



Eres Importante (Self Matters): Construye tu vida desde el interior (Creating Your Life from the Inside Out) (Spanish Edition)

By Dr. Phil McGraw

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Imagina que existe dentro de ti otro rostro que nunca ha visto la luz del día, que nunca ha podido decir: "Oye, ¿y qué conmigo?". . .

Imagina que ni siquiera conoces esa otra faceta y que nunca has dejado que se exprese por miedo a ser juzgado y condenado. . .

Imagina que vives con miedo de fallarle a quienes generalmente te juzgan por tu manera de ser y por la forma en que vives. . .

Imagina que descubres que te has conformado con lo que se te ha presentado en la vida, en lugar de buscar aquello que realmente necesitas. . .

Imagina que realmente piensas y sientes cosas que nunca te habías permitido y que, de hecho, nunca te has atrevido a experimentar. . .

Imagina que tu matrimonio no es lo que emocionalmente deseas y necesitas, pero silenciosamente continuas con el mismo curso, renunciando a tu esperanza de ser feliz. . .

Imagina que estás dejando que los días se conviertan en semanas y las semanas en meses y los meses en años, y el tiempo se va sumando, convirtiéndote en una persona gris. . .

Si cualquiera de estos escenarios son una realidad en tu vida, entonces tenemos que hablar, y a lo largo de estas páginas lo haremos. Tengo malas noticias para ti y otras muy buenas. Las malas son que tú tomas las decisiones que te han puesto en las circunstancias actuales de tu vida; las buenas, que tú tomas las decisiones que te han puesto en tus circunstancias actuales de tu vida. Ahora es el momento de tomar la decisión más grande. *Eres importante* te ayudará a hacerlo.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

"Dr. Phil" (Phillip C. McGraw, Ph.D.) is the host of America's number-one daytime talk show and is perhaps the most well-known expert in the field of psychology and human functioning in the world today. In his 16th year on television and his 11th year of the *Dr. Phil* show, he has devoted his international platform to delivering common sense information to individuals and families seeking to improve their lives. Passionately pursuing such topics as family functioning, domestic violence, anti-bullying, addiction and the myths of mental illness, he works tirelessly both on and off the air. Dr. Phil has carried his message from the senate chambers of Washington, D.C. to the suburbs and inner cities across America. He and Robin, his wife of 38 years and counting, along with their "wonder dog," Maggie, reside in Southern California, as do his two sons, Jordan and Jay, along with daughter-in-law, Erica, and two grandchildren, Avery Elizabeth and London Phillip.

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Chapter 1: What If...?

"Somehow we learn who we really are and then live with that decision."

-- Eleanor Roosevelt

The sun beat down relentlessly on the young man standing in the barren parking lot. There was not a breath of air, and the black asphalt was sticky and melting as it gave way to the afternoon heat. It radiated up into his face like a blast furnace. He wouldn't be here, using a pay phone, except that he was out of town and this was one call that absolutely had to go through an operator.

Over the years he had placed collect calls back home many times, but this one was entirely different. This time, he instructed the operator to be sure to emphasize that the call was from "doctor," rather than "mister." How strange it sounded to hear her say "doctor" in front of his name when his father answered at the other end. It was "Dr. Son" calling "Dr. Dad," an achievement that had been so very long and hard in coming. Eleven years, to be exact. Three hundred hours of college credit, tens of thousands of pages read and studied, and hundreds and hundreds of all-nighters in preparation for nearly as many tests and exams. There had been miles and miles of long walks from the remote parking lots at the hospital, where students, interns, and residents were "dog meat." More recently, it had been month after month of enduring the inescapable, acrid smell of Thorazine-laced urine on the psychiatric wards of the VA hospital -- some might say warehouse -- where he had spent long days and longer nights "treating" (storing) the inpatients on those cold and desolate wards.

No less painfully, there had been the days, weeks, and months of dealing with a variety of insecure, "emotionally interesting" professors, many of them white-coated Napoleons who were all too eager to wield the power of their petty fiefdoms. Their torments had culminated in that unforgettable final year, when he had walked the halls at school and put in his time at the hospital, armed with a signed letter of resignation on his clipboard, daring just one more anal-retentive, power-hungry mentor-turned-tormentor to say so much as "boo" to him.

In spite of it all, and as surprised as anyone who knew him, here he stood. He remembered one of his favorite profs telling him he would never make it because he had an "attitude" and refused to "kiss ass." He was told,

"You have too many options in your life to put up with this fiasco of dysfunction, you aren't near desperate enough to tolerate the abuse!" Yet here he was. One by one, the department heads had signed off on his final requirements, shaken his hand, and congratulated him on earning the highest degree in his profession. Doctor -- wow! He knew how proud his dad was going to be. This phone call would be a huge step closer to a father's dream come true: father and son, both doctors, practicing together, side by side!

Throughout the long ordeal, he had been powerfully influenced by his knowledge of his father's vision and dream. Theirs was a family of meager and simple beginnings. In fact, the young doctor and his father were the only ones from either side of the extended family ever to go to college, let alone earn doctoral degrees. Surely, then, this phone call was to be a proud moment indeed. The long journey was over. Victory was at hand, and parents and family were bursting with pride.

It was all cued up just right. Ready and waiting for him was a thriving practice, all set to explode with the energy and inspiration he would bring. That meant no more scrounging for money for him and his young wife. No more driving cars that were beyond old. No more living in apartments so small you had to go outside to turn around. Most importantly, the young doctor truly did care about helping people, and here was his chance to do just that. So there couldn't be anything wrong with any of this. Right?

