



INTRODUCTION

Do you know what you stand for—I mean what you really stand for—your core values? Most people do not. For a long time, I was included in that group of unknowing. Sure, I was always aware of certain values that were important to me or that I hoped I showed the world, just as you might be. But when it came right down to it, I did not know what was at my core.

Once I embraced the concept of core values, though, my life changed completely. Suddenly, I had a clear vision for my future and a way to get there. And the more I hold true to my core values every day, the better my life seems to be. The same can happen to you. This book will show you how.

If you've never given much thought to your core values, you're not alone. Most people don't devote much time, if any, to establishing core values for themselves. My first real experience with my own core values started on the basis of being accountable—of doing what I said I would do and not making excuses for any shortcomings. Over time, I realized that accountability is really just one piece of the puzzle, and that a person's core values are interrelated and run deep.

STRIVING FOR CLARITY

I freely admit that when I was a young professional, I had no idea what I wanted in life. I went from a career in the military to being a medical and pharmaceutical sales professional to being a business owner to being an author and speaker. It wasn't until my transition from business owner to my present day career that I realized knowing

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and staying true to my core values would set me free—free to be the person I knew I could be.

The journey of my life has also been one of self-discovery...and the journey is still going. My path of not knowing led me to what I wanted to discover. As it turns out, I'm not the only one who wants or needs this information. Since you teach best in life what you want to learn the most, it only makes sense that I share everything I've learned with you regarding core values so you can find clarity as well.

In this book, I present themes or areas of core values that deserve your focus and attention. The main areas addressed are Attitude, Accountability, Self-Respect, Personal Honesty, Life Balance, and Principled Leadership. Of course, you could have other core values; this book simply offers a way for you to discover which core values are important to you.

I chose these six focus areas for a reason. First, without the proper attitude, change of any kind is difficult. Your attitude in anything will either propel you forward or hold you back. With the proper attitude in place, you can begin to open your mind to the concept of core values. If you don't have any idea what you stand for and believe in—your core values—then it's difficult to be accountable and you're more likely to make excuses. If you're living a life like that, you can't have self-respect because you're not being personally honest and have no idea who you really are. As such, life balance becomes near impossible because you end up “drifting,” following whatever idea happens to grab you at the time because you have no focus. Finally, because you lack focus and you're not behaving in a way that's reflective of what you stand for and believe in, you're less likely to be a principled leader and attain professional or personal success.

So as you can see, these six areas are interrelated. You can't focus on one without the other. And all the principles combined create a base of core values, which is the foundation of who you are.

You'll find that in order to grow and develop as an individual, a parent, a spouse, a business professional, a community leader, or anything in life you need a solid foundation. It's not just one principle or value that generates a degree of fulfillment, contentment, or success. To truly live your life to its fullest, you need a working relationship of all the principles in

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this book combined with any other core values you hold dear. Ultimately, understanding the relationship between these principles is really the foundation of developing the core values that reflect who you are.

WHY LISTEN TO ME?

That's certainly a valid question. After all, who am I to be telling you about core values? I'm not someone who is "all knowing." I'm not a famous football coach, astronaut, rock star, Olympic athlete, academy award winning actor, or high-profile CEO of a Fortune 100 company...and that's the point.

I'm not someone who is "special" or unapproachable. Quite the contrary, actually. I'm right there with you because I am just like you. I'm a parent, a spouse, and a business owner who has attempted to bring all the different facets of life into some type of collective understanding of how to conduct your life. Everything I share with you is a reflection of what I've encountered along the way. If I didn't overcome these challenges myself, I wouldn't know how to write about them or how to use my experiences to help others.

In fact, my message has resonated so well with the thousands of people who have attended my presentations and workshops simply because the insights are coming from a regular person. Sure, it's great to attend a seminar and listen to famous people, but what are you taking away from them? What learning points from their life can you really apply to your own? I may not be rich and famous, but the message in these pages is one that anyone can apply to their own life.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Any kind of change you want to make in your life is a process. Meaningful change rarely occurs overnight. That's why I've broken these six core areas of development down into 52 strategies or common sense approaches. I know 52 is a big number—it represents the passing of an entire year. But is a year really that long? Look back at your own life. Do the years drag on endlessly, or do you often wonder where the years have gone? For most people, 52 weeks are gone in what feels like a blink of an eye.

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While I hope it doesn't take you a full year to get through this book, I recognize the power of reflection. So while you may very well read these pages in just a few days, I would recommend you go back and choose one strategy per week to reflect on and develop in yourself. You will discover the more you reflect and reread these pages, the more the principles will become part of your thought process and life practice. By year's end, you'll be a more enriched and authentic person.

BE TRUE TO YOU

Now is the time to plan a path for yourself. Whether you already have some level of internal understanding of what your core values are, or if you've never given your core values a second thought, it's time that you formally solidify what your core values are and focus on them. You have the power to make major changes in your life and to live the life you want; knowing and living by your core values is the key.

This book will help you discover the power within yourself—the power to live your life to its fullest. Use the principles in this book to help guide your thinking and decision making from this day forward. Remember that the outcomes you experience in life are largely dependent on your choices and actions. Your actions, based on your core values, can create turning points in your life.

