

" This book is a MUST READ for anyone who wants to master their craft!! "
- Jon Gordon, Best Selling Author of *The Energy Bus*

CHOP WOOD CARRY WATER

**HOW TO FALL IN LOVE WITH THE
PROCESS OF BECOMING GREAT**

JOSHUA MEDCALF

CHOP
WOOD
CARRY
WATER

**HOW TO FALL IN LOVE WITH THE PROCESS OF
BECOMING GREAT**

JOSHUA MEDCALF

Copyright © 2015 Joshua Medcalf.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted by any means—whether auditory, graphic, mechanical, or electronic—without written permission of both publisher and author, except in the case of brief excerpts used in critical articles and reviews. Unauthorized reproduction of any part of this work is illegal and is punishable by law.

ISBN: 978-1-4834-4178-8 (sc)

ISBN: 978-1-4834-4177-1 (e)

Because of the dynamic nature of the Internet, any web addresses or links contained in this book may have changed since publication and may no longer be valid. The views expressed in this work are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher, and the publisher hereby disclaims any responsibility for them.

Any people depicted in stock imagery provided by Thinkstock are models, and such images are being used for illustrative purposes only.

Certain stock imagery © Thinkstock.

Lulu Publishing Services rev. date: 11/30/2015

CONTENTS

- [Chapter 1 Chop Wood, Carry Water](#)
- [Chapter 2 Building Your Own House](#)
- [Chapter 3 Faithful in the Small Things](#)
- [Chapter 4 One Eye For the Journey](#)
- [Chapter 5 Nothing is a Test](#)
- [Chapter 6 Where Do You Find Your Identity?](#)
- [Chapter 7 Guzzling Salt Water](#)
- [Chapter 8 Evil's Best Weapon](#)
- [Chapter 9 What Went Well?](#)
- [Chapter 10 Insta-everything](#)
- [Chapter 11 Wandering Eyes](#)
- [Chapter 12 Rough Side of the Mountain](#)
- [Chapter 13 Harnessing Power](#)
- [Chapter 14 Diet Coke](#)
- [Chapter 15 The Path to Mastery](#)
- [Chapter 16 I Aim With Everything](#)
- [Chapter 17 Bamboo](#)
- [Chapter 18 Road Signs on The Path To Mastery](#)
- [Chapter 19 Be Where Your Feet Are](#)
- [Chapter 20 Goal vs. Mission](#)
- [Chapter 21 Surrender](#)
- [Chapter 22 Famous Failures](#)
- [Chapter 23 The Illusion of Partially Controllable Goals](#)

Chapter 24 The Fight

Chapter 25 Principles Instead of Feelings

Chapter 26 Warrior Dial

Chapter 27 “They”

Chapter 28 A New Name

-Final Thoughts-

“What do you do with all your time?”

“Drowning Without a Mission”

Ready to apply everything you learned?!

Thank You’s

-CHAPTER 1-

Chop Wood, Carry Water

For as long as his family could remember, John and his younger brother Jordan had been in love with the samurai culture of Japan. When John was only eight years old, his family visited many places in Asia. He and Jordan excitedly explored every place they visited, and dreamt of returning one day to become their favorite type of samurai warriors: archers.

A year later, tragedy struck as the family was in a bad car accident and Jordan was severely injured. The rest of the family was pretty banged up, but Jordan was barely hanging onto life in the ICU. For the first few months John sat at his bedside, only leaving the hospital to shower two times a week, reading him stories throughout the day about the samurai culture that they both loved so much. Every night they would fall asleep to Jackie Chan movies. John's parents even let him miss the first month of school.

Eventually after five months of being in the hospital Jordan was cleared to go home. The doctors said he would never again be able to talk, walk, or feed himself. Jordan still found ways to communicate and play with John and they became even closer than they were before the accident. John always admired his brother's upbeat attitude and warm energy despite his circumstances. The doctors said for Jordan to go through a normal day it required as much energy as it does for an average person to run a marathon.

As John entered his teenage years, he never forgot their shared love of the samurai, and over time his fascination turned to deep admiration and lasting respect. He began to think more and more about pursuing it in his future.

Finally, when he turned eighteen, John bought a one-way ticket to an ancient

city in Japan, intent on fulfilling his boyhood dream. He enrolled as an apprentice to a small community of samurai who lived outside the city walls, practicing their timeless traditions. There, he knew he could become a samurai archer.

When John arrived, he was greeted by a friendly old sensei named Akira. He helped John unload his bags and get settled. As they walked the grounds, taking a look at the advanced training areas and shooting ranges, John grew more and more excited. This place was amazing! He couldn't wait to get started.

But the next morning, Akira gathered the newly arrived apprentices and informed them of their first task: for the rest of the morning, they would chop wood and carry water.

John was surprised and confused. He addressed his teacher with the proper title of respect that they had been taught: "Akira-sensei, what do you mean?"

The old man explained that their community was outfitted with every modern convenience, except for heat and running water. Instead of using gas or electricity, they burned wood for heat when the weather grew cold. And in order to use water in the bathrooms and kitchen, it had to be brought by hand from a well outside. Thus, in order for the community to use water and stay warm during the winter, the community depended on everyone to chop wood and carry water.

"But when will we get to shoot?" John wondered aloud.

Akira just smiled. "Shooting will come soon enough. But first you must chop wood, and carry water."

John was frustrated, but he obeyed. He trusted his sensei's wisdom, and knew that in time, they would move on to more exciting things.

-CHAPTER 2-

Building Your Own House

The next day was hot and muggy. John sweated as he drove his axe through log after log. His shoulders ached as he hauled bucket after bucket of water from the well into the house, and his hands began to blister from the friction of the axe handle. It was frustrating watching men old enough to be in retirement homes chop wood and carry water so effortlessly. But he kept working, remembering Akira's words that, "shooting will come soon enough."

Finally, after the day's work had finished, Akira took John aside. He handed him a cup of cool water and told him a story.

He told John that in Japan they have a deep love of architecture, and there once was a man named Kota who built some of the finest houses in all of Tokyo. His work became world famous due to his dedication to the process, his willingness to beat on his craft, and his relentless devotion to keep learning, even late into his career.

Eventually though, Kota grew tired of building homes for other people and he was ready to retire. He had been building homes for over thirty years, and he was ready to move on. He wanted to travel and spend lots of time with his grandkids.

One day, Kota approached his boss, and turned in his two-week notice.

His boss said, "Kota, we are forever indebted to you for the magnificent work you have done for our company, and we are so grateful you have worked for us for so long. We do have one favor to ask of you though. Could you please build one more house? It is a very important house, for a very important

client, and everyone in the company agreed it needs your magic touch!”

Kota was frustrated. He would have to cancel two trips and postpone his new life, all for one house. He told his boss that he needed a day to think about it. After talking it over with his wife, he gave in and decided he would build one more house. But he told his boss, “This is the very last one!”

But while Kota had agreed with his *head* to build this last house, his *heart* was no longer in it. He had always been very hands-on through the entire building process, always selecting the finest materials by hand and making sure every detail was diligently tended to.

But this house was different.

He viewed it more as an *obligation* than an *opportunity*. He delegated much of the work, and consequently a lot of things started slipping through the cracks. The house would be up to code, but as it started to come together, it was obvious that it lacked the “wow” factor that Kota’s other homes were known for.

Kota knew in his heart that this was far from his best work, but he was over it and ready to move on to the next phase of his life. The *next* phase was much more appealing and important to him than the *present* phase.

After four months had passed, Kota finally finished the house.

He went back to his boss, telling him, “I did what you asked. Now I am asking, one last time, for your blessing to retire.”

His boss said, “Thank you Kota! We just have one more thing!”

Now Kota was beginning to get really upset because he thought they were going to ask him to build another house.

His boss reached into his desk and pulled out a very small black box with a red ribbon tied around it. He handed the box to Kota, and said, “We are so grateful for you, Kota. This gift is a token of our appreciation.”

Kota pulled the ribbon, opening the box to discover a set of shiny new keys. His boss smiled, “The house is yours! You deserve it!”

Immediately, his heart sank. Unbeknownst to Kota, *the whole time he had been building his own house*. If he had only known he was building his own house, he would have cared so much more. He would have only used the finest materials, and he would have overseen every detail and given it his all like he had always done. But now, it was too late.

Akira looked at John and said, “The only thing that is truly significant about today, or any other day, is who you become in the process. Each of us are building our own house. Sometimes you might think you are building for your school, your family, your company, or your team, but you are always building your own house... I hope you build wisely.”

The story hit home for John and he really started to think deeply about his own life. He sat in silent contemplation while wondering if he had been building his house wisely.

-CHAPTER 3-

Faithful in the Small Things

As the weeks passed, John grew more comfortable with life in the community. One day, he woke up to find all the other apprentices crowding excitedly around an announcement that had been posted in the dining hall. It announced that each year, the incoming class of apprentices would be able to compete in an archery tournament.

John could barely contain his excitement. He loved competition, and he was intent on winning the tournament.

He couldn't stop talking about it that morning as he finished his daily routine. Finally, Akira grabbed his shoulders, and sat him down. He looked deep into John's eyes.

“John, Mother Theresa always told people, ‘Be faithful in the small things, for it is in them that your strength lies.’ The temptation while you are here with us will be to focus on all the big sexy goals, like winning the tournament, and becoming a great samurai archer. You must fight that temptation, and stay focused on chopping wood and carrying water. Do you recognize the name *Ingvar Kamprad*?”

John shook his head, no.

“Good!” Akira smiled wide. “Ingvar was a young boy who spent four or five years selling individual matchsticks door to door in his small town in Sweden. He was often laughed at when he would tell the other boys he couldn't play, because he needed to ride his bike three hours into Stockholm to purchase another box of matches.”

John couldn't believe his ears. "Hold on! You mean to tell me that this little kid was really selling individual matchsticks door to door, for years?!"

"Yes, John. This is a true story. When Ingvar was seventeen years old he decided to name his company. You might have heard of it: *Ikea* is worth over one hundred fifty billion dollars today."

John listened in awe as Akira continued.

"John, everyone wants to start the next Ikea, but few are willing to be faithful selling individual matchsticks door to door. Everyone wants to build the next Apple or Facebook, *nobody* wants to sell matches door to door. Everyone wants to become a samurai warrior, but few are willing to faithfully chop wood, carry water.

Every now and then a person comes along and accidentally gets it the first time, but most of us have to learn the hard way through multiple failed experiments, which allows us to learn lessons and skills those who had it easier did not develop.

Steve Jobs didn't set out to transform entertainment, computers, music, telecommunications, and education. It happened as a byproduct of passion, persistence, and faithfulness to a small idea.

The problem with small is that it isn't sexy, and it's often repetitively boring.

A guy who played professional golf, was once hit by a bus and the people serving as his doctors told him he would never walk again. But he trained hard, day in and day out, and went on to win a *major*. He said, 'Everyone thinks greatness is sexy, it's not. It's dirty, hard work.'¹

Ingvar didn't have a sexy idea, he had an idea most people would laugh at today. I can't even imagine how much grief he took from friends and family. 'You are doing what?! That is the stupidest idea ever!'

Everyone wants to win championships, but nobody wants to sweep the barn

they practice in like John Wooden did for his first few years in Westwood.

Everyone wants to be great, until it's time to do what greatness requires.

Dream BIG. Start small. Be ridiculously faithful.

Focus on what you can control.

Your greatest challenge during your time here will be faithfully keeping your focus on the process, while surrendering the outcome.”

John nodded his head in acknowledgement, but the truth was more than he could handle. He thought he understood, but some things can only be experienced to be fully learned.0

-CHAPTER 4-

One Eye For the Journey

After the excitement of the first few months had started to wear off, John began to get frustrated. The monotony of chopping wood and carrying water every morning and every evening had begun to wear on him.

He was only allowed to practice archery for four hours, during the heat of the day. What frustrated him the most, was that he was only allowed to shoot at a straw roll that was only seven feet away from him. He and the other apprentices were also required to attend weekly workshops where they learned life skills and lessons through stories.

One day he approached Akira and asked, “Akira-sensei, how long will it take me to become a samurai archer? I have dreamed my whole life of being one, but it feels like it will take forever.”

Akira stopped what he was doing and said, “In the West, you want everything instantly, but here you must learn to fall in love with the process of becoming great. Now go chop wood, and carry water.”

John was confused, but he went back to his normal daily activities.

The months passed, and before he knew it, an entire year had gone by. During the first year ‘acclimation period’ apprentices are not allowed to speak with their family and friends. When John was finally able to have a Skype video call with his family, he was disappointed to share with them that he hadn’t moved past shooting at a target only seven feet away from him, and that the rest of his time each day was spent chopping wood and carrying water.

As John talked about his daily routine, his father got a big smile on his face. He asked John who his favorite basketball players were growing up. John replied, “That’s easy: Kobe Bryant and Michael Jordan.”

His dad then told him how Phil Jackson had just released a book, *Eleven Rings*, and how he was constantly telling the guys on his teams about the necessity of “chop wood, carry water.” No matter whether you are winning or losing, the point was to focus on the *process* and neither get too high or too low, but instead to control the controllables.

After the call, John’s spirits were much better. It was especially hard being away from Jordan, and just seeing him was encouraging to John.

A few months went by, and as John practiced, his muscles began to learn the familiar motions of drawing and releasing, and his shots grew more accurate. He began to feel very confident with his bow and hitting the seven-foot target.

One day while he was practicing, Akira walked over and John asked again, “Akira-sensei, I am getting better and better each week. How long will it take for me to become a samurai archer now?”

