVIDSON

Harley Davidson Motorcycles. The first Harley Davidson motorcycle appeared in Milwaukee on September 8, 1904. The company's long history incorporates many challenging times, including the Great Depression, and most recently, the Great Recession of 2008, which is continuing to this day. Despite its many challenges, it has built an extraordinarily loyal customer base.

In its 2011 Annual Report, Harley Davidson had \$274 million in sales of various clothing, jewelry, and other *general merchandise* with the Harley Davidson emblem, which identifies customers as members of the Harley Davidson culture. That figure does not include motorcycle sales - just general merchandise.

Why is over \$750,000 spent each and every day on Harley Davidson merchandise? It is the same reason that kept Harley Davidson alive when the company was acquired by AMF in 1969.

Harley Davidson was nearing extinction because of numerous challenges that resulted in steadily declining sales. AMF (American Machinery and Foundry) saved Harley Davidson by buying the company. However, during the period that Harley Davidson was owned by AMF, the products (motorcycles) were substandard and foreign competition was gaining market

share. Harley Davidson was purchased back from AMF for a total price of \$80 million in 1981 by a group of thirteen individuals, led by Vaughn Beals and Willie G. Davidson.

Harley Davidson has survived because its foundation was rooted in its culture - a culture that resuscitated an almost dead organization - a culture that rose from the ashes of adversity - a culture that produced over \$4.66 billion in 2011 revenues while turning a handsome profit during one of the most challenging periods in our country's history.

I've personally owned several Harley-Davidson motorcycles since the 1980's and recently sold my 2001 Wide Glide, which I bought new and turned roughly 100,000 miles before letting her go.

I enjoy the Harley-Davidson sponsored Poker Runs, which facilitate fund raising for Muscular Dystrophy. There are actually several cultures within the Harley-Davidson crowd.

The paradigm Harley Davidson culture continues to exist, which is the Hell's Angels and outlaw motorcyclists. However, the majority of Harley Davidson owners are a completely different breed than the culture of thirty years ago.

I was on a trip with my new Harley during the summer of 2001 and ended up spending a night in Eagle Nest, a tiny town in New Mexico. The next morning, I found a little hole-in-the-wall diner and stopped for breakfast. There were a couple of bikes parked out front, and as I went in, the owners of those bikes were the only two people in the restaurant. They invited me to join them for breakfast and we talked about our journeys. After breakfast, we went our separate way and I never expected to hear from either of them again.

About a month after returning home, an article appeared in the local business paper regarding my company with a picture of me in my normal business attire. About a week later, I received a letter in the mail with a copy of the article that said, "You don't look anything like that dusty old rugged looking biker I had breakfast with in Eagle Nest, New Mexico a few weeks ago." It was signed by, Dr. Larry Gill. Dr. Gill is an ophthalmologist from my hometown and has taken care of my vision requirements ever since. It's a small world. His travel partner is an attorney. Both are professional men, just out ridding their bikes. So much for the old paradigms. One of the larger cultures of bikers today is comprised substantially of professional people.

The Harley Davidson story is only one of thousands of examples where a strong cultural influence has directly impacted the success or the demise of a business.

THE GUARDIAN ANGELS

Street Gangs are cultures that attract children, adolescents and young adults for the same fundamental reasons as any other culture.

Curtis Sliwa - a former gang member, with just 13 members, founded the Guardian Angels during early 1979 in New York City. The last I checked, the Guardian Angels had over 5,000 members in 67 American, Canadian and Mexican cities and 7 countries overseas.

The Alliance of Guardian Angels, Inc. is a non-profit, all-volunteer organization whose purpose is to fight crime and provide positive real-life role models for young people. Sliwa also founded Cyberangles, the largest online safety and educational program in cyberspace, he has authored several books on self defense and is a news talk radio host on 77 WABC in New York.

Why would a kid join the Guardian Angels as a volunteer as opposed to a street gang that is producing income from drug sales and other illegal activity? Both organizations offer membership in a culture. The Guardian Angels culture however provides nobility and honor, and a mechanism to make a positive contribution to mankind - traits that create that prerequisite *desire* that I have mentioned several times. Its members have made a conscious choice to join this organization as opposed to becoming a member of an organization that essentially drafts them into it, frequently by force and intimidation.

It really is vitally important to recognize your past cultural memberships and decide what benefits or detriments it can have on the rest of your life. Once you make the analysis of where you have been, you can make very conscious and deliberate choices about where you are going.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

This is the Foreword as it appeared in the first printing of the first edition of "*The Big Book*" in 1939.

We, of Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than one hundred men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. To show other alcoholics precisely how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book. For them, we hope these pages will prove so convincing that no further authentication will be necessary. We think this account of our experiences will help everyone to better understand the alcoholic. Many do not comprehend that the alcoholic is a very sick person. And besides, we are sure that our way of living has its advantages for all.

This is the Foreword to the Fourth edition published in 2001.

This fourth edition of “Alcoholics Anonymous” came off press in November 2001, at the start of a new millennium. Since the third edition was published in 1976, worldwide membership of A.A. has just about doubled, to an estimated two million or more, with nearly 100,800 groups meeting in approximately 150 countries around the world.

The book did not increase the membership from a few people to over two million, and cause the organization to propagate to 150 countries. Alcoholics Anonymous created a culture, which has today become an institution. The organization is a classic example of, people of like adversity - helping people of like adversity - People who are inspired to become their own solution.

It is the culture that produces books and other materials, and has caused the spread of the culture to affect multitudes of people worldwide in every conceivable demographic. Was a constituency of literally millions of members the original vision? Doubtful! The power of culture is that it grows its own legs, becomes a living, dynamic, inextinguishable and eternal flame that expands its mission further, and long after the founders, and the initial concept and vision have passed.

It is interesting that with over two million people in prison and estimates of over twenty million people who have been in prison or jail at some time, there has been no culture developed, by these people - for these people, with a focus on pursuing a life of legitimacy and normalcy. There are a few small groups that have formed such as Delancey Street. I say “small” organizations, relative to the enormous demographic of people who have served time in jail or prison. Statistically, one out of every 140 people in the United States has been in prison or jail.

Delancey Street was started in 1971 with four residents and a one thousand dollar loan. Its mission was to provide an environment where people could turn their lives around. Today, the organization has locations in six major metropolitan areas, and it owns and operates numerous businesses that provide employment and training to its residents. Its success stories number in the tens of thousands of people who were substance abusers, former felons, and others who have hit bottom. I have paraphrased its slogan in this book. The entire organization is based upon the principle of empowering the people with the problems to become their own solution.

PROMISE KEEPERS

“Way back before Promise Keepers had a name, we looked up the word *integrity* in Webster's Dictionary. Webster's gave six definitions: ‘utter sincerity, honesty, candor, not artificial, not shallow, no empty promises.’”

- *Bill McCartney*
Founder and President (Ret.)
Promise Keepers

The genesis of Promise Keepers occurred in March 1990. The organization was formally founded during the next several months by Bill McCartney (Mac), then football coach for the University of Colorado, and some of his close associates and friends.

Substantially an organization for men that is based largely upon Christianity, Promise Keepers has transformed many men into the true definition of Head of Household - a recognition that is not demanded or simply awarded because of gender, but rather, it is earned through accountability and responsibility, by doing the work necessary to provide for the family, and by setting the example for leadership of the family unit. This is among the organization's fundamental missions.

In July 1990 seventy-two friends and associates of the core group gathered at Boulder Valley Christian Church to discuss a conference for the men of Colorado.

Within only five years, the total attendance for 1995 was 738,000 men at 13 conferences. The attendance for 1996 at 22 stadium conferences was 1.1 million men nationwide and the organization continues to attract six and seven figure audiences each year.

In December 2001, 14,000 teens, dads, and youth pastors took part in Promise Keepers' first-ever conference designed specifically for youth age 13-17.

During the November 2002 youth event, Promise Keepers hosted an estimated 10,000 teens, dads, mentors, and youth pastors.

Among the organization's core themes are: personal integrity; leadership; racial harmony among men; what makes a man the head of household; and, building strong marriages and families.

A first-ever prison conference was held in Ohio, August 12, 2003 called "Redeem the Time." About 1,000 men at the medium-security Marion Correctional Institute in Marion, Ohio, attended the four-hour event, and 10,000 more in 70 other prisons participated via the free Web cast.

Twenty-three years and several million transformed lives later, Promise Keepers continues to transform people, resuscitate broken families, integrate family values where they were previously absent and mold honorable Head of Household models.

Irrespective of the Christian theology, people hunger to be responsible and accountable, they yearn for a life of dignity, and they thirst for the cultural organization that will lead the way.

The Internet has accelerated the growth of many cultures by streamlining communication among each culture's members through the different UseNet, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Yahoo, MSN and IRC Chat Groups that serve every conceivable culture. These various on-line groups numbers in the millions.

Other cultures, whether good or bad, wholesome or nefarious, include every religious faction, the Apple Computer culture, the Hell's Angles, NASCAR, militia groups, college fraternities, public safety forces, The Beatles and the cultural revolution of the 1960's to name only a few.

Some cultures grew out of other cultures, or at least had other influences that acted as a catalyst, like The Beatles culture, which was also augmented in large part by the Vietnam conflict.

All cultures provide the elements of unity, have a bond based upon a commonality of interest or cause, and they all create the desire for membership.

ENRON

The preceding four cultural examples are cultures that have produced great and positive results. There are corporate cultures - many which are extraordinarily good and incorporate a healthy measure of humanitarian doctrine and some that are exceptionally poor and are based upon greed and power.

Some corporate cultures create their own set of rules - [this is how we do things to achieve our objectives] - even though those rules may be in conflict with the law. An impressionable young individual who works in such an environment begins to believe that the unwritten day-to-day operational

policies and procedures of their employer are gospel - even though such policies and procedures may be in conflict with the law. Everything is legal because such practices are a part of the culture of this huge corporation.

We have seen the examples in recent years that include Enron and Worldcom. The recorded conversations that have surfaced from the Enron scandal eerily illustrate how individuals internalized that their behaviors were sanctioned by the corporate culture.

To rationalize their repugnantly unethical behavior, which caused horrendous damage to hundreds of thousands of faceless victims, the people and the Enron culture diluted the reality with a veneer of perverse amusement.

Perhaps among the most publicized examples of a corporate culture gone array was Douglas Faneuil, the bright and articulate young man who testified in the Martha Stewart case. Douglas was tarred and feathered by the corporate culture, and the media for that matter - for telling the truth! As I have stated previously, everyone deals with injustices at some point or another, so don't feel alone or singled out.

During his dilemma, I called Douglas. I was rather surprised that his number was listed in the public telephone directory, given the amount of media publicity he was receiving. We had some conversation on the telephone, and I made a trip to New York to meet him for dinner.

Douglas impressed me as a remarkable young man - very talented and intelligent. He has since founded Living Proof, an organization that addresses Suicide Prevention via Mental Illness Awareness. The Genesis of the organization was the tragic loss of his sister to suicide. Douglas is clearly an example of an individual who has risen from the ashes of adversity and moved on to bigger and greater things.

Once again, I want to emphasize this point. People seek culture and cultural identity. It is not unusual for people to find themselves a member of a culture by default and not by a conscious and deliberate decision. Nonetheless, once a member, individuals will strive for recognition within that culture.

I have reiterated this paragraph because it is important that you examine what culture(s) you have been a member, or are currently a member, and how it is that you became a member.

When I examine my life, I have been a member of numerous cultures. My current position in life is partially because I have made some good choices. However, it is also a result of the cultures I have consciously and deliberately chosen to become a member. But for those choices, I could just as easily have

been driving a VW taxi in Key West or spending a good deal more time in prison than I did.

My experience in the aviation industry placed me in a culture of people where an individual is honored by their level of professionalism and adherence to the rules of that culture. The Federal Aviation Regulations are voluminous however, there are no traffic cops up in the sky. The function of the aviation regulations is to promote safety, and adherence to those regulations is based substantially on the honor system.

A considerable amount of credit for my position in life is due to the groups with which I interacted. In any relationship, one will become like the other or the relationship will not achieve equilibrium. If a relationship does not achieve equilibrium, it will dissolve.

In one-to-one relationships, the transition where people gradually become similar is not that difficult. However, when one person is forming a relationship with a larger group of people, the group is generally not going to change to the standards of the individual - the individual will change to the standards of the group.

If you make a very conscious examination of your culture, peer groups and spheres of influence, you can then make deliberate choices as to what culture you decide will best facilitate your objectives. The people with whom you interact will largely influence your destiny.

THE DOT-COM CULTURE

During my tenure as President & CEO of an Internet based company (Circa 1995 - 2003), a whole culture arose.

During that period, people who were between the ages of 18 and 30 working in the telecommunications industry, or for one of those enormous corporations that grew a few hundred thousand percent overnight, had a distorted perception of reality in the workplace that was borderline fantasy.

There was a time, prior to the emergence of the "New Economy," that a college grad with no substantive work experience was hired by a company and understood that this was his/her opportunity to begin proving their value and their capabilities to impact a company's bottom line. Starting pay ranged from \$18,000 - \$26,000 with raises based upon merit and productivity.

The "New Economy" provided individuals right out of college with positions that paid salaries in the middle to upper five and lower six figures, and

perks, bonuses and benefits that were previously only seen in the very upper management of large corporations.

The advent of the “Dot-Com” era brought about a hiring frenzy that made it difficult for employers to attract talent. Many of the hyper-growth corporations needed to staff positions so rapidly they hired anyone who could steam a mirror. To attract individuals, a whole new corporate culture emerged that redefined that exercise we used to call “work.”

Base salaries that borderline on the ridiculous, stock option programs that didn't require an option grantee to demonstrate more than a pulse, luxury automobiles, flex schedules (which means you work - (show up) - three days a week), quarterly corporate retreats, picnics, lunch cart gratis the employer, free snacks and on and on. It is no surprise that so many of these companies ended up in bankruptcy and disappeared as fast as they initially emerged.

I would hire a kid right out of high school before I would hire someone who had only experienced employment between 1995 and 2000 with one of the Wall Street Darling corporations. It is hard enough to teach good business skills without having to un-teach an individual who was taught (albeit by example) business skills and principles that formulate a recipe for disaster.

I wish there was a way that we could sugarcoat it, but there are very few individuals who began their working career between 1995 and 2000 with Enron, WorldCom, Global Crossing and the like, and who have capabilities and skill-sets much beyond drinking their share of the coffee and breathing their share of the air. Notwithstanding, many of them actually believe that they are worth what these organizations had been paying them.

How difficult is it to become (perceptibly) successful in an executive sales position when your employer is spending several hundred million dollars on advertising so you can sit in your office and answer the phone? Where are the sales, prospecting and hunting skills in that scenario?

I didn't have the budget to hire people that weren't prepared to go out hunting the Dragon, slaying the Dragon and dragging the carcass back to the cave. Our producers made an excellent income because they earned it via their individual production.

Our employees had the opportunity to generate substantial personal incomes and participate in the company's stock options program. However, the rewards followed the productivity - not vice versa. I continue to subscribe to the Old Economy principles that support the concept of; first run the race, win the race, and then get your trophy.

Prior to the New Economy which dominated the lions share of my tenure as CEO of FiberNet, an \$85,000 annual salary generally commanded

prerequisites that included a master's degree, ten to fifteen years of proven performance - in-industry and in-job function, and a work ethic that placed you in the upper ten percent of the hardest working employees company wide.

When the economic downturn in telecommunications escalated with the bankruptcies of Worldcom, Global Crossing, NorthPoint, etc., we began receiving literally mail bags full of resumes.

The astronomical accomplishments with which people embellished their resumes became comical. In reality, none of them were actually responsible for the tens of millions in sales that they purported. A cursory examination indicated that they sold very little personally. But, somehow many of these people actually believed that because they showed up for work, they made some kind of galactic contribution to the total revenue generated by their previous employer's total revenues.

I had interviewed a number of individuals from WorldCom. At 46 years old, I was astonished with how these individuals with a few years of work experience actually believe their own press - they truly believed that they created enough value to their employer to command eighty to one hundred thousand dollar base salaries. And God forbid, don't even think about asking them to pay for their own coffee like WorldCom did several months before it filed bankruptcy.

Most of these people were way over paid, which was easy to do for those companies that were using funny money. How hard is it to over pay people when you're essentially using stolen money?

Had our nation's workforce become tainted? The salary and benefits an individual commands from an employer necessarily must be representative of the value that individual provides to that employer. That is fundamental business 101. Substantial contributors to the demise of many of the Dot-Com companies were the employees. Don't kill the goose that lays the golden egg, and be very careful about believing your own press.

I had interviewed account managers from some of those companies who wanted a six figure base salary, but they were unable to explain the basic disciplines of their profession, and some of them had never even closed a single sale. I was often tempted to lean over, and with my most gentle bedside manner whisper, *"Psssttttt, waaaaake uuuuup."*

We paid our employees rather handsomely too. There were individuals under twenty-five with incomes over \$65,000 per year with matching 401(k) (dollar-for-dollar cash match) and a host of other benefits that rivaled the Fortune 500 corporations. The difference is they weren't hired at those levels and they didn't receive endurance raises. They had to earn their raises.

We pioneered several unique concepts, including our Raise-a-Month program. As a privately held company, we needed to watch our cash closely. Giving large pay raises would drain cash. I developed a program whereby employees earned pay raises and their raise was implemented over a period of 6 to 12 months - paralleling the company's increasing revenues. Getting a raise each month was a tremendous morale booster and the company comfortably scaled into the increasing payroll

The company also implemented a shared commission pool. Individuals who demonstrated their ability to go the extra mile to facilitate the acquisition of new customers, or the retention of current customers, applied for indoctrination to the pool. Requirements included one year of continuous service and the unanimous consent of all current pool participants.

The commission pool amount was split equally among its participants. When it was first implemented, it paid less than \$100 per month. By the time we sold the company, it was adding roughly \$10,000 per year to each participant's income. An individual had to demonstrate to his/her co-workers that their contribution will generate enough synergy to cause the total pool amount to increase substantially enough to justify the additional share-split created by an additional participant.

I also implemented Holiday Break from December 24th through the first workday after the New Year. It was a fully paid break in addition to an employee's normal vacation accrual. Employees even received a paid day off for their birthday. In total, the company provided almost 30 paid days off per year.

We hired many people who did not have the clothing required to meet with our dress code, which we coined *spiffy casual*. For those individuals, one of the company managers took them shopping and paid for a new wardrobe.

There were several instances where I learned of people who were experiencing consumer credit problems and their creditors were calling, or judgments had been obtained. Some employee's creditors were contacting the company to garnish their wages.

I provided finance, consumer credit and budgeting instruction, helped troubled employees set up a realistic budget, and after they demonstrated their ability to follow their budget, the company paid their debt to zero - once. If they got back into financial problems, they were on their own.

Does this seem like just another one of the high-tech New Economy corporate cultures? I frequently had to defend that it was not. Every one of our programs had a strong and sensible business case.

Take the holiday break for example. To a large extent, American businesses all but shut down between Thanksgiving and New Years. There was absolutely nothing happening between Christmas and New Years. We had payroll irrespective of whether or not people came to work during that week. It made better sense to let people stay home with their family, rest up and start the New Year fully charged as opposed to having them sitting around taking a vacation in a suit.

Sure, we took some of our employees shopping. Some of them simply didn't have clothing adequate to meet our dress code and they didn't have the money to buy clothes themselves. For a few hundred dollars, we took a kid and uplifted their self-image by ten fold. They felt better about themselves and that person's contagious positive attitude was transmitted throughout the company and in conversations with our customers.

The business case for paying off a person's credit card debt and teaching them fiscal management was simple. The individual was able to focus on their job and the goals of the company as opposed to worrying about the hit man that the credit card company had after them.

There were no free rides in my company. We had enormous competitors and everyone had to either row the boat with the team or get their own boat.

I had a great deal of hesitancy in hiring those individuals who spent years in the WorldCom, Global Crossing and Enron cultures. Those were the corporate cultures that not only promoted instant gratification but also, gratification preceded production.

Unfortunately, a lot of the people who were tainted by the dot-com era continued to suffer some pain as they resisted reality and became embittered. After their severance package was exhausted and they hit the interviewing circuit, they had to talk with those employers that were the survivors - and those companies weren't survivors by accident, but rather by design.

The interviews were not as heavenly as they once were. Many of these people found themselves actually having to talk about their work habits, which were pretty lax, their work ethics, which were zilch, and their experience which was sipping Cafe Latte, playing ping-pong and putt-putt in their 800 square foot private office, watching soap operas, surfing the net, visiting with their co-workers gathered at the company spa and getting a tan. Not only were the interviews and opportunities not as heavenly, the pay adjusted to reality - three times lower, no stock options, their 800 square foot office was now a 9 x 10 foot cubicle and they are required to perform this foreign activity called work - every day, from nine to five. Oh, and no foosball.

Here is a small piece of advice for you. To paraphrase President Kennedy, *"Ask not what your company can do for you, ask what you can do for your company."* When everyone working in a company embraces this concept, the entire team reaps the benefits - both collectively and individually. If you actually practice this simple philosophy and you're working for an honest and ethical company, your rewards will come.

Do the job you are hired to do, work hard, be compensated for your performance, and expect only what you have earned and deserve. Even today, too many people are in Fantasy Land, thinking the company they are employed with owes them a living. This couldn't be any further from the truth.

Successful companies didn't become successful by hiring people to play games and take naps. Those companies that hired people to do just that are out of business or have one foot in bankruptcy. Successful companies became successful by hiring people who work and perform.

Work is an okay thing. For me, work has genuinely become an exercise in entertainment. Once you have completed work, you feel successful, and deserve to be compensated. I wouldn't argue the fact that an on-site gym would help in keeping employees fit, healthy, and their minds clear and creative. I think a gym would be a great perk. It just shouldn't take the place of good, old-fashioned work.

There is a great opportunity for those individuals who understand the principle that work and performance comes *before* the reward. Those people should be capable of landing a good position with long-term benefits.

The whole concept of work evolves around this: some sort of task needs to be done, someone does it, and that someone is compensated fairly for the task performed. Pretty simple, huh?

During the eight years that I owned Fiber Network Solutions, I employed several hundred sales people. I never had production quotas that were based upon how much an individual was required to sell. Rather, I had activity quotas - how many telephone calls a sales person was required to make each day. If a sales person is focused on productive activities, the sales will follow.

Any time I had been in a sales position, I always disciplined myself to make a minimum of fifty telephone calls a day, and actual production was usually closer to 100 calls. I was able to complete these introductory calls in the morning and then follow up on any requests for quotations, brochures or further information during the afternoon.

We had sales people with zero previous sales experience who felt that they knew how to sell better than I did, and they protested the telephone call

activity quota. Since I was paying them a generous base salary, plus commissions, plus medical benefits, plus matching 401(k) contributions and a host of other benefits, I believed that a requirement that they make telephone calls to our prospective customer base was reasonable. I just could not understand how they could sell something without contacting anyone.

After I realized that many of these sales people were not making the required calls, we designed a system that monitored the number of telephone calls each sales person made, the number they called and the duration of the call.

I had several people who vehemently protested this system. The people who protested the loudest were those who were not producing anything. I gave them the option of doing it their way on a straight commission basis, or doing it my way and I would pay them a base salary.

I looked at the employer - employee relationship in very simplistic terms. They expected me to meet my quota to them twice a month - on the first and the fifteenth. If I missed my payroll quota to them, they would not cut me any slack and say, "Gee Dave, it's okay that you missed payroll this period. Don't worry about it, you don't have to make it up. Just try real hard and make it next time." Not hardly! If I missed payroll even once, I would be fired - no one would show up the next day. And my quota was not just an activity quota - it was a hard dollar quota.

If the company couldn't meet payroll, it came out of my personal pocket. Since I owned the company, either way, it was still coming out of my pocket. I felt that since I was held accountable to meet my quota twice a month, it was reasonable to hold people accountable to come in each day and actually perform activities that would result in moving the ball forward. At the very least, it was reasonable to expect people to contribute to the production required to generate the revenue necessary for their own payroll.

I had five words for those individuals who felt that I should be accountable to them, but they did not have to be accountable to the company. *"The exits are clearly marked."*

Until a person has actually owned a business, it is difficult to internalize and understand the pressures that a business owner endures, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. You live it, breathe it, eat it, drink it and sleep it.

When you are the personal guarantor on several million dollars in credit and lease lines, you have no choice but to devote every conscious minute to generating the revenue necessary to keep the ship afloat. The employee who does understand this reality, and is devoted to hard work, will become an employer's greatest asset. That employer will pay handsomely for the dedication and loyalty. Those people are few and far between. You can become one of those employer's greatest assets based upon your decision to

dedicate yourself. Based upon my observations in today's workplace with many companies, your competition is predominantly lazy.

If you were paying someone out of your own pocket to do a job for you, what would you be looking for in that individual?

I was always looking for someone who would make my life easier. I needed people who would pick up the ball and run with it. I wanted people who would just do their job and not require supervision. I needed people who I didn't have to watch and monitor - like developing a phone system that monitored whether or not they were doing the minimum required work. I wanted people who would surprise me with extraordinary production. I wanted people who made me feel like I was getting the bargain of the century. Is this not what you would want in a person if you were paying them out of your pocket to do a job for you? Be these things and believe me, your employer will stop at nothing to keep you.

I found a few people over the eight years who met those criteria listed above. The bad news is, during eight years and probably six or seven hundred people, it amounted to probably three percent. The good news is you have very little competition.

Here is some advice for those of you interviewing and searching for a job:

1. Ask not what the company can do for you, but what you can do for the company!
2. Research the salary for the position you are seeking and compare it to your own experiences. Be realistic.
3. Be prepared to work.



Chapter 12

WHAT IS REHABILITATION

Whether a person has been incarcerated, experienced a medical or health challenge, has experienced a financial disaster, or has simply experienced defeat or failure, rehabilitation is the process of making the conscious and deliberate changes necessary to facilitate a positive and productive direction that is within the individual's capacity and capabilities.

Rehabilitation is an attitude and a series of decisions. It requires that an individual make deliberate and conscious choices to change habits and behaviors. The choices and changes result in behavioral changes, which then produce different results. Rehabilitation is the function of getting back up after being knocked down.

Perhaps the two most important ingredients to rehabilitation as it pertains to persons who have had a criminal past are:

- 1) The genuine desire to attain success and a normal life through legitimate agendas.
- 2) The belief that a normal life is attainable after prison.

I cannot help you with your desire, but I can guarantee that if you put forth the genuine effort, a healthy life of normalcy is attainable.

You may or may not like me. That doesn't matter. However, you cannot dispute the absolute fact that I serve as the indisputable evidence that a total recovery from several felony convictions and an incarceration experience is attainable. It's all up to you.

I'm not one of those people who got out of prison, wrote a book and went on a speaking tour purporting to be an authority on reentry and making assertions to have the requisite skills and experience to help other's reenter mainstream society. I actually did it - for over a quarter of a century - then wrote a book. My example is not a matter of you having faith in the possibilities, rather mine is an example with a foundation of concrete fact - several decades of concrete fact. Look, the prize is there if you're willing to fight for it.

People in general resist, and in-fact sabotage change. Some people tend to wallow through life, day in and day out, making little or no progress, and then blaming their lot in life on the government, their employer, their parents, their teachers, their race, their age, their school or any variety of people and institutions, and even God. These people point their finger and say, "He or she, that institution, that government agency, that experience, (or any variety of Dragons) etc., is the reason I have not been able to achieve anything good in life. It's the Dragon's fault that I am destitute.

The fact is, every one of us is positioned in life exactly where we have chosen to be. Most often however, our circumstances and position in life is not the result of having made choices that are well thought out and conscious choices, but rather, our present situation is the resultant consequences that occur from *not* making deliberate and conscious choices.

If an individual does not make deliberate and well planned choices regarding their direction in life, then they are just aimlessly wandering through the forest, reactively acting on impulse and spontaneity, and unprepared and unequipped for the battles that are certain to occur. Dragons love these people. They are easy prey and they are the main supply of the dreams and hopes that Dragons feast upon.

It is always easier to blame everyone else whenever we find ourselves with a case of the *poor-poor-pitiful-me's*. It is not to say that there are not injustices in the world. There clearly are. However, what is ever gained by sitting around sucking your thumb and allowing your case of the poor-poor-pitiful-me's to become a chronic and debilitating condition? Injustices are just another breed of Dragon. It is just another battle you need to wage for the preservation of your hopes and dreams. Hold tight to your dreams, fight the battle and slay that Dragon.

There is another interesting thing about pointing your finger, and placing blame for your lot in life on everyone and everything else. Ever notice that when you point your finger, there are three fingers pointing back at you?

The first step in any rehabilitation plan is to understand that no one except you can champion the cause, lead the charge, fight the battles and slay your Dragons. Frankly, no one else cares - at least not to the degree that you need to care.

Sure, there are numerous agencies and a bunch of people who can try to help you, and who have genuine concern and empathy for you and your predicament. However, they have their own Dragons to slay and their own life to live. They are not going to slay your Dragons. All they can do is help point you in the right direction and help you prepare yourself for the battles. Only you can slay your Dragons.

Depending on government, institutions or other people to solve your problems, conquer your challenges, slay your Dragons and plan your future will only lead to disappointment. You need to control your destiny - not delegate it to someone else, or otherwise convince yourself that you are entitled to that which you are unwilling to earn.

It starts with an attitude - a choice - a decision - a desire to change. If you don't like the results you have realized from your habits and behaviors, the only way to change the results is to change the behaviors and habits. If you do change behaviors and habits, the results will most definitely be different.

Change is difficult and it is painful. Tolerating pain, whether physical or emotional is achieved by observing the pain - not internalizing it and allowing it to consume your conscious. Just observe the pain.

You can either decide to become a warrior or decide to do nothing and accept mediocrity as your destination. If you make the choice to become a warrior, your life will be rich and filled with an abundance of prosperity. It carries a price however. Anything good and worthwhile has a corresponding price to pay. However, as a warrior pays a price for the attainment of a dream, hope, goal or aspiration, that warrior then receives the benefit of its attainment. Victory is yours!

Alternatively, those who choose not to engage the Dragon in battle pay a much higher price - a life without dreams, without achievement, without the rich rewards that life has to offer. In short, they are living life dead.



Chapter 13

MAKING THE DECISION

Pursuing a life that is productive, healthy, socially acceptable, rewarding and free of crime requires a deliberate, conscious and concrete decision to embrace an agenda of legitimacy. There are many reasons that ex-offenders avoid making this decision.

Below are a few of the challenges that I faced when I was released, and a few that I have come to understand through the interaction I have had with some of the inmates during the visits I have made to prisons over the past several years. You may be able to relate to some, or all of these reasons, which I clarify in the following chapters.

1. You do not believe that it is possible to overcome the felony conviction label.
2. You have been told over and over and over again that the system doesn't work and no matter what you do, no matter how hard you work, once you are a convicted felon, the doors of opportunity are permanently closed. Who you listen to and receive counsel and advice from can have a dramatic impact on your future.
3. Who are your friends - your peer group - your support structure and sphere of influence?
4. It doesn't hurt enough. The motivation of pain is versus the motivation of pleasure.
5. You do not have the patience and tenacity required to take the small steps to achieve great goals.
6. You do not believe in yourself. You do not have self-confidence or a healthy self-image. You do not believe that you represent any value, that you are capable of making a meaningful contribution to society, or that you are capable of achieving any recognizable accomplishments. You feel beaten down.
7. You do not know where to begin. You feel overwhelmed with problems. You do not know where to turn. You feel like your life is just a mess.

8. You are dealing with incredible anger, which is many times accompanied by periods of deep depression.

9. You have no definitiveness of purpose.

10. It's a totally different world than the one you left xx years ago. It's okay to be scared.

11. It was easier 33 years ago.

12. You're too old to get started, or to start over.

13. Don't Swing at a Pitch in the Dirt

14. Where do you start your journey?

To summarize the possible reason(s) you may have for not making the decision, you may believe that putting forth the effort to legitimize your life would just be an exercise in futility.

You may believe that no matter what you do or how hard you try, there is no light at the end of the tunnel.

You're correct about the journey through a dark tunnel. However, there most definitely is a bright light and promise of a rich and fulfilling future at the end. Aside from that, the actual journey is rewarding. The journey is interesting and it can become a character building adventure.

Let's examine each of the above reasons that you may have for not making the decision.



Chapter 14

YOU DO NOT BELIEVE THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO OVERCOME THE CONVICTION LABEL

When I was released on parole on August 7, 1980, the conviction stigma loomed large. It seemed like a vertical mountain that had a peak beyond sight. I recalled the innumerable intelligent, well spoken and educated individuals [fellow inmates] who told me that the conviction label would follow me forever and that my opportunities, if I were so lucky to have any at all, would be limited to little more than reciting the seven magic words - *"Would you like fries with that sir?"*

Indeed, I was branded as a social outcast, a criminal, a misfit, a rebel and any number of descriptors that characterize me as someone who employers should avoid like the plague.

Getting beyond the labels was important. At the time, this was a tough Dragon to slay. I first examined why I had such a low self esteem - who had influenced me to believe that if I were truly going to choose a path of legitimacy, I was destined for a life of mediocrity at very best.

The vast majority of those people who influenced my perception regarding my dismal future opportunities were fellow inmates. Most of those inmates who I regularly interacted with were pretty bright, had great potential intellectually, were well educated, street smart, and they sounded completely logical in their explanations and long diatribes as to why they didn't make it on the outside.

Well, of course their explanations sounded legitimate - they failed at reentry and recidivated. They had to make it sound legitimate. They were well rehearsed and recited their rationalizations a million times until the explanation was so well refined that they actually came to believe it themselves.

It is these tortured rationalizations that are made to sound completely logical that contributed to these repetitive recidivists own continuous demise. They actually begin to internalize their own excuses.

As I have stated previously, be careful that you don't believe your own press. Fabricating excuses, justifications and rationalizations regarding why we are positioned at a particular place in life, and then believing your own press can

be really dangerous. For those people who practice the blame game, the only other believable explanation would be to blame them self and accept the possibility that they are responsible for their return to prison.

We humans are loath to ever blame ourselves. But, we are quick to fabricate rationalizations and justifications that shield us from blame and accountability, and publish this press until we actually begin to believe it ourselves.

I will emphasize that believing your own press can be really dangerous. Over time, you stop dealing with reality. Consequently, you never face and resolve challenges with valid solutions because you believe that none of the negative consequences you are experiencing are the result of your own actions.

Some people will go far out of their way to convince others that you cannot achieve your dreams because they couldn't achieve their dreams. Such individuals would have you believe that *your future* equals *their past*. If they can validate this tortured concept, then their failure is justified almost as a destiny that was beyond any control that they could have had.

These people will attempt to convince you that no one with a felony conviction can ever have a life of legitimacy. Because they failed, the argument is that the entire demographic of convicted persons is doomed. As a member of the constituency of convicted felons, their failures are thereby justified.

The people who live under the delusion that their failures are someone else's fault clearly need to recruit others into their fraternity of non-believers because there is power in numbers. As they convince more people that they recidivated because of the system, but not because of any fault of their own, then their rationalizations become the doctrine of the culture. It's all bunch of rubbish. It is all rationalization to justify the simple fact that they were not willing to pay the price to achieve anything worthwhile. Many of them accepted defeat with the first few challenges, obstacles or rejections. Remember, we already discussed being honest with yourself. If the effort you need to put forth to get the prize is too great, just be honest with yourself and accept the consequences of not trying.

Oh, I clearly remember and understand how those initial rejections can be discouraging - even painful. After being beaten down by an experience in prison, it isn't easy for an individual to have a healthy self-image and strong self-confidence.

What will grow your self-image and self-confidence is the act of achieving goals - creating those new *most recent significant events*. This is why it is important to begin with setting small and easily attainable goals first. With the attainment of each goal, give yourself a pat on the back - *celebrate it!* As

your confidence grows, you will face and slay bigger and bigger Dragons. Be patient with yourself and start out small.

As I reflect back on my incarceration experience, I came to realize that all of my friends in prison - my peer group, were other guys who had failed to achieve life's dreams via legitimate methods. Irrespective of whether they were first-time or returning offenders, they had not grasped the necessary concepts, or acquired the fundamental tools to succeed within the guidelines of our civilized society.

Throughout my career spanning the past quarter century, I have consciously examined people who offer advice and counsel, and how that advice and counsel compares with where they are in life.

When listening to someone giving advice, I always ask myself, "Is this person who is offering their advice at a place in their life where I want to be? Have they achieved something in their life that I want to achieve?" If the answer to those questions isn't a resounding "yes," then I don't pay any homage to their extraneous rhetoric, which is generally regurgitated to rationalize their own failures or bolster their ego. People who give advice without having made a practical application of that advice in their own life are just blowing wind.

I began by creating an image of myself as the person I wanted to become - not the person I was, or as the person that I thought others saw me.

I wanted to become successful and situate myself in a professional position of responsibility. I wanted to be recognized for my achievements. I wanted to be respected and liked by others. I wanted to be respected by those people who I respected and admired. My focus was to really develop my character. Everything else emanates from character.

The end result or target is far less important than the journey and how you arrive at your destination. A person's character and their success are measured not by what they accumulate from all of their toil but rather, by what they become through the process.

Don't all parents dream that their children grow up and become persons of character, success, responsibility and charity? If you have children, isn't this what you want for your children. Isn't this what your parents dreamt for you?

Many people of affluence who raise their children with a silver spoon deprive their kids of the most essential and delicious part of any achievement - *the journey*.

Such parents are selfishly attempting to purchase the fulfillment of *their* dream - not their children's dream. Such affluent parents buy the fulfillment of their dream, which is to see their children achieve success. Even more importantly to these affluent parents is for the parents' peer group to see their children as successful, as counterfeit as that success may be. It doesn't work that way. These parents want the fulfillment of *their* dream - to see their children successful, with material possessions measuring the quality and quantity of their child's success, so they attempt to buy it. All they are really buying is a veneer that makes their children appear successful. It is no different than buying a trophy that would otherwise be earned through a process, a journey or a contest.

Giving a sixteen-year-old a brand new Corvette may make the child temporarily happy. However, it is frequently given so the parents have bragging rights among their peers in a continuous search for a feeling of fulfillment of the dream they have that their children achieve some tortured measure of success.

In reality, these parents are raising mental and emotional invalids who are many times later in life incapable of facing even the simplest of challenges. Little itty-bitty Dragons that you or I would swat like flies eat them like a bedtime snack. I thank God I didn't have wealthy parents. I was forced to slay Dragons at an early age, perhaps even more so because my Dad died when I was only eleven.

I don't blame the kids of parents who hand them everything they desire. I have empathy for the kids - I blame the parents. These self-serving parents just want everything to appear *country club* perfect. They don't want any inconveniences so they buy whatever is necessary to avoid hassles and conflict, or embarrassment among the neighbors and friends, and to create this utterly phony façade. These parents believe their own press, which gives them a false sense that their children have risen to a level that fulfills the dream of the parents - as counterfeit as that realization may be.

Just because a person finds himself or herself on home base doesn't mean they hit a home run. You can be on home base before you even swing the bat. Some affluent parents wrap their children in protective insulation so no Dragons can even approach. Later in life, the first time these handicapped people stub their toe without mommy and daddy available to lick their wounds they jump off of a bridge. It is so tragic.

It is interesting to note that I know of not a single case where millionaire parents have produced self-made millionaire children. It is rare indeed that a child who is raised in affluence and privilege develops the character that can only come through the experiences that are an integral component of journeys' challenges. The journey and the conquering of challenges are

central to genuine achievement. The young Prince Charles, who had very deliberately placed himself in situations and environments of challenge, may provide a representative example of the few children of affluence who understand the necessity of character building.

In contrast, do a little research and take a look at those people who have risen out of the flames of oppression, or been raised in poverty, yet went on to achieve phenomenal success.

Many public icons, people we consider heroes and people who have achieved self-made wealth had their beginnings in poverty, in one form or another. When you examine these people, you are quick to notice character. These are some of the worlds most masterful Dragon Slayers - they have had a lifetime of practice, facing and conquering life's most difficult challenges.

A prerequisite to slaying big Dragons is you have to start at some point by slaying the itty-bitty Dragons first. Whether this process begins during adolescence or later in life, the prerequisite doesn't change - you still have to start small.

If I were in the foxhole or battling Dragons, I would clearly rather be accompanied by someone who rose from oppression and poverty to someone who was raised in privilege, *hands down*. If you were raised in poverty and oppression, then know that the person you can become will far exceed anything the person raised in privilege could ever hope for.

How does this relate to the ex-offender? I am drawing a parallel to everyone's desire for gratification - actually, the desire for instant gratification. By taking shortcuts to achieve what we may perceive as the destination of our dreams and goals, or to solve conflicts, challenges and problems, we rob ourselves of the journey. And, without the journey, the destination doesn't really exist - it's just a mirage. Everyone wants a position of respect and admiration from their peers and a sense of financial security. How you arrive at that destination is far more important than the arrival itself.

People frequently look at successful people and want what they have. They want the success and position in life. However, they fail to even consider the work, time and sacrifice that were integral components of the necessary journey that led to the destination. If a person is not willing to take the journey and the necessary steps, they are just kidding themselves if they think there is any chance of arriving at a similar destination.

I talked with an individual who had recently been released from a short visit to county jail. He stated that he was entertaining the idea of enrolling at the local community college. He had dropped out of school in the 7th grade and had not yet earned his GED. I told him that the community college would

require that he have his GED. His solution is to lie on the application, stating that they don't verify whether or not a person actually has their GED.

The journey from point A to point B is not always the shortest path. Lying on an application may perceptibly place you at point B, however it will be temporary. If this particular individual lies on his application about his GED, the lie will surface in time, not to mention that he will be ill-equipped to enter his first year of college with a 7th grade education. The longer path from point A to point B would be for him to prepare himself for, and take the GED examination. If he does, then his arrival at point B is permanent.

Although this individual was 21 years old at the time of our conversation, he was functionally at the 7th grade level, and that is where he needs to begin his journey. I hope he does, because it will not be any easier for him to begin at the 7th grade level when he is 31, but the absolute requirement to begin where he left off will never change.

Like any goal, a deliberate plan must be made that includes all of the elements, duties and tasks that must be completed to achieve the goal. Anything that is to be built, whether a building, a bridge, a ship, an airplane, a house, or a new business, must begin with a plan - a blueprint that has been well thought out, and then reduced to a series of simple and logical steps.

It is during the planning stage where one discovers that certain tasks must be completed before others. The foundation of a building must be built before erecting the structure. Conflicts are identified during the planning phase. The installation of plumbing and wiring will need to flow with the structural plans. In the final plan, everything is coordinated, orchestrated and prioritized. Once the plan is completed, one can estimate the time needed to reach completion and the date will be set for the attainment of the goal.

Consider a common goal that many people have like buying their first home. Some fundamental parts of this goal requires a down payment, closing costs, credit worthiness, good work history and job security, and time. These components need to be coordinated with other financial obligations and other events such as the expiration of your apartment lease. There is foundation work that necessarily must be addressed. If you have no credit, or if you have bad credit, you can begin immediately addressing the credit issue. Establishing or repairing credit can take a couple of years. You can start the process of establishing or repairing credit simultaneously with a savings plan. Self-discipline is a major key to achieving this, as well as any goal. I went through this very process and each of these components - post conviction and post incarceration. *You can too.*

If you have past due credit obligations, you can either use one of the many credit-counseling services that will contact all of your creditors and arrange a payment budget that fits your income, or you can make these contacts directly with your creditors yourself. It is generally best to have a third party represent you, which can also be a friend or relative. You may be emotional about your credit situation, and emotion should not be a part of the negotiations. Once a payment plan is established, you need to stick to it. You will only get one bite at that apple. If you don't keep up with the budgeted payment arrangements, the credit counseling service will drop you. Make a plan that is realistic. Then, self-control and self-discipline are critical.

You may not be able to save much toward a down payment during your first year. You may have other expenses that are a priority. You may not even have a job yet. If you don't, then the first priority in building your foundation toward achieving this financial goal is to seek gainful employment. Any job is fine starting out. You will gain experience and be eligible for raises and promotions. The raises and promotions will directly depend on your choices, decisions and performance. It's up to you.

On August 7th, 1980, I had no money, my credit was trashed, I had no job and I had just been released from prison with three felony convictions. Between then and now however, I have purchased several homes. So yes, it can be done and you can do it too.

Be willing to accept the job that no one else wants. You can build a good employment reference with this job that will show employers that you are dependable and accountable. The opportunity to prove yourself and demonstrate a good work ethic, dependability and accountability are the only goals of that first job, so whatever job it is, it doesn't really matter very much. Just be willing to accept the job that no one else wants.

Your savings plan for the down payment will start out small and scale upward as your income increases. When you find employment, you can choose to claim zero dependents for income tax withholding. You will then most likely receive a tax refund each year. Earmark this refund for your savings plan.

As your income increases, start saving. You might start with only ten bucks a month. That's fine - it's a start. Do the arithmetic and figure out how much you will be able to save assuming that you have set career goals to advance and earn promotions and increased income. Your savings deposits will increase each month and year. As you complete a realistic plan, the attainment date of the goal will pretty much establish itself. This may be five or six years.

I was talking with an inmate during my financial goal setting presentation. As we worked through the plan to purchase a home, we arrived at a little over six years to achieve that goal. He said, with certain indignation in his voice, "With this plan, I'll be 31 by the time I can buy a house!" I replied, "So, if you don't work this plan, you won't be thirty-one?"

With this plan, he turns 31 and buys a house. Without this plan, he just turns thirty-one. Let's not lose sight of that instant gratification syndrome. If you allow yourself to be a servant to instant gratification, you may never achieve the goal. Sometimes acquiring the good things in life takes time. Be patient.

I have heard other ex-offenders balk at this time frame - indicating that they are unwilling to make such a long-term commitment.

Well, here are a few facts. In five years, you will be five years older, and that fact is set in stone. Where you will be in five years is entirely up to you. You decide whether or not you will be prepared to purchase a home or otherwise achieve any other goal. If you don't make this conscious choice, you will be in much the same position you are in today, which may include little or no credit, or bad credit, and little or no savings, but you will most definitely be older. And, if you are hoping to achieve this goal sans the journey - by taking the same shortcuts that you have in the past, your results will very likely be similar to those you have realized up to the present. Where you are today is the result of what you have done for the past year, five years, ten years, etc.

When I was released from prison on August 7, 1980, among my first tasks was declaring bankruptcy. My credit and financial situation simply was not repairable, and I needed a clean and fresh start.

I have repaired my credit from what was a total disaster to pristine, bought several houses, bought or leased several new trophy cars and motorcycles, taken a few great cruises, vacationed at some of the nation's finest resorts, bought several luxury travel RV's, borrowed millions of dollars from banks, generated tens of millions in revenue, and enjoy a comfortable lifestyle. It was all built by the patient pursuance of goals, each one adding to an accumulating total, and the achievements were all post conviction and post incarceration.

As you read this book, try to remember that thirty-plus years ago, I was sitting in prison with nothing more than a little glimmer of hope. Believe me, you can achieve the same results as I have. Just take the journey!



Chapter 15

WORKING THE SYSTEM AND SEIZING OPPORTUNITY

YOU HAVE BEEN TOLD OVER AND OVER AGAIN THAT THE SYSTEM DOESN'T WORK, AND NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO, NO MATTER HOW HARD YOU WORK, ONCE YOU ARE A CONVICTED FELON, THE DOORS OF OPPORTUNITY ARE PERMANENTLY CLOSED. WHO YOU LISTEN TO AND GET COUNSEL AND ADVICE FROM CAN HAVE A DRAMATIC IMPACT ON YOUR FUTURE.

In my opinion, reentry is way overrated. My writings and speaking engagements seem to reach those people who are ready to embrace a new path. There are a few people who are skeptical. The skepticism is a disguise for their inability to fabricate new excuses and rationalizations not to try, thereby justifying why they continue to fail. Most of the excuses are cancelled in this book. They need new excuses that sound rational and intelligent. The excuseists are not the demographic I hope to reach.

Change is difficult, especially after an individual is released from prison. All of the temptations and the old friends are readily available upon release. It is harder to get out than it is to be in. Not because of the "barriers" to reentry. I think that the reentry "barriers" are overrated, and largely propaganda that is perpetuated by recidivists.

It is always someone else's fault when someone recidivates - the police were targeting them, their parole officer had it out for them, the judge, the system, etc. They refuse to accept personal accountability, and they justify themselves to everyone else by placing blame on everyone except he who stares back in the mirror. These are people who refuse to take the long path from point A to point B. They always want to take the shortcut.

If a person wants to become a card-carrying member of mainstream society, it is simply a choice, and the individual who makes the choice to pursue a legitimate and rewarding lifestyle will do it with, or without any assistance. I didn't say that it is an easy cakewalk. It's hard. Life is hard. Conversely, if a person has not made the conscious choice, there is no amount of assistance that will cause them to successfully reenter mainstream society.

Many people who are released from prison are fundamentally brain washed to believe that becoming a card-carrying member of mainstream society is an almost impossible task. That is utter propaganda.

I have met people who seem to think that they can continue to play games on the side while functionally *faking* reentry. Reentering mainstream society is not something that you can be lukewarm about. Either decide to reenter mainstream, or decide not to reenter. If you “*sort-of*” try to reenter, you’re probably not going to be very successful.

Conversely, if you genuinely make the commitment, and you are willing to face and conquer the challenges, your likelihood of success is just about guaranteed. I am absolute proof that if a person makes the genuine commitment to legitimacy, they can have a healthy life of normalcy, and the rewards will be representative of the effort that they put forth.

I should emphasize that there are challenges. Irrespective of whether a person has been in prison or not, life still has challenges. Those who face and conquer challenges reap the rewards, and those who do not, wallow through life sucking their thumb about their mediocrity.

Throughout my volunteer work with the numerous re-entry programs, I continue to see a recurring problem where ex-offenders are released with no place to live, no job and no money. Some live in shelters (if available) and a few end up living under a bridge.

I have heard both ex-offenders and professionals working in rehabilitation and corrections blame the system for this unfortunate circumstance. Sans any physical or mental handicap, although I empathize with these individuals, I do not sympathize with them.

Whether a person pulls a one-year sentence or a fifteen-year sentence, they have adequate time and resources to prepare for their release. If you are still a guest of the state or the feds, right now is the time to begin preparing for your release. Your reentry needs to start right now - not a month before you hit the streets, or after you’ve walked through the gates.

An enormous amount of money and resources are spent each year within the federal and state institutions for offender rehabilitation and re-entry. There is a system available that can work, if you work the system. It is not a system that mandates an offender’s participation. Fundamentally, achieving success is strictly voluntary, irrespective of whether an individual is an ex-offender or not.

One question that I crystallized in my mind was; is the system closed to me, or have I closed myself to the system? If you are driving your car toward a brick wall and do nothing to change your direction to avoid hitting the wall, it

is just not reasonable to blame the wall or anything else after the collision. An individual has the ability to begin steering their direction at any time, and the conditions to begin will never be ideal. You just need to start.

The misinformation regarding the system and whether or not it works is just that - it is misinformation. The sources of such misinformation are those individuals who have recidivated and returned to an institution. They have failed to successfully reenter mainstream society, and many of these individuals attempt to rationalize their failure by blaming everyone and everything except themselves. They haven't made the decision. If you're one of these individuals, you can make the decision now.

Don't let yourself get caught up in the recruiting effort of an individual who blames his or her lot in life on anything and everything except their own poor choices, and their lack of planning and effort.

I say recruiting effort because the only way an individual who continues to fail at reentry can feel comfortable hiding behind their excuses is if they can get others to buy into their fabricated explanation as to why opportunity has never been available to them. That is just a load of bear oil. It is total propaganda. In reality, all that those people have ever done in life is quit. If you have made it this far in this book, then you have met these people I am discussing, and you have heard their rap. Take a close look and examine what they have really done in their life.

Opportunity is available to anyone who wants to seize it and is prepared to make the sacrifices, endure the journey, conquer the challenges, slay the Dragons and persist in the pursuit of their goal until it is achieved. It isn't a painless undertaking. We are all victimized in some way or another by a variety of circumstances and injustices. The key to achieving the prize is don't quit during the journey. Just don't quit.

