

EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Steve Olsher is an entrepreneur, the creator/founder of the Reinvention Workshop, and an award-winning author.

What Is Your What?

THE SUMMARY

Introduction

I wrote *What Is Your WHAT?* Because I want you to celebrate the Gifts that are uniquely yours, share your special talents with the world, and become who you were born to be.

I've developed and refined the proprietary exercises, theories, and principles you'll find in these pages over the past 25 years. They're crafted from my own (often painful) hands-on experience. I've made the mistakes and suffered the inevitable results so you don't have to.

I'm a steadfast believer that we should learn from the trials and tribulations of others. I've been fortunate to benefit from the guidance of incredible teachers. I hope that you'll allow me to mentor you.

My unique methodology blends ancient wisdom (e.g., from Buddha, Lao Tzu, and The Bible) with revolutionary lessons from modern gurus (e.g., Jack Welch, David Allen, and Larry Winget). These teachings, combined with my unique exercises and singular approach to realizing permanent, positive change, form a proven system for ultimate achievement in business and life.

I firmly believe The Destination Is the Road and The Journey Is the Destination. *What Is Your WHAT?* is a quest for the most precious of destinations: your true self. Let's begin your journey.

What Is Your What?

PART I: ESTABLISH THE FOUNDATION

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Four Stages of Learning

In order to discover your WHAT and share the one amazing thing you were born to do with the world, you first need to understand who you are. This is essential for manifesting long-term, sustainable change that continually supports the realization of your goals and objectives.

One of the most effective tools for obtaining such understanding and creating the necessary blank slate for reinvention is the Four Stages of Learning. While very powerful, the Four Stages are a bit dry. Please grab a glass of water and bear with me as I take you through it. I promise you'll reach the other side with a compelling new perspective on your life and the strength required to stay clear, focused, and fired up about becoming who you were born to be.

Behind this bland academic title lies the key to understanding why you're able to excel in certain aspects of your life and lag in others. The four stages are:

1. Unconscious Incompetence: Not knowing what your strengths or problems are or how to identify them.
2. Conscious Incompetence: Having the ability to identify strengths or problems but not the desire or knowledge to improve upon or correct them.
3. Conscious Competence: Having the proficiency to achieve your desired results but needing to be consciously focused on your process as you perform the actions required.
4. Unconscious Competence: Having the proficiency to achieve your desired results without having to think about your process (a.k.a. "The Zone")

Ultimately, your goal is to attain the stage of Unconscious Competence in as many areas of your life as possible. Many correlate this stage with having achieved "mastery." The world applauds and generously compensates those who have become a master of their craft. While pursuing mastery of additional skills should be your ongoing objective, mastering even one skill can result in significant spiritual and psychological benefit for both you and those you touch.

Stage One: Unconscious Incompetence. Put simply, in this stage of learning you're not aware of your strengths or problems, or your inability to address them. Life in the stage of Unconscious Incompetence is exemplified by a "What's wrong with the rest of the world?" attitude. Within this unaware state, it's everyone who doesn't "get it" who is the problem, and you experience frustration due to your inability to recognize personal shortcomings or strengths.

What Is Your What?

You must be ruthless with yourself to identify where you live within the state of Unconscious Incompetence, and in the next two chapters, I'll show you how. Until you're willing to reclaim control, your life will run on autopilot, and your reactions to the world will continue to be what is most familiar and most comfortable. This is a destructive pattern that eliminates the possibility for growth. And if you're not growing, you're dying.

Chapter 2: The Vortex of Vulnerability

There's an old adage that says, "Better the devil you know than the devil you don't."

It's true that we typically fear the unknown much more than the familiar. But positioning yourself to look what you don't know in the eye – and refusing to back down – will empower you to achieve breakthrough results.

The Vortex of Vulnerability will help cultivate this strength. It's composed of a three-step process. Each step will help you gain clarity as to who you are and why you do what you do. When combined, the steps will help you move forward with conviction and purpose, and reveal aspects of your life you aren't consciously aware of but that have a profound impact on your behavior. Let's begin.

Step One: Identify three recent times in your life when you absolutely lost it.

Step Two: Identify three moments in your life that had major life-altering ramifications.

Step Three: Identify how you believe the world sees you versus how you'd ideally like to be seen.

In Step One, you were asked to identify three recent times in your life when you absolutely lost it. The purpose is to help you understand which events throw you off balance, causing you to lose perspective. Being able to recognize what drives you to the edge of disaster is the first step toward reclaiming your life.

Look back at the times you identified. Chances are they happened in response to situations in which you felt out of control. Identifying similarities among situations that make you feel out of control will enable you to become keenly aware of when you're likely to lose it. Start to recognize these as danger zones that can create great harm.

It may take you a while to know what sets you off. Once you do, though, you'll stop reacting in an automatic way – that is, the way you've responded until now – and instead behave in a manner that's appropriate to each specific situation.