Yet standing in that parking lot, mouthing the words of expected excitement -- even as he heard his father's voice breaking with unmistakable pride -- he looked over at his wife waiting in the car. There sat the only person in the entire world who knew him well enough to know that something was wrong. How could everything be so right, yet feel so wrong? He looked into her eyes. Without speaking a word, he knew that she knew.

But he would play the good soldier. He would shrug off the negative feelings and forge ahead. Soon he would be scrambling so fast that life would crowd out the nagging thoughts, and he would focus instead on meeting the expectations held by so many who loved him. He told himself it was probably just anxiety anyway, nothing a little hard work won't take care of. So with a healthy dose of dutiful self-righteousness, a work-your-butt-off commitment, and a naïveté that can only come from being young and stupid, he prepared to go to work. There were those doubts, and there was that vague uneasiness about the road he had started down. That nagging sense that something just wasn't quite right continued. But hey, he was going to make a lot of people really proud.

At the same time, he made a heartfelt promise to himself: **I don't care how much money I get to making -- If I ever find myself doing this just for the money, if I am ever just going through the motions, I am out of here. I will turn on my heels and walk smooth away. I will never sell out and live without passion and fire just because it is secure, expected, or easy! I'm no one-trick pony. If I can succeed at this, I could succeed at a lot of things just as well, no problem.**

Ten years later...

Ten years and thousands of patients later, the not-so-young, not-so-stupid, and not-nearly-so-naïve doctor and his wife step off of a client's private jet at a busy airport in the heart of a teeming, fast-paced city. It is a crisp and beautiful Sunday afternoon in October. His practice has exploded to perhaps the largest in the country. He has mastered his profession. Successful? Yes, certainly by any standard he knows of. A secure lifestyle? Without a doubt. Houses and cars? Only the best. Two great children, a wonderful marriage, and proud parents: he has it all.

So why doesn't it feel any more right than it did ten years ago, standing at the pay phone in that hot, deserted

parking lot? His self-righteous declaration of ten years ago haunts him more and more. He has often wished he had never said it. There are those dreadful times when "the truth" runs faster than he can. It is particularly bad when he is really tired, or in those rare moments when he has allowed himself to become very still. He has hated those times, because it is then that his private reality mocks him: **If I ever find myself doing this just for the money...if I am ever just going through the motions, I am out of here. I will never sell out. I will never live without passion and fire just because it is secure, expected, or easy....**

The promise haunts him, because he knows that money and lifestyle have in fact "bought him," just as he swore they would not. Far from being vitally involved in his own life, he feels trapped by it. There is a part of him that remembers what it was like to have passion, hope, optimism, and energy. It is a part that has refused to succumb to and accept the roles assigned by an insensitive and sometimes hurtful world. It is a part of his concept of self that just wants to get in the game, the game *he* wants to play: a game that means something to him, whether it means anything to anyone else or not. It is a private, usually denied, part of himself that does not want to be controlled by what is expected. It is a part of him that knows what is genuine, yet it is a part that usually lives in silence.

The simple truth is that he is not living a life that he wants, or that he chose. He is living a life that pleases a lot of people, most of them well intended, but not him. He is doing what he does, simply because it is what his father did. He is even living in a place he did not consciously choose. In fact, it is the last place on earth he would have ever chosen. He has a life many would love, but his heart is not in it. It is not natural for him, so he has to do what he does by brute force: Everything is a chore. There is no passion; there is no excitement. He ignores his real dreams, but doing so is hard and getting harder. Being someone and something he is not is the hardest thing he has ever done.

Clearly, this is not some monumental tragedy. I mean, come on: "Poor baby has to work in a cushy office all day!" It is not the kind of cause célèbre that makes the evening news. Could he "get happy"? After all, his marriage and family are great. Could he be satisfied with that and just keep on keeping on? Yes. But it gets harder with every day that passes, days that have turned into weeks, months, and years. He sometimes hears a voice, his own voice, crying for relief, but he does not react. Sometimes it is just easier not to think about it. After all, does *feeling* right, does *having passion* really matter? Is he being just a ridiculous romantic to think that being "true to self" might be something more than just some high-handed philosophy? Shouldn't he be thankful for his many blessings, blessings that everyone else sure seems to hold in high regard?

He rationalizes that he really would make a change, give it all up and pursue something he truly has a passion for -- but he has "responsibilities." He has a wife and kids, for God's sake: How could he ask them to give up their friends, schools, and lives, just so he can chase some dream? He wonders if that is really what holds him back, or if he is just afraid. Maybe he really is just a one-trick pony. Maybe he isn't talented at all. Maybe he just got lucky and could never succeed at something different. He doesn't seem to know that confident part of himself as well as he used to. It's there, but the connection grows weak, the image that once was sharp and clear is becoming dim and fuzzy.

At the precise moment when he is wrestling with those very thoughts, his wife says, "Where were you just now? You have to tell me what you're thinking! Tell me where you go when you are lost in that hundred-yard stare." It's as though she is reading his mind. She says: "More and more each day, I feel like I'm losing a part of you. When it's just the two of us, or when we are alone with our boys, it's like the real you, the way you used to be before all of *this* we call our life. But as soon as the world creeps in, you glaze over. The phone rings, or something else breaks the spell, and you become totally different -- like a robotic machine."

