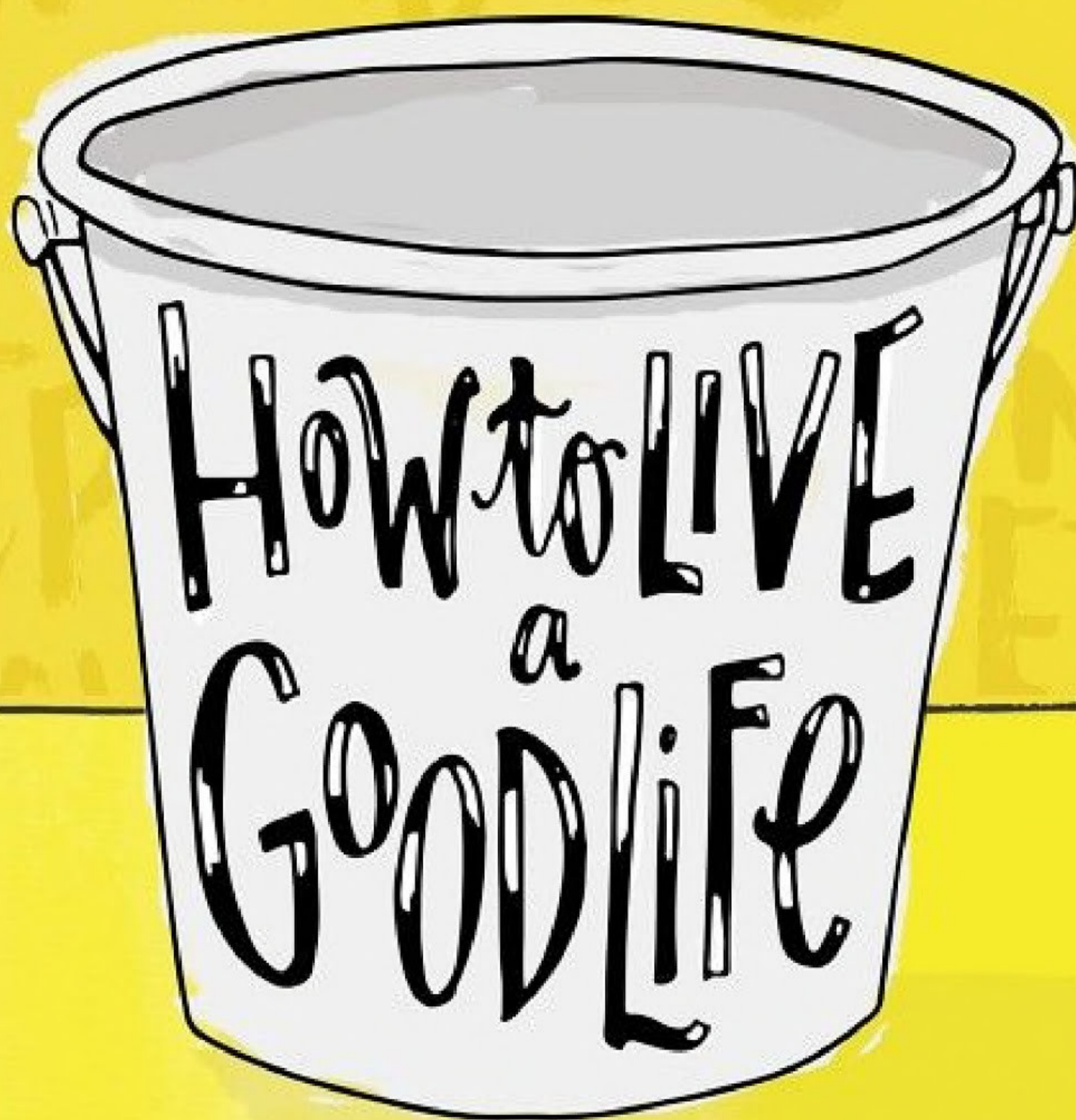


"We yearn for lives with more energy, enthusiasm, and connection—but where to start? The brilliant Jonathan Fields shows us in this thought-provoking and action-provoking guide."