I am frustrated daily with the incompetence that exists in the world and the time that I need to spend to correct the mistakes of my vendors, which errors are most frequently to my financial disadvantage. However, most people who suggest that their position in life is the consequence of someone or something other than their own choices are simply trying to rationalize the fact that they were unwilling to perform in one or more of the aforementioned requirements. Life is a daily series of identifying and solving problems, regardless of whether those problems were caused by you or someone else.

There are sacrifices in achieving anything. If you sacrifice today, you will receive back the fruits of your sacrifice ten fold tomorrow. Enduring the journey means that you keep going even when you get tired, and feel deflated and defeated, because I guarantee that from time to time you will. Persisting until you achieve your goals and enduring the challenges and battles along

the journey is definitely not easy. Quitting is easy. Either choice has its respective rewards.

You may want to be an engineer, a computer technician, an attorney, president of a company, a teacher, an accountant or any other profession that captures your interest and focus. But you say, "I can't read, so those opportunities are not available to me." Horse Spit!!! Yes they are! Based upon that outlook, then those opportunities are not available to any infant or first grader. Yet, every person in any profession was at some point an infant and a first grader. You just need to start today - wherever it was that you left off.

Opportunities are most definitely available to you. Only you can make yourself available to the opportunity. If you can't read and write, learn to read and form the necessary foundation blocks upon which you can build a strong future. Obviously you can read since you are reading this. But really examine where you left off in your personal and professional development. Start there.

Why can't you just start today? Go ahead, rattle off the excuses, then go look directly into your eyes in the mirror and ask yourself if you're being honest with yourself! Give opportunity a chance to work. It will build. Be patient.

I had to take some rather remedial courses before I could understand some of the material related to my aviation education. I needed to first learn those fundamental things that were required to form the necessary foundation so I could then learn more.

Several years ago, I had a friend, Don, who told me that he was considering going back to school to earn his law degree. At age thirty-six, he had already enjoyed a successful career as a professional pilot. We actually first met when I was pumping gas, cutting grass and washing airplanes - the first job I had when I was released. Don was performing essentially the same janitorial and line service duties as I was for a different flight school that was a competitor of my employer.

I encouraged Don to pursue his interest and a law degree. A variety of careers make life far more interesting. He finished law school at age forty. As a new attorney, he is now at the same level as a twenty-five-year-old new attorney starting out in a new profession. It's invigorating. He loves it. It's a whole new journey.

No matter what you want to do, believe me, the journey is the best part. You are certainly capable of learning and embracing a journey. And, every journey leads to a destination. I suppose I came to those realizations when I was still in prison. I just decided to work toward designing a journey that would lead to a better destination.

Regardless of whether or not you deliberately and consciously choose a journey, you will definitely have a journey that leads to a destination. The destination will either be determined by the journey you choose, or by the failure to make a conscious and deliberate choice. Where do you want to go from here?

Opportunity is available to anyone who puts him or herself in a position to recognize it and seize it when it comes along. The belief that opportunity only knocks once is just a load of nonsense. Opportunity knocks constantly. You just need to be awake and listening.

If you are sitting at home and not getting out looking for work, deliberately using some of your time productively, interacting with society, shaking the bushes and rattling the trees, then when opportunity comes, you just aren't available. The opportunity is presenting itself in one place, but you are in a different place. It's like the old adage, my ship came in, but I was at the airport.

I have never been offered anything that I didn't deliberately pursue. The World population is over seven billion people. No one is beating a path to my door to work for them, or to otherwise give me opportunity. If I want opportunity, I need to go hunting in the forest of opportunity. That never changes, no matter who you are or what you had previously achieved.

My first fourteen months out, I had worked washing airplanes, pumping gas, cleaning hangers and mowing grass while going to school and working toward my private and commercial pilot, and flight instructor certificates. Once I conquered those challenges, I was flight instructing.

I had been working as a flight instructor for roughly four or five months. Working for a flight school as an instructor was clearly exciting, but the money was lousy. I was only paid for flight hours - when the engine is running - and only eight bucks per flight hour. The boss required that all of the instructors be at the school whether we were flying or not. This created a triple dilemma. First, I wasn't being paid that much when I was flying. Second, the requirement that I be there when I wasn't flying impeded the pursuit of additional employment and third, I wasn't building flight time as fast as I needed to further my aviation career.

I simply needed more flight time and more money. I understood that the Boss needed to have people attend to the needs of the store, and I appreciated the opportunity that I had. My level of ambition just far exceeded of the opportunity and the school.

I learned of a new flying club opening in the area at Lost Nation Airport, which is located about twenty miles east of Cleveland.

I met a flight instructor who was a member of the flying club, Joe Marks. Joe had an arrangement with the club that allowed him to give flight instruction in flying club airplanes and charge his students directly for the flight lessons. The club did not take any override on the instructor's fees. The student would join the flying club, pay the club directly for monthly dues and the rental of the aircraft, and contract directly with the flight instructors for instruction.

The going rate for flight instruction back then was twenty dollars per flight hour. The school I was instructing for was also charging roughly twenty dollars per flight hour, but as the instructor, I was only getting eight of those twenty dollars. I understand that businesses need to make money, but I did too.

If I were to consider the flying club alternative, my biggest challenge was where would I find enough students? I not only needed an adequate flow of students to keep me busy and make a decent living, but also to accelerate building flight time so I could advance to corporate aviation or airlines.

The trade-off that I needed to measure was working for the flight school versus the flying club situation. The flight school provided me with a steady flow of students - albeit, the stream was thin. The flight school had the attraction - it was well established in Cleveland and had an agreement with the community college to provide flight training to the students who were attending the aviation technology program at the college. I was just another flight instructor out there trying to compete for students.

The flying club was fairly new and very few people had even heard of them. Under the flying club scenario, I would be on my own - an independent - and I would have to find my own flight students. This was the epitome of the, "*You can eat what you kill*" principle. Given that I was a pretty green instructor with a whopping 800 hours total time and only 500 hours as an instructor, this was definitely a daunting decision.

There were plenty of reasons not to take the risk and make the move to become an independent instructor - at least perceived reasons that were founded in fear of failure. However, the lure of making more money, building flight time faster, accelerating my aviation career, and not having to baby-sit someone else's business without compensation provided a compelling list of reasons in favor of the flying club alternative.

During my decision process, Mister Doubt seemed to creep into my mind, especially at night when I was tired. Was I looking at an opportunity, or was I about to fall into a pit of Dragons that would eat me alive? I agonized over this decision.

In order to make an informed and intelligent decision, and to hedge my bet, I needed to assemble all of the additional support that would be necessary to achieve the objective. I needed to make a plan.

I dressed to the nines one morning and visited the Board of Education offices in Parma, Ohio where I had attended elementary, junior high and high school. I told the receptionist that I was a former student and asked to see the Superintendent.

A man came into the lobby where I was waiting and introduced himself, "Hi, I'm Barrett Smith." I was a little surprised that I was talking directly with the top dog, but it was late July or early August, so I suspect that he may not have been as busy as he would be in mid-September. He invited me into his office.

The school system had an evening adult continuing education program. I explained to Mr. Smith that I was a flight and ground instructor, and that I was interested in offering courses in Private and Instrument Pilot Theory. He inquired as to my teaching credentials and whether or not I had a teaching license and a degree in Education. I had neither. However, I explained that the Federal Aviation Administration certified me as a Flight and Ground Instructor. He indicated that a part-time teacher's license would be required and that my application could probably be approved on the basis of my FAA certification.

I accurately assumed that working with the public school system would also involve a background check, so I laid out the fact that I had a youthful indiscretion, which earned me a vacation with the State and the Feds. I didn't go into a great deal of detail about the incident, but rather, I expounded on what I had done since the convictions and from the date I was released to the present.

Mr. Smith was so thoroughly impressed with my rebound, and perhaps even more with my candidness, that he immediately began filling out the necessary paperwork. He wanted to help, and he told me that I could count on starting with the fall schedule.

People generally do not care what you did. What matters is what you have done since, and what you are doing as you move forward. It was obvious that my conviction was not a liability, but rather, it could be used as an asset.

Given the success of my meeting with Mr. Smith, I also contacted the Superintendents of the Rocky River and North Olmsted school systems. These school systems also offered an adult evening continuing education curriculum.

After successful meetings with the Rocky River and North Olmsted schools, I had a schedule to teach Private Pilot Theory four evenings, and Instrument Pilot Theory one evening per week. My plan was to give flight instruction from 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM, and then teach the classroom theory from 7:00 PM to 9:30 PM. It was definitely an ambitious schedule, but I wanted to put my aviation career on the fast track.

I met with the owner of the flying club, Larry Rohl, a savvy businessman and a genuinely down to earth individual in his early forties. I dressed appropriately for an interview / business meeting, as I wanted to make the best possible impression.

At the time we met, Larry was already giving consideration to stationing one training aircraft at Burke Lakefront Airport, which is located directly north of downtown Cleveland on the Lake Erie shore. Burke Lakefront was considerably more convenient for me as opposed to Lost Nation Airport.

During our meeting, I told Larry with a great deal of enthusiasm that between Joe Marks and me, we could build the club's Burke Lakefront division to a fleet of fifteen airplanes in one year. I'm pretty sure that Larry thought that I was blowing a lot of smoke with a claim like that, but he agreed to give me a shot at it. Instead of one airplane, he stationed two at Burke Lakefront.

This story all boils down to one fundamental concept. An opportunity came by, and when it presented itself, I was out there pursuing my goals and ambitions ready to seize it. I was already working toward achieving goals. A different path was presented that appeared to provide an acceleration of the goal attainment. I invested the time and effort, did my homework, created a realistic and sensible plan. As the alternative opportunity and path evolved, it became clear that it was the better option.

The point I need to emphasize is to just get out there and pursue your visions, ambitions, dreams and goals. If you do, you will have your eyes wide open to alternative opportunities as they come along - and they most definitely will if you are out hunting in the forest of opportunity. You can evaluate opportunities and make good choices that will move you forward that much faster. Just stick with the honest opportunities and you'll be fine.

There was one final step in my decision to become an independent instructor. I felt that I had an ethical obligation to speak with my Boss at the flight school. He had given me an abundance of opportunity, but at the same time, he also made good money since I received all of my training at his school through my Commercial Pilot, Flight Instructor and Instrument Flight Instructor certificates. Nevertheless, it was only fair that I attempt to negotiate an arrangement whereby I could increase the flow of students to

the school in exchange for a raise in my hourly pay, and the Boss waiving the requirement that I had to be at the school during my non-flying time.

I had this dialog several times previously with the Boss regarding my pay and babysitting his flight school for free. However, I was never in a negotiating position during any of the previous discussions. Now however, I had compiled all of the necessary components to move forward, and irrespective of his agenda, I was going to achieve my goals and objectives with or without his flight school.

A little piece of advice: Never quit a job without a better opportunity to replace it. I pretty much anticipated the boss's response to my requests. During previous meetings on these topics, his response was, "*Koch, Flight Instructors are a dime a dozen.*" And, he was absolutely correct. It is not difficult to find aspiring pilots who need to build time toward that corporate or airline flying job.

During that final meeting with my Boss at the flight school, I pointed out that I was willing to teach classes, which would bring more students to the school resulting in increased revenue. I only requested that he release my non-flying time and pay me a couple dollars more for the hours I was flying - and only for those students that I brought to the school. His response was, "*Koch, Flight Instructors are a dime a dozen.*" I took a nickel out of my pocket, placed it on his desk, slid it toward him and said, "Here, buy six."

In addition to the advertising & promotion that the city school system distributed regarding its adult continuing education program, I had placed a few classified ads for my aviation ground school classes.

I began teaching in the evenings, and to my surprise all of the classes were packed with twenty or more students. Roughly half of them also wanted to take flight lessons and earn their Private Pilot Certificate or Instrument Rating.

I took a flight check ride with Joe Marks on September 30, 1982 who certified me to fly the airplanes in the flying club, and I gave instruction to my first student with the club on October 2nd.

In just a little over two years, I had gone from a guy sitting in a prison cell to a commercial pilot and flight instructor, and an entrepreneurial independent business owner. The prize was great, but the journey was phenomenal.

I might point out that during the first fourteen months of my aviation training, I did not go out socially - not even once. I went to school, went to work, took my flying lessons, went home and studied, went to bed, and then got up the next morning and did it all over again. There was sacrifice, but in the longer term, it was well worth it.

My ground school students needed books and other aviation related equipment as a part of the training. I visited a local aviation supply wholesale distributor. Just by chance, the regional manager was in the facility the day I visited. This is just another classic example of an opportunity coming by and me being out there and available to seize that opportunity.

I explained that I was teaching Private Pilot and Instrument Pilot Theory classes with the Parma, Rocky River and North Olmsted school systems. I also explained that I didn't have the cash flow to buy all of the materials to re-sell to the students. The manager was excited with my ambition and the agenda I had created. We calculated the cost for all of the materials and he approved a Net 30 Day credit line for \$2,500 on the spot. *I was in business!* In addition to being paid by the school systems for teaching the courses, the schools agreed to allow me to sell the books and materials to my students, which had a 40% margin. *Cha-Ching!!!*

As ground school students from the classroom also began taking flight lessons, I offered a small discount if they paid for ten hours of flight instruction in advance, called block time. Almost all of them took advantage of the discount, more because they wanted to help me as opposed to the savings. Selling block-time had a dramatic and positive impact on cash flow.

I had flight students booked back-to-back in two hour blocks seven days a week, taught ground school five evenings per week from 7:00 - 9:30 PM, sold the books and materials, and aside from making a decent living, I was building flight time rapidly and learning how to operate an entrepreneurial business. My students were joining the flying club in droves, which justified adding additional leaseback aircraft to the fleet.

Teaching the classroom theory really increased my personal understanding of the various aviation subjects. You really need to understand something if you're going to teach it. The flight training made my flying skills sharp as a tack.

One of the trickiest things to learn as a new pilot is landing in a crosswind. If the wind is blowing perpendicular to the runway, the airplane weathervanes into the wind, causing the airplane to track down the centerline of runway, but with the nose pointing sideways to the direction of travel.

You can't land with the airplane traveling sideways to the direction of the runway. To compensate, you need to straighten out the airplane's direction with the rudder pedals so the nose is pointing in the same direction of the runway centerline. Now, when the airplane's nose is pointing straight down the runway, since it is not weathervaning into the wind, the wind causes it to

begin drifting off the side of the runway. You now need to bank the airplane into the wind to stop the drift while simultaneously working the rudder pedals so the nose remains straight - in the same direction of the runway centerline. With the airplane banked to prevent sideways drifting, you land on one wheel and then allow the airplane to slowly set down on the second main wheel, and finally let the nose wheel touch. It's a little tricky, but with practice, it is perfectly safe. If this explanation is a little confusing, then suffice to reiterate that crosswind landings are a little tricky to learn.

Burke Lakefront Airport in Cleveland is an outstanding airport for teaching crosswind landings. The airport is located directly on the shore of Lake Erie. When the wind is blowing out of the north from across the surface of Lake Erie, it is smooth and there is very little turbulence. It is ideal for teaching the crosswind-landing maneuver.

I took my responsibilities as a flight instructor very seriously. My goal was for my students to have a thorough understanding of all aspects of flying.

Because cross wind landings are tricky and unforgiving of any lack of competence, I frequently taught crosswind training when the winds were at higher than normal velocity. I found that if I exposed my students to the extreme of crosswind landings, then when they had a light, mild or even moderate crosswind, they were exceptionally safe.

The folks who worked in the control tower dignified me with the call sign, *Cross-Wind Koch* (pronounced, Cross-Wind Cook). They apparently found watching a student transpire from appearing out-of-control to making perfect crosswind landings pretty entertaining.

There were many days, particularly during the months of November and April - the windiest months of the year, that I would be the only airplane in the airport traffic pattern practicing touch-n-go landings with my students. From a layman's perspective, we looked like we were out of control because the first part of the lesson was teaching a student to fly three feet above the runway with the nose straight and the wing tilted into the wind, traveling at around 80 knots.

Training aircraft are equipped with fully functioning dual controls. If I felt a student was losing it, I simply took over. I had a simple rule with my students: When I say, "My Airplane," you let go.

During the time I was a flight instructor, there were two primary training aircraft - the Cessna 152 and the Piper Tomahawk.

I personally learned to fly in a Cessna 152. Both aircraft are two seat configurations for primary training and both are relatively simple to operate. My first exposure to the Tomahawk was when I began instructing through

the flying club. The Cessna 152 is easier to learn to fly. The Tomahawk has a few characteristics that make it a little more challenging, but both airplanes are safe training aircraft.

The flying club would attract aircraft owners with what is called a leaseback. A person buys an aircraft and places it in the flying club. The flying club maintains the aircraft and the owner receives revenue for every hour a club member uses the aircraft. The revenue generating arrangement helps to offset the owner's cost of aircraft ownership.

One of the club members, John, who was the 57 year-old president of a young and growing advertising agency purchased a Tomahawk and placed it in the club on leaseback.

John tried to set up a whole set of rules pertaining to his aircraft that were dysfunctional in the flying club arena, and he personally was not subject to obeying those rules he made.

At least a dozen times, I had John's aircraft scheduled with a student only to have him bump us from the schedule so he could go on a pleasure flight with his dog. He was cutting into my revenues every time he bumped me from the schedule. As a pilot, he had logged only a couple hundred hours total time. His inexperience coupled with his gigantic know-it-all ego had not earned him much respect from other pilots.

John was frequently looking for recognition and adulation from Larry, the club owner. John was clearly a legend in his own mind with a Triple-X-L ego. I knew that I irritated him because I didn't snap to attention and salute when he entered a room, and I pretty much ignored his condescending demeanor that seemed to galvanize his delusion that everyone stood in line to plant their lips on his ass.

My reputation as Crosswind Koch was one of respect. The ultimate goal with crosswind landing lessons was to teach my students to take the airplane down the length of the runway on one wheel. When a pilot can perform that maneuver, they have become one with the machine. Larry, the other instructors and most of the club members knew that my teaching methods were not only safe - my methods produced pilots that probably had better than average skills.

I was with a student one Saturday afternoon practicing crosswind landing's in John's Tomahawk. Because it was a weekend, the club activity was high. This was my student's first experience with a strong crosswind.

As is customary with the first few lessons in a formidable crosswind, from a spectator's perspective, it appeared to be an airplane out of control. And, on that day, there were a number of spectators watching us, including Larry, the

club owner, and John, the owner of the Tomahawk I was flying with my green student.

I would later learn that Larry had told John that what we were doing was perfectly safe. Nevertheless, John was looking for any excuse he could find to exert his perceived authority that he yearned to have over me.

After an hour or so of touch-n-go landings, my student and I taxied on to the parking ramp, secured the airplane and walked toward the office. John, Larry and one of the other instructors were standing at the building entrance.

As I approached, John started blowing a gasket. He had been looking for any opportunity to scold me for failure to suck-up for months. I guess this was it.

John positioned himself within about a foot of my face and was screaming at the top of his lungs, turning a bright red, with the veins in his neck and forehead looking like they were ready to burst. I stood there and listened to him rant and rave about how important he is, whether or not I knew who he is, and if I knew who he knows.

Those people who make those statements always amuse me, "*Do you know who I am?*" I didn't care. I just observed as John got his panties tied in a knot and he got himself all worked up.

John then began with the really hard scolding. Still yelling at 90 decibels and becoming animated to a level that could only be described as bizarre, he said, "You cannot ever fly my airplane again! Do you understand, you can never fly my airplane!?" I just calmly stood there and listened, occasionally looking over at Larry and the other instructor - both of them rolling their eyes.

John continued - his voice cracking and looking like he was about to stroke out, "You hear me! You can never fly my airplane, you can never dive my car and you can never come to my house!"

Where the heck the car and house fit into this was a mystery. "Do you understand me - do you have any questions about anything I am telling you," he continued, arms flapping around like a marionette with broken strings - having a seizure - pointing and shaking his finger about two inches from my face. His ranting went on for solid three or four minutes, which seemed like three or four hours. I just kept thinking, GOOD GAWD, is this guy twelve years old!?!

John posed the question, for the third or fourth time, "do you understand me - do you have any questions about anything I'm telling you?" Only one

thought entered my mind. I did have one question, but I figured I had better brace myself because he will probably clock-out and deck me.

Pretty much immediately after his third or fourth screaming tirade; “You can never fly my airplane, you can never dive my car and you can never come to my house! Do you understand me - do you have any questions about anything I am telling you!?!,” I cocked my head to the side, and in a calm and sincere tone said, “...Well then, I suppose fucking your daughter is completely out of the question, huh?”

I just walked away as he tried to gasp for breath, figuring Joe and Larry would need to give him oxygen.

Afterward, John tore into Larry and demanded that I be fired, which I suppose answered my question regarding his daughter. Too bad, it could have been her lucky day.

Larry explained to John that he couldn't fire me because I didn't work for him. I was an independent instructor, and I represented a whole lot more in business to the club than John's one little airplane.

That was the day that I first realized that I was out. I didn't get out of prison when they opened the gates. I got out when I had achieved a level of financial independence whereby I could pursue my journey my way, and tell anyone who did not help to facilitate my goals to go pound rocks. Anyone who is getting out of prison should focus on this as one of their ultimate goals - to become independent - to genuinely get out.

People say you shouldn't burn a bridge. In this situation, I figured, you can't burn an ash. John was a relationship I didn't want or need, and even if I thought the use of his airplane was imperative to my business, I would have found other alternatives.

My priority in life was not to massage John's obviously delicate ego - it was to provide robust instruction and produce pilots who would be safe in any conditions they might face when I'm not in the airplane. I was also in business to make money. If John didn't want the revenue from my students and me, it was his loss.

Ego can be really expensive. John eventually had to sell his airplane. It wasn't generating any revenue. I agree with the concept that you should not burn bridges however, I qualify the conditions, and I quantify the value of the bridge.

I probably should note that the incident with the Tomahawk owner occurred before I had read Dale Carnegie's, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. I might have handled that situation differently after reading that book. If I

had handled it differently, I might have had that opportunity to date his twenty-one-year-old adorable daughter.

There was one other time that comes to mind that I knowingly burnt a bridge, but it was a choice of the lesser of two evils.

When I first met my business partner Kyle, he had just graduated from college a few months prior and was designing websites. Back then, there were literally only a handful of web sites on the Internet, and most of those were universities.

Kyle had an attorney incorporate his business as, Your Connection World Wide Web Services, Inc. Incorporating as a business at that juncture was a mistake, but the attorney apparently convinced him that it was necessary, and managed to separate Kyle from \$1,500 in attorney fees. Under the attorney's direction, the corporation did not even initially authorize the correct number of shares. Taking business advice from professionals who are not currently, or have not successfully operated a business, is bad business.

Kyle's education was technology, having graduated with a double major in electrical engineering and computer sciences. He is a gifted technologist, but he had little focus or appetite for business and administration. Kyle and I first became partners when we reached an agreement that I join Your Connection as President. The alternative was not too attractive since the several-month-old business already had one foot in bankruptcy.

Kyle had four or five months of web site design invested for Rubbermaid when it was first exploring a presence on the World Wide Web in 1995. As I said, at that time, there were very few websites other than government and academia. Rubbermaid was one of the corporate pioneers that was exploring the endeavor from within its research & development department - not its marketing department.

Among my initial priorities after accepting the presidency with Kyle's company was cash flow, because it was zero. There were some receivables. However, Kyle had not devoted much attention to collecting those receivables.

Rubbermaid owed a relatively considerable amount of money, but Kyle and the friendly reminder notices were getting us nowhere. I arranged a meeting with our Rubbermaid contact at its Wooster, Ohio facility.

My only objective for the visit with Rubbermaid was to leave with a check. Going into the meeting, I fully planned to start at a level of diplomacy, but I would not be hesitant to escalate to whatever levels it required to get paid, whether diplomatic or adversarial - within the guidelines of civilized society of course. Our survival was dependent on bringing in some cash.

Our contact at Rubbermaid had a Ph.D. after his name on his business card, so I extended the proper courtesy by addressing him as Doctor Jensen. After ten minutes of general discussion, I moved the conversation to the receivables that Rubbermaid had open and due. The response was smug and arrogant, and Dr. Jensen conveyed to us that he did not feel that paying us was a high priority.

I explained to Dr. Jensen that we would suspend service and take down Rubbermaid's website if it did not bring the account current. Dr. Jensen slowly leaned back in his chair, crossed his arms across his puffed out chest, and looking down his nose at me said, "Rubbermaid is a big company." I immediately shot back, "I agree, but you're a small customer." He literally almost fell backwards off his chair.

Big egos that work for big companies are not used to being told that they are insignificant. As I stood up and shook his hand, I said, "We will expect a check bringing your account current by the end of the week." We thanked him for his time and left.

As Kyle and I were walking out of the building he asked, "Do you think we will get a check by Friday?" Kyle was only 22 or 23 years old, so in addition to facilitating the needs of the company, I also wanted to teach him about some of the idiosyncrasies of business that they don't teach in college courses. I therefore substantially qualified my answer.

I told Kyle that we would probably have a check before Friday, but Dr. Jensen will also be searching for another vendor. Rubbermaid is not accustomed to being told that it is a small customer. Nevertheless, I explained that if we didn't get paid, Rubbermaid wasn't a customer at all - it was a liability. The account was eating up a large amount of our time that could be spent on customers that paid their invoices in a timelier manner.

We had a check from Rubbermaid that week bringing its account totally current. Rubbermaid remained a very prompt paying customer for about another year. Then, as I expected, Rubbermaid severed the relationship. I burnt the bridge, but if I hadn't, I doubt that our company would have been in existence a year later.

I have never had a problem with cutting a customer off for non-payment. If a customer is not paying, it is not a customer. If the customer isn't paying for the services, then we are losing time, resources and the costs that we incur to provide services without remuneration. The customer that doesn't pay on time quickly becomes a liability.

We never lost a customer by suspending services. In fact, every customer that we shut off suddenly became among or most timely paying customers. Even so, I always got a little heartburn when it came time to throw the

switch. There was always the thought in the back of my mind that we could lose a customer. That was particularly true with some of the larger customers who were paying us thirty to fifty thousand dollars a month.

When AT&T's account was several months and roughly seventy thousand dollars past due, I agonized over the decision. Not only was it a significant amount of money, it was a real trophy client. After all, AT&T was one of the major Internet backbone operators and a competitor that was now purchasing access to the Internet backbone from us. Nevertheless, if it didn't pay, it can't play. We shut AT&T off. The money was in our hands within twenty-four hours and it was never late again.

Circling back to my early experiences in aviation, I only had three disappointments during my tenure as a flight instructor. My best flight student ever, Farooq had soloed in less than ten hours.

Solo is exactly as the word implies. The instructor steps out of the airplane and the student makes a few take off's and landing's while the instructor stands watching from the side of the runway, ...eating Roloids.

Farooq was an exceptionally bright 18 year-old first year community college student from India. He spoke several languages fluently, including English with no detectible foreign accent, and he frequently dazzled people with his ability to perform rather complex mathematical calculations in his head.

Burke Lakefront airport had been a political football for many years. The airport had difficulty generating adequate revenue to sustain operations. There had been a couple of different commuter airlines that had operated out of Burke over the years, with Wright Airlines probably having been the most successful. These commuter airlines offered low fare flights to Detroit, Columbus and Cincinnati. There were frequent rumors that the airport would be sold to developers to build condominiums, and on occasion someone would come up with a real harebrain idea.

One such harebrain idea appeared on the front page of one of the free press newspapers touting a concept to offer flights from Burke Lakefront to Detroit via a glider that would be launched by what amounted to a gigantic slingshot. An artist's rendering of a fifty-passenger airplane sitting on the slingshot launcher was depicted along with the article.

I was working with a student and debriefing him on the flight lesson we had just completed. Farooq was my next scheduled student and I noticed him reading the article about the slingshot glider and punching away on his engineering calculator.

There were five or six students and three instructors in the room when Farooq stood up and proudly declared, "This thing won't work!" I think

everyone in the room, all laughing, simultaneously uttered something to the effect of, “*Duhhhh!*”

Farooq exclaimed, “No, you don’t understand! The reason it won’t work is...” and he began rapidly punching away at his calculator. I don’t remember the exact numbers, but his fact-based oratory went something like this.

“The article states that the airplane weighs 18,000 pounds. With an average weight of 170 pounds per passenger, the fully loaded weight would be 26,500 pounds. In order for the airplane to glide to Detroit, it would need to climb to an altitude of 21,153 feet. The energy required to overcome gravity would be <xxx.xx> and the acceleration would be <xxx.xxx>. The G forces that would be generated to achieve the required acceleration would be 108 G’s. The human body liquefies at 74 G’s. The thing that would be arriving in Detroit wouldn’t just be an airplane - it would be a blender with the tail cone full of liquefied passengers.”

Farooq thought for a second and then continued, “If all of the passengers were liquefied, then it would be really hard to identify which person goes with which baggage.”

I’m sure all of Farooq’s calculations were correct, and the lost baggage conclusion was just characteristic of his personality.

Some weeks later, I received a telephone call from one of the instructors I was working with who asked if Farooq had taken his private pilot check ride. He had not - he was still a student. The instructor told me that I should come to the airport. I was living in a high-rise apartment in the center of downtown Cleveland at the time, so the trip to the airport was only five minutes.

When I arrived, the instructor who had called me told me that he thought he saw Farooq depart with a passenger on board.

Student pilots are prohibited from carrying any passengers by regulation. Until a student successfully completes the FAA private pilot written test and the FAA flight test, and receives their private pilot certificate, they are under the supervision of their instructor. The instructor can authorize solo flights and cross country flights, but the regulations are crystal clear about carrying passengers - it’s a no-no.

Because aviation safety is a result, or a consequence, of adherence to the regulations, and following those regulations is largely based upon the honor system, any breach of any regulations by a student might be a forecast of more serious problems after they receive their private pilot certificate.

The John F. Kennedy Jr. tragedy would be one example. He did not have an instrument rating, but he was flying in what amounted to instrument weather conditions. There was no instructor to supervise him because he had a private pilot certificate. Once the umbilical chord is cut between the student and instructor by the issuance of the private pilot certificate, then the responsibility is solely on that pilot.

I watched as Farooq landed and taxied the airplane to the parking ramp. Indeed, he had a passenger with him. I just felt like I got kicked in the gut. Evidently, he had done this several times before, first checking my schedule to make sure that he would not inadvertently run into me at the airport when he was taking his friends for rides.

When Farooq came in the building, I asked to speak with him in one of the offices. We sat down and I asked Farooq, "Are you aware that student pilots are prohibited from carrying passengers?" Farooq looked at me and said with a certain level of cockiness, "Rules are made for the masses." Although I agree with that answer in theory, it has no place in aviation. Mistakes in aviation are quantified in lives and property damage.

I don't think Farooq ever endangered anyone that he took for a flight - he was what is called in aviation, *a natural*. His skills were way above average, and he was *one with the machine*.

My concern was that Farooq had just demonstrated a total disregard for the very regulations that are in place to ensure aviation safety. Now my concern was, which regulations would he be breaking next, after the umbilical chord was cut and he held his private pilot certificate? This could become even more problematic after he receives his private pilot certificate and he is taking up passengers who are relying on him to make sound judgments, follow regulations, and above all, be safe.

Aviation is very safe, but it is also unforgiving for any lack of capacity or competence. Aviation accidents are infrequently the fender-bender variety. Rather, aviation accidents are more commonly a scenario of total devastation. And, the number one cause of aviation accidents is pilot error.

Farooq's act of breaching the regulations, and the act of carrying passengers was not my major concern. My concern was his attitude toward safety regulations. I was faced with a situation where an individual has now presented question as to whether or not he will exercise the judgment that is prerequisite to being a safe pilot, and no amount of discussion or rhetoric could remove the question.

I terminated Farooq's training. The decision was gut wrenching and it really broke my heart. Goodness, that kid was so bright and such a good pilot.

The same incident occurred with another student. Bob had recently completed his medical training and was a board certified medical doctor.

I had developed a friendship with Bob and we frequently scheduled our training sessions close to the lunch or dinner hour so we could meet and enjoy some conversation with a meal.

Bob and I had frequently discussed the double standards that exist in society. When I learned that Bob had also been taking up passengers as a student, I told him of the situation with Farooq and the resulting disposition. I asked him to make the decision.

From that point on, the first thing I wrote on the chalk board during the first day of my private pilot theory classes was the regulation pertaining to students carrying passengers, verbatim.

The third disappointment was Terry. He was young when he started his training, and I not only enjoyed working with him, I had become good friends with his parents. Our goal was to have him take his FAA check ride on his 17th birthday - the minimum age for the private pilot certificate.

Terry learned quickly and handled the airplane rather well. He had a little bit of a confidence, self-esteem and self-image challenge, which gradually improved as he became more proficient with flying the airplane.

After roughly 20 hours of flight instruction, I felt confident that Terry was safe to solo. However, Terry did not share my high level of confidence in him. I clearly recognized that his hesitation was a confidence issue and had nothing to do with his capabilities.

The confidence challenge did have some effect on Terry's classroom work. He was having a little trouble comprehending a few things, but with a little more explanation, he eventually absorbed and understood the material.

The first solo is a major milestone for all pilots. There is not a pilot flying who does not vividly remember their first solo.

If you injected a quart of adrenalin, you would probably produce a feeling that closely approximates the feeling of a pilot's first solo. Just for good measure, it might help to add some of that scary violin music they play in horror movies just before someone gets axed.

I talked with Terry's parents and told them that he was ready to solo and I wanted them to be there to celebrate. I also thought that this would be a great confidence builder for Terry.

I asked Terry's parents to arrive at the airport the following Saturday 30 minutes after my scheduled lesson time with Terry. I wanted to be sure that

Terry and I would already be flying when his parents arrived. I didn't want to exacerbate Terry's nervousness with an audience, and I didn't want to let the cat out of the bag that this was the day that he was likely going to solo.

Terry and I had been practicing take off and landing's for roughly 40 minutes. I gave him several simulated engine out emergencies, aborted take offs and go-around procedures. It was a perfect day, fairly calm winds and a clear blue sky. I reached over and felt the palm of his hand and it was perfectly dry - a great nervousness indicator. I told Terry to pull over onto the taxiway and I radioed the tower that this would be a first solo.

Terry looked a little surprised, but I just said, "You're ready man - get up there." I watched from the taxiway as Terry flew the traffic pattern perfectly and made three textbook takeoffs and landings. He taxied over, picked me up and we taxied to the ramp where his parents were standing. This had clearly marked that kid's most significant accomplishment in his life. Mom and Dad were pretty proud, and so was Terry. I was mighty proud too. It was a moving moment.

We spent the following couple of months continuing with Terry's flight training and focusing on the book material. I felt he was ready to take the FAA written test. I had given him numerous practice tests and he passed them all, scoring higher with each one.

I gave Terry a letter of recommendation to take the FAA written test. The FAA written test was administered in several locations. Kent State University was the location where I had taken all of my tests. Over the years, I had developed a good dialog and working relationship with the examiner, so I referred all of my students to that facility for their tests.

I knew that Terry was sweating the exam. I just emphasized to him that he would do fine. I told him that the worse thing that could happen is he fail the test and then take it again. You only need a 70% to pass. Terry had been scoring in the mid 90% range on all of the recent practice exams. I joked with him and said, "If you get a 71% or more, then it is just wasted effort - terribly inefficient."

I received a telephone call from the FAA Examiner the day that Terry was taking his written test. She sounded upset as she explained that she had caught Terry using a cheat sheet.

The procedure from this point forward was completely out of my hands. The FAA really frowns upon cheating on a written exam. In fact, if a pilot is caught cheating on his Airline Transport Pilot exam, he loses his commercial pilot certificate, private pilot certificate, instrument rating, flight instructor certificates, and any and all ratings. In other words, they are busted to the

level of student. Since Terry was only a student, he was barred from re-taking the test for a couple of years.

Terry would have passed the test without any cheating. His only deficiency was self-confidence. His mom and dad were devastated. For me, life and business goes on, but I was definitely a little heartbroken.

At some time or other, everyone is tempted to cheat, and that temptation is generally rooted in our own lack of self-confidence. Trust in your abilities.

I have taken a number of tests that I thought I would score terribly, but I ended up scoring high. I think we tend to put far more expectations on ourselves than the expectations that are put on us by others.

I have reflected back on the decisions I made with regard to Bob and Farooq - terminating their training because they took up passengers. At that time in my career, I was hell-bent on maintaining total legitimacy as the path for my life. I'm sure that played a role in my decisions, and I question whether I would make the same decision today.

As I have matured, I see a great deal more gray between the black and white. The aviation safety issue and my attitude toward safety are absolute. However, if I were faced with the same circumstances, I wonder if I would have found a way to continue the training and cause Farooq and Bob to benefit and grow from the mistake.

Pilots frequently work as flight instructors so they can accumulate flight hours in their logbook. The industry refers to this period as *paying your dues*. Almost all pilots aspire to fly jets - either for the airlines or for corporate operators.

To qualify for almost any corporate or airline position, a pilot needs to accumulate 1,500 flight hours, which was also the minimum flight experience required for the Airline Transport Pilot Certificate during my aviation career.

Aside from the accumulation of flight hours, the experience as a flight instructor is invaluable. I can attest that I learned to fly after I became a flight instructor. The private pilot and commercial pilot certificates, and the instrument rating are licenses to learn. When you are teaching the material, you really internalize it. Being able to sit and observe a student flying, particularly during instrument training, without having your hands full of airplane, provides the instructor with a really comprehensive understanding.

I remain convinced that a student's primary objective is to kill the instructor, so it is the instructor's responsibility to recover from whatever predicaments the student manages to get the airplane into. Some of the student-induced attitudes I have found myself in really were amazing.

I had actually applied for a position with Continental Airlines back in 1984 or 1985. I received a telephone call from them in 1999 - 14 years later. At the time Continental called, I was President & CEO of Fiber Network Solutions, drawing a six-figure salary, a nice bonus schedule and a generous benefit package that included a leased 5-Series BMW and apartments in several of our divisional cities. Continental offered me a flight engineer position on a Boeing 727 with a starting salary of \$12,500 a year. That figure was roughly what I was making a month. I somehow managed to resist the temptation.

I was previously presented with a temptation that was a little more realistic during late 1996.

During the first year of FiberNet's operation, there was not enough revenue to pay all of our expenses and salaries for my partner and me.

A friend I flew with previously, Craig Housley, offered me a one-year duty assignment as a Learjet co-captain for a local entrepreneur, Dutch Knowlton. Dutch was 84 years old at the time and he was the epitome of a gentleman.

Flying for Dutch was an ideal flying job. Dutch used the airplane infrequently during the week. He would spend roughly six out of every eight weekends at his estate in Ft. Lauderdale. We would generally leave Columbus on a Friday afternoon and return Sunday evening. It was a perfect schedule for building my business since I was in the office Monday through Friday.

Visiting Ft. Lauderdale on the weekends and staying in the guest cottage on Dutch's estate wasn't torture. He had a 171-foot, four-deck Feadship parked at the dock on the estate, which wasn't torture to play with either.

Since Dutch used the airplane so little, it really did not make sense for him to own a Learjet. Several aircraft management organizations offered a package whereby a corporation or an individual could purchase a share-ownership in an aircraft - whether an eighth, quarter or half share. The owner of the share could then trade time on any aircraft the aircraft management company had in its fleet. For shorter flights, a Learjet or Cessna Citation might fit the mission profile, and for longer flights, a Gulfstream IV or executive Boeing 737 could be available.

Late 1996, Dutch decided to sell his Learjet and purchase a quarter share with NetJets. He was thoughtful enough to make the deal contingent on NetJets hiring his pilots.

Early December 1996, I was in my office and received a telephone from Richard Smith, one of the vice presidents of NetJets. He said, "Dave, you're scheduled to go to Gulfstream School next week."

The Gulfstream is the ultimate corporate jet. It is definitely the jet that all CEO's aspire to own, and that all professional pilots would sell their soul to fly. At the time, getting a type rating in the Gulfstream required a grueling three weeks of training at a cost of roughly \$25,000, plus hotel, meals and expenses.

Fiber Network Solutions was in its infancy, and was struggling to survive. Cash was really tight. I still wasn't drawing a salary and Dutch had just sold his airplane. From an income standpoint, I was unemployed. Until I had received this phone call from NetJets, I was not aware that Dutch had made any arrangements for his pilots. Such arrangements are pretty rare in the industry. Like I said, Dutch was the epitome of a gentleman.

Under the circumstances, accepting a six-figure position to fly a Gulfstream would certainly seem an easier path. The temptation was clearly there. However, I had made commitments to my partner and a number of other people. Perhaps most importantly, I had made a commitment to myself to achieve the goal that I had set to build this business. Aside from that, I actually thought that this *Internet* thing had some potential to grow. Back then, no one really knew for sure where the Internet could go.

This is where the rubber meets the road - how much do I believe in myself. I could accept a comfortable flying position with one of the industry's finest companies, flying the World's finest corporate jet, or I could continue building a company that was struggling to keep the lights turned on and have zero personal income for at least the foreseeable future.

I turned down the opportunity with NetJets. I am probably the only pilot on the planet that turned down a type rating in a Gulfstream. Richard Smith couldn't believe his ears when I told him I was passing on the opportunity.

During the 1980's and 1990's, the airline opportunities didn't much appeal to me, and I could probably count the number of applications I made to airlines on one hand. The airlines were frequently *furloughing* pilots, which is a socially palatable term for *laid-off* or *fired*.

Airlines hire pilots initially as flight engineers. So, you spend three to five years sitting sideways before you get to a first officer slot. Then you ride right seat for another three to five years before you get a captain's position. Then, if you want to upgrade to a better aircraft, a Boeing 747 for example, you transfer as a flight engineer or first officer and essentially go through the whole process all over again.

Given the industry instability and the time it took to achieve a captain's position, with several furloughs probable during the journey, it hardly seemed worth it. If flying for an airline is a person's aspiration and they are willing to pay all of those dues, I certainly support that path.

My choice of corporate aviation versus airlines also considered the conviction issue. I found that corporate aviation presented a path of least resistance.

I really don't know if the conviction would have affected my career if I wanted to go with the airlines. My guess is that it would not have impeded my career progress, but it would have entailed substantially more interviews and paperwork to get started.

As I have repeated many times before, people do not judge you for what you have done in the past, they judge you for what you have done since, what you are doing now, and what your goals are as you move into the future. You are judged based upon your *most recent significant event*.

After I had been instructing for a little less than two years and had logged almost 2,000 hours as a flight instructor, I learned of a new company operating out of Burke Lakefront Airport that provided corporate aircraft management and charter services. The company was located in a brand new facility that was the envy of the aviation community and boasted all of the most modern amenities.

Someone had mentioned the names of the owners to me, and the name Richard Michaels was familiar from my adolescent years. In my teen years, I knew a Rick Michaels who was a friend of my older brothers.

During my teen years, I spent most of my time with the friends of my older brothers who were all four or five years my senior. I was accepted in the group as a sort of mascot and had affectionately been called either *Little Cook*, since I was the youngest of my brothers and the group, or *Fat Cook*, because I carried around a few extra pounds during those years. Actually, I had lost those few extra pounds, but in recent years, I found them.

I never had much interaction with Rick during my teen years. He was always considerate to me and I was always impressed with him. He was probably the only person within the group of people I hung out with that seemed to be doing something positive with his life.

I doubt that I actually made that conscious assessment at that time, but I'm sure Rick's attitude toward building his future came through and contributed to why I respected and admired him. Rick never participated in the cultural activities that included experimentation with drugs or alcohol. He was pretty clean cut and focused on work and school. In his late teens, he drove a gorgeous Corvette and he always managed to have the prettiest girlfriend, making him the envy of every kid in the city.

I remember that Rick had enrolled at Kent State University and planned to pursue a major in aviation. That was pretty much the last I had heard from or about him. Given the aviation connection, I figured there was at least a

decent chance that this was the same Richard Michaels with whom I was familiar from many years past.

I had a student cancellation one afternoon, and I decided to take a walk over to the new facility where Rick Michaels was the executive vice president.

I still didn't know if this was the Rick Michaels I knew from my teen years, and I thought, if it is the same Rick Michaels, my teen years would not serve as any glowing reference. One part of me just wanted to see if it was the same Rick Michaels, but I also wanted to explore any possibilities of flying in the corporate arena with an operator that had a fleet of turbine equipment.

I entered the facility and saw a glass wall with double glass doors that was the entrance to the offices of the company I had come to visit. The offices were spectacular. It made an immediate impression.

I entered the lobby and a bubbly young receptionist offered her assistance. I asked if Richard Michaels was in. "Yes, he is - may I tell him your name," she replied. I smiled and said, "Tell him it's *Fat Cook*." She gave me a strange look and asked, "did you say, Fat Cook?" I replied with my smile growing, "Yes, Fat Cook." "Oooookaaay," she replied, giving an exaggerated rolling of her eyes.

The receptionist rang Rick's extension and said, "There is a gentleman in the lobby to see you - a *Mister Fat Cook*." Immediately she started laughing, and as she hung up the phone, she said, "He'll be right out."

Given the reaction, I was pretty sure this was the same Rick Michaels I knew as a teen. I should qualify the "...I knew as a teen" statement. I knew of Rick and he knew of me. I doubt that our history included a full hour of dialog, and what superficial dialog it did include wasn't much beyond hello and drooling over his Corvette.

Within a few minutes, Rick appeared in the lobby, laughing as he extended his hand, and addressing me with an emphasized pronunciation - "Faaaat Coookkk. How are you?" We both laughed as we shook hands and he invited me back to his office. The name stuck even though at that time, I was in great shape.

As I had remembered him, Rick was a total gentleman. He offered me a beverage and showed a genuine interest in what I was doing. He had no idea that I even had an interest in aviation, let alone that I had all of my certificates and ratings, and was working as an instructor. Rick seemed genuinely amazed, even more because I was operating as an independent, and I was actually making a living, which is unusual for flight instructors. In many respects, when I really think about it, I was amazed as well.

Rick and I exchanged hangar stories of our experiences as flight instructors and reminisced about the old neighborhood and what had become of the old gang. "Half of them are probably in prison," he joked. *Oh God*, I thought. *Little did he know...*

After visiting for fifteen or twenty minutes, Rick offered a tour of the facility. The offices were nothing short of first class. We continued the tour in the hangar, which was packed with turboprop and jet aircraft.

As is common with most flight instructors when in the presence of jets, or inhaling the fumes of burning jet fuel, I had the conditioned response that is remarkably similar to Pavlov's drooling dogs. I was salivating.

After the tour and effortless conversation that included easy and genuine laughter, we exchanged contact information and pledged to stay in touch. I never brought up the interest in working there because I didn't want to seem too eager.

A couple of weeks later, Rick called with a lead for someone who was interested in taking flying lessons. I was a little disappointed that he wasn't calling me to talk about going to work at his company. I appreciated the lead, but in reality, I was reaching the point of instructor burnout. I had been giving flight training seven days a week and teaching ground school five evenings per week for two years. I expressed my appreciation for the lead with enthusiasm and told him I would give him a call so we could schedule a convenient day to meet for lunch.

Over the next couple of months, Rick and I had developed a good dialog and we found that we had a great deal in common. Our relationship developed more in the direction of a friendship than any kind of professional relationship. We shared laughter that was spontaneous and frequent. We also shared a strong commonality of interest in aviation, which seemed to form a bond.

Frequently during conversations regarding aviation, Rick would smile, shake his head, and as a compliment and form of flattery, he would just say, "Fat Cook, I can't believe it - Fat Cook is a pilot."

I received a call from Rick one evening at home. He asked if I had time to stop by and meet his partner, Ken. This is a good thing, I thought. Without sounding like I was doing cartwheels and summersaults (which I was), we arranged a time.

I arrived at Rick's office a few minutes early and he met me in the lobby. Rick took me back to his partner's spacious office that was probably about the size of the living room of my apartment.

Ken's office was designed to impress. I asked him about his desk, which was a polished 9 x 4 foot x 4 inch thick piece of cherry wood. He had it custom made and I suspected that it priced in the ten thousand dollar range.

Ken and Rick were young stuff. Both of them were 27 or 28 years old, and here they were operating a company that provided aircraft management for some of the largest corporations and wealthiest people in the community. They really were a class act.

As we talked, Ken and Rick explained the business of aircraft management. Historically, if a corporation or a wealthy individual bought an airplane, they hired their own pilots, leased hangar space and arranged for all of their own maintenance. The cost of operating a flight department is astronomical.

Aircraft management provided a soup-to-nuts turnkey management solution, but at a fraction of the cost of operating a flight department. The management company provided pilots as required, ensured that they were properly trained, and handled all maintenance, insurance and scheduling.

If an owner wanted to use his aircraft to generate revenue when it was otherwise sitting on the ground, the management company would place the aircraft in air charter - a leaseback similar to the leasebacks I mentioned at the flying club. Because of the economies of scale, a management company can provide all of the necessary aircraft management and operational services far more efficiently and economically than managing an autonomous flight department.

Rick had given Ken an overview of my aviation background and told him of my interest in the sales, marketing and business side of aviation as well as the flying side.

My dilemma throughout my aviation career had always been trying to ascertain which I enjoy more - flying an airplane or flying a desk. Ken was impressed with the fact that I was making a good living in a profession that customarily pays poorly, that being flight instruction.

Ken and Rick wanted to expand their business and were interviewing me for a position as marketing director. I indicated that I would still want to pursue my flying career and they offered me their assurances that I would have the opportunity to participate in sales, marketing and flying, and they would arrange for a checkout in a turbo commander. As far as I was concerned, I was ready to go.

I vividly remember Ken looking at me and asking, "Dave, what does it take to get a guy like you?" I have remembered and used that approach my entire career. I don't know if he was sincere in the way the question was phrased, but it has to be the most flattering way I have ever heard to initiate

employment negotiations. My answer was simple. I just said, "Ken, I'm sure you're too busy to deal with such details. I will talk with Rick, and I'll just say that I'd be delighted to join your team." Ken and I shook hands and Rick escorted me to the lobby. We agreed to talk in a few days.

My next meeting with Rick was early in the morning. We arrived at the facility at the same time. We went back to his office, took off our coats and he offered me coffee - self-serve, so I followed him to a small closet that functioned as a kitchenette. We talked as water heated and he shared his private stash of yuppie coffee - some kind of flavored vanilla, hazel nut, cinnamon and almond blend that although delicious, was sold and consumed more for the *yuppie symbolism thing* than anything else.

As we talked, Rick mentioned that he was offering no favoritism because we had known each other in our teens - it had to be the right decision for the business. I told Rick that I fully understood. We talked a little about the flying club and my contributions toward expanding its membership and aircraft fleet. "I just marketed myself," I said. "There's no mystery." Rick responded, "Well, you're the first flight instructor I've ever met who makes a decent living teaching."

We had talked previously about some of my marketing campaigns. During the Cleveland National Air Show, I held a free raffle for a free introductory flight lesson. I had tickets printed so people could give me their name, address and telephone number. I figured that if someone took the time to fill out a ticket, they probably had some interest in learning to fly. Of course, everyone was a winner and I gave a free introductory lesson to anyone who wanted to schedule it.

I found that if I sold someone ten percent during a half-hour introductory lesson - the airplane ride sold the other ninety percent. I ended up with a bunch of new students from that campaign alone.

I was just capitalizing on all of the publicity and attendance generated by the Air Show. I didn't think it was particularly revolutionary, but Rick seemed to think it was. Rick had seen me at the air show, and it was my little raffle recruiting campaign that impressed him enough to open employment negotiations. When you're doing your best, people do take notice.

We took our coffee and sat in Rick's office talking about the business and the position they wanted to fill. When it came time for Rick to make the offer, he seemed a little hesitant and uncomfortable, and he preceded it with various justifications indicating that it was probably going to be on the low side.

"We're a small company, only in business for three years", etc., Rick said. I sat and listened, shaking my head in the affirmative, indicating that I understood and agreed with everything he was saying.