In Step Two, you were asked to identify three moments in your life you would describe as having unequivocal, life-altering ramifications. The goal is to shed light on the events you most closely associate with your sense of self, and to understand how these events affect you.

What Is Your What?

No matter what happened in the past, you can commit to thinking and acting in ways that benefit you from this point on. You can make that decision right now and make it again for every moment that follows.

In Step Three, you were asked to identify three examples of how you believe the world sees you versus how you'd ideally like to be seen. The purpose is to help you understand how dramatically you're affected by the disconnect between these two realities.

Look at your list. If you were brutally honest, what you've written may alert you to lies you've been living. Our intentions are often very different from our actions, and this can create serious problems.

Disconnected states will inevitably lead to frustration and unhappiness. To identify these states in your life, explore the areas where you experience dissatisfaction, and then probe for the cause.

If you can move each disconnect out of your state of Unconscious Incompetence and into your state of consciousness, and then make deliberate choices to align your internal dialogue and actions with your intentions, you'll take a powerful step towards improving your life.

If you're having difficulty identifying your disconnects, one of the most effective ways to uncover them is to conduct no-holds-barred discussions with those closest to you about how they see you versus how you see yourself. This step isn't for everyone. It can lead to long-term hurt feelings and can even destroy fulfilling relationships.

This experience will be harsh. However, nothing will give you more valuable insight into how the world sees you than honest feedback from loved ones. Once you have the information, use it to repair the disconnects you've discovered. At that point, you'll be able to move your life forward with better clarity and focus.

Chapter 3: The Vortex of Invincibility

The key to freeing your soul and encouraging it to soar is to recognize areas of your life where you excel. Once this happens, you'll begin to withhold power from the activities, people, and interactions that dare to clip your wings, and concentrate on what brings you the most joy.

The Vortex of Invincibility empowers you to make these discoveries. Each of its three steps will reveal important aspects about you and allow you to hone in on your natural strengths. When combined, the steps will help you identify who you truly are and where you should focus your energy.

Step One: Identify three positive moments in your life when time absolutely flew by.

Step Two: Identify the three people you most admire and the character traits they display.

What Is Your What?

Step Three: Identify three accomplishments or times when you've been proud of yourself.

In Step One, you were asked to identify three positive moments in your life when time absolutely flew by. The purpose is to help you understand when you feel most at peace. Acknowledging these remarkable moments enables you to take a milestone step toward reliving this way of being as often as possible. By becoming aware of what makes you feel invincible, you can begin to understand where you'll find true fulfillment.

In Step Two, you were asked to identify three people you most admire and the character traits they display. The objective is to gain an understanding of who captures your interest and the motivation behind your attraction. This exercise functions like a mirror for the inner you, providing an honest reflection of who you inherently are. What you admire in others directly reflects what you most desire for yourself and provides insights about who you are. It's therefore very important to be completely honest when exploring why each person made your list.

In Step Three, you were asked to identify three accomplishments or times when you've been proud of yourself. The purpose is to focus on moments when everything clicked and explore why you succeeded. Since childhood, you've proven over and over that you possess the ability to succeed. Whether it's walking, feeding yourself, or driving, when you've put your mind to it you've created your desired results. The triumphs on your list represent natural talents. Accepting these Gifts as fundamental pieces of who you are will help you achieve long-term satisfaction. If identifying your strengths is difficult, consult those closest to you. Those who care about you will support your personal development.

To complete The Vortex of Invincibility, examine the items you've identified, and look carefully for patterns. If the commonalities and patterns aren't evident, don't panic. This exercise is designed to begin creating awareness. By diligently pursuing where you're most likely to experience peace, elation, and an undeniable sense of stillness, you'll expose your natural talents. This inevitably leads to focusing on activities and interactions where your soul soars.

Chapter 4: The Next Stages of Learning

Stage Two: Conscious Incompetence. Before entering into the state of Conscious Incompetence, you were living in the dark. Things simply happened and you didn't know why. In this second stage of learning, your eyes are wide open and you can make informed choices. More specifically, you're aware of your strengths and problems, as well as your current deficiency in dealing with them.

As a result, you can make a conscious choice to either take the necessary steps to gain competence in your core areas and reap the benefits, or not try to gain the competence because you don't perceive the potential benefits outweighing the cost in time and energy. Either way, you can say, "I am in control of my life." You're now in a state of awareness.

What Is Your What?

Stage Three: Conscious Competence. In this stage of learning, you have concentrated skill. You can achieve your desired results because you have the ability to perform as needed. Living at this level is not your ultimate goal, though. Leveraging strengths and solving problems in the state of Conscious Competence too often requires expending a substantial amount of thought and effort, leaving you tired and, in all likelihood, unsatisfied.