For some reason, on this beautiful afternoon, driving across town with the top down and the cool autumn air

breezing through the car, he decides once and for all to stop denying himself. He decides to give his feelings a voice and tell the truth: "Bottom line -- I'm going jack-ass batty in here. I hate to tell you this, but I think a huge part of my life absolutely sucks! I hate myself for getting in so deep that I feel like I can't get out. I hate my career. I hate where we are living. I hate what I am doing. I've hated it all since before the day I started it. I stood in that parking lot calling my dad on the phone ten years ago, knowing full well I didn't want to move to that godforsaken town and launch into that godforsaken career. I screwed up big time and now I'm stuck, trapped in a life I hate. I sold myself out and gave in to what everyone else wanted for me, not what I wanted. I have zero passion for what I am doing. I'm just going through the motions, and it is getting harder and harder every day. I should be excited about my life, but I am not, not even close. I'm cheating you and the boys because I'm not being me. I have one shot at this, one shot, and I'm choking, I'm blowing it. I'm now almost forty years old. I've wasted ten years of my life and I can't get them back no matter what I do. To even say that makes me sick to my stomach. I don't want to rock the boat, but I hate this deal, and if it were up to me I would shut this whole deal down, move away, and do something I want to do in a place where I want to do it. I'm sorry, but that's the truth. I feel like a fraud. I'm sorry to dump all of this on you, but you're asking and so I'm telling you. I'm running out of life energy here. I'm tired of being tired. I'm tired of not waking up excited in the morning. I'm tired of not being proud of what I do or who I am. It's no one's fault but my own, I've done it to myself because I didn't have the guts to stand up for myself. How dumb is that?"

I know every detail of this story, including what was said in that car, because I was in that car. The story, the "confession," is my own. I was the young man who stood in that parking lot in 1979, and it was me who drove out of Love Field in Dallas, Texas, with my wife, Robin, in 1989.

For those ten years, I lived a life of incongruency. The content of my life, the choices I had made, was incongruent with who I was and what I wanted. I was doing things I didn't have my heart in and was not doing the things I did have a passion for. On the one hand, I occupied a comfort zone where my life felt "safe," because it was as steady and predictable as the ticking of a clock. The problem was that everything I was doing was chosen to please other people by meeting their expectations while totally ignoring my own. I was miserable. If you had asked me, "Is this the kind of life you want?" "Is this the career you want?" "Are you fulfilling your purpose for being on this earth?" I would have had to answer, "No, not by a long shot." I knew I wasn't living the life I was meant to live. I knew there was something wrong with my life, but for those ten years, I avoided dealing with it because it just seemed easier to go along than to upset everyone. Instead of addressing the dull ache that I carried everywhere, instead of trying to root out what was bothering me, I chose to "keep on keeping on." Incredibly dumb, but it's the truth.

Like an enemy I knew as intimately as any friend, I came to know the nagging, constant emptiness of the incongruent life. I ignored my self and lived for people, purposes, and goals that weren't my own. I betrayed who I was and instead accepted a fictional substitute that was defined from the outside in. I betrayed myself, and mine was a life and an experience that was a fraud and a fiction.

So much of what I did -- while totally okay *if* it had been what I had a passion for -- was as unnatural for me as it would be for a dog trying to fly. There's nothing wrong with trying to fly, unless you happen to be a beagle instead of an eagle. I loved my family, but every other aspect of my life was, for me, a painful and forced ordeal because it didn't come from the heart. It wasn't something that sprang from who I really was. And in addition to the presence of negatives that came from being and doing that which was foreign to my authentic self, there was the glaring absence of positives. I wasn't having any fun or excitement. I wasn't doing what was meaningful for me. I wasn't doing what I was good at and therefore was not pursuing my mission in life, my purpose for being here. I never finished a day and said, "Wow! Great job today, be proud!" I needed that feeling, a feeling I missed when I looked in the mirror. I needed to feel like I belonged and was called to a purpose, but I didn't, because I wasn't. I was excited about nothing, zip, zero. It was not

good.

Ultimately, I was able to totally reengineer those parts of my life that were not "me," and build on those that felt right because they were right. Once I stopped living that incongruent life and started to hear my own voice, my own needs, my experience of life changed monumentally. I didn't get those ten years back but they are a fading memory, daily being replaced with a life that is authentically me. (I'm going to tell you a whole lot about how I did it very soon.)

I will never completely forget the pain and emptiness of living the way I did for those ten years and I don't want to. Having spent ten years in that desolate territory, I know it's a place where I will never go again. I would starve or work for food and shelter doing what I love, before I would betray my self again at any price. If you have ever done anything that was really dumb for a long time, and then finally quit and made a change, you know how it feels. You look back and say, "Oh my God, how could I have been so stupid?! I wasted so much time!" I know the feeling because I've even had the revelation after doing trivial things like when I finally got eyeglasses; and when I finally built a fence so that I could quit chasing my dog. So you can imagine how I felt when I changed my entire life after *ten years!* Huge relief, huge! I got out, and if you are in that place, I want to get you out, too. Don't panic: I'm not getting ready to blow up your marriage or family. Living an incongruent life doesn't necessarily involve geography, occupation, time commitments, or even the people with whom you are sharing your life. The "fix" I'm talking about comes from the inside out. What it does always deal with is *how* you do what you do. It always deals with you being true to yourself from the inside out. I still do a lot of what I once did; I just do it very, very differently and the priorities are mine, not someone else's. It is always about being there for you, about being your own best friend.