Finally, Rick said, “We can offer you eighteen thousand a year.” Without any hesitation, I said, “That’s fine, I’ll accept that.” In a very surprised tone and looking like he would fall backwards in his chair Rick said, “*You will?!?!?*”

Given Rick’s surprised response, I had that sinking feeling like he was ready to pay more if I had negotiated. “Sure,” I said. “After you see what I can do for you, you guys are going to feel so guilty that you’ll give me double the amount of the *other number* you had in mind.” We both laughed and continued with a comfortable conversation.

I told Rick that there was one other thing I needed to discuss before accepting his offer, and if after our discussion he wanted to withdraw the offer, I would understand. He looked pretty puzzled.

I started by asking, “Do you remember when we were talking about the old gang a couple of months ago and you said most of them are probably in prison?” Rick responded with a chuckle in his voice, “Yeah, they probably are.” I just said, “Bingo!” There was a long pause, Rick started to smile and said, “No, you have got to be kidding!”

I spent a few minutes explaining that I had an incarceration event, which was the result of a series of bad choices that I characterized as a behavioral aberration. I then spent substantially more time reemphasizing what I had done post-release, and why I believed I was well qualified for the position Rick had available.

Rick was obviously surprised. He told me that he appreciated me being so upfront and that he would discuss it with his partner, Ken. He gave me some assurances that he didn’t think it would be an issue.

The next day, Rick called me and said I would be starting the following Monday. I asked if he discussed my conviction issue with Ken. He said he had, and Ken was impressed with the disclosure. Neither of them felt that it was an issue because I had accomplished a significant number of positive goals since the time of my release from prison.

Rick was a great individual to work for. He took time to teach and mentor, and he was instrumental in helping me get my life back on track, including co-signing on my first credit card.

I worked with Rick for several years. Of all of the people that I can identify as having had a substantial and positive influence in my life, Rick would be at the very top of that list. I was eventually promoted to vice president of marketing and received three rather substantial pay increases.

The position I held had many benefits including pretty much unrestricted use of Ken's personal airplane, a Mooney 201, which I flew back and forth to Texas frequently when we were operating a division in Austin.

Put simply, people who suggest that you cannot achieve anything because of your conviction are people who would not have achieved anything with or without a conviction. Those are people who are unwilling to get out in the forest of opportunity, apply themselves, figure out all of the components necessary to achieve a goal, create a plan and then work that plan. Those unwilling people just aren't achievers. If the conviction didn't exist, they would have just blamed their failures on something else - some other excuse to justify and rationalize why they just can't achieve success. The conviction card is just a convenient place to hang their baggage, but it is no more valid than any other excuse for not getting started toward a new life. In a word, they're just quitters.

I didn't get the job in corporate aviation because Rick was my friend. If I had approached him before earning my aviation certification and achieving success as an independent instructor, he would not have had any interest beyond a friendship.

All a person needs to do is take the small steps that lead to great rewards. Taking giant leaps, or always trying to take the shortcut path from point A to point B doesn't work - you end up falling flat on your face.

Are people going to judge you for your conviction? Will it be held against you? The short answer is, *yes*. The long answer is a little more involved.

Throughout this book, I give examples of when people attempted to use my conviction against me, and how I managed to slay those Dragons. I have embraced the concept of legitimacy with utter passion and consequently, I have no skeletons or areas of my conduct or character that can be attacked.

Whenever I was engaged in battle (litigation and business political battles), my adversary frequently defaulted to petty attempts to vilify me with this twenty-plus year old conviction. Using my conviction as a weapon against me demonstrated how desperate my opponent was to find any kind of leverage, and that they were unable to find any legitimate and relevant shortcomings to use against me. These were those adversaries who could not win on the merits of their position, or on the facts, so they attempted to create a smoke screen by making an issue out of my conviction, which was always completely irrelevant to the matter and dispute at hand.

Time after time, every judge involved in such litigation cases would rule that the conviction was *discoverable* during depositions, admissions and interrogatories, but it was *not admissible* because it was over ten years old, and it had no relevancy to the case.

I was always amused when that occurred because it clearly demonstrated that my adversary was groping for straws - they had no legitimate argument or case, and my victory was imminent. I wore that like a badge of honor and frankly, in every instance, I kicked those Dragons to Mars.

During my tenure as President & CEO of Fiber Network Solutions, I recall a case that became a bitter dispute with one of our landlords. We had leased several thousand square feet in a building located in downtown Columbus, which we modified to serve as one of our collocation data centers.

Collocation is a service that we offered to customers who wanted to co-locate their web servers in our facility and connect directly to the Internet backbone. The advantages were that the customer's equipment would be in our secured and climate controlled facility with diesel generator back up, and the customer would not have any bandwidth limitation.

Bandwidth is the amount of digital traffic sent and received. The collocation space (also called data centers) was ultimately filled with row after row of server cabinets, with each cabinet holding up to a couple dozen servers and various other computer and routing equipment. For us, collocation was a real gravy train.

The space we leased in Columbus had a total of 400 Amps of electrical service when we initially signed the lease. We knew that we would require substantially more power as the space became populated with energy hungry web servers.

When I negotiated the lease on the space, I specified in the lease that the landlord would be responsible for providing electrical power as required by the tenant.

As the collocation department of our business grew, we were adding new customers in the Columbus data center daily, and opening data centers in several other cities.

When a customer installed their equipment in our collocation centers, we always advised that they also install an auxiliary power supply - essentially a battery that can filter any power spikes and keep their equipment running in the event of a power outage.

The predominant manufacturer of these auxiliary power supplies is American Power Conversion, so the units are commonly referred to as APC's.

When we first established the Columbus data center, we had not installed the diesel-powered generator. We were still *working on the cheap*, and wanted to wait until we had good revenues from the facility before spending the \$65,000 to purchase and install the generator.

As we rather quickly populated the Columbus data center with customers' equipment, apparently no one was monitoring the amount of electricity we were using versus the 400 Amps of power available. We had not exceeded the 400 amps, however we were probably very close.

I received a telephone call from one of our technicians informing me that we had lost all power to the Columbus data center. Since I am not even close to having the knowledge and capabilities of an electrical engineer, I relied on Kyle, who is an electrical engineer, to remedy this issue.

Evidently, there had been a power outage that may have been caused by a lightening strike. Almost our entire customer base had installed APC's with their equipment, which kept their systems running for thirty, or forty-five minutes depending upon the size of the APC and the amount of equipment they had attached. Unfortunately, the electrical power was out for several hours, and consequently, all of the APC's completely exhausted their power.

When the power was finally restored, the electrical draw was not only the amount required to power all of the equipment, it also drew the power necessary to recharge all of the APC's, which were all completely dead.

Apparently, no one had thought through the problem, calculated the power required to both power the equipment and recharge the APC's, and developed a plan to bring customer equipment back on line in smaller batches. Consequently, the immediate electrical draw required to power all of the equipment and recharge all of the APC's literally melted the circuits. Essentially the entire electrical system that provided power to our facility was fried.

Kyle had two trailer mounted diesel powered generators delivered. Our landlord and the other tenants in the building were obviously not happy with all of the cables running through hallways, or the noise created by the diesel engines that had to run twenty-four hours a day. I wasn't particularly happy with having to pay the \$1,500 per day rental on those units either, but it was the only short-term solution that would restore power to our customers.

The long-term solution obviously required that we bring in substantially more power, which requirements were calculated at 3,000 amps to meet the needs of the data center when it was fully populated.

The agent representing the landlord gave Kyle a document to sign that authorized us to bring in the additional power at our expense. Bringing in 3,000 amp power is not a light undertaking, and requires a great deal of engineering, new equipment and cabling, not to mention an estimated cost approaching \$100,000.

When Kyle showed the document to me that the landlord's agent gave him to sign, I remembered that we had stipulated in the lease that the additional electrical power requirements would be the landlord's obligation.

I pulled our copy of the lease and the language was unambiguous. It was the landlord's obligation to provide adequate electrical power. The document that the landlords' agent gave us appeared to be a clever attempt to circumvent the landlord's obligations by effectively modifying the terms of the contract, which did not engender a warm fuzzy feeling of trust.

The landlord, Bradley, lived in California. I previously had very little interaction with him directly. The lease had been negotiated through his local agent, and local contractors performed the work required to modify the space to meet our needs and specifications.

After speaking with Bradley's agent and getting no satisfaction, I called Bradley directly. His attitude was one of total indignation. As far as he was concerned, any requirements for additional electrical needs would have to be installed at my expense. I read the language of the lease to him verbatim. He attempted to give a tortured argument that twisted the language of the contract to his favor. The language was clear - it was his obligation to "install electrical service as required by the tenant."

I explained our emergency situation to Bradley. We needed to restore power or risk the likelihood of losing all of our data center collocation customers. I offered to pay the cost to install the required electrical service to meet the mission critical emergency at hand, and we could argue later about whose obligation it was to pay for it.

Bradley refused to give permission for us to install the service unless we signed the document that would modify the contract, transferring the cost liability for installing additional electrical service from the landlord to the tenant. I asked Bradley, "If you're so sure that the obligation is mine, then why do we need to modify the contract?"

Bradley threatened to seek a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) if we attempted to proceed with the installation without his approval. Essentially, he held my business and my customer's hostage, attempting to force me to agree to modify the terms of the contract, which would transfer the responsibility for the installation of additional electric power as my financial responsibility.

After it became apparent that he would not adhere to his contractual obligations and insisted in perpetuating what I felt amounted to blackmail, I just said, "Brad, you will loathe the day."

After our respective attorneys exchanged numerous saber rattling letters, we ended up filing a lawsuit in Common Pleas Court. Given that Bradley was on the West Coast and the suit was filed in Columbus, we had home court advantage.

I had been involved in enough civil litigation to understand the judicial procedure, and perhaps more importantly, to understand the unspoken but true purposes of litigation.

Civil litigation exists to further the interests of a specialty industry - the lawyers, which is evidenced by the fact that we are one of the only nations in the civilized world that does not have a loser pays law. And if the trial lawyers have anything to say about it, we never will.

One should never enter into litigation with any expectation of winning. It is a battle that has only one purpose - maximize the financial mutilation of your adversary. Anyone who argues this existent hypothesis is either profiteering from the industry, or they are simply naïve. The only winners in litigation are the attorney's on both sides. It is to their financial advantage to escalate the dispute. The parties both lose. It is just a matter of who can hold out to the end and achieve the desired results. Hence, litigation should be an absolute last resort to any dispute resolution. Occasionally however, as in the instant case, litigation was unavoidable.

I had relationships with numerous independent attorneys, several large law firms, and FiberNet had an in-house legal department and general counsel. We decided to have one of the larger firms handle this case.

My posture with litigation is aggressive. I instructed our attorneys to file every conceivable motion possible to drive up costs for my adversary. Eventually however, I felt that the firm handling the case was not effective. I fired them and hired a dream-team of independent attorneys who instigated the *shit storm* that I wanted.

We managed to cause a total interruption to my adversary's business, and in a fairly short time, he had spent more on legal costs than he would have spent by simply installing the electrical service in accordance with the contract.

We conducted weeks of depositions, again the primary objective being to drive up costs. The depositions were conducted at our offices, which provided an additional intimidation. Our building was huge and gave our adversary the clear impression that he was up against a financially formidable opponent.

My deposition was held at the offices of the court reporter. As my opponent's attorney, Jeff Sams, questioned me, I noticed my opponent writing the word

“conviction” on a legal pad and pushing it in front of Mr. Sams. It was obvious that he was writing it so I would see it. I presume that I was supposed to feel intimidated. Given that I have been in federal and state penitentiaries, I wondered if they really believed that there was anything that they could do that would rattle my cage.

Mr. Sams continued with his questions and eventually began asking questions related to my conviction. My attorney objected and advised me not to answer, which instigated an argument between counsels.

From previous experience, I knew that a judge would rule that the conviction is discoverable, but it is not admissible because it was over ten years old, and it was utterly irrelevant to these proceedings. This was a contract dispute. Nevertheless, since Mr. Sams insisted on the questioning in his attempt to vilify me, and my attorney insisted that I would not answer those questions, we ended up going to see the judge. I was happy with that outcome since it only served to drive up my opponents’ legal costs.

The judge was actually apologetic as he ruled that I needed to answer the questions during my deposition. The judge’s demeanor gave me the impression that he did not support my opponent even raising this irrelevant issue, but the law states that it is discoverable. I think the opposition shot themselves in the foot with the judge by playing this card.

I don’t remember exactly what the occasion was, but someone had given me a stuffed Eeyore toy at work. Eeyore is a cartoon character and friend of Winnie the Pooh. Mine was a gray stuffed Eeyore toy who speaks only of gloom and doom when his front hoof is squeezed.

We held the deposition of my opponent Bradley, and his agents at our offices. We were on day two or three of Bradley’s deposition, and it appeared that both he and his attorney were becoming weary.

I had put the Eeyore toy on a window shelf in the conference room where we were conducting the depositions. I noticed that after each break, the stuffed toy was turned and faced out the window. Apparently, Bradley or his attorney Jeff Sams, arguably thought that the toy had a camera or some kind of recording device in it, and we had planted it there to surreptitiously eavesdrop on the deposition.

It is rather ludicrous to suspect that someone is recording a deposition since every word of the deposition is recorded by the court reporter / stenographer. Nevertheless, I decided to amuse myself and turn the stuffed toy back facing the conference table after each break, pointing directly at Bradley and Jeff Sams.

The turning of Eeyore back and forth went on for a couple of days. Officially, my attorneys all objected to me leaving Eeyore in the conference room however, they conceded that it was my conference room, and it was my Eeyore toy. We were thoroughly enjoying the probability that we were plucking my opponents' nerves, and the fact that Eeyore is a stuffed ass just seemed so appropriate.

On day three of Bradley's deposition, three attorneys; Eric and James, and our in-house General Counsel, Julie, represented my company.

Several hours into the day's deposition, Julie came into my office suddenly and said in a rather urgent and serious tone, "Jim said to call the police." Rather surprised, shocked actually, I responded, "Why, what the hell is going on?" I thought perhaps someone had completely lost it, pulled out a weapon and was about to go postal. As Julie called the police, I broadcast on the company intercom to evacuate the building.

When Julie came back in my office, I reiterated, "What the hell is going on in there Julie?" With a totally straight face and serious demeanor, Julie said, "Jeff Sams has kidnapped Eeyore!"

I began laughing and walked to the conference where I saw Jeff Sams sitting on a chair in a corner, clutching the stuffed Eeyore toy and rocking back and forth.

The transcript as taken by the stenographer during the kidnap of Eeyore is hysterical. The court reporter took down every word of the exchange that took place between our attorneys, Jim and Eric, and Jeff Sams, the attorney who attempted to take possession of Eeyore. Mr. Sams insisted on having Eeyore marked as an exhibit.

Evidently, we plucked Mr. Sams' nerves. Touché! It is by far the most hilarious deposition transcript I have ever read. Mr. Sams would take Eeyore and my attorney's would take it back. This went on for page after page in the transcript. After Mr. Sams placed the stuffed donkey toy on the conference table in front of the court reporter, insisting that she take possession and mark Eeyore as an exhibit, Jim would pick it up and the argument would continue.

Mr. Sams would re-acquire the stuffed donkey toy only to have Jim take it back. Jim even said to Mr. Sams, "If you really want one of these, I'll buy one for you."

The attorney's argued as to whether or not they should all go see the judge and let him decide who should take possession of Eeyore. It is amusing to visualize a room full of attorneys, dressed in suits, having this interaction.

One attorney takes the stuffed donkey toy only to have the other take it back. It seems similar to children in kindergarten fighting over a toy, perhaps something like a stuffed donkey, but with legalese language. "It's my toy - no, it's my toy - no, my toy."

I had thrown out a distraction - a piece of bait, and my adversary swallowed the bait, the line, the hook, the sinker, the rod & reel - the entire boat. I was thoroughly amused.

My attorneys made numerous references to the Eeyore incident in subsequent pleadings that they filed with the court. The reference served well to embarrass Eeyore's kidnaper.

This Eeyore incident was a real embarrassment for Sams, and since it is a matter of a certified record, it is pretty much stapled to his resume. I savored the sweet justice for his attempt to vilify me for my twenty-plus year old conviction during my deposition.

Mr. Sams and his client had left the deposition. It was interesting explaining the incident to the police when they arrived. They indicated that they were not sure if they had jurisdiction since kidnapping is a federal offense that is handled by the FBI. We tried to determine if *toy donkey napping* fell under the same category. They suggested that we might want to file a complaint with animal protective services.

It would have been even more amusing if all of the attorneys had gone to see the judge and had him dissect and essentially perform an autopsy on poor innocent Eeyore. There was nothing in Eeyore other than the device that made him speak, which was installed by the toy manufacturer. I can just imagine the scene in the judges' chambers - Eeyore pieces all over the conference table and the judge just scratching his head.

Jeff got his way. Eeyore was marked as an exhibit and spent several days in the trunk of the court reporters' car. The afternoon that he was kidnapped, I had my marketing department make campaign buttons depicting Eeyore's picture with jail bars superimposed, and the caption "*Free Eeyore!*"

Later during the litigation, we were in a mediation session with a magistrate in an attempt to arrive at a settlement. Our attorneys had referenced the Eeyore incident in several subsequent motions to the court, which served well to cause further embarrassment and irritation of my adversaries.

When the parties were segregated during the mediation session and we were discussing the case with the magistrate, the Eeyore incident had come up. I of course made sure to give the magistrate a *Free Eeyore* button. I suspect that the roaring laughter coming from our conference room engendered little

confidence with our adversary that they would be leaving the mediation with anything more than the same dead fish they came in with.

Eventually, my adversary Bradley invited me to sit down and have a discussion between just the two of us. He started the discussion with saying, "Dave, I vividly remember you telling me that I would loathe the day. Dave, I loathe the day." It would have been vainglorious grandstanding to even comment, so I just listened, but the temptation was certainly there to say, "I told you so."

Brad went on to say that it was apparent to him that I was driving the litigation personally in a substantially more aggressive manner than he had previously experienced. I knew that he had already spent probably three times the cost to install the electrical service and equipment on legal fees. He just didn't want to fight anymore.

Over the next week or so, a settlement was reached. We recovered our costs and Bradley paid for the installation of the electrical service and equipment.

My opponent's attempt to use my twenty-plus-year-old conviction to vilify me was disingenuous and simply bad taste. It amounted to an attempted lynching. It ended up being a very, very costly strategy for them.

So, will there be times that your conviction will be used against you? As I said, the short answer is *Yes*. If you pursue an honest agenda, it will be the only blemish that people can attempt to use to besmear you.

If you're in the forest of opportunity pursuing your dreams, the Dragons will attack you. If you are out in the public and moving your ball forward, you're a target. If you aren't getting attacked, then you're not in the forest and you're not pushing your ball forward. For what it's worth, the many people who ever tried to vilify me with my felony convictions all lost in a big way.

As you make positive progress and achieve greater goals, your conviction will be used against you, but only by people who are dishonest and pursuing an agenda that has no foundation in truth. If you have conducted your life honestly and legitimately, they simply have nothing else to use. Additionally, these are those people who are unable to exalt themselves on the basis of their own credentials and achievements, so they attempt to glorify themselves by degrading their opponent. Generally speaking, my experience is that these are people who are fundamentally unaccountable and have more lead in their seat than steel in their backbone. They're just lazy and trying to make a quick buck by stealing from someone else's success.

I have a policy of never launching a first strike. I only respond to the attacks of others, which is essentially a form of self-defense. This would include situations where people or corporations breach their contractual agreements.

When I enter a contract or an agreement, written or otherwise, I fully expect to be held accountable to my obligations, and conversely, I fully expect the other party to meet their obligations. If I do not meet my obligations, they will likely pursue remedies to enforce the agreement, and I do as well.

A breach of an agreement and a refusal to cure the default is, in my opinion, a first strike. Since I have always been cognizant of my obligations, when I have had to pursue remedies to compel a company or individual to fulfill their contractual obligations, the best defense they have ever been able to assemble is a collage of fabrications, lies, perjurious testimony and frivolous claims and counterclaims that have no basis in law or fact. And of course, the hopeless attempt to rattle my cage or prejudice the court by raising the red herring issue of my felony convictions of a quarter century ago.

I continue to enjoy the amusement of knowing that many of these situations that were created by some of my adversaries shall follow them to the grave. Their lies live forever and have created some serious skeletons - particularly for those individuals who have created their own record of perjury and hope to pursue a livelihood as a member of the Bar Association or other position of trust.

None of my adversaries ever got a cent from these battles. I rather aggressively defended myself, and I not only slain those Dragons, I sliced'em and diced'em.

As with any Dragon encounter, none of those battles were without some injury to me. None were easy. I got burnt, singed, broken, bruised, cut and scratched. So what! The point here is - the truth always prevailed. The truth always surfaces, but not without some effort on your part.

I firmly believe in avoiding battle, but one should never fear battle. I remember when I was a kid and the school bully decided he was going to give me an ass kicking. I said to him, "You're welcome to start a fight and you will probably win. In fact, you'll probably wipe up the floor with me. But, I will absolutely guarantee that before it's over, you will have at least one broken bone. If that's worth it to you, then let's go." He never bothered me again.

I wish adults would understand that engaging in battle through our civil litigation system will result in a best case scenario whereby they suffer substantially. Litigation is by far the worst mechanism for resolving disputes, second only to nuclear war.

For many people who have a less than pristine history, it is more the fear of disclosure of their conviction than anything else. Ex-offenders cringe at the very thought of having to tell someone their story. For goodness sakes, what are they going to do - say "*Boo!*" and take away your birthday? When it is

brought up in a deposition, I wear it like a badge of honor, because it is then clear that my opponent has absolutely nothing, and they can find nothing to legitimately disparage me.

When people attack you for what has occurred in your past, it is simply an indication that they are groping for straws - provided however, that you have demonstrated your credibility through post-conviction achievements. You are who you are. Your past is what it is. Demonstrate that you are transforming yourself through the deliberate and conscious process of setting and achieving goals, slaying Dragons and conquering challenges and you'll be fine.

You've read it before, and I will continue to repeat it. It is not what you did in the past that is important - it is what you have done since, and what you will do moving into the future that counts. The past is dust in the wind. You can't change the past, but you very definitely can control the future.

If you have made the decision, then a part of that decision is that you will conduct your life, your business and your personal affairs with deliberate and conscious honesty and integrity. No hidden agendas. If you hope to achieve significant milestones and have stability in your life there is only one fundamental formula. You can't dance on the edge, sit on the fence, run hot and cold, be partially legitimate and partially not. It won't work.

You are a package and how you wrap that package will send strong signals and make indelible impressions. No, I'm not referring to how you groom and dress. Dress for Success is covered in other books, and it is an important practice. For this discussion, I am referring to how you wrap the package that is you - who you are, what you are, and what you project to other people - your very essence.

If you have genuinely made the decision then you are no longer the same person who did whatever it was you did that led to a conviction. Even if you are starting today, you have a future, and you are, or you will be adjusting your choices and behaviors to facilitate achievement.

If you have made the decision, then you are in fact a different person. Because you are a different person, when compared to who you are today, your past behaviors were behavioral aberrations. Those behaviors do not fit the character of the new person you are, who will strive to achieve success through legitimate methods.

A *behavioral aberration* is analogous to walking down the street and seeing a cat sitting on the sidewalk. You walk up to the cat and say, "Hello kitty." In response, the cat looks up at you and barks like a Bulldog, but then hesitates for a second, puts its paw over its mouth and says, "oops, I mean, Meeooooowwww." If a cat barks, it is totally out of character for a cat - it is a

behavioral aberration. It was not within its normal behavior to bark like a bulldog.

When I think back about my behavioral aberration, it is so totally foreign to the person I am today, I cannot believe that I did that. It almost seems like it could not possibly have been me. It must have been a story I read in a book or a movie I saw, but it could not have possibly been the same me. It wasn't the same me. I deliberately changed that person. You can too.

Before you made the decision, you had certain behaviors. But, because you have made the decision, you are focused on your future and you are in a life-long process of modifying your behaviors in a very deliberate and productive direction - behaviors and habits that will produce predictable and positive results. When those behaviors of yesteryear are compared to the person you are today, those past behavioral aberrations become totally out of character.

This is the new you. You are a new person with a new outlook and a new and fresh future. Begin now seeing yourself as the person you are and the person you are to become - not the person you were in the past. It really does just boil down to making a simple decision.

Now, how do we wrap the package that includes the past so it makes a positive presentation to those people who you will meet in your future, some of whom have a right to know about your past? This might include employers, business associates and various other people who might be in a position to help you achieve a prosperous future.

Whenever I have seen the question on any application, "Have you ever been convicted of a felony," it provides two possible selections. A check box for "Yes," and a check box for "No." I always draw my own check box and write: "Behavioral Aberration" -or- "Youthful Indiscretion," then I check that box.

If you try this, or something similar, it definitely raises an eyebrow and arouses some curiosity. It sets a stage where you have the ability to present your package in a positive light as opposed to trying to justify your background in what feels like a grueling and negative interrogation. This may at least open the door for an interview, and if it does, chances are the atmosphere will be one in which you will have that opportunity to present your package positively.

If it doesn't open the door, then the interviewer may just be predisposed to taking a negative posture. You may not even want this interview since it may only serve to provide a forum for someone to exalt themselves and their own ego by passing judgment on you and thereby depleting your enthusiasm and energy. So, if you don't get the interview, consider it a gain.

Now, before you speak to anyone about a job, internalize this concept. Be an open book. Have your cards face up, and no hidden agendas. People hate hidden agendas. If you dance around a question or give vague answers that do not seem sensible, it arouses skepticism. Once you arouse suspicion, you have nailed the door shut and this opportunity has passed. Conversely, when you open up, lay out your cards face up, tell your story - the real honest to God truth, people get a warm fuzzy feeling and have a propensity to want to help.

Have you ever helped someone without any expectation for anything in return? Assuming that you have, how do you feel about yourself when you do that?

People innately want to help other people, in part because helping someone else makes us feel good about our self. If you can appeal to this intrinsic need that most people have - to help other people because it satisfies their need for a feeling of gratification, then you both win. You get the job, and even more importantly, they get you. It's their lucky day!

Are you not in fact a person capable of bringing tremendous value to an employer? Of course you are. We're just working on wrapping the package so all of your good attributes shine.

It is interesting that we human beings are engineered with this innate craving for the feeling we only get when we have helped someone with no expectation for anything in return. The need for that feeling continues to grow the more we exercise the mechanism that generates the feeling that comes from helping others. It is among life's natural opiates.

You can capitalize upon this phenomenon of human nature to your advantage. People want to help the underdog. The only thing that will prevent them from helping you is if you create any suspicion, skepticism or a feeling that they cannot believe what you are telling them.

I have found that people are attracted to openness and honesty, and when those elements are present during conversation, most people genuinely want to help. When people help you, the goodwill feeling they get is so powerful, they will go even further to prolong their feeling by telling their co-workers and spouse how they helped an underdog get their life straightened out. If you do a good job and receive a promotion, the person who helped you get that job will get another injection of this opiate by taking bragging rights - "Yep, of course he got promoted. After all, I hired him!"

Now, how do we create this, no hidden agenda - open book persona? I actually stumbled on it by accident. Let me share my personal experiences.

After I was released on August 7 1980, I spent a solid month canvassing office and industrial parks looking for work - any work.

I was driving along a back access road through Cleveland Hopkins Airport and noticed a row of small airplanes. It was a flight school. I had a curiosity for airplanes, and because there was this fantasy that I might go to school for aviation based upon an interview I had with a counselor, which I all but completely dismissed as even a realistic possibility, I stopped, parked my car and started walking around looking at the little Cessna 152's. Admittedly, I also stopped because I was feeling a little beaten up that particular day with the extreme heat and several bombed interviews.

I paid little attention to a maintenance man who was mowing the grass. I figured he would eventually come over and kick me off the premises, but until he did, I just kept looking at all of the airplanes.

Sure enough, I noticed the maintenance guy was mowing a path straight in my direction, and when he was within five feet of me, the engine stopped. He hopped off the lawn tractor and walked up to me, looking like he just crawled out of a 110-degree grease pit full of grass - the sweat pouring off of him.

Unexpectedly, he greeted me with a broad smile and an enthusiastic, "Hi, how are you! Are you a pilot?" I just laughed and said, "I wish!" "Well, this place is a flight school," he said. "If you want to learn, they can teach you."

He reached out his hand and introduced himself, "I'm John Kovach." I shook hands and said, "Hi John, I'm Dave Koch." His voice was pleasant, he was easy going, and for some reason, he just seemed like he was genuinely interested in me.

"Are you interested in learning how to fly?" John asked. I said, "Well, I have a few limitations." "Like what," he asked. "Well, money for one - it's pretty thin right now," I responded. He rubbed his chin for a few seconds in thought and said, "There are all kinds of student loans and grants, and other programs that can help pay for training, so that can be taken care of."

There must have been something in my demeanor, a look on my face, something that he noticed - that my limitations weren't just about the money. He asked, "What else is holding you back?" I just responded with a shrug of my shoulders and said, "I just don't think my future includes getting a pilot's license."

This man of probably sixty-plus years must have felt something in his gut. He put his hand on my shoulder and in a warm personal tone that felt like it was coming from God, he said, "Tell me your story son - maybe I can help."

We walked over to a couple of chairs that were placed in front of one of the hangers. John went inside and came out with a couple bottles of soda. As he handed me a soda, he said in a really gentle tone, "Tell me your story son." He sat and just looked at me - totally silent - smiling and not at all intimidating. As I sat there, sipping the cold soda, I looked in his eyes. His expression was one that made me feel like no matter what I said, he wouldn't pass judgment.

What the hell, I thought. I'll probably never see this guy again for the rest of my life. There's no loss in telling him and besides, he just bought me a soda that I couldn't afford to buy myself.

I looked at him and said, "I don't think they give pilot licenses to guys who just got out of the can." His eyes smiled almost as though he knew what I needed to tell him. "Prison or just county jail," he asked. "Oh, it was the real McCoy," I replied, "Both federal and state."

John rubbed his chin for probably a minute as he thought. Then he said, "I don't think that would pose any limitations. I'm pretty familiar with the Federal Aviation Regulations and I cannot think of any that would prevent you from pursuing an aviation career." Then he asked, "What did you do?"

Since I wasn't interviewing for a job, I didn't dance around the question. I just gave him the full report. No face down cards - no hidden agendas - I just laid it out and spilled my guts. He listened intently. I saw real and deep concern in his eyes as he listened and rubbed his chin the entire time.

After I finished, John asked, "So, what are you doing now?" I explained that I had been looking for work - a job - any job. "Any luck?" he asked. I just shook my head, no. "So, you're available to work," he asked. "Definitely," I replied.

John looked at me and smiled and asked, "Do you think you could cut the grass?" I shook my head and said, "Sure!" Inside, my first thoughts were, geezzz, a job cutting grass? Is this my destiny?

As for getting a pilots license, I thought that was a pretty far-fetched assertion. But, a job and income sounded good, even if it wasn't the greatest job in the world.

John went on asking, "How about keeping the hangers clean, scrubbing the hanger floors, washing the airplanes, fueling airplanes and keeping the offices clean?" The whole time John was posing these questions, I just kept shaking my head and replying, "Yes, sure, yes, sure."

John took the last swig from his soda and said, "Good, when can you start?" I was silent for a few seconds and just stared at him. Then I said, "Well, I

appreciate that sir, but I wouldn't want to take your job from you." He just smiled and said, "Oh, that's okay, I have plenty of other things to keep me busy." A little puzzled, I gestured and asked, "Like what?" He calmly replied, "Oh, I'm the president of this company, I own this flight school, and I'm a FAA Examiner." If you're serious about wanting to get your pilot's license, I can help you with that too."

As he was walking away, he looked back at me, smiled and winked and said, "I know this might not be your dream job, but look at the bright side of it - you're starting out with presidential duties. I'll see you next Monday at 8:00 AM sharp."

It turns out that John was also a retired Cleveland Police Officer having served a couple of decades on the force. The flight school was his second passion and career. Perhaps this accounted for his perception that my issue was more than just money.

Looking at this guy, you wouldn't think he had two nickels to rub together. To abbreviate the story, he hired me, and he and his wife helped me with securing some student loans and grants, along with another individual I will discuss later.

I cut the grass, I washed the airplanes, I cleaned the hangers, I pumped fuel, and I learned to fly. This was the beginning of a rewarding career as a captain flying some of the finest corporate jets on the planet.

Think about why the president of that flight school was cutting the grass, cleaning the hangers, washing airplanes and fueling airplanes. It is because those were jobs that needed to be done, but they were jobs that no one else wanted. *Be willing to take that job that no one else wants.* It can lead to great things...

Although this first job may not have been my ideal career choice, I took pride in my work. I never missed a day of work, I was never late, I was responsible and I was accountable.

When I washed an airplane, it looked like it just rolled off the factory floor. I even took the time to clean the instrument faces with Q-Tips. The flight instructors and the customers frequently commented on what a great job I was doing and how good the fleet of training aircraft looked. I took the same time and pride when I cleaned the hangers.

My meticulous work habits paid off. The day I took my FAA flight check ride and received my flight instructor's certificate, the Boss congratulated me and said, "Wear a shirt and tie to work tomorrow. Tomorrow, you're a flight instructor."

I took pride in my work, no matter what the work was, and it eventually led to earning my Airline Transport Pilot Certificate, the highest FAA pilot certificate attainable, and Type Ratings in the Learjet, Cessna Citation Fanjet and Israeli Westwind. It started with washing airplanes, scrubbing floors and cutting grass.

I also made a whole new set of friends while I was working at the flight school. Among my best friends, Don Weyls was a 17 year-old who was working for a competing flight school a few hundred yards away.

Seventeen is probably about the average age of people working at flight schools in the line service jobs as they learn to fly. I was twenty-five at the time I met Don.

One of my co-workers told me that Don had inquired, “Who is that *old guy* pumping gas.” Don is now bumping 50, and I’m pretty sure I raise the “*old guy*” thing during every conversation we have, and I am quite sure that I will continue to reference the twenty-five year-old - old guy thing forever.

Don and I did a lot of flying together. When we were both working toward our various certificates and ratings, and we frequently took practice flights together. For several years, we made a point to fly to Port Clinton on our birthdays for dinner. We flew professionally in subsequent jobs and Don had a great career as a pilot.

Today, Don is also an attorney and has his master’s degree in education. Don is definitely a well-credentialed old guy. This was a friend I met only months after being released from prison and that friendship has endured for over a quarter of a century.

As a side note, your first job is probably going to be one of those jobs that no one else wants. If you want to get started on a new direction, be willing to accept the job that no one else wants.

Taking that first crummy job is a little tough on the pride. Call it double jeopardy, collateral damage, or call it whatever you want. I called it reality. You don’t have a great deal of control over that. You do however have total control over whether or not you earn pay raises and promotions. That is controlled by how you perform in that first job. Provided that you perform to the best of your ability, even if you do not receive the promotions and pay raises you have earned, you have acquired the experience and good references that you can take to a new employer.

Once you take that job that no one else wants, you’ve started the building process of a new and good resume. You have created *a new most recent significant event*. Either way, that first job that no one else wants will become vacant based upon your decision to perform - you will either get

promoted out of that job, you will leave it for a different employer, or you will fail to perform and get fired. You control all of the outcomes, but I guarantee that that first job you take will eventually become a vacancy.

Do your best job, maintain a good and positive attitude, and your job will become vacant because you will be promoted. Do a poor job and your position will also become vacant, but the promotion will not likely be a part of the reason.

Within a few days of starting that first job, the Boss referred me to FAA Inspector Ronald Drake to determine whether or not any limitations would exist with respect to getting my pilot's license, and if there were any restrictions, whether a waiver would be attainable.

I met with Ron and told him my story. Ron was a guy who was genuinely interested in other people and helping them in any way that he could. He was a government employee who epitomized the responsibility to be a good public servant, and he internalized the need to serve his fellow man. From a personality standpoint, Ron and I just clicked - I thoroughly enjoyed his intellect, his wit and dry sense of humor.

Ron began his inquiries through the channels at the FAA, and during the next couple of months, through our dialog we also forged a friendship that lasted my entire aviation career.

Through Ron's inquiries, he determined that there would be no limitations imposed by the FAA because of my felony convictions. Ron provided me with a letter delineating the FAA's official position which later served to assist in securing student financial aid for my aviation education and training.

My interactions with Ron over the years were frequent and considerably enjoyable. From Ron's perspective, I suspect that he derived a certain gratification as he followed my career - knowing that he was instrumental in its genesis. He felt good about helping someone who was clearly an underdog, and who had the tenacity and drive to help himself.

My last conversation with Ron was in the early 1990's over lunch at a Mexican restaurant. Ron was preparing for a bicycle trip of several hundred miles. Looking about twenty pounds over weight, I said, "Don't you think you should train a little and get into shape before tackling this rather ambitious journey." He smiled and said, "That would be a great excuse not to take the trip and deal with the pain I know I'm going to endure. But, in reality, that's what the trip is for - to get in shape." I admired his ambition.

Ron had an accident on that trip and the world lost one of its great servants to fellow man, and I lost a cherished friend and a hero whom I was honored to know and whom I shall never forget.

What were the keys that made my new career in aviation possible?

Did all of this just happen by luck? Was it because the opportunity found me, or was it because I found the opportunity? I was simply out there and available, so when an opportunity came along, I was poised and positioned to see it. When the opportunity became available, I was available to seize it. Just get out there. But, this is only part of the significance of my story.

Besides just being out there and making yourself available to opportunity, another key here is this. I didn't feel nervous talking to John Kovach [the maintenance guy] who was mowing the lawn at the flight school because I perceived him to be just a maintenance man - not the president and owner of the business.

When John asked, "What is your story son," I just laid it out and told him. I spilled my guts out. I didn't sugar coat it, I didn't hide any of it, I didn't dance around it, and I didn't try to justify it or blame anyone else for it. I just laid it out. I was totally and brutally honest.

John apparently sensed my candor, and when he did, he opened up his arms and offered to help. It made him feel good because, together we were going to go out and slay some Dragons - conquer these challenges. And we did.

People want to be a savior. People innately want to rescue other people from distress. You can use your conviction and your status as an underdog as a tool.

From that moment forward, I have just simply been completely open and forthright about my past. If asked about my conviction, I disclose it - fully and without anything hidden. Even if I am not asked about it, if the circumstances dictate that the other party may have the right to know, I disclose it before fully consummating whatever agreements are on the table.

During my tenure as President & CEO of Fiber Network Solutions, my bank was considering closing on a seven-figure credit and lease line. My conviction wasn't the first thing that we discussed. However, I felt a lender of this magnitude had a right to know. I certainly would rather my bankers hear it from me before the line is granted than hear about it afterward from some other source.

The line was approved. In fact, my felony convictions have never prevented me from achieving anything I wanted. Just lose the *chuck-n-jive* and be open and honest.

During my career as an employer and CEO of a growing company that hired hundreds of people, I could quickly spot someone who was trying to pull the wool over my eyes, or who was otherwise hiding something - either during the

initial interview, or during performance evaluations of current employees. Hidden agendas are a real turn-off. It is very difficult to justify making an investment in someone who is creating a feeling of skepticism and suspicion.

Conversely, I interviewed and gave performance evaluations to people who spilled their guts and laid their cards out all face up. Guess who got the jobs, pay raises and promotions.

Think about how you have reacted at times when you felt someone was handing you a bunch of rhetoric that just didn't add up. You generally get a feeling of skepticism and distrust.

My advice for the interview includes the following components - all of which must exist homogeneously and with a deep level of personal conviction, commitment and sincerity. This isn't a script but rather, it is a philosophical change in you, that if embraced, your script will come from your heart.

A. Be an open book. I realize that our past is not something that we are particularly proud of. It's an embarrassment. But, everyone has periods in their past that they are not especially eager to discuss, and they understand and respect when someone demonstrates the humility to discuss such an embarrassment openly and honestly. This is especially true if the people you are talking to have children who are in their adolescent years.

If I was feeling relatively comfortable in the interview, I sometimes pushed the envelope a little. You will have to trust your gut as to the appropriateness of making this reference, but I have at times made statements during an interview to the effect; "If you have children, perhaps you can appreciate the fact that sometimes young people don't always make the best choices." If the person I was talking with had the same propensity for honesty as I was demonstrating, at the very least, this comment generally elicited a rolling of the eyes and slight smile indicating their acknowledgement.

Just lay it out, spill your guts, no hidden agendas and present yourself with all of the cards face up. Give that person the opportunity to fulfill their innate desire to be a savior. It will make them feel so good that they will go out of their way to further satisfy their craving to compound the opiate fix. They will go home and tell their spouse how they are helping someone who made a little mistake, they will tell their friends and co-workers. They will justify your mistake for you.

B. I have emphasized that you need to open up and spill your guts out. This does not mean that you spend an hour discussing your background. On the contrary, you spend a maximum of thirty seconds. This is called my 30-second rule.

Spilling your guts out and being an open book is not measured by the volume of your rhetoric. It is measured by the depth of your sincerity. After providing a very brief but forthright and humble admission to the poor choices you made in your life, you immediately slide into the following topics.

- i.* List all of the positive accomplishments you have made since the time of your *behavioral aberration*. Right now is a good time to start physically writing down this list.
- ii.* List all of your talents and skills that could apply to the particular position, and your skills that represent any value to any employer. You may find that they have other positions to which your skills could apply.
- iii.* Show the employer your written goals and your written plan to achieve those goals.

Let's elaborate on each of these topics.

List all of the achievements and accomplishments you have made since the date of your conviction.

Did you graduate from high school or earn your GED? Perhaps you became involved in a rigorous exercise agenda that taught you good self-discipline. You may have attended and completed various behavioral modification classes for anger management, substance abuse, goal setting, etc. Did you learn a new trade, or receive a diploma or degree in higher education? You may have become self-educated, taken correspondence courses or simply immersed yourself in reading. List the understandings you have realized from reading.

You may have developed faith in a higher power. It is fine to mention this however, *be careful!* Playing the religion card is sometimes perceived as a bunch of malarkey. And, if you are talking to someone who is also a person of faith, you better be sincere and know the material. If you don't, all this will do is create skepticism. If your faith isn't a genuine and integral part of your essence, then don't try using faith as an empty selling point. It will backfire.

List everything you have done that demonstrates a contrast between the person you were, and the person you are, since having made the decision to pursue a new life path. The actions, habits and behaviors you have had since the time of your behavioral aberration is the only thing that defines the new you and provides evidence of positive behavioral change. Talk is cheap. You need to back up the claim that you have changed with evidence of change.

Every person has value. You know in your heart that you can represent a value to an employer. You may have never taken the time to actually write down what value you bring to the table.

If you have learned specific trade skills, this is an easy list to make. Irrespective of formal education, there are talents and skills that you have that are valuable to an employer. If you know how to work on your own vehicles, but have never been formally educated in auto mechanics, then you have an ability to understand and learn how mechanical systems function.

Your life experiences have certainly taught you how to perform various functions. Are you a patient person, capable and willing to learn new skills? Do you have the self-discipline to perform those tasks that you may not necessarily want or like (*called work*), but must perform in order to reach fulfillments and positive conclusions?

What about your attitude? As an employer, I looked for people who had the attitude; *"I'm willing to cheerfully do anything that will make your job and life easier."* I looked for people who had a positive attitude and were willing to embrace and conquer challenges. Otherwise, all I would be hiring is someone who required a lot of supervision, which just made my job and life harder.

I wanted people who did not need to be told what to do but rather, people who would do their job, and when they were finished, they would go above and beyond and find other things that they could do which would benefit the company.

If you were hiring someone and paying him or her out of your pocket, what kind of person would you want to invest in? Become that person. Not just as lip service in an interview either.

Remember, all a successful interview does is open a door to an opportunity. What happens after you walk through that door is entirely up to you. When you land the job, the work begins. It is now time to perform and prove that you are worthy of promotions and raises, or at the very least, continued employment.

Starting today, walk around for a month or so with a pencil and paper in your pocket at all times. Keep paper and pencils next to your bed. Think about yourself, your talents and skills, and the value you bring to an employer. That employer is considering making an investment in you. You need to give an employer the justification for that investment, and you need to generate a solid level of confidence that it will receive a return on that investment.

As I said before, as an employer, I am only interested in hiring and paying people if they will make my life easier. If I have any inkling that a prospective employee will be a complainer, or that they are otherwise coming with a bunch of negative attitude, I'm not interested because they will just make my life harder - then the interview is over.

Develop a written list. Let me emphasize, *written list*. If you don't write it down, you are not going to remember these great selling attributes when it is most important - during an interview.

From your list, you will develop a presentation. You are going to want to memorize and practice your presentation until it flows easily and naturally, with sincerity and conviction from the gut - much the same as anyone practices a speech or sales presentation.

Your presentation needs to create a certain enthusiasm. If you are excited about your new future, (which you will be when you genuinely make the decision) then that excitement and your positive outlook will be contagious.

You have good reason to be excited - you have begun a journey that leads to life's rich rewards. You're at the foothills, climbing a mountain that has a pot of gold at its peak. The climb will fill you with the feeling of challenge and accomplishment, create confidence and form your character. You're on stage and under the spotlight during your interview. Make it an Academy Award presentation.

Having read thousands of resumes and conducted hundreds of interviews as an employer, there were only a handful of people who had *written* goals. Of course everyone states on their resume, "Goal Oriented," and gives lip service about their goals. However, it becomes pretty obvious that the statement on their resume is only a thin and unsubstantiated veneer. During the interview, they are just making it up as they are talking.

I frequently ask people about their goals during an interview. After an individual had explained their goals, whether it sounded sincere or was just an obvious bunch of rhetoric to create what they perceived would be the desired impression, I would ask to see their written plan to achieve those goals.

I can count on one hand the number of individuals who were able to produce a written goal plan. Those who did were hired on the spot. Why? Because these are people who are forward thinking and have a plan to actually achieve something moving into the future. These people represent that small percentage of individuals who are controlling their destiny.

If an individual has goals, and a genuine written plan to achieve those goals, that plan will translate into them working hard and achieving my company's goals. These people are genuinely goal oriented. To achieve their goals, they will need to maintain gainful employment, and they will need pay raises and promotions, which I am delighted to hand out - if they are earned.

I don't give out endurance raises. If a person manages to come to work every day, drink their share of the coffee and breathe their share of the air, and do

their minimum job requirements, they are already receiving appropriate compensation. If they want more from the company, the raises and promotions, then it is up to them to demonstrate that they are giving more.

People who have written goals and written plans to achieve those goals are creating a greater value to the organization through their own efforts, motivation and attitude.

What is a goal? A goal is a dream with a plan to achieve that dream, and an achievement date.

If money were no object, what do you want? What are your dreams? While you're walking around for a couple of weeks with pencil and paper, start writing down the things that you want.

Perhaps you want to buy a new house - one with a swimming pool and Jacuzzi. You might want a couple of nice cars, nice furniture, a nice wardrobe and an entertainment system in your new home.

You may want respect and admiration from the people whom you admire and respect. You want other people to recognize your position in life and the accomplishments you have made. You want a lifestyle that includes financial security, comfort and convenience.

If you have children, you may want to help them with college expenses. You may want to develop a robust retirement savings account. Perhaps you want to own your own business as I did and enjoy the journey of building, and the rewards that come with conquering challenges. You may want to travel, take vacations and stay in the best hotels, or sail in a top-of-the-line suite aboard one of the best cruise ships.

Maybe you want to help family and friends, or make abundant donations to your church or other charitable organizations. Perhaps you want to go to college and earn a degree, or sail around the world in your new yacht.

Above all, you want freedom. You want the secure feeling that there are no skeletons in your closet and that you're not looking over your shoulder. You want to take comfort in the fact that everything you are achieving cannot be taken away.

These are just a few examples of dreams. Can they be attainable goals? Of course they can.

Houses with swimming pools and Jacuzzis are built and bought every day. The cruise ship and hospitality industries only survive because people set a goal to take vacations. People earn respect and admiration on the basis of their achievements all the time, because they deliberately set and achieve

goals. People attend and graduate from college every quarter. There are thousands of new businesses started every year, and those organizations that have goals and a plan that provides a clear path to profitability achieve great success. People follow savings goals that provide for retirement and college funds for their children each and every day.

I have been where you are, and I have achieved all of the aforementioned goals, so there is nothing preventing you from doing the same. The path is there, and with this book, I'm just showing you that the path is real, and that you can follow it the same as I did.

People, at least the vast majority, take freedom for granted. Most people never even consider the possibility of losing their liberty and accumulated assets, and that is because they are not engaging in any behavior that could jeopardize that freedom. In many respects, the ex-offender has a great advantage. They have eaten the forbidden fruit. They have the knowledge and experience to know the difference.

Can you dream dreams - do you dream dreams? Of course you do. Can you realize your dreams? Yes, of course you can. Achieving your dreams only requires that you take the time to formulate a realistic plan, and through that planning process, you will determine a realistic attainment date for reaching your goal.

The goal setting and planning process is not difficult. It only takes a little focus and time to internalize your dreams, make your plan to achieve your dreams, and determine a reasonable and attainable date that you will achieve your dream.

When you go through these few steps, you have now taken a dream and made it an attainable goal. Then, you simply follow the plan, with the understanding that you will face Dragons, adversities and challenges. *Divide and conquer!*

Be careful that your goals do not conflict with each other. If your career goal is to become a professional pilot and your personal goal is to raise a family and spend a great deal of time with your children, then you have set conflicting goals.

During my corporate flying career, I was out-of-town an average of 25 days a month. I thoroughly enjoyed the traveling for many years. However, I was not raising a family, and those pilots I knew who had family obligations also had frequent family and marital problems. All of your goals need to coincide with one another.

After you have organized your goals and made written plans to achieve those goals, break down your plan to monthly and weekly sub-goals. Now, break it

down further to daily tasks. This is critical. You must know each day the tasks that you need to complete to stay on track and on schedule.

After you have made your written plan and broken it down to daily tasks, you will have a really powerful and compelling presentation for a prospective employer. As I said before, any person that I ever interviewed who actually produced a written plan to achieve their goals was hired on the spot.

To summarize this section:

1. Keep pencil and paper close at hand for a month - actually for the rest of your life, but we'll start with a month.
2. Think about yourself and list all of the positive accomplishments you have made since the time of your behavioral aberration. If you carry paper and pencil for a month, you will be amazed how large a list you will make.
3. List all of your talents and skills that could apply to the particular position you plan to pursue, and your skills that represent any value to any employer. *Emphasize* the skills that apply to the position you are pursuing, but list them all during an interview. An employer may have other positions available.
4. Develop a list of goals - short term, medium term and long term. Develop a plan to achieve each of those goals. Keep a progress report on each of your goals. Show the employer your written goals and your written plan to achieve those goals.
5. Memorize your lists of accomplishments, skills and talents, and your goals and plans.
6. Practice your presentation.

When the question arises about your behavioral aberration, you might handle it something like this. Keep in mind that your explanation needs to be sincere - not just a bunch of hyped up rhetoric that sounds good. Everything you say could bring more probing questions. If your explanation is sincere, the answers to any probing questions will flow naturally. When you are telling the truth, the answer to any question is the truth. It doesn't require much thought or rehearsal.

Yes Mr. Employer, a few years ago I made some poor choices and engaged in some unacceptable behaviors. In retrospect, and in looking at the person I am today, those choices were clearly not in keeping with my standards of acceptable conduct.

Mr. Employer, I stole some money that did not belong to me. I'm not proud of that and I cannot offer any excuses. I did not steal for *need* of others or

myself. I stole money because of greed, and because I somehow thought that I could take a shortcut to financial freedom and security. It was not victimless, and for that I genuinely feel bad. I paid a dear price with my liberty, but the experience was the genesis of a directional change and a healthy understanding that the choices I make today determine where I will be tomorrow.

The changes that have occurred within me have been the result of very conscious and deliberate choices. I can confidently say that I am not the same person today who stole that money. Based upon who I am today and who I intend to become, the stark contrast of my behavior of yesteryear is so foreign, and it so violates my very essence, it can only be described as a *behavioral aberration*.

That took about thirty seconds. *The 30-Second Rule*.

Now, you immediately start to dilute the past with your progress.