The single most effective way to move from Conscious Competence to Unconscious Competence is practice. So identify one skill that's most important to you, and then perform it again and again until it becomes a part of who you are. Very few people achieve full mastery over any aspect of their lives beyond what their brains and bodies learned to do by the age of seven. Rise above the crowd. Become automatic in a meaningful way. You'll be amazed at the power and confidence that results.

Stage Four: Unconscious Competence. When you're at the stage of Unconscious Competence, your strengths and problem-solving abilities have become an integral part of who you are. Those who master life at this level can appear magical to the rest of the world—because they make something look easy that almost everyone else finds very difficult to do. I refer to this stage of learning as the automation zone. Engaging in your top skills or handling problems will be as second nature to you as breathing.

Engaging in events and interactions while operating in a state of Unconscious Competence feels effortless and fulfilling. The periods of achieving this state tend to be rare, but you can increase their frequency by practicing your key skills. If you focus on achieving Unconscious Competence in even one area of your life, you'll begin the process of living in this magical state more often in other areas as well.

Getting past Unconscious Incompetence means opening your eyes to forces from the past that drive you and recognizing strengths that propel you toward your destiny. By leveraging your natural Gifts and recognizing issues you've unknowingly battled day after day, you give yourself the ability to redefine your identity and behavior.

Conscious Incompetence and Conscious Competence are about choosing what to do with the qualities embedded deep within you that you're now consciously aware of. They give you the opportunity to hone in on innate talents and solve problems by perfecting pertinent skills. Once you embark on this path, your goal is to reach the stage of Unconscious Competence. This will allow you to act effortlessly and effectively and to be in touch with yourself and achieve peace and prosperity. Ultimately, you'll be able to do certain things so well that your abilities may appear to be magical.

Chapter 5: The Pinnacle

When you're at your best, fully thriving, and living in a way that's consistent with who you were born to be, you've achieved what I call The Pinnacle. The Pinnacle is living at the peak of your existence. Imagine living without compromise. Imagine fulfilling your dreams and desires, surrounding yourself

What Is Your What?

with people you love, and engaging in activities that bring you the most joy. What would you do each day if you could design your life in any way you choose? Take a few moments to think about this. I want you to dream. Now, dream big. Now, dream even bigger. Assume there are no barriers to what you want.

You must begin to fight tooth and nail to reclaim your life and pursue what's most important to you. The first step may be as simple as giving yourself the time and permission to sit in a quiet place and start trying to identify your Pinnacle. Some people need to hit rock bottom before realizing they've been on a continuous downward slide. Don't let that happen to you. Stop your descent right now. You have the power to ascend towards and reclaim The Pinnacle.

In 1943, psychologist Abraham Maslow famously hypothesized a Hierarchy of Needs that must be met before your ultimate state of existence – which he called self-actualization – can be reached. Maslow visualized the hierarchy as a pyramid. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs has five distinct levels: physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. These are genuinely powerful aids for understanding human behavior. However, Maslow believed that your needs had an order to them—your safety needs must be secured before you pursue love/belonging needs, and so on. He claimed that it's only when you fulfill the first four levels of needs that you can pursue self-actualization. I disagree. The key to effective living is to first identify what most directly reflects The Pinnacle for you at each of the five levels of needs, and then apply The Pinnacle to your pursuit of those needs.

Level One: Your physiological needs consist of breathing, food, water, sex, sleep, homeostasis, and excretion. This may seem simple enough. But the choices you make in satisfying these needs spell the difference between living an ordinary life and living at The Pinnacle.

Level Two: Your safety needs involve security of body, employment, resources, morality, the family, health, and property. Being clear on the impact these needs have on you will help you maintain balance.

Level Three: Your need for love and belonging consists of friendship, family, and sexual intimacy. Your needs on this level may have been damaged by your past, but Chapter 2's "The Vortex of Vulnerability" should have helped you become aware of these issues and begin the process of getting past them.

Level Four: Your need for esteem consists of self-esteem, confidence, achievement, respect of others, and respect by others.

Level Five: Your need for self-actualization involves morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, lack of prejudice, and acceptance of facts. Maslow defined self-actualization as "the full realization

What Is Your What?

of one's potential; the desire for self-fulfillment, namely the tendency for the individual to become actualized in what he is potentially." It's at this level, according to Maslow, where you have complete freedom to soar.

By examining the five levels of needs within the context of The Pinnacle, you can gain valuable insights into what matters most to you. You can then construct a personalized outline for living focusing on those areas. Attaining The Pinnacle is incredibly challenging. The climb up the mountain is steep, and the terrain is far from smooth. Achieving The Pinnacle is absolutely possible, though. In fact, at some point in your life, you were already there. Now that you're aware of how you were knocked down from your peak and understand how to reclaim the summit, nothing should prevent you from taking flight and ascending to your most natural state of being.

PART II: REALIZE PERMANENT POSITIVE CHANGE

Chapter 6: The Seven Life-Altering Principles (The S.L.A.P.)