Akira smiled, and told him it would take ten years.

John was furious. “Ten years? Maybe if I didn’t have to spend so much time chopping wood and carrying water then I would be able to reach my goal much faster!”

Akira replied, “If you don’t chop wood and carry water, then it will take you twenty years to become a samurai archer.” Then he turned and walked away.

John was even more confused, and he questioned whether or not he should quit. Would it really take him ten years? He wasn’t sure this investment was worth it, but decided he would try even harder.

More time passed, and John’s shots became more accurate and more powerful. He came to love the sound of the arrow slamming into the target.

THWACK!! THWACK!!

Soon, he was certain that he could become a samurai archer in less than ten years.

So one day, as they were carrying water back from the well, he pulled Akira aside and asked, “Akira-sensei, I am more accurate now and my shots are more powerful than ever. How long will it take me to become a samurai archer?”

Akira smiled. “You know the answer. It is still ten years.”

John kept pressing, “But what if I devote every waking moment to becoming a samurai archer? No chopping wood or carrying water, just archery.”

But Akira only shrugged. “Then, it will take thirty years.”

John had reached his emotional breaking point. He blurted out, “But I don’t understand!”

Akira looked at John with compassion. “You will learn, young John, the reason it takes longer is because with one eye on the goal, you only have one eye for the journey.”

He then went on to tell John stories of people who climb ice mountains, and how if they are focused on the top of the mountain they will not know where to step in front of them. They will slip and die. The key to ice climbing is to focus on one solid step at a time. “No man climbs a mountain all at once. He climbs it by making one solid step at a time.”

John nodded, he understood now. He would try to focus on doing his best at archery, chopping wood, carrying water, and letting go of the result.

-CHAPTER 5-

Nothing is a Test

But try as he might, John kept unconsciously slipping back into his old habits. Growing up, he had always succeeded in sports and school by focusing on proving himself. Some of his coaches even told him they liked the way he played with a chip on his shoulder, and even in the peaceful environment of the samurai community it was hard for him to shake those instincts of seeing life as one test after another to prove his worth.

Without realizing it, he began to pride himself on completing each drill and archery movement the fastest, and even made sure that he chopped more wood and carried more water in less time than the other apprentices.

One day, he was so focused on this that he filled his buckets well above the normal level. Walking briskly toward the community house, his foot caught the lip of an old root buried in the ground, and the weight of the water in his buckets sent him toppling over! He slammed to the ground, soaked to the bone.

But just as he opened his mouth to shout in anger, he noticed Akira watching him. The old sensei had seen the whole thing, and as John picked himself painfully up off the ground, Akira pulled John to his feet, picked up one of his buckets, and walked with him back toward the well.

“You were carrying quite a lot of water, weren’t you?” he asked.

John shrugged, trying to play it off. “I guess. I don’t think about it. I just try to carry the most that I can.”

Akira saw through this, asking quietly, “The most that you can, or just *more*

than any of the others?”

John reddened, caught, as Akira went on. “John, you keep getting in the way of your own potential, because you keep seeing everything as a test. The secret is to understand that nothing is a test, but only an opportunity to learn and grow. Many people never fulfill their potential, because they look at every situation in life as a test.

If you look at something as a test, then you will focus only on passing the test instead of maximizing your growth through the experience. Over time, the person who is simply focused on maximizing what they can learn and how they can grow will become much greater than the person who sees life as one continual test to prove themselves.”

John nodded, struggling with that wisdom.

“Don’t fall for the trap, John. Even tests in school are not tests. Nothing is a test, it’s only an illusion. Everything is an opportunity to learn and grow, because remember, you are building your own house.”

-CHAPTER 6-

Where Do You Find Your Identity?

As time passed, despite Akira's warnings, John grew more and more intently focused on his goal of becoming a samurai archer. He even began to sneak in extra time at the range. Every night at dusk, he would slip away from the dining hall and down to the range, where he'd shoot until darkness fell.

But over time, the extra practice began to wear on his body. Then, one afternoon at the range, he began to feel a burning tightness as he drew his bow, which became increasingly painful as he locked his shoulder into the firing position. He pushed through it, forcing his body to repeat the motion, but soon the pain in his shoulder made firing his bow impossible. He cringed, as...

"What's wrong, John?"

Akira walked toward him, concerned. Clearly, the old sensei had noticed the pain in John's eyes. John knew there was no way to hide it.

The next thing he knew, he was in the infirmary, getting his shoulder wrapped. Akira explained his injury, telling him, "Practice is good, but too much practice is not. Your muscles have torn, and they need time and rest in order to heal."

"How long?"

"Six to eight weeks."

John's face fell, as he realized that because of this, he would fall far behind in his program.

Seeing this, Akira asked him a question: “John, who would you *be* if everything you *do* was taken away from you?”

“What do you mean, Akira-sensei?”

“I mean that right now, you cannot shoot and practice archery. You cannot chop wood and carry water. So, who are you?”

John thought for a minute, becoming frustrated as he realized: *he didn't have a good answer.*

Akira nodded, understanding. “Do not worry. Even I fall into this trap, John. It is so easy for me to get caught up in the results I get from working with people, to get lost in the work or in the response from my archers. I constantly have to remind myself that my value comes from who I am, *not* from what I do. I am not a samurai archer, I am a human being who happens to be world class at archery.

It is easy to feel like your value is much greater when your teams win, when you make a lot of money, when you experience great success in business. But it is just as easy to feel defeated and depressed when your teams aren't winning, when your business is failing, and when it feels like you are failing at *everything*.

The truth is that your value is constant, it is priceless, and it never truly goes up or down based off of results or your performance. *Your value comes from who you are, not from what you do.*

You are more than an athlete.

You are more than a parent, a brother, and a daughter.

You are more than a coach.

You are more than a CEO.

You are more than a fast food worker.

When your identity gets wrapped up in what you do, it clouds every decision you make. It is easy to see some of the reasons that a person would make very compromising decisions when their identity comes from what they do. You must fight that instinct.”

John nodded, realizing the truth in his sensei’s words.

Akira stood to go, leaving John with this: “Here is my challenge for you during your time here, John. Find your identity in something that cannot simply be stripped away in a moment, and do the hard work of reminding yourself that your value comes from who you are. For me, and it took a long time to grasp this, but my identity comes from being a child of God, and knowing that He recklessly and unconditionally loves me.

I believe He feels the same way about you, and already unconditionally loves you. It *has never been* about your performance, and it *never will be* about your performance. You can’t do anything to make Him love you any more, and you can’t do anything to make Him love you any less. Therefore, you are free to accept His love, love Him back, love yourself, and finally be freed to love others with no strings attached.

I do not expect you to believe everything that I believe John. You must come to your own conclusions. Whatever you do though, please don’t find your identity in something that can be gone in a moment’s notice.”

-CHAPTER 7-

Guzzling Salt Water

Once a week, the apprentices were allowed to watch television. John and Akira started to form a bond watching American sports together. One of their favorite teams to watch was the Los Angeles Lakers. One night, Akira began to speak to the apprentices about the importance of creating a new scorecard for life.

He pointed to Kobe Bryant as Kobe drained another three-pointer. “Tell me, why is Kobe Bryant still playing basketball?”

The apprentices watched Kobe hustle. John answered, “Because he loves basketball?”

“Yes, possibly, but he has repeatedly said that if he wins his sixth NBA title, *then* he will be satisfied and retire. Kobe isn’t the only one who has fallen for this trap. Every day, people everywhere live their lives believing that everything will be different if they can just achieve more, win more, or make more money. But if achievement hasn’t filled that void to date, how is achieving more going to fill it in the future?”

Like thirsty people guzzling salt water, achievement only creates a greater desire for accomplishing more, dehydrating us of true satisfaction and fulfillment.

After Andre Agassi made it to number one in the world in tennis, he said, ‘I thought that getting to number one was going to be the moment I made sense of my life. But it left me a little empty, and I spiraled down.’

Have you ever noticed that some of the most outwardly beautiful people on

earth seemingly have the most troubling relationships, or that some of the wealthiest people have the most sleepless nights?

A man from South Korea who played in 3 World Cups and in the English Premiere League once told me in his broken English, ‘Before I have any money, I never worry about money. I get to the EPL and sign big contract, then all I think about is money.’

It is not our place to judge, but it is wise to learn from those who have come before us.

The scorecard society judges us by is tragically flawed, and pursuing it will leave you completely unfulfilled.

It is time we develop a new scorecard for how we define a truly successful life. I want you to think about a few people that you truly admire, and write out what characteristics they embodied that you would like to be known for.”

John started to think about the people he truly admired, and he wrote down:

Courage

Boldness

Empathy

Loving

Grateful

Persistence

Joyful

Resourceful

Akira nodded. “Now I want you to choose the top four characteristics that are most important to you.”

This was tough for John, because he felt like all of the characteristics on his list were really important. But he finally wrote down:

Boldness & Courage

Loving

Resourceful

Persistence

Akira smiled as the apprentices finished writing. “You now have your new scorecard. I want you to grade yourself twice a day on how you have done on the things that you have said are the most important characteristics for living a truly successful life. If you grade yourself around the middle of the day, then you will know what areas you need to focus on that evening. With this new scorecard, you can use any situation you find yourself in as an opportunity to grow these characteristics!”

John took a blank 4x6 note card as they were being passed around, and wrote out his new scorecard. He was excited because he now had a very practical tool for using any circumstance as an opportunity to develop into the man he wanted to become.

-CHAPTER 8-

Evil's Best Weapon

One summer day, the weather was so hot and humid the sensei actually told the apprentices to stop chopping wood and carrying water an hour early, in order for everyone to spend some time in the nearby lake.

On the way to the water, Akira asked John if anyone had told him the story *Evil's Best Weapon*. John said that no one had, and Akira smiled wide, "Then you are in for a treat!"

As they walked, he began his story. "One day, an evil old witch was going out of business, and she had a yard sale to sell her potions and tools. You could buy all the traditional tools you think of when you think of evil: jealousy, anger, lust, pride, envy, deceit, and adultery. Drove of people flocked to the sale and all her shiny tools were sold to the highest bidder.

Towards the end of the day, after all the tools had been well picked through, all that remained were a few trash heaps of old worn-out and broken tools. One gentleman dug through the scraps and found a tool that was very well worn, and looked like it was on its last leg. Hoping for a good deal, he brought it to the woman to ask how much it cost.

The old witch was startled. 'That tool is too valuable for me to sell, it is the only one I'm passing down to my niece. Give it back to me. It should not have been out here!'

Now the man was even more intrigued. 'But it's so worn, and yet you claim it is worth more than all these other shinier and newer tools. I must know what it is.'

The witch refused to tell him, and instead she pried it from his hands and asked him to leave. She took the old tool back and hid it in her house, and by the day's end, every other tool had been sold except for that one.

A few months later, the witch was on her deathbed. She called for her niece. Her niece was very angry she had sold all of her fancy tools.

‘How could you sell all your tools and not pass them on to me?!’ she shouted.

The old witch waited for her to calm down, and then told her to look under her bed. The niece looked under the bed but all she saw was an old, worn-out tool.

She was surprised. ‘This?! This old thing is all you left me?!’

The old witch looked at her and said, ‘Oh how naive you are, young child. *This tool is discouragement, and it is more powerful than all the other tools combined.* The best part is that most people never suspect that it comes from you. Discouragement will allow you to get to a person's heart when none of the other tools will, and once they become discouraged, they are putty in your hands. You can squash the most powerful of dreams, level the greatest of ideas, and ruin almost anything in the world without detection, all by using this tool to plant the seeds of discouragement.’

And with nothing but that single tool of discouragement, her niece went on to become one of the most powerful witches to ever live.

John, one of the most powerful forces you will face during your time here is discouragement. It can come in many different forms; sometimes it is the voice inside your head that says you aren't good enough, while other times it might come from giving your best and still not succeeding. Still other times it will creep in in ways you might not even be aware of. But make sure you always keep your guard up, and fuel your heart with encouragement.”

John nodded, asking, “How do I fuel my heart?”

Akira smiled. “Good question. You fuel your heart with six things: what you

watch, what you read, what you listen to, who you surround yourself with, how you talk to yourself, and what you visualize. Let me ask you a question: if you owned a Lamborghini, would you ever put water into the gas tank?"

John looked up in confusion. "Of course not! That would ruin the engine!"

"Exactly," Akira said, "But this is what most people do with their hearts. You and I were created just like that Lamborghini, but if we put the wrong fuel into the gas tank of our hearts, we won't run as we were intended to. We get frustrated and discouraged because we know deep down that we were created for so much more. You were created perfectly and meticulously for a purpose John, but if you put the wrong fuel into your gas tank, it is very easy to get discouraged and break down as you go through the journey of life."

-CHAPTER 9-

What Went Well?

On one particularly tough day of training, John just couldn't seem to shoot as well as normal. His groupings were loose and unfocused, and he became mentally distracted by the fit of his new shooting guard. As he finished the day in frustration, Akira took him aside, and asked him how his day had been.

"Terrible! I couldn't focus, I got distracted by my new shooting guard, and my groupings weren't as tight as they needed to be. I feel like a failure."

Akira smiled, and shrugged. "I didn't ask how you shot John, but since you brought it up, *what did you do well in training?*"

John paused, thrown off. He struggled to think of a single positive takeaway from the day's shooting. "Nothing. I did nothing well." He said discouraged.

"I have a very hard time believing that John." said Akira. "Why do you think it is so hard for you to think of what you did well?"