Since the time of my indiscretion, I have... (List all of your positive accomplishments.) Some examples might include: Earned my GED and completed several college courses. I intend to continue my education on a part time basis until I earn my degree. I developed a couple of trade skills including horticulture, construction and culinary. I am computer literate and have a good working knowledge of Microsoft Word, Excel, Access and PowerPoint. I've developed excellent organizational disciplines and the ability to identify challenges and work through them to reach positive resolutions. I have let all of my old friendships and association's drift, because I'm just moving in a totally different and positive direction. I'm participating in several programs through several community organizations that are designed to help me become the best that I can be. I have volunteered with United Way and meet with economically disadvantaged teens once a week. I am applying to volunteer with other organizations as well. I find that volunteering helps a good number of people, and it has also resulted in meeting a whole new group of genuinely wonderful people. These are my new friends.

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to take up too much of your time talking about what I have been doing. Let me offer some information about my skills and experience as it relates to this particular position.

Now just list your professional skills as brief bullet points. If the person interviewing you has questions, they will ask you to elaborate on those skills that they feel are most applicable to the position you are seeking.

Briefly list every skill that you have that supports your ability to perform in the job, to interact well with co-workers, and that demonstrate responsibility.

After you have gone through the list, now elaborate in more detail on those skills that are most applicable to the specific job for which you are applying.

Mr. Employer, the last things I would like to share with you are my goals. (Briefly list your goals.) Here in my planner, I have developed my goals and I have my written plans to achieve each of these goals. I would be happy to share them with you in detail. I'm not sure how many people working here have written goals, but I believe that there is an enormous advantage to you and this company when you hire someone who has genuine goals and a decisive plan to achieve those goals. I can only achieve my goals if I demonstrate a high level of performance in my job. To achieve my goals, I will need to earn promotions and pay raises. And yes, Mr. Employer, I clearly understand that promotions and pay raises are earned on the basis of my performance. My goals and the company's goals will become interdependent, which will result in forward progress for both the company and me.

During your positive orations, the employer may bring you back to your conviction issue with additional questions. Questions regarding your conviction are a really good sign. The interviewer wants to understand, so embrace it. Answer their questions directly and completely, observing the *30-Second Rule*, then right back into more positive facts that dilute it.

It is also important that you know a little about the company that you are interviewing with. Take the time to do a little homework. Almost all libraries have Internet access and you can probably read about the company on-line. If the company does not have a website, take the time to visit them and get a brochure. If they are a publicly traded company, read their annual report. During the interview, you are going to want to demonstrate that you have enough interest in their company to have done a little research.

Incidentally, as an employer, I cannot imagine hiring someone who does not have and *use* a planner - essentially a calendar. Planners are inexpensive. You cannot achieve a goal without a plan, and you cannot create and follow a plan without a planner. It is a fundamental tool for success. Aside from that, if people don't write things down, they forget. This really is a critically important point that I need to emphasize. *You cannot achieve a goal without a plan.*

If you forget to attend meetings, forget an assignment, or that you are supposed to call someone, you may not get a second chance. Develop the habit of writing things down and using a planner/calendar. Then people will start to think that you have a steel trap for a memory. You'll never forget anything, and you will demonstrate a high level of responsibility.

If you have genuinely made the decision for a life of legitimacy, then the preceding interview presentation will come from the heart. Your enthusiasm will be contagious, and the person interviewing you will become excited about you and your future as well. You will have appealed to their innate hunger to help another person.

Notice that the explanation of the behavioral aberration is brief but thorough. It is a complete admission that defuses any need to turn the interview into an interrogation. You've opened up and admitted your wayward past. You then diluted the significance of your conviction with positive information about your skills, and what you have done since the time of your conviction that demonstrates and provides compelling evidence of behavioral change. Perhaps most importantly, you have *definitiveness of purpose* as you embrace the future, which is clearly demonstrated by your goals and written plans for their attainment. You have taken what could be a negative element of the interview (your conviction) and turned it into a very positive asset.

You need to remember one side note. Do not bring up money. On the application where it questions your income requirements, write the word "Open." Do not write the word "Negotiable." Frankly, when I landed that first job, I was not in a position to negotiate - I just needed a break.

Do not ask about money or benefits in an interview - *ever!* If you have utilized the twenty or thirty minutes allotted for the interview to truly highlight your positive characteristics, trust me, they will raise the money issue. They already know that you're not there to volunteer and that the paycheck thing will be a necessary component of your coming to work. There is more detail on this throughout this book.

For now, try to remember the simple concept so eloquently stated by President John F. Kennedy. Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.

If you were hiring someone and paying them out of your pocket, wouldn't you want a person whom you believe is going to make your life easier - a person who demonstrates that their priority is facilitating your agenda as opposed to using you to facilitate theirs?

As an employer, I always became very attentive and receptive during an interview when the person asked questions that pertained to how they could help make my life easier. I became very engaged with those people that emphasized how they could participate in resolving the challenges that my company had and assist with moving my company forward.

I have always noticed that 99% of resumes include a self-serving objective. The objectives generally state how they want to secure a position that will

further their career, give them experience and give them education. Why in the world would that interest me? Such an objective suggests to me that the individual will take what I invest in them and then sell it to my competitor? Employers find self-serving objectives distasteful.

Write an objective that appeals to the needs of an employer as opposed to an objective that tells the employer what you hope to get out of a position with their company.

Tailor your objective to yourself, but try to include such phrases as:

- Produce quantifiable results.
- Maintain accountability to my assigned responsibilities.
- Pioneer fresh, definitive and innovative agendas that homogenize toward a positive and substantial impact on an organization's ultimate objectives.
- Embrace difficult challenges and implement solutions that engender conclusive resolutions.

If you are seeking the privilege of employment and want someone to invest in you, appeal to the employers needs - not to your own.

Ask not what your company can do for you - ask what you can do for your company.

As a final note, if you follow my guidance regarding interviewing, you will probably get the job - or a job. If you're just faking it and using the rhetoric, you might get the job, but you won't keep it, and then when you return to prison, you'll likely be blaming me. Either make the decision, or don't, but don't do it half way.

*John R. Kovach, Sr. - the man who was cutting the grass, shared
a soda with me, listened and cared, and gave me my first
break shall forever remain among my greatest hero's.*



Chapter 16

WHO ARE YOUR FRIENDS YOUR PEER GROUP - YOUR SPHERE OF INFLUENCE - YOUR SUPPORT STRUCTURE?

Many people have a tendency to serve their own needs. Everyone has their own agendas and their own Dragons to slay. Consequently, we humans are sometimes selfish and self-serving creatures.

This does not diminish the innate need many people have to help others as I discussed before. When people are presented with the opportunity to help someone, and they believe the person they are helping is working to help them self, many of these people will generally provide that help. But, as I have alluded to before, the question remains, what is the core reason that underlies their charity? Is it completely out of altruism or benevolence, or is it because of the goodwill feeling that *they* receive?

As that pertains to you, and as it pertained to me when I needed that help, who really cares? I received the help I needed and the person helping me received their benefit. It was a win-win scenario. Nevertheless, you do need to understand that no one is going to chase after you and beat a path to your door to offer his or her help. You need to seek out your own destiny and there will be people along the way who will give you assistance.

As an employer, I realize and understand the relationship between a company and its employees. There is only one fundamental reason why people came to work for my company. Sure, I provided a really neat environment. The company presented a high-tech, laid back corporate culture, fun people to work with, free snacks, our corporate puppy to play with, etc. But, the singular and fundamental reason that facilitated a congregation of people every morning around nine o'clock is money. Almost any other benefit could be removed and people would continue to show up every morning. However, if money is not a part of the equation, I guarantee that no one would come to work.

I frequently ask people during an interview why they want to work at my company and just listen to them regurgitate some rhetoric on the fly that doesn't amount to much more than a pile of manure.

Occasionally someone interviewing for a sales position would state straight out that their reason for wanting to work at my company was *money*! They were generally hired on the spot. The response that always caused me to really pull up my pasture-trolling boots is, *"Because I love People."* Uggg. Please don't ever use that line in an interview.

I don't know about you, but I go to work every day to make money. If you want an environment to exercise your love for people, join a church. If you want a job and you want to work, do it for the money.

The relationship between an employee and employer at its bare essence level is self-serving for both parties. When people came knocking for employment, I fully understood and accepted the fact that they were only there for their interests, to determine if this company could serve their needs, and if working at my company could satisfy their agendas. Guess what? I was only interested in hiring them if it would serve my needs and the needs of my company.

A corporation is an entity in and of itself, defined by law and in a very practical sense, as a "person," which has needs and agendas. A corporation is much like an infant. It is incapable of fulfilling any of its own needs. Infants and corporations need caregivers and fiduciaries - people whose responsibility it is to ensure the company's health and welfare.

As President & CEO, my primary job was to facilitate the needs, health and welfare, and overall stability of the company. Companies are narcissistic, selfish, self-serving, self-focused, self-centered, self-seeking and egocentric entities. Corporations and people alike are interested in what benefits accrue to them from a relationship.

Once you understand and internalize this fundamental fact - that people and corporations are interested in what they get out of a relationship, then you are able to form relationships that facilitate your agendas by appealing to the needs of the other.

I would like to believe that the genesis of various programs within my company was my humanitarian doctrine. Beginning in our first year, the company celebrated the Christmas holidays by giving its employees a paid holiday break from December 24th through the first weekday after January 1st. That generally equated to roughly ten days off, with pay, in addition to their normal paid vacation accrual.

Employees received a days pay for taking off on their birthday. National holidays and even company-invented holidays (Festivous) were paid in addition to an annual allowance of personal and sick days. In all, the company provided roughly 30 days a year off with full pay.

As the caretaker of the company who was obligated to serve the needs of the company, what justification did I have for implementing such programs? How did these programs serve the needs of the company? Did I implement these programs because I just love people, or was there a business case that supported the company's needs?

Indeed, my responsibility was to the company. The business case for our holiday break was simple. Business in American, excluding retail and few other industries, functionally shuts down between Christmas and New Year's. There is nothing significant happening from a practical business standpoint and payroll would be issued whether people worked that period or not. The payroll question was a wash.

Would the company's interests be best served by having people come in every day during the holidays and effectively take a vacation in a suit, endure hours of boredom and frustration, their minds at home, longing for time off? Or, would the company's interests be better served by letting people spend time with their families and get the rest they need? Many of our employees enjoyed the boasting rights about the great benefits they receive from their great employer among their friends who were still working during that season.

The benefits I implemented had a dramatic and positive affect on morale. People returned to work after the first of the year refreshed and energized - their sword and lance sharpened and ready to engage the Dragon in battle.

One of our early advisors suggested that employees could perform routine maintenance during holiday break. However, this was the same advisor who shared his signature methods when starting on a new construction project, and the way he managed his new employees. The day his company started a new project and the union had sent a group to the worksite to staff the project, he walks out and fires one.

I'm not suggesting that one of us is right and the other wrong. I suppose we just have different management styles. It is interesting however, that the revenues of my company exceeded the revenues of his company in only a few years, and his company was roughly 60 years old. He inherited it from Daddy, so he never did fully understand what it takes to actually build a corporation from scratch. If my recollection serves me well, I stopped listening to his advice right around the time he suggested that I just walk out and fire someone without cause, just to make a statement.

As an employer, I simply recognized the needs and wants of people and whenever possible, I implemented programs that appealed to those needs. The business case was that the company was the benefactor.

As an employee, it is important to identify the needs and wants of your employer, the company, your supervisor and your supervisor's supervisor. Serve their needs and you will definitely be served. Take your focus off of yourself and put it on others and the benefits that will accrue to you will be bountiful.

Just as with professional and business relationships, people maintain friendships and interpersonal relationships for what they get out of it - not for the benefit of the other.

Why do men and women seek a partner - a significant other? We seek the fulfillment of our needs - not the fulfillment of the other's needs. Among other things, we seek physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual gratification. We seek an individual who can satisfy most of the needs that are the most important to us at that particular period in our lives. We forge bonding interpersonal relationships, akin to marriage or civil unions, with that one person who gives us the feeling of fulfillment of our needs - not with the person who we are able to fulfill their needs.

If your spouse or significant other fulfills your needs and simultaneously, you fulfill his or her needs, it is the gratifications each receives - *not gives* that perpetuates the relationship.

You do not maintain these relationships because you love your partner, but rather it is because they love you, which satisfies your need. When the needs are mutually satisfied, the relationship continues. However, it is critical to understand that people and their schedule of most important needs will change as they evolve through life. Your needs change and so do the needs of those people with whom you share a relationship.

As I stated, we form our closest interpersonal relationship with that one person who satisfies most of the needs that are the most important to us at that particular time in life. The needs that are the most important at any particular time are dynamic and will change. As we change, our needs change, and of particular importance, as we change, we may not be capable of fulfilling one or more needs of the other. If both parties of the relationship continuously examine one another's needs, they can make assessments as to whether or not they continue to satisfy those needs that are most important throughout their individual and collective evolution.

Relationships become dysfunctional for lack of awareness, understanding, consideration and attention to this fundamental premise. The survival of a relationship necessitates a continual communication and delineation of respective and changing needs, and the ability or inability of one to satisfy the needs of the other.

Through a healthy communication and understanding regarding each person's evolution and change, a relationship can not only continue, it can grow stronger because each are able to address and satisfy most of the needs that are the most important to the other. Furthermore, the expectation for satisfaction of a particular need that the other is incapable of fulfilling no longer creates tension with an open communication.

Marriages many times fail because one continues to have the same expectations of the other that were formed during the genesis of the relationship. Sexual expectations are formed when the relationship is in its hot passion phase. As time goes on, whether it is a year or fifteen years, the passion tends to fade, the frequency of sexual activity decreases and the gratification diminishes. Infidelity and its consequence is arguably a behavior of one who is seeking that fresh passion.

As two people in a relationship change and evolve, so do their respective needs. A person's individual needs directly affect their ability to fulfill the expectations of the other. If people recognize this and adjust their expectations of one another based upon the other's needs, they are capable of communicating and adjusting, resulting in the continued fulfillment of one another's needs that are the most important at any point in their respective evolution. This concept holds true for personal and interpersonal relationships as well as professional and business relationships.

Observe and adjust to the other persons needs and communicate your changing needs to the other person.

I believe that the relationship between men and women has a deliberate design by nature. I believe that women innately want a man who is going to treat them like a queen and provide for all of her needs. Women want their man to be a true warrior, a man who will conquer challenges, slay Dragons, be responsible and accountable, be a leader and provide for his family. If a man wants to keep a woman, he need not focus on that relationship. All he really needs to do is be the warrior his woman envisions, and she will have undying loyalty.

I have met so many men who worry about the relationship with their spouse or significant other. The reason they worry is because deep inside, they know that they are not doing their part. Consequently, they try to keep a woman by force or some other Neanderthal method. These are the men who don't have the guts to really go out and hunt, battle and slay the Dragons. Instead, they lie around sucking their thumb and make excuses, and frequently blame their woman for their lot in life. They beat on their puffed out chest and declare themselves head-of-household. Those are the men who have more lead in their seat than steel in their backbone. A cursory examination of these men indicates that they wear their zipper on the side of their pants.

The woman becomes the true head-of-household. Again, by the deliberate design of nature, where a man won't take action and fulfill his responsibilities, a strong woman will take over.

If you're a man reading this book, be a man, be responsible and accountable, and do whatever you need to do to provide for your family. If you're a woman reading this book and you are with one of those men who finds his zipper on the side of his pants, there are a lot of fish in the sea. Find a warrior.

People often use the word friend very loosely. We often refer to people who we know by name, our acquaintances and co-workers, as our friends. In recent years, the popularity of social media such as Facebook, MySpace, Google Circles, etc., have really exacerbated just how loosely people define *friends*. Does anyone *really* have two or three thousand friends?

It is important to understand the difference between a friend and those people who are merely acquaintances. We frequently consider co-workers, people whose name we know, even relatives, and people who we simply find ourselves associating with because we live in the same neighborhood, work in the same place or otherwise share some commonality of interest as friends. Those relationships do not necessarily establish the requisite elements that really define *friend*.

Establishing a relationship of friend requires a conscious and deliberate decision, but only on the part of one person. The term friendship would suggest that both parties have made the deliberate and conscious decision to be the friend of the other. However, the relationship of friend is not always mutual and does not require that people consider the other to be their friend, or that they are the friend of the other.

I can make a choice that I am your friend. However, I cannot make the choice that you are my friend. The decision for me to be your friend is my decision - not yours, and the decision for you to be my friend is your decision, not mine.

You can freely give your friendship to anyone and it is critically important that you be judicious to whom you give your friendship. The decision to give your friendship to someone creates obligations and responsibilities. You have no control however, as to whether or not the other person gives their friendship to you. Therefore it is entirely possible that you can be a friend to someone and they not necessarily be a friend to you, and vice versa.

It is entirely possible that a person can be your friend and you are not necessarily their friend. As stated, being a friend to someone requires a conscious and deliberate decision, and that decision has nothing to do with the choice or decision that the other person makes with regard to them being a friend to you.

Making the decision to be a friend to someone means that you've decided that you will not judge him or her for whom they are, or what they've done in the past, or for their future aspirations or lack thereof. You accept them for whom and what they are. You may make suggestions in their best interest as you recognize potentials that they could pursue toward greater rewards, provided that those suggestions dovetail into that individual's pursuits and passions.

When you commit to being a friend to someone, you decide that when they make a mistake you will not chastise them, but rather, you will be compassionate and understanding, you will put yourself in their shoes, and you will try to help them resolve whatever challenge they may face.

As a committed friend, you will be available for your friend and make time for them when they need to talk, when they need counsel, and you will always try to give objectivity and help them work through any difficulties that they may be experiencing. You will allow them to make their own choices and decisions. Although their choices may not necessarily be the choices and decisions that you would make for your life, you will support their choices and support their decisions, provided that their choices will not lead to negative implications or consequences.

If you're a friend to someone, always remember that they are a completely different and distinct person than you, and that their goals, their aspirations and their dreams are different than yours.

When you're a friend to someone, you don't demand that they live up to your expectations. You attempt to help them recognize their gifts and talents, their skills, and perhaps most importantly, you try to help them identify what their passions are. Then you try to help them define, and set and achieve goals to fulfill their passions - not yours.

Now, turn everything I've been discussing here around and examine the people who tell you that they are your friend. Are *your friends* demonstrating the fundamental ingredients I have described and the compassion and caring of a friend? Who are your real friends?

Many a professional musician and artist were criticized and dissuaded, perhaps by parents, from pursuing their passion because that particular agenda did not meet the expectations that were envisioned by the parents. Don't place your expectations on someone else. Rather, mold your expectations around the passions of the other person and support the attainment of their aspirations and goals.

Based upon the definition of a friend, you can see that giving your friendship to another definitely creates some obligations and responsibilities. It is not easy to be a friend, but rather it is difficult and incorporates sacrifices.

Conversely, remember this when you are looking at those individuals who claim to be your friend. Are they really your friend or just using the term for their personal gain?

As president and CEO of a young growing company, I hired a large number of young people, primarily because in the early days we did not have the budget to hire people with vast amounts of experience.

Hiring young people presents a number of challenges. First they don't have a great deal of experience. However, as long as they had a good and positive attitude, were teachable and willing to learn, had the aptitude to learn the necessary components of their job, and were willing to embrace training and mentoring, I was prepared to work with these individuals and invest the necessary time to help them grow both personally and professionally.

One of the second challenges was that young people sometimes have a tendency to get off track, and they do things that are occasionally in opposition to the rules.

When I met a young person whom I felt had great potential, I also recognized that as a result of their youth there would probably be times that they would make mistakes and would need support. In these instances, I made a very conscious decision with those people that I was their friend.

I'm quite sure that there have been times that many of those young people did not even realize that I was their friend. Many of them thought their co-workers, the people with whom they hung out after work and on weekends, and everybody else were their friends. In their mind, I was just their boss. But when they were in need, when they made mistakes, or when they were in trouble, they then realized that I was their friend because I was the only person who was there backing them up.

When I made a conscious decision to be a friend to one of our young employee's, it meant that I knew there would be times that they would need my assistance, and because I decided I would be their friend, the support and assistance would be there when they needed it. It was not important to me that him or her be my friend. His or her decision to be my friend had nothing to do with my decision that I was their friend.

On average, there was a thirty-year age difference between many of these people and myself. Therefore, most of these people were not individuals that I interacted with on a social level. Our relationship was pretty much limited the work environment. However, I did not define the relationship of friend as to whether or not we shared social activities, or necessarily even had commonality of interest. I simply recognized that this is a person with potential, and in order for them to reach their potential, they occasionally need somebody who would stand behind them at times that they needed

support. I was interested in providing support toward the personal and professional growth of our young staff, not assembling a group of people who would be friends to me.

I can vividly remember working for a man during my late teens that called me into his office after I had made a mistake. I remember my boss reprimanding me and saying, "Dave, as long as you're right, I'll always back to one hundred percent." My response was one of bewilderment. There was probably a full minute of silence as I examined what an absurd statement that was, and what would be the best way of responding. After I had gathered my thoughts, I looked my boss in the eyes and said, "Sir, as long as I'm right, I don't need you back me. I can back myself if I'm right. I need you to back me up when I'm wrong."

I can also remember when I was probably 14 or 15 years old and the Vice-Principal of my junior high school, Vernon Rhoades, who I seem to have challenged on a frequent basis, once told me, "Dave, you probably don't understand this, but I am your best friend." At the age of 14 or 15, I'm sure I probably thought that this guy is full of malarkey. It wasn't until years later, as an adult, that I recognized the utter truth in that statement. When I reflect upon those adolescent years and the many discussions I had with Mr. Rhoades, I would venture to say that, not only was he my best friend, but also he was my *only* friend.

There are three fundamental points that I would like to emphasize in this discussion. The first, and probably the most important point, is to recognize who your friends are.

Your real friends are those people who are trying to provide help to you and are not looking for any return from you for their help. This list might include your parents, teachers, counselors, case workers, ministers, priests, employers, supervisors, probation and parole officers, some social workers, and numerous other people who have dedicated their life to assisting other people.

Your friends are those people who want to see you succeed, are there to help you solve problems and identify and conquer challenges. They're not necessarily the same people with whom you will interact socially, join on a picnic, go out with for dinner, or accompany to an amusement park. Those people are your pals - they're your playmates and your toys - but not necessarily your friends.

Your friends are those people who see you for who you can become - not for who you are today, or who you were in the past. They are willing to work with you, help you, give of their time and their effort to help you stretch and grow and achieve your very highest potentials.

I can remember when I was eleven years old and was being scolded by my father for some behavioral infraction. As I recall, I was being disciplined and was told that I had to go to my room for the rest of the evening. I protested, as I apparently did not feel that the infraction was deserving of such a severe penalty as spending the remainder of the evening confined to my room. My defense was, "you're not my friend!" As my Dad looked at me, I could see compassion in his eyes and he said, "No David, I'm not your friend - I'm your father." He paused briefly, and said, "We will be friends later." Even at the early age of eleven years old, I genuinely understood what he was saying. I remember that I hugged him, and then went to my room for the evening. That was my last conversation with my Dad. It was that night that my Dad had a heart attack and died.

It is important to recognize that your true friends are not always going to tell you what you want to hear or sugarcoat the facts so everything appears peaches and cream. A friend will tell you the truth and be honest with you. They will help you identify challenges that you may not see, but that they recognize as challenges that must be addressed and conquered in order for you to move forward.

Your true friends will give little or no consideration to whether or not you like them. A true friend's mission in the relationship is to help you - to be your friend, not for you to be their friend. This is a decision that they have made, and it is not a decision that you have any part, or participation in making. A person's decision to be your friend is completely independent of any input by you. Whether you decide that you are their friend is completely immaterial and irrelevant to their decision that they are your friend. Recognize who your friends are.

The greatest appreciation that you could show to your friends is not what you give them back, but what you do with what they give to you.

Conversely, and perhaps critically important, it is imperative to recognize who *are not* your friends. If you engage in activities and behaviors with another person or group of people that lead to undesirable consequences, then these people are probably not your friends.

Friends will not put you in a compromising situation where you would have negative consequences as a result of any mutual activities in which you engage. Your friends are not those people who maintain a relationship or interaction with you primarily for their benefit. Your friends are not people who either dare you or otherwise pressure you to do things to somehow prove your loyalty to them. Your real friends will not support your excuses or your rationalizations to quit trying to succeed.

Make a written list of your friends. Ask yourself about each of your friends and whether they make some positive contribution toward you achieving your goals and dreams, and a healthy life of legitimacy and normalcy.

Alternatively, are some of your *friends* holding you back, or otherwise corroborating your excuses so you can give up and quit?

If your current friends are not moving forward in a positive direction with their own lives, then they cannot be much help to you and your goal to move forward in your life. In fact, they will hold you down. If you make an honest assessment of your current friendships, you might conclude that it is time to let some of those relationships drift, and then find new friends.

A very fast and effective way of finding new friends is to go volunteer for something. United Way is a great place to start because it centralizes a plethora of different non-profit organizations that are always looking for volunteers.

When you volunteer for something, you will feel good about yourself, and you will be interacting with people who are in the workplace. You will make new friends, and you will be networking with people who can help advance your career.

I was flying full-time as a Learjet Captain in the early 1990's for a fairly large air charter firm. The company had a fleet of various jet and turbo-prop aircraft that numbered around thirty-five, and a staff of roughly forty pilots. Most of the pilots were cross-trained in two or three different aircraft, and I was type rated in the Learjet Models 25 and 35, the Cessna Citation, and the Israeli Westwind II.

From a business standpoint, it made good business sense to capitalize upon the economies of scale by maintaining a minimum staff of pilots and maximizing their use. From a practicality standpoint, there were many times that crewing flights became very difficult because of the duty time limitations specified by the Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR's).

Air Taxi or Air Charter operations are governed under a specific and stringent set of federal aviation regulations (FAR's) that fall under FAR's Part 135. If a pilot is flying an aircraft for himself or for the owner of the aircraft, those operations are governed under FAR's Part 91 - a substantially less restrictive set of guidelines.

Under FAR's Part 135, a pilot's maximum duty time is fourteen hours, and he must have a minimum of ten consecutive hours of rest before starting a new duty cycle.

Company policy required that pilots arrive one hour before a scheduled flight. Therefore, the duty cycle begins one hour before departure and ends a half an

hour after landing. Because the company operated with minimum flight crews, the duty time limitations frequently conflicted with the scheduling demands of charter customers.

During my employ, there were times when a pilot would complete a duty cycle and sign off-duty, but then be required to sign back on exactly ten hours later, and that ten hour mark was the actual departure time of the next flight. In other words, the pilot was to allegedly arrive at the airport at the exact time the flight was to depart. There was zero pre-flight planning time. It amounted to fudging the paperwork to meet the regulations. There were also occasions when the company dispatchers simply asked pilots to fudge the paperwork. As the company grew larger, the frequency of scheduling and duty time conflicts increased as well.

My flying schedule kept me on the road twenty-three to twenty-nine days a month. As much as I enjoyed flying, I suppose there comes a point that any job becomes *work*. The flying part was great. I still love operating an airplane. Flying a Learjet is like strapping your ass to a blowtorch. The part that gets old is being out of town all of the time and never being able to make any personal plans that aren't subject to interruption by the telephone or pager. Pilots were on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Even Christmas, Thanksgiving and other holidays were frequently spent in a hotel room. Staying in nice hotels and eating in nice restaurants is fun for a while, but eventually it gets old too. How many times can you go to Disney World in Orlando before it isn't a vacation anymore? I've been there over twenty times.

The hardest part of flying corporate is the waiting. Hence, the reason I traveled with a computer and taught myself several programming languages. It was a great way to pass what is otherwise completely unproductive time.

Federal Aviation Regulations and flight safety are sacred to me. This is partly because of my unconditional decision to pursue a life of total legitimacy, partly because these concepts became thoroughly ingrained in me when I was teaching the aviation technologies, and partly because I have seen the results that occur when aviation regulations and prudent safety procedures are ignored.

Despite the intimidation from my employer to fudge the regulations, I never did. If I wasn't operating within the legal duty cycle, I didn't accept the assignment. If the airplane had any mechanical or maintenance issues, I grounded it.

My employer became unhappy with me grounding airplanes and the relationship grew tenuous. I felt the pressure that was exerted by my employer - holding my income and financial security over my head if I didn't

place its policies above safety and regulations. However, I figured that getting fired from a job is better than picking aluminum out of my teeth.

The morale in the company was low. The pilots were being stretched beyond reasonable limits. Once morale begins to slip in a company, people begin to complain about anything and everything. I was cognizant of this, but it can be difficult to avoid when your interaction with your co-workers is comparable to living together. As an analogy to deteriorating company morale, my boss once said, *"Half the fun of being in the Army is complaining about the Army."*

My fellow pilots respected my attitude toward safety and regulations. They seemed to take delight in how I stood my ground with company management. Although my co-workers applauded my posture, management accused me of being belligerent. To some extent I was. It wasn't just the safety issues that eventually irritated me. Having worked in management for the company for a number of years, I knew the company and its management inside and out. I knew all of the little secrets, and I knew that management expected the pilots to follow the unwritten policies of the company - even if those policies conflicted with regulations and safety.

I departed from Cleveland on a trip to the West Coast. Before every flight, I conducted a thorough preflight examination of the aircraft and its systems. When the passengers arrived, it was my routine to have them board the aircraft and then make one final walk around the airplane to make sure that there were no abnormalities.

The Lear 35 is fueled through receptacles in the tip tanks that are attached the ends of its wings. From the tip tanks, the fuel free-flows into the wing tanks and can then be transferred to fill the fuselage tank by an electric pump. Fully fueled, the Lear 35 holds roughly 6,200 pounds, or 925 gallons of Jet-A fuel, which is essentially kerosene.

As a part of my walk around, I would visually and physically check to make sure that the fuel caps were locked and secure. The fuel caps are very conspicuously located, and it would be almost impossible to walk around a Learjet and not notice that one is not locked.

As we departed and were in the initial departure climb, the control tower radioed and said that we were streaming fuel from our left wing tank. I looked out at the tip tank, and sure enough, we were losing fuel rapidly. The airplane quickly began developing an imbalance since the left tank was losing fuel and the right tank was still full. When we departed, we were close to our maximum weight of 18,000 pounds. The maximum landing weight of the aircraft was 15,300 pounds - a difference of 2,700 pounds.

I had three concerns, the first being control of the aircraft. If it went too far out of balance, it would become difficult to control at the lower landing speed. I began transferring fuel from the right wing into the left wing. The second concern was landing weight. We needed to lose 2,700 pounds, or roughly 400 gallons of fuel.

Generally, if an aircraft has an emergency immediately after take-off, it dumps fuel through fuel dump valves to achieve the maximum landing weight. Since I was already losing fuel rapidly, I was faced with the choice of dumping fuel to meet the maximum landing weight, which added the risk of running out of fuel. Alternatively, I could consider landing above maximum landing weight. I elected to land over the maximum landing weight. The landing was uneventful.

As we taxied to the parking ramp, I reviewed in my mind whether or not I checked the fuel caps. I clearly remember visually and physically checking the security of both caps. After we parked, the line service manager who had fueled the aircraft could not even make eye contact. I found this disturbing since he was a friend of many years, *or so I thought*. I wondered if he had loosened the cap after I had checked it.

Within only a few minutes, I was called to the office of one of the vice presidents of the company. I sat in his office and he questioned me about the fuel cap. I explained that I had checked it and perhaps there was a mechanical issue with the locking mechanism. However, I was thinking that perhaps the cause was something more sinister. He opened his desk drawer and pulled out three employee warning reports that he requested I sign. One was for failure to check the fuel caps before departure, one was for landing over the maximum gross landing weight and one for poor attitude. I found it curious that these warning reports were completely filled out and in his desk drawer within ten minutes of the incident. I did not sign them.

A few weeks later, I was captain on a flight with a plane-load of attorneys from Columbus, Ohio. On the return trip to Columbus, we were completing our approach checklist and beginning the landing checklist.

The landing gear and the brakes on the Learjet are controlled hydraulically. In the event of a hydraulic system failure, there is a pneumatic system that “blows” the gear down with 1800 PSI of nitrogen. The breaks can be actuated using the pneumatic system as well.

When the landing gear is down and locked, there are micro-switches that make contact and illuminate three enunciator lights in the cockpit, indicating that the two main gears and the nose gear are down and locked.

We were on approach to OSU airport in Columbus. We extended the landing gear and had green down and locked indicator lights for the two main landing

gears, but no green light for the nose gear. We tested the light bulb and it was working fine.

I suspected that the problem was simply dirt in the micro-switch, preventing it from making contact. We cycled the gear a couple of times - raising it and then lowering it again. There was still no light that positively indicated that the nose gear was locked down.

The nose wheel steering on the Learjet is electronic. There is another micro-switch that must make contact before the nose wheel steering will work. Once the nose gear is raised, the switch breaks the electrical circuit and disables the steering. If the nose gear was down and locked, the electrical circuit for the nose wheel steering should be closed. I turned on the nose wheel steering and the annunciator light came on indicating that the micro-switch was closed and the nose wheel steering was operative. Since the nose wheel steering micro-switch was closed, there was a reasonable certainty that the nose gear was down and locked.

From a pilot's perspective and an understanding of the Learjet's systems, I was certain that the nose gear was down and locked. However, this flight was governed under FAR's Part 135 which require a strict adherence to the manufacturer's operating manual.

According to the manufacturer, the only positive and approved indication that the nose gear is down and locked is the green nose gear down and locked annunciator light. Therefore, even though I was quite certain that the nose gear was down and locked via secondary verifications, my common sense and system cross checks were not an approved method to serve as a positive indication. At the very least, it would be embarrassing to land and have the nose gear collapse, particularly with a bunch of lawyers on board.

We declared an emergency and asked to be placed in a holding pattern as we consulted the landing gear abnormality checklist. To give every assurance that the gear was down and would not collapse on landing, we extended the gear hydraulically, and then actuated the pneumatic gear blow-down system. With the additional 1800 PSI of nitrogen on the gear from the pneumatic system, the gear was *not* going to collapse. I told my co-pilot to advise the passengers of the situation and to make sure their seat belts were securely fastened.

We radioed air traffic control and advised that we were prepared to land. My plan was to touch down on the main gear and then hold the nose gear off as long as possible, thereby reaching the slowest possible speed before the nose gear touched down.

We made a textbook perfect approach. The main gear touched down and all of a sudden, the nose gear slammed down with such force, I was surprised it

didn't break off. The airplane was decelerating rapidly, I had no lateral or steering control, and it was heading toward the edge of the runway. The touch down and roll-out was anything but routine.

As the airplane came to a stop, I began shutting down the engines and all of the systems. I turned to my co-pilot and calmly said, "Evacuate the airplane." I never saw him move so fast.

As I got out of my seat, I took the fire extinguisher that was located behind the co-pilots seat. I was concerned that we might have a fire from over heated brakes. I stepped off of the airplane and looked under the wing to see all four main gear tires were blown, completely worn down almost hitting the rims.

Obviously, the brakes were locked on landing. How that was possible was a complete mystery. Luckily, the airplane had new tires installed the previous day. This was the first flight on those new tires. Had the tires been older and more worn, it would have destroyed the rims and wheel assemblies, which on a Learjet run in the twenty-thousand-dollar apiece range.

The airport fire & rescue team arrived and took the passengers to the terminal. A maintenance crew placed the airplane on dollies and towed it to a hangar. After completing a report, my co-pilot and I rented a car and made the drive back to Cleveland.

The next day, I was asked to report to the same vice president who gave me three rather quickly prepared warning reports for the fuel cap incident. He already had another warning report prepared for landing with the brakes locked. I suggested that we might wait until maintenance determines what happened. He insisted that it had to be pilot error. This guy was just such a weasel, and the only reason he was a vice president, or even had a job, was because he went to school with the company president.

It was apparent that the company, or at least this vice president, wanted to stuff my personnel file with bogus warning reports so he could justify firing me. Admittedly, I was a thorn in his side, or perhaps I should say, the Federal Aviation Regulations were a thorn in his side. All I did was abide by the regulations.

I contacted a friend who was an inspector with the FAA. I explained the situation and asked that the FAA observe the maintenance inspection on the Learjet I landed in Columbus. He assigned an inspector to oversee the maintenance inspection.

As I mentioned before, the landing gear and the brakes on the Learjet are hydraulic, and both have a high-pressure pneumatic emergency back-up system. There is a lever in the cockpit to actuate the emergency pneumatic

gear system, which sends 1800 PSI of nitrogen into the landing gear hydraulic lines to blow the gear down. There is a separate lever that can be used after landing to divert pneumatic pressure to the brakes. Both the emergency gear and brakes are served from the same 1800-PSI nitrogen bottle.

As the maintenance crew inspected the airplane, with the FAA observing, it was discovered that the pneumatic lines that route high-pressure nitrogen to the landing gear and brakes had been crossed. The line that went from the pneumatic braking valve was routed to the landing gear, and the line that went from the emergency gear blow-down valve went to the brakes. Consequently, when we actuated the lever that controls the valve that releases the 1800-PSI of nitrogen to the landing gear, it actually went to the brakes. When we landed, there was 1800 PSI on the brakes.

There was no way we could have known that the 1800 PSI didn't go to the gear, but went to the brakes instead. We already had the gear extended hydraulically. Putting the 1800-PSI pneumatic pressure on the landing gear was just added insurance.

If our emergency had been an actual hydraulic system failure, and we had to extend the landing gear strictly using pneumatic pressure, we would have known that the pressure did not go to the landing gear because the gear would not have extended. However, there still would have been no way of knowing that it went to the brakes. Most pilots would have concluded that the gear did not extend either hydraulically or via the emergency pneumatic system because of a blown hose or leak in a line.

A hydraulic system failure preventing us from extending the landing gear hydraulically or pneumatically would have been an even worse situation.

If we had miraculously concluded that the 1800-PSI nitrogen pressure went to the brakes, that pneumatic pressure would have been spent on the brakes, and there may not have been adequate pressure to extend and lock the landing gear. Further, if the landing gear would not extend by using the emergency gear down lever, I'm not sure that either my co-pilot or me would have even thought that perhaps we should try extending the landing gear using the emergency brake lever.

I never found out how these pneumatic lines were misconnected. I thought it was a poor design that the receptacles were of identical size, and they were not even color-coded to prevent them from being cross connected.

I have no way of knowing if those lines had been improperly connected since the airplane left the manufacturer, or if they had been inadvertently switched during subsequent maintenance.

At the time of this incident, management seemed to have a petulant attitude toward me, and my adherence to regulations and safety. I wondered what had occurred the previous day when the tires were changed.

Changing tires on an airplane requires that it be jacked up off the ground. Conspiracy theories are generally for crackpots or people who otherwise have way too much time on their hands. The thought simply crossed my mind.

After the fuel cap and the locked brakes incidents, I was measuring the support I might receive from other pilots if I choose to pursue either civil remedies or a grievance through the FAA. My co-workers and I all believed that the company management was intimidating pilots and expecting them to compromise safety for the sake of profitability.

I had 100% support from all of my *friends*. As I prepared a grievance to file with the FAA, I was eventually fired. Out of all of those friends, there were only two, Craig and Bob, who stood up for what was right. The rest of my *friends* rolled over and wet themselves. They were still complaining, but too afraid to stand in unison.

From that experience, I learned to only count on those individuals who I know have made their decision that they are my friends. I am a friend to many, but very few are a friend to me. I have no issues with that - it is just important to know who your real friends are.

When I started my company in 1995, most of my friends thought I was nuts. I was starting a company that would compete with a few dozen billion-dollar giants. I reflected on the previous experience I had regarding my friends.

If you have ever gone fishing for crabs, you know that one crab in a bucket will crawl out. The way to keep a crab in the bucket is to put in another crab. As one climbs out, the other will grab on and pull it back down.

Sometimes friends will hold you back because they fear that you might leave the nest. Sometimes people can be like crabs in a bucket. If you try to climb out and move on to a more prosperous life, your friends might try to hold you back. They won't grab on and physically pull you down. However, they might just criticize your direction and mock whatever it is you are doing.

If you have a friend who ever mocks you for taking positive steps forward, you might want to consider letting that relationship drift. Move on and focus on your destination. When you arrive years later, you will look back at that friend, and you will be astonished to see him in exactly the same place you left him.

Volunteer for something. You will meet a whole bunch of genuinely good people who are also volunteering. Some may become your friend and you may become a friend to some.

There are hundreds of organizations that assist various people in need, or that advocate for important causes. This is the place you will find people who are moving in a positive direction. You will become networked with people, and these people will become your new friends and peer group. They will help you move forward, and as those relationships grow, you will help them as well.



Chapter 17

IT DOESN'T HURT ENOUGH. THE MOTIVATION OF PAIN VERSUS THE MOTIVATION OF PLEASURE.

Brian went to visit his friend, Courtney. As they were talking and enjoying the fresh lemonade that Courtney made, Brian noticed her dog Penelope, lying in a corner, quietly whimpering, making slight adjustments to her position and letting out an occasional painful sounding yelp.

“What’s wrong with Penelope?” Brian asked Courtney. “Oh,” Courtney replied, “There’s a rusty nail sticking up out of the floor over there and she’s laying right on it.”

With a puzzled look on his face, Brian asked, “Then why doesn’t she just move and lay someplace else?” Looking over at Penelope, then turning back and looking at Brian, Courtney shrugged her shoulders and said, *“I guess it doesn’t hurt enough.”*

When the nail hurts enough, people will move. Until then, they will continue lying on the same old rusty nail, complaining and whimpering with occasional painful yelps, but never putting forth the necessary effort to just getting up and moving to a place that is more comfortable.

If your nail doesn’t hurt enough yet, *it will*. Hopefully, you will make the decision to get off the nail before you catch a fifteen-year to life sentence. It is guaranteed that the nail will hurt enough before that sentence is finished, but you’ll be stuck sitting on that nail until someone else decides it’s time for you to get off of it.

If you haven’t reached a point where the consequences of your actions have caused enough pain, then the decision to move forward and embrace legitimacy as your future path may require a more conscious and deliberate contemplation.

When your hand touches a hot stove, you don’t need to think about moving your hand, it is an auto-response - a reflex to pain. Eventually, we develop emotional auto-responses to pain as well, which cause us to avoid those things that create the pain.

The pain of your nail needs to hurt more than the pain that is associated with change, pursuing a path of legitimacy and dealing with the challenges that are a part of achievement. If your pain hasn't reached a high enough intensity, then it is probably a little more difficult to make the decision to embrace and conquer the challenges that are inherent with legitimate achievement. Conquering challenges isn't painless.

Perhaps you can at least forecast into the future that eventually the pain will progressively get worse if the direction of your life remains substantially the same. If you continue on the same path, the logical consequence is that you will continue to experience the same painful results.

You're certainly able to forecast the results of touching a hot stove. Having already experienced the reflex, you make a conscious decision not to touch it. You don't need to touch it every time just to realize the same painful result over and over again. You can make the same conscious decisions about the direction of your life without diving back into the same fire that caused your most recent episode of pain.

There are compelling arguments to both theories as to whether pain or pleasure is a greater motivator. I will introduce a third possibility.

First, I want you to think of the one person in your life that you care about the most. If you have children, it might be your child. It might be your spouse or significant other, a parent or sibling. Take a second and picture that person in your mind. We'll come back to that in a few minutes.

The twin Petronas Towers located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia are among the world's tallest buildings, towering some 1,483 feet (about a quarter of a mile) to the top of the buildings' spires.

Picture in your mind, stretching a one-inch diameter steel cable from the top of one tower to the top of the other tower. Now, we'll spread a generous coating of grease on that cable so it's nice and slippery. We'll wait until we have a nice windy and gusty day. Try to get the visual in your mind.

Once all of the conditions are perfect, lots of grease on the cable and strong gusty winds, we'll set a one hundred dollar bill out in the middle of the cable. Are you willing to go out and retrieve it? If not, how about if we put two of those one hundred dollar bills out there?

We could continue to increase the amount and some would say they're willing to climb out on that one inch steel cable that is coated with grease, 1,483 feet up in the air with the wind howling. But really, if they were actually standing up there, would anyone really attempt this?

Most people state that they would not go out for any amount of money. If you are one of those people who would not go out for any amount of money, ask yourself why you wouldn't. Is it because of a natural protective instinct we have called "*fear*?"

A few paragraphs ago, I asked you to think of the one person in your life who you care about most. If you have children, it might be your child. It might be your spouse or significant other, a parent or sibling.

Now, were at the top of the towers looking out over the cable that stretches to the other tower. That one person most important to you is out in the middle, dangling and holding on with only one hand, pleading for you to save them from falling almost 1,500 feet to a certain death. Will you go out there now? Almost 100% of people I ask have no hesitation - they absolutely would go out there.

Let's examine why. Most people would not go out there for money, irrespective the amount. Most of those people indicated that the reason was fear. Yet, if that one person who they care about most in life were hanging out there, most of them would go to the rescue without hesitation. So, what happened to *fear*?

There is another dimension that comes into play when we are talking about motivation by pain or pleasure, or the emotion we call "fear" that prevents us from doing certain things that we know will cause a reaction that is undesirable to us - either real or perceived. It is called *Definitiveness of Purpose*. Most people will not go out on the cable to retrieve money, and they suggest the reason is fear. Yet, when the person who is most important to them is dangling out on the cable, they are out there like lightning. What happened to fear?

The reason that a person would not go out on the greasy cable for the money, but they would climb out to save the life of the person they care about most is the *definitiveness of purpose*. The money did not create the definitiveness of purpose, but saving the person closest to your heart does.

We are motivated by a combination of pain and pleasure. We will adjust our behavior to avoid pain and to gain pleasure. Understanding definitiveness of purpose gives you the catalyst to control your motivation. In fact, without *definitiveness of purpose*, a person is a ship without a rudder.

Without a defined direction, a person is just walking through life aimlessly, stumbling over moments of pain and pleasure, constantly in reactive mode as opposed to proactively pursuing defined objectives. Conversely, when you have a definitiveness of purpose, you very consciously seize an abundance of pleasure and avoid a great deal of pain.

If you observe any achievement, there was an underlying definitiveness of purpose. A professional athlete became a professional because the definitiveness of purpose drove them to relentlessly practice. The same holds true for professional musicians. Landing a man on the moon required a powerful definitiveness of purpose. Anyone who has graduated from college, particularly with a masters or doctorate degree had a definitiveness of purpose.

A definitiveness of purpose can be a long-term vision or a very short-term objective. Falling out of a boat into shark-infested waters would usually engender a very short-term definitiveness of purpose - to get back in the boat. The shark-infested water is analogous to prison, and getting back in the boat is making a successful reintegration into mainstream society.

A definitiveness of purpose creates a burning desire to achieve something. When a person is in the pursuit of their definitiveness of purpose, they are performing all of those things that we generally call work, but it just doesn't seem like work because they are focused on the objective. Pursuing a definitiveness of purpose is not necessarily a specific goal with a defined destination or outcome.

Looking back over my aviation career, I was doing something, which if I were not getting paid to do it, I would have paid to do it. That first introductory flight lesson had me totally hooked.

When I started my aviation career, the definitiveness of purpose was two fold. One, I had the burn to fly and advance to the highest certificates and ratings, and to fly jets. And two, it was a career direction that incorporated all of the elements of legitimacy that were integral components of my decision after my release on parole.

There were some discouraging periods while I was learning to fly. Money was tight and most of the people who were in my age group were doing pretty well financially. For all practical purposes, I was twenty-five, but I was at the same academic and professional level as seventeen and eighteen year old kids.

There was a lot of pride that I had to swallow for a few years. Nevertheless, the experience was good in that respect. Pride and ego are expensive and offer no positive return. Pride and ego generally only serve to repel people.

I was scheduled for my private pilot flight test, which is called a check ride. Check rides are given either directly by the FAA, or by a designated FAA examiner, either of whom ride in the airplane and observe as the pilot performs various maneuvers and procedures.

The itinerary for my check ride was to fly from Cleveland Hopkins airport to Marion, Ohio and back to Hopkins. The “cross country” portion of the private pilot check ride is a test of dead reckoning navigation.

Dead reckoning navigation requires the calculation of the winds aloft and the course to reach the destination. Theoretically, if all conditions are perfect, a pilot should be able to fly the magnetic heading that is calculated and arrive at the destination. However, conditions are never exact. Dead reckoning navigation is generally combined with *pilotage*, which uses ground features to identify whether the aircraft is on or off course.

Electronic navigation is far easier than dead reckoning. There are numerous ground based radio navigation facilities that communicate with the navigation radios in the aircraft. The combination of the ground based and on board radio facilities allows an airplane to track to and from specific geographic locations. There are also more advanced navigation systems like Loran-C and the Global Position System (GPS). Dead reckoning is almost never used as a practical form of navigation anymore, but it is important for a pilot to understand the principles of dead reckoning navigation.

I spent several hours on my preflight planning for my private pilot check ride. I double and triple checked all of my calculations and they were perfect. I had my weight & balance calculations exact and my fuel estimate calculated within drops.

The examiner reviewed all of my preflight planning and administered the oral portion of the examination. I passed with flying colors.

I had a total of 67 flight hours and I had straight “A’s” in all of my aviation courses at Cuyahoga Community College. I felt comfortable with the material, and I was very comfortable flying the airplane.

After the oral portion of the examination, the examiner and I got in the airplane, completed the required checklists, taxied to the active runway and departed Cleveland Hopkins airport. We flew to a practice area that is located about 25 miles west of the airport where the examiner had me execute a battery of maneuvers and emergency procedures, all of which were performed satisfactorily.

We then started out on the cross country to Marion, Ohio. Unfortunately, all of my planning was from Cleveland to Marion, and now we were starting somewhere in the area of Lorain, Ohio. This wasn’t in the plan. I somehow got way off course, and once I realized that I had no clue where I was, I became even more nervous than I already was.

I actually managed to get lost on my check ride with the FAA on board. I couldn’t believe it! I had practiced cross-country navigation, but this was

unfamiliar territory. All of my previous cross country flights had been to Findlay, Toledo and Columbus, Ohio. Once I confessed that I was unsure where I was, the examiner allowed me to use the electronic navigation systems to reorient myself.

Feeling rather somber, we made the return flight to Cleveland Hopkins. As far as handling the airplane, all of my procedures were fine with one exception. My landing wasn't much better than a controlled crash. I really slammed it down hard. Goodness, I felt like a horse's ass. For months, I had been making landings that were smooth as glass. Now, with the FAA examiner on board, I get lost on my cross-country, and then make a landing like the meteorite that slammed into the Earth causing the extinction of the dinosaurs. No damage - except to my pride.

We taxied to the flight school and parked the airplane. The examiner and I talked for twenty or thirty minutes. He could see that I was really upset. Gosh, I was almost in tears. He said that he knew that I could fly - my instructor had boasted frequently that I was his best student.

The examiner insisted that I had a case of *check ride jitters*. He decided that the check ride was simply incomplete and he told me to go home, get some rest and come back the following day to complete the check ride.

That was the first time since I had been released from prison that I really felt like giving up. Looking back at that situation, and having experienced many other setbacks over the past thirty-plus years, I am convinced that recidivism occurs when a person is still a little fragile, and they experience their first, or first few setbacks.

I had worked so hard and for so many months only to bomb my first check ride. I wasn't sure if I would even go back to re-test. If there was a time I could have recidivated, this was it.

Feeling completely drained, disappointed and deflated, I went home, had some dinner and went to bed. The next morning, still feeling nervous, I was right on the thin line of giving up.

I pushed beyond my broken pride, went to the airport and took my check ride - again. I received my private pilot certificate that day, April 26, 1981.

I slain the Dragon, conquered the challenge and emerged victorious. I reflected on how I had felt. The self-doubt and the frustration and disappointment - all of which disappeared when I achieved the goal. But, I almost gave up because I was tired and got knocked down. From that point forward, I always monitored my reaction to disappointments, especially if I was sick or tired. I never again negotiated the price of achieving a goal.

When I find myself feeling a little down, I get some rest, and then just push on.