Your power to influence yourself will always be enormously greater than your power to influence others. Even though it may seem like it at times, the world is not out to get you...nor does it revolve around you. However, if you allow yourself to become complacent, you'll end up somewhere you didn't intend to go. Spending time complaining while you behave in ways that don't serve you well is self-destructive. Creating positive change in your life starts with making thoughtful decisions about your actions. How different would your life be if you established guidelines for your actions that reflected your true nature? How powerful would you feel knowing you're focused on living your optimal life?

Can you picture yourself with this type of power and confidence? Can you imagine pursuing your life's objectives without fear of self-sabotage? You can do all this, and more, by learning The Seven Life-Altering Principles and making them a part of who you are.

Chapter 7: Life-Altering Principle #1: YaNo

Throughout your life, you've experienced thousands of life-altering events that were completely within your control. They all reflect choices you made – consciously or unconsciously. The resulting impact on your life is the foundation upon which the concept of YaNo (pronounced Yay-No) is built.

There are precise moments, which I refer to as YaNo moments, in which you either move toward growing and thriving, or digress in a direction that's inconsistent with your true self. A key to living a fulfilling and genuine life is taking control of these life-altering moments and choosing the paths that are beneficial for you.

Many YaNo moments will be obvious, such as a marriage proposal. Others may seem insignificant if you aren't paying close attention. For example you might agree to meet a friend for drinks even

What Is Your What?

though you don't enjoy drinking. Or you might donate money to a politician who your boss supports but you secretly despise. The more you agree to participate in activities that don't feel right, the more likely you are to feel your life is out of control. To avoid this, you must address each YaNo moment with equal seriousness.

The key to regaining control of your life is to make deliberate choices with an understanding of the consequences. Once you do, you'll stop childishly blaming others for your actions. If you choose to undertake an activity that makes you uncomfortable, at least you'll have consciously made the choice based upon review of your options. Being resentful of the person who asked you to perform the activity is misguided.

One of the most significant aspects of effectively managing your YaNo moments is making choices today that will have a positive impact on your future self, the you of tomorrow. When you think this way, you're less likely to apply for a job you know would be a terrible fit; eat greasy foods that make you feel awful afterward; say something in anger to a loved one that might permanently change the relationship; or drive when drunk, which risks completely ruining your future. When faced with a YaNo moment, choose whatever option provides the most rewarding long-term benefits, allowing the you of tomorrow to look back and give thanks to the you of today.

Chapter 8: Life-Altering Principle #2: Reclaim the Canyon

Most people focus on the times when things are being said or done, but the periods in between are just as critical. It's in these "areas of silence" that you can choose the best path for you. Leveraging this sacred space into a powerful asset will enable you to live the life you desire and Reclaim the Canyon.

When faced with adversity – such as missing a bus that makes you late for work or having a heated exchange with a friend—how do you normally react? Do you immediately let the incident take full control of your mind, body, and spirit? Is your day pretty much over from that point forward? Our reactions are often similar to how we step over a crack in the sidewalk. They happen swiftly, without thought, and with no regard for what we might be stepping into on the other side.

How different would your life be if your first response to an upsetting event was simply a pause – a long, thoughtful pause comparable in size to the Grand Canyon? It's within this pause that you can quiet your emotions, gather your thoughts, and rationally consider the situation and the best way to respond to it.

Knowing how long a pause to take and how to vary that pause appropriately depending on the complexity and scale of the issue involved, is a skill you'll develop over time. But the first and most important step is to change your reaction from instantaneous and thoughtless to becoming the result of meaningful consideration.

What Is Your What?

Leveraging the principle of Reclaim the Canyon will enable you to significantly reduce the apparent “randomness” in your world and empower you to embrace life with open eyes. By mitigating the effects of the actions of others, you’ll avoid being at the mercy of their whims. And consciously maintaining awareness and control over interactions will help you prevent many negative events from ever happening.

Chapter 9: Life-Altering Principle #3: The Sufficiency Theory

In order to truly enjoy the journey, you must reverse the way people typically pursue their objectives. The first step is to feel peace and contentment by imagining that you’ve already achieved your objectives. Whatever you’ve convinced yourself you’ll feel once you accomplish certain goals is the way you must start feeling from today on. This shift will powerfully enable you to achieve your objectives from a foundation of happiness.

The second step is to engage in activities that support the way you want to be. Once you start operating with a positive attitude of accomplishment and a strong sense of self, amazing things happen. The choices you make and the activities you undertake will be markedly different from the way you used to live, and people will pick up on your aura of success, increasing your chances of achieving genuine success. Further, you’ll free yourself from the pressure of meeting certain objectives before you can feel and act in ways that are most natural for you. In other words, you’re giving yourself permission to be who you really are.