John shrugged, "I guess I don't think about it, because... I don't want to get a big head."

"Let me tell you something, John: *I do.*"

John looked at his sensei in surprise and confusion, as Akira continued. "It is much easier for your brain to focus on the negatives, even if they are totally outweighed by the positives! Many people's confidence suffers, because they are more concerned with appearing to be humble, so they have been conditioned to tell really negative stories about themselves and their performance.

Now, there are people who have the reverse challenge and can't see their flaws, but far and away the bigger issue is people who lack confidence and who are highly critical of themselves. But let's be clear, negativity and a 'nothing I do is good enough' attitude is *not* humility. A much smarter man than I said, 'Humility is not thinking less of your self, but thinking of your self less.'

Let me tell you a couple secrets about how our marvelous brains *actually* work John. Your memories are not created through your experiences, rather they are created through the stories you tell yourself and others about those experiences. So, if you leave a practice or a match and you tell everyone how poorly you played, and you focus on all your mistakes, then that is what your brain remembers. Most people undermine all the hard work they are putting in by telling really negative stories and blocking out all the growth that is happening." Akira smiled.

"What do you mean "blocking out?" Said John as his nose scrunched and his eyebrows furrowed inquisitively.

"Our brains are marvelous machines, John, which process around eleven million bits of information per second. But we are only *aware* of about forty of those bits. In other words you are only aware of .00000364 of what is *actually* happening around you! You and I block out 99.99999% of what our brain is processing. So, if we want to change the way our brain scans the world and start to adopt a more beneficial reality and vantage point, we must start by rewiring the way our brain scans the world around us."

"Well, that sounds incredibly challenging! How in the world do you do that?" asked John.

Akira handed him a small notepad and a pen. "By writing it down."

John flipped through the blank pages, as Akira went on, "I want you to do this after every shooting session. I want you to start by writing a *value statement* at the top. It should say, 'My value comes from who I am, *not* from

what I do.’ Then, follow that with a *growth mindset statement*. ‘Anything that happens to me today is in my best interest and it’s an opportunity to learn and grow.’ Then, I want you to write out between fifteen to sixty-three specific things you did well.”

John blinked, taken aback. “Whoa, that’s a *lot! I think that might be impossible!*”

“Of course it *feels* that way! That’s because you haven’t yet trained your brain to think that way. Do you remember the first time you tried to make a left hand lay up in basketball?” Asked Akira.

John blushed and mumbled, “Yes, I was eleven years old, and I started to cry. Truthfully, I started balling and ran out of the gym. I thought the guy who was training me was a huge jerk! But he made me keep doing it for months, often through crying fits of frustration.”

“Sounds like a tough trainer. Did it get easier though?” Akira asked.

“Yes, eventually I became highly skilled with finishing with my left hand.” Said John as a smile broke through and things clicked in his mind.

“In time this will get easier as you consistently force your brain to scan the world differently, but until then I encourage you to always keep going until you have at least fifteen things. If you decide to quit before fifteen, make sure you at least get two more than where you quit the day before. Remember, this is rewiring your brain. It is hard work, but it is very worth it.” Said Akira.

One thing that might be helpful is to carry this notebook with you, and jot things down as you go through practice, your day, or during breaks in competition. You may not need to write them all the way out during competition or practice, but write down enough to remember when you complete your journal later in the day. And remember John, you have ignored what you have done well for a long time, while blowing your ‘flaws’ out of proportion. So, maybe for the next six months let’s try and do the reverse. Let’s ignore most of the ‘flaws’ and focus on finding even the smallest things

you did well and how you got better.”

“That’s helpful, actually. I think I can do that,” said John.

“The next part of the journal is writing out only two *areas for growth*, but you only get to write these down once you get to fifteen specific things you have done well. You only get two areas because it is hard to remember to focus on more than two at any one time. By writing down only two areas you can look back at yesterday’s journal and know exactly what you need to focus on today during training. Finally, the last thing you write out is at least two things you *learned* today, because remember ‘nothing is a test.’ Everything is an opportunity to learn, but we need to actually focus on learning. Akira said with a big smile.

John, it takes a lot of discipline to stick with a ‘what went well journal,’ but it is a very rewarding exercise with far-reaching implications for your life! If you can’t see what you do well, it is awful hard to encourage other people with what they do well.”

John nodded, encouraged to try this new exercise. As soon as he got back to his room, he flipped open the notebook and began writing. When he had finished, his entry looked like this...

Worth Statement: My value comes from who I am, NOT from what I do.

Growth Mindset: Anything that happens to me today is in my best interest and it is an opportunity for me to learn and grow.

What Went Well: (Write out 15 **specific** things you did well today. Feel free to use examples of areas you got better in even if they weren’t the very best you are capable of.)

1. I kept my stance solid for every shot
2. I caught myself wondering if I would be able to finish the practice.
Started to talk to myself instead of listening to myself

3. I was intentional about treating the other apprentices very well even when I felt like they didn't deserve it
4. I chose to take deep breaths before I approached the firing line
5. I held my core stable and kept clean lines in my shooting form
6. I cleared my mind before each release and remembered to focus on controllables
7. I saw Katsuo shoot three tight groupings, but I chose not to compare and focused on my own shots
8. I chose to see myself being very strong even when I felt my shoulder shake on my last set of draws
9. When I got frustrated and wanted to give up, I reminded myself that I am building my own house
10. I started and finished my practice today without anyone forcing me
11. I kept my breathing slow and focused on the firing line
12. I remembered to keep visualizing each arrow hitting where I aimed it, even when my shots were off
13. I remembered to pause and settle my mind and breathe before each release
14. I encouraged the other apprentices by reminding them of what they were doing well
15. I did a better job today of letting the negative thoughts fly on by and not give them power
16. I kept my releases easy and unconscious

Areas For Growth: (Formerly called “Weaknesses” but we are looking at them as growth opportunities now)

- Keeping my mind clear and focusing on my process even when I am distracted
- Staying present after a mistake and focusing on what I need to do NOW

What I Learned: (This can be something that you already know but learned the importance of again)

- I shoot tighter groupings when I remember to release my goals and focus on my controllables instead
- By focusing on what my fellow apprentices do well, it creates a much better energy and environment for growth and optimum performance.

-CHAPTER 10-

Insta-everything

Another year passed, and John kept growing and learning. Every morning he chopped wood, and every evening he carried water. His hands developed thick calluses, his arms grew stronger, and his movements became fluid and memorized as his brain wrapped intricate wires of muscle memory.

One night during the summer John and the Sensei didn't find any games they wanted to watch on TV, so they decided on the new *Karate Kid* movie starring Jaden Smith.

During a commercial break, Akira told John about his admiration for Jaden's father Will. In an interview, he once heard Will say, "Talent you have naturally. Skill is only developed by hours and hours and hours of beating on your craft." Will went on, "I have never considered myself particularly talented, but where I excel is ridiculous, sickening work ethic... there is no easy way around it, no matter how talented you are, your talent is going to fail you if you are not skilled."

John grew up watching reruns of *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, and he always considered Will Smith to be one of those talented people to whom everything just came naturally.

He asked Akira, "So do you think that someone like Will Smith really isn't that talented?"

His sensei replied, "I think he might have plenty of talent, but I think that his talent is overshadowed by his character. A wise man once told me, 'Talent without character is like an expensive, fast car with no gas. It is useless without the fuel that drives it².'" "

John nodded, as Akira went on. “And while I do not know what anyone is *born* with, I do know that *none* of us know our potential. In fact, I would argue that your potential is much greater than you ever realize, but it will take incredible dedication and purposeful training to unlock it. Most people never realize their potential, because when things get hard, or they experience failure, they just quit. Or, they never give their very, very best and exhaust themselves in order to protect their ego. They enjoy being able to say, ‘I didn’t even really try,’ or ‘I didn’t really care.’ Because if they did really give it their best, and still failed, that would be too much for their ego to handle.”

John felt like he had just uncovered one of the greatest secrets to success. “I guess it makes sense now that you explain it like that, because with things like Instagram and YouTube we only see the most edited, Photoshopped version of people’s lives. It *feels* like they wake up like that, but really everything is staged, they took fifty pictures, and highly edited the very best one. No one posts anything of them not looking their best.”

Akira nodded his approval. “Exactly! Never forget, you do not shine under the bright lights; the bright lights only reveal your work in the dark. We get so used to seeing superstars on game day, that we forget what we do not see: all the hours they spend beating on their craft, drenched in sweat, at the point of exhaustion, with no one watching³. Too many people seek exposure from the bright lights, but the bright lights only expose their lack of faithfulness to their craft in the dark.”

-CHAPTER 11-

Wandering Eyes

After that evening, John went to bed with a renewed sense of excitement to chop wood, carry water and beat on his craft. Over the next couple of months, he still had his days that were more challenging than others, but overall he was in a much better place.

Eventually though, John developed a wandering eye. One of his fellow apprentices, a young man named Katsuo, seemed to constantly be achieving things faster than John. His shots were stronger and more accurate, and he didn't complain or grow tired with his work. It seemed like he was always doing everything better than John.

And he wasn't the only one. John started looking at all of his friends, and began to grow jealous at how easy things seemingly came for them and how hard things were for him.

One day, John was walking to lunch when Akira came up beside him. "Why the heavy shoulders John? It looks like something is really weighing on you."

John sulked, "I have really been struggling the last few months, because it just feels like it's not fair that I work so hard, yet other people who are more talented than me continue to surpass me with less effort. Do you know how embarrassing it is to be busting my butt every day, and giving my everything to get better, and it never feels good enough? I watch Katsuo give half the effort, and he's still better than me. I just feel like I should quit, go home, and get a normal job. Maybe this whole samurai archer thing just isn't for me."

Akira stopped, spun John around by his shoulders and stared deep into his soul with his piercing grey eyes. "Let me tell you a story, John. When I was

your age, I was the last in my class in *everything*. I struggled. I wanted to quit. I was constantly embarrassed, because I gave everything, but it never felt good enough.”

“So how did you get so good?” John said.

“I never gave up, and I realized the whole time I was building my own house. A sensei shared with me that very same story about Kota building his own house, and I realized that it wasn’t about what I was doing, but rather about who I became. John, let me tell you two very important things: comparison is the thief of all joy, and the grass isn’t greener on the other side. *The grass is greener where you water it*. You have grown up in a society where things like social media and twenty-four hour television have established a culture that is hyper-focused on comparison. But if you are constantly comparing, you will have all the joy sucked out of you. You must focus on *your* journey, yours alone.”

He continued, stern. “If it rains, bottle the water and sell it. If crap falls from the sky, package it and sell fertilizer. If it is sunny, plant a garden. Use what *you and you alone* have been given. You do not know what other people are going through, and *everyone* has their own unique struggles, even Katsuo. Stop trying to live their life, because there are millions of people who would give anything to live your life. Did you know there are a billion people without access to clean drinking water, and millions of people with debilitating diseases and accidents that have left them nearly paralyzed?”

John perked up and he got tears in his eyes as he thought about Jordan. He would give anything for the opportunity John was complaining about. “I guess I got so distracted with the people who seemingly have more than me, that I forgot about those with less than me.”

“You must always keep perspective, John. It is very easy to lose it, and when you lose perspective you forget that this life is but a vapor; we are here today and gone tomorrow. Do not waste your life, John. Focus on what truly matters, and do not fall for the lies of the comparison thief.”

-CHAPTER 12-

Rough Side of the Mountain

One day, just as the apprentices reached the shooting range, the sky cracked with thunder, and began pouring down rain like John had never seen before. Everyone was instructed to go into the dining hall. Once they arrived, they were asked to be seated.

Up on the board was written: *Talent vs. Skill*.

As the apprentices settled in, Akira began to teach, speaking about how the difference between talent and skill is widely misunderstood. “Many people think that all you need is talent, and that only the chosen few can ever truly succeed. Many talented people believe the same thing, and then get frustrated when they fail, because they think all they need to do is show up, and everything will magically line up for them because of their talent.”

After everyone was dismissed, John waited around to talk with the old sensei.

John was bubbling over with excitement. “As you were talking, I remembered that Michael Jordan got cut from his high school basketball team. He even had a commercial once where he said, ‘Maybe it’s my fault. Maybe I led you to believe that basketball was a God-given gift, and not something that I worked for every single day of my life.’ Many people thought the commercial was M.J. going at LeBron James, and sure enough, LeBron’s work ethic and willingness to sacrifice increased dramatically since that commercial. It wasn’t until he had that shift that he actually won an NBA championship.”

“Very interesting,” mused Akira. “I didn’t know that, but it doesn’t surprise me. I always wondered what happened, but I had never heard that

commercial or M. J. quote before. Maybe it did have something to do with LeBron's shift in mentality and work ethic."

It was still pouring rain outside, so Akira asked John if he wanted to join him by the fire. John agreed, loading a few logs into the furnace. They sat, enjoying the warmth of the flames in the chilly dining hall.

Akira asked, "John, you love golf, don't you?"

John replied, "Yes! My dad, Jordan and I grew up playing every Friday, and it developed a special bond between us. Jordan LOVED to watch us play!"

The old man smiled as John spoke of the warm memories he and his family shared on the course. Finally he asked, "But do you know the story of how golf balls were first made?"

"I don't think I do," John realized.

Akira continued, "At first, golf balls were made smooth, without any dimples at all. But eventually during testing, one man started to notice something strange. He developed a theory about it, and one day he came into work early to test his theory, because he thought that everyone would think he was crazy if he shared his theory with them.