Question: Is it possible that, just like me, you have a great chance for a tremendously more satisfying and exciting life, but you are selling yourself short and missing out because you don't know it, or, if you do know it, you are just stuck in your life and aren't doing anything about it? Is it possible that you are, in fact, an excitingly unique individual with the need to do and be *all* of who you are, yet you are denying that powerful individuality and remain bogged down and buried in a world of "responsibility traps" and "don't make waves" conformity?

Well, I'll confess that I'm setting you up, because those are "loaded" questions, and I'm betting the answer to both is, in whole or part, a big fat *yes!* If I am right, your self-concept is in trouble and you're cheating not only yourself but your children, your spouse, and everyone else in your life, just like I was. Read on and we'll see if I'm right. If I am right, don't despair because, I promise, I'm about to save you those ten years that I wasted. Together we are about to light your life up like you can't believe.

Warning: This is an extremely direct, plain-talking, tell-you-the-unvarnished-truth, common-sense book about how to take control of your entire life. The control I'm talking about is a control that comes from reconnecting with what I call your *authentic self*. In order to understand what I mean by your authentic self, you need only think back to the times in your life when you have been your best. I'm talking about the absolute happiest time in your life: the most fulfilled and especially the most real you have ever been. Think back to the you at the heart of those moments. In those moments, your life flowed with an energy and an excitement. At the same time, you may have felt a quiet calm within. You may have been at work, but work was play. You probably felt as if you were exactly where you were supposed to be, doing just what you were meant to do, and with exactly the right people. You had an unshakable understanding of your own worth. You trusted yourself. You were having fun, and you didn't care what others thought. There was no room in your life for fear or anxiety or self-doubt. Every part of your life was in harmony with the other parts. You were living fully in the present moment, yet you had a sense of optimism, an expectation that tomorrow was going to be just as interesting and gratifying as today. Life seemed to be filled with vivid colors. Your own

life was the most interesting one you knew, and you couldn't wait to see what would happen next. Perhaps most important was the fact that you accepted yourself for who and what you were. The result was a kind of bulletproofing from the judgments of others. Because you felt so good about yourself, because you felt self-determined and in control, you couldn't care less what others thought about you. It was you that mattered, not in a selfish way, but in a confident way. Without judgment you were proud of yourself and walked with a sense of pride and self-assurance. You weren't sure what the future would bring, but you were sure that you could handle it. Self-acceptance was the foundation of the happiest time in your life and it was the engine that powered the train.

Connecting with this authentic self again means finding your way back to the no-kidding, real you that existed before the world started crowding you out. This is a control that comes from the inside out. That means that this is a book about you -- no one else, just you. It is a how-to book that is designed to get you excited about and filling your life with what is genuinely important to you, instead of a lot of mindless, inherited, assigned, go-through-the-motions activity. I'm talking about controlling virtually every aspect of your experience in this world. That means putting your life together in a way that you feel the way you want to feel, do the things you want, and more importantly, *need* to do. It means putting your life together in a way that you can respect yourself for who you are and what you do. It means you can look in the mirror and know that what is important to you is not being buried in favor of a "go along to get along" mentality. It means you are living in a way that those things you always dreamed of are still alive. It means putting your life together in a way that you don't sit around asking yourself: "What's the point? Why am I doing all of this?" "Life is a bitch and then you die" is not my idea of a good philosophy or life strategy. If you want to be totally, consciously in charge of *you* and everything you think, do, and feel, and use that control to create value for you, and therefore for everyone around you, you've come to the right place, but there is work to be done.

You see, I have a theory: I believe that you, me, all of us, have in the past and/or are currently "screwing up" in this game we call life. Too many people in this day and time have gotten so busy "getting by," so busy being busy, that they have let the colors fade from their lives. They have settled too cheap, way too cheap. Think about it: Your life, behind closed doors, can totally suck. It can be a major train wreck, yet you will get up in the morning and instead of working on your mind and your heart for even five minutes, you will obsess around for two hours, focusing totally on your appearance instead of your substance. You do it all throughout your life. You would do well to stop and think about just how much of your life energy is absorbed by the superficial rather than what you know in your heart really matters. A good example is found in our approach to "tying the knot." I see tons of couples getting married every year and I'll bet 90-plus percent of them spent months, or even years, planning their *wedding* and almost no time planning their *marriage!* How crazy is it to spend more time on the caterer and the flowers for a one-hour event and precious little if any time on kids, money, and life plan. (I'm not just saying that because I'm a *man* and don't get how important a wedding is to a woman! I have three sisters, all married. I get it. I'm just saying, plan the marriage, too!) The same is true with your life. Your life is created from the inside out, so you must get right with you on the inside -- and that takes time and focus on you; not your social mask, but you.