The third step is to achieve your objectives. By feeling and acting like you’ve already succeeded, you inevitably will succeed...and sooner rather than later. This three-step process is the polar opposite of the way we’ve been trained to achieve our objectives. However, it’s much more effective. When you simply envision an outcome, you’re putting off your feelings of fulfillment and contentment until the objective is met. The Sufficiency Theory doesn’t stop asking you to envision your goal; it asks you to live as if you’ve already achieved it...and to use that sense of being victorious as fuel for propelling you on your journey.

Chapter 10: Life-Altering Principle #4: Retrain Your Brain

Throughout childhood and into early adolescence, we’re focused on discovery and personal growth. For most people, this learning process stops at some point during adolescence. But if we work at it, we can keep our eyes and minds wide open for our entire lives. When you’re able to do so, you have the power to recreate your entire world and smash the rewind button to pieces.

Can you imagine how different speaking with a loved one would be if you put aside the memory of thousands of previous conversations and fully paid attention to how the two of you were interacting? Instead of being rote and repetitive, it would be an exchange of true communication and revelation.

What Is Your What?

It's also important that you break past the "personal language" you've created for yourself. When someone says X to you, you translate it to mean Y. When you encounter an event that's in some ways similar to Z, you simply categorize it as Z – missing subtleties that could yield deeper understanding. The language you've developed is uniquely yours, but if it's all you speak, you'll never learn other people's languages. And if you rely only on what you know to assign meanings, you cut off the opportunity to see the world from different perspectives

Of course, there's much to be said for experience. Learning from your past is one of the points of being human. This isn't about wiping your memory clean. It's about not letting what you know blind you to learning even more. The goal is to achieve life as a blank slate as your default way of being.

A critical step in leaning to Retrain Your Brain is to clear away the muddle of generalizations. Lazy phrases such as "that's not me," "that's just how things are," or "people are like that" are too often used as easy excuses to avoid the unfamiliar. Becoming keenly aware of how often generalizations influence your thinking – and evasion of thinking – is an important step toward achieving positive, permanent change.

Close the gap between living in a state of wonder and being dissuaded by the generalizations you've unconsciously put in place to limit your thoughts and your willingness to take on the unfamiliar.

Chapter 11: Life-Altering Principle #5: The Altar of Jack's Cathedral

Jack Welch, the chairman and CEO of General Electric from 1981 to 2001, is renowned for creating a world-class organization through his disciplined approach to management, intuitive decision-making, and ability to bring out the absolute best in his team. To sustain its competitive edge and avoid an unfocused, monolithic culture, Welch and his team created an evaluation matrix called The Vitality Curve. It required the executives within each business unit to rank its managers into a Top 20 Percent, Vital 70 Percent, or Bottom 10 Percent. The under-performers in the Bottom 10 Percent generally had to go.

This is an incredibly powerful concept that you can immediately apply. Think about the four key areas of your life: 1. Family and friends 2. Work 3. Hobbies 4. Spirituality. To begin, take a few minutes to think about the top section. When you're ready, write in the top third of the page and the pertinent quadrants of your Top 20 Percent: The family members and friends you love most, the most fulfilling tasks associated with your job, the hobbies that give you the most joy, the spiritual endeavors that bring you the most peace and contentment. It is this 20 percent that brings you 90 percent or more of what you find most fulfilling in life.

Now, take a few minutes to think about the next section. When you're ready, fill in the middle third of the page and the pertinent quadrants of your vital 70 percent: the family members and friends you moderately enjoy, the tasks for your job that are merely tolerable, the hobbies you maintain but

What Is Your What?

don't really thrill you, the elements of your spiritual endeavors that aren't entirely satisfying. This vital 70 percent represents aspects of your life that aren't sources of great joy but that you can accept as necessary or "good enough."

Finally, take a few moments to think about the last section. This bottom 10 percent represents the aspects of your life that cause most of your stress and unhappiness. When you're finished, please review the entire Vitality Curve and double check that you've included each person, activity, or interaction that should be listed. This powerful exercise will help you understand what drives you on a daily basis, as well as the impact that various people and activities have on your life.

A common knee-jerk reaction is to get rid of the Bottom 10 Percent immediately. Before you do so, however, ask yourself what life lessons you're receiving from these people and activities. While it may eventually prove necessary to eliminate the aspects of your life that drag you down, first take care to consider why the Bottom 10 Percent is part of your world. Understanding what you loathe, and why, can help you better appreciate what you most value and love. It's also possible that what you loathe hits too close to home. Think about this before making any rash decisions. That said, if permanently removing these people and activities from your life will vastly improve it, then it's time to do so...with no excuses.

Examine what you've listed under your Vital 70 Percent over the next two to three months; take a hard look at the people and activities falling into this category. Either improve upon your Vital 70 Percent so you're able to move some people and activities into the Top 20 Percent for your next Vitality Curve, or relegate some people and activities into your Bottom 10 Percent and choose how to deal with them.

Consider Your Top 20 Percent. Quite simply, these people and activities should be the focus of your life. Your Top 20 Percent accounts for the lion's share of your fulfillment and joy, and deserves the majority of your attention. Think about the satisfaction you'll experience from concentrating on your Top 20 Percent...and do it.