Later in my training, I was working toward my instrument rating. An instrument rating allows a pilot to safely fly in adverse weather conditions when there is limited or zero visibility. The aircraft is flown strictly by reference to the flight instruments, and it is an entirely different type of flying than operating by visual reference to the outside.

The FAA requirements for the instrument rating have been lowered since the time I trained and received my rating. However, at the time I was working toward the rating, the requirements included passing the instrument written examination with a score of 70% or better, 40 hours of instrument flight training, 200 hours total flight time, an oral examination and a flight check ride with a FAA examiner.

My goal was to achieve my Certified Flight Instructor certificate (CFI) so I could make money flying as opposed to paying money to fly, and the instrument rating was one of the prerequisites for the CFI.

The steps to reach the CFI are to earn the private pilot certificate, then the instrument rating, then the commercial pilot certificate and finally the CFI. Each rating and each certificate required passing a written examination, an oral exam and a flight check ride. The CFI requires passing two separate written examinations. After receiving my CFI, I also took the written exam and flight check ride for the Instrument Flight Instructor certificate (CFI-IA), which then authorized me to provide primary, advanced and instrument flight training.

As a quick side note, I think that it is important to reiterate the fact that I had dropped out of high school, and although I had my GED, from a practical standpoint, I had about an eighth or ninth grade education.

Conterminous with my aviation studies, I had to take a few remedial math and English courses. As I said before, no matter how old you are, if you want to move forward, you have to start from where you left off.

If you're not willing to start where you left off, you simply will not move forward, and in reality, you will remain in life where you are, which will forever be where you left off.

I was enrolled in the Instrument Flight ground school course at Cuyahoga Community College. The course is designed to prepare the students to pass the FAA Instrument Rating written examination.

Most of the other students in the class were first year college students and some were still in high school taking college level courses. I was twenty-five,

which was well beyond the average age of someone working toward the certificates and ratings required to start a career in aviation.

After class one evening, I walked with my professor to the parking lot. Ron Revelt was in his early forties, loved aviation and loved flying, but he never pursued a career as a professional pilot, or he never succeeded at the pursuit.

I wondered if my age would pose any limitations on actually pursuing a career as a professional pilot. I asked Ron, "Given my age, what do you think my chances are of a career in aviation?" Ron just chuckled and said, "About zero."

Looking back at that conversation, I wonder if Ron was a crab in a bucket. Was his discouraging response rooted in his own disappointments that he did not succeed in pursuing a career as a professional pilot?

Many people will give you opinions regarding your chances of success that are based upon their experiences at failure. *Beware!* Don't listen to advice about your career progression unless the person giving the advice is, or has been in their life, where you want to be. I also look back and wonder how I could have possibly thought that twenty-five was old. Goodness, I was still a baby.

I obviously did not listen to Ron's bleak outlook of my future. I had a commanding definitiveness of purpose that drove me to earn all of my pilot certificates and ratings, and to move forward and enjoy a career as a professional pilot.

I also built a successful corporation that achieved respectable revenues and a host of awards and accolades despite a substantial amount of initial criticism and ridicule. The company was started on a credit card. My initial definitiveness of purpose was strong, but it was not really discovered until I was neck deep into the project.

Through the initial developmental and growth stages of the company, I discovered that my passion was helping people who had poor self-esteem and perceived that their future was limited.

My definitiveness of purpose was creating an environment that facilitated personal and professional growth. I spent countless hours mentoring and teaching, and challenging these individuals - forcing them to stretch and grow so there would be a genuine self-realization of potential and accomplishment. My burn was not growing the business, but rather what got me out of bed every morning was growing the people. Many people resisted and sabotaged the opportunity they had to grow. However, the few that embraced the opportunity, and the people that they have become as a result are my most cherished trophies.

Today, I have several interests that could individually be defined as a definitiveness of purpose. One is a residual continuation of my tenure as president & CEO, and it is probably stronger than any I have had before, primarily because I share a commonality of experience and pain with my constituency - ex-offenders.

I have become passionate about helping other people who have made mistakes in their past, experienced incarceration and are ready to make the decision to pursue legitimacy and the rich rewards life has to offer - hence, the motivation to write this book. If a person's nail hurts enough and they want to make the decision to move off of that nail, helping them succeed is among my core definitiveness of purpose.

My primary objective is to simply prove to you that it is possible to have a great life in mainstream society after an incarceration event. I serve as a sort of model that a life of legitimacy certainly can be achieved.

Passion can either create a definitiveness of purpose or passion grows from the pursuit of your definitiveness of purpose. They are definitely interrelated. If you can discover your passion, it will probably form your definitiveness of purpose, and vice versa.

If you won the lottery, what would you do with your time on a long-term basis? In the short term, most of us would do a little traveling, buy a new house, cars, pay off debt, etc. But, over the long term, after you've traveled the world, bought a dozen cars, invested, started a business, bought a few houses, lounge on the couch and watch television for a year, and did an abundant amount of playing, what would you do?

Think seriously about winning the lottery and what you would do with the rest of your life. In other words, if you did not have to work to earn the money necessary to survive, what are your interests - what are you passionate about? What do you want to become in your ultimate dreams? What would you do and what would you achieve, who would you be, and who would you want to be respected and admired by?

If you can discover your passion, you will be able to develop your definitiveness of purpose. I say, "*discover*" your passion because it is already there. You don't need to invent it - you already have it. You just need to discover it.

When you discover your passion and develop your definitiveness of purpose, you will be able to control the motives of pain and pleasure.

It is important to note that an individual can have many passions and definitiveness of purpose, and these can be short-term, medium-term and long term.

You may become passionate about a goal to buy a home, to operate a successful business, to further your education, or to provide for your children's education. These goal centric passions can generate a definitiveness of purpose. However, it is the long-range definitiveness of purpose that is based upon your passion that clarifies life's direction and crystallizes a person's character and essence.

Discover your passion and follow it. Admittedly, this is where it can get a little complicated, and at times frustrating. For example, if your passion is any of the many artistic endeavors, music, graphics, etc., the question is; how will this passion generate income, since you have probably not actually won the lottery?

I encourage the pursuit of passion. However, it is important to discern whether the passion has the ability to generate income, or if the passion should be treated as an avocation or hobby.

If you are 18 years old, play a musical instrument, and can sing and dance well, then you can probably pursue this passion as a career direction. If you are thirty-five, have been playing in various bands for 20 years, and you have not graduated beyond weddings and night clubs, you may want to continue this passion as a hobby and avocation, but not as the most lucrative career direction.

The competition is fierce for the eighteen-year-old, and the success probability for the thirty-five year-old is substantially less. However, the thirty-five-year-old might be able to work in the industry, promoting, managing and working with the organizations that produce the successful musicians.

Pursue your passions, but carefully examine which passion should form your definitiveness of purpose and which should become the focus of your professional career.

I am not suggesting that a person's definitiveness of purpose should be their career. A person can pursue many crusades outside of their career about which they are passionate. Their job is simply a means to support the pursuit of their true passion. A person can work to live, or they can live to work. I have experienced both. If you can find a mix where passion and career amalgamate, you will do exceptionally well.

The motivation of pain may serve to facilitate your decision to change your direction in life. If it hasn't, *it will*. I would only hope that you make the decision while you have control over whether or not you lay on the nail, or get up and move off the nail.

Pain was definitely a motivating factor in my decision. When I bombed my first attempt at the private pilot check ride, I guarantee I looked over at that nail sticking up out of the floor and asked myself if I wanted to risk lying back down on it. I'm sure that one of the factors that motivated me to drive back to the airport and finish my check ride the next day was the avoidance of pain.

Discovering your passions and definitiveness of purpose will serve to facilitate your motivations for pleasure, and it will modify your choices and behaviors to avoid pain. In addition to not wanting to risk lying back down on that nail, I also had a passion and a definitiveness of purpose that motivated me finish the check ride and receive the prize.

Give thoughtful consideration to what really creates passion for you and which of these alternatives have some potential for professional achievement. Remember to consider the many dimensions of your passion, i.e. you may not make it as a star in a band, but perhaps you could become a promoter or manager.

Finally, it is sometimes easier to set a date to make the decision to pursue or not to pursue a life of legitimacy. Pick a date, and on that date, make your decision. As you read this book, you will discover that there is only one limitation or obstacle between you and a life of legitimacy - *yourself!* There simply are no other barriers or obstacles that cannot be conquered.

Incidentally, if you avoid making the decision, the default is a continuance of your past. In the absence of a deliberate and conscious decision, and subsequent behavioral and attitudinal modifications, the default is *no change*. The decision will not just happen by osmosis, auto-magically, or be made for you by someone else. You either make a decision, one way or the other, or don't make a decision and stay on the same path that led to where you are in life today.

Set a date to make your decision, and after you make your decision, accept the benefits, or consequences, depending upon the direction you decide to pursue.

If you choose to continue lying on that rusty old nail, don't whine, whimper or complain, or let out those occasional painful yelps. If you choose to get off that nail and move on, don't let an occasional set back cause you to give up and quit.

I never claimed that the past thirty-plus years have been peaches and cream or a stroll in the park. There are going to be challenges to conquer and there will be many Dragons to slay. Don't lose sight of the stashes of gold and jewels hoarded by those Dragons. I have commandeered many of those stashes.

There is one other question to ask yourself. What are you going to do between this very moment and the date you are going to make your conscious decision about the pursuit of your future?

One last thought about pain that I would like to reiterate. Our brain has a wonderful protective mechanism in that we are incapable of *recalling* pain. You may be capable of remembering a painful experience, whether physical or emotional pain, but you are not capable of recalling and re-living the actual sensation of the pain.

It is good that the mind cannot recall the sensation of pain. If you have ever suffered an injury, a broken bone or a painful bruise, life would be difficult if we would actually have to re-experience that pain every time we recollected a painful incident. However, this wonderful mechanism is to our *disadvantage* when we are released from prison.

While in prison, I have noted that people are experiencing pain, and they are very conciliatory. However, I have also noted that many people quickly forget the pain after they are released.

I have observed many people who genuinely want to pursue a new and fresh path when they are released. Their convictions and dedication to pursuing a healthy and normal life are absolute - while they are still incarcerated, lying on the nail, and living the pain.

However, once an individual is released, the pain of incarceration quickly fades, and it is *replaced* with the pain that is associated with change, facing and conquering challenges and slaying dragons - *the pain of reentry*.

Rather than endure the pain of reentry, some simply quit and go back to their old habits and comfort zone. Eventually they recidivate, and of course, they blame their failure on everyone and everything except the fact that they were unwilling to endure a temporary period of pain to achieve a normal and healthy life of comfort and pleasure.

You may be feeling enthusiastic about starting a new life. You may be absolutely sincere in your decision to dedicate yourself to slaying any Dragon that comes along during your pursuit. That is all great. Just be very conscious that the pain you are feeling in prison will fade once you are released. More importantly, it will be substituted with a whole new set of painful experiences. Just observe the pain, deal with it, but don't internalize it and let it consume you. Don't let the new pain influence your ultimate decision to stay on the path that you have chosen.

Get off the rusty old nail, move from a place of pain to a place of pleasure, and continue on that path. Yes, you can do this!

Chapter 18

PATIENCE IS REQUIRED TO TAKE THE SMALL STEPS THAT ARE NECESSARY TO ACHIEVE GREAT GOALS.

As a nation, we have become incredibly impatient and impulsive. As I have said, we all want *instant gratification*. It is that want of instant gratification that has made Visa and MasterCard behemoth corporations and is fundamental to the success of the Internet and the cellular industries.

We want instant rice, instant mash potatoes, video on demand, instant communication, instant information access, and instant gratification of every conceivable kind and nature. We see a car advertised and we want it now. We see the latest clothing styles and we want them now.

People tend to be very impulsive. I am not sure whether the advertising and merchandising industries created our impulsiveness, or if our impulsiveness was always there and it is simply being capitalized upon by business and industry. Either way, from the standpoint of advancements, our impulsiveness has certainly been a catalyst to the development of countless products, services and technologies. From the standpoint of advancing the human race and technology, our impulsiveness is good, but like many things, in moderation.

If you examine the personal debt structure of our population, it is staggering, and getting worse. Some politicians use consumer spending as an indicator of economic growth. That number is only valid if consumer debt is not increasing parallel to spending. If consumer debt is increasing at the same or a greater rate than consumer spending, then that suggests that people are buying on credit.

Why don't most people deliberately and consciously set financial goals? It's because they don't have to. The credit card companies have created a culture whereby people can have all of the instant gratifications they crave today, without practicing the first concept of financial planning and discipline. The essence of the advertising and marketing agendas by the credit card industry is clearly, "*Live for today*," and don't look at, or worry about that man behind the curtain - *the future*.

Some credit card companies have interesting agendas. I had an opportunity to spend several days as the pilot for an executive of one of the major credit card companies who had chartered a jet.

As we were traversing the country, he laid out the credit card corporate strategy during one of our conversations. The actual figures are probably a little fuzzy since it was over two decades ago, but the gist of the strategy follows what he shared with me.

They take a kid who is 18 years old, first year in college and give him a credit card with a \$500.00 limit. If the kid makes timely minimum payments for three months, they increase the limit to \$1,000.00, and send convenience checks that he can use for purchases or cash advances.

At eighteen years old, very few people really internalize the ramifications of creating credit card debt. Consequently, many of these kids treat the credit card as a ticket for free income.

Most kids who get their first couple of credit cards haven't really grasped the concept that they have to pay it all back, with interest, and the more they borrow, the longer it takes to retire the debt.

If the student continues making timely minimum payments for another three months, the limit is raised again. Statistically the vast majority of these kids increase the debt right up to the limit within a month of each increase.

As the credit card company increases the spending limits, statistically the limit increases are followed with the full use of the credit line by the cardholder.

The credit card company's ultimate goal was to have a total of \$15,000.00 outstanding with an interest rate of 18% per year by age 22 - generally the age of graduation. *(These are 1980's figures. Today, the debt and income numbers have likely adjusted).*

According to the Federal Reserve Board figures, consumer debt hit \$11.31 trillion as of March 2013. This figure translates into approximately \$15,266 of credit card debt, \$149,667 mortgage debt and \$32,559 student loan debt per U.S. household. Based upon these averages, it appears that credit card companies are achieving its objective.

A kid graduates and gets his first job. On average, the income was \$22,000 per year. That was the *gross* income. Calculating taxes, social security and other common deductions, the *net* take home pay was closer to \$19,000.

The \$15,000 of credit card debt at an annual interest rate of eighteen percent required a minimum payment of roughly \$232.00 per month - \$2,800 per

year, depending upon the method the credit card company used for calculating minimum payment.

The frequent norm in America is that expenses always rise to meet income. I'm not saying that is the right thing to do, or that it is fiscally healthy, but rather it's just the way it is. Consequently, many college grads develop a lifestyle that meets with their gross income, or maybe even a little more. If they are earning a gross income of \$22,000, their lifestyle rises to at least that level and in many cases beyond.

In the scenario described above, we now have an individual with a \$22,000 lifestyle and a \$19,000 net income. However, the adjusted net income after servicing the current credit card debt, which requires roughly \$2,800 per year, is only \$16,200 (\$19,000 net income minus the \$2,800 annualized minimum payments on the credit card debt.)

A \$22,000 lifestyle with a \$16,200 income creates a budget deficit of \$5,800 per year. Guess how the deficit is funded. The credit card company continues to increase the limit astonishingly parallel to the deficit requirement.

There is a deliberate and very sophisticated agenda to get people hooked into credit card debt early in their career, so they can spend the rest of their life giving a percentage of their income to these companies.

Year number two, the individual may have received a 10% pay raise, but the debt has increased by twenty-five percent. To fund the prior year's budget deficit, statistically, the individual borrows that \$5,800.00 from the credit card company, which the lender is delighted to make available. The budget deficit has grown and the credit card company has increased the spending limit to meet the deficit - *again!* The fact that the spending limit miraculously increases almost exactly parallel to the increasing deficit isn't a coincidence.

This scenario continues to age 29 where the goal of the credit card company is to own at least twenty-five percent of the individual's income, and no more easy credit line increases. By age forty-five, it doesn't even matter if the individual files a Chapter Seven bankruptcy. If they don't, the continued payments are all gravy.

Credit card marketing, particularly on college campuses, is as repugnant as the marketing of cigarettes to children of yesteryear.

According to Opinion Research Corporation International, "The credit card industry knows exactly what it is doing [in encouraging debt] while taking advantage of students who are trying to learn how to adjust to living away from home, often for the first time."

Robert Manning - Georgetown University is quoted, "...The unrestricted marketing of credit cards on college campuses is so aggressive that it now poses a greater threat than alcohol or sexually transmitted diseases. Typically, students slide into debt through the extension of unaffordable credit lines, increasing education-related expenses, peer pressure to spend, and financial naïveté reinforced by low minimum monthly payments and routine increases in credit."

Previous research has underestimated the extent of this debt and related problems, including suicides of indebted students. Studies also reveal how aggressive, seductive, and effective the marketing efforts of credit card issuers have become.

Financial planning today is different then it was even thirty-plus years ago. It is a different economy, and credit is so readily available that many people are spending in just a few years, decades into their income.

Why the long oratory regarding credit card debt? It is the number one malignancy that deters financial planning and causes financial demise. It is also among the leading causes of suicide among college students and young adults.

Although there are no studies as to whether credit card debt has any influence on recidivism, I would zealously argue that its effect is profound.

Money and finance encompass only one category of goals. However, it is an important category. Making a successful reintegration into mainstream society is fundamentally a function of economics.

Achieving financial independence through legitimate agendas is what fully removes the chains. It is only after I developed independence by earning an adequate living to pay my expenses and support myself that I fully reentered mainstream society. That is when I got out - not when the prison gates were opened. Making a successful reintegration into mainstream society is substantially a function of financial capabilities. It can be achieved if a person exercises patience and is willing to put forth the effort.

Throughout this book, I give observations and suggestions regarding financial planning and management, and I provide an overview of credit and debt, and the dramatic impact it has on an individual's future financial security.

The first financial goal of all individuals is to achieve and maintain zero credit card debt. Today, I live by the lost cultural concept when people saved and sacrificed to buy many of the things they wanted. Through this process, the gratification is far greater and deeper, and the appreciation is substantially enhanced. It engenders the gratification of conquering

challenges, slaying Dragons and achieving victory. From this foundation of zero credit card debt, financial planning and goal attainment can be extraordinarily robust.

Stimulated by impulse and the want of instant gratification, the credit card Dragon takes years to slay and generates astronomical sacrifices. Your paycheck comes in one envelope and is sent back out in twenty envelopes. Sans credit card debt, you get to keep most of your paycheck. This is definitely a Dragon to avoid, and if it is already pestering you in your life, it is one you need to slay.

Keep your lifestyle below your *net* income. If you already have debt, make the lifestyle sacrifices for a couple of years and get it reduced to zero. A couple of years sacrifice equates to a lifetime of freedom.

Alternative debt reducing options are discussed in this book. If your first question is “*where*” in this book are these debt reducing options discussed, you just confirmed your own affliction of the instant gratification syndrome that we are discussing. *Patience!* Read the book and you will find it. And, you might pick up some other valuable information during the journey.

Goals are achieved through a series of small steps. The concept of “*One-day-at-a-time*” works. We all want that instant gratification. The gratification will come - just be a little patient.

I became impatient during my aviation training because I compared myself at twenty-five to other students at my professional level who were in their teens. I also compared myself to other people who were my age, but much further ahead in their lives than I was in mine.

While I was teaching private pilot theory at the Parma City Schools Adult Evening Education Program, I met Ellie Reiff who became my partner and soul mate for many years.

Ellie had a fear of flying and thought that taking flying lessons would help to eliminate that fear. It worked. There is a big difference sitting in the back of an airplane with no control and sitting in the front, fully aware and in total control.

Ellie frequently commented about my drive to succeed and the fact that I spent an extraordinary amount of time working. “I lost a few years and need to make it up,” I would respond. I was on a steady sprint for many years, watching for, and seizing every opportunity that came along. I’m not sure when it was that I finally felt like I had made up for those lost years, but I’m sure I was well into my mid-thirties.

As I look back over my career, I can make a reasonable comparison of my progress to other's my age at various stages. I think I can accurately say that I was leading the pack when I compare myself to many other people my age, including other people who did not have a felony conviction.

Whether or not you have a felony conviction, if you want to arrive at the same destinations as I have, follow a path similar in principle to mine. No matter what your challenges or Dragons, you can achieve substantially the same results.

On a day-to-day basis, it never felt like I was making progress. Comparing where you are today to where you were yesterday does not generally reflect a noticeable contrast. Progress assessments need to be made over a longer period of time.

While I was Captain on a Learjet flying at 41,000 feet, there were many times that I thought about where I had been earlier in life. That comparison created a rather significant contrast.

It is important to understand that the substantial disparity between the person I was as a federal and state prisoner, versus the person I became as a Learjet Captain, was created by taking a whole lot of very small daily steps - steps that many times were imperceptibility small.

My crimes for which I was convicted were the result of impatience, impulsiveness and want of instant gratification. I believe that is the underlying motivation for many crimes.

At twenty years old, I wanted the lifestyle of people who were in their forties. I wanted to leap from my meager existence to the ivory tower. I wanted to impress my friends with my success, and I thought that my success would be evidenced by my many and expensive material possessions.

You can't cross a canyon with a single leap. When you try, you just end up falling into the gorge, which is a great deal further down from where you were before taking the leap. And then, you're also faced with the challenge of climbing back out before you can even think about moving forward again.

The single leap to the ivory tower, when I was young and naïve seemed to be a shorter path to financial freedom. With every attempted leap however, I only fell further behind.

The first attempted time-wasting leap was when I spent a couple of years pursuing a path that certainly had no redeeming value from an experience perspective. My criminal activities were not exactly what I would consider resume-building material. And of course, secondly, I crashed and burned, wasting a couple more years in prison.

Many people end up in prison because they want to take the shortest path. I fully encourage people to find the shortest path, provided however, that the chosen path is within the guidelines of legitimacy. Attempting to arrive at a destination through an agenda of illegitimate shortcuts will frequently result in a destination that is substantially less desirable than that which you may have envisioned.

Over the past thirty-plus years I have arrived at the ivory tower, but not by a single leap. I built single steps, one-day-at-a-time, and then just strolled up the steps. The destination was the same. However, as I have emphasized before, the journey was the most delicious part.

Although I take full responsibility for my activities during my early twenties and the resultant convictions, I wonder if those behaviors were in part attributable to *Baby Bull Syndrome* - a condition caused by an overabundance of hormones combined with a liberal measure of inexperience and naïveté.

Baby Bull Syndrome is best described with the following story.

One clear spring day, a herd of cows were grazing in a pasture of lush green grass. Two bulls, one older adult and his grandson, *Baby Bull*, were standing atop a hill, grazing on the fresh spring grass and looking down upon the valley of beautiful shapely cows.

As Grandpa Bull lazily reached down and pulled up a mouthful of the luscious vegetation, slowly chewing and gazing down at the pasture of cows, Baby Bull was running back and forth, jumping and hopping around his Grandpa, snorting and digging the ground with his front hooves, and lowering his head in the charging position.

Grandpa Bull, rolling his eyes, paid little attention to Baby Bull's antics until Baby Bull blurted out with excitement, "Come' on Grandpa, let's charge down this hill and fuck-us one of them cows!"

Continuing to chew his delicious moist cud, rolling his eyes and yawning, Grandpa Bull looked over at the energetic youth and calmly said, "No son, let's walk down this hill and fuck'em all."

Stop charging after the prize. Try the step-by-step approach. The destination will be achieved. *Walk down the hill.*



Chapter 19

YOU DO NOT BELIEVE IN YOURSELF. YOU DO NOT HAVE SELF-CONFIDENCE OR A HEALTHY SELF-IMAGE

If you feel anything like I felt when I was first released from prison, you do not believe that you represent any value, that you are capable of making a meaningful contribution to society, or that you are capable of achieving any recognizable accomplishments. You are beaten down, and perhaps you feel that only the most nefarious cultures will grant you admission. This is understandable and I have definitely been in that place. We will discuss the cure in the following paragraphs.

The way that you feel about yourself is projected to other people. If you are agitated, people will sense that. If you do not have a good self-image about yourself, people can sense that as well.

Making eye contact is critically important during conversation with people. If you find it difficult to make eye contact, look at the bridge of the person's nose. To them, it will appear that you are looking into their eyes and you will project much greater level of self-confidence. After a while, you will become more comfortable, and you will look into their eyes during conversation as opposed to the bridge of their nose.

Belief in yourself grows as you achieve goals. If you have been in prison, it is an experience that really beats you down. But, even in prison, you can set and achieve goals that will substantially contribute to enhancing and building a strong self-image. If you don't work toward achieving anything worthwhile, you will never really have a good feeling about yourself. Sure, you'll tell all of your friends that you are confident and feel good about yourself, but inwardly, you really don't. Let's keep our conversation here honest. How do you really feel about yourself and where you are in life? The good news is you can change.

There are several exercises that can help your self-image. First and foremost, it is important to envision yourself as the person you want to become, not the person you are, or the person you have been in the past. Forget about any perceived limitations. Who do you want to be? What professional and social circles do you want to be a part of? Who are the people that you want to be respected by?

I discussed culture in previous chapters. The culture in which you are a member is going to have a dramatic influence on what you will achieve in life. If you choose to interact with a group of people who are involved in criminal activity, then additional prison time will almost certainly be a part of your future. The sphere of influence we choose will substantially determine our destiny.

If your current sphere of influence is a group of people who are engaged in less than legitimate endeavors, it is possible that you will say that these are the people from whom you want respect.

If you had a time machine and could take a trip in the future, where do you suppose your friends and peers will be in ten, twenty or thirty years? Do you want to be along side them because they are your buddy's, or do you want to move forward, and in ten years look back to see that they are right where you left them.

When you make a choice to change and you begin to form a new peer group of people who are making positive advancements in their lives, you most definitely will begin to build a good self-image, and you will genuinely begin to feel good about yourself.

Through my first job after release, I met all new friends. These were people who were working toward goals. I expanded that network of progressive friends after I began attending Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C). I began to feel better about myself because I was earning the respect of people I respected.

While attending Tri-C, I met three friends with whom I had lunch every day. There was a certain chemistry that existed between us that literally always resulted in laughter. Not the shallow giggle kind of laughter, but the real rolling-on-the-floor, I need oxygen, nearly vomiting, horse-laughing variety where your sides and jaw start to hurt. We would have half of the people in the cafeteria laughing during the lunch hour. It was after one such session that I realized I had not laughed - real belly laughing - for years. I think I also realized that even though I was pretty much broke, I was also rich. To this day, I can tell you that money is a really poor barometer for measuring success. During my aviation career, and while a CEO, I've met hordes of very wealthy, but very miserable people.

If I had to identify what was the greatest single influence on repairing my tarnished self-image, self-confidence and belief in myself, it would probably be those three people, Sandra, Doug and Mike, and the laughter we shared. But, it was also clearly those small goals I was achieving each day, week and month that gave me back my self-worth.

I enjoy practical jokes, whether I am the victim or the perpetrator. When I was living with my Mom and Step Dad, we frequently played practical jokes on each other.

At twenty-five, my relationship with my folks had matured to a deep friendship, and we thoroughly enjoyed one another's company. After the enormous disappointment I gave my parents, (ya know, the going to prison thing), I think a substantial motivation to succeed was to hand them their dream they had for me - to become a productive and respectable contributor to society.

My folks enjoyed putting together jigsaw puzzles. When they would first start one of those 5,000 piece puzzles, I would occasionally amuse myself by hiding one piece, like in the light fixture directly above the table. A month later, after they painstakingly put together all of the pieces, I would listen to them rant and rave about how the game manufacturing company was the culprit responsible for missing a piece. Then I would reach up in the light fixture, hand them the piece and horselaugh.

My Step Dad, Ben and I were both smokers. I confess that I did frequently walk off with his cigarette lighter, which irritated him to no end.

When I was going to school for my aviation training, I developed a habit of getting up at 4:30 AM to study. I found that my comprehension was far greater in the morning as opposed to studying late at night.

Ben had bought a new Zippo lighter, which was sitting on the dinning room table where I was studying. I left for class early that morning before my folks woke up. I picked up the new Zippo lighter and left a note on the table, "*What Zippo Lighter?*" I was laughing so hard on my way to school I could barely drive.

When I returned home that afternoon, I got the full report from my Mom. Evidently, Ben spent the entire morning animated and referring to me with words and phrases that were less than flattering. For the entire hour and a half, and even while he was in the shower, he went on and on and on about the various medieval tortures I would face when he saw me next. It was all just figurative - Ben was an extraordinarily mild and gentle man.

As my Mom told me of the mornings' events, she was giddy. Ben was all worked up right to the time that he and my Mom opened the kitchen door to the attached garage.

Ben gave my Mom the customary kiss and turned on the garage lights. There, sitting on the top of his car directly above the driver's side door was his brand new Zippo lighter. It was a total *Gotcha*. Dinner that evening was

a riot, my Mom and I hysterical and Ben trying to hold back from laughing, unsuccessfully.

Laughter is an interesting phenomenon. It distracts you from worry, stress and depressing thoughts. Laughter can stimulate the release of chemicals by the brain and the pituitary gland, and may also stimulate the release of endorphins and enkephalins - natural painkillers that are chemical cousins to opiates such as morphine and heroin.

Laughter had a major influence on my start, or should I say my re-start, in life.

I would make three recommendations.

First, find friends with whom you have that chemistry where laughter just happens spontaneously. Don't be afraid to get a little silly. Second, read, *Laughter is the Best Medicine* - Bruce Lansky, or any of the several similar books that are available. If you can get yourself laughing, you will be amazed at the impact that can have on your future. Third, set and achieve small goals. That is what restores your self-worth. Your goals will become larger with time, and their attainment will become easier as you grow your self-confidence.



Chapter 20

PEEL OFF THE LABELS

I met a young lady during one of my presentations at an Ohio prison during the summer of 2004.

Donna was 22 years old and was recently released when she called me on the telephone. She said that she found my presentation inspirational and asked if I could find time to meet with her and help her with some directional issues.

We met for coffee and conversation. Donna had been out for about six weeks and was involved in several programs through a couple of the community organizations. She previously had some issues with drugs, primarily cocaine and crack. She had a six-month addiction prior to going to jail, but the one-year incarceration experience served to break her habit, and served as a powerful lesson.

Donna was in an alcohol treatment program through one of the faith based organizations. We had met for coffee a week or so after the 2004-2005 New Year. She explained that her sponsor and peers were coming down on her because she had more than a few drinks at a New Year's Eve party.

I asked Donna if she was an alcoholic. Without any hesitation, she immediately replied, "Yes, I am." I asked her if she had anything to drink after New Year's and she said that she hadn't. I asked if she had any craving for a drink the next morning and she had no craving at all.

Donna and I were sitting in a small restaurant that also had a bar. I said, "Donna, if we order a couple of drinks, how many more will you want after the first?" She shrugged her shoulders and said, "None."

I am not an expert on alcoholism and in fact, I have no expertise regarding the subject at all. However, it is my understanding that alcoholism is a disease where any ingestion of alcohol creates a physiological chemical imbalance in a person's system, and the need for additional alcohol is not a choice, but rather a necessity. Donna did not display the characteristics of an alcoholic, as I understood the condition.

I asked Donna why she believed that she is an alcoholic. "Because the psychiatrist said I am," she replied. "What psychiatrist?" I asked. "The one at the treatment center," Donna answered. I just said, "I see."

I asked Donna what other physical or psychological issues she believed she had that might create barriers to her moving forward in life. "Well, I have Attention Deficit Disorder and Hyper Activity Disorder," she replied.

Donna impressed me as a rather normal and articulate young lady. I asked Donna, "Who said you have Attention Deficit Disorder and Hyper Activity Disorder?" She thought for a minute and said, "I can't remember his name but he was a doctor that worked at my Junior High School." "Let me guess," I said. "They put you on Ritalin." Donna looked a little surprised that I had guessed correctly and said, "Yes, I was also on Prozac and Risperdal." I asked, "Why? Why were you on those medications?" Donna raised her eyebrows and said, "I really don't know - because the doctor said I should be on them."

I'm 57 years old. When I was in Junior High School, the authorities had remedies for Attention Deficit Disorder and Hyper Activity Disorder. It was called the *Principal's office*. That was also a time that the Principal had, and was permitted to use a paddle, with prior parental consent, which was a phone call away in my case. It is astonishing how my attention deficit and hyperactivity corrected after each of those numerous episodes with the Principal.

As I have said, I am no expert. I am not a psychologist, psychiatrist, medical doctor or behavioral counselor, and I profess to have a limited if any understanding of the various disorders for which children are frequently diagnosed and medicated.

I do find it interesting that as a society we have managed to raise children for centuries without pharmaceuticals designed to modify behavior, and we seem to have produced pretty good results. One might argue that having kids drugged up during adolescence has prevented them from engaging in crime. Unfortunately, the statistics would not support that assertion. Crime has increased.

I told Donna that I did not think she was an alcoholic. I have never heard of a case where an alcoholic could take just one drink and walk away. It appeared to me that someone who may have had something to gain by placing that label on her labeled her an alcoholic.

The psychiatrist who put the alcoholic label on Donna works for an agency that provides him with a paycheck. The agency receives its funding from various grant sources. The amount of its funding is dependent upon the number of alcoholics it is treating. The more people who have the alcoholic

label, the more abundant the funding and consequently, the more robust and secure the paycheck.

Maybe I'm just cynical, but Donna is not an alcoholic and was grossly misdiagnosed. We had a drink - as in one. I then spent the better part of the afternoon with her in what I would consider very engaging conversation. She displayed absolutely no anxiety or behavior that suggested that she wanted or needed another drink. I think we made great progress in removing numerous labels that had been attached to her over many years.

Why is it that so many children today, from elementary through high school, are put on pharmaceuticals? There are probably a couple of possible reasons.

1. There is a legitimate need when a student's behavior is not compatible with a learning environment. If a student genuinely has a clinical behavioral dysfunction, medication may be a necessary and valuable tool.
2. In some instances, a child's home environment may not incorporate a positive support structure. If a child's home environment is poor, the child may have a compulsion to act-out his or her frustration. I would argue that pharmaceuticals are a cop-out in such situations.

Children need positive role models and a child's first heroes should be his or her parents. If parents are not accountable and doing the work that is necessary to earn the admiration and respect of their children, they are certainly not going to engender esteem by pounding their fist and screaming real loud.

3. Unfortunately, our public school system has deteriorated substantially since the days I was a student. Many well-intentioned teachers have given up because of low pay and politics. I remember many of my guidance counselor's throughout my junior high and high school years. I didn't have a guidance counselor because I was singled-out. Every student was assigned to a guidance counselor. A guidance counselor was a person a student could talk with about almost anything.

I'm not sure what the access is to guidance counselor's today or how large the counselor's case load is. For a variety of reasons however, students are getting loaded up with pharmaceuticals. None of those behavioral modifying drugs were even invented when I was in school. Nevertheless, I think most of the people with whom I attended school were pretty normal kids.

Sure, there were kids who didn't have an attention span that was more than a few minutes and there were kids who were, what would be defined today, as hyperactive. Kids are full of energy because they are kids. And, if something does not captivate a kid's interest, their attention is going to drift - because they are kids.

I am sure that there are genuine cases where a kid needs medical treatment. However, when the number of students on behavioral modifying drugs can be measured as a left-of-the-decimal percentage, then something is terribly wrong.

4. I am aghast with the number of pharmaceutical television commercials and magazine ads that bombard the public every day. During a typical evening of channel surfing, I have counted as many as 32 commercials for prescription medications.

In recent years, the multibillion-dollar pharmaceutical companies market every conceivable ailment directly to the public and its magic pill to cure that disorder.

Prior to all of the advertising, pharmaceutical companies marketed strictly to doctors. The pharmaceutical companies provide doctors with a generous supply of samples and continue to romance many doctors with all expense paid seminars, which just happen to be held in some nice tropical paradise.

Today, people do not go to a doctor for an examination and diagnosis, but rather they already have their diagnosis and prognosis from a television commercial. People go to a doctor with their diagnosis and prognosis in hand, needing only a supply of magic pills.

As I said before, maybe I'm just cynical to infer that labels are put on people for the profit of the person or organization handing out the labels. Equally egregious, sometimes a person is labeled because an institution and its staff are politically handicapped or suffer from flagrant and systemic apathy.

Take an inventory of the labels that have been placed on you during your life. If you genuinely have a condition that requires medical and pharmaceutical treatment, then thank God for science. However, be brutally honest with yourself. Don't use a counterfeit condition as an excuse not to strive for a better life.

Labels can be dangerous. If a kid is told his whole adolescent life that he suffers from Attention Deficit Disorder, or any of the many other conditions whose genesis just happened to coincide with FDA approval of a magic pill, then that kid is eventually going to believe they have that condition - that label.

If you believe you have conditions and labels, take a close look at when the label was applied and by whom it was applied. Did the person labeling you have any ulterior motivations? Was that person's income somehow subject to the number of labels they applied?

Believing in yourself can be heavily weighted by who you believe you are, based upon the labels that other people have attached to you. Over many years, you may have come to believe that those labels are valid.

Peel off the labels.



Chapter 21

***YOU DO NOT KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN.
YOU FEEL OVERWHELMED WITH PROBLEMS.
YOU DO NOT KNOW WHERE TO TURN.
LIFE IS JUST A MESS***

Feeling overwhelmed - Preparing to Battle the Dragon

No matter who you are, no matter what you do, there are going to be times that you feel just completely overwhelmed. At times when it seems like your whole world is crashing in on you and your problems seem bigger than life itself, I've learned from experience that this is generally caused by two main factors.

The first and probably the most important cause of feeling overwhelmed is disorganization. The second factor is looking at a series of compounding problems as a single situation, without taking the time to dissect and analyze each issue individually.

When I get the feeling of being overwhelmed, that feeling that I'm simply dealing with more problems than I can handle, I immediately stop what I am doing, shut out the world, turn the phone off, get a bottle of Windex and a roll of paper towels, and I clean my office. No kidding. I really do this, even to this day.

From my experience, I've learned that the feeling of being overwhelmed generally has a great deal to do with organization. The Windex solution may seem like a very simplistic exercise, but it works. If you try this, I can assure you that afterward you will feel a great deal less overwhelmed. It's like giving your brain a shower.

Whether you have an office, a desk, a workshop, or simply your house or apartment, get a bottle of Windex and roll of paper towels, shut out the rest of the world and start cleaning and organizing.

My first step is to simply take everything lying on my desk and put it all in a pile. I then spray down my desk, my computer monitor, my phone, printers and fax machine with Windex and wipe everything clean. Now with nothing

on my desk and clean surfaces, I begin reviewing the stack of papers. One by one, I handle each situation individually. Each sheet gets compartmentalized and put in separate smaller stacks. Some things that need to be filed comprise a stack, and there are additional stacks for such things as issues requiring that I write a letter or, something that requires a response or telephone call. I either handle each issue immediately, or I put each piece of paper in a separate *to-do* stack.

After completing the review of the initial stack of paper, everything has either been filed, responses been made, or it has been placed in a new stack of issues requiring additional attention. Generally speaking, the new stack of issues requiring additional attention includes those problems that need resolution.

I examine each of these issues that require additional attention individually. I then categorize each issue by priority. At this juncture, although my problems have not been resolved, they are now organized and categorized in a manner in which they can be dealt with individually - as opposed to that sinking and overwhelming feeling of having multiple compounding problems hitting me all at the same time. If you want to resolve issues, you can't attack them all at once. You need to slice them into manageable tasks.

This exercise summarized in the preceding paragraph appears very simplistic. However, depending on how disorganized I allowed myself to become, this exercise can require anywhere from twenty minutes to four or even five hours to complete.

I want to emphasize that it is not relevant whether you have an office, workshop, an apartment or house to organize - it is simply your environment that needs to be well organized on a fairly frequent basis in order to confront, deal with, and solve problems.

If you do not correctly identify, confront and resolve problems, your forward progress will be next to impossible, because unresolved problems will generally only become exacerbated. It is hard to run if you're carrying an ever-increasing load of bricks.

Organization isn't a skill - it is a discipline. It is not difficult - it just requires some quiet time.

During my tenure as president and CEO of Fiber Network Solutions I spent a great deal of time teaching people of all ages how to identify, confront and resolve problems. I developed what appears to be a very simplistic three-step process. The acronym we used was ICR, which stands for the three steps necessary to resolve a problem; *Identify - Coordinate - Resolve*.

No matter whom you are, no matter what you do, every career, every job and life in general has issues and problems. And problems, no matter how big or small are like carrying around bags full of bricks - they just weight you down and hold you back.

Since everyone has problems, the one thing that separates those who move forward, from those who do not, is the ability to lose the bricks by practicing the discipline to identify problems and resolve them as expeditiously as possible. Once a problem has reached resolution, you are then freed from that burden to move forward to conquer the next problem or challenge.

To a great extent, the entire concept of setting and achieving goals involves identifying and conquering challenges. Why do so few people set and achieve goals? The reasons may be many however, the predominant factor is the lack of self discipline to take the time to organize, identify challenges and problems, categorize by priority, and develop a reasonable and workable plan of actions to address and resolve each of the problems.

As a business owner, I spent a great deal of my time dealing with compliance and legal issues. Consequently, I had a good deal of interaction with our numerous corporate attorneys.

There is one attorney who had started working with us during the very early stages of the company. Initially I thought that he was probably among the brightest people I knew, had a good legal mind, and potential to be a great attorney. However he frequently felt very overwhelmed.

As time went on, I had the occasion to visit this attorney at his office. I was genuinely shocked at the condition of his office, and most particularly his desk. His desk was literally stacked with paper and documents from edge to edge, probably over a foot deep in the center and sloping to the sides. Every other surface in his office, including the floor, was stacked with documents, folders and boxes. His office was a disaster.

I immediately took a detour from the topic that we were scheduled to discuss to talk to my attorney about his obvious lack of organization. I told him that it was impossible for him to be effective with any of his clients unless he was organized to the point that he was capable of locating documents and information upon request. He gave me the normal lame excuses that people generally give when they are disorganized. 1.) I have my own system of organization and I know where everything is, and; 2.) I just don't have good organizational skills.

My answer to the first point is simple. *Malarkey!* He didn't know where everything was and frequently lost or misplaced information and documents that were important to my company. As to the second point, I looked at him

and said, "If you don't have good organizational skills, I'll be happy to spend as much time with you as necessary to teach you how to use manila folders."

Organization is not a skill - it is a discipline. Seriously, how much skill does it take to keep documents in file folders, label folders, and put them in a filing cabinet in alphabetical order?

The condition of a person's environment, whether it is their personal, professional or work environment that is in disarray, is generally a sign of laziness, and an indication of a lack of self-discipline to do those things that they may not necessarily want or like to do, *called work*, but must do in order to reach for fulfillments and positive conclusions.

Over the following several months, there were several instances that this attorney had dropped the ball in important legal matters. There were also instances where he attempted to cut corners and engaged in over billing. I later learned that he provided legal assistance to several of our employees who were starting a business while still on my payroll, and he provided assistance to a couple of employees who breached the very non-competition agreement that this attorney authored.

He did not practice good organizational disciplines, which resulted in his inability to earn an adequate income legitimately. To compensate for his deficiencies, he chased after nickels and dimes, even if it created conflicts of interests and compromised the ethical cannons and disciplinary rules of his profession, not to mention his relationships with his clients.

It was apparent to me that this attorney would not embrace the simple concepts of organization, and in order for him to continue to achieve his desired lifestyle, he engaged in activities that were in conflict with the interest of his client and could likely be grounds for disbarment.

I genuinely liked this attorney as an individual and on a personal basis. However, as CEO of the company, it was my job and duty to make my decisions in the best interest of the company. I provided him with every opportunity to embrace concepts that would result in him providing better and more competent legal service - not only to my company, but also to all of his other clients. As the old adage goes, "*You can't teach a pig how to sing.*" When you try, it just gets you frustrated and the pig gets angry. I simply allowed the relationship to drift.

What is the consequence of not solving problems? Unsolved problems will certainly impede progress in achieving goals. However, despite whether a person is or is not organized, everyone shares the fundamental desire to attain a comfortable lifestyle.

A comfortable lifestyle incorporates such elements as financial security, which provides a comfortable place to live, food, clothing and transportation. Many other things help to define the quality of our lifestyle, which include having time to pursue our own personal interests, the recognition of achievement from friends and peer-group, and earning respect with co-workers, employers, and within our community.

Achieving an acceptable lifestyle and maintaining that lifestyle can be accomplished by setting its attainment as a deliberate goal, then conquering any challenges and solving any problems that may impede or stand in the way of your goal's fulfillment.

People who do not take this disciplined approach to organization and problem solving still have the same desire for a comfortable lifestyle. However, without the practice of organizational discipline, people frequently attempt to cut corners in their attempt to achieve the desired results.

People attempt to achieve the same ultimate objectives that would otherwise be achieved through the simple practice of organizational discipline. With good organizational discipline, an individual is well equipped to engage in the process of setting goals, and then solving the problems and conquering the challenges and obstacles that arise while striving to attain those goals. You can't circumvent the natural process. I tried that option - *remember?*

I firmly believe that a good deal of criminal activity is precipitated by people who simply want to attain a comfortable lifestyle as described above, but do not know or understand the process to attain the same goal through legitimate activities. They may lack the discipline and intestinal fortitude to face and conquer the challenges necessary to achieve their goals, or as in the case of my aforementioned attorney, some people are just lazy.

If you want to achieve anything in life, it starts with a dream. An individual's dreams might include a new car, a new house, wanting to help friends and family financially, getting a raise or promotion, taking a vacation, getting a motorcycle or any of the other many toys that are available, having enough money to go out to dinner on a frequent basis, and having enough financial security to be able to take time off to pursue personal interests and hobbies. It all starts with the desire. Goals start with a dream.

Setting a goal is simply taking a dream and determining the date that you will achieve that goal. A goal is simply a dream with a date on it.

For this discussion I simply want to emphasize that it is paramount to understand that while striving toward the attainment of any goal, there are going to be Dragons to slay, there are going to be challenges that must be conquered, there are going to be problems that must be solved, and there will

be obstacles that necessarily must be addressed and resolved in order to continue moving toward the achievement of the goal.

If an individual expects to set a goal and somehow the end result will miraculously materialize - without effort, work, sacrifice, pain, frustration, setbacks, challenges and problems, then their first goal should be to rent a U-Haul and *move away* from Fantasy Land. If an individual believes that the attainment of a goal will *just happen*, then they really are living in Fantasy Land.

Achieving any goal requires a warrior mentality. You have to be willing and prepared to hunt and slay the Dragon. You must maintain the mentality and discipline that you will conquer whatever challenges arise and emerge victorious. Each time you do that, you will have moved that much closer to the goal. But, keep in mind that you are not going to slay any Dragons if you aren't well organized.

Assuming that you understand the necessity for problem resolution as a fundamental component to achieve goals, and quite frankly, just to live life, then embrace the following three step process, practice it, and make it an integral part of your discipline.

IDENTIFY - COORDINATE - RESOLVE

The first step to solving a problem is you must identify the problem. Generally speaking, when a problem exists you only see the symptoms of the problem, but not the problem itself. This is why large corporations and government bureaucracies frequently *fund* problems as opposed to *solving* them. They treat symptoms as opposed to identifying and solving the problems that create the symptoms. They throw money at the symptoms, hoping that will solve the problem.

It is simply not possible to solve a problem unless the root core of the problem has been identified. And, it is imperative to understand that treating symptoms will almost never resolve a problem. When a problem exists, what jumps up and slaps you in the face are the symptoms, not the problem itself.

Here is a small example. You're sitting at home, enjoying a delicious dinner of Oscar Mayer wieners, peanut butter crackers and macaroni & cheese, quietly humming the Oscar Mayer theme melody when suddenly, your entire house begins to fill with thick acrid smoke. What's the problem? It is probably safe to conclude that where there is smoke there is fire, and most of us would likely conclude that the house is on fire.

Having believed that we have *identified* the problem, the next step is to *coordinate* all of the available resources necessary to address the problem. Aside from turning on your garden hose, other resources would include a call to 911 or the local fire department, and coordinating their resources to address the problem.

You explain to the fire department your problem - you have identified that your house is on fire. Multiple fire trucks arrive at your home, immediately start unrolling fire hoses, connecting them to fire hydrants and firemen begin trampling in, breaking your windows and filling your house with water. After several minutes and several thousand gallons of water sprayed throughout your house, the smoke in your house only continues to worsen.

It turns out that your house was not on fire at all. It was your neighbor's house that was on fire and smoke was blowing into your house through the open windows.

The problem was not a fire in your house, but rather, the problem was a fire in your neighbor's house. The *coordination* step was pretty good. However, it did not treat the problem. It only attempted to treat the symptoms. The consequence of incorrectly *identifying* the core problem and only treating symptoms was substantial destruction to two houses instead of one - one by fire, and the other by water.

Treating symptoms is easy. Symptoms are obvious and apparent. Treating problems is a good deal more difficult. It requires a very deliberate examination of the symptoms and a focus and digging down to determine what the problem is that is actually causing the symptoms.

Once a core problem is correctly identified and the necessary resources are coordinated to address the problem, solutions can be considered, and a clear plan can be developed, implemented and executed upon to achieve *resolve*.

The feeling of being overwhelmed as we discussed before can also be caused from the bombardment of a multitude of symptoms resulting from one or more problems. Again, organization is the key to identifying the underlying problems that are causing the symptoms. So, the first step is to organize so that you are able to examine the undesirable symptoms you're experiencing toward identifying the problem or problems that are causing these symptoms.

Money, or the lack thereof, certainly seems to be one of the most predominant contributors to many problems. If money appears to be one of the core problems that you are dealing with, then it is important to gain an understanding regarding credit, budgeting, and managing personal finances.

I've worked with a number of people who had problems with creditors. After formulating a budget, the problem did not turn out to be a lack of money, but

rather, mismanagement of money. People with financial challenges had adequate money to pay all of their bills, but without a budget, they had no way of monitoring where their money was going and how much had to be set aside for upcoming bills and expenses.

When formulating a budget, it is important to include every expense that you have. It is important to tailor a budget to your personal situation. One of the best ways to do that is to simply go through your checkbook register for the past year, or if you don't have a checkbook, go through past bills that you've paid over the past year. Just make sure that you're not missing something that needs to be in the budget.

Another issue that I found many people face is that their budget does not coincide with their income stream. Most people, and even financial counselors, formulate a monthly budget. A monthly budget is effective if you are paid once a month. However, if you are paid once a week, once every two weeks, or twice a month, then a monthly budget becomes very difficult to follow.

For example, assume you are paying rent of \$400 a month. Then assume your monthly electric, gas and telephone bills total \$75. Assume groceries cost you \$50 a week. Let's assume that your net take-home income is \$2,000 a month and you are paid once a week. There are 4.3 weeks in each month on average, or you can calculate 52 paychecks a year. Therefore, your weekly take-home pay in this scenario would be approximately \$465.12 ($\$2,000 / 4.3 = \465.12). You need to be on a weekly - not a monthly budget.

If you try to follow a monthly budget when you are paid weekly, you're trying to fit a square peg in a round hole. You might find yourself on the first of the month with inadequate money, but with the rent due, utilities due, and bare cupboards. This is the scenario many people face each month - they have more month than they have money. It doesn't have to be that way. You simply need to budget on the same schedule or frequency that you are paid.

If you had not set aside money for your rent, utilities, and groceries out of each weekly paycheck throughout the month, when the first of the month arrives, you will have one weekly paycheck that would not be enough to pay your rent and utilities, let alone enough to buy groceries.

If you were paid once a week as in the above example, out of each paycheck, you would set aside \$93.02 for your rent, \$17.44 for utilities and \$50 for groceries. Under this scenario, after receiving a check on the first of the month, you would have set aside enough money throughout the month to pay your bills, and you would have \$239.54 left over from each weekly paycheck.

The example above is very simplistic, and I certainly understand that most everyone has more monthly expenses than rent, utilities and groceries. The

point that I'd like to emphasize is that your budget needs to coincide and cash flow with your paycheck frequency.