This stuff about self, about who you are on the inside, matters, it really matters. Why? Because a life without color is a life without excitement and passion. It is a gray existence where you put one foot in front of the other and go through the motions without any emotions. You spend all of your energy meeting expectations and doing jobs and chores. You stop really living and instead start existing: You get up, feed the kids, worry about money, go to work, come home, do the laundry, cook dinner, worry about the kids, mow the yard, worry some more about money, watch TV, eat some more, worry some more, go to bed; then you get up and do it all over again, and again, and again, and again, three hundred and sixty-five days a year. Make no mistake about it: When chores, routine existence, and just playing it safe become the only purpose in life, there is no purpose, and one must be found. You *need* to know your "highest and best use" in this world, and

then to pursue it. How tragic would it have been if Einstein had spent his life as a merchant or a sailor; if Elvis had remained a truck driver; if Mother Teresa had been an accountant or a waitress? When mindless, unchallenging, routine existence and safety are blindly accepted and become unthinking goals, there can be no authenticity, because you and everyone else has a mission, a purpose in life that cannot be denied if you are to live fully. If you have no purpose, you have no passion. If you have no passion, you have sold yourself out. I know that, because I know that within each of us there are passions that, if acknowledged and released, will energize and excite the experience of life.

In a passionless life, superficiality becomes the substitute for the things that ought to matter. False goals like money, approval from others, and the accumulation of "stuff" will come to dominate your life and its energy. You are then trapped in a descending circle of aimless existence. If you are committed to nothing, if you believe in nothing, including yourself, you can be led to and suckered into anything. You are uniquely equipped for a mission in this world, and to fail to recognize and commit to finding that mission and then achieving it is to wither in mind, body, and spirit. You cannot play the game of life trying not to lose, trying to play it safe. You must live to win; however, you may personally define "winning." To do otherwise is to deny who you are.

Now you may be convinced that your life never had any color or passion to begin with. But if it did, can you remember it? Reflect on that, then ask yourself, How much have I let those colors fade? It may have been hard to notice because it happened a little bit at a time; just a bit here and there. Either way, have you gone from a life that was in full living color to one that is nothing more than shades of gray? Ask yourself how long it has been since you were really excited about some meaningful aspect of your life. I'm not talking about getting a new car or a piece of jewelry or a great fishing pole; I'm talking about the passion and excitement of knowing you are fulfilling your purpose and are doing it well. I'm talking about the feeling of confidence that comes from self-trust; the calm assurance that you experience when you know that you have the courage to be who you really are and to be there for yourself when it really counts. It's the kind of courage that will help you stand up for yourself with an abusive mate, when choosing the career you want, or in deciding whether or not to have children. Passion, excitement, and confidence are important medicines that you need every day. And they can come in a form as simple as claiming your right to some joy and fun in life now -- not as some fleeting memory from your past, but now.

Here's a "gotcha": Are you one of those people who sit around and talk about how "crazy and fun" you *used* to be? Do you reminisce about times gone by, often saying, "Remember when we used to...?" Do you just accept the fact that the most fun or fulfillment you will ever have is in your past, because now you have responsibilities and bills and kids and whatever else you can think of to rationalize neglecting yourself and what matters to you? Well, let me tell you, if that's how you think, that's just crazy! I went to a college reunion-type deal not long ago and got together with a bunch of my former teammates. Some of them have really gone on to create and live wonderful lives with great wives, families, and careers. Others have been absolutely "stuck" in their memories of the glory days of when we played football. These guys were basking in the fading glow: "Hey Phil, remember the fourth quarter when we blitzed that OU quarterback without a single defensive back left in the secondary? Man, were we crazy gamblers or what?" I respond: "Yeah boy, that was really something, wasn't it." What I'm really thinking is: Hell no, I don't remember that, I've done about nine million things since that one play thirty years ago, and apparently you haven't. And by the way, this glory you're basking in, hotshot, is a bunch of hooey. The truth is we were terrible! In fact, now that I recall the fourth quarter of that game you've been boring your kids with stories about, we were behind about sixty to nothing! God, get over it. You sound like my dad; by the time he got through telling it, he used to walk three miles to school every day through a foot of snow and it was up hill both ways!

The only reason you would want to continue focusing on some fantasized past is if the present you have

created is not as good. I don't know about you, but I don't want to be twenty again. Some of the times were good but a whole lot of them weren't. Another thing my dad used to say when he would reminisce about being in the navy or playing college ball was: "I wouldn't take a million dollars for the experience and I wouldn't give you a dime to do it again." That's how I feel about an awful lot of where I've been, although there is some of it I would sell you back "for a dime"!

If the best part of your life is in the past, something is way out of whack. Here's how the deal is supposed to work: As we get older, we are supposed to be *more* competent, not less. Life is supposed to get better, because we are supposed to be *better at it*. Attempting to rationalize or justify ignoring yourself and what you truly want and need is BS. I want to put you center stage for a while and talk about getting your self-concept to a place where you won't sell out your wants, dreams, needs, and visions.

Now you may be thinking, Dang, you're being hard on me, and you don't even know me. Give me a break here! How can you think you know all of this about me and my life when you haven't even met me?

Well, I don't think you really want me to "give you a break," and I sure hope you don't tune me out because I'm being so direct and telling you things that aren't fun to hear about. Anybody can tell you what you want to hear, and frankly, it would be a lot easier for me to do just that. But then this book would be just like a hundred others, and you didn't pick this book up so I would blow smoke at you. You bought this book because you care about your life and want to do as good a job as you can at taking care of you and everybody who means something to you.

I do think I know a lot about what may be going on in your life. I think so for two reasons. One, I lived it in my own life, and two, because I deal directly with thousands and thousands of people just like you and me every year, and I see it in their lives, their faces, and their eyes! They're too busy, too caught up in roles, too entrenched to consider themselves. You're probably thinking, Oh great! I thought I was doing fine until I bought this damn book -- now you're telling me I only thought I was happy. Thanks a lot!