Leveraging the Vitality Curve will enable you to establish a highly focused approach to living. I encourage you to create a new Vitality Curve every 6 to 12 months. This will provide you with clear priorities, help motivate you to cut out whatever drags you down, and spend more time with the people and activities truly important to you.

Chapter 12: Life-Altering Principle #6: The Not-So-Golden Rule

For years I tuned into Dr. Laura Schlessinger's radio show. One of Dr. Laura's overriding principles is being the person to whom you want to come home to. If you're married, pamper your spouse. Say sweet nothings. Bring breakfast to bed. Make your home an oasis.

What Is Your What?

That may sound similar to the Golden Rule or karma. The key difference is to act out of love, without the expectation of anything in return. You love because you want to, not because you need that person to love you back. Of course, the latter might happen. But there's a big difference between saying "I love you" because you want to be loved and saying it simply because you want to express how you feel.

It's possible to find love in everything you do. Whether at work, with family and friends, in your hobbies, or at your place of worship, look for love and act on it. Period. In the words of my favorite musician, Lenny Kravitz, "Let love rule". It's within this pure state of effortless bliss that you'll find peace and contentment. By establishing love as the ruler of your domain, and taking action without expectation of reward, you'll realize spiritual wealth of far greater value than gold.

Chapter 13: Life-Altering Principle #7: The Slow Death of Not Being the Star

Spending your time is essentially the same as spending money. You have a limited amount of money, and you use it to fill various needs and desires. Once it's spent, it's no longer available for buying something else. The same is true of your time. When you choose to devote an hour to something that doesn't advance your life's goals, you've spent that time. It's no longer yours to use, and there's nothing you can do to get it back.

Investing money typically means putting your assets into stocks, real estate, and other areas that—you hope—will pay off in the long term. Similarly, investing time means focusing on activities that—you hope—will reap meaningful rewards, both as you're doing them and down the road. In other words, investing your time means focusing on achieving your hopes and dreams.

Instead of spending most of your time consuming the creations of others, consider focusing your time on becoming a creator. Creators are a rare breed. Only a small number of people have the patience, will, and guts necessary to take something from an idea to a tangible form and put it out there for the world to judge. Virtually everyone is a critic.

The time for you to rekindle your creative energy is now. There's only one you. You're unlike anyone else on this planet, and you have unique Gifts to share and important contributions to make. If you have the talent, passion, and dedication to leverage those Gifts, you can become a creator. And maybe one day, a Star.

It's easy to become enchanted with the lives of others. It's fine to be inspired by their accomplishments and to learn from their examples. But when you spend all your days obsessing about those you believe are "living the dream," you lose precious time you could be investing in the creation of your own ideal life. Instead, decide to become a Star yourself, and focus your time and energy on making it happen.

What Is Your What?

PART III: BECOME WHO YOU WERE BORN TO BE

Chapter 14: What Is Your WHAT? - An Introduction

So what exactly is your WHAT? Your WHAT is the singular combination of your innate Gifts, the Vehicle you'll leverage to share your Gifts with the world, and serving the specific audiences who'll benefit most from your Gifts. It's what comes most naturally to you, is part of your inherent blueprint, and you'd happily do without being paid a cent. When you're engaged in your WHAT, time flies by and there's nothing else you'd rather be doing. Your WHAT reflects who you were born to be and guides you towards realizing the impact you were predestined to have on this and future generations. Inseparable from who you are, your WHAT is your gift. If you honor, heed, and use it wisely, it's also your gift to the world.

Many on the mission of discovering and sharing their WHAT make the mistake of confusing what it is they were born to do with what it is they are currently doing. Rarely are these the same thing. Too often people forge a self-containing trench by seeking to satisfy the requirements of others, creating products and services that address the needs of their chosen market. This is very different from fulfilling the requirements of what you need and then leveraging your Gift to serve others. Ultimately, your WHAT isn't about you...it's about those you're compelled to serve.

Fear—of failure, of being embarrassed, of losing money, of not receiving the approval of others—these are just some of the reasons I repeatedly hear from those resisting their WHAT. Whatever your fears are, they are absolutely surmountable. If pursuing your WHAT is truly important to you, you'll find the solutions to overcome any self-created barriers.

Consider my acronym for FEAR: Forget Everything About Reality. You can never be sure what'll happen when you embark on a new path. No matter how many scenarios you envision, the chances are things won't go as well as hoped for or as poorly as you're afraid they might. However, to deny yourself and others your inherent Gifts is a sure-fire formula for mediocrity.