A budget that directly matches the frequency of income will give you a guide of how much money you need to set aside out of each of your paychecks so that you have the cash required to pay your bills that only come on a monthly basis.

If you are paid twice a month, then make a budget that sets aside half of your monthly expenses from each paycheck. If you are paid once a week, you need to set aside roughly 1/4 of your monthly expenses from each paycheck. If you do this simple exercise, you will find that budgeting is a very simple and painless process. You will also be able to start a savings account. Your savings deposit simply becomes another line item in your budget, whether weekly, semi-monthly or monthly.

I spoke with one individual who took my paycheck frequency budget a step further. He funded his full monthly budget by putting away one third of all monthly expenses from three of the four weekly paychecks he received each month. His forth weekly paycheck each month was total discretionary income to do with as he pleased. Sometimes he saved it, but other times it was just used for mad money.

Money is just one of a multitude of other issues that can cause problems. Interaction with other people, co-workers, supervisors, etc., can create stress and anxiety, which can also cause a focus diversion. If your focus is diverted to your various problems, it can also affect your work performance and even affect your interpersonal relationships. People tend to focus on their problems as opposed to focusing on the solutions.

You will always get what you focus on. If you focus on problems, as many people do, then you will continue to have problems. Problems aren't going to solve themselves. If you identify problems, and then *focus on the solutions*, your results are going to be much more beneficial.

If you identify that one of your problems is your interaction with co-workers or supervisors, it is imperative to confront the problem head on.

You should approach that person with whom you feel there may be a conflict in a very diplomatic way and ask them if they can find time to meet for a cup of coffee and talk.

Always keep in mind that you will catch more bees with honey than with vinegar. The approach in these kinds of conversations should always be to sincerely explain what you're feeling - that your feeling hurt and that you want to do what ever is necessary so that your relationship with this person can grow into a good relationship.

Another important element in these situations is timing. The timing needs to be right. These are not situations you want to approach when the other party has their hands full of their own issues.

I became very good at diplomacy and still have a high success rate in taking difficult relationships and making them great relationships.

I owe most of my diplomatic skills to one single book. *"How to Win Friends and Influence People"* by, Dale Carnegie. This book is a time-tested classic, and it could be the most important book you ever read. It definitely was for me.

There are those relationships that can never be productive, or from which you can never derive value. By taking the diplomatic approach, you then learn whether the relationship has positive potential, or if it is effectively a barrier to your progress. Either way, I cannot overemphasize the benefit you will receive by reading, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.

The last time I approached my boss at the flight school and asked him to either compensate me for babysitting his flight school, or release that time back to me, his answer was, "Koch, flight instructors are a dime a dozen." That was when I gave him a nickel and said, "Good, here buy six."

The relationship between my boss and I could not evolve to meet my changing needs. It reached a point where it was a hindrance to my forward progress. Nevertheless, I gave my boss the option of continuing the relationship under conditions that reasonably met our mutual requirements. I took the diplomatic approach and my boss's response made my decision for me.

Once you have accurately identified the core problem causing the undesirable symptoms that you are experiencing, the next step is to coordinate the resources and possible solutions that will address the problem.

I developed the step-by-step problem resolution process when I was President & CEO of Fiber Network Solutions.

Just as I truly learned to fly when I was a flight instructor, I internalized the process of problem resolution when the need arose to teach it to others. Sure, I could fly before I became a flight instructor - I had a commercial pilot certificate and instrument rating. I solved problems before I developed the process of problem resolution, but teaching any material gives you a deep internalization of the subject.

I will offer the following real-life example.

When my company was founded, we developed procedures, systems and automation that we believed were scalable to handle a fair amount of growth. Those systems were scalable. However, we grew faster than we initially anticipated.

The company was in its fourth year of operation and its engineering department had outgrown its operational technology, processes, software and systems. I was not aware that this problem existed. The symptoms that jumped up and slapped me in the face were customer complaints, service cancellations and unhappy employees.

As I searched for the underlying problem that was creating these undesirable symptoms, I discovered that our Network Operations Center (NOC) had become ineffective, was not providing good customer service, and for all intents and purposes, the department was operating like a perpetual fire drill. It was not necessarily the fault of the employees rather, they did not have the tools necessary to operate and perform efficiently and effectively.

Our Network Operations Center was a 10,000 sq. ft. facility with rows of computer consoles facing a twenty-four foot high wall covered with projection screens that displayed all the various parameters of our national Internet network backbone. At the time, the NOC had a staff of approximately 20 engineers and technicians, all of whom were constantly addressing problems that had escalated to emergency status, primarily because those problems had not been identified and resolved at their genesis.

I should emphasize that the initial indications were not the problems themselves. What I saw were the symptoms of a problem. The symptoms that caught my attention were unhappy customers, unhappy and frustrated employees, and a working atmosphere where people appeared to be constantly overwhelmed from the moment they arrived at work until the moment they left. It was a real goat roping.

I scheduled a series of daily meetings with the entire engineering department. I told the engineers and technicians that their goal was to become the *Maytag Repairman* - the analogy being that their department should run so smoothly and our services become so bulletproof, that they are just sitting around bored with their job. If you're under 40, you might not appreciate the Maytag Repairman analogy, which comes from the Maytag advertising campaigns of a few decades ago.

Through the daily meetings and discussions, we were able to examine symptoms and identify the problems that were causing the symptoms. I told the engineering staff that the ultimate goal of becoming Maytag Repairmen encompassed identifying the problems, implementing solutions, executing on those solutions and streamlining operations to the point that everything ran

so effectively and efficiently that the most difficult challenge of their job would be boredom. We needed to completely overhaul and redesign our automated systems, processes and computer software.

I asked each of the engineers and technicians to identify the six biggest problems that were facing the department. After we identified the six biggest problems facing the department, we examined each problem individually.

As we had accurately identified some of the major and core problems, I asked each of the engineers to think of six possible solutions for each individual problem that we could implement and execute upon to resolve each of the problems.

The engineers and technicians were asked not to discuss these possible solutions amongst each other until we were gathered together at the next day's meeting.

At the next meeting, I would have each of the engineers read their six suggested solutions for each of the problems that we had identified, which were listed on a marker board. Many of the engineers came up with the same, or very similar solutions. Those ideas that were duplicated by two or more of the engineers were prioritized and the six solutions' list was formed that would become the initial focus toward resolving each of the problems.

Through our process of identifying problems and implementing solutions, we determined that our trouble ticketing system was completely out of date and ineffective. We identified that technicians and engineers became so busy putting out fires, they never bothered to call the customer to either provide the customer with an update on their trouble ticket, or to advise the customer that the problem had been resolved.

Frequently, a customer issue would be resolved, but the customer was never notified. Consequently, the customer did not know if we fixed the problem, or if the problem fixed itself, which left the customer wondering if it would reoccur. This caused customers to have a depleted confidence in our services, which was really bad since most of our customers used our services for mission critical applications.

At subsequent meetings, we would review the progress of resolving previously identified problems and whether or not the six possible solutions for each problem were proving effective. If the possible solutions were resolving the problem, we continued with those solutions until the problem was completely resolved. If the solutions were not effective, we developed a new list of six possible solutions for that particular problem.

As solutions were developed and implemented for each of these six biggest problems, we again developed a new list of the six biggest problems facing the

department. As one problem was resolved, we added a new problem to the list, thereby keeping a constant and dynamic list of the six biggest problems facing the department. For each problem, we developed a list of six possible solutions and worked those solutions until the problem was resolved.

We continued with this exercise of identifying our six-pack of problems, and developing and implementing solutions until we could not identify any more problems in the department.

I vividly recall the meeting when we simply could not identify six big problems. People almost seemed disappointed. The biggest problem we faced was the company managing our soda machines did not deliver enough Mountain Dew.

Several months later, I recall one afternoon sitting out in front of our facility where we had tables and chairs set up as a break area. I saw Brian, one of our engineers speed off in his car, swerving and tires squealing. This was completely out of character for this individual (*a behavioral aberration*). He was probably among the most no-drama, mild-mannered and amenable individuals working at the company.

Later that afternoon, Brian had returned and came into my office. As he sat down it was evident that he was agitated. I asked what was on his mind. Brian began to explain that he was frustrated, he was irritated, he had a disagreement with his manager, and he wasn't sure if he wanted to continue working for the company.

Brian's confrontation with his manager pertained to his biggest frustration. He was bored, he felt he wasn't making any progress, and he didn't enjoy his job because there was nothing to do. His manager unfortunately had not set new and progressive goals for the department.

There was probably a minute of silence, and then I said very calmly, "Brian, do you remember what your ultimate goal was several months ago?" It probably took ten or fifteen seconds and I could see the wheels turning as Brian was thinking. Suddenly like a light bulb coming on, I could see his face light up. A big smile came across his face and he looked at me and said, "I'm the Maytag repairman." "That's correct Brian," I said. "And, I congratulate you for having achieved such a monumental goal. You should be very proud yourself." I went on to further explain that he shouldn't be feeling frustrated or agitated - he just achieved the goal and he didn't even realize that he had achieved it.

This example epitomizes the concept of: Take a dream - create a plan to achieve that dream - set an attainment date which makes the dream a goal - forget the goal and just work the plan. Focus on the plan and the goal will be

achieved. As stated previously, identify a problem, find the solution and focus on the solution - not on the problem.

Another example of achieving a goal without really realizing that it had been realized occurred during the summer of 1999. I had revised the company's business plan and financial projections the previous year during June 1998, and provided copies to our lenders.

The company was reaching the close of its second quarter in June 1999. I was chairing a staff meeting with our senior managers, during which I was bellyaching that we were not achieving the growth that I wanted. I was impatient. Kyle left the meeting and returned a few minutes later with a copy of the business plan revision I had produced a year prior.

As the meeting continued, Kyle was comparing the financial projections from the revised business plan produced a year prior with our actual current financial statements.

I was thoroughly amazed. Our actual financial statements were within 7% of the projections. And, we were on the positive side - we exceeded the projections by roughly 7.5 %.

I had achieved the goal almost exactly as I had planned and didn't even realize it. I stopped sucking my thumb, apologized and offered everyone my congratulations.

Immediately after the meeting, I called all of our banks and lenders and asked them to make the same comparison between the projections I had provided to them a year prior and our actual current financial statements.

Naturally, I was gloating. Within only a couple of weeks, the lenders were drilling my kneecaps to lend us more money. They all had a nice warm fuzzy feeling because we had proven that our financial projections were extremely reliable, and equally important, we achieved our stated goals.

Set the goal, create the plan, forget about the goal and focus on the plan. The same is true for solving problems. Identify the problem, develop solutions and focus on the solution - not on the problem.

After achieving every goal, it is important is to set new goals. The goals that were achieved by Brian and his department took several months, and it was a period when everyone was busy and focused on solving a multitude of problems. Their focus was not however on the problems - their focus was on the solutions. The problems had been resolved and the ultimate goal had been achieved.

The fact that Brian had completely forgotten about the goal did not surprise me. Goals that are properly set with a realistic plan generally come and go, having been achieved without a great deal of recognition or celebration.

When setting goals, you must develop a realistic plan that includes the tasks and events that are necessary to complete in order to achieve the goal. These tasks and events are then broken down to monthly weekly and, most importantly, daily tasks and events. Once broken-down to daily tasks, then you simply work the plan. Forget about the goal and focus on working the plan. Eventually the goal is achieved, many times without even realizing how close you were to the finish line, or that in fact you actually crossed it.

For many years I dreamt of being a part of a management team that achieved recognition on the *Inc 500 List* of America's fastest growing companies. Aside from having that distinction on my resume, I thought that it would be an awesome journey to work with a team that achieved such a lofty goal. Achieving recognition on the *Inc 500 List* was among the initial goals I set for my company during its inception in 1995.

During October 2001, I was reading my mail in my office. I opened a large envelope and inside was a letter congratulating me as CEO of the 68th fastest growing company in America. We made the top 13 percent on the *Inc 500 List*, and not only was I a part of the team, I was the President & CEO. Once again, I was focused on working the plan and the goal was realized without having even thought about it for years.

In summary, whenever you are feeling overwhelmed remember the simple four-step process.

1. Get organized. Take the time to clean and organize your work area, your home, apartment, or office. This is a critical function because it will allow you to separate what appears to be a single monumental and unsolvable problem into much smaller manageable and solvable issues.
2. Examine each issue that you're facing. Understand and remember that problems don't generally identify themselves. What you generally see are the symptoms resulting from a problem. Examine the symptoms and accurately *identify* the core problem that is creating the symptoms.

Among the most difficult challenges of this exercise is that you must be brutally honest with yourself. Many times, in fact in a majority of instances, we individually cause our own problems, at least in some part. Never be afraid to admit that a problem may be the result of our failure to do, or not to do, a specific task, or that the problem is rooted in a specific behavior that we may need to examine and modify.

3. Coordinate the available resources and solutions necessary to address each problem. I recommend listing on paper six possible solutions, tasks, events and activities to address each of the individual problems or challenges.

Create a plan with monthly and weekly milestones, and daily tasks for each of the six possible solutions. Do something each day. Perform one or multiple tasks each day that pertain to each of the six possible solutions for each of the problems you have identified. Your plan must be in writing, and I highly recommend the use of a day planner, which can be purchased very inexpensively at any office supply store.

4. Continue working your plan until each individual problem achieves or reaches resolve. The problem is then checked off and you are ready to face new challenges. Continue repeating the process for each challenge you face and you will be astounded at the forward progress you will make both in your personal and your professional life. With the resolution of each problem, you will move that much closer to the fulfillment of a goal.

Get organized. Then, *identify, coordinate, and resolve* your problems and challenges individually, and then move on to the next.

Remember this:

You will always get what you focus on. *Do not focus on your problems.*
Develop a plan to resolve your problems and *focus on the solutions.*



Chapter 22

YOU ARE DEALING WITH INCREDIBLE ANGER, WHICH IS FREQUENTLY ACCOMPANIED BY PERIODS OF DEEP DEPRESSION.

There is a real contrast between federal and state time - at least there was in my case. After serving a couple of years in a federal institution, I still owed the state some time. That was a real culture shock. After completing my federal sentence, I was dumped in the old Mansfield Reformatory that has since been closed and turned into a museum.

I felt like all of the rehabilitation I had achieved during my federal time was for naught. Mansfield was almost surreal. Hollywood could not possibly create a more atrocious environment than that which existed at Mansfield. The cell floor had a half inch thick - black, gooey 100 year coating of God knows what. As soon as the lights went out, the cockroaches literally covered the walls, ceiling and floor of my cell. We only got out of our cells for meals each day, and a shower once a week. As for the meals, the food was not edible.

After spending several months in Mansfield, I was transferred to the Ohio Penitentiary in Columbus, Ohio, which has also since been closed and subsequently razed.

At the conclusion of my federal time, I felt that I was ready to reenter the community and pursue a positive direction. The state time had a very debilitating effect. When I was granted parole and released, I was full of anger and rage. I would wake up in the morning depressed, and rather than have much motivation to move forward, I found myself consumed with anger. I was just pissed-off at the world.

I had my first appointment with my parole officer, Janice Merrill. Ms. Merrill was an attractive and intelligent lady in her middle twenties. She had a mild personality and genuinely seemed to want to help. During that first meeting, she went over the rules and what her expectations were. We also discussed several optional directions that I could pursue, which included going to school. Since I had no money for college, I thought that going to school was a pretty unrealistic option. Ms. Merrill gave me the names and telephone numbers for several people who would allegedly provide me with

some assistance. Without having much expectation, I made the calls and set appointments.

My first appointment was with an employment counselor who worked at the Ohio Department of Employment Services. After talking for a half an hour, he gave me a few leads and suggested that I simply canvas industrial and office parks, filling out applications and dropping off resumes. The leads didn't amount to much, but I did spend my days visiting companies in industrial parks and office complexes. While I was out looking, I stumbled across that first job at the flight school.

The second person that my parole officer had referred me to was an education counselor. I wish I could remember her name however, thirty-plus years seems to have eroded (or corroded) my steel-trap memory. The appointment was set for about a month after I had been released.

I arrived for the scheduled meeting and met with a lady who appeared to be in her late fifties. Her office was crowded and there was a rack of small tri-fold educational brochures within arm's reach of where I was sitting. She had taken a telephone call and I was looking at the rack of brochures, noticing the course descriptions on the front of each; Accounting, Business, Marketing, Nursing, etc.

After she completed her telephone call, we began discussing the possibility of going to school. I explained that I had no money for school to which she replied with a list of possibilities that included grants, scholarships and student loans.

On the rack of educational brochures was one that had a drawing of an airplane and the caption, "Aviation Technologies - Associates Degree Program." The lady asked me what I want to do with my future. My answer was diplomatic, but deliberately acrimonious and probably deep down, I had hoped that she would say that her agency could not help me. I was looking for any excuse so I would feel justified in saying that the system doesn't work.

I picked up the aviation brochure from the rack, slid it in front of her and said, "I want to be a pilot." I fully expected that the meeting would end quickly with her telling me that becoming a pilot ranked among the remotest of possibilities. Instead, without even batting an eye, she said, "Okay that sounds fine. Let's get started on the process."

I was almost resistant. Even if she believed that there was some possibility of me becoming a pilot, I certainly didn't believe it was possible. But, I went along with it, wondering when the barriers would present themselves and bring this fantasy to an abrupt end.

We filled out a host of paperwork and discussed my enrollment in the aviation technology program at Cuyahoga Community College. After completing a half an hour worth of forms, she sent me on my way with a list of names and agencies I needed to contact.

As instructed, I made an appointment with the Ohio Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation. When I arrived, Jim Grieves greeted me who was assigned as my caseworker. We discussed my interest in aviation. Jim went over the process of securing grants to help pay for college tuition and flight training.

The process of securing grants and loans was lengthy and would involve meeting with a couple dozen other people and agencies. He was looking for my commitment that, if he put in all of the work and effort, I would do all that is expected of me, keep all of my appointments and follow through with the process. He was right, it was long and tedious, and there was no promise or guarantee that it would result in anything.

I met with at least a few dozen other agencies. Some organizations provided a little additional assistance and some could not provide any. After several months of daily appointments, a whole package of scholarships, grants and student loans had been put together that paid my tuition, books, gave me a little money to assist with living expenses, and paid for my flight training - for one academic quarter. Subsequent scholarships, grants and student loans would be based upon my performance for that first quarter.

In all, the process took several months and indeed, it was a lot of work and a lot of stress. I had operated for months on faith alone that all of my work and effort would amount to something. And, by now, I had taken that job cutting grass and washing airplanes at the flight school. I was working hard, both at the flight school, and putting together the plan and package to go to school. I clearly had my doubts if the plan would ever really come together, but I hung onto that hope.

On December 24, 1980 (*Christmas Eve*) at 6:00 PM, the phone rang. It was Jim Grieves. He just said, "You are starting school in January - Merry Christmas." It was a bit of a climatic and emotional moment. A few weeks later, I began flight training and attending Cuyahoga Community College.

What is interesting is that the majority of my anger had diminished. I didn't really even realize that it was subsiding. I had been busy - starting my new job, visiting with a multitude of agencies and counselors, working toward the goal of going to school and then finally finding myself in college and learning to fly.

The reason I wasn't angry anymore was because I diluted it with positive goals and activities. I was anything but depressed - I was on top of the world.

My time was occupied and I wasn't sitting around festering about the past but rather, I was focused on the future.

Yes, it was a leap of faith. I didn't believe that all of my activity would actually result in securing the package that would send me to school. But, it was the process of trying that kept me busy. The anger just evaporated during the process.

If you're angry, you are probably angry about the past - not about the future. When I stopped dwelling on the past and focused on my future, the anger evaporated.

Set some immediate goals, create a plan and focus on the solution - not on the problem. Dilute the negative past with work toward positive possibilities for your future. Occupy your time with productive and wholesome activities. Work toward something constructive and just dilute the negative with positive possibilities.



Chapter 23

YOU HAVE NO DEFINITIVENESS OF PURPOSE

More on Definitiveness of Purpose, because it was, and continues to be, so critically important to my achievements, and it will be to yours as well.

Passion and definitiveness of purpose are interchangeable. One can create the other. Both passion and definitiveness of purpose are critically important to achieving any measurement of success. I have discovered several passions during the past thirty-plus years, many which became my definitiveness of purpose.

Simply beating the recidivism odds was a definitiveness of purpose. Aviation and learning to fly became a passion, and that passion facilitated the fulfillment of my definitiveness of purpose to beat the recidivism odds. It also fulfilled several other purposes that were important to me at the time.

For example, I earned the respect of those people I respected. I developed a whole new sphere of influence and peer group of people who were striving to achieve their goals. I was working and acquiring an education. I strived to do the best job I possibly could so I would earn promotions, and I maintained a 4.0 GPA in my Aviation major with a 3.92 GPA overall. Keep in mind that I pretty much mentally dropped out of school in about the 7th or 8th grade, a few years after my natural Father died.

Every time I achieved a small goal, it fueled the burn to continue striving for even greater achievements. These principles have followed me throughout my career.

Having been released on parole in 1980, I was quickly attracted to the growing market for personal computers and software. Computers and software became a passion, which later developed into an additional profession that generated income. I learned several programming languages and wrote custom database software applications. More importantly, I simply became very comfortable with using a personal computer as a tool to facilitate the fulfillment of a multitude of projects. I wrote the first edition of this book using a personal computer and Microsoft Word. This current edition is being written using a Mac, but still using Microsoft Word. I still have the passion for computers and technology.

Early in 1990, I made the last payment on my 1987 Chrysler LeBaron, which I had purchased new when I moved to Columbus. The car was in great shape, so I had no reason to trade it in only to have a new car payment. Now I had a little extra discretionary income, and I had no debt, which almost seemed un-American.

I thought about how much I enjoyed motorcycles when I was a kid. At 34 years old, I questioned whether I wanted a motorcycle because I would genuinely enjoy it, or because I was one of those guys bumping 35 who somehow thinks that buying a new Corvette would make them look eighteen again. In reality, those guys look like 35 year-olds trying to look eighteen. It's amusing.

Rather than buy the full-size Harley-Davidson, I bought a Sportster 883. In one year, I rode a little over 20,000 miles. I felt pretty comfortable that my rationale for owning a motorcycle was that I genuinely enjoyed ridding it as opposed to spending money to address some unconscious mid-life crisis. I traded it for a new Harley-Davidson Low Rider the following year.

I just sold my 2001 Harley-Davidson Wide Glide that I bought new in October 2000. I rode that bike roughly 100,000 miles. I have been coast-to-coast, and from the northern border of the United States to the southern border.

After selling my company first quarter 2003, all I did was ride my Harley and play with my dog until the weather started to cool down in November.

Riding is among my greatest passions. Does my passion for ridding my Harley fulfill any definitiveness of purpose? Yes, it does satisfy a couple of purposes. Ridding provides a certain mind clearing therapy. Aside from the genuine enjoyment of ridding, it also facilitates a great social interaction with other people who ride. It may not be a professional need, but balance is important in life. For me, it provides balance.

1993 to 1995 were a couple of rough years. I had been fired from a flying position as a Learjet captain for refusing to compromise safety, exceed the legal duty time regulations, fudge paperwork, and fly aircraft that were in disrepair. Those were valid reasons however, a contributing factor to my demise was that I had also become somewhat of a crusader among my co-workers, which made me a thorn in the side of the company managers.

Frankly, the crusader thing was a mistake. I would never again let myself become involved with a bunch of disgruntled employees who all say that they will be there when I need them to stand up for what is right. People are quick to sit in the cheerleading section while someone else takes the heat. But, when it comes time for the rubber to meet the road and for them to put up, they disappear. Even the one person who I thought was my best friend,

greatest advocate and mentor abandoned me because it wasn't in his interest politically to show his support.

I have experienced the disgruntled employee syndrome both as an employee and as an employer. Carrying the baggage of other disgruntled co-workers is a losing proposition. As an employee, it contributed to a setback that took a couple of years from which to recover. As an employer, I saw employees learn some powerful and expensive lessons by following a former disgruntled sales manager and network manager to their demise.

During the period that I was unemployed, my Mom became ill. She had several previous battles with cancer from which she made full recoveries. This time however, her diagnosis involved a pulmonary embolism in her descending aorta. She also had advanced arterial sclerosis and her doctor described her arteries as *"pretty crispy."*

The procedure to repair the issue with her aorta was very involved. It required that she be put on a heart and lung machine, her body cooled, and her heart stopped. The risks were substantial however, without the procedure the embolism would burst within weeks or months.

Prior to the surgery, my Mom made clear that if she could not recover with all of her mental faculties, she did not want any life sustaining measures, including nutrition or hydration.

The surgery was scheduled and lasted over nine hours. The doctor came to the waiting room several times and explained that they were having a lot of difficulty stopping the bleeding.

Mom was in intensive care immediately after the surgery. Days had passed and she wasn't waking up.

The doctor finally ordered a brain scan, which showed that there had been massive systemic strokes throughout her brain. She would never wake up, and if she ever did, she would not by any definition be a person. It was only the second time I saw my Step Dad cry. The first and only other time I saw Ben cry was at his Mom's funeral.

Even in their twilight years, my Mom and Step Dad were like a couple of high school kids who just fell in love. There are innumerable reasons for which I have a supreme and unconditional respect and admiration for my step Dad. At the very top of that list of reasons is because he treated my Mom like a Queen for twenty-five years.

In accordance with my Mom's wishes, nutrition and hydration was withdrawn. Even though all scientific and medical evidence indicated that

she had no ability to feel pain, she was given a morphine drip and moved into a private room. Her doctor was visibly upset.

As my Mom did with every person she met, she had a relationship with her doctor that went beyond the customary doctor-patient relationship.

During those last hours I was spending with my Mom, feeling so helpless, I was reminded of one of the most significant events in my life, which really epitomized how my Mom cherished her relationships with all people.

My Dad died of a sudden heart attack when I was eleven. He was a hard working, good and honest man. A couple of years after the passing of my Dad, quite by accident, my Mom met a man who had never been married, and had only months before retired after serving 21 years in the United States Army. My Mom and my brothers and sister were blessed.

Ben and my Mom were married, and this wonderful man took on the challenge of raising three teenage boys who had been without the strict directional counsel of a father for a couple of years.

Ben developed some medical issues, much of which were likely the result of the stress that can only be exacted by three teenage boys who challenged him at every turn. Ben was admitted to the Veteran's Hospital in Cleveland, Ohio for a couple of week's worth of extensive testing.

I was probably fourteen, and the United States' involvement in the Vietnam conflict was still in full swing.

While visiting Ben at the hospital, (who had in all respects become my Dad), a woman came into the visiting area, looking tattered and exhausted, obviously distressed and animated. My Mom and Dad, as a fundamental part of their core, immediately came to this woman's aid. I recall the woman's name was Marylyn.

Marylyn was almost inconsolable. She had just arrived from Tennessee on word that her only son had been gravely injured in Vietnam, and flown to the Veterans Hospital in Cleveland. Marylyn had spent her every last dime to arrive by bus and taxi, only to learn that she was at the Cleveland branch, and her son had been taken to the Brecksville branch. Marylyn's son was receiving his last rights miles away as my Mom and Dad were trying to console her.

There was no discussion between my Mom and Dad – they both immediately knew what needed to be done. My parents were struggling middle-class people, with little or no frills.

My Dad took out his wallet and emptied it in Marylyn's hand, saying, "it isn't much, but it's enough for a few days in a hotel and meals." Then he looked at my Mom, who had already started briskly gathering her things, and just said, "Go!"

My Mom, pulling Marylyn by her jacket sleeve, and me in tow ran to the car. We drove Marylyn to the Veterans Hospital Brecksville branch. When we arrived, we all rushed in and Marylyn was immediately taken to her son, who was still conscious and elated to see his Mom.

I do not know if Marylyn's son survived. But, I do know that if he died, he died in his Mom's arms. Given the enormity of the tragedy, nothing could be more comforting – for both of them. If he survived, it is a story that I am sure his Mom related to him.

Driving home with my Mom, it was silent. We were both very caught up in the emotion of the moment. Quietly I asked, "Why did you guys do that?" My Mom gently clutched my arm and said, "David, that is religion." That experience has resonated with me my entire life, and it was clearly a major influence on the formation of my core.

Ben truly became my Dad during the following decades and was the most wonderful, giving, compassionate, strong and honest man I have ever known. More than my Dad, Ben was my best friend.

I was so very fortunate to have had such wonderful parents, who both had long and full lives. This was the definitive event when my Mom taught me religion...

I sat in Mom's room late into the evening. I remembered the first song she ever taught me when I was a child, well before kindergarten, "*You are my sunshine*," which I remember singing with her often as a little boy.

I held her hand and sang, "*You are my sunshine*," kissed her good night and went home. The next morning she was gone.

Although those were rough years and losing my Mom exacerbated the challenges, what I remember was that I had the enormous benefit of being unemployed. I spent every day and every evening with Mom for that last month that she was ill.

It is interesting how I remember the silver lining from a period, which at the time seemed filled with tragedy. I will always miss my Mom, but I have no regrets. Unemployment at the time was no fun, but I would not trade the time I was able to spend with my Mom in her last weeks for anything.

Prior to losing my Mom, I had achieved a great number of goals, had become a professional pilot, and I had earned a comfortable lifestyle during the thirteen years since my release from prison.

The greatest and most important goal I have, or ever will achieve was that I made my Mom proud of her son. I experienced the honor to have given her the gift of the fulfillment of her greatest dream - to see her son become everything she dreamt he could become.

When I look back at any of my challenging periods, I have forgotten the pain and only remember the good that resulted, including my incarceration experience. Anyone can do the same and benefit from capitalizing upon experiences to move forward, as opposed to exploiting past catastrophes as the reason or excuse not to pursue a rewarding future.

Being fired from that flying position as a Learjet Captain and spending a year or so unemployed obviously wasn't the first time I had bit the floor, so I squeaked out a living doing flight and ground instruction, writing computer software and working as a channel liaison for TempReps.

TempReps was a division of Technology Advancement Corporation, a company that represented many of the major computer software development and hardware manufacturers.

The TempReps job was at least interesting and it was fairly lucrative. Whenever one of the company's clients developed a new software program or an innovative piece of computer hardware, we would be hired to visit commercial and retail distributors (*the Channel*) and provide demonstrations and training. I covered a five state territory; Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, Pennsylvania and New York.

A typical job was one we did for Adobe. I visited Adobes' facility in San Jose, California where I attended its weeklong training seminar on a newly released printing and fax peripheral.

After returning home from manufacturer's training, I would take a week to schedule appointments with the channel distributors. Appointment setting was a breeze - the channel was always interested in the latest and greatest technology that was coming down the pipe, some calling it leading edge, and others calling it bleeding edge.

Once my schedule was set, I simply traveled from one computer distributor to another, providing demonstrations and training. I was paid for each competed demonstration, I received meals and hotel expenses, and I was paid for my mileage at 28 cents a mile. Frankly, the mileage reimbursement was a gravy train since a typical tour racked up a few thousand miles.

At the time, I was living in the Cleveland area, and despite having a decent job that required little effort, by 1995 I determined that I was going nowhere professionally.

I was still licking my wounds from being unjustifiably fired from my flying position, and I needed a new passion - a new definitiveness of purpose.

I felt like I was dying in Cleveland. I wasn't sure what I needed. However, I thought that a change in environment might form a new beginning. I just questioned if I was running toward something or running away from something. Either way, if I wanted different results, I needed to change what I was doing, and perhaps where I was doing it. I was feeling beat up and drained.

Be very, very conscious of those times that you experience a setback. It will happen. During the past thirty-plus years, my career has been anything but a smooth ride. There have been obstacles, challenges and Dragons. I have indeed been knocked down. I have bit the floor so many times that I've developed a taste for linoleum. It is during these difficult periods that many people recidivate. They think that the system doesn't work and it isn't worth all of their hard work, blood, sweat and tears, only to find themselves flat on their face ...*again*.

In the short term, it may appear that all of your work is an effort in futility. That thought had passed through my mind more than once. You work hard, strive to achieve goals and then get knocked down. Don't lose faith. Picking yourself back up does become easier with time and experience.

If I examine my progress over the long term, I am clearly ahead of where I was when I was released on parole, not to mention where I was before I was released. I still get knocked down today and when I do, I allow myself fifteen minutes to suck my thumb, and then I brush off the dust, pick myself up and move on down the road.

When you get knocked down, you have a clear choice to move in one of two directions - forward or backward, or a third option is to do nothing and just stay down. Trust me, forward is better.

If you aren't getting knocked down, hammered, scuffed, scratched, bitten, broken and bloody, then you aren't out in the forest of opportunity, and you aren't engaging the Dragons. You aren't doing anything. It is part of the journey. If you want the stashes of gold and jewels, you need to slay the Dragons.

My concern that I was professionally dying in Cleveland grew during early 1995. I had lived in Columbus, Ohio during the late 1980's, and remembered a stark contrast between Columbus and Cleveland. I decided to take a ride to

Columbus. As I drove around Columbus, I was attracted to the disparity of the city compared to Cleveland. I felt energized.

I returned home and put my condominium on the market - for sale by owner. It was sold the first weekend. Now, I was moving for sure and I thought it might be a good idea to get a job in Columbus.

While working as a channel liaison for TempReps, I had met a number of people in the PC computer and networking business. I met with several of those contacts in Columbus and accepted an offer from Mitch, a dynamic man who was the vice president of sales for a company that built PC computers and provided network services. Two brothers of Chinese descent who both had remarkable technical expertise owned the company.

The company started all new sales people in the computer assembly department actually building new PC computers. The pay was lousy, but it was important that I gained a meticulous understanding of the technology that I would eventually be selling.

I built computers for roughly a month, after which, I felt more than prepared to begin in the sales side. The only problem was, I had done such a good job building computers that the production manager was resisting my move to sales. I spoke with Mitch and within a few days, I was assembling my prefabricated desk in the sales department.

The desk came in a carton that had a full color 6 x 4 foot picture of what the desk looks like fully assembled with large red letters, *Easy to Assemble Oak Laminated Executive Desk*.

I fully admit I swallowed the hook all the way. I had the pieces and parts scattered all over the floor, and I was trying to interpret the instructions that were written in a language from a different universe.

I looked over at the box that was leaning against the wall - touting the advertisement, *Easy to Assemble Oak Laminated Executive Desk*. I thought, oh, like maybe they would advertise it as, *Difficult to Impossible to Assemble* without a Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering from MIT. *Duhhh!*

At least during the two days it took me to assemble that easy to assemble desk, I had a good belly laugh at how the wool was clearly pulled over my eyes. I've learned to laugh at myself - especially when I become a victim of my own naïveté and stupidity.

When I started selling, I found over fifty boxes of beautiful, full color post cards sitting in a storage room that the company had printed. There were twenty different postcards that totaled in the tens of thousands. The company was not even using them.

I developed a computerized program that automatically generated introductory letters to prospective customers. I then made follow up telephone calls to each of those introductory letters a week later. My system then automatically generated mailing labels so each of these prospective customers would receive each of the twenty postcards a week apart. The exposure was phenomenal and resulted in accelerating the whole sales process. I became passionate about the success of my program and the passion paid off handsomely.

My boss, Mitch was impressed with my progress and he took the time to mention that my progress had clearly captured the attention of the owner's of the company.

Frankly, all I was doing was my job. I was soliciting new business, making a ton of telephone calls and using the resources available in the company, i.e. the postcards.

The fact is, I was being compared to the rest of the sales people who were not doing much more than coming in, breathing the air, drinking the coffee and waiting for the phone to ring. It made for a recognizable contrast - not necessarily because I was doing such an exemplary job, but rather, because the average person does such a lousy job.

If you are concerned as to how your performance will measure up to the average individual in the workplace, don't worry. Most people in the workplace have little more than a pulse.

I've been an employee and an employer. Average is worthless and it is pretty simple to draw a stark contrast between your work ethic and that of the average work ethic. Just work, and do your job.

I found a small list of Internet Service Providers and World Wide Website development companies in a local newspaper. Given that it was 1995 and very few people had even heard of the Internet, the list was probably only 8 or 10 companies. In fact, there were very few web sites other than government and education at that time.

I began sending letters and post cards to the list of Internet related companies since I thought for sure they would have a need for lots of computer equipment.

I received a telephone call from one of the companies, Your Connection World Wide Web Services, Inc. I had been spamming them with post cards for a couple of months. The caller, Kyle, said that he had a dozen of my post cards and that he would never buy any of my PC equipment because he used Silicon Graphics computers. I told him that I was fascinated with his business and asked if we could meet so he could tell me how he got started.

I made several appointments with Kyle, the owner of Your Connection. At least a couple of times, he was not there at the scheduled time. Nevertheless, I persisted. Within a few weeks, Kyle called me in need of a CD ROM drive. I scheduled an appointment to meet for lunch and deliver the CD drive.

During lunch, Kyle explained that he had just graduated from college a few months prior. Literally a few days after graduation, he moved to Columbus and opened his business. I asked to see his operation, and after lunch we went to his office.

I was immediately captivated with Kyle's involvement in the Internet. Over the next several weeks, we forged a friendship.

Based upon the friendship with Kyle, and my interest in helping him with his business, we talked about how his company was structured and how he was handling the administrative and business functions. He wasn't. In fact, the deeper I dug into the organizational aspects of his business, the more I realized that his expertise was technology - not business and administration, and certainly not business planning. There was no business plan. For the most part, the company was on the fast track to bankruptcy.

As a friend, I volunteered my time to get Kyle's accounting set up and get his business organized. Over a fairly short period of time, we both realized that the combination of our skills would probably make a good partnership.

Rather quickly, my passion was clearly moving in the direction of the Internet and Kyle's business. Although I was performing in my job with my employer, it became apparent that the Internet had captured my focus.

No one knew for certain what the potential was for the Internet back in 1995, but I envisioned that it would be astronomical.

I talked with my employer and explained that I did not believe that it was appropriate to remain on the company's payroll when my focus and passion was not dedicated to its business. We amicably severed the employment relationship but maintained a good customer - vendor relationship.

I wanted to become involved in Kyle's business and he recognized the benefit of having a partner who has good administrative skills and organizational disciplines.

The partnership started when Kyle offered me the position as President of Your Connection for the total compensation of \$10.00 per year. Given that the package came with a 50% equity position in the company, I accepted and we were on our way to building the business together. Money was tight - both for the business and for me personally.

I made the 40 minute drive to our little office in Hilliard, Ohio every morning and back home every evening - evening, generally in the area of 1:00 AM.

It's an interesting phenomenon when something totally captures your focus and develops into a passion. Every night I went to bed and couldn't wait to get up and go to work again. Once I was at work, I never wanted to leave. The only thing that forced me to go home every night was exhaustion.

That 1987 Chrysler LeBaron was bumping the 100,000 mile mark and began to develop a few problems. The month was August and the air conditioning system stopped working. I had it recharged, but within a day, all of the refrigerant leaked back out. It simply was not worth the cost of repair. Then all of the power windows stopped working. Since money was tight, I just figured that I would grit my teeth and bear it. It would start cooling down in September and after that, rolling down the windows would not be important. It was pretty uncomfortable, but when you're pursuing a passion, the little things just don't matter.

As November approached and the weather began to cool down, I had turned on the heater for the first time since the previous winter. There was no heat. It may have been due to a clogged heater core, or clogs throughout the entire radiator and cooling system.

Going into December and January, the car began over-heating and leaking all of the coolant on every trip to and from the office.

I simply began carrying two, 2-liter bottles of water. On each trip to work, I had to stop twice to replenish the radiator water and the same on the return trip home.

Another problem developed - I had a leak in the gas tank. Now the car would only hold about four gallons of gas. So now, the routine for the trip to the office was; add water to the radiator at home, fill my two 2-liter bottles for the trip, drive to the gas station, pump in four gallons of gas, add more water to the radiator, drive toward the office, stop and add more water to the radiator and finish the drive to the office. When you're chasing your passion, the little things just don't matter.

This system worked fine until one night during February 1996 when I was leaving the office at roughly 1:30 AM. It was the record setting coldest night of the year, and it felt like the temperature was well below zero.

Because it was so dangerously cold, everything was closed, including gas stations. After filling the radiator and my two, 2-liter bottles, I began my journey home.

It was amazingly cold. I passed the gas station that I customarily purchased my four gallons of gas because it was closed. The gas gauge indicated that I had two needle-widths of gas in the tank. I thought - I hoped - it would get me home.

Within five miles or so after entering the highway, which was deserted, as expected the hot light came on indicating that the engine was not cooling properly. I made the usual stop along the side of the highway and opened the hood. As I opened the radiator, the cap flew off and hot water gushed out, completely drenching me. It is astonishing how cold it gets when the temperature is below zero and you're soaking wet! I dumped the remaining water I had with me into the radiator.

As I got back in the car thoroughly soaked with the water that had just come out of my radiator, the steam coming off of me immediately frosted all of the windows in the car. Since I had no heater, I also had no windshield defroster. The electric rear window defroster still worked (*yippee!*). That was about the only thing on that car that did work.

I commenced my drive toward home, frequently scraping the frost from the inside of the windshield, and within another five miles, the hot light came back on. I had no more water, nothing was open, the highway was literally deserted and I was freezing. I didn't have much choice but to press on.

The car began making variety of noises that no machinery should be making. I noticed in my rear view mirror that I was leaving an ever-increasing smoke trail mixed with a sprinkling of red glowing particles. It was pretty clear that the engine was burning up. I didn't relish the thought of destroying my engine, but I knew I couldn't stop because I would freeze to death.

Even with the accelerator to the floor, the car continued to slow down, and by now there was maximum smoke and sparks pouring out from under the hood until finally, the engine completely seized. The heat did help to defrost the windshield though.

I was roughly three miles from home as I coasted to a stop on the side of the road. It is remarkable how cold it gets when the temperature is below zero, you're soaking wet and you have to walk three miles. By the time I made it home, I had most of the early stage symptoms of hypothermia and spent a couple of hours in the bathtub. *When you're chasing your passion, the little things just don't matter.* I couldn't wait to get up and go to work the next day.

The dog in the hunt has no fleas. Even though he may be totally infested, the fleas are completely unnoticed for as long as he is focused on the hunt. It is only when you're sitting idle that you are bothered by little things and start scratching.

The following day, I had the car towed to a dealership that was offering \$1,000 trade-in on anything that even resembled a car. I told the dealer that the car wasn't worth anything more than its weight in scrap. They still gave me the trade-in allowance on a lease, and I drove away in a new Mercury Marquis. Of course, all of the younger employees commented on what a nice middle age man's car that was. I liked that car. It was huge. It felt like sitting on my sofa in my living room and driving a condominium.

Whenever I see a broken down and disheveled looking car on the side of the road, I always think, there goes a CEO pursuing his passion and trying to start a new business.

Within the same month, just by chance, my friend Craig Housley, who I had flown with while living in Cleveland, called with an opportunity. He was flying a Learjet for a local entrepreneur, Dutch Knowlton. The Learjet requires a crew of two pilots. His co-captain had accepted another position, so there was an opening.

The timing was perfect and so was the position. Dutch used the airplane very little. Generally, he went to his estate in Ft. Lauderdale on Friday and returned to Columbus on Sunday evening. This gave me a decent salary and I still had the entire week in the office to build Your Connection.

My passion only continued to intensify as we expanded our business interests. I had asked Kyle, where is the top of the food chain with respect to the Internet? No one actually owned the Internet, but who had the greatest control, or put another way, who was the least controlled?

Kyle explained the hierarchy of the Internet infrastructure. It all starts with the "*Tier One*" network backbones such as Sprint, MCI, AT&T and Worldcom. These Tier One companies all have massive networks that interconnect with one another to form one behemoth network - *the Internet*.

The *Tier One* networks sell Internet backbone access to the Internet Service Providers, the web site development and hosting companies, business and industry, and government.

Even though very few businesses had a direct connection to the Internet in 1995, we anticipated that the Internet might become fairly big, and corporations would have a need for direct access to the backbone. I wanted to be at the top of the food chain - a Tier One network operator.

So, here we were, two guys in Columbus, Ohio, basically pretty close to broke and we decided to follow our passion and start a company that would be in direct competition with AT&T, MCI, Sprint and the other huge telecommunication companies. Passion is powerful!

Our revenue from building web sites was growing. We decided to use the revenues from Your Connection to launch Fiber Network Solutions and slowly transition our focus to operating a national network.

Once *FiberNet* became the obvious path to follow and the best option for our focus, *Your Connection* became an inconvenience. In a manner of speaking, I just wanted to take it out back and shoot it. We ended up just giving the website customer base to our FiberNet customers who were in the website development and hosting business. We helped our customers grow, and they in turn bought more services from us.

Among my first year goals was to have our name on a building. When a company has its name on a building, it creates an image and aura of success. Even though we weren't anywhere close to a successful company, most entrepreneurs understand the concept of; "Act as if ye have faith, and faith will be given to you." In other words, *fake it til you make it*. But also, it is important to *act* - take action. A warrior will only rediscover himself on the battlefield.

At about the same time that I was searching for a new building, we landed our first customer for Fiber Network Solutions. Providing Internet access service to our customer required one Cisco router on our end, and one on the customer's end, at a cost of \$2,500 each.

Since we were a brand spanking new business, Cisco was not about to extend any credit to us. My credit cards were pretty close to being maxed out, so I had to figure out a way to get Cisco to give us a *Net 30 Day* account.

I was on a trip to Ft. Lauderdale with Dutch Knowlton, who owned the Learjet that I was flying that first year while starting FiberNet. On the trip back to Columbus, the weather started to deteriorate below forecast, and by the time we arrived, the weather at Ohio State University Airport (OSU), which is where the airplane was based, was way below safe landing minimums.

We diverted and landed at Port Columbus Airport, had the airplane put in a hangar and arranged transportation for the boss.

The next morning the weather had cleared and my flying partner Craig, called me to arrange a time to reposition the airplane from Port Columbus back to its base at OSU airport.

After I arranged a time to meet Craig at Port Columbus, I called Kyle, my business partner, and told him to call the Cisco sales rep and tell him, "My backer, Mister Koch is flying into OSU airport today and wants to meet you."

After making the call, Kyle called me back and said he and the Cisco rep would be at OSU airport when I arrive. These were utterly true statements. I was flying into OSU Airport and I was Kyle's backer - MasterCard and me.

I briefed Craig on my, *fake it til you make it plan*, and we departed Port Columbus for the five minute flight to OSU airport.

As Kyle and the Cisco rep were waiting, the Cisco rep asked Kyle about the airplane - what kind, what color, etc. Kyle just said, "Well, it doesn't have any propellers, I think it's white and green, ...Oh, and Dave's initials are on the tail. Indeed, Dutch Knowlton's initials (DK) were on the tail and coincidentally, they are the same initials as Dave Koch.

We tooled up to the ramp in a six million dollar Learjet and the only two people who got off were Craig and I.

Kyle, the Cisco rep and I went to the Barnstormer restaurant, which is located on the OSU airport. We had a greasy cheeseburger and talked about the Internet and its potential.

As we were finishing lunch, I said to the Cisco rep, "Hey, give the kid a credit line." I then leaned over and kind of whispered, "Don't worry, I'll guarantee payment."

The next day, we had a Net 30 Day credit line with Cisco and the equipment we needed was shipped. Cisco never even asked for a personal guarantee.

At no time did Kyle or I ever say that the Learjet was mine. In fact, there was absolutely no misinformation provided. Whatever the Cisco rep perceived or assumed were his perceptions.

Over the years, we bought heavy seven-figures worth of Cisco equipment, and we always paid our invoices within the 30-day terms. No harm - no foul. But yes, admittedly, my intent was, *fake it til you make it*.

In my search for a new corporate headquarters, I found a building that was empty in an obscure area on the north side of Columbus. The area was a small office park that was off the beaten path, but close to the two major freeways.

Looking through the windows, the building was a unique design with angled walls and walkways crossing over the lobby. It also appeared to have been empty for some time and showed signs of water damage. I called the number on the realtor's sign and set an appointment to see the building.

As soon as I entered the building, there was a strong odor of mold and dampness. The decor was way out-of-date with orange shag carpeting and Earth tones. The owner of the building had initially built his business in the

building, but he required more space as his company expanded. The building had been sitting empty for over three years, with a leaky roof.

The few employees we had, and a few of my friends cringed when they toured the building. I was looking beyond the mess. The building had great potential. The three-level design was an ideal fit for a high tech company and the corporate culture I wanted to create. It had plenty of space, a kitchenette and even a sauna and shower. The lowest level was an unfinished workshop area that could eventually be converted to office space as we grew. In total, there was roughly five thousand square feet.

Over the next several weeks, I asked the Realtor to arrange a meeting with the owner of the building several times. The Realtor wasn't very accommodating. Understandably, this dilapidated building was not a high priority for the Realtor, and I perceived that he did not want me talking directly with the owner.

After a couple of weeks and making no progress with the Realtor, I looked up the property through the Franklin County Auditor. The owner of the building was Jeff Belfore, and he coincidentally lived in the same neighborhood as I did. I called him and told him of my interest in his building. He invited me to meet at his home.

Jeff had started a computer technology company in that building in the mid 1980's. His business grew and was now located in a 15,000 square foot facility. Jeff enjoyed technology and he was immediately intrigued with the company I was building. Like many people in the mid-1990's, Jeff had heard of the Internet and believed it had tremendous potential.

Jeff impressed me as being very genuine and a real gentleman. As with many entrepreneurs, Jeff enjoyed helping, or at least watching, new businesses get started.

There is a certain and special excitement during the early formative years of all businesses that once tasted, continues to attract those who have experienced it in their career before.

That initial impression I had of Jeff proved accurate as our relationship grew over the years. I remember asking him some years later, "Why are you so good to us?" His response was quick and sincere. He said, "Because I had a good Mother."

When I first met with Jeff, he was asking for \$2,500 per month and a five-year lease. I knew that there was probably some negotiating room since the building had been empty for three years and it definitely did not show well. Monthly rent of \$2,500 for five years calculates to a total of \$150,000.

In that area, commercial office space was leasing for \$9.00 - \$15.00 per square foot. Jeff was only asking \$6.00 per square foot. I really didn't have an issue with the monthly rent, and I didn't want to use up any of my negotiating chips by beating Jeff up on the rent figure. Candidly, I thought the figure was surprisingly reasonable for that amount of space in that area.

From an accountant's standpoint, my business really could not afford any increase in monthly rent. But, most accountants are genetically predisposed to believe that *the future equals the past*. Entrepreneurs know that the future equals whatever they decide it needs to equal. I was operating on future potential - not on the present or past revenue figures. And, just for the record, the future does not equal the past.

As we negotiated, Jeff agreed to completely refurbish the entire interior, repair the roof, paint, install new carpeting, and make a few modifications that I requested as well, such as removing the fireplace in my office and turning it into a closet with French doors. For all practical purposes, the building would look brand new. Equally important, I hit my goal. Our sign went on the building.

We never did completely get rid of the musty damp mold smell and the building affectionately adopted the name, *The Litter Box*. Thanks to Glade Plug-in's placed throughout the building, it was quite a pleasant environment.

I told Jeff that I would agree to pay the \$150,000 over the five years. However, to preserve cash flow, I needed to pay it differently than a fixed figure of \$2,500 per month.

I proposed a rent escalation for the first eighteen months where the rent for the first three months would be zero. The rent for months 4-6 would be \$1,000 per month, months 7-9 would be \$1,500 per month, months 10-12 would be \$2,000 per month and the monthly rent for the first six months of the second year would escalate to \$2,500. The rent thereafter would escalate to make up the discounts Jeff had provided for the first year and a half.

Keep in mind that whatever you need to achieve, there is always room for reasonable negotiations so you and the other party can achieve your respective objectives.

Jeff is an exceptionally bright individual, a successful entrepreneur and clearly understood the importance of cash flow. He agreed to the proposal. We were so excited that we moved into the building and just lived with the mess during the refurbishment.

The goal of having the company name on a building was achieved. That goal was actually exceeded since we were the only occupants in our own

freestanding building. We definitely looked like we were the hottest high-tech game in town.

The image created by occupying our own free standing building attracted new business, attracted media coverage, and it was a magnet for people who wanted to work there. Many people wanted to work there so badly that they accepted far less compensation as compared to what they were offered by other employers.