His theory was that the golf balls that had been hit many times, the bruised and rough ones, actually traveled much further than the perfectly smooth ones did. Sure enough, he was right: these tiny imperfections create a thin layer of turbulence around the ball, reducing drag and allowing air to flow further and more smoothly around the ball. And that is why today, all golf balls have dimples on them.

John, I know you are afraid of your perceived weaknesses and shortcomings, and you feel like your journey has always taken you up the rough side of the mountain. But when you don't give up and you don't give in, the rough side of the mountain actually molds you and shapes you into a person who can travel much further in life, just like those roughed-up golf balls. The

blemishes, scars, and setbacks are what give you the character to take you places other people are too soft and smooth to go!”

John nodded, feeling a weight lift gently off his shoulders as Akira spoke.

“Are you still struggling with comparing yourself to other people who things seemingly come more easily to?” his sensei asked.

“I’m doing a lot better since we last talked about it, but if I’m honest, it’s still a struggle.”

“I think talent is often more of a curse than a blessing, John. Did you know that most people who win the lottery are worse off financially five years down the road than they were before winning the lottery?”

John shook his head. “I never knew that.”

“Winning the lottery skips the valuable process of going up the rough side of the mountain. Instead of being forced to learn and develop the skills necessary for creating or sustaining success, you arrive at the top, without any of what it takes to stay there. Talent can be a kind of lottery, John. A talented athlete is often less likely to develop the skills and work ethic that a less-talented one has to develop just to survive, and because of that, they may end up much worse off down the road. They never learned the work ethic, persistence, and grit needed to overcome the inevitable challenges that life throws their way.

I know that it seems like life is unfair right now, and you want things to be easier, but the rough side of the mountain will actually prepare you for life much better than the smooth side. Believe it or not, the setbacks of today can quickly become the forging blades of greatness for tomorrow. In fact, a wise man once said, “hardship often prepares ordinary people for an extraordinary destiny.”⁴

“Wow, I’d never thought of it that way before,” John pondered. “I guess I need to rethink my setbacks! Thank you so much for sharing your wisdom

and perspective. I'm not sure I would have made it this long without you."

Akira just smiled, nodding patiently. "My blessing!"

-CHAPTER 13-

Harnessing Power

One evening John and Akira had gone on a long walk after dinner to the edge of the property to catch the sunset. As they watched the sun drop to the horizon, Akira pointed to a large oak tree, which had been uprooted and lay fallen at the edge of the property.

He asked, “Do you see that tree, John?”

“Of course. What happened to it?”

“A very strong wind storm blew it over, many years ago. But after that same windstorm, a company in the city came out and set up those. Do you know what they are?”

Akira pointed in the other direction, across a wide field. Far away, John could glimpse the spinning turbines.

“A wind farm?”

“Exactly. Isn’t it strange, John, that wind can be both creative and destructive at the same time? It all depends on how you harness it. It can destroy homes or trees, or it can create power or push a sailboat across an ocean.”

John nodded, “I’d never thought of it that way.”

Akira continued, “Words are a lot like that. Just like the wind, they are everywhere. We use them every day to talk to others, but most importantly, we use them to talk to *ourselves*. And just like the wind, their power can either destroy, or create. You may not have control over how other people talk to you, but you do have control over how you talk to yourself. And that

is hugely important, because...

Words put pictures in your mind.

Pictures in your mind impact how you feel.

How you feel impacts what you do.

What you habitually do impacts your destiny.

What amazes me is that many people, often without realizing it, use this power to talk themselves into choices that are harmful for themselves in the long run, even if they might offer temporary happiness. Or, they use their words to give power to their inner critic, destroying their own joy and growth before it even has a chance to start.”

“What do you mean?” asked John.

“We are all experts in mental training, John, because we practice it every day. Most people just aren’t aware of it. Our brains can’t distinguish between what is real and imagined, and we can actually wrap muscle memory with vivid visualization. You use visualization every single day, though you might only be using it in negative ways.”

“How so?” asked John.

“Do you ever worry, John? Worrying is a form of negative visualization, that helps create the scenario you see happening in your mind. The hard choice, but the one that is best for us in the long run, is to use our words to put beneficial pictures in our minds, and to talk to ourselves in ways that push us toward growth and toward what is most beneficial for ourselves in the long run. It might sound crazy at first, but using beneficial and constructive self-talk instead of giving power to our inner critic is one of the most formidable strategies possible to use toward reaching our own potential.

You might not be able to stop negative thoughts or your inner critic from screaming at you, but you don’t have to believe them or give them significance, and you can definitely talk to yourself rather than just listening to the negativity!”

John nodded, understanding. “Just like the wind?”

Akira smiled, “Yes, John. Just like the wind.”

-CHAPTER 14-

Diet Coke

One night John was watching TV alone, when a commercial came on. It was a loud, garish advertisement for a product that promised its users they could lose twenty pounds in two weeks. Suddenly, a voice sounded from behind him...

“What a ridiculous idea!”

John whirled in surprise to find Akira standing at the doorway. The sensei entered the room, shaking his head.

“Those commercials always frustrate me and remind me of something. Have you ever seen a person order a two or three thousand calorie meal, complete with a huge dessert, but then ask for a Diet Coke? What is that Diet Coke possibly doing for them? It might make them feel better, but it is not helping them get better! Unfortunately, this is how most people treat mental training.”

Sensing John’s confusion, Akira explained, “Most people want to consume whatever they want to for 86,000 seconds of their day, just like they want to eat what they want to eat for most of each day. But then, just like this commercial offers a ‘get fit quick’ fix for an overweight body, they want a trick they can do for the other 400 seconds left in their day that is going to override all the negative training they’ve been doing all day long!”

John nodded, understanding, as Akira went on.

“Mental training is not magic. It is deliberate, intentional, and extremely hard training. If I told you it would be easy to lose one hundred fifty pounds, you would think I was crazy, just like you do when you watch these commercials.

It is the same with mental training and developing true mental toughness. It's not sexy, it's dirty, hard work."

The commercial ended, and John smiled. "So you're sure I can't lose twenty pounds in two weeks?"

Akira just looked at John's athletic frame and smiled back, "If you lost twenty pounds, what would be left?"

-CHAPTER 15-

The Path to Mastery

Even though John enjoyed his time with Akira, it took four very long and frustrating years before he was able to move up from the seven-foot target to the full targets more than a hundred feet away.

When the day finally came, John couldn't wait. He walked to the firing line filled with confidence, drawing his arrow smoothly and quickly. With a smile, he released it... only to watch in total disappointment as it flew sideways, totally off-target.

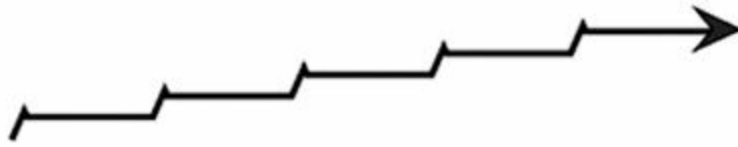
He couldn't believe it! He'd been shooting every day for four years, and now the bow and arrow felt like foreign objects in his hands. Once again, he wondered if all this time had been a waste.

For weeks, he couldn't hit the target. Every day he tried, and every day his arrows flared all over the place. Then one day, Akira went over to check on his progress.

John shrugged in total discouragement. "I can't hit the target, and I feel like giving up. Maybe I'm just not meant to be a samurai archer!"

John expected Akira to respond with some of his usual words of wisdom, but instead the old sensei beckoned John to follow him. He walked away from the firing line, to a patch of dirt. He bent down, and used an arrow to draw something in the dirt.

John peered at the drawings curiously. They looked like this:



“What is that?”

“That,” replied Akira, “Is the path to mastery.”

He explained that while John wanted to feel constant improvement, mastery moves much differently: it moves in steps, not constants. So while John might feel discouraged now, he was on a long plateau, and in time he would eventually have another growth spurt.

But John was tired of all the philosophical sayings and stories, and he couldn’t believe the words that slipped out of his mouth. “You make it sound so easy, but I bet you can’t even hit the target any more, *old man!*”

Akira calmly responded, “Meet me back here at ten tonight.”

-CHAPTER 16-

I Aim With Everything

All day long, John couldn't shake his nerves. He knew he shouldn't have spoken to any sensei that way, but especially not the one who had invested so much time and energy in him. John was fearful of what would come next. Half expecting to be beaten, John showed up at the shooting range a few minutes early to scout the scene.

At 9:59, Akira walked up silently, holding his bow and two arrows. John was confused, because it was pitch black outside. You could barely see to walk. But Akira calmly walked over to one of the shooting blocks, nocked an arrow, and drew his bow.

John watched in awe, as — all at once, with intense focus that still seemed effortless somehow — Akira exhaled and released.

THWACK!

John knew that sound. Akira had hit the target, but it seemed impossible.

Once again, the old man nocked his arrow, drew it, and...

THWACK!

This time, the noise wasn't as loud, but John knew it must have hit something. He took off running to the target, and when he got there he couldn't believe his eyes.

It seemed impossible. Akira's first arrow was lodged in the middle of the target, while his second had hit the first arrow, splitting it in half.

John walked back stunned, stuttering, "How on earth did you do that? It's

impossible!”

Akira smiled, pointing down in the dirt to where his drawings were still clear. With nothing but a little bit of moonlight he indicated the steps of the final drawing. “Many years of chop wood, carry water.”

He indicated the bottom step. “First year, you must learn to aim with your eyes.”

He indicated the next step. “Second year, you must learn to draw your bow smoothly, hold it stable, and aim with your muscles.”

Again, the next step. “Third year, you must learn to breathe slowly, control your diaphragm, and aim with your lungs.”

He repeated this, all the way to the top of the drawing, where he stopped. “John, I have been chopping wood and carrying water for forty-nine years. And while you may only aim with your eyes and your muscles and your lungs right now, I aim with *everything*. The way I stand, the position of my feet, how much tension I put in the bow, how much tension I have in my hands, how I breathe, and what I see in my mind all impact the end result. Everything impacts everything. Everything is aiming. You have much to learn, John. Get some sleep, and tomorrow we chop wood, carry water.”

John just nodded in total amazement, thankful for such a masterful and patient teacher.

-CHAPTER 17-

Bamboo

The next morning at breakfast, Akira told John to meet him at the big bamboo grove in ten minutes. Still mesmerized from the night before, John quickly agreed.

When John arrived seven minutes later, Akira was already there waiting for him. “Let’s go for a walk. I want to tell you a story,” he said. John replied, “First, I owe you an apology. I am very sorry for speaking to you in such a disrespectful manner. It was wrong, and I am very sorry.”

The old man looked at John and said with a smile, “I appreciate that you recognized this on your own, and I accept your apology. I had already forgiven you though, because not forgiving people is like swallowing a deadly drug and hoping the person who wronged you dies from it.”

John whipped his head around. “That’s crazy! I had never thought of that. My whole life I thought that forgiveness was about something you did for other people, but I never thought about its importance for the person who was wronged!”

Akira just smiled at the boy as they kept walking.

“Now, has anyone ever told you the story of bamboo, John?”

He pointed to the towering grove of bamboo trees, with their thick green trunks and whispering leaves. John shook his head, “No, sir.”

“Well then, you are in for a treat!” Akira grinned and went on, “You see, many people love bamboo. They love the bamboo trees, and they love the

bamboo wood, but very few people understand the process of growing bamboo. You dig up the soil and make sure it is good soil, and then you plant the bamboo seed. You then must faithfully water it every day. After three months, guess what starts to happen?”

John said excitedly, “The bamboo tree starts to sprout up out of the ground?”

“Nothing! You see absolutely nothing happening. You keep watering it and watering it, but you continue to see nothing happening for one year, then two years, then three years. Do you know what happens after three years, John?”

John replied, more tentatively this time, “The bamboo tree starts to sprout up out of the ground?”

“Nothing! You see absolutely nothing.”

John shook his head, “I don’t understand.”

“What you don’t see happening is what is taking place *beneath the surface*. Beneath the surface, a massive, dense foundation of roots is spreading out all throughout the ground to prepare for the rapid growth that the bamboo will experience. So, you keep watering it and watering it, and eventually, after *five* years of seeing nothing at all happen above the surface, the bamboo tree shoots up to over ninety feet tall in just six weeks!

You see John, most people want the ninety-foot-tall bamboo tree without the five years of the *process*. They want the bamboo to grow to ninety feet tall in six weeks, but without the five years of invisible growth, the bamboo wouldn’t have a solid foundation, and it could never sustain the massive and rapid growth that occurs.

This is why you see people who achieve massive levels of ‘success’ end up broke, homeless and divorced. Did you know that around 75% of NFL players and around 65% of NBA players end up bankrupt, homeless, and divorced?”

Shaken, John shook his head no.

“Do you remember when I told you that the majority of people who win the lottery end up worse off financially than they were before winning the lottery, just five years down the road?”

John nodded, of course he remembered.

“John, chopping wood and carrying water is the price of admission for the opportunity to reach sustained excellence. Like the roots of a bamboo tree, it is a long and arduous process of invisible growth, where you are building the foundation that is necessary to sustain success. For many years it might feel as if nothing is happening, but you must trust the process and continue to chop wood and carry water, day in day out, regardless of what is happening around you.

There will be distractions. There will be people who tell you that you are stupid or crazy for doing it. There will be people who try and lure you off the path with quick fixes and get rich quick schemes. But you must be wise and stay the path, and continue to build your foundation by chopping wood and carrying water every day. Greatness isn't sexy John, it is the dirty, hard work that is often very boring. You have a bright future. Stay the path, and never forget --”

“I know, I know,” interrupted John. “No matter what happens, I must chop wood, and carry water.”