Chapter 15: Identifying Your WHAT: Step One

Discovering your WHAT starts with identifying your inherent Gifts. This is achieved through a three-step process. To begin, find a quiet place where you can think. No TV. No radio. No iPod. No kids. Just you, alone with your thoughts. Once you're in a place of silence, think about all the things you love doing. Whatever they are, write them down in a notebook, or on your laptop. Don't worry about anyone else reading your list; it's for you alone. When recalling a special moment, try not to be too literal; look for the subtext. For example, imagine you have a fond memory of an evening spent bowling with your grandmother. Instead of writing "bowling with Grammy" on your list, broaden it to "investing time with a beloved family member."

I want you to be brutally honest, because actively seeking and accepting the truth is critical if you're going to find your WHAT. You might be hesitant about admitting that you love to do something

What Is Your What?

because you feel others won't approve. But if it's moral and legal, then why care what others think? Stop trying to impress people you don't really like. If you've been thoroughly honest with yourself, your God-given Gifts now appear somewhere on your list. When you're ready, please order your list by preference.

The next step in the process of identifying your inherent Gifts requires you to be totally honest about all the things you hate to do. If you're clear about what activities you despise, you can establish a strong foundation for moving your life forward by starting to let them go. Whatever it is that eats at you, write it down. Even if you worry others might see it as petty, include it. This exercise takes place without judgment. The key is to acknowledge your thoughts and feelings. Again, tie these moments to descriptions that encapsulate the activity in noun or adjective form – for example, cleaning, watching TV, eating unhealthy food, being around miserable people, shopping. The next step is to put the activities you've identified in order, from most to least distasteful.

Let's start with the top item on your list of Things I Love Doing. Read it to yourself a couple of times so you can really feel the words. Next, ask yourself each of the six questions below as it relates to the activity. Each answer should be a definitive yes or no. Trust yourself and don't second-guess. Your first answer will almost always be right:

1. Even if you didn't get paid a cent for it, would you still do this?
2. Would doing this inspire you every day?
3. Does doing this come as naturally to you as breathing?
4. Do you feel you've been given a special Gift to do this?
5. Does time seem to fly by when you're engaged in this activity?
6. Can you possibly make money doing this?

If any of your answers to these first six questions is no, cross out the activity and move to the next item on your list. Again, read the activity to yourself a couple of times and then run it through the six questions. Continue this process until you reach an activity that results in a yes to all six questions. When you arrive at such an item, circle it, and then ask yourself the final question: Does performing this activity involve anything on my list of Things I Hate Doing?

For the beloved activity to pass the criteria it has to match no more than two of your hated activities. If you answer yes three or more times, cross off the activity, and continue the process with the next item on your Things I Love Doing list. If you answer yes less than three times, however, double circle the activity because you'll be returning to it. Meanwhile, continue the process by moving to the next item on your Things I Love Doing list.

What Is Your What?

You may wonder why I'm not insisting on a clean sweep of no's for the Things I Hate Doing list. The fact is virtually any activity you engage in will include aspects you dislike. That's just reality. But the discomfort level has to be low enough to be tolerable.

This exercise may be time-consuming if you've created an extremely long list (in which case, kudos for enjoying so many things), but it's well worth the investment. It's possible that your inherent Gifts won't appear in the first half or even the first two-thirds of your list, so be patient and work through every item. Bottom line: These are the first steps of the most important process in this entire book. Don't rush it. And no matter how long it takes, see it through to completion. Your life is at stake, and the rewards are incalculable.

Once you've identified three or fewer activities, the last step is to choose the specific nouns or adjectives that best define your Gifts. These will typically be the first words of your activity statements.

Chapter 16: Identifying Your What: Steps Two and Three

Now that you've completed Step One of the three-step process for identifying your WHAT, you should have a solid grasp of your inherent Gifts. Step Two requires you to identify your Vehicle. While your Gifts represent your innate skills and abilities, the Vehicle is the physical action or platform you'll use to share your Gifts with the world.

The key to identifying your Vehicle is to consider how, and when, you're most at peace. For instance, some people love the stage. No matter where they are or who the audience is, they want to be front and center. For this group, speaking or teaching may be a perfect Vehicle, as when they're engaged in this activity they feel the most alive. Others, however, loathe public speaking; the idea of all eyes being on them makes their skin crawl. This group might prefer communicating through blogs or books, or simply one-on-one.

Too many people get hung up on having to choose just one Gift and one Vehicle, and ultimately never choose anything. "There's so much more to me than that!" is a statement I often hear. It's certainly true that there are many ways you're able to share your Gift with the world, but you must start somewhere before expanding to other endeavors and Vehicles. In our instant gratification society, it's common to want to be immediately seen as being at the pinnacle of one's profession. But this is unlikely to happen. What will happen if you're willing to work at honing both your Gifts and your chosen Vehicle is that you'll begin to manifest meaningful results. Growth is a natural byproduct of forward motion.