Sorry, but as your parents always said, "You'll thank me for this someday!" The only difference is, this time it's true.

Just hear me out, and if when you finish you conclude that you are in fact happy and doing just fine, then great. At least then you will know it with the confidence of having audited your life, mind, and spirit. But again, I'm betting you're going to be shocked at what you find and ultimately be thankful that you got a wake-up call. And boy, oh boy, do I intend to give you a wake-up call, because I *don't* want you to sleep through your life like I did for ten years.

YOU AND THE WORLD

I think a lot of this losing ourselves has happened because our world has sped up to the point of being absolutely, out-of-control insane. It has sped up to the point of so overstimulating us with input from the outside that we can't or don't even hear any voices or messages coming from the inside. We have lost ourselves in the rush of the world.

Five hundred TV channels, the Internet, rental videos, two or three jobs all are conspiring to steal ourselves from us. Kids without a minute of unprogrammed time are racing from school to dance, soccer, drama, debate, one activity after another. We are on a merry-go-round spinning too fast for us to hold onto, and too fast for us to jump off of. In response, we "hunker down" and just try to get through it. If somehow you happened to have some quiet, unstructured, undemanded-upon time, you don't use it to focus on or deal with

you. Instead, you get nervous; you panic and start looking for something to do or someone to tell you what to do. You're so busy doing stuff you didn't choose and probably wouldn't choose that you don't even think about what you do want, need, and care about anymore.

Here's some quick, "litmus test" logic for determining whether you are passively accepting or even choosing behaviors that ignore who you really are, or have been choosing behaviors and life circumstances that naturally flow from your true, authentic self.

If you are constantly tired, stressed, emotionally flat, or even depressed, worried, and unhappy, you are ignoring the authentic you and living a "go-through-the-motions" existence. If your life includes things you profess to hate, yet you continue to do them anyway, that, too, indicates self-betrayal. For example, are you always complaining about being overweight, yet you continue to be? Do you fail to exercise, go back to school, change jobs, confront your dead marriage, get a date, get a hobby, or deal with the pain of abuse or neglect that has scarred you from childhood? If so, you can't possibly be living in concert with who you were originally designed to be. If your life is dominated by constant anxiety and worry, but you don't do a damn thing to change it, that, too, is a bad sign. (My dad used to say that "worrying is like rocking in a chair: it's something to do, but you don't get anywhere.")

If your mind has gotten dull and you just aren't as sharp as you used to be, you aren't getting old or dumb; it's just that your authentic self is getting buried. It's fighting for air. If your emotions are marked by cynicism, apathy, hopelessness, and a lack of optimism, it is because you have abandoned yourself and what matters to you. If you are choosing what you do, what you think about, and put at the top of your priority list based on what you think others expect instead of what matters to you, then you have the "fictional infection." Your authentic self has been infected with a lot of nongenuine living that has ignored who you are and has created a fictional self instead.

Ignoring who you truly, authentically are can literally be killing you. Yes, I said "literally." If you are ignoring who you really are, your entire "system" is so distressed that it will wear out, and you will be old beyond your years. Forcing yourself to be someone you are not, or stuffing down who you really are, is incredibly taxing. It will tax you so much that it will shorten your life by years and years. I wonder how many obituaries in the newspaper should actually read something like:

"Jackson, Robert. Mr. Robert Jackson died yesterday of complications from doing a lifetime of crap that he didn't really want to do. His condition was further complicated because he also failed to do much, if any, of what he did want to do. Experts report that he died from cramming someone else's idea of life into his body, his brain, and his life. Attempts by Mr. Jackson to fill the voids with work, cars, excessive eating, alcohol, three wives, two thousand rounds of golf, and meeting everyone else's expectancies but his own, were dismally unsuccessful. Unfortunately, this all took so much out of Mr. Jackson that he was just worn flat out and died about twenty years too soon. Miserable in his last years, he passed unpeacefully yesterday at his home. He was surrounded by colleagues from the job he hated, and family members who were all just as miserable as he was."

Okay, that was kind of smart-ass, but I'm not kidding here. Medical experts tell us we can lose as many as fourteen years from our life expectancy by living the kind of prolonged stress I'm describing. This is why I am telling you, you are playing with fire here.

So if I am right, how did all of this happen? Obviously, nobody slipped you a stupid pill, and you aren't some moron who should be in an institution. You just got caught up in this runaway train we call life. You just got used to not being excited. Across time, it got easier to tell yourself no than it was to tell someone else no.

You very likely got some programming that taught you that it was selfish to focus on you. That programming, of course, came from a bunch of *other people* who would a whole lot rather you focus on them and what they want, instead of you and what you want. Duh!

Now if, on the other hand, you *are* excited about something in your life every day, feel really good about who you are and what you are doing, you are very likely living consistently with your authentic self. If you are often peaceful and fulfilled and feel like you are in touch with and focused on your mission and purpose for being in this world, then you are living in concert with who you really are.

Let me tell you what I would wish for you to be thinking and saying now, during, and after you read this book:

"Hey, wait a minute here. Screw the expectancies; screw living for everyone else. They (whoever 'they' are) don't pay my rent, they don't come home with me at night and bathe my kids and cook my dinner! Why, then, am I living for what I think some ill-defined bunch of people expect of me? They don't get a vote anymore. I will no longer give my power away. I want it back, and I'm going to use it to be me.