Akira couldn't help but grin. “You have learned much, but you still have much to learn.”

-CHAPTER 18-

Road Signs on The Path To Mastery

On a beautiful fall day while John was out training, Akira sat nearby, watching as John shot arrow after arrow. Eventually, he grabbed two cups of water and handed one to John.

“Time for a break, John.”

John was happy to oblige, and they sat in silence for a minute. Then, Akira said, “Have I told you lately that I love to watch you shoot, and that I am very proud of you?”

John’s face turned a little red as he replied, “Yes, you tell me every week.”

“Good!” Akira nodded. “Did you know that I drove trucks all over Asia for two years when I was in my early twenties?”

“Really?! I didn’t know they even had cars back then!”

John grinned at his own joke as Akira shook his head, “I’m not *that* old, John. Need I remind you about our night of shooting in the dark?”

John laughed, “Of course not, I’ll never forget it!”

“The interesting thing about driving trucks back then, was that without navigational technology, we depended a lot on road signs to help us. You would often snap out of haze and wonder, ‘Wait a minute, am I going in the right direction?!’”

He looked off for a minute, then continued:

“The same thing often happens with people in their teams, businesses,

corporations, and families. The road signs on the path to mastery are similar regardless of the context we find ourselves in at any particular time in life. We can take solace in knowing that we are going in the right direction by the signs on the road. Here are some of those road signs:

- This is hard.
- I don't feel like doing _____ today.
- Everyone else has more time than me.
- I don't feel like this is making a difference.
- Almost no one else is doing this.

Sound familiar?

The thing about all of these signs is that they provide information, but they don't give a whole lot of instruction. Instead, they are more like the mile-markers or rest stop signs that tell us where things are. But the great thing about most highways is that they don't just provide *information*; they actually provide *instruction* that will help us move safely and efficiently towards our destination. These are the yellow diamond signs that we see instructing us about a speed change for a sharp bend, uneven roads, or road work ahead. The road signs on the path to mastery are no different. So, what are some of the path to mastery's instructions?

- Talk to yourself instead of listening to yourself.
- Ask the question, "What is one thing I can do to make the situation better?" rather than, "why is this happening to me?"
- Live by principles rather than feelings.

Finally, there are warning signs that mark the path. They are signs that warn us about the result of our choices. On the highway we see warnings about fines in a work zone, fines for littering, and fines for HOV violators. They are the boundaries that we must operate in, or else there will be a consequence.

The path to mastery is marked with those as well.

- Your choice creates your challenge
- You are building your own house
- Your choice creates a challenge for those on your team
- You will reap what you sow
- The grass is greener where you water it
- The wise man finds the diamonds on his own land

Even though the path to mastery is available to everyone, very few will choose to take it.

Will there be obstacles? *Yes.*

Will there be people who try to hold you back? *Yes.*

Will there be circumstances that create challenges outside of your control?
Yes.

Will it be lonely at times? *Yes.*

But choosing to believe that anything that happens is in your best interest will turn all of the challenges and circumstances into a refinery that will shape your character and skills, and will develop within you an ability to change the world.”

John nodded, amazed. Then, a smile grew on his face as he began to laugh.

“Is something funny, John?”

He looked at his sensei and grinned, “Sure is. I just pictured you in a trucker hat!”

Akira began to laugh as well. “Aren’t you glad I didn’t stick to trucking? I know I am.”

-CHAPTER 19-

Be Where Your Feet Are

A few more years passed, and John had begun to hit the far target with some consistency, becoming more and more accurate. His excitement grew, because the annual apprentice tournament was coming up, and he felt like it would finally be his time to shine and prove to everyone how good he had become.

But that week, John really began to struggle with a concept he had just learned in training. A sensei had talked about the need to be fully absorbed in the moment. The way he described it was almost as if the greatest samurai archers arrived at a place where they were so fully absorbed in the moment that they melded with the bow and arrow, so that they were no longer two separate things, but became one.

It reminded John of a concept he had been taught at a high school basketball mental skills workshop. The teacher had shared the importance of *playing present*. He told John that the majority of people feel pressure and never come close to playing to their potential, because they never *play present*⁵. Instead, they play in the past or the future, which is where they feel pressure. There is no such thing as pressure in the present moment.

John didn't understand how to play present, but had made a commitment to himself to try to learn how. He had even reached out to a few people on Twitter, trying to discover how to be more effective at playing present.

The response he never forgot said simply, "Sit in the front row away from friends and teammates, turn off your phone, and take notes by hand, for every class."

One afternoon, John was so absorbed with thinking this through that he nearly ran headfirst into a tree on his way to the shooting range. Stumbling, he caught himself, as...

“Good catch, I thought you were going down!” It was Akira, who had seen the whole thing and couldn’t help but let out a belly laugh. John joined in, red with embarrassment, as Akira continued, “What are you thinking about? It must be something big, if you’re walking into trees thinking about it!”

John started explaining how confused he was by the concept of playing present. He shared that strange response from years ago about sitting in the front row.

Akira nodded, quizzical. “So, did you do what he told you to do?”

John squirmed a bit, mumbling something indiscernible.

Akira said, “I didn’t think you had, or you wouldn’t be struggling with the concept. Here is what you must understand: to play present, you must first learn to *live* present. Remember, you are always training!”

John nodded, realizing something: “I’m also late. Now I have to go chop wood, carry water!” He bowed to his sensei and turned to leave, but Akira wasn’t finished.

“Excuse me?” he said. “John, there is only one thing you *have to* do in life, and that is die. You are always doing what you *want to* do, because there is *always* a choice. You may not like the choices, or the consequences, but you always have a choice. When you tell yourself that you *have to* do something, it creates a negative internal energy, but when you realize you *want to* do something it creates a more beneficial internal energy.”

John nodded, “Then let me correct myself: I *want to* go chop wood, carry water now!”

Akira smiled, watching his apprentice go, proud of how John had transformed over the years.

-CHAPTER 20-

Goal vs. Mission

The day before the big apprentice tournament, John was on a walk with Akira.

“How are you feeling about the tournament?” Akira asked.

“Great! I put in my work in the dark, and now it’s my time to shine under the bright lights. My goal is to win the tournament, and I think I finally have the skill to accomplish that,” John said with excitement.

Akira pondered that for a silent moment, then replied, “Do you know why so many people love goals, John? Because they secretly let them off the hook. If your goal is to become a doctor, there are a lot of people who can stop that from happening. There are many checkpoints along the way where people can tell you that you aren’t smart enough, or that you don’t qualify. But if you look at Mother Theresa’s mission, ‘to serve the needs of the sick and the dying,’ no one could ever stop her from living that out.

Goals actually allow you to shirk responsibility. But a mission? Only the person in the mirror can stop you from living that out.

I think one of the reasons so many young people today are floundering around chasing all the wrong things, is because they are bored with goals. They need a compelling mission. One hundred years ago, teenagers were leading armies, raising families, and living inspired lives. They might have lived ‘boring’ lives by today’s standards, but I would argue many of them were inspired by a compelling mission from a very young age. Today, our parents and coaches do all sorts of things to shelter kids from the consequences of their choices, and rarely inspire them with a mission.

I believe a mission is something you can do right where you are, anywhere, using only what you have. You do not need anyone's permission.

So, what is your mission John? It is much deeper than a goal, and it is okay to borrow one from others and then refine it as you go. But your mission will act as your internal navigation system. Without a mission, you will flounder through life and very easily end up with your ladder on the 'oh sh**' building."

John was surprised, but couldn't help cracking up. "What building is that?" he asked.

"Many people keep climbing and climbing, only to get to the end of their life and the top of the ladder, and realize their ladder has been on the wrong building. Without a mission, it is easy to lose perspective on what truly matters. A mission will make you think beyond the moment, which is greatly important because the only thing that is significant about the moment is who you become in the process, and the impact you have on others.

No one on their death bed is worried about how they did in a game, on a test, or how much money they made. They care about their relationships, and who they have become as a person. I know that in the moment, the achievements feel like a big deal, but with perspective, you will realize just how insignificant they really are."

John nodded, but in all honesty, his mind was still set on the tournament the next day.

"Do you understand what I mean?" asked Akira. John said he did, but Akira knew better: John's mind was elsewhere. He sighed, knowing what was coming, but knowing that he had to let John experience it on his own.

Oftentimes, failure is the greatest teaching tool.

-CHAPTER 21-

Surrender

Sure enough, when the tournament came around, John just couldn't seem to perform as well as he knew he could. Anxiety got the best of him, and after blowing his first three rounds, he wasn't even close to hitting the target by the end of it.

So instead of winning, or even placing, he watched in jealousy as Katsuo's arrows slammed into the bullseye, winning him the tournament.

As John walked off, emotion overcame him like a tidal wave, and tears of pure frustration began to fall. He had worked so hard for the last six years, and now he felt like he was back at square one, shooting at a seven-foot target. Lost in frustration, he walked for miles, ending up at the edge of the community's property. He collapsed at the top of a beautiful overlook, exhausted. He was so worn out, that he eventually dozed off.

A while later, a familiar voice roused him...

"John?" Sure enough, it was Akira. He offered John a bottle of water and a sandwich. "I figured you might be here."

The old man gestured to the surrounding hills, rolling in miles in every direction. "When I was an apprentice, I too used to come up here when I was frustrated with my training."

John began to eat and drink, as Akira continued, "John, I knew this was going to happen. As soon as you told me your goal was to win the tournament last week, I knew you had allowed your focus to shift away from the process and onto the uncontrollables. You cannot play present if you are focused on

winning or the outcome.”

As the sun began to set, the sky ignited with an explosion of color. Akira looked John in the eyes. “I want you to do something for me, John. I want you to go for a two minute gratefulness walk. I want you to walk around for two minutes thanking God for everything you are grateful for, and make sure you pay special attention to all the little things you often take for granted.”

John nodded, deciding to give it a shot. After two minutes, he returned with a huge smile on his face. “That was amazing! I could feel the energy inside of me shift!”

Akira nodded, “Remember that the next time you are struggling and you need a perspective shift! It’s not just what you do, but it is also the heart posture you have while doing it. If you broke your legs, I bet you would give anything to just be able to go for a walk. But it is easy to lose perspective and focus on silly things like the results of a tournament, rather than on being grateful for even being able to participate in that tournament in the first place.

When you operate with a heart posture of gratefulness, you free yourself up to be at your best and slip into the zone. When you are focused on results you tend to force things, which makes you tight, and it’s almost impossible to get into the zone. Not to mention, you are also much more of a joy to be around for those you love when you operate with a heart posture of gratefulness.”

John nodded, as he took in the sunset. Akira thought for a minute, then said, “John, I want to share with you the most important piece of wisdom my sensei ever shared with me.

The ultimate illusion of the human experience is control⁶. The person you want beside you in battle is the guy who has surrendered the outcome, and surrendered to the fact that he might die. When you surrender the outcome, you are freed up to be at your best, to be in the moment, and to trust your training. It is the one who has surrendered the outcome who ironically has the greatest chance of survival.

It is the one who has surrendered the outcome who has the greatest chance of success. It is the one who has surrendered to the fact that he could fail, who has the greatest likelihood of not failing. Until you surrender the outcome, you will always be the greatest enemy to your own success. In order to reach your greatest potential you must operate with a heart posture of gratitude, commit to the controllables, surrender the outcome, and trust the process.

-CHAPTER 22-

Famous Failures

The week after the tournament, the community buzzed because of a special guest they were hosting for the week. Jackie Chan was going to be arriving later that day and speaking to the group that night, and John couldn't be more excited to get to meet him.

When Jackie got up to speak, he said he wanted to talk to them about the importance of failure, and that failure can be an incredible launching pad if you have a growth mindset. He said that a growth mindset is believing that, "anything that happens to me is in my best interest and is an opportunity to learn and grow."

Mr. Chan began to share a list of people who became famous after persevering through many continuous failures:

"It was 1937 when Theodore Geisel's first book hit the market after being rejected twenty-six times by different publishers. He went on to write a few books you might have read, such as *Cat In The Hat*, *Green Eggs and Ham*, and *Oh The Places We Will Go*.

Einstein's teachers labeled him 'mentally slow.' He didn't speak until almost five years old, and he was expelled from school.

Ben Carson was told he was stupid by teachers, and made to sit in the back corners of classrooms. He eventually became the first neurosurgeon to ever separate Siamese twins attached at the skull.

Oprah was fired and told she was 'unfit for television.'

David Sanders' famous chicken recipes were rejected by over 1,000 different

restaurants, but you have probably eaten at a *KFC*.

A young engineer named Soichiro wanted a certain engineering job at *Toyota*, and he was very upset he didn't get it. So, he left and started a brand using his last name: *Honda*.

Henry had multiple businesses fail under his leadership, but eventually he created a small company called *Ford*.

Walt was fired from a local Kansas City newspaper for 'lacking creativity' and 'having no original ideas.' *Mr. Disney's* original ideas still draw billions to his amusement parks and movies every single year.

At thirty years old Steve was fired from the company he created, until *Apple* begged him to come back and save the company ten years later.

Tom was told he was 'too stupid to learn anything' but Mr. Edison did invent the first light bulb along with at least *one thousand and ninety-three* other things.

Their group was told they 'have no future in show business' but I bet the person who told *The Beatles* that might have eventually found *himself* with no future in show business.