I needed to further enhance and intensify our million-dollar corporate image. Hiring an advertising and public relations firm was cost prohibitive. Instead, I hired a graphic artist student from one of the local art colleges, starting part-time at \$500.00 a month. We created corporate brochures, a worldwide website, and started producing post cards that I mailed to a developing list of businesses in the local market.

I needed to raise additional capital if we were to fully seize this opportunity and achieve the growth objectives I had envisioned.

Many businesses fail because they do not have a clear plan. I was probably among the majority of entrepreneurs who dread writing a business plan. However, I clearly understood the necessity and invested the time and effort to produce an exhaustive 300-plus-page business plan that facilitated raising roughly \$850,000 in equity capital.

The process of writing a business plan clarified our mission and the path we would pursue to achieve our objectives. I did not develop the business plan for the purpose of raising money. I developed a plan to ascertain whether or not profitability was attainable, and how we would achieve that critical goal.

As I examined each aspect of the plan, there were many times that certain elements would conflict with previously written parts of the plan, which then required a reexamination and modification of those areas. By the end of the process, the plan was clear and concise, and it provided a clear path to building the business to profitability.

If you ever want to start a business, write a business plan. I definitely resisted starting the task of developing a business plan. After going through the process however, I can confidently state that without a plan, success is almost impossible. Conversely, if you develop and write a realistic and attainable plan, it is almost impossible to fail. Once we had a blueprint, all that we needed to do was follow it.

My marketing, sales and corporate image agendas were quite successful. We developed humorous post cards that were mailed on a weekly basis, and we quickly became well known in the business and technology community for our technical expertise, and as *the post card guys*. I was writing news releases

every week and sending them to various media contacts. We had frequent articles published in newspapers and magazines. Sales soared.

After just two years, our revenues were in the millions of dollars, our staff had expanded exponentially, and we were growing out of the space we were leasing from Jeff Belfore. We had two to three people in each office, which made everyone's working environment a little crowded. Interestingly however, it also enhanced corporate comradery.

Our landlord Jeff visited me frequently. He was intrigued with my business and enjoyed watching its explosive growth. During one visit, I asked Jeff what it would take to refurbish the workshop/garage area into office space for an expansion of our sales department. Without batting an eye, he just offered to pay for the refurbishment and tack it on as a small increase in the monthly rent. That was when I asked him why he was so good to us. We could not have asked for a better landlord.

In contrast to my relationship with Jeff, there were many times when I was in contract negotiations where I started to get an unfavorable impression about the other party's sincerity.

What I've learned through my experiences is that the negotiating process itself provides guidance as to whether or not I actually want to consummate a deal at all. When I get the impression that there are hidden agendas and insincerity, I walk away. Who needs contractually binding relationships that are formed on a foundation of disingenuous agendas?

As the 1990's were coming to a close, we were again outgrowing our space. By now, we had opened divisions in Cincinnati, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Toledo, Akron, Canton and Dayton. We were clearly through the proof-of-concept phase, and it was time to re-write our business plan for the accelerated growth phase - deployment to 51 North American markets.

I again invested the many long hours, burning the midnight oil, to revise the business plan. It was somewhat easier because I had actual operational data to use toward forecasting accurate projections.

When I began the process of revising the business plan, it appeared that we needed an additional \$550,000 in debt or equity capital. However, once the process was completed and I had a realistic and attainable plan, it turned out that we only needed roughly \$50,000. I did not feel that taking in new investors was worth \$50,000, so my partner Kyle, and I funded the requirements personally.

I distributed copies of the revised plan and financial projections to our bankers seeking debt capital. Although our bankers were happy with our progress, they wanted to measure the accuracy of my revised projections. As

previously mentioned, a year later, our revenues were almost exactly as projected. Revenues were 7.5% over projections. The banks felt very comfortable with my ability to accurately project our revenues, and the lending subsequently became very robust.

Since we were already outgrowing our office space, and we projected a substantial expansion of our staff, I began looking for space that would accommodate our needs for the next five years. I negotiated on several pieces of property however, I had difficulty finding anyone who would embrace my escalating rent concept - pay a little starting out, and escalate upward as my revenues increased.

During the several years that we occupied *the Litter Box*, I became acquainted with a gentleman who owned two of the other buildings in the office park. Juergen (*pronounced Urgan*) was an immigrant from Germany and took advantage of the wealth of opportunity in America. I met him when he was out cutting the grass in front of one of his buildings. Juergen was roughly 70 years old. He clearly understood the concept of keeping his expenses low and doing whatever work he could as opposed to hiring a contractor.

One of the buildings that Juergen owned was roughly the size of the building I was currently leasing, and the other building was massive - over 21,000 square feet.

The small building was unoccupied and the large building had one tenant that was leasing a small amount of space on the upper level.

I would often visit with Juergen when I saw him out cutting the grass or doing other maintenance on his buildings. I estimated my future space requirements to be roughly double what I was currently leasing. I thought that it would be ideal to lease a second building in the same office park, only thirty yards away.

As Juergen and I talked, I would throw out lowball offers in jest, which would result in lighthearted arguments regarding the value of his property. Several times I suggested that he should just give us the space in the small building for free - *because it was lonely*. It was intellectual fencing and we both enjoyed it.

By the end of 1999, I was preparing to expand the business to substantially more cities and needed to get more serious about leasing additional space for the support staff at our corporate headquarters. Although I really loved the building we were in, there was just no way that the Litter Box could be built out large enough to accommodate our continually expanding requirements.

Coincidentally, at the same time that I was planning a move and negotiating on several options for office space, Juergen's large building became vacant. It was originally designed for his business, which distributed hair care products. The upper level had an enormous lobby, a 120-seat theater that had been used for product demonstrations, a full size kitchen, two conference rooms and plenty of spacious private offices.

The lower level was a 10,000 square foot warehouse with 24-foot ceilings. I envisioned the lower level as the Network Operations Center (NOC) and a twenty-five office sales department separated by a large smoked glass *fishbowl* conference room looking into the NOC.

I negotiated a step lease with Juergen that was structured similar to the step lease I had initially negotiated on the Litter Box. Pay a lower monthly rent for the first couple of years with escalations every three months. The agreement was structured similarly, except the numbers were a whole lot higher - a little over \$19,000 a month, plus the utilities were a couple grand a month.

We signed the lease and hired a contractor to build out the lower level. I told the contractor that I wanted to create the "*Holy Shit!*" effect. In other words, when people would first see our Network Operations Center, I wanted them to say, or at least think, *holy shit!*

During the construction, all of the engineers were using banquet tables as their desks for their computers. Indeed, our entire national network could have functionally been managed with computers set up on orange crates. We built the NOC for marketing and corporate image.

When the NOC construction was completed it looked like something out of Star Wars. A person would walk down the stairs and first enter the sales department, which was set up with thirty impressive looking modular offices. As they walked a little further, they would see the fishbowl conference room.

The conference room was a room constructed from smoked glass. Through the glass, you could see into the dimly lit NASA looking NOC, and the twelve enormous projection screens that were attached to the 24-foot high wall.

The projection screens displayed various technical data and network performance parameters. From there, a person would walk into the NOC and see the six rows of computer consoles, each row accommodating twelve computer workstations. The senior network engineers were above the NOC in a smoked glass enclosed room from where they could oversee the entire facility. It was impressive beyond belief.

A few weeks after the NOC was completed, we hosted an open house. Almost five hundred people attended the catered event, many who made the drive

from our satellite divisions. That open house created quite a buzz in the business and technology community.

I amused myself during the open house by standing at the entrance to the NOC. I lost count of how many people literally said out loud, *"Holy shit!"* as they entered the NOC. Shazam! The goal was achieved! With subsequent tours over the following years, we heard that phrase frequently.

I distinctly remember looking at all of the people in that impressive facility the evening of our open house, most sucking my kneecaps for a piece of our action, and thinking to myself, *not bad for a guy who spent time in prison*. Several sales reps of other companies that frequently visited the NOC had told us that our NOC was second only to *AT&T's World NOC*.

Of course the best part about that building was the enormous lobby, which provided an ideal place for my Harley-Davidson Wide Glide during the winter months. The Harley really looked sharp in the lobby, all polished with lights shining on it. It made a great conversation piece, and I naturally felt better that my baby was warm and cozy for the season.

The only reason that Harley-Davidson's are parked in garages is because the owner's spouse has some lame objection to parking it in the living room. Cruelty to motorcycles, I say.

The rest is history. We built a national backbone network, we built a corporation, we were among the top ten Internet backbone operators in North America, we achieved tens of millions in revenues, made the *Inc 500 List* of America's Fastest Growing Companies twice, Entrepreneur of the Year finalist, made a boatload of money personally, and at the end of the day, even companies like AT&T were buying access to our network.

It all started with a dream, a passion and a definitiveness of purpose. And, I just didn't worry about the little things.

There was no luck involved. Opportunities presented themselves because I was out in the forest of opportunity hunting for my dreams. I simply acted on those opportunities as they came along.

That flying position that presented itself the first year I was building the company was not luck. I had years of training, fifteen years of flying experience and earned the qualifications as a Learjet captain, which was obviously prerequisite for that position. If that position had not presented itself, I would have sought other opportunities to cash flow my personal expenses.

The point is, I dived in, I got out there in the forest of opportunity, and when I was out pursuing my passion, I figured out ways to bring my passion to

fruition. As your passion matures, it becomes your burn - your *definitiveness of purpose*.

As I built the company, additional passions emerged. I found that I derived enormous gratification from helping our young and talented staff grow and mature, and become the best that they can become.

Since we started the company on a shoestring, we could not afford to hire people with vast amounts of experience. I was forced to hire youth because of budgetary restraints. But rather than allow that to be a liability, I found the silver lining and made it an asset.

I became passionate about teaching and mentoring, and that became the burn that got me out of bed every morning. My definitiveness of purpose was modified from growing a company to growing the people. As I pursued that passion, the people then grew the company.

I cannot tell you what your passion is. I cannot create your definitiveness of purpose. You have to *discover* your passion, and that discovery won't be made sitting at home, or hanging with social circles who are engaged in agendas that don't conform to mainstream society.

What I can tell you is that you definitely have a passion. It isn't invented - it is *discovered*. It is somewhat like falling in love. You can't force it - it occurs naturally.

Just the same as trying to sit around thinking about whom you will fall in love with, if you decide to sit around and do nothing until you discover your passion, you will never find it. You need to get out and pursue life. Your love, and your passion will present themselves, but only if you position yourself to recognize it and seize it when it comes along.

Like love, passion is elusive. If you go out every day looking diligently for the love of your life, you will probably end up in a relationship. But, it will probably not be the love of your life.

If you want to find the love of your life, just go about living and getting on with your business and goals. The same is true with passion. Start the journey and you will discover the treasures along the way.



Chapter 24

IT SEEMS LIKE IT'S A TOTALLY DIFFERENT WORLD THAN THE WORLD YOU LEFT YEARS AGO WHEN YOU WENT TO PRISON. IT'S OKAY TO BE SCARED.

It's a totally different world. This statement can have a couple of different interpretations.

Imagine what it must have been like for people who spent 20 years in prison and were released shortly after the automobile became popular. Today, there are probably some people being released who have had little exposure to a personal computer or the Internet.

If you have spent more than twenty years in prison, yes the world is a different place. But, its differences are not dissimilar to any other time where advancement caused change, for example after the invention of the automobile, which revolutionized transportation.

The personal computer has revolutionized reading, writing and arithmetic, communications, the pace of business, the storage of records, and it has alleviated a multitude of other mundane tasks that were previously handled manually.

The Internet has revolutionized communication, information access and dissemination, collaboration, commerce, and the ability to access information about virtually any topic from almost anyplace on the planet, instantly.

People who went to prison during the days of the horse and buggy, and were then released after the automobile's popularity dominated transportation simply learned to drive a car. There is nothing mysterious that has happened while you were away that you couldn't adapt to. People are still pretty much the same.

It is also a fact that you are a totally different person than you were *xx* years ago. The fact that the world is different is also due to the fact that you have changed, and therefore your entire perception of the world has probably changed as well.

Another interpretation of, it's a totally different world is: The inside versus the outside. Indeed, it is different. Some people become institutionalized. Junior Brown spent almost thirty years in prison, and as of this writing, he has pursued a legitimate life outside for almost fifteen years. I have no doubt that he will only continue to grow and prosper and enjoy the benefits and the rich rewards life has to offer. His secret: *"I began to live my life differently while I was inside. I was in prison, but prison was not in me."*

It is a doggie-dog world out here. But, it is inside too. In either societal structure, people are territorial and possessive. It is innate to our nature to covet and possess, and as a member of the animal kingdom, people are among the most territorial.

Let's rewind a couple hundred thousand years. Man protected his territory, not infrequently by force, from a multitude of other animals. Man is a predatory animal who hunted and killed animals for food and clothing. Man killed other animals for his own personal survival.

Now, let's fast-forward a couple hundred thousand years to present day. The innate natures of man have not changed. He is still territorial, he is still a predator, and he will still use the other animals to survive and advance his own agendas. The only thing that has changed is that our civilized societal structure has removed all of the other animals from metropolitan areas, except one - other people.

The nature of man has not changed. What has changed over the millennium is the societal structure that we call civilized society. Man has adapted to his environment so he can continue to facilitate his innate nature to dominate, gain power, build a bigger cave, protect his territory, and gain advantage through predatory and conquering agendas.

Man versus man dominates the civil judicial system, and despite the assertions of the trial lawyers lobby, an inordinate number of cases are frivolous. Frequently, litigation is simply a civilized mechanism, not dissimilar to a club, to exercise man's nature to commandeer the territory or covet the property of another.

Corporate and political corruption is nature attempting to break through the civilized structure man has created. The reptilian level instincts of man to survive, and to hunt and kill, continue to dominate man's fundamental nature. However, today man does not fulfill his instinctive dominance with a club, but rather, by operating within the civilized societal guidelines that were invented by man.

Man manipulates that system, uses loopholes and operates on the fringes of what is legal, moral and ethical to facilitate his personal gain, sometimes at the demise of other animals - other people.

The nature of man to dominate, covet, hunt and gain is innate. We have seen this phenomenon during many high-profile scandals. When the dust settles from the current economic and other catastrophes our nation has faced during the past decade, I can guarantee that we will learn that widespread and systemic corruption was at the core.

Given the nature of man, some people will use other people for their own personal gain and have no scruples about the other person's loss. To climb their mountain, some people will step on countless carcasses. I witnessed this in business and during my career as a corporate pilot. Many of the passengers I had on board grew enormous fortunes, but left in their wake equally enormous devastation. Most interestingly, there was only a handful that had discovered their inner self. Many were miserably unhappy.

Here is an interesting story that I heard somewhere, but cannot recall who the original author was.

Back around the time that the Earth was being created, Satan and his disciples were sitting around a conference table discussing various ways that they would haunt man, once he had been created.

Satan wanted to find a place to hide man's self worth, his feeling of wellbeing, his harmony with himself. Satan presented this dilemma to his council.

One of his disciples suggested that Satan hide man's self-worth by digging a deep hole in the Earth and burying it. Satan thought for a minute and then said, "Well, God is giving man a high level of intuition. As difficult as it may seem, man may one day find a way to dig down in the Earth and find his self-worth."

Another of Satan's disciples suggested that Satan hide man's self-worth in the deepest part of the ocean, stating that the pressure at such a depth would make it impossible for man to ever venture into such an environment. Satan gave serious consideration and thought to this suggestion. Again however, Satan said that even though it seemed impossible that man could ever venture to the depths of the ocean, man would have great intellect and capability, and one day perhaps he would find his self-worth.

Satan and his council thought for hours where to hide man's self-worth. Then, all of a sudden, one of Satan's disciples blurted out with excitement, "Satan, I know where to hide it! Man will never find it! We will hide it on the Moon. Man could never even hope to get to the Moon." Of course all of the disciples and Satan believed that this suggestion had great possibilities. After all, there was no conceivable way that man could ever get to the Moon.

Satan thought as he scratched his chin. With a tone of doubt in his voice, Satan declared, "No, the Moon won't work either." Most of the disciples were almost amused - I mean, how could man ever find his self-worth on the Moon?

Satan explained, "I know what the plan is for man. I know he will have great powers of thought, intellect, intuition, discovery and ability. As far fetched as it may seem, there could come a day that man builds a tool that could take him to the Moon."

As the council and Satan sat and thought for hours longer, Satan finally said in a calm and confident voice, "I know where we will hide man's self-worth, his feeling of wellbeing, and his harmony with himself."

The room was silent as the council listened to Satan's solution to this difficult problem.

Satan explained, "We will hide man's self-worth in a place where he will never even look."

The council listened as Satan pronounced, "We will hide man's self-worth, his feeling of wellbeing, his harmony with himself in the one place he will never look - we will hide it inside of man himself."

Your self-worth, your feeling of wellbeing and your harmony with yourself is indeed, within yourself.

So many people spend their life chasing the next deal, or trying to impress everyone else hoping to find what makes them happy and content. Find your inner-self and become comfortable with who you really are. Everything else you want or need shall come.

Perhaps the one wealthy individual I admired most was Peter McCann. He was a man who had been homeless, a practicing alcoholic, and had half his stomach and who knows what else removed. There was a point in Peter's life that he was totally and utterly destitute.

Peter turned his life around, and when I worked for him, he bought a turboprop and a jet - a couple million dollars worth of aircraft. He built his personal fortune by owning apartment complexes and office buildings.

When I first met Peter McCann, I was working as the manager for a small air charter firm in Columbus called PDQ Air Service. I landed that job with PDQ after my previous boss refused to give me vacation time that I earned and desperately needed.

As I have mentioned before, if you do a great job for your employer, you will either get promoted, or you will have a great reference to take to a different employer. Either way, you get promoted based upon the job you have done.

I contacted the president of PDQ, Jerry Mercer, and scheduled a meeting with him at his Pontiac Michigan headquarters. Jerry already knew who I was since I had been selling against his company numerous times.

I rented a single engine Cessna for the trip to Pontiac to meet with Jerry. Jerry was impressed with my business acumen and the fact that I was a well-rated pilot with a thorough understanding of the aviation industry.

PDQ Air Service had started out as a company that picked up cancelled checks from the Federal Reserve Banks and flew them to the Federal Reserve Bank that governed the financial intuition on which the checks were drawn. PDQ was an early contributor to the expedited processing of checks in the United States.

During my tenure as CEO of FiberNet, we frequently played the “float.” The float is the time it takes for a check to return to your bank for payment. The float became significant when our company had several hundred checks outstanding on any given day, which totaled perhaps a million dollars. Today, checks are cancelled via the Internet the same day they are deposited. The days of playing the “float” on checks is over.

PDQ’s operation had grown substantially. The company had a fleet of twenty-plus Learjet’s that flew all over the country picking up cancelled checks from the Federal Reserve Banks, back to Columbus where all of the cargo was sorted, then reloaded, and the airplanes would again traverse the country delivering the checks to the Federal Reserve Bank on which the checks were drawn. PDQ’s operation was also expanding to carrying small freight. The company was becoming a mini FedEx.

PDQ had recently built a huge facility at Port Columbus Airport to accommodate its growth. Jerry Mercer wanted to build PDQ’s passenger charter operations, which had been sagging at best. Jerry asked me to meet with his Columbus management team at PDQ’s new Columbus facility, which was a Taj Mahal.

A few weeks prior to initially contacting Jerry, I had invested my \$1,500 income tax refund in a new wardrobe. I bought seven new suits from a men’s discount clothing warehouse. That was also a period in my life that daily exercise formed the basis of my social activities, so I was looking good. No, actually, I was looking *damn good!*

I was living in the heart of downtown Cleveland on the 22nd floor of a high-rise with a breathtaking view of the city. The apartment complex had an exercise facility, indoor swimming pool, sauna and indoor running track.

During the fair weather months, I would run five miles every day after work through downtown Cleveland, and then spend a couple of hours working out in the exercise facility. I was 205 pounds of *tight-twisted-steel*, and with my new suits, I looked like I walked of the cover of GQ Magazine. I was young, healthy and full of energy. That was among the most gratifying periods of my life. Mine was a simple, but great lifestyle.

Jerry Mercer was very people oriented, a devout Christian and his management style reflected his beliefs. A few nights before the meeting, I spent a little time thinking of an acronym for PDQ, which is generally defined as, "*Pretty Damn Quick*."

After an hour or so during the meeting in Columbus with Jerry and his managers, I mentioned that I thought the generally presumed acronym for PDQ might have connotations that were not representative of the company's high moral and ethical philosophies. Jerry said, "I know. I've spent fifteen years trying to come up with something different." I immediately replied with, "Well, how about *People Dedicated to Quality*."

A broad smile came across Jerry's face as he leaned back in his chair and said, "I've thought about different acronyms since I started this company and you have just hit the mark in two minutes." It was a little bit of a theatrical moment, and the spotlight was centered directly on me. The entire conference room was almost speechless.

Jerry immediately told one of his managers to order all new signs for all of their facilities. The theme, *People Dedicated to Quality*, would now become the company's identity. Needless to say, if there was any doubt that anyone had about hiring me, which there wasn't, it evaporated.

The point here is, prepare for your interviews. Bring something that will impress the pants off of them. Give them something so they feel like it's their lucky day by hiring you.

After the meeting with Jerry and his management team in Columbus, Jerry was ready to make an offer for me to become the general manager of the Columbus passenger charter department.

I knew that the president of my then current employer would not be all too happy that I was leaving and taking a position with a competitor. I had witnessed his battle tactics and assumed, correctly so, that he would make my felony conviction known to my new employer as his form of sophomoric revenge.

I told Jerry that I was honored and most interested in his offer however, I needed to schedule an hour for additional conversation. He invited me to visit with him in Pontiac the following week.

During my meeting with Jerry in Pontiac, I gave him a full disclosure of my conviction and incarceration experience. He embraced it and was enthusiastic about helping me continue my aggressive forward career progress.

I can't emphasize enough that all you need to do is create one *new significant event* and people will want to see you work toward creating another, and another, and another. Your felony conviction can be a liability, or it can be a tremendous asset. I simply choose to make it an asset.

Jerry did receive a telephone call from the president of my former employer. Both Jerry and I discussed how phenomenally petty it was for my former boss to call. It also reinforced in my mind that I had made a good move - *I was now working with adults*.

I made the move from Cleveland to Columbus and received a warm welcome from the entire staff at PDQ's Columbus facility. Everyone working there was excited to see someone come in who could manage and grow the passenger charter department.

I was given a beautiful office and went out and bought my first new car, that 1987 Chrysler LeBaron, which I have previously discussed.

I leased a brand new three level townhouse on a golf course. At the time, there were rent wars in Columbus and I received an incentive of three free months, which pretty much made the decision as to where I would live.

At a cost of \$1,000, I had a mobile phone installed in my new car. Back in 1987, cellular telephones were still fairly rare. The only portable cellular phones were so big that they had their own carrying case. If I recall correctly, airtime was around 25 cents a minute. Compare that with today where I have unlimited minutes for fifty bucks a month, and my phone will fit comfortably in my shirt pocket.

New job, new city, new house, new car, and what I felt were milestone advancements in my career. *A new most significant event* - I was on top of the world.

As I was settling into my new position, Peter McCann came into my office one day and talked about how he was planning to buy a corporate aircraft.

Peter didn't appear to fit the paradigm - he didn't look like he had two nickels to rub together, and frankly I thought he was giving me a lot of puffery.

Nevertheless, and not to judge a book by its cover, I was cordial, answered all of his questions and even prepared several proposals and pro forma cash flow analyses for aircraft purchase and management.

Peter called one morning wanting to charter a turbo-Commander 690, which is a jet prop that accommodates six passengers. With a new customer, we required a credit card guarantee for the \$4,000 estimated cost for the trip.

Peter gave me his credit card number. I ran the card, but it was declined. I continued to have a healthy and perhaps increasing skepticism. Nonetheless, I called Peter and diplomatically told him that his bank was undoubtedly in error, as his card was declined. Peter gave me a different credit card number that was approved.

Over the next several months, Peter chartered a number of flights and all of his invoices were timely paid.

As Peter and I became better acquainted, he continued to charter aircraft as we searched the market for an aircraft he could purchase. Within roughly three months, Peter purchased a nine-passenger turbo-commander 900 for just under \$700,000. Peter offered me a position as his Chief Pilot, which I accepted. This was another advancement, and another most significant event. I knew that *Chief Pilot* would be a great enhancement on my resume.

During my tenure working for Peter, he also purchased an Israeli Westwind - a long range nine-passenger jet with a seven figure price tag.

During the late 1980's the interest rates increased dramatically. Peter decided that keeping the airplanes was draining too much cash from his business and asked that I sell them.

Fortunately, because I initially located the aircraft and negotiated the purchase correctly, when we sold them, Peter made a nice six-figure profit. He presented me with a rather substantial severance check as a bonus for selling the airplanes. He certainly had no obligation to give me any commission or bonus, but that was Peter's nature.

There are a few lessons from this story.

Peter is clearly an individual who rose from the ashes of adversity. *Yes, it can be done.*

It is good to be skeptical, but don't close doors - just be guarded until you have adequate information to form a definite conclusion that is based on fact - not on perception. Given the skepticism I already had, how many people would have just written this guy off after his credit card was declined?

Peter is an individual who genuinely practices the concept of, *take your focus off of yourself and put it on some one else*. Build other people and your rewards will be automatic.

J. Paul Getty, one of the world's wealthiest oil tycoons said, "If you want to make a million dollars, help someone else make a million dollars." This entire philosophy ties into how I operated in every management position I have ever held. I build the people - they build the company.

How will Peter McCann be remembered in a hundred years? Not for all that he accumulated from all of his toil but rather, by what he became through the process, and the model that he created for others to follow. Peter McCann's legacy will endure for eternity.

Now, to circle back to the nature of man, the jungle out here and how you need to deal with it to survive.

You can probably achieve some financial victory by stepping on others, building your personal gain on other people's losses and climbing the mountain by stepping over all of the carcasses. The problem is that the end result is just not very fulfilling. When you reach the top of the mountain, you're all alone. Well, you and a few goats.

The concept that has worked effectively for me is the boost-n-pull method. We climb the mountain together. I boost you, and then you pull me. Then you boost me, and I pull you. We both arrive at the top of the mountain. With this method, there are no carcasses in our wake, we have not created skeletons in our closets, we don't have to watch our back, and we both have someone with whom to share the success and the memories of the challenges we conquered together.

I disagree with the statement, "*it's lonely at the top*." I never found it lonely - just a lot less crowded. However, that being said, believe me, there is a great deal more gratification when you take the journey *with* someone as opposed to stepping *on* someone. That is not to say that you won't encounter a few Dragons that need slain. *You will!*

Over the past thirty-plus years, I am not suggesting that I have been Mister Nice Guy. I always try to be good to people however, many times people misinterpret nice for weak or stupid.

While CEO of Fiber Network Solutions, I learned how quickly people forget that I was paying their salary, paying for their medical insurance, matching their 401(k) contributions, giving them roughly 30 days off per year with full pay, gave people company automobiles, a beautiful work environment and a host of other benefits. All I wanted in return was for them to do the job they were hired and paid to do. Most of the people did their job however, there

were some who thought I was weak or stupid and attempted to take advantage.

Some people remember the experience working for me as a great chapter that moved their career substantially forward. Other people remember me as a total prick. The latter are those who thought that running to a lawyer and suing their employer was a way of winning the lottery, or otherwise venting their resentment because I demanded that they earn their paycheck. As I look back at that particular group of people, they are right where I left them - still trying to scrape, skim and scam a meager living.

I always hated having to participate in elucidating the lesson that litigation can be a life altering experience. Nevertheless, when someone decided to open Pandora's Box, I made the lesson crystal clear.

I am sure that there are a few who are still recovering from the caustic and expensive experience of litigation and curse my name every day. I'm a Dragon Slayer. I don't apologize for it, and I don't negotiate when I'm attacked. I fight back with the same ferocity and venomous tactics that are brought to the contest by my opponent.

However, as I have said before, I never seek a battle - I only respond when attacked. If I am wrong, I admit it and make it right. However, when I know I am right and I am challenged, I have no issues with donning my suit of armor and unsheathing my sword.

I remember a highly publicized case a number of years ago where a woman who alleged that she burnt herself on McDonald's hot coffee sued McDonald's. McDonald's settled out-of-court for one million dollars. I was dumbfounded by that decision. McDonald's opened Pandora's Box and then had to deal with numerous copycat lawsuits.

An attorney filed suit against one of the other fast food chains because his adolescent clients were fat. The complaint alleged that his clients' obesity was the fault of fast food. That lawsuit was ferociously defended. Not only did the defendant win the case, but also the fast food industry was subsequently insulated from any future frivolous lawsuits by congressional legislation.

Sometimes people think that litigation is their opportunity to achieve a financial windfall. That behavior is really no different than holding gun to someone and trying to extort their wallet. The behavior is manifested in man's nature to survive, hunt and kill, but attempts to utilize the civil judicial system as the weapon. For every person who gains from this Neanderthal behavior, there are probably several thousand who make the attempt, but lose.

Some people thought that my viciousness in litigation was my ego. I have thick enough skin that the sticks and stones were as inconsequential as a mosquito. The main reason that I refused to settle any litigation by paying my opponent was because it opened the door for copycat lawsuits.

I would only settle the suit if my opponent agreed to pay us, even if the amount was somewhat insignificant. My strategy was to make the statement that suing us resulted in months of anxiety, stress and negativity, expenses that caused various levels of financial demise, and the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow was really a bucket of manure. Even worse, my opponent had to pay just to stop the financial hemorrhaging he was experiencing in costs and legal fees.

Be careful about attacking someone and holding a gun to their head via litigation. You might find yourself up against a warrior who will simply embrace the battle mercilessly.

It takes a lot more intestinal fortitude to achieve something on the basis of our skills, talents and hard work as opposed to stepping on and stealing the achievements of others.

Frankly, I think that people who facilitate their own personal gain by stealing other people's ideas or property, and causing the demise of other people are cowards. I call that the Neanderthal approach. How hard is it to walk around with a club?

After selling my company, I took some time to rest and play, become reacquainted with my Yellow Labrador and my motorcycle, and to thoughtfully reflect on the past eight-year experience. After the weather started to cool down around November 2003, it was time to start focusing on the next chapter of my career.

I made a few contacts with government and community organizations that are involved in the reentry initiatives designed to facilitate a successful community reintegration for ex-offenders.

The number of organizations available to help you make a successful community reentry is phenomenal. I don't care what challenges you might have, there is an organization that can help. But, here is a secret. They are not going to meet you at the gate on release day, and they are not going to hunt you down and beat a path to your door to give you help. You need to take the initiative to seek them out.

Just the same as I went through probably fifty or sixty different social and government organizations while putting together my aviation education package, you need to get out there and seek the help you need.

There are hundreds of people who can help you. You also need to be wise to the fact that there are those who practice the Neanderthal approach and would be delighted to have you for a snack.

Be aware that the Neanderthal approach is not uncommon. However, its successes are shallow. Such individuals are quickly recognized for what they are. They may make small temporary gains, but they never build a genuine support structure of people who practice the boost-n-pull method, which is far more successful. The only support structure they build are people of like-mentality, who all practice the same Neanderthal methods, and consequently, they all have to watch their back. There is no genuine trust among the members of that constituency. They typecast and sentence themselves to the snake pit.

I don't become angry about the antics of these individuals. Rather, I am amused. I do become a little frustrated at times. The frustration is based upon the fact that people who attempt to lie, steal or cheat at my expense waste my time. I have to take time to reveal the truth to those people who matter. Time is wasted that could otherwise be spent on my core agendas.

Don't let yourself get dragged into battles with such individuals. Amuse yourself with them. Identify the people who matter and provide them with the information they need to arrive at accurate conclusions about you. The truth always surfaces and your adversaries will self-destruct. Remain focused on your agenda.

I will give three examples of how *not* to handle adversaries.

1. As I mentioned previously, 1993 - 1995 were a couple of rough years for me. I was fired from my job as a Learjet captain for reasons that I fundamentally believed to be unethical at best, and arguably, unlawful conduct on the part of my employer.

I could have just picked myself up, brushed off the dust, licked my wounds and moved on. Instead, I coordinated with several other current and former employees, and drafted a fifty-plus page federal lawsuit against my former employer that alleged, among other serious charges, numerous counts under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO).

Obviously, because we believed the allegations to be truthful, and because the complaint was massive, it became my full time job and totally consumed my every thought and action.

I spent over two years in that battle and every day was blanketed with negativity. My life came to a standstill. When I moved to Columbus in 1995, the lawsuit was still pending.

There were numerous regrets I had for filing that lawsuit. When we were initially developing the complaint, our attorney's advised that we had to name all of the corporate officers personally. Consequently, one of those corporate officers who had become a good friend and one of my closest mentors was named as a co-defendant. That is probably among my life's greatest regrets, and it is a regret that I will take to the grave.

Several months after moving to Columbus in 1995, meeting Kyle, starting full-time with Your Connection and beginning the formation of Fiber Network Solutions, Inc., I examined the value of the case pending against my former employer.

The challenge that most people do not understand about litigation before rushing off to court is that there is a liability phase and a subsequent damages phase.

In litigation, you first need to prove that your adversary has liability, which is an adversarial, time consuming, egregious and expensive process. Then, even if you prove that your adversary is culpable, you have to prove your damages. Speculative damages are very difficult to prove (pain & suffering, etc.) and even hard damages, lost wages, etc., can be equally difficult.

I was still fully capable of working as a Learjet captain the day after I was fired. I figured at best, I might get an award - if I won both phases of the litigation - in the area of \$100,000. The attorneys would get a third, costs would eat another third and it would require an enormous amount of my time, energy and effort to get to a trial. Most importantly, I would continue to be cloaked in negativity. On the other hand, I was looking at an opportunity to move forward and build something positive by focusing on my business.

The case was settled with a mutual walk-away. No one got anything. If I had not made a zero dollar settlement, mine would be a much different story today. There is no way that I could have built my company had that lawsuit continued.

2. During the 1990's a company called Netscape developed the first fully functional, feature rich and robust web browser. Netscape cornered the market and it did so because it had the best product on the market.

Netscape initiated litigation in the late 1990's against Microsoft, making allegations that Microsoft was unfairly promoting its web browser, Internet Explorer, thereby limiting Netscape's ability to penetrate the market. Netscape diverted substantial resources and focus to the battle with Microsoft.

I'm sure that Microsoft also invested substantial resources in this battle. However, because of the size of Microsoft, it was capable of fighting this battle while simultaneously continuing the growth of the company and the development of Internet Explorer.

Although Netscape may have had some victories in court, it arguably lost in the market. Many people believe that the Microsoft Internet Explorer web browser is now superior to the Netscape browser, even though the Netscape browser is a feature rich and excellent alternative. Microsoft's Internet Explorer has become the industry standard.

Playing Monday morning quarterback, I firmly believe that Netscape would have dominated the web browser market had it not filed the suit against Microsoft. If Netscape had simply focused on its core business, it is entirely possible that it would have won the battle where it really matters - in the market.

Choose your battles carefully and determine where it is fought. Netscape may have had greater success fighting its battle in the market as opposed to a courtroom. Had Netscape continued to focus on its core goals, the Netscape browser may have become the standard used by the vast majority of the public.

Be cautious that you don't engage in situations that are based upon emotion, which suck you into battles where you might win the battle, but lose the war. Remain focused on your core agendas and just move on.

That being said, should you find no other alternative but to engage in a battle, be prepared and willing to fight to the death.

The warrior who is prepared and willing to make the ultimate sacrifices wins battles. When you enter battle with this attitude, your adversary will likely fold long before you sustain any significant injury.

Just to clarify, we are talking about battle within the guidelines of our civil judicial system. Once you step outside of the civilized system for dispute resolution, *you've lost*.

3. During late 1999 and early 2000, my company was in a rapid expansion. We had outgrown our 5,000 square foot building - *The Litter Box*. We had two to three people in each office and desperately needed more space. I spent the better part of that year negotiating real estate leases.

We eventually leased the 21,000 square foot two level building that would become our headquarters.

Preparing the new building required a substantial amount of construction and technology, (and money) including the installation of several miles worth of network cabling to connect all of the company computers and communications systems.

The day before the move to our new facility, one of our senior network engineers, *Dilbert*, submitted his resignation. It was apparent to us that this individual was attempting a power-play, hoping that we would call him and offer him pay raises and additional authority so he wouldn't leave us at this critical time. Dilbert was simply not capable or competent to handle any authority. Although talented as an engineer, he required constant adult supervision.

We never called him. Frankly, we had been hoping that he would quit, and if he didn't, we were preparing to fire him. Because of his ego, prejudice and racism, he had alienated himself from most of the employees in the company.

As far as Dilbert was concerned, he was brilliant and everyone else was a moron. He was a sulky individual in a bad marriage, he was bitter, and his disgruntlement with his life came to work with him every day. Over time, his attitude became intolerable.

Dilbert had been working on our Cleveland network and managed to crash the entire system. Because of his huge ego, Dilbert didn't bother making a back up before initiating the changes that brought down the entire network in Cleveland. It took the whole engineering department a week to bring the network back on line, while our customers were without service throughout the entire city.

Dilbert was frequently frustrated with his desire to over-build the network and my unwillingness to spend millions of dollars for equipment we did not need. In fact, Dilbert was frustrated that he had no spending authority without approval from his supervisor. Dilbert simply demonstrated that he was not mature or accountable enough to be given budgetary authority and responsibility.

Dilbert did not understand the business building process. He could not get his alleged mind wrapped around the fact that the company did not need next year's network to handle today's customer base.

Dilbert was the classic example and the Poster Child for a whimpering, sniveling, wailing, trembling, crying, sobbing, drooling, bellyaching, whining, moaning, thumb-sucking, lip-quivering, butt-puckering, puking, complaining, delirious, repugnant bottom feeding, pandering, pathetic, shallow, synthetic, dysfunctional, easily manipulated and frightened, homophobic, bigoted, galactically ignorant, low information, backwoods, Archie Bunker knuckle dragging *disgruntled employee*.

Dilbert's disgruntlement worsened with each passing day after he resigned because we did not call him and beg *His Eminence* to return. We never called him.

We never succumbed to Dilbert's attempt to hold the company's move hostage, and we were happy to see him leave, as you might have gathered from my description in the previous paragraph.

Within a week or so of Dilbert's departure, we heard through the grapevine that he was publishing various scurrilous remarks. The comment that amused me most was, "That company will go out of business without me."

In hindsight, it was a comment that might be expected from an individual in his early twenties who was raised in an upper middle class lifestyle as an only child. He never had to battle a Dragon in his life. And when faced with a challenge, he could only cower.

Don't be a Dilbert.

During early May 2001, our entire Michigan network went down. The engineering department was working feverishly to identify the cause and get the system back up.

Our company had an automated tape back-up system that would restore all of the programming in our routers and telecommunication switches. The back-up tapes were automatically made every day, and there were seven separate tapes in the event one or more became corrupted, or were otherwise unusable. *All of the back-up tapes were corrupted.*

The subsequent investigation indicated that the network outage was a deliberate act, which was traced to several disgruntled employees, some who had left the company and others who were still working there - people to whom I gave their first start in life and went out of my way to support.

Dilbert was high on the FBI's list of suspects and there was technical evidence surfacing that pointed to his and other's involvement.

I invested substantial time pursuing the apprehension and prosecution of these individuals. However, September 11, 2001 obviously diverted the focus of any investigations.

It was interesting how many people became involved in the agendas of one disgruntled employee and ended up damaging their futures. The worse part for all of them is that the investigation continued, and the truth always comes out. Anyone who has served time understands that law enforcement has time on its side. No matter what, at some point and time the truth will

always surface. Acting on revenge or disgruntlement is always a really poor choice.

As I have mentioned before, people who behave like Dilbert, generally self-destruct. You really do not need to waste any time engaging these people in any kind of battle. Their behavior is an indication of their lack of skill and ability. When you see this, just let them self-implode. It turns out that Dilbert and friends had started a business, and all by themselves, they went belly-up.

The most important lesson from the preceding three experiences is that I have learned to just accept an occasional injustice and continue to move forward. You have a better chance of winning the lottery than winning a lawsuit. And, either way, you lose because you cannot replace the time that you could have otherwise been using to move your ball forward.

It is a fact of life that some people who are incapable of creating their own destiny walk around with a club and will try to steal from others. In the political circles, particularly in Washington DC, this is called *Blood Sport* - the practice of destroying other people's lives for political gain. This may not engender a great deal of confidence in our political systems, but it is reality.

Just because you need to watch your back does not mean that you have to participate in such behaviors. There are better ways to achieve the things you want in life that bring a great deal more gratification.

You are going to battle Dragons and sometimes the Dragon is going to get the best of you. Sometimes, you will regroup and charge right back after that Dragon. However, learn when it is best to take a different direction, gain experience and capture more treasures - live to fight another day. There will always be a time when you can re-approach that Dragon that knocked you down. After you have accumulated more experience and a greater arsenal, you can reengage that Dragon and kick it to Mars.

The other lesson: Don't practice the Neanderthal approach. Hone your skills and advance yourself on the basis of your own capabilities. Try the boost-n-pull method. It works.

What are some of the causes of trust and mistrust? Some of these lessons can be learned from the Cold War.

During the cold War and the escalated build-up of nuclear weapons, there was certainly no trust between The United States and the Soviet Union. Obviously, the nations had starkly contrasting agendas. However, the mistrust that the United States had for the Soviet Union was not necessarily because of the things that the Soviet Union was doing and vice versa.

The United States was skeptical of the Soviet Union because the United States knew that the US Government was doing things that it didn't want the Soviet Union to know about. And, the Soviet Union was skeptical of the United States because the Soviet Union was doing things that it did not want the United States to know about. Both Nations had hidden agendas.

The United States did not trust the Soviet Union because the United States had hidden agendas and vice versa.

When President Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963, the United States went to an elevated military alert status. The United States was concerned that the Soviet Union might think that the United States suspected it of some level of participation in the assassination. Conversely, the Soviet Union was concerned that it was suspect, and the United States was concerned that the Soviet Union felt suspect. It was skepticism run amuck.

Mutual suspicion, skepticism and paranoia are what occur when you don't have an open agenda with your cards face up. You become suspicious of the other person because you are concerned that they may find what you're hiding.

You might believe that if you have hidden agendas, then the other person must have hidden agendas as well. It is a whole lot easier to just be honest. You don't have to catalog all of the lies and hidden agendas.

See people for who they are. If they practice the boost-n-pull methods, get close to them. If they practice the Neanderthal methods, they are not worthy of your implied endorsement by association. Let them feed off of their other brethren snakes. That is not to say however that you can't use the association to gain what you need and then move on.

Once someone has demonstrated that they practice the Neanderthal methods, either by direct experience or observation, you owe no loyalty. Just maintain your own credibility.

Being savvy does not mean being dishonest. However, it is important to understand that many people will interpret good nature and good humanitarian doctrine as being either weak or among the intellectually challenged.

The preceding oratory is not the all-encompassing answer to the fact that it's a totally different world than the one you left xx years ago. It's okay to be scared. The most important thing to remember is patience. One day at a time.

Don't worry about it if you get knocked down or set back once in a while, if you are taken advantage of, or are the victim of an occasional injustice. When my network was hacked, I was pretty perturbed. I wasted a lot of time with all of the investigations. If I had it to do over again, I would have gone to work the next day and just focused on moving the ball forward. In the end, Dilbert and friends self-destructed anyhow.

Just pick it up and keep moving forward and add the lesson to your repertoire of Dragon slaying weapons. Next time you encounter a similar situation, you'll handle it differently and have different results.

Your mistakes and the resultant pain they cause are life's greatest lessons. Embrace your mistakes and challenges - they are a far better education than you can ever receive from any university.



Chapter 25

IT WAS EASIER 33 YEARS AGO.

I frequently hear the excuse from ex-offenders that I am only successful because it was easier 33 years ago for people to reenter mainstream society who have a felony conviction. This sounds so logical and intelligent. It provides many ex-offenders with the rationalization they crave so they can justify their tortured argument for not even trying.

Sure, it was a whole lot easier for me to reenter mainstream society than it will be for an ex-offender today. When I was released from prison with several felony convictions under my belt, employers always greeted me at my front door with a limousine to drive me to the interview. When I arrived, I was showered with champagne and caviar, and on several occasions, there was even a marching band playing a rendition of *Hail to the Chief*.

I was generally ushered into a large conference room where the entire staff would kneel and kiss my ring. Arriving home with an escort that rivaled that of the President of the United States was a challenge because employers were generally stacked a few dozen deep waiting at my front door. All of those employers were begging me to work for them with offers that included such perks as sign-on bonuses, golf club memberships, luxury automobiles, tropical vacations, and a 1,500 square foot private office complete with my very own café latté machine, foosball, tanning bed, personal masseuse and concierge. And, the economy was just booming after the Carter Administration.

The excuse that it was easier for me 33 years ago is just that - an excuse for you to quit. It has no real logic. It is now more than 33 years later and guess what? - I am still a convicted felon. I not only deal with the same circumstances as an ex-offender released today, but I have dealt with those circumstances for thirty-plus years.

Having pointed out the irrationality of the excuse, and the fact that I am still a convicted felon, I was told, "Sure, but it is easier for you now because you have achieved success." If a person were thinking rationally, I would simply say, "I rest my case." However, in some instances it appears that additional explanation is required.

I did not arrive where I am by a 33-year-long streak of luck. It was not by a single leap or bound. It was not magic. It was roughly twelve thousand days

- one day at a time, starting at zero. It was the continued achievement of one new most significant event superseding the previous most significant event.

People in general suffer from Adult Attention Deficit Disorder. We all want instant gratification. We want the position we dream of, the cars we dream of, the houses, clothing, jewelry, respect, etc., but we want it *NOW*. Many people are unwilling, and others are unequipped, to earn it. You want to be where I am, but are you willing to take the same, or a similar journey to get here?

I am amused with the media hype that the conflict in Iraq continued for so long, and that the United States maintains a presence there. It makes no difference whether you or I agree with why we are there. We are there, and we cannot change that. As General Colin Powell stated prior to the invasion, "If you break it, you own it." It is a little unreasonable to think that the coalition forces are going to conquer a dictator, occupy an entire country, rebuild its infrastructure and implement a new government in what, a few years? The United States is going to be in Iraq in some form for the next 75 years. There is no instant gratification in that situation. Albeit the invasion was sold to the American public based partially on how quickly and easily it would transpire, which was a direct appeal to our want of instant gratification.

Some ex-offenders seem to form a demographic that has acted on their impulses for want of instant gratification. They want what I have achieved, but are unwilling to make the changes and sacrifices that I have made to achieve it. If they have to endure the pain that is an integral component of change, then it is easier to point the finger and say that my journey was a walk in the park, but their journey would be far, far more difficult if not impossible. So, why bother even trying?

As long as a person has that attitude and is willing to accept a life of mediocrity, or frequent returns to prison that are inherent thereof, they have the freedom to make that choice.

I was released from prison in August 1980. I suppose I could have said, "It was easier for someone who was released in August 1947 - thirty-plus years earlier." I certainly could have used that as my rationalization not to try, and my justification for sitting around sucking my thumb for the past 33 years. However, that would have provided zero toward achieving a healthy life of normalcy via legitimate agendas.

Whether a person is an ex-offender or not, achievement is not easy, it's hard. That has not changed in the last 33 years, or 330 years, and it will not change in the in next 33 years or any other time in the future. In some respects, I believe that the whole felony conviction label stigma is just a convenient

excuse for many to quit, or not give a legitimate lifestyle an honest try. For some, if they didn't have the felony excuse, it would just be something else, a hangnail perhaps.

Success is a choice and the rewards are commensurate with the choices a person makes. There is a myriad of excuses not to try. Those who embrace the excuses have only a hand full of excuses at the end of the road. Those who embrace the challenges and refuse to negotiate the price of success arrive at rewarding destinations, but more importantly, the journey is phenomenal.

A person is only defeated when they stop getting back up and trying. When a person quits, they lost. Alternatively, the winners realize that the game of life is simply a state of continued challenges and a ceaseless series of problem solving exercises.

The challenges facing an ex-offender today may be different than they were 25, 50, 75 or 100 years ago. And, the challenges will be different in the future. I had to exercise creativity, gain some additional education, find new friends, make sacrifices, endure pain, conquer challenges, solve problems, and embrace change. Most importantly, I had to decide not to quit when the going got a little rough.

I chose to reenter "mainstream" society. In other words, it was me who had to change - I changed. I did not sit around complaining that mainstream society should change.

Too many ex-offenders want mainstream society to change so they do not have to make any adjustments. That is not going to happen - *ever!* Whatever your challenges are, as I have pointed out, organization and prioritization is key. Take the journey - one day at a time.

It is 2013. I face the same challenges because I am still an ex-felon. I simply refuse to quit.

Think about this:

"We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too. ...even though I realize that this is in some measure an act of faith and vision, for we do not now know what benefits await us. But if I were to say, my fellow citizens, that we shall send to the moon, 240,000 miles away from the control station in Houston, a giant rocket more than 300 feet tall, the length of this football field, made of new metal alloys, some of which have not yet been invented, capable of standing heat and stresses several times more than have ever been experienced, fitted together with a precision better than the finest watch, carrying all the equipment needed for propulsion, guidance, control, communications, food and survival, on an untried mission, to an unknown celestial

body, and then return it safely to earth, re-entering the atmosphere at speeds of over 25,000 miles per hour, causing heat about half that of the temperature of the sun - almost as hot as it is here today - and do all this, and do it right, and do it first before this decade is out - then we must be bold.”

John F. Kennedy
President of the United States

Do you genuinely have the ambition and the desire to succeed legitimately and enjoy a life of normalcy? It all starts with the desire. Once you have desire, it's just a matter of planning the path.

I can't plan your path for you, but I can tell you with absolute assurance that if you are prepared to put forth the effort, not because it is easy, but because it is hard, because your goals will serve to organize and measure the best of your energies and skills, and you act with some measure of faith and vision, for you do not now know what benefits await you, you will stretch and apply yourself and exercise your every talent and skill, some of which have not yet been realized, and be bold, then success awaits you. *Be Bold !*

There are literally hundreds of millions of dollars being invested in ex-offender reentry every year. I would argue that ex-offenders today have a great deal more help than I did 33 years ago.

However, I also know that the help available and the social organizations that are helping ex-offenders can only act as a catalyst. The choice and desire must come from you.

Without the fundamental choice and desire, no amount of money or assistance will make any difference. Conversely, the person who makes the genuine choice and has the sincere desire is going to successfully reenter mainstream society regardless of whether or not any help is available.

If you make the choice, and stick to it, truly have the desire for a normal life, and seek and embrace all available assistance, your chances of building a successful life are phenomenal.



Chapter 26

YOU'RE TOO OLD TO GET STARTED OR TO START OVER.

The age excuse is interesting. People frequently compare where they are in life to other people of the same age. People fail to compare what they have done to what others have done that contributed to the other person's success and positions in life.

Age has nothing to do with success or achieving anything worthwhile. Some people will convince themselves that society owes them something for all of the lost time - because they are not in a similar position in their life as others of the same age. I was definitely conscious of my lost time, but that fact became a motivator for many years to aggressively pursue my success.

We've already discussed the blame game. All the blame game will accomplish is the perpetuation of wasting time that could otherwise be used productively.

You are where you are in your life, and others are where they are in life, because of choices you and they have made - *period*.

I am where I am in my life because of choices I have made. I have certainly been tempted from time to time to sit around sucking my thumb and blaming someone or something for any of the numerous times I have been knocked down. Where is the gain in that?

Achieving goals and milestones, whether small or major, is not a respecter of persons. Achievement does not discern whether a person is young or old, black or white, rich or poor, Christian, Muslim or Atheist, or what an individual's history contains. It is the result of deliberate planning and persistence in pursuing that plan.

Accept the fact that you are positioned in life based upon your choices and you will begin making forward progress. If you're sitting in prison, there is a good probability that you earned your stay as the result of your own behaviors. That certainly was the case when I was sitting in prison.

