

I N T R O D U C T I O N

In 1972, a relatively minor event occurred in my young life that would change me forever.

I was 6 years old.

I was riding my first bike at a friend's house. I was told by my parents, for a lot of reasons, to ride only on the driveway, which is what I did for a while. At some point, I, along with the friends who were riding around with me, decided to ride our bikes down the street to another friend's house, which we did. In short ... I disobeyed.

Because I was a new rider, and therefore, very inexperienced, I drove through some mud in the gutter, hit the curb, fell off my bike, and slammed headfirst into the sidewalk. I got hurt. I messed up some teeth, but came out of it okay.

This event changed me forever. Why?

For one thing, it got my attention. Experiencing pain will do that. Plus, I learned some significant lessons:

- I learned that it's both dangerous and exciting to make your own decisions.
- I learned that there are consequences to those decisions.
- And I learned that my parents had my best interest in mind when they gave me rules to follow.

Unknowingly, this little trauma set in motion a series of decisions I would make that helped shape who I am today.

I remember the experience in great detail now, some 35 years later.

Whether you have thought about it or not, you are shaped in the same way. Some events occurred in your life and taught you an important lesson about the outcome you can expect from specific behavior. It's inescapable. The lessons you learned from one experience to the next gave you your unique perspective on the world. It has made you who you are.

You are also the culmination of the decisions you have made in your life, including the really big choices and the seemingly insignificant ones that you make hundreds of times a day. These smaller choices you make especially add up because, when you look closely, they are the habits you have formed. They are patterns of behavior that you and I have created. We are all living the results of this kind of decision-making.

Do you feel successful in your business life? How about in your personal life?

Are there things about it that you'd like to change?

Are you just starting out in your career, and are wondering which direction to go?

If you were presented the opportunity to make a tremendous improvement in your situation, would you see it for what it is and act on it?

What if I told you that by making a few decisions differently, you could make a big change and greatly improve your results?

It's true.

This book is about just that ... how little decisions can radically change outcomes.

It is the culmination of all your decisions – even the smallest ones – that will determine your outcome. Some decisions are monumental, but most of them are subtle, and when you are aware of the importance of your decision-making habits, you are learning ways that you can take control of your own destiny.

This book that started with a series of interviews; conversations that I had with a friend, Stewart Anstead, who suggested that, with the consistent amount of requests I receive about how I became successful, that I had become like an “accidental guru”, in a way. It was meant to be kind of ironic, but it also made sense. He, and several other people who I know, suggested that my life lessons ought to be compiled, as they might prove helpful to others. We structured a framework, I was asked a lot of questions, and the result of our conversations became this book.

I never intended to become a “guru” about success, and never intended to write a book, either ... not ever. And especially not one about myself. But it was another series of events that happened which gave me the thought that I may do it someday.

The first time I thought about writing a book occurred when I was sitting in traffic on I-55 heading northeast to Chicago some years ago. The traffic was moving very slowly, and I looked around at all the people and the sea of cars. It occurred to me that even though I was really aware

of my own situation (I was running late). All of these other folks had lives and agendas and stories and families just like I did. Many of them were running late, too. Were they anxious? Angry? Where were they going? Who were they going to see? The thought of so many of us close together, with such different lives, intrigued me.

I don't know why that struck me at the time; I have been in worse traffic many times in my life before that. But for some reason I saw things from a different perspective that day. Each of them was on their own path, and was at different stages in their own experience. They were making choices and were either progressing with their objectives in life, or were heading somewhere else.

My life experiences were not the same as all the other motorists around me. However, just as we were bound by the truths that govern the Chicago freeway, my experiences have taught me that there are basic fundamental facts or truths that apply to many aspects of life, including business. I have access to the same fundamental truths in life as you and everyone else.

It is true that we have all developed specific talents and gifts, but one thing that possibly makes me different than some people in business, is that I now take the fundamental truths of business a lot more seriously than I did before. At times that realization came through learning hard lessons that jolted me enough to see that I was dealing with truths that were basic, proven, and already defined, and fighting them was a waste of time.