When you live a life consistent with your core values, you will clearly see the path that will lead you to happiness and fulfillment. You will have an attitude of success and will be fully accountable for any decision you make. As a result, you will live a life filled with self-respect and personal honesty because you are being true to yourself. When that occurs, attaining life balance and being a genuine principled leader will come naturally. Ultimately, when you live a life focused on your core values, you will be drawn toward your highest aspirations!

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Common Sense Values
for Living Life to Its Fullest

SECTION ONE



BE OPTIMISTIC – FOCUS ON YOUR ATTITUDE

“It is one’s attitude at the beginning of a difficult undertaking which, more than anything else, will determine its successful outcome.”

–William James

You can improve your life simply by changing your attitude. While that may sound simplistic, it’s not simple for many people to do. Every day you can see examples of people who take a negative approach to life—from people who think and say negative and derogatory things to those who don’t believe in themselves or their abilities.

Having the proper attitude helps you attain what you want in life. A positive attitude maintains focus on your goals and on the right path to achieving them. As a side benefit, your positive attitude can even inspire others to take action in their own lives.

When it comes to developing your core, a proper attitude is where it all starts. After all, you can have the best intentions to change your life, develop your core values, and attain your goals. But if you don’t

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have the right attitude to propel you along the way, you'll likely have a difficult time on your path. That's why I'd like you to start our journey together by focusing on your attitude.

The principles in this section are designed to help you enhance your perspective on life. They're meant to help open your mind to new ways of thinking and looking at things. I want them to shake up your current thinking so you can let go of deeply rooted, long held beliefs that may be holding you back and diminishing your success. I also want the ideas presented here to lay the foundation for the rest of our journey together.

By keeping your attitude in check, you can create meaningful results in all areas of your life. Very soon, you'll be on your way to becoming happier, more successful, and more empowered to live by your core values every day.

1. BRINGING THE BEST INTO YOUR LIFE

Your attitude determines the overall course of your life. So I ask you, what do you attract into your life and why? Are the people and situations you attract positive or negative? Healthy or unhealthy? Respectful or abusive? Humble or egotistical? Selfless or self-centered? When was the last time you asked yourself such questions as, “Who are my circle of friends? Are they winners or whiners? Kind or critical? Giving or taking? Tomorrow or yesterday thinking? Thoughtful or thoughtless?”

Do you project to others your own vulnerabilities, and subsequently attract those who you think can fix those vulnerabilities? In reality, those who you believe can fix your vulnerabilities often possess similar or even more destructive vulnerabilities themselves.

Do you allow and enable a repetitive pattern of relationships and friendships that consistently result in the same disappointments? What kind of outlet do you gravitate toward to relinquish not having to be responsible for repairing yourself? Is that outlet one that invigorates you, or one that stagnates you? Does that outlet assist in breaking the pattern or reinforcing the same old pattern?

REFLECT ON YOUR ATTITUDE

I know these are many questions to ask you all at once. But I ask them for a reason. Through the course of my life’s journey, I have found that reflecting and acting on these questions, especially during periods of personal doubt, has been extremely important and helpful. We all get caught up in the routine of life, but how often do you examine how healthy that routine may be? Are you hanging out with successful or oppressive people?

You likely know what the answers to the above questions should be, but what are your real answers—the answers that reflect your current reality and that subsequently determine your overall attitude?

People often ask me, “How do I break the patterns of behavior that reveal my weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and lack of self-respect?” The answer is to stop repeating the pattern. Granted, that’s much easier said than done.

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The first step is to acknowledge that a destructive pattern exists. Then, recognize the characteristics that initiate the pattern to be repeated. You can often gauge this by the status of your physical and emotional wellbeing. If a destructive pattern does exist, are you searching for a quick fix or working toward a durable repair to cope with those harmful behaviors?

YOU ARE THE COMPANY YOU KEEP

Regarding relationships, it is often easy to attach to a person who you believe possesses the characteristics you are lacking, because it directs you away from having to take responsibility for your own insecurities. It's also less stressful to repeat a relationship pattern that's familiar rather than construct a new pattern based on the personal core values you truly believe in. In reality, this person you are attaching to increases stress and creates more anxiety because the relationship provides erroneous justification to procrastinate working on your own internal dysfunctions.

Emotionally, you give yourself permission to forego dealing with your own issues by putting priority on the other person's issues. It's also common to use the other person's behaviors as an opportunity to validate your own value by enabling them, even if the behaviors are destructive in nature. You may become falsely dependent on the other person to "fix" you, or you may enable the other person's behavior to create a false sense of self-value. These behaviors tend to be ones you know, have experienced, or what you grew up with. Congratulations, and welcome to being codependent!

Codependents Anonymous defines codependence as "a tendency to behave in ways that negatively impact one's relationships and quality of life. This behavior may be characterized by denial, low self-esteem, compliance, and/or control patterns." Ouch! We are all codependent to varying degrees, and although these patterns can be deep rooted, whom we bring into our lives will either fuel the destructive symptoms or help dissipate them.

Therefore, it's imperative you make an effort to associate with emotionally healthy and optimistic people—people with a healthy attitude. Attract those in your life who are a positive force, not a debilitating

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one. Find those who you have common interests with, and together participate in events that reinforce the things and values you love.

FOCUS ON THE GOOD

Reflect on the things and experiences that have brought the most happiness to you. Those times where your joy and happiness were invalidated by others is not an excuse to live in misery, but an opportunity to reignite the passion for what inspires you to live. So celebrate the joys you cherish and attract those who mutually share those similar joys.