After you have grasped the fundamental reality that you are where you are in life because of your choices, perhaps one of the first things you might consider doing is talking to some of the younger kids who are making the

same poor choices today that you made xx years ago, which resulted in your present position in life. By doing this, you might touch a few lives, and most importantly for now, you will come to more fully accept and internalize this truth; *where we are today is the result of the choices we made yesterday.*

Begin the process of moving your life forward by simply making conscious and deliberate choices that have a predictable outcome.

If you are now too old to get started or to start over, will you be in a better position in a year or in five years? You will continue to age - that is carved in stone.

Where will you be in five years if you don't start now? Still blaming age? If you start now, in five years you will be well on your journey to a better life, and you will have achieved many goals along the way.

Just keep in mind that you will always have to start from where you left off. If you're thirty-five years old and you haven't graduated from high school or earned your GED, then you are functionally sixteen, which is where you left off. As you achieve goals and successes, and accumulate stashes of gold and jewels from your battles with Dragons, the place you left off frequently makes for an easier new start.

Draw a comparison as to what you have done in life in terms of setting and achieving genuine goals to what others have done in their lives that have achieved a position of comfort and security. It is entirely possible that you might be in your mid fifties and this comparative would place you parallel to an individual in their early twenties.

You have to be willing to start where you left off. If you dropped out of high school, that is where you need to start, because that is where you left off.

Starting where you left off will never change. However, until you do, the disparity between where you left off, and where you are, will continue to widen. There will never be an easier time to start from where you left off than right now. If you don't start now, tomorrow the disparity between where you are and where you left off will have widened.

You might suggest that people who have achieved success in life are lucky. Luck is a superstition, a fallacy, a fictional phenomenon, and a fantasy.

Even winning the lottery is not luck. The lottery, as with all gambling, is based upon mathematical statistics. For every winner there are hundreds of thousands of losers. The statistical odds are mathematically measurable, and they are not in favor of anyone winning. It's gambling, and with any gamble, the odds of winning are substantially unfavorable.

When a person who has not achieved success suggests that a successful person's accomplishments are "luck," they are simply making a tortured rationalization to justify why they have not been willing to face and conquer the challenges that are inherent to, and an integral component of success.

People who fabricate rationalizations for their lot in life might suggest, "You're successful because you are lucky, but I have not succeeded because I have had bad luck, or because I have been victimized by the system." *Whatever!* Maybe my luck and that person's lack of luck is because of the astrological alignment of the stars. That is just a total cop-out. *My luck* and *my bad luck* has always been the result of *my choices*. The same holds true for anyone.

I very definitely believe in the good fortune that accompanies "being in the right place at the right time." As I have stated over and over throughout this book, I have arrived at my destinations because I was out hunting in the forest of opportunity.

The word "occupation" is generally referred to as a person's career or job. Occupation is that which occupies our time and focus. My occupation has, and remains, being in the forest of opportunity.

Years ago I remember being asked during an interview where I envisioned myself in five years. My answer; exactly where I am today. In five years I will be hunting in the forest of opportunity, prepared to seize every opportunity that presents itself, because I will find myself in the right place at the right time, simply by being out there looking.

I have acquaintances that smoke pot as a lifestyle. If they aren't smoking it, they're looking for someplace to buy more of it. A day doesn't pass that they don't smoke pot. Their lives are mediocre at best. Smoking pot has become their *occupation*. It is what occupies their primary life focus. Ask yourself, what is your occupation? What occupies your focus? What do you really want your occupation to be?

There is a secret to success. *Hard work!* No kidding, that's the secret. I have seen people who are among the intellectually challenged become very successful. They just out worked their competition. Conversely, I have known intellectually gifted people who sit around and think up cool ideas, but they never implement and execute. They just sit around with no decipherable forward progress.

I have also known many people who have a sound mind, a good education and a fair amount of ambition, but still they do not achieve. They are what I call the "*two-eleven*" crowd, and it probably incorporates the majority of people.

The 2-11 crowd are those people who operate at 211 degrees Fahrenheit. If you heat water to 211 degrees Fahrenheit, it sits there and does absolutely nothing. Take it up just one more degree, to 212 degrees, and you can move a two hundred ton ship across the ocean. If you want success, first achieve the level of the *two-eleven* crowd, and then take it up one more degree.

Walking through life without a plan to achieve something is also gambling. You are hoping that some day, your number will come up, that your ship will come in, that somehow you will be *lucky*. The odds are clearly against you.

Excluding people who were raised with privilege, which we have already discussed, it is a simple fact that people who have achieved any success have followed a deliberate and conscious plan. And, along the way, they have faced and conquered many anticipated, as well as unforeseen challenges that stood between them and the attainment of their goals.

Waiting for your lucky day is not going to bring you anything but heartache. Conversely, if you plan for success as successful people do, you will attain substantially the same results as they have.

I have definitely had opportunity present itself many times. I very definitely believe that being in the right place at the right time has had a dramatic affect on my life. That should not however be confused with luck. I was simply out in the forest of opportunity hunting for the fulfillment of my dreams.

When you are in the forest of opportunity, from time to time you will be in the right place at the right time, and you will find opportunities to seize. You just have to get out there. Also along the way, you will encounter those vicious Dragons. Be a warrior. Conquer the challenges, solve the problems, Slay the Dragons, and move forward.

Your age is not a barrier to getting started and quite candidly, you don't have any choice because you will indeed continue to get older. Unless you are absolutely certain that you are going to die within the next few minutes, you have a future.

You can capitalize on age as a negative barrier or an excuse, or you can embrace the positive attributes of your age, that includes experience and wisdom.

Since I'm well beyond the time that I was young and good looking - well young maybe - I rationalize my age by subscribing to the concept that age and experience will always beat youth and beauty.

I have been asked a few times, “Wouldn’t you love to be 21 again?” My answer is a resounding, “*Hell no!*” I wouldn’t trade my age and experience even for the excitement of once again being a Baby Bull.

You can either decide to use age as your excuse, or you can accept that which you cannot change, which is the past, and begin your fresh start toward a productive and rewarding future. *The future does not equal the past.* I know, I have mentioned that numerous times because I want you to internalize this fact.

Only you will be affected by the results of your choices, good or bad. No one else will care about whom else or what else you focus your blame upon. It is however interesting how quickly you will build a support structure of people who will go above and beyond when you start to accept responsibility and accountability for where you are in life. When I started to accept blame for where I was in life, people were quick to help me in any way that they could.

Make new choices, embrace change, make a deliberate and conscious plan with realistic and attainable goals, take small steps, be patient and persistent and genuinely apply your best efforts. You will eventually find that even your most grandiose dreams are attainable if you have a plan and are prepared to slay the Dragons that lurk between where you are today and where you want to be tomorrow.

If you’re over 30, over 40 or over 50 and you feel that it’s too late to get started or to start over, but you believe that the concepts offered in this book would have changed your life if you were 18 or 21, then what difference does it make?

If you believe that some of these concepts and experiences could facilitate positive change for an eighteen or twenty-one year old, then it will do the same for someone over fifty.

Just start now.



Chapter 27

DON'T SWING AT A PITCH IN THE DIRT

Early in the development of my company, I had become acquainted with an attorney, Eric who was interested in the emerging Internet industry. I had expressed a concern to Eric about our competition hiring our employees and stealing our trade secrets.

FiberNet was pioneering some very innovative systems, and since our competitors were companies like AT&T, Sprint and WorldCom, any of which could crush us like a bug, I wanted to protect our propriety information.

There was also a wide discrepancy between what we were paying our employees and what those giant companies were offering. I needed to implement some kind of protection so the big boys couldn't steal our people and all of the information they had accumulated while working for me.

Eric suggested that we require that all employees sign a no-compete, sole employment, and confidentiality and copyright assignment agreement.

Between Eric and me, we developed an employee agreement that prohibited employees from working for a competitor within our markets for one year after leaving the company, required that their employment with my company be their sole employment, required that the sources & methods, and the confidential and proprietary information they learned at my company would be kept confidential, and any software programs or other materials authored by an employee would become the copyrighted property of the company, since they were being paid by the company for creating such works.

Among the greatest challenges of managing the company was motivating sales people to simply do their job. We had a variety of incentive programs, a great commission structure and all of the sales people received a base salary that ranged between \$18,000 and \$30,000 per year.

I had only one expectation of sales people in exchange for their base salary. All I required was that they make fifty telephone calls per day. That may sound like a lot, but it only equates to roughly one call every ten minutes. If a sales person is making telephone calls, they will eventually sell our services. Even a blind squirrel will stumble over an acorn.

When a sales person sold something, they received additional compensation in the form of commissions, and if they achieved their monthly and quarterly sales goal, they received additional bonus incentives, like a new BMW for example.

My quota for sales people was an activity quota - just make phone calls. I have no idea how a person can sell something unless they are making phone calls. In exchange for the activity quota that I held sales people accountable to, they also held me accountable to a quota twice a month - *payroll!*

If a sales person missed meeting their quota, they would receive counseling. If I missed my payroll quota, there would not likely be any flexibility. I never missed my quota.

If a sales person had a pattern of missing their quota, they received warning reports with accountability expectations. If their work habits did not improve, I could not afford to continue paying them - just the same as if I missed my payroll quota, they could not afford to continue working for me.

My definition of the employer - employee relationship is simple mutual accountability. You meet your expected quota and I'll meet mine.

I felt justified in having employees sign the employee agreement. We were hiring people who were young and inexperienced, and could barely tie their own shoes. We were providing employees with a good work and learning environment, a decent base salary, medical benefits, matching dollar-to-dollar 401(k) contributions, bonuses, and experience that gave them a start in life.

My investment in a new sales person was substantial. A desk, telephone and work area averaged \$15,000 plus a new PC computer, which back then ran \$3,500, not to mention the overhead for office space and utilities.

Despite the investment and all of the benefits the company provided, it still had sales people who protested that my fifty-telephone call quota was unreasonable.

I offered a compromise. If a sales person knew a better way to sell our services without contacting prospective customers, they were more than welcome to disregard my methods and pursue their own strategies. I would not hold them accountable to any quota, but I expected to be released from my payroll quota as well.

Do it my way and you receive a base salary. Do it your way and you are straight commission. What exactly is unfair about that? If sales people were so confident that their methods would be successful, they would make more money straight commission.

We had some difficulty with locating a qualified sales manager. Our first sales manager was a disaster. He created his own little kingdom and used threats and intimidation as a management style. Once I heard of his tactics, he was released.

We had a salesman, in our Columbus headquarters, Harold (Harry), who was about my age. He had owned a couple of businesses previously, none that were very successful. Nevertheless, I liked his tenacity and he was producing sales. He seemed to have gained the admiration of many of the younger sales people with a fatherly image, and he came across as credible, even though in twenty-twenty hindsight, most of the time he was full of crap.

We were in a period of rapid expansion and I had recently signed leases for office space in Cleveland, Detroit and Pittsburgh. After spending a small fortune on furniture and computers in those new satellite offices, all that was needed were sales people. We began a recruiting effort and hired between 10 and 20 people for each satellite office, in addition to expanding our staff in Columbus.

Among my many mistakes running that company, I promoted people to district manager long before they had the maturity and experience to handle the responsibility. I also learned that although I promoted the top sales producers, sales people do not always make good managers. Oh well, we live and learn.

I eventually learned to hire and promote people who make my life easier - people who take the bull by the horns - *Dragon Slayers!* If I have to manage a manager and his staff, then I don't really need the manager. True Dragon Slayers are rare indeed.

I think it is completely ineffective to give a person responsibility without the corresponding authority necessary to meet that responsibility. I had high hopes that Harry would basically take charge of the sales department, manage it and free up my time to focus on other growth objectives.

I gave Harry responsibility, authority, a great base salary, a percentage of all sales, a beautiful big private office, cell phone, company car, and expense account - *the works!*

Within only a few months, we had opened and staffed sales offices in Cleveland, Detroit, Pittsburgh and Cincinnati. We had also expanded the Columbus sales force to roughly twenty sales people.

An interesting fact that I learned about growing a business is that while it is small, you run the business. As the business becomes larger, it runs you.

I slept better at night when the company was at a size that I could afford to take a personal loss if everything went to hell in a hand basket. We now had a payroll of over \$1.5 million and total overhead was reaching a million dollars a month.

All of the company's growth was financed with lease agreements, debt capital and bank loans. If this business crashed and burned, I was the personal guarantor on the lending. Consequently, if the business went down the tubes, I would personally crash and burn as well. Since failure was not an option in my wildest imagination, if I was awake, I was working.

There is a paradigm that exists in corporate America regarding the "Boss." Presidents of companies are frequently perceived as cruel and greedy slave drivers who expect everything and give nothing in return. The perception seemed even worse among young people during the Dot-Com era.

The New Economy brought with it a new philosophy of how businesses operated, and the "*suits*" were the enemy. Since I was building a corporation in accordance with the traditional Old Economy principles, the company was the *Evil Empire* and I was the evil leader in the minds of certain young and inexperienced employees - a designation first bestowed upon Bill Gates and Microsoft Corporation by the *Geek Culture*.

I had developed some rather altruistic management concepts. I genuinely cared about the people working for us and I felt like I was somewhat of a Dorm Daddy. I wanted people to enjoy and grow from a wholesome and nurturing work environment. I went to great lengths and expense to ensure that everyone had everything they needed to excel.

As the company hired more and more people, it became difficult to find time to become acquainted with each employee individually. I should say that it became more difficult for the employees to become acquainted with my fundamental good nature and me. Consequently, many people simply perceived me as the unapproachable boss who sits in the corner office of the Ivory Tower, cracking the whip - the paradigm of the *Corporate-America* Boss.

The company reached a size where new employees didn't realize that all of the company's good-natured policies had their genesis with me. They saw three disparate entities - the company, which was the Evil Empire, the awesome work environment, which everyone loved, and me the boss, who was a hard-ass because I expected people to work and earn their pay.

As we hired additional staff, some of the new employees only perceived me in accordance with a paradigm that was totally erroneous. However, a person's perceptions are a person's reality.

People built walls and barriers and much of the discussion around the water cooler was bickering and complaining. Once people convinced themselves that the Boss was the enemy, they would attempt to discover loopholes through which they could gain an advantage.

I would later learn that to a large degree, much of the discontentment was instigated by my VP sales, Harry. Harry had an affinity for our young salesmen. Harry managed to gain the loyalty and comradery of the young and impressionable salesmen by appealing to their perception that company management and any icon of authority was the enemy, simultaneous with a quid pro quo appointment of himself as the commander of a crusade to conquer the Evil Empire.

I never did fully understand why Harry worked so hard to gain acceptance with a group of 21-year-old guys as opposed to having loyalty to the company and managers his own age. I had suspicions that included his past failures in business, failed marriages and his general failure in life. Maybe he was just psychologically and emotionally stuck in his twenties.

My vulnerabilities were plentiful. My altruistic humanitarian doctrine and the policies that were born from my good nature were out in the open for people to exploit. One did not have to look far to find a policy that they could manipulate. My good-natured policies became perceived as weaknesses, I was perceived by some as the enemy, and some thought that they were in a battle where they needed to gain any possible advantage.

Over time, I found myself frequently defending our policies and trying to explain that everyone needed to be accountable to one another, or the company would not survive.

I was constantly swinging at pitches in the dirt, which wasted an extraordinary amount of my time. In twenty-twenty hindsight, I should not have even dignified petty complaints by acknowledging them. If anyone did not like the rather robust benefits that they had working there, *the exits were clearly marked*. It was not however the last time I took a swing at a pitch in the dirt.

All of the district managers were under twenty-five years old. Although they had proven themselves as relatively productive sales people, none of them had any management experience, and in hindsight, very few had any actual potential for management.

Harry ran the sales department and insisted that he could teach and mentor. However, that process is very difficult with five offices, all of which are over 100 miles away from the nucleus. It also became extraordinarily problematic working with the young emerging ego syndrome of our newly appointed district managers.

The district managers and the production of the district sales offices fell under Harry's responsibility. Sales were increasing steadily, but at that particular time in the Dot-Com space, if a person could steam a mirror, they could sell.

We maintained an accounting system that separated the financial statements for each division and provided copies of those statements to each of the district managers. I wanted each manager to learn how to run his or her store based upon its own profit & loss statement. I later learned that our Cleveland DM (Paul) was sharing the financial statements with his wife who had no understanding of the business.

The monthly overhead in the Cleveland office was in the low six-figure range and revenues had not caught up where the division was self-sustaining. Paul's wife however only saw the top number - the revenues, which were approaching \$100,000 a month. Paul was 23 years old and had a base salary in the \$30,000 a year range with a generous commission structure, a company car, and a robust benefit package, Class A office space and an expense account. His total package cost the company roughly \$65,000 a year. Paul's wife felt that he should be paid far more since the office was generating such revenue, even though the division was still losing money.

Paul had hired a receptionist in the Cleveland office who could only be defined as galactically awful. After tolerating her for a few weeks with no sign of improvement, I suggested that Paul replace her. After a few more weeks, I told Paul to fire her, which is when I learned that she was his wife's little sister, and firing her would create tension in his marriage.

Since the company was a for-profit business and not a marriage counseling service, I gave Paul the option of firing her, or just resigning, and I would find someone who *would* fire her. After Paul resigned, I decided to refrain from sharing financial statements with the district managers. Men who claim to be head-of-household but wear their zipper on the side of their pants just make me vomit.

Paul and his wife, and the drama they created were good lessons for me. I realized that *it is impossible for me to have a business relationship with someone whose career is being managed by someone with whom I do not have a relationship.*

Keep your spouse out of your business decisions. No one can make judgments about your business with snap-shots of your activities. If they aren't by your side eight hours a day, living each of the challenges, and an integral part of the daily dynamics, then they can't offer constructive counsel.

I started holding quarterly meetings with the entire staff and sharing those expense items that could be reduced if people would pay attention and exercise a little spending discipline.

Company wide, our gross profit margin was in the 50% range. For every dollar in revenue, our cost of sales was roughly 50 cents and therefore, fifty cents went to pay overhead expenses.

To look at it another way, for every dollar that was spent on overhead expenses, it required that we generate two dollars in revenue. When you're looking at it in terms of one or two dollars, it doesn't have much impact. However, when the numbers reach seven figures, the impact is profound. One million dollars in expenses requires generating two million dollars in revenue - and that is just a break-even scenario.

I held budget seminars with all of the employees so they could see where we were wasting money. Our cellular telephone bill was several thousand dollars a month. I asked that people stop using their cell phone while in the office since there were over 70 telephones in the building that they could use for free.

Sales people had developed a habit of sending contracts to new customers via FedEx at \$15.00 each. A fax is free and the customer can fax back the signed contract with the original being sent via regular US mail for less than a buck.

My office was situated where I had a direct view of the glass enclosed copy-fax-printer room. After one of the budget meetings, during which I specifically discussed cell phone usage in the building, I saw one of our young technicians sending a fax and talking on his company provided cell phone.

I went into the copy room and asked the technician whom he was talking to. He replied, "My insurance agent." I took the phone, hung it up and just walked back into my office. Not ten minutes before, he was in the budget meeting where we discussed cell phone usage. Sitting right next to the fax machine was a telephone.

I arrived at my office very early one morning, around 5:00 AM. One of our salesmen, Derek, was in the office, which didn't necessarily seem all that unusual. If a sales person had an early morning presentation in a different city, coming in early to prepare was normal procedure.

The sales facility was located in the lower level of the building. The sales department had a couple of printers that were networked with all of their computers, but the one high-speed printer we had was located in the glass enclosed copy-fax-printer room across the hall from my office. As I was entering my office, I noticed that the high-speed printer was running at full speed and accumulating a pile of paper in the printers' out bin.

I walked into the room where the printer was grinding away and looked at the pile of printed pages that was accumulating. It was our customer list and our customer-prospecting database.

I went into the lower level to ask Derek why he was printing out our customer and prospecting list. When I arrived, he was in the process of cleaning out his desk and putting his personal belongings in a box. He was a little startled to see me.

I was disappointed, Derek was obviously making a clandestine exit and stealing our customer and prospecting list. I was also disappointed because he had won the annual top sales person award, which would have been given to him the following week during our company awards ceremony - along with a pretty beefy bonus check. He was not aware that he had won the award.

I didn't skimp on awards. The cost for the gold and crystal awards we handed out each year was almost \$25,000, plus the bonus checks that accompanied those trophies.

During the 2001 annual awards, I had 12 custom-made solid gold rings, with a ruby and a diamond produced for our *Founding Warriors*. These were that small group of real Dragon Slayers who did whatever it took to hit the goal. With over 600 employees up to that point, I had identified only 12 people who were deserving of the Founding Warrior distinction. The Founding Warrior rings were roughly \$2,000 each.

I asked Derek to come up to my office, which he did. As Derek sat down in the chair in front of my desk, I asked him where he was going and why he printed out our customer and prospecting databases.

Derek's attitude was petulant as he announced that he had accepted an offer with one of our major competitors. I told Derek that he was bound to a non-competition agreement and that stealing our customer list not only violated the agreement, it violated Ohio statute. He said he didn't care about the agreement and stormed out of my office.

I retrieved the pages that Derek had printed. As I walked back to my office, I noticed that the customer and prospecting list he printed only included those alphabetically listed records from the letter X through Z. I assumed that his clandestine activities this particular day were preceded by several other days during which he had already printed the majority of the database. Our entire customer and prospecting list would soon be in the hands of a major competitor along with the knowledge of many of our sources & methods, trade secrets and proprietary processes.

My job was to protect the company as a whole. If one person caused damage to the company, then everyone's job could be in jeopardy. I'm not sure that

people think about that when they support a co-worker who is doing something that could damage their employer. Ultimately, by supporting a co-worker who is causing damage, they are damaging you.

I contacted Eric, one of our attorneys who had drafted the employee agreement, and explained the morning's encounter I had with Derek. He suggested that we go to court and seek a temporary restraining order (TRO) on the basis of the non-competition agreement.

As Eric was preparing the documents to file with the court, I received a notice on my fax machine that Derek's attorney planned to file a TRO to enjoin us against interfering with Derek's employment at our competitor. The notice provided us with less than an hour to have our counsel meet Derek's attorney at the courthouse.

When Eric arrived at the court, he met Derek's attorney as he was leaving. Derek's attorney had secured the TRO that he sought. However, when Eric went to see the judge and provided him with a copy of the non-competition agreement, the judge reversed the TRO issued in Derek's favor and issued a TRO in our favor.

Evidently, Derek's attorney never mentioned that there was a non-competition agreement to the judge, probably because Derek never mentioned that little detail to his attorney, which was at best kind of dumb. Once served with our TRO, our competitor suspended Derek.

We received a voluminous document discovery request from Derek's attorney. The request was several pages in length. Most of the documents requested were not relevant to the case and it appeared to be a futile attempt to intimidate me. I suspect that his strategy was to try to burry me with burdensome work, hoping that I would just want to settle and let Derek return to work at my competitor.

I decided to simply comply with our opponent's document discovery request and delivered over 10,000 pages of documents, each marked as a separate exhibit. Now, Derek's attorney would have to spend the time going through the boxes of documents, and cataloging each page, one page at a time. *Expensive!* They tried a power play, a swing at a pitch in the dirt of sorts. I returned a grand slam.

Derek's attorney complained (*whined*) to the judge about the enormity of the documents we provided pursuant to his discovery request. The judge simply coined the phrase: *Be careful what you ask for, you might just get it.* They were now stuck with the expensive task of cataloging all of the documents that they had requested.

During the next month, we held a few depositions and filed numerous motions to escalate the litigation. Derek's attorney contacted our counsel and asked if we would consider a mediation conference with a magistrate. Obviously, Derek had no idea that litigation could be so involved, or so expensive.

We met with a magistrate at the courthouse. The discussion began with Derek's attorney giving a long diatribe about how Derek saw the writing on the wall that he was going to be fired. Nothing could be further from the truth. However, I just sat there and listened, letting him dig his hole as deep as he wanted.

After Derek's attorney finished delineating his tortured defense that his client was slated to be fired, and therefore had every right to seek other employment, I pulled from my brief case, a crystal and 18-carat gold award for *Top Salesman of the Year* that had Derek's name inscribed, set it on the table and said, "*Then how do you explain this?*"

Everyone, my attorney's included, were rather shocked. There was a full minute of silence as everyone just stared at the trophy. Obviously companies do not just fire their top sales person out-of-hand. It was one of those melodramatic theatrical moments that completely deflated the tortured defense made during the previous half an hour oratory by Derek's attorney.

Evidently, Derek's attorney assumed that, like many corporations, we would offer a monetary settlement to Derek for nuisance value. They misjudged me. It was apparent to me that Derek could not afford to continue the litigation that he started, and his attorney was becoming weary as well - since he wasn't getting paid. Attorneys generally do not particularly like working when it becomes obvious that there is no pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, and their client has little or no ability to pay their hourly fees.

The case settled during the mediation, with Derek agreeing to pay a portion of my legal fees each month for the following year. The amount of those payments was insignificant and did not even come close to the \$40,000 we had spent.

My objective in having Derek make the payments was to drive home a point with all of the other sales people, since Derek fundamentally served himself up as the sacrificial lamb. The rest of the sales people needed to see that our non-competition agreement would be enforced and that engaging me in battle did not result in winning the lottery. Rather, instigating litigation would likely cause them an immediate and residual financial demise.

I had no personal vendetta against Derek. I simply had to protect the company and the employment security of everyone else who was working

there. Aside from that, it was Derek who first filed the lawsuit. All I did was respond.

It was important to set precedence, so I did not have to teach other people that litigation is costly and there are no winners - just losers. Derek had offered himself up as the sacrificial lamb when he decided to violate his agreement, steal our customer and prospect lists, engage an attorney and file a lawsuit. It was Derek who was on the offense and made the attack. I simply responded as I do when attacked by any Dragon.

Was the episode with Derek worth the forty grand we spent? In twenty-twenty hindsight, I doubt that Derek would have been able to take any of our customers. For one thing, our customers loved us - we provided a great service. Secondly, our customers were contractually bound and they were not going to break their contract to buy a more expensive service from Derek's new employer.

Sometimes it's difficult to see the forest for the trees when you are in the heat of battle. I was under attack by Derek and at the moment, I was concerned that he could cause substantial damage to my company. However, after the smoke cleared and I reflected upon all of the facts, I concluded that I swung at a pitch in the dirt. I spent forty grand to swat a fly.

Non-competition agreements are a great vehicle for attorney's to make a lot of money. From a practical standpoint, unless a company is protecting some kind of revolutionary patent, they are a waste of money and a waste of time. I changed our policy, however unpublished, that we would probably not enforce those agreements in the future.

During the Dot-Com era, companies were valued on a multiple of *revenues*. Many times the valuation would be based upon several hundred times a company's gross revenue. Consequently, even during 1997 - 1999 when our gross revenues were only six or seven million dollars a year, the value of the company was in the hundreds of millions, based upon the insane valuation principles that were used during that period.

I frequently received inquiries as to our interest in selling the company. However, most of the solicitations were based upon making a stock-swap with a company that had no fundamentals.

Companies that did not have the resources to actually bring a deal to fruition made other solicitations. The lions share of solicitations were tire-kickers hoping to buy the company with an offer that was well below market.

I had seen companies that were being solicited for acquisition nibble on the hook of a potential purchase only to divert their focus to the process of selling the business while the business itself suffered from a lack of management

attention. I was very cognizant not to swing at a pitch in the dirt and have my management staff and me focused on a sale process while the company suffered a steady decline.

In some instances, the buyer of a company is hoping to create a focus diversion. If the seller's business begins to decline during the acquisition process, the buyer refines its offer - downward. The seller is then left with a choice to sell at a reduced price, or attempt to pick up the pieces and rebuild.

As I mentioned previously, our entire Michigan network was taken down by a group of disgruntled employees who had hacked into our network. The FBI investigation was ongoing, and the group of disgruntled employees that the FBI had identified as suspects was continuously recruiting other employees to join the battle against their employer - *The Evil Empire*.

Shortly after the turn of the new millennium, I received a solicitation from Excel Communications. Excel's CEO visited our facility and suggested that it would be interested in acquiring my company for a figure in the twenty million dollar range. Twenty million was a low-ball offer at the time and I gave him a counter offer, which he said Excel would consider.

During the following several weeks that I was negotiating with Excel, none of the divisional sales offices were achieving its sales goals.

I spoke with Harry, my VP Sales, and told him that I wanted him to conduct performance evaluations with each of the sales people. In other words, clean house and replace the non-producers with people who were willing to work. Alternatively, if someone wasn't selling, then reduce my payroll expense so I could take more to the bottom line.

Harry told me that he didn't like telling his sales people that they had to achieve the goals, further stating, "Dave, I just want to make sure I can have coffee with these guys in ten years." I explained to Harry that we all have to be accountable and he was being paid to hold his sales people accountable, the same as they held me accountable to meet payroll twice a month.

Several weeks had passed and Harry had still not conducted the performance evaluations. At that time, my overhead was over \$25,000 a day. With every passing day that sales production was sagging, I was wasting a lot of money.

I called Harry into my office and asked him about the status of him conducting the performance evaluations. He reiterated that which he had stated previously; "Dave, I just want to make sure that I can have coffee with these guys in ten years." I replied, "Well Harry, I'm not paying you to expand your social circle - I'm paying you to manage a productive sales department." Harry said, "Dave, as I have told you before, if our philosophies don't agree, I'll be happy to resign and move on."

I pretty much anticipated Harry's response. Before calling the meeting with Harry, I had prepared a resignation letter for him. I slid the letter in front of him and handed him a pen. He was rather shocked that I called his bluff. He signed it.

I always preferred that people resign as opposed to me firing them. The obvious reason is that I prefer that the separation be their decision and not mine. The less conspicuous reason that I prefer to have employees resign is because the premium I paid to the state for unemployment compensation was based upon the number of claims that it approved for employees that left my company. If an employee resigns, they cannot collect unemployment compensation and my premium is not affected.

If you are an employer, you always want a resignation. If you are an employee, you would be brain dead to resign from a job and forfeit your unemployment compensation benefits.

Harry turned in his keys and company car, his company credit card, and his cell phone, which I just put on my desk.

I had ordered a limousine to pick Harry up and take him home. I had no animosity toward Harry. Santa Claus has his place, but it is not as a manager of people who needed to be managed. Without close management, these young people sit around surfing the Internet and practice their golf putting.

After employees left the company, their PC computers would be reformatted so they could be redeployed. However, before reformatting, we would have one of our technicians make a mirror of the hard drive and review where they had been surfing on the Internet, which frequently explained why they didn't get much done. Harry's Internet activity was interesting. I learned why Harry had such an affinity for the young guys working for him, and why he wanted to be sure he could have his cozy little coffee-clutches with them years into the future.

Within a few weeks, several other employees had resigned. It was apparent that Harry influenced them. I just thought Harry was a coward for using many other young people to further his agenda of revenge against me.

Harry had a lot of those kids wrapped around his little finger. He was a real Santa Claus. A lot of young people were used by Harry and got hurt while unknowingly fulfilling his twisted agendas. Harry just sat in the bleachers leading the cheer with no personal exposure.

I was sitting in my office one afternoon and the cell phone rang that Harry had turned in when he resigned. I answered with a simple, "Hello." The caller said, "Hi Harry, this is Trisha from Excel. We've ordered your

notebook computer.” I said, Oh, that’s great Trisha. By the way, did you order business cards for me?” Trisha responded, “Yes, they should be here next week.” I then asked, “Trisha, did you have them print a title on my cards?” Trisha responded, “Yes, Vice President of Sales.” I finished the conversation, never once saying that I was Harry.

This created an interesting dilemma. Harry was offered and accepted a position with Excel, the company who was allegedly trying to buy my company. I didn’t have any particular interest in enforcing the non-competition agreement as a matter of policy, but this situation was a little different.

I knew that the CEO of Excel believed in, and enforced non-competition agreements. I faxed a copy of the agreement to Excel’s CEO and followed up with a telephone call. He suggested that we work out some kind of arrangement where Excel would give us some business in exchange for waiving the non-competition agreement with Harry.

I felt that if Excel was sincere in any of its prior negotiations, I should have received a telephone call before it made an offer to Harry. The fact that Excel hired Harry clandestinely, and knowing that he was bound to the no-compete agreement indicated that Excel was disingenuous. It was not until I had one of our attorneys send Excel a cease & desist letter that it finally woke up and realized that Harry did not represent the requisite value that was worth a litigation battle. Excel fired him.

The fallout from the confrontation with Excel regarding Harry resulted in the cessation of all negotiations regarding the sale of my company. One could only speculate as to whether or not Excel was sincere in its negotiations or if it was simply using the acquisition negotiations as a smokescreen to acquire our knowledge and employees for free. There was also a wide gap between Excel’s and my valuation of my company. I would never know if that gap could be closed and a deal consummated.

During March 2001, while still employed by me, two of our salesmen, Dumb & Dumber, both in their early twenties, formed a company to represent several of the large billion-dollar Internet backbone operators - all of which were competitors. I did not learn that they formed that company while still on our payroll until months later when I researched the Secretary of State business filing records.

In May 2001, our Michigan network was hacked by former disgruntled employees. Through the investigation that followed, I learned of the existence of the business that had been formed by the two salesmen, Dumb & Dumber, who had resigned only weeks prior to the network hack.

When I looked at Dumb & Dumber's website, I saw that their company was representing the largest network operators in the country. Given the attack on our network by former disgruntled employees and the close proximity in time that they had formed their competing business, I felt that there could be a nexus.

Perhaps these naive kids thought that they could attempt to take over our company by decreasing our service reliability through hacking activity, and have a company in place to take over our customers. Given the circumstances, it seemed like enforcing the non-competition agreement was essential.

After serving Dumb & Dumber with a cease & desist letter, they retained an attorney. Litigation ensued which lasted seven or eight months and ran into the tens of thousands of dollars.

After we filed our suit for their breach of contract, they filed a frivolous counterclaim hoping that they would gain some kind of leverage. Not only did it not gain them leverage, it triggered my employment practices insurance. Now these two inexperienced kids were battling with a major insurance carrier and its bottomless pockets.

Insurance companies like to settle claims as opposed to litigating. Literally the day that the legal fees hit my \$10,000 deductible, my insurance carrier suggested that we offer Dumb and Dumber a settlement to just make the case go away.

When I negotiated the employment practices policy, I stipulated that any settlements would require my consent. In other words, if litigation got expensive, the insurance carrier could not just decide to bail out, which is what they would have done had I not made that stipulation to the contract. I told the attorney that represented the insurance company to advise our opponent that there will never be a cash settlement.

Depositions of Dumb & Dumber went on for weeks. Because they had no business or litigation experience, they apparently did not understand that lying in a deposition does not help their case. Dumb & Dumber lied so frequently that my attorneys felt compelled to contact the county prosecutor and report them for perjury.

I would recall the frequently used line in the old Perry Mason television series when he would be questioning a witness; *"Are you aware of the penalty for perjury?"*

I learned a reality during that litigation. The penalty for perjury is nothing in terms of criminal sanctions. Perjury is rarely prosecuted, except for a

handful of high profile cases. Nevertheless, when perjury is discovered in a civil case, it pretty much destroys any hope of victory.

The perjury by Dumber was unorganized and easily detected. Dumb's perjury was at least a little more creative and sophisticated, but it was all still detected.

It became apparent that Dumb was a pathological liar and had practiced lying as his normal behavior his entire life. I am sure that he could be clinically diagnosed as a pathological liar.

During the highly publicized Scott Peterson trial, Dumb came to mind frequently. The personality of Dumb and Scott Peterson were strikingly similar. A person has to be among the galactically stupid to state in a sworn deposition that they are *willing to lie whenever it meets their needs*, as did Dumb during one of his depositions.

Early in the case, we had issued a subpoena for Dumb & Dumber to turn over copies of all of their eMail. Under oath during their depositions, Dumb & Dumber both stated that they lost all of their eMail because their eMail server had crashed. We issued a subpoena to their Internet Service Provider that surrendered Dumb and Dumber's entire eMail server.

All of the several thousand eMail messages were on Dumb & Dumber's server, including eMail that had been sent and received after the deposition in which they claimed the server had crashed resulting in the loss of all of their eMail. *Oops!*

There was plenty of eMail between Dumb & Dumber and other members of the *Geek Culture* that despised the very corporate America that paid their salaries. They referred to my company as the *Evil Empire*. Once that circulated through the company, I had several employees who knew me well enough to understand the utter absurdity, and presented me with a Darth Vader helmet.

Dumb & Dumber seemed to just lie about everything. It appeared that their perception of the litigation process was, whoever tells the most convincing lies wins. They just kept digging their hole deeper and deeper.

There was a substantial amount of eMail between Dumb & Dumber, and some of the other former disgruntled employees who were trying to harm the company. Some eMail led us to other servers that were managed by other former employees. The FBI took an interest in all of the servers and made copies of the hard drives.

On one server that we seized, we discovered eMail between our Human Resources manager and our young Michigan district manager, both of whom

were married. The Human Resources manager was in her mid-thirties and married to a truck driver. The young district manager was in his early twenties, recently married and his wife was expecting their first child. There was a substantial amount of eMail between the two that was recovered when we seized the district manager's server. Both of them had left the company.

The sales manager had resigned after being called on the carpet for various shenanigans that were occurring in his department, and the Human Resources manager was fired for coercion and falsification of records.

I wouldn't suggest that there was an affair brewing between the human resources manager and the Michigan district manager, but the eMail between the two indicated that meeting for lunch was frequent. For example, an eMail that was sent from the human resources manager to the district manager stated: "Truck guy left, it must be lunch time! :)" [sic] When I read all of the Email from that server, I just thought, Oh God, this company is a real *Payton Place*.

Early in the litigation with Dumb & Dumber, their attorney had filed a motion for Protective Order to prevent discovery by my company of contacts that Dumb & Dumber had made with two potential customers. The sole basis for the motion was that the information was "irrelevant" to my company's claims that Dumb & Dumber had breached their non-competition covenants.

The eMail we retrieved from Dumb & Dumber's eMail server gave us the names of those two customers and the fact that those customers were building facilities in Columbus and Dayton, Ohio - two cities that were expressly covered by the no-compete agreement, which was the basis of the litigation.

Dumb & Dumber's attorney signed his name to that motion. The attorney either knew that the motion was utterly false, or he failed to fulfill his obligation to determine whether or not the Motion he was filing with the court was, or was not factual.

Dumb & Dumber's attorney was well experienced, having served for a number of years as an appellate court judge. His name by the way is, Dumbest. Giving him the benefit of the doubt, I am sure that Dumb & Dumber sold him a load of lies when they first retained his services, the same as they lied to everyone else, and on the record during their depositions.

I had been pressing my attorneys for months to file a motion for sanctions, citing the fact that the motion for a protective order filed for Dumb, Dumber by Dumbest. As far as I was concerned, the motion for Protective Order that was filed by Dumb & Dumber's attorney boarder-lined on fraud upon the court.

My attorney's kept dragging their feet. Many attorneys do not like to expose information that could result in a colleague being sanctioned by the court, or sanctions imposed by the Bar Association, or by the Ohio Supreme Court's office of disciplinary counsel. My attorney's also knew that once we did expose the fact that the motion for Protective Order was frivolous, the case would likely come to an abrupt end and the gravy train of billable hours would cease as well.

After six months of prodding, my counsel finally filed an extensive motion for sanctions against Dumb & Dumber, and Dumbest (the attorney), who signed the aforementioned motion. Even though the presiding judge and Dumbest were friends, there was no getting around the facts of our motion. Our motion was pretty much the knockout punch, not that they even had a whisper of a prayer anyhow.

The case ended with Dumb & Dumber's attorney having a heart-to-heart with his clients and explaining that all of their perjury pretty much destroyed their case, they had no authentic or viable counterclaims, and the motion we had filed that week asking the court for sanctions was a fatal blow. Dumb & Dumber had also accumulated a balance owing to their attorneys of roughly \$60,000.

The settlement agreement required that Dumb & Dumber pay us - not we pay them. There was no pot of gold at the end of that little journey.

I had read the eMail that Dumb and Dumber exchanged with other members of their consortium against the Evil Empire, in which they were soliciting (begging) donations for their legal fund. None of their *friends* contributed so much as a nickel. Some friends!

The only friend those two ever had was the guy who gave them an opportunity to work when they had little or no experience, be a part of a well regarded and growing company, learn and grow, and earn good money.

The last I heard, Dumb & Dumber had a parting of the ways. Dumb was contemplating attending law school and pursuing a career as an attorney. Good luck with that option, given the voluminous records of perjurious testimony that is publicly available throughout the universe, and endures to the end of eternity. Dumbest is probably selling something someplace, squeaking out what I imagine will never go beyond a mediocre lifestyle.

I never felt very good about the experience those two young guys had to endure. It took its toll on them, and even their attorney told us that they had a difficult time dealing with the battle emotionally. My intent was to protect my company, not to create any harm to two young guys. But once again, it was not me who initiated that battle. I was simply pursuing my path

through the forest of opportunity, when along came a Dragon, which I sliced and diced.

Litigation is an extremely caustic process, and it was a battle that Dumb & Dumber could have easily avoided entirely. They choose to puff out their chest and say they are going to kick my ass. *For what!?!* They swung at a pitch in the dirt. Their ego led them to play a game of hardball, but before getting into the game, they had no idea what real hardball was all about. They were amateurs.

Not infrequently, people react to ego, passion and emotion, which have a tendency to facilitate really bad choices. Dumb & Dumber made choices that were influenced by individuals like Harry, who had hidden agendas, ulterior motives, was many years their senior and whom insulated himself while Dumb & Dumber twisted in the wind. Nevertheless, Dumb & Dumber were both adults, albeit young and inexperienced, and they could have avoided making ego-based choices that led to devastating and long lasting consequences.

There are many people in prison who made emotionally or ego based choices over circumstances that were trivial. A dispute over a few dollars or relationship quarrels, but perceived as disrespectful or a smack to their ego is not a good reason to risk going to prison. Yet, there are many people incarcerated because they chose to react on the basis of principle. Sometimes it is better to just retreat and live to fight another day.

I choose not to use Dumb & Dumber's names in the rendition of this story because I have no interest in bringing any residual heartache to them. If they want more heartache, they seem perfectly capable of bring it on themselves. I suspect that the lessons they had learned in battle with me were powerful enough that they now know to avoid the slippery slope of litigation at all costs.

If the records of the case and the deposition transcripts ever surfaced, Dumb could not be an attorney, or for that matter, he would probably have some serious restrictions in holding any position of trust. The case file is with all of my other archived business records in a warehouse gathering dust. I wish Dumb well, and I hope he does become an attorney. He's well suited and will be in good and uniform company.

As for Dumber, whom I do not recall ever had a date with a girl, I can only pray that he never has the opportunity to pollute the gene pool.

Many years later now, I reflect back, and if I knew then what I know now, I would have done nothing with respect to Dumb & Dumber. They did not have the capital to start a business and continue its operation beyond a few months. Their company's ability to secure the agreements to resell for the

large providers was based upon the bullshit they handed to all of those companies. They were not selling anything. They were no more harmful to my business than a couple of kids opening a lemonade stand.

I wasted months of time and a fair amount of money. My reaction at the moment was made during what I perceived as the heat of multiple attacks. *I swung at a pitch in the dirt.*

As for all of the other disgruntled employees, I would have done nothing there either. It is simply a fact of business that there are going to be disgruntled employees. Hating the boss is a phenomenon of nature - much the same as gravity.

I have expectations of people, but I'm a sensitive guy. Deep down, no one wants to feel that they are Darth Vader, the leader of the Evil Empire, especially when they have invested great amounts of time and money to deliberately facilitate their altruistic agendas to make people's lives better.

I'm sure that I'll swing at pitches in the dirt again in my life. However, the experiences I have had will go far to recognize when I should swing or just take a ball, and to separate and evaluate oncoming threats while battling other Dragons.



Chapter 28

WHERE DO YOU START YOUR JOURNEY?

If you plan to rely solely on the various community and government organizations to facilitate your reintegration into mainstream society, you are setting yourself up for a lot of disappointment. These organizations are there to help, but they can only help those people who want to help themselves. They can point you in the right direction, but it isn't their job to take you by the hand and lead you through the rest of your life. The rest of your life is up to you. If you embrace the help that is available and follow the concepts in this book, I think you have close to a 100% chance of making a successful reintegration and attaining a normal future and lifestyle in mainstream society.

Use community and government organizations for sources of information and leads. Don't rely upon community organizations to make your success - make your own success. Most importantly, I want to emphasize that no person or organization is going to meet you at the gates when you are released. No one will chase after you to help you change your life.

I frequently receive letters and calls from people who are either in prison or recently released. I will make as much time as necessary to help any individual who is willing to invest the time to help himself.

During an initial telephone conversation with an individual, I tell them a few of the items they need to gather together for a face-to-face meeting, such as educational records, credit and debt information, etc.

Very few of the people who call me ever call back, because they aren't even prepared to put forth the effort of completing the necessary homework for a productive meeting. If they don't call, I definitely don't pursue them to offer my assistance. The people who don't call back are people who initially called for a handout. I am not the source for handouts and never will be. I am however more than willing to help anyone who is willing to help him or herself toward creating a rewarding future.

Give a man a fish and feed him for a day - Teach a man to fish and feed him for life. If someone is just looking for a fish, don't call. If a person is prepared to learn how to achieve self-sustenance and reintegrate into mainstream society, I have nothing but time for them.

PRE-RELEASE

Almost all institutions offer some kind of pre-release program. In Ohio, pre-release begins 3 - 6 months prior to scheduled release date. During pre-release, you will be provided with a host of information and agencies that can help you. Pay attention during these sessions and don't throw this information away when you are released. You will need the resources you receive during pre-release for reference. The list of agencies is among the most important information you will need.

As mentioned previously, the media and Hollywood have largely created the paradigm of an individual who has had a conviction or incarceration event. Although there is a small percentage of this demographic that are incorrigible, it is less than five percent.

Over the past few years, I have had dialog with ex-offenders during speaking engagements at correctional institutions.

During each presentation, I ask the question; "How old were you when you had your first infraction with the law?" The follow-up question is; "How long had you been engaged in illegal activities before you were caught?"

The latter of my two questions is the most relevant - it was the genesis of what had become a snowballing lifestyle. Most had participated in some type of illegal activity for one to three years before they were caught. The answers to the first question were between thirteen and fifteen. Consequently, the age that these individuals' illegal behavior began ranged between ten and thirteen.

Based upon my interactions with ex-offenders, almost all inmates genuinely want a normal lifestyle, but few believe that it is attainable with the conviction label.

Labeled as societal discards that are out of sight - out of mind, ex-offenders are people who have dreams, visions, aspirations and emotions that are no different than any other person. They laugh, they cry, they feel compassion for others, they want to achieve, and they dream.

Given an opportunity, direction, guidance, and the fundamental belief that they can achieve, the potential for success and legitimacy for ex-offenders is not dissimilar than it is for anyone else.

An enormous barrier, perhaps the only barrier to making a successful reintegration into mainstream society and building a successful lifestyle is

simple self-belief. Many, if not most ex-offenders simply do not believe that a normal and prosperous life is even possible after having been in prison.

If I achieve nothing else by writing this book, over the past thirty-plus years, I have certainly proven that a life of normalcy is attainable post-conviction and incarceration, if an individual is willing to put forth the effort.

I am here to tell you, and to serve as an example, that you can pursue a completely legitimate life and enjoy a bright and prosperous future. If you can dream it and believe it, you can achieve it. It just starts with a decision and then you begin the journey.

There is no absolute path that will lead to success. There are definite principles that should be practiced. However, there are many variables, challenges and obstacles that differ with time, environment, location, etc.

Two people can depart New York on separate paths and hike to Alaska. They will both head in the same general direction and arrive at the same destination. However, their individual experience will be very different and their journey's will have encompassed vastly different challenges.

A necessary component to realizing any achievement is the pre-planning phase. Before you begin your journey, we can stack the deck in your favor. We can do a little planning to make sure you are as well equipped as possible to start heading in the general direction of success.

Before you are released, you can begin the process of cleaning up your "*Life Baggage*."

Many individuals are released from prison carrying the same baggage out with which they entered, i.e., delinquent taxes, consumer credit issues, creditor liens, driver license suspensions or expirations, pending litigation, delinquent child support, etc.

The day that you are released, you ideally want to have a clean slate. The issues that you had before going to prison may have been perceived by you as one big problem that was completely overwhelming. That one big problem was a collection of many different small problems. Nevertheless, in many cases, your *Life Baggage* probably contributed to your demise at least to some degree.

Resolving Life Baggage requires that you first separate your issues into individual problems, as discussed previously in this book. Many people carry an enormous number of individual problems that amalgamate into a single overwhelming and devastating anchor.

Logically, the only reason a person develops an accumulation of problems is because they do not address and solve their problems as each problem surfaces. Ignoring problems is the root cause of Life Baggage. If a person has two or more problems, it is because they have not solved the first, second, third and so on.

The process of making a successful reintegration into mainstream society and pursuing a successful future is not a leisurely stroll - *it is a marathon*. It is not possible to run a marathon if you're carrying a bag full of bricks.

If you take the time to really examine and develop a list of the individual problems that collectively form your Life Baggage, you will then be capable of addressing each problem individually and solving the entire collection. It requires time, patience and effort. Once all of your Life Baggage is resolved, you will be starting anew with a clean slate.

If you begin with a clean slate, then you will only be facing and conquering today's challenges that present themselves as you pursue your journey, as opposed to carrying around yesterday's challenges as well.

Your future can be whatever you decide you want it to be. Your future and its benefits or consequences will be directly proportional to the effort you are willing put forth to achieve any dream or goal you wish to attain. Another major ingredient to your success will be your commitment to persevere and never quit, just because it gets a little tough.

Depending on which demographic of mainstream you want to become a member, there are certain expectations and norms that mainstream society has developed over centuries.

If you plan to enter some of the artistic cultures, or vocations such as motorcycle or auto mechanics, then your personal appearance may be of little concern. But, why limit yourself to narrow demographics. If you want to expand your available opportunities, with a few changes you can appeal to all parts of mainstream and widen the potential opportunities. That is essentially what I did. I did not want to stand out and be noticed as something different. I just wanted to blend in with everyone else. By taking that approach, I didn't alienate myself from any potential opportunities.

I see some people who feel that mainstream should accept them for their nose ring and various other visible piercings. I wholeheartedly agree - mainstream should be accepting and should not judge a book by its cover. But the fact is, mainstream doesn't accept that which differs from what it has defined as the norm.

The mainstream expected image is pretty much carved in granite. Sure, you have every right, and you're welcome to spend the next several decades

protesting that you didn't get hired because you had all of your glorious piercings and tattoos on display during a multitude of interviews.

Now, ask yourself honestly. Are you wearing the hardware, knowing that it will elicit an unfavorable impression, so you have that as your justification not to try - to just quit? If you want to become a part of mainstream, fit the part. Mainstream is not going to change to fit you.

In closing, if the experiences I have shared in this book seem to indicate that I have had a pretty normal life, it is because I have. A normal life is attainable after a conviction and incarceration experience.

Sometimes people think that the easy way is the path that leads to a life of financial security and rewards. The easy way only leads to a very hard lifestyle. If the easy way also incorporates the risk of going to prison, then the easy way just brings a lot of heartache.

The hard way - the path that incorporates work, patience, perseverance, problem solving, and facing and resolving daily challenges leads to a very easy and comfortable lifestyle. If you continuously do what is easy today, then tomorrow will always be harder.

I am genuinely hopeful that this book has caused you to examine where you are in life, how you have arrived at your particular place, and where you want to go in the future.

If you are in prison, if you just got out of prison or if you are simply faced with difficult challenges, you can conquer! I have experienced all of those dilemmas.

No matter what you decide, your life will be a journey that will lead to many different destinations. Choose your journey carefully and deliberately, and you will be pleased with the destinations.

Life is simply a series of choices. If you make a sincere commitment to pursue a healthy and legitimate path, and you are genuinely willing to remain committed during the times of challenge, then you will reap all of the rewards that you seek.

*“At the moment of commitment,
the universe aspires to assist you.”*

- Barbara Streisand