"I want to make *me* happy by being true to myself doing what I care about. If I love music, I want to have music in my life. If I want a career, then I want to find a way to have it. If I'm tired of being fat, I want to prioritize that change into my lifestyle. If I'm not being treated with dignity and respect, that's not okay, not now, not ever. I would rather be alone than sick with someone else. If I miss God being in my life because my husband is not spiritual, then he will need to adjust, not me. I'm tired of being scared all the time. Scared about kids, money, job, boss, parents, and acceptance. I want some upside here. I want to feel alive. I want to feel valued by others and myself. I want to get up in the morning, instead of dreading it. I want to have tremendous clarity about why I am in this world and what I am supposed to do while I am here. I want to realize this is not a dress rehearsal; it is my life, my one shot. I want my kids to know and have all of me instead of some half-assed counterfeit. I want them to really see all of the real me, my interest, my sense of humor, my values. I believe that children learn what they live, and I want to teach them *by example* to be proud, instead of showing them how to compromise. I want to live with peace, fulfillment, joy, and excitement. I want to be able to finish a day and say that the day 'felt really good.' I want to be able to say that I am proud of me and proud of what I did today. I want to be able to say, 'I like who I am and what I'm all about.' I want to feel calm and peaceful. I want to feel satisfied. I want to be able to say, 'I feel good.' I want to feel like I belong and I deserve what I want just because -- just because! I want to like me for being there for me and putting what's important to me on my priority list."

Are you in total shock right now? You're probably thinking I've gone walleyed, steer-headed, over-the-top "selfish-crazy."

Wrong! That's just your politically correct, "tell 'em what they want to hear" thinking taking over. How can it be selfish to take care of yourself when you know that it's absolutely true that you cannot give away what you do not have? So, if you're being self-righteously selfless, you may be a great, well-intentioned martyr, but regardless of your intentions you will cheat everyone in your life -- your kids, spouse, friends, coworkers, your church -- you cheat the whole world out of you. Even the Bible tells us to "love your neighbor *as* yourself." You have to take care of yourself before you *can* take care of anyone else.

How long has it been, if ever, that you really, no kidding, guilt free, took care of you? Ask yourself how long it's been since you could say, "I am doing what I'm doing today because it's what I want to do today, instead of doing what I'm doing today simply because it's what I was doing yesterday?"

Well, I don't want you to mindlessly go from one day to the next anymore. I want you to make a deep, uncompromised, committed decision to bringing your world in line with the person that you truly, authentically are. I don't want you living consistent with some fictional self that doesn't have a damn thing to do with you or what's important to you. I want you to start asking yourself what is important to you: What do you want? What do you need to be part of your life? Look at the following list and see if you can spot things on there that you wish were a part of your life, or were at least a bigger part of your life, yet they just aren't:

Music

Art

Work

Kids

Spiritual life

Honesty

Free time

Pride in work

Pride in appearance

Living with dignity

Health

Being in nature

A career that uses your strengths

Permission to say, do, and be who you are

Volunteer work

Hobby

Different lifestyle

Passion

Excitement

Independence

Meaningful relationship

Different body type

Feeling like a giver

I could go on and on. I just offer these to get you percolating and thinking about things that you might want in your life. If those things are not there, and I'm betting that many of them aren't, I'm going to show you exactly, precisely why and how they have been robbed from you, and exactly, precisely how to restore them to your life.

The good news is that the only person we need to fix all of this is you. You don't need your parents, your spouse, your boss, or anyone else, just you. My theory is this is all about you, because you have either passively allowed or actively been jerking yourself around by putting you and what's important to you at the bottom of the priority list. Whether you know it or not, you may very well have sold out. Typically, when we do that, when we sell out, the things we abandon first are the things that matter only to ourselves. Why? Because that way we don't disappoint anyone else and God forbid we do that. Remember, when you put yourself at the bottom of the priority list you are cheating not just yourself, but also everyone around you.

What I'm telling you here is that you don't just have a right to find your way back to the authentic and true you; you have a responsibility to do it. We're talking about your entire life here. We're talking about the one shot you get in this world. If you are just so fundamentally self-righteous that you can't justify doing this for yourself, then do it for your kids, do it for your family, and everyone else you love. Otherwise, you aren't getting you, they aren't getting you, and that's not okay.

When you're through with this book, I want you to be able to say, "I get it, and I am now there for me and everybody in this world that I care about." I want to introduce you to a key, foundational reality that is the sum and substance of where we are starting in your particular life and that is Your Personal Truth.

YOUR PERSONAL STARTING PLACE

In order for you ever to effectively figure out and map out how to get to where you want to go, you have to first know exactly where you are starting. Where you are now, everything you are, everything you do, begins with and is based on what I call your personal truth. By personal truth, I mean *whatever it is that you, at the absolute, uncensored core of your being, have come to believe about you*. This personal truth is critical, because if you believe it, if it is real to you, then it is for you the precise reality that you will live every day. We all have and live our own personal truth, whether we want to or not. If you are honest in truly acknowledging what you really think and feel about your self in your most candid moments, you know that what I'm saying is true. You know it because you have seen your personal truth come to light when you wished it would not. You may tell me and the rest of the world Story A and hope we buy it, but you're telling yourself what you believe to be the "real deal," at least as you see it, and we both know that version isn't even almost Story A! What you're telling yourself is the story you live; that's the one that jumps up and trips you when the pressure is on. You're always wondering if today is the day that the masquerade will come crashing down, and you will be "found out." No matter how hard you try, you can never escape your personal truth; it always gets you in the end, which is why it is so critical that you clean it up and get rid of all the doubt and distortion. You don't have to look far to find negative examples of personal truths that jump up and bite those who try to hide them: the schoolyard bully who folds like a cheap tent in the wind when someone finally calls his bluff because his personal truth is that of a coward; the bragging, yet insecure athlete who chokes at that critical moment in the competition; the "confident" beauty queen who is in truth lonely and scared and eventually takes her own life.