I then made it my job to learn them and apply them to what I am doing. Not only does it help me to be successful, but I also get the benefit of knowing *why* I was successful, which makes all the difference. When I know why something works, I can then repeat what worked over and over again.

I have been fortunate to have success in business. My experiences have given me opportunity beyond what I could have imagined. And while I see these opportunities coming at me at a fast pace, I haven't always taken stock in what has happened.

I was in attendance at a seminar that a friend of mine was conducting on real estate investing. He talked about how the principles he learned in one investing methodology helped him become a millionaire in five different industries. I thought, "Wow! That's impressive!" Then it occurred to me that I had done the same thing! However, this did not strike me in an egotistical way. What struck me was that, independently, we both took the basic fundamental truths in business as we knew them and applied them to different business ventures and had great success. We didn't invent them. We learned them. They already existed. We just had to put forth the effort to find them and apply them.

Let me say right up front that I am in no way making a claim that I know all the truths of business or in life, nor am I trying to create a comprehensive list of them. What I am hoping to accomplish is to illustrate how I learned some of these truths, through the experiences I've had, with the hope that you can benefit from them as well.

It is remarkable to me how many times I ended up learning the hard way in order to rediscover the basics. Most of what I learned boiled down to fundamental truths that we have all either never heard before, or instinctively believed to be right, or that we have known and forgotten altogether. In any case, these truths are “out there” to be discovered.

In order for me to live the way I’d like to, I know from experience there are fundamental facts, or “truths” that govern certain things. The truth behind my desire to play sports at a high level throughout my life is that I need to keep in shape and stay involved in those sports. I enjoy playing the guitar a lot, and try to do so at a high level. I want to continue playing at a high level and I know that the fundamental truth behind this interest is that I must practice on a regular basis, and so on.

Another thing I have learned is that the “truths” that I am referring to can be tough to accept. The importance of me being honest with myself, and you being honest with yourself, is a running theme throughout this book.

Another key truth I learned early on is that there are usually no shortcuts to what you desire. I think it is our human nature to search for shortcuts and find ways to avoid things that are difficult. But there aren’t that many successful shortcuts in life. At least not when the destination is meaningful, and I think that is a good thing.

Reaching meaningful goals and doing the things I enjoy in life have always required taking action. From what I have seen, I believe that this principle is true for everyone.

Whether you are actively seeking to learn those truths or not, when you are obeying the laws behind them, you are benefiting from them. When you are ignorant of them or ignore them, there are natural consequences. For example, you may not know anything about the laws of gravity, but if you jump off a high place, your body will obey the truths that determine how gravity operates, which includes the experience of falling—a natural consequence.

The same principle applies to business and personal success.

In business theory, hot new fads typically are the opposite of the fundamentals. They are like potato chips or those delicious chocolate chip cookies that mom used to make. At first, you can't get enough of them. They are so good and tasty, but a steady diet of them is a really bad idea. And after a while, you find that the hot new thing in business is simply a mutation of the fundamental truths that govern business success, and they will fall short. As often as I have had to learn these truths of success, I have learned that sooner or later, we all end up coming back to the basics.

Hopefully, as you read through the chapters and the lessons, they will reveal to you a new way of recognizing the beauty of classic truths, many of which have been around for ages, so you can see them for what they are, and use them to your advantage.

Many of the lessons you will read about were expensive ones to learn, and some could have been completely avoided had I just learned what the basic truths were that related to

the matter. I would have saved myself a whole lot of money, time, and energy. Realize, at the same time, that just like my experience as a 6-year-old bike rider, I can still look back and appreciate even the tough times. These are often the times when I have learned the most.

If, after you have read the book you can say that you were motivated to do better, to climb higher, and to serve others along the way, then I would count this book a success.

Life is yours for the taking, and remember this one thing: You **DO** have control over its outcome.

Now go get it!

– Mark