Steven was rejected from the University of Southern California three times, and eventually dropped out of another college. He created a few movies you might have seen like *Jaws*, *Jurassic Park*, and *Indiana Jones*.

Rowland Hussey had seven straight businesses fail before he started *Macy's*.

A young singer named Paul's sample tape was continuously rejected by record labels as, 'not suitable for us,' but those same companies perked up their ears when *Bono* and his band *U2* eventually became some of the most successful rock stars of all time.

Akio's company was so broke they started making rice cookers that didn't work very well at all, but after many years of barely keeping the lights on,

Sony found their niche.

Winston failed the sixth grade and was beaten in every election he partook in, until becoming the prime minister. His last name, *Churchill*, is now synonymous with the stalwart leadership that helped the Allies defeat Hitler in World War II.

Abraham failed at seemingly everything he put his hand to (including multiple businesses and runs at office) but *President Lincoln* eventually got a couple things right, like saving the Union and the Emancipation Proclamation.

Jerry froze his first time up on the big stage, and was consequently booed off it. His television show ‘about nothing’ was laughed at and ridiculed, until *Seinfeld* became one of the longest-running and most popular shows in television history.

Vincent only sold one painting during his lifetime and was a true starving artist, but today *Van Gogh’s* paintings together are worth billions.

Mr. Presley was fired from the Grand Old Opry in Nashville and told to ‘go back to driving a truck.’ *Elvis* was able to buy many trucks in his lifetime while selling a couple records along the way.

Ludwig was completely deaf, which made playing the violin and composing pretty difficult. Apparently a few people still play *Beethoven’s* music today.”

Jackie Chan paused, every eye in the room locked on him.

He continued, “I’m grateful these people didn’t give up, and I hope you don’t give up either. Because your failures, shortcomings, and challenges can either end up as your *excuse* or your *story*. I hope you choose courage, curiosity, and persistence. Because those are stories worth telling.”

Having watched all of Jackie’s films with his father and Jordan growing up, John was a huge fan. But it wasn’t his movies that John was still thinking about that night as he lay in bed. Instead, it was the incredible stories Jackie

told; John never realized that so many of the people he admired had gone through such adversity throughout their lives.

As he finally drifted off to sleep, he knew that if all of them could overcome such incredible challenges, then so could he.

-CHAPTER 23-

The Illusion of Partially Controllable Goals

One day, as the sun was about to go down, Akira found John at the shooting range. He was still firing, intensely focused. THWACK! THWACK! THWACK! He sent arrow after arrow into the target, hurriedly reloading and moving on to the next.

Akira calmly asked, “John, what are you shooting for?”

“I need to get four bullseye groupings in a row before I lose the light.”

“Why?”

Without thinking, John snapped, “Because that’s Katsuo’s record, and I need to beat him!”

“Be honest. Do you really *need* to do that?”

John shook his head, slowly deflating, as Akira continued...

“John, let me tell you story about trying to reach a goal before losing the light. A very long time ago, I was in love with a girl named Kimiko. One summer, I surprised her with a trip to a land she had always wanted to visit: Croatia, home of some of the world’s most beautiful waterfalls.

There was one waterfall in particular whose beauty captured us. We found out about it on the last day of our journey, and I was determined to see it before we left the country.

Our guides at the hotel had told us that this beautiful place was five hours away, through the winding mountain roads and over several dangerous bridges. So, we awoke at dawn and began our journey. After driving trucks

for a living, I was confident I could navigate the difficult roads and terrain in plenty of time to get there. According to my calculations, we would arrive at the waterfall halfway through the afternoon at the latest.

I drove us through the winding mountain roads like a madman, but all my crazy driving was for nothing as we arrived at our first sign of trouble: the first 'bridge' was no bridge at all, but a car ferry across a wide lake. *And the next ferry did not leave for another hour and a half.*

We took some pictures by the beautiful ferry, and I tried to enjoy the view and the journey. Truthfully though, I was not enjoying any of it, because my sole focus was achieving my goal (getting to the waterfall) and I wouldn't be satisfied until we (I) made it there.

Determined to make up our lost time, we were the first people off the ferry. We stopped at the tollbooth on the mountain road, where the operator informed us: despite my calculations that the waterfall was an hour away, it was more like *two hours* with the muddy roads.

As we drove, Kimiko asked me, 'Do you want to go do something else? I just want to spend time with you, it doesn't matter what we do.' I shrugged her off as if she'd just suggested we ride a wooden horse, instead of experience something truly spectacular

We (I) were going to make it to the cascading waterfall.

I began to snap at Kimiko, irritated at even the slightest inconvenience. I wish I could say I was enjoying the journey, but I wasn't. Instead, I was angrily focused on how quickly I could make each turn in the road, instead of enjoying the beautiful vistas around us. I could not get my mind off of my goal, and with the sun passing overhead, I knew we did not have much time.

We finally arrived at the trailhead to the waterfall, but as we got out of the car, we saw that even the man and woman running a roadside stand nearby were beginning to pack up for the day.

I asked them frantically, ‘How do I get to the waterfall?’

‘It’s too late.’

‘How do I get to the waterfall?!’

‘It’s too late. Come back tomorrow.’

We leave in the morning, and now is the only time! HOW DO I GET TO THE WATERFALL?!’

‘The waterfall is several miles away. It is about to downpour, and the trail is not easy. It is a very bad idea. You can’t make it there and back. There isn’t enough light, it is very dangerous. You will be in the middle of the forest with no one around to help you if you get in trouble.’

But I refused to listen to them. Instead, I pulled Kimiko with me, ignoring the ominous clouds that gathered overhead, and the rapidly-fading daylight.

I had now traveled for over eight hours to experience this beautiful cascading waterfall, and it was too late to turn back or admit defeat.

Even Kimiko’s patience began to wear thin as we trekked through the mountains. I am sure she asked if we could just stop and go somewhere else multiple times along the muddy trail, but she might as well have asked a statue, because I just kept going.

As we crossed the first bridge, it started to rain. It was muddy and hard to get good footing after the bridge, but we kept going. Occasionally, I looked back to see if I could still see her.

We passed two other travelers, on their way back down the mountain. I asked, ‘Is it worth it?’ and they replied, ‘It’s amazing! But you will never make it in time.’ I told Kimiko to walk back with them, and I pressed on.

I took off running. It started to rain, but I ran harder. I came across a pond in

the middle of the path, and I could barely get around it. The light was getting worse. I kept running hard, although the hills were making my legs burn. I got to the top of another one, and reality finally set in.

I could make it to the cascading waterfall, but then I would have no light for a difficult (even with sunlight) trek back.

I was in the middle of a foreign country.

There were wild animals in this forest.

Kimiko was worried sick, and I had abandoned her.

It was pouring rain.

I had not eaten all day.

The rainstorm was killing the last of the sunlight.

I was not going to reach my goal.

I would not experience the cascading waterfall.

I screamed at the top of my lungs. I cursed the rain and Croatia. *I sacrificed so much to achieve my goal, and I was so close, but I knew I needed to turn back.* I screamed and cursed it all again and... I finally turned around.

John, this is where I learned the truth about partially controllable goals: they are very alluring, but very dangerous. Things like winning, rebounding, sales, or beating your opponent's records, can distract us from what is more important: the person we become on the journey.

That day, my focus was on the partially controllable goal, and I spoiled the journey, my character, my health, and my relationship in the process. I compromised the things that are not only important to me, but the things I spend my life trying to teach others to do well.

Cascading waterfalls in life are sexy and alluring, and I hope you get to

experience some of them. But if we focus on them instead of true mental toughness, we so often end up compromising all the things that truly matter. Sometimes we make it to the waterfalls, many times we do not. But regardless of whether we achieve our goal or not, there is always a path of destruction in our wake.

TRUE MENTAL TOUGHNESS

- HAVE A GREAT ATTITUDE
- GIVE YOUR VERY VERY BEST
- TREAT PEOPLE REALLY REALLY WELL
- HAVE UNCONDITIONAL GRATITUDE
- REGARDLESS OF YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES

It might be easier to justify that wake of destruction when you achieve the goal, but it is even more of a reality check when you do not. John, a wise man once said, ‘You can go chase a dream, but then sometimes you look back and there’s a trail of tears behind you. And the tears are usually your wife and kids.’⁷

I have no wife and children, but that day I learned the truth: that focusing on partially controllable goals can be much more trouble than it is worth!”

John nodded, looking up as the night sky faded down around them. The light was now gone for shooting, but he felt relieved and his body felt lighter.

“Thank you, Akira-sensei. I think I needed to hear that. I get very derailed when I focus on goals instead of the process and building my house.”

Akira nodded, “I know, John. I still have to re-learn this lesson too sometimes.”

John grinned, “So maybe one day we’ll *both* learn?”

Akira just smiled back, “Yes, John. Let us hope so!”

-CHAPTER 24-

The Fight

One day during lunch, the apprentices gathered in the dining hall as usual. But in the midst of some good-natured joking, Katsuo crossed a line, talking about how John had “choked” in the last tournament. John didn’t hear a single word after that. His blood boiled, and before he knew it, he had tackled Katsuo!

They rolled wildly across the floor, food flying, each trying to land a punch. As the other apprentices pulled them apart, John made one last lunge. But Katsuo dodged, sending John slipping past him on the slick floor, then crashing to the ground. As he fell, John heard a hollow *pop!* followed by a wrenching bolt of pain, as he felt his arm shatter into two pieces.

Later that day, after the doctors had finished setting his arm and had sent him back from the hospital, John was sitting in his room when Akira arrived. John looked away, unable to meet his sensei’s eyes. He felt ashamed, he wasn’t ready for a lecture.

But instead of a lecture, the old man seemed to be filled with joy. “John, it’s great to see you! I know you wish the circumstance were different, and I believe me, I know how you feel. I was a hot head growing up as well, and I got in plenty of trouble. It took me a long time to learn how to live by *principles*, instead of *feelings*.

Many years ago, I even found myself in a place just like the one you are in right now. I had been knocked out, my face was split open, gushing blood, and my nose was broken, by a man much larger than myself. But I chose to believe it was in my best interest and an opportunity to learn and grow. That

mindset helped propel me towards becoming the man I am today.”

“Wait a second!” said John, “You can’t just say something like that and skip over it!”

Akira just smiled, “That is a story for another day. Right now we have more important things to think about. Did you know that the Chinese symbol for *crisis* is the combination of two words: danger and opportunity?

John shook his head, as Akira continued, “At every crossroads there are at least two choices: to view your circumstance as a calamity, or to view it as an incredible opportunity. The most important question to think about right now is this: five years from today, will you be ashamed of how you shrank from what you saw as a calamity? Or, will you look back and be proud of how you maximized your incredible opportunity?”

John nodded, but couldn’t stop the tears that began to sting his eyes. “I can’t believe I was this stupid! Why did I have to break my arm? I’m trying to believe this is in my best interest and an opportunity to learn and grow, but it seems impossible to believe right now!”

His sensei pulled up a chair beside his bed. “I figured you would feel that way, so I thought maybe we could talk about chasing lions on snowy days.”

John couldn’t help chuckling even with tears and snot flowing down his face. “I don’t know how that’s going to help, but let’s hear it.”

Akira continued, “The thing about incredible opportunities is that they often come to us disguised as five-hundred-pound lions. Right now you are face to face with one of the many lions you will encounter in life. The question is, what will you *believe* about it, and what will you *do* about it? There is an ancient story about a warrior named Benaiah, and while he doesn’t get very many lines in the Book, they tell us a lot about life. In the first line, it says that one day he chased a lion into a pit on a snowy day, and killed it. The next line says that Benaiah went on to become King David’s chief bodyguard.

When most people come face to face with their opportunities (lions) they run as fast as they can in the opposite direction, but when you decide to embrace the lion and chase it, you have the opportunity to build your resume, your character, and your skills.

John, no one is interested in watching a story where the hero doesn't have to overcome a lot of adversity. That would be incredibly boring.

Do I condone you getting into a fight? Not at all! But we all have different challenges in life, and now you have found yourself here. I would never *want* someone to come face to face with a lion on a snowy day, but I can tell you one thing: if I were the king, I would want the guy who had killed the lion in that encounter to be my bodyguard.

Right now, you have an opportunity to develop mental, emotional, and relational skills in a way that you never would have if you had not suffered this physical setback. But what you do with that opportunity, is up to you. Will you squander it wasting time, or will you harness the opportunity and allow it to build you into more of the person that you want to become?"

John grinned, sounding more like his old self, "I want to harness the opportunity!"

Akira nodded, "Good." He walked to a cabinet, and pulled out a pen and notepad. "I want you to make a 'can do' list of all the things you can do to get better while you are not able to train. I would start with reading at least fifteen books off this [reading challenge](#).⁸"

John nodded, then started thinking about all the things he could do to get better while he was injured. He started writing...

- Visualization exercises
- Listen to guided imagery
- Do highlight film study of my best shots
- Film study of other great samurai archers

- Encourage my teammates
- Write articles about the lessons I've learned during my time training and the lessons I'm learning through the injury
- Strength training areas not affected by my injury
- Hand-eye coordination exercises with my other arm
- Study Wisdom

As he finished, Akira looked over the list, then nodded in approval. "Those are a few great examples, and I am certain you can think of many more over the next couple of days. Now, I have to get back to the range, but it sounds like you have a 'can do' list to start getting to work on."

"I sure do," John said. "And thank you for helping me see this as an opportunity. I'll do my best to take it on... just like a lion on a snowy day."