Yours may be a positive, accurate truth or it may be a "train wreck" of misbeliefs grounded in a history of fear, pain, and confusion. Most likely it is a combination of all those things. My job, our job, is to get real about those parts of what you believe about yourself that aren't working for you. You cannot hide from nor exceed the boundaries imposed by what you believe you "know" about yourself on the inside. You cannot play the game of life with confidence and assurance if your personal truth is riddled with fear and apprehension. Your "personal best" will never be better than the one your personal truth dictates for you. If it is distorted and fictional, be assured that it *will* show itself at the worst and most inopportune times, because that self-critical voice is relentlessly whispering in your ear. This personal truth business is a big deal, a huge deal. If you don't get yours straight, it will ruin even the best-laid plans to revitalize your life and everything in it. As we move forward, don't dare cheat yourself with some deluded thinking because you don't have the guts to tell yourself "out loud" what it is that you really believe on the inside. Unless and until you confront your personal truth you will never, ever have a chance to be the person you can be. You, like every other living person, get mixed and faulty messages from the world and from all of your experiences in it. The result is a distortion of your personal truth. Failing to confront that ill-conceived personal truth is a crucial betrayal of you, by you. Let's look at why I say your personal truth is so very important.

Now I'll just confess that about half of the time, I don't even know what the "experts" who talk and write about our lives mean when they throw around words like "self-realization," "inner self," "actualized self," being "centered," and whatever other buzzwords they manufacture to sound smart. A lot of it is beyond me, I'm afraid, way too fancy and convoluted for this ol' country boy. But to my simple way of thinking, who you are in this world, who you become, all boils down to this personal truth, this set of beliefs you have about you. It is so critical because it sets up and defines what I call your self-concept. If your beliefs about you are an authentic reflection of who you truly are, then you will live with a self-concept that empowers you and equips you to be absolutely the most effective and genuine person possible. If not, if there is distortion instead of accuracy, then you will have a limited and fictional self-concept that betrays who you truly are, and one that will cripple you in all of your pursuits. Not good!

We will talk in more detail about the authentic self and the fictional self in the next chapter. In the meantime, just understand that you have only one "self," but it is one that, like a chameleon, takes on the emotional colors of the history and environment in which it has existed. Your self-concept moves up and down a continuum anchored on one end by an authentic self-image (who you were created to be), and on the other by a fictional and distorted self-image (who the world has told you to be). Where you are on that continuum depends on what your external experiences in life have been, and what personal truth you have created from observing and interpreting yourself across the years.

This personal truth, and the self-concept that flows from it, is the "DNA" of your personality. Know this DNA, and you know your starting place in the journey to reconnect with your life.

As we move forward, I intend to show you how, whatever your DNA is, this came to be. I will then lead you to "deconstruct" those elements that are just plain wrong and have not served you well. I will also lead you through the steps necessary to reconstruct your authentic self-concept in a way to insure your success.

The process will work this way. I intend to demystify all this business about self-concept and how you think, feel, and believe about you. I intend to show you, in plain-talk terms, how that personal truth has and will determine the quality of virtually every aspect of your life, and how to change it by ridding it of distortion. This is a knowable process and one that we can break down into manageable steps. Those steps will involve events that happened externally, as well as events that happen and already have happened internally.

As we progress through the coming chapters, we are going to review your most relevant history by

identifying the key life experiences that have written on the "slate of *you*" and define your personal truth and concept of self. We don't have to dissect every event in your entire life. To do so would be to just get bogged down in a bunch of details and minutiae that don't matter. Instead, we are going to deal with an amazingly few external and internal events that have determined the outcome of your entire existence. When you see how few events have so powerfully dictated who and what you have become, you are going to be absolutely shocked! But it is what it is, and at least that makes our job manageable. By answering some very pointed questions, reflecting on the various factors that contribute to your self-concept, and generally conducting a thorough and brutally honest audit of your own life, you will begin to feel a power and a peace that you may not have known for years, if at all. Whatever your current circumstances may be, this is work that you can do. All that it requires is a willing spirit and the desire to see it through. And it is work that you must do. If now is not the time to reconnect with your authentic self, when will there be a better time? This is hard work; I confess that to you up front. At this particular moment in time, you may doubt that you are worth the effort or that it is even possible to really "get right" with you and unlock your true passion, strengths, gifts, and talents. Trust me when I tell you that it is possible and you are worth it. I also want you to realize that whether all of this takes a week, a month, or a year, that precious and limited time is going to pass whether you are doing something about your life or not. I promise you that at this precise moment next year, your life will be better or worse than it is right now. It will not be the same; the choice to improve it or let it decay is wholly and undeniably yours. I will show you the way. Whether you need a little "polishing up" or feel totally and hopelessly lost, I am coming for you. I need your help and at a minimum your open mind and willing spirit. Let's get busy.

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