—Gretchen Rubin, *New York Times* best-selling author  
of *The Happiness Project* and *Better Than Before*



SOULFUL STORIES, SURPRISING SCIENCE,  
AND PRACTICAL WISDOM

—  
JONATHAN FIELDS

# CONTENTS

[Introduction](#)

[Who Is This Book For?](#)

[Who Am I to Write \*This\* Book, and How Is It Different?](#)

[Where Do the Ideas I'm about to Share Come From?](#)

[Let's Get Your Good Life Going!](#)

---

[\*\*The Good Life Buckets™\*\*](#)

[Your Vitality Bucket](#)

[Your Connection Bucket](#)

[Your Contribution Bucket](#)

[The Three Laws of the Buckets](#)

[\*\*How to Fill Your Good Life Buckets\*\*](#)

[Take Your 60-Second Snapshot](#)

[Draft Your Good Life Project® Team](#)

[Join Our Virtual Family](#)

[Two Paths: Deep Dive or 30-Day Challenge](#)

[Let's Make It Happen](#)

## **Vitality Bucket**

Wake Up

Make Exercise More Fun Than Sex

Snooze to Live

Take a Green Day

Get Your Gratitude On

Dance Like Nobody's Watching (Because They're Not)

Own the Unknown

Take a Forest Bath

Unfix Your Mind

Take the Slow Lane

## **Connection Bucket**

Discover Your Social Set Point

Find Your People

Cultivate Compassion

Look Up!

The 60-Minute Love Bomb

Find Your Four Loves

What's Your Love Language?

Dial In to Source

Vanquish the Vampires

Uncage Your Conversation

## **Contribution Bucket**

Spark Yourself

Know What Matters

[Tap Your Strengths](#)

[Find Your Killer App](#)

[Get Out of Your Head](#)

[WOOP It Up](#)

[Give to Glow](#)

[Practice the Loving No](#)

[Love the Job You're With](#)

Think Ripple, Not Wave

## [Bringing It Home](#)

### [Endnotes](#)

*A Personal Invitation from Jonathan*

*Acknowledgments*

[About the Author](#)

# Introduction

---

I'm the son of a hippie-potter mom and a mad-professor dad. I came of age in the '70s and '80s. Growing up, Duran Duran, ripped jeans, big hair, and Frisbee were my religion. Yes, for those who've glanced at the headshot of me on the inside cover, there was a time I had hair. Same cut as Juan Epstein from *Welcome Back, Kotter*, and it was #GLORIOUS! I just missed the '60s free-love thing, but there was still a lot of love in our house.

Under the surface, though, as I'd come to learn, things weren't as I thought. My parents' marriage was coming apart. Over the years, my mom had become less hippie and my dad more academic. They wanted different things; they'd become different people. My mom had always been fiercely creative, possessed by the urge to make stuff. That's something I inherited from her. Clay was her playground. She'd vanish for

days into the basement studio, absorbed in the process of throwing slabs into works of art. As my parents drifted apart, though, life got increasingly complicated. Pulled in many directions, my mom spent less and less time lost in the embrace of her basement pottery studio, largely abandoning the consuming devotion to craft that had been her source of solace, inspiration, identity, salvation, and even income for so many years. In my junior year of high school, my sister split for college. Shortly afterward, my dad moved out, leaving my mom and me alone together in a big old house.

My folks had kept most of the emotional fallout of their separation from us, at least in the early days. Now, Mom and I had to figure out a new dance. She kept up the facade of strength for a while. Then, one day, it all came tumbling down.

I came home to find her sitting on the edge of an old mattress flopped on the floor in the middle of her bedroom—hers alone. Her head lay buried in her knees. Her arms clung to her shins. She was crying. I'd seen her angry plenty of times, especially in the years leading up to the divorce. But I'd never seen her sitting quietly, lights off, weeping.

I didn't know what to do. For the moment, I was being called into the role of caregiver. It was my turn to kiss the boo-boo. But, this wound was soul deep. So I did the only thing I knew. I sat next to her and gently wrapped my arm across her back. "What's wrong?" I asked. In a somber silence that seemed to linger interminably, the unease of reversing roles washed through me. I almost hoped she wouldn't

answer. Then I wouldn't need to figure out how to respond. My standard fallback to 17-year-old sarcasm wouldn't close this gap.