-CHAPTER 25-

Principles Instead of Feelings

A few days later, John returned from his check-in at the hospital with his arm in a cast and a recommendation from the doctors of four weeks of no strenuous physical activity, followed by eight weeks of only light physical activity.

As he grabbed his lunch in the dining hall, Akira came up alongside him with a to-go carton. “How about we go for a walk?”

John was happy to comply, as they took their lunch to a massive tree on the property. Under its shade, they ate in silence for a while. Then Akira asked, “John, do you remember me talking to you a few days ago about how it took me a long time to learn to live by principles, not feelings?”

John nodded, quietly acknowledging that he had.

Akira went on, “Like I said, just like you I had quite a hot head when I was younger. I made many stupid and careless choices that caused others and myself much pain. Thankfully, I had a mentor in my life who brought me out of that, and taught me about living by principles.

When I was about your age, he had seen me react to several different situations.

Finally, he asked me a very simple question: ‘How is your strategy of living by your feelings working out for you?’ I got very quiet, and had to admit that it wasn’t working out very well at all. He then shared a quote from a man named Eric Thomas, ‘At the end of your feelings is nothing. But at the end of every principle is a promise.’

Living by feelings is never going to work out well for anyone, because feelings change. Sometimes we simply wake up and we feel differently. Sometimes, someone does something to make us feel differently. Living by our feelings is like riding an emotional rollercoaster. When you make the choice to live by a certain set of principles, it will not only protect you from your feelings, it will allow you to step into your greatest potential.

Many days, you aren't going to *feel* like working out and honing your craft.

Many days, you aren't going to *feel* like treating people really well.

Many days, you aren't going to *feel* like being unconditionally grateful.

Many days, you aren't going to *feel* like giving your very best.

But the *principle* says you are going to reap what you sow.

The *principle* says that diligent workers are going to serve kings instead of ordinary men.

The *principle* says to turn the other cheek.

The *principle* says to seek wise counsel.

The *principle* says to speak life and not death.

At the end of principles there is life, freedom, hope, joy, and peace.

But at the end of feelings is destruction.

John, what I want you to do is to seek out principles from ancient wisdom that have been tried and tested through the ages. When you switch from living by your feelings to living by principles, you will start to see very different fruit in your life. It is not easy, and sometimes you will slip up and make choices based off of your feelings. Pick yourself up, and get back on the road to living by your principles rather than your feelings. It's not easy,

but —” he nodded to John’s cast, “—it is a lot better than living by your feelings!”

John laughed in agreement, as Akira went on. “Now, can you think of four principles you have learned so far from your time here that you want to live by?”

John started to think deeply. He finally replied, “One: you are building your own house. Two: to play present, you must train to live present. Three: you must surrender the outcome and commit to the process or you will become your own worst enemy. And four: no matter what my circumstances are, always chop wood and carry water.”

Akira smiled, “Those are excellent! I am happy to see our time together is paying off. Now, each day when you wake up, before you enter the shooting range, or before you compete, write out four to six principles that you want to stick to no matter what. Stick them in your pocket, and if you feel yourself wanting to live by your feelings, either touch that pocket, or pull them out and say them aloud a few times by yourself. Got it?”

“Yes, Akira-sensei,” said John. He was excited to use this new tool.

-CHAPTER 26-

Warrior Dial

A few months and many reps of the can-do list later, John was finally cleared to train fully again. The night before, he was so excited he could barely sleep.

The next morning, Akira joined him as they walked to the range together.

“I’m so excited for you to get to be back out here shooting, John, and I think it is really important that I share a concept with you that I’m not sure you have ever been aware of. It is called the warrior dial. Think about your warrior dial from one to ten. One is ultra stealth mode, and barely moving. Ten is a super-hyped kamikaze screaming and running into a building with a bomb strapped to them.

Every one of us can turn our warrior dial up or down, and depending on the context of the situation and where we are at our best, we would be wise to do so. Think about today. Based off the context of the day and it being your first day back, where do you think you are at on the warrior dial?”

John thought for a second, then answered, “I am probably at an eight or a nine.”

Akira nodded his head in agreement. “And where do you think you need to be to be at your best, and not get re-injured?”

John replied, “Honestly, I’m not sure. Growing up I had always been taught that you were supposed to get hyped before games by watching movies like *Braveheart* and listening to upbeat music. I’ve never really thought about this before.”

“Then I am glad we’re talking about it now,” said Akira. “I think the best samurai archers would tell you that your best shooting will happen around a four or a five. If your dial is too high, you are more likely to shoot inaccurately.”

John nodded, trying to process what he had heard, while simultaneously wondering why he had never learned this growing up playing sports. “So, how do you turn your warrior dial down?”

His sensei smiled wide, “I was hoping you would ask. You can turn your warrior dial down by doing deep-breathing exercises, talking slower, lowering your voice, listening to classical music, and slowing your movements. In fact, many of your teams in the west would benefit from turning their dial down before the “BIG” games and turning it up before the “smaller” games. You already know how to turn your warrior dial up by watching inspirational movies, listening to upbeat music, and by jumping around. But in my experience, it is more challenging to turn your dial down, than it is to turn it up. It will take practice, but you will get the hang of it.”

John grinned, “Thank you, sensei! I’m excited to try it out today.”

Sure enough, as soon as John gripped his bow, a surge of energy flowed through him. Remembering Akira’s lesson, he breathed deeply, and hummed a slow song, calming his mind and letting the oxygen in his lungs quiet his nerves. That simple exercise was enough to steady his hand as he nocked an arrow, drew, and released, sending the arrow slamming into the bull’s-eye!

It felt good that all of his mental training was paying off, but it felt even better just to get back out on the blocks and be able to chop wood and carry water again. It seemed as if John was finally learning to fall in love with the process of becoming great.

-CHAPTER 27-

“They”

As the years passed, John kept training with focus and perseverance. In cold weather and warm, he kept chopping wood and carrying water. In wind and rain and sun and storms he kept beating on his craft, focusing on mental training when the weather was too rough to shoot, and shooting four hours each day, every day. And before he knew it, John had nearly spent ten years at the samurai community. He was very close now to graduation.

One day at dusk, just as the sun was setting, John was finishing up his shooting when Akira approached, watching his apprentice with great pride. As John finished his shooting, he and Akira walked back to the dining hall.

As they did, Akira said, “John, you are very close to finishing your training now. You will graduate as a samurai archer soon, and then you will dive back into the world. Before you do, there is something I must share with you.”

“And what is that, Akira-sensei?” asked John.

“I want you know that when you get back into the world, you will face a unique challenge. You will face the challenge of ‘they.’”

John just blinked, curious. “Who are ‘they’?”

“John, we come out from the womb creating and exploring. But then we start school, and we are told to sit down, shut up, and get in line. We are told to behave and to color inside the lines. We are told to dream sensibly and to be ‘realistic.’

You want to know who ‘they’ are? *‘They’ are the ones saying all of that.* And if you don’t obey, if you don’t do what ‘they’ say, they call you disobedient,

unassimilated, disturbed, or they diagnose you with ADHD. Then they drug you, all to get you to fit in their nice little box.

‘They’ called a coach named John Wooden crazy when he tried to run a press for the entire game. ‘They’ also thought it was crazy he didn’t scout opponents; rather, he chose to focus on letting the other team worry about stopping his team.

The board at Apple ran Steve Jobs out of the company calling him crazy and reckless. Twelve years later, months away from bankruptcy, they came crawling back begging him to come back and save them. He took Apple from the fringes of bankruptcy to one of the most successful and innovative companies of all time.

‘They’ wanted to have the man committed who came up with the idea of television. ‘They’ thought the idea of a 24-hour sports network was stupid and could never work. ‘They’ called Nelson Mandela a terrorist, and ‘they’ called Jackie Robinson much worse. Rest assured, ‘they’ will call you all sorts of names, they will throw down the gauntlet in front of you, they will do everything they can to keep you inside their ‘safe’ container.

If you put one crab in a bucket, it will crawl out. If you put multiple crabs in a bucket, they will pull each other down every time one starts to crawl out. If a crab continues to try and crawl out of the bucket the other crabs will break its leg.

Unfortunately, John, we live in a society of crabs.

But we weren’t created to sit still and learn the ‘right’ answer. We were created to explore, create, to be loved, to love and to learn.

Be courageous, and never listen to ‘they.’ Once you break out they will call you a genius, and tell everyone how talented you are. They will try and neatly sweep all your years of sweat, turmoil, and uncommon persistence under the

rug. Why? *Because it is so much more comfortable to believe greatness is reserved for the chosen few than it is to work your ever-loving butt off to become the best you are capable of being.*”

And most importantly, please don’t try and teach your friends and family the lessons you learned here.”

“But that doesn’t make any sense?” Said John.

“John, it is different here because you sought out this environment to grow and transform. There will be people who ask you for wisdom, and feel free to share it with them, BUT you must never cross boundaries without an invitation. A wise man once said “the difference between a pest and a guest is an invitation.”⁹ You have gained so much wisdom while you are here, but most people won’t be interested in learning or changing. It is very sad, but you need to be prepared for what you are walking into.

If I were the best heart surgeon in the world, and my best friend had a heart problem that only I could fix, does that give me permission to do surgery on him?” John was puzzled, but eventually said, “I guess not.”

“Exactly! I would still need *permission* to perform heart surgery. Even though you are equipped with life changing wisdom that could transform lives, you must not share it without an invitation. Most people just want to be heard and loved, they don’t want your wisdom, and that is OK! Sometimes, you can actually become the greatest impediment to other people growing when you try and force things on them. In time, if they see you model it, they will probably start to ask for help.

But I’ll share something with you I have never shared with you before. I don’t ask your permission to share wisdom with you, because of the nature and context of our relationship. However, with my friends and family, I always ask “would you like my opinion or do you just need to be heard and want me to listen?” Sometimes this annoys them, and just because I could help, I must make sure they need it, want it, and give their permission.

Trust me John, disregard this advice at your own peril. We get letters from former apprentices all the time, and this is the biggest challenge they face when they assimilate back into the ‘real’ world,” said Akira.

“Thank YOU Akira-sensei! I will do my best to always be a guest and never a pest!”

-CHAPTER 28-

A New Name

By the time he neared graduation, John had become one of the most accurate archers in his class. He was able to pack the bull's-eye with a cluster of three arrows, even at a far range. Finally, after ten years of training, John had become a samurai archer!

After his graduation ceremony and before he left the community to travel back home, John and Akira took one last long walk through the grounds. They passed many of their favorite locations, spots that John had come to love during his time there.

As they walked, Akira told him how proud he was, saying, “You know now that excellence is within your reach, John. It is accomplished through deliberate actions, ordinary in themselves, performed consistently and carefully, made into habits, compounded together and added up over time. I learned this from a coach in your country who won twenty-one national championships¹⁰. He said that greatness is a bunch of small things done well, added up over time, that most people think are too small to matter. John, you have learned to fall in love with the process of becoming great, to take the rough side of the mountain, and to let your skills and character be refined by the day-in, day-out process of chopping wood and carrying water. I am so proud of you!”

John couldn't stop smiling, as his sensei's words resonated inside him. This was one of the satisfying days of his life, not because of what he had achieved, but because of the man he had become.

Akira wrapped him in a big hug, then said, “Before you leave, there is one

more thing we must do. I want you to close your eyes, put your hand on your heart, and take some deep breaths. I want you to think about all the names you have gone by in your life. Each of those names probably represents a part of your personality. And I want you to think: which of the names represents the strongest, kindest, and most authentic version of you?”

John obeyed, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath. Finally, he opened them, and said with resolution, “Jonathan does. Growing up, my family always called me Johnny. That’s the very playful side of my personality, but also a very immature version of myself. Eventually people started calling me John, but that side of my personality is kind of soft and a pushover. I think that Jonathan is the best version of myself.”

His sensei smiled, and said, “Then from now on tell people that your name is Jonathan, and do not allow them to call you anything else. Names are very powerful. In the Bible, many people experienced name changes, and those name changes were watershed moments in their lives. You have transformed through your time here Jonathan, and you need to have a new name that represents that transformation. I am excited for all the journeys you will go on from here, and I trust that you will impact many people’s lives in the process. I am honored to have known you.”

Jonathan nodded, his heart filled with emotion. He embraced Akira one last time. Eventually, he let go, grabbing his bags to leave. “Akira-sensei, I’ll never forget my time here. Thank you for teaching me how to chop wood, carry water, and to fall in love with the process of becoming great!”

The end....

-FINAL THOUGHTS-

My hope is that you feel encouraged, refreshed, and maybe even a little bit lighter from reading this book. Before you go though, there are a few more secrets of wisdom I learned on my personal journey to falling in love with the process of becoming great, and I want to share them with you 😊

You don't need to spend too much time around me before I bring up Judah Smith. In my opinion he is the best in the world at sharing stories in public speaking, hands down.

Another one of my friends who does a lot of public speaking and is world renowned at his craft said, "Judah is the best, and no one else is even close."

I agree.

I've only spent about 5 minutes with Judah in a private setting and I chose my questions carefully. The first question I asked him was, "What do you know now that you wish you would have known when you first started out?"

Every week I study Judah's work. I listen to his mp3's. I've read his books. I listen to him live twice a week even though he gives the same talk twice, I take notes and stay for both. His thinking, writing, and speaking have *greatly* influenced all of mine. However, nothing has hit me as hard as his response to that question.

He said, "When I started out, I tried to write the BEST sermons. Now I just try and love the people in the audience."