The third part of the equation requires you to become clear on who you're most compelled to serve. Many have brought their WHAT into focus by identifying the specific audience who'll benefit from their Gifts. A simple way to start this process is by reflecting on who you are and what you've

What Is Your What?

experienced. This can help reveal the groups for whom you feel a natural connection. The more specific you can be, the easier it'll be to share your knowledge, cultivate a legion of followers, get paid exceptionally well for your expertise, and achieve peace and prosperity.

Finally, while each element of your WHAT can stand alone as a guiding component of who you inherently are, a well-defined, cohesive statement is substantially more powerful than the sum of its parts. Creating a one-sentence summation that ties together your findings will provide an easy-to-reference mantra that keeps you focused on the core objective you've identified as your reason for being.

If you're still having trouble identifying your WHAT, or understanding how to move forward with the discoveries you've made, enlist those in your closest circle. Often what's hardest for you to see is obvious to others. Commit to this process and eventually your WHAT will become clear. When it does, life as you know it will never be the same.

Chapter 17: You've Found Your WHAT...Now What?!

To create a sustainable business, you need to fully understand who your audience is, how they define themselves, what they need, how to reach them, and how to most effectively communicate with and persuade them to purchase your products and/or services. You can accomplish this using a variety of research tools, ranging from Google and social media to surveys and the tools available at your local library. The more information you have, the easier it'll be to practice precision targeting (vs. a shotgun approach). This will save you time and money, maximizing your return on investment.

Another important component of your profile is identifying your audience's frustrations, worries, and needs. Once you truly understand your market, you'll be in a position to convert prospects into lifelong customers. Data, information, and demographic details are the most valuable weapons in your marketing arsenal. An effective marketer has the answers before writing copy, placing ads, and seeking customers. Too many business owners are ready to write checks long before they're ready to cash them. Don't make that mistake.

Avoid working in commodity-driven markets where price is king, and service and originality means almost nothing, as this will inevitably lead to frustration. George Washington Carver said, "When you can do the common things in life in an uncommon way, you will command the attention of the world." To become one-of-a-kind as opposed to one-of-many, create your own market, establish yourself as the only choice within your defined area of expertise, charge a premium for your services—and have the world knocking down your door to benefit from your unique talents. By identifying your WHAT, you've taken the first step towards achieving greatness, but you must also decide how to use your Gift in a focused way.

What Is Your What?

Pursuing your WHAT may seem like an overwhelming task. Breaking the process down into small steps you can readily envision will make it feel more concrete and achievable. Just because life is unpredictable doesn't mean you shouldn't have plans, though. It simply means that you should be flexible and adaptable, and always ready to change in response to the unexpected. With this in mind, I want you to identify the steps that lead to your Ultimate Objective. Your final goal, naturally, is to reach it. So write your Ultimate Objective on the first line and work backwards to identify the first step, which should be something you can begin doing today. Many find that working backwards is easier than starting with the present. If you prefer to start with today and work forward, that's fine too.

Chapter 18: Forge Your Path, Create Your Legacy

If you've patiently worked your way through the previous chapters, I hope you've experienced an incredible journey. You should now have a profoundly better understanding of who you are and what to do with your life. That said, there's one more exercise to tackle – writing your Letter of Reflection. Your letter will provide a concise summation of the goals you've identified and help keep you on point as you share your Gifts with the world.

Writing your own Letter of Reflection is a highly effective way to face your mortality, realize your time on this planet is limited, and provide you with direction and motivation to achieve the goals dearest to you. As Stephen Covey wrote in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, "You must begin with the end in mind." Not to be morbid, but nothing represents "the end" more than death. Take a few quiet moments to imagine yourself in your final days. Now ask yourself these questions:

How do I feel about the life I lived? Am I happy about how my life affected the world? Did my life have the meaning I intended? Did I accomplish the things most important to me? When I imagine the people visiting me in my final days, do I sense they feel real loss, or are they there simply because they feel obligated?

Chances are, most of your answers may not be positive. The good news is, you're still alive. And while tomorrow isn't a given, you can immediately begin constructing the life and legacy you desire and take full advantage of however many years are left to you.

Your Letter of Reflection represents the culmination of your journey with this book. You've mastered *The Four Stages of Learning*, *The Vortex of Vulnerability*, *The Vortex of Invincibility*, and *The Pinnacle*. You've lived *The Seven Life Altering Principles* and discovered your WHAT. With these in mind, write your Letter of Reflection. Begin with the end in mind. Everything else will fall into place.

This journey has required you to explore the very depths of your being. You may have experienced some discomfort, and even pain, along the way as you shed self-destructive habits. I applaud you for

What Is Your What?

sticking with it. By completing this book and pursuing what you've learned, I'm confident you'll enjoy profound and long-lasting, positive change.

Consider the words of motivational speaker Les Brown: "Most people fail in life not because they aim too high and miss, but because they aim too low and hit." And some people never aim at all. I encourage you to aim as high as you can imagine...and then aim higher. Commandeer life by living like a sniper. Don't just endeavor to hit the target—aim for the bull's eye. The world is waiting for you!