"I lost it," she whispered. "I went downstairs to the studio today. I sat at the wheel, grabbed some clay, and tried to throw. I kept trying. But I couldn't do it. It's gone." On the surface, the "it" she was talking about was her near-mystical mastery over clay. Just below that, it was the entirety of her being. Her identity as a maker, an artist, a powerful woman, and a creator. Her ability to reconnect with joy, to play, to get lost in a process, to achieve and be recognized, to put money in the bank and food on the table. The "it" that had left her was the very essence of who she believed herself to be. Somehow, at 17, I got that.

I wanted to cry along with her. Instead, I spoke. I'd trained as a gymnast for years, so this metaphor tumbled clumsily out. "You haven't lost it, Mom; you're just rusty. It's like me and gymnastics. You know how I get into great shape for competition during the season, but then during the off-season I kind of fall apart. And when I come back to training camp the week before we start, I'm pretty terrible. It takes me a few weeks to get everything back. But it always comes back. Once it's in you, it's in you. You've been away from it for a while. You haven't lost anything. You're just rusty. It'll take a little time to get it back, but you will."

As she listened, the crying began to ease. Her breathing relaxed and she looked up. "Yeah," she said, "that makes sense." A spark of hope emerged, along with a gentle smile,

and she gave me a hug. Later that evening, I heard the clank of the basement door as she made her way back into the studio.

I've often wondered why this moment has stayed with me. It would be years before I realized what had actually happened. What had been revealed to me. And it would be many more years until I gave myself permission to own the possibility that somewhere within me lay the ember of a rough-edged ability to affect others. Both the desire and the potential to create moments, experiences, and things that might inspire a change in state and belief. To incite possibility.

This potential to make a difference is, truth told, something I still grapple with. Owning it feels a little too trippy for my rational brain and a little too forward facing and arrogant for my more introverted, maker self. When my last book was named the number one personal development book of the year by 800-CEO-READ, I was publicly grateful, but privately I recoiled at the label and what I believed it implied, both about me and about the work I was doing in the world. I'm not that guy, I offered quietly to friends. I'm about business, entrepreneurship, language, and creativity. Yet everywhere I've turned there have been signs. You are all those, those same friends would reply, but underneath it all, you're about something bigger: creating vehicles and pathways and moments that allow people to embrace their potential. To connect. To reveal. To see and engage with possibility.



I've come to learn that not owning this part of me out of fear of some kind of external judgment or label—well, that causes its own pain. It keeps me from doing what I'm here to do. Having refused the call for so long (I'm slow; what can I say?), I finally realized it was time to step into it.

That gradual awakening has fueled years of seeking and study and fierce engagement with life. It eventually brought me back to my seat not just as a student, but also as a maker, a mentor, a writer, and a teacher. It's the reason this book exists.

## Who Is This Book For?

I wrote this book with one person in mind but soon discovered she was, in fact, the face, the heart, the soul, and the stifled yearning of millions. From the outside looking in, she had so many reasons to be grateful. A confident woman in her middle years, she was building a career, had plenty of friends and shared interests, and put on a great show of health. She knew she was, in so many ways, blessed. But that did little to quell the undercurrent of yearning and her growing sense of stifled potential. Her deeper reality, like that of so many of us, told a different story.

She had given up so much in the name of being an adult and partner; a source of unflagging, always-on strength and wisdom, kindness and understanding, security and surrender. Everything to everyone at all times, except herself.

What had happened to those deep interests and passions,

the burning questions, delicious topics, joyful activities, and moments of transcendent awe that had been at the center of her younger life? They had long been relegated to the land of lost socks and someday. Being lit up ceded the way to being grown-up.

Nobody else saw that she was increasingly uncomfortable in her own skin, but she knew. Standing before her mirror revealed more than clothes could ever hide. It wasn't just about the way she looked; it was about the way she felt. Her health and vitality, her sexual and sensual core, had gone the way of her exercise and former identity. Her friends, numerous as they were, drifted somewhere "out there," wrapped in their own versions of sweet oblivion. Sure, there was the occasional "Let's do lunch" text, but without fail, it would linger unanswered in the digital ether. She had her "people," but having them and being with them were two different things. She was never truly alone but often lonely.