When I started out, I tried to be the best in the world at performance psychology. My focus was teaching mental training exercises, tips, and tricks to increase performance.

Today, I start almost every talk with “YOU Matter.”

I let people know that they matter.

Not what they do.

Not what they achieve.

Not their goals.

Not their stuff.

Not their accomplishments.

Not their dreams.

THEY matter.

YOU matter.

You are a human BEING, not just a human DOING.

Always remember this.

Be bold and courageous, chase lions, but never forget where your true value comes from!

“WHAT DO YOU DO WITH ALL YOUR TIME?”

“Joshua, what do you do with all your time?” Russ asked me the day we first met.

It was such a simple question, but looking back it completely changed the trajectory of my life. I had just quit my job, moved out of the closet of a gym and into an apartment with my mom, and I was focusing on building my non-profit organization.

In the moment, I got up on my high horse and pontificated about all the things I did with my time. I told him about the non-profit I started and how I trained kids in the toughest housing project in the country. I told him about the humanitarian events that my friend and I would plan and run. I told him that I needed a social life.

He seemed to have bought it, but hard questions always trump easy answers, and that question haunted me.

Time is the only resource that is the same for everyone regardless of how much money you make, your race, or where you live. We only get 86,400 seconds per day.

John Wooden said, “The softest pillow is a clear conscience,” and my soft pillow quickly began to feel like a crusty hard rock at night.

I knew I had massive dreams, and how I used my time was not in direct proportion to the size of my dreams.

So, I started cutting a lot of stuff out of my life and drastically changed what I did with my time. I was guilty, as many of us are, of running towards all the stuff that was keeping me from my dreams: friends, chilling, Facebook, TV,

staying busy, parties, and many other time wasters.

For six months, I studied like a student in medical school, reading for up to fifteen hours a day. Most of my friends and family told me I was crazy. I had to block out a lot of noise from outside influences. *When you are climbing out of a bucket full of crabs, there will be many people who try to pull you back down to their level.*

Today, I get to mentor and consult for a lot of amazing people, but it wasn't always like this. There was a time when no one was asking me to mentor them, but back then my circle needed a serious upgrade.

Certain people had to go. They were negatively influencing my decisions, and it was my responsibility to change how I spent my time and with whom I spent it.

The majority of my circle at that time came from spending time with Lincoln, Steve Jobs, Jesus, MLK, and other people whose lives I want to model. You may not have physical access to the ideal people for your circle yet, but we all have access to books, mp3's, and videos where we can bring the greats into our circle.

You don't have to be a jerk or tell the people of your current circle that they have been negatively influencing you. You can treat them very well, but consciously choose to spend much less time around them.

According to a recent study done by a Harvard professor and published by the New England Journal of Medicine in 2007, you are 57% more likely to become obese if you have a person close to you who becomes obese.

It's never easy to spend less time with people you've been around for a while, but at some point you have to remember that *you* are the one who is building your own house.

Your choice creates your challenge. You never know, they might start following you when they see things in your life starting to change for the

better. Maybe they will call you names and treat you poorly, but either way, how they treat you is outside of your control.

After six months of spending the majority of my time reading and studying, I found myself in an elevator with Anson Dorrance. Anson serves as the Head Coach of the University of North Carolina Women's Soccer program. We got off the elevator, and while everyone else turned right, Anson and I turned left.

I asked him, "Who works with your girls on mental training?"

He said, "I do. I can read and write!"

Touché! If I had won twenty out of a total of thirty national championships ever held in my sport, I would probably be very confident in my work as well.

So, I asked if he knew who Barbara Fredrickson was, and he replied, "I do not. Why should I?"

I spouted off my response at the pace of an auctioneer.

"Her research on positivity shows that if your positivity ratio is around 1 to 1 that forecasts clinical depression. If your positivity ratio is around 2 to 1 that forecasts languishing in life. But if your positivity ratio is over 3 to 1 it hits this funny tipping point and it starts to forecast flourishing, regardless of how you define 'flourishing.' It also impacts individuals and teams in a similar way. Oh, and she teaches at a little school you might be familiar with, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill."

A huge smile spread slowly across his face, and he stopped in his tracks. "Can you write that down for me? You might have just made my trip here worthwhile."

Three months later, he invited me out to work with his program as only the second outsider ever to work with the UNC Women's Soccer program on mental training.

For a long time, I was really frustrated because I felt like nobody took me seriously. Now looking back, I realize the real problem was that *I didn't take myself seriously*. When I started taking myself seriously I drastically changed how I used my time, and everyone started to take me very seriously as a byproduct.

We have control over how we use our time, but we don't have control over our goals. We know it is counter-cultural and potentially crazy to let go of goals. It goes against everything most parents, mentors, self-help books and expensive special consultants implore us to do. That is why Jamie and I wrote the book, *Burn Your Goals*. What it really comes down to is this...

Everyone wants to be great, until it's time to do what greatness requires.

Anyone can set a big sexy audacious goal, but very few people are willing to commit to focusing 100% of their energy on the things they have complete control over in life, like falling in love with the process of becoming great, and doing the boring work (chop wood carry water) with excellence.

If you feel stuck, or like you haven't made it to the level you know you're capable of achieving, take a hard look at who is in your circle and how you use your time.

If you are frustrated with the things that keep happening in your life, take a hard look at those with whom you are spending your time. If you are continually finding yourself at the wrong place at the wrong time, take a hard look at your circle.

If you want to achieve your greatest potential, you must surround yourself with people who love you deeply, believe in you, and encourage you, but who are also willing to challenge you to become the best you can be by modeling greatness for you.

My encouragement to you would be to actually track how you use your time each day for the next week. Most people are shocked at how they *actually* use their 86,400 seconds.

“DROWNING WITHOUT A MISSION”

I’ve noticed something, and maybe you have to. Have you ever come across a person who seemingly has endless amounts of energy, and they continue to persevere through the challenges that life throws at them with joy and optimism. These people not only inspire you with their actions, but they are also the people you want to spend your most precious resource, time, around them.

I believe that group of people all have something in common. I believe they live mission driven lives. Mother Theresa lived a mission driven life, and she dramatically changed the world we live in. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. lived a mission driven life, and he dramatically changed our world. Gandhi. Mandella. The list could go on and on.

Like I said in the story, I think one of the reasons so many of our youth today are floundering around chasing all the wrong things is because they are bored with goals. They need a compelling mission.

A goal is different than a mission, and that is why we wrote the book *Burn Your Goals*. No one can stop me from loving people, serving people, and providing value, but there are many barriers to becoming a sport psychologist. No one can stop you from pursuing athletic excellence, but there are many people and teams that can stop you from winning games or a championship.

How do you find your mission?

I think some great questions to ask yourself are the following:

What am I really passionate about?

What would I do if money didn’t matter?

What makes me really mad?

What makes me really sad?

What do I wish I would have known, or what do I wish I would have had to better equip me for my journey?

My personal mission is to live my life in a way that I can get diagnosed with terminal cancer and it not changed a thing in my life. My father grew up in a trailer park, and he sold drugs as a means of survival. He had a very rough child hood, but he worked very hard and became one of the most successful eye surgeons in Oklahoma. He modeled for me that hard work pays off, and showed me that anything is possible. However, when he was diagnosed with terminal cancer at age 50, his life dramatically changed. I couldn't help but think he would have done things a little differently if he could have a do-over.

But in life we don't get do-overs. So, at the age of 21 after seeing my dad's struggle, I made a commitment that I wouldn't wait until I got cancer to be grateful for everything God had given me in life.

Our mission at *Train to be CLUTCH* is to Love People, Serve People, and Provide value. We are passionate about seeing hearts and minds transformed *through love and mentorship*. We often go back to the question, what do we wish we would have had or known about earlier in our journey? We then try and create or be the answers to those questions.

Todd White is a person I have a lot of respect for and the mission of his organization is "To become love so that everywhere we go people will want what we have." I think that is incredibly powerful.

The way I found my mission was through serving, and it is something I often recommend to people I mentor who are struggling to figure out their mission. I encourage them to immerse themselves in a service project for at least six months. After I did this at the *Dream Center* in Los Angeles my mission started to be birthed out of that experience. A book I always recommend

about finding your mission is Adam Braun's book, *The Promise of a Pencil*. Another recommendation is to spend as much time as possible around people who are actively living out their mission.

Once you start to give birth to your mission, every decision along the journey becomes much more simple. Not necessarily easy, but simple. Your mission will often act as your internal GPS system.

A mission driven life dedicated to serving is one of the most powerful lives you can live, and you only get one life to live. I hope your life is a story worth telling.

I don't know about you, but I want to become the type of person people love being around because my life inspires them to become everything they are capable of being.

Originally this story was apart of a larger work that included my personal journey of building *Train to be CLUTCH*. But after listening to wise counsel I decided to make my personal journey it's own book. *Hustle- The People at the Top of the Mountain Didn't Fall There*. So, pick up a copy if you want to hear about the personal lessons I learned on my journey to falling in love with the process of becoming great!

I look forward to hearing about how this book and all our tools have impacted your life!

Email: Joshua@traintobeclutch.com

Twitter: @joshuamedcalf

If you are interested in leadership, life-skills, mental, or sales training programs based on the *Chop Wood Carry Water* principles, please fill out the contact form at t2bc.com/Joshua

Website: t2bc.com

READY TO APPLY EVERYTHING YOU LEARNED?!

Go to **t2bc.com/chopwoodactionplan**
to download your *free* action plan today!

Additional T2BC Resources

Keynote Speaking- t2bc.com/joshua

Mentorship Program- Our mentorship program isn't a good fit for everyone, but we are always willing to see if it is a good fit for you. It is a serious investment of time and resources. Email Joshua@traintobeclutch.com for more information.

T2BC Reading Challenge- www.t2bc.com/challenge to sign up for free today

The Experience- *Transformational Leadership Retreats*. We bring together people from all over the country to engage in a day of interactive learning. We also create space for fun activities like golf, surfing, or snowboarding with Joshua and Jamie. Visit t2bc.com/experience for more information and to see when the next retreat will be.

T2BC 101 Online Video Course- With over 20 short video sessions, you can use this course individually or to teach your team the T2BC curriculum. It is a great next step tool. Available at **t2bc.com/training**

Join the T2BC community- This is the best way for us to provide consistent value to your life and for us to develop a long term relationship. You will get articles, mp3's, videos, and other tools as they come out. It's also free. 😊
Join at t2bc.com

Books- You can always order signed copies of any of our books by emailing us, and they are also available on iBooks, Kindle, Amazon, and through our publisher at Lulu.com

The first book we wrote is ***Burn Your Goals.***

The second book we wrote is ***An Impractical Guide to Becoming a Transformational Leader.***

The third book I wrote in conjunction with this book is ***Hustle***

YouTube- Our channel is *train2bclutch*

Twitter- @joshuamedcalf

Instagram- @realjoshuamedcalf

Website- t2bc.com

THANK YOU'S

I'm incredibly grateful to my mother, who has supported me and been one of my best friends my whole life. Thank you for never giving up on me when no one would have blamed you if you had.

Thank you to my father, who did the best he could with what he had.

Thank you Judah Smith for being the most amazing pastor a person could ask for. You have taught me so much about Jesus, and how He really feels about me. I don't think anyone has ever had such a profound impact on my life in such a short period of time as you have.

I'm so grateful to Jamie and Amy, you both have been such an amazing support system in my life, and I'm so grateful I get to spend so much time with you. Thank you for creating a safe space for me to be me devoid of judgment.

Thank you Lisa for always being there to hear my articles, or just to listen to another one of my crazy stories, and for being an incredible best friend!

Thank you Steph for being an amazing woman full of love, empathy, and creativity. Your childlike spirit encourages and inspires me every day. Your sunshine lights up the world 😊

Thank you to Tim & Laura for being a living representation of the love and grace of Jesus!

Thank you Amber for always listening to my stories. It's pretty amazing to hear about how you have grown so much in the last couple of years 😊

Thank you to Austin, TJ, Kyle, Joe, Pooter, Krause, Brady and my many other friends who have been there for me during the many low points in my life.

Thank you Anson for all your words of encouragement, and for allowing me to work with your program.

Thank you Russ and Skip for all the mentorship over the years. Thank you Skip for being one of the first people outside of my family to financially invest in me and my dreams.

Thank you Andy and Terry for teaching me so much as a teenager. I wouldn't be here today without your love and wisdom.

Thank you Jacob Roman for clearing your schedule to transform my horrific grammar and at times incoherent thoughts into something people will love and treasure!

Thank you to all the people who have given me the great privilege and responsibility of mentoring you and speaking into the lives of those you lead. I have learned so much, and I am truly grateful for the opportunity to work with you.

Thank you to Tim McClements for never giving up on me at Vanderbilt, and helping me get a scholarship at Duke. I was a royal pain in your ass, and I'm forever grateful you stuck by my side.

Thank you Adri for all your prayers and friendship.

Thank you Jesus for your extravagant, reckless, relentless, and undeserved love

ENDNOTES

- [1](#) Ben Hogan quote
- [2](#) The wise man is Jon Gordon
- [3](#) This is from a note Anson Dorrance wrote Mia Hamm
- [4](#) The wise man was C.S. Lewis
- [5](#) This concept was originated by Graham Betchart
- [6](#) Judah Smith quote
- [7](#) – The wise man is Mark Richt (Head Coach of Georgia Football)
- [8](#) t2bc.com/challenge to download the T2BC Reading Challenge
- [9](#) Dr. James Richards quote
- [10](#) Anson Dorrance