She met each day overwhelmed with a sense of pervasive busyness, and fractured attention. It was as if a swarm of "interested parties" were in control and her job, from the moment she opened her eyes to the moment she lay down to sleep, was not to choose with intention but to mindlessly react to an ever-expanding list of other people's agendas. Punch lists replaced purpose and possibility. Awakening one morning, she thought, *Welcome to my autopilot life.*

Maybe most upsetting was that pervasive sense of untapped potential, as if the "real" her was screaming to get out, to reclaim that lit-up self she used to be or silently

yearned to become. She'd give anything to close the gap between the life she knew she was capable of living and the one that met her every morning. And she was gut-tired of answering "busy" and "fine" and "surviving" whenever someone asked, "How are you?" She was desperate to be in a place where she would look up when asked and, with a radiant smile, reply, "So damn good!"

She had flatlined on nearly every level. It was as if she were living that classic lyric from Pink Floyd: she'd become "comfortably numb." For years, she didn't want to own it. Despite her slow descent into what Teddy Roosevelt famously described as "the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat," there was extraordinary good in her life. She knew this. With so much "real" suffering in the world, she had just written off her state of disillusionment, disconnection, and malaise as a "first-world problem" because it was more about elevation than survival. And who was she to complain? Who was she to want more? Framing it this way not only made her feel greedy for wanting more, but gave her a seemingly rational justification for inaction. But there was something else. If she stood in her deeper truth, if she really owned it, she'd also have to own both her role in arriving at that place and her responsibility to do what was necessary to create a different future. And that terrified her, because she had no idea how to bridge the gap between where she was and where she so desperately wanted to be.

Until she finally hit her breaking point.

I wrote this book for her—but then, I'm guessing if you've

read this far, there's a good chance she is you. Even if you're a guy. Even if you're just graduating from college. Even if you're starting over a bit further into life. We've all felt what she felt at different moments along the road. We've all been in that place of "fine" and "busy," disconnected from the people, places, and activities that allow us to walk through each day utterly alive. Disconnected from our best selves. We've all felt like a piece of us was dying a little bit every day and we just didn't know how to flip the switch, how to turn our lives back on. And we've all spun the conversation in our heads that justified inaction and complacency. The one that kept us cocooned, safe from the unknown, but also estranged from the possible.

Sadly, we are not alone. In a world where awareness and intention long ago lost the battle to mindless surrender, we're not even the exception. For years, if not decades, we've been living with an undiagnosed condition: Reactive Life Syndrome. Living each day not by choice, but by default. Doing what we can simply to keep up and tread water. It's not about getting ahead, but rather about desperately trying not to fall too far behind. And in the end, it's a losing proposition. The great news is that it's not too late. There is an antidote.

If you're nodding and saying, "That's me. This is what I need. I am ready," then this book will serve as your guide. The community you'll discover around the ideas in the book will help ensure that, maybe for the first time in your life, you'll move from existing to living, and from knowing what to do to actually doing it.

But then, I'm guessing you've heard that line before. And you're wondering, "Really? How is this going to give me back my life? What makes it so different? And who are you to tell me what to do?"

With your permission, I'll start with that last question.

## Who Am I to Write *This* Book, and How Is It Different?

My finger hovered over the send button. "Who am I," I wondered, "to propose a book entitled *How to Live a Good Life*?" The arrogance! A middle-aged, married dad from the Upper West Side of Manhattan pontificating on the single most vexing question in all of human history. What do I have to say about how to live a good life that hasn't been said or shared a million times before? Funny enough, a large part of my work is helping people and companies who've lost their sense of identity, voice, and meaning answer this very question. *Who am I to have something to say?* As I sat with the question, the words of iconic dancer and choreographer Martha Graham, offered in Agnes de Mille's biography *Martha: The Life and Work of Martha Graham*,<sup>1</sup> settled over me:

There is vitality, a life force, energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all of time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and it will be lost. The world will not have it. It

is not your business to determine how good it is nor how valuable nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly, to keep the channel open. You do not even have to believe in yourself or your work. You have to keep yourself open and aware to the urges that motivate you. Keep the channel open. . . .

Adding value to another's life is not about being a guru, a sage, or a wizard. It's not about placing yourself above others, preaching down, or telling anyone to "sit and listen while I save you from the world and yourself." When I look at the astonishing body of wisdom around the pursuit of a good life, from the Stoics to the Buddha, from faith to science and metaphysics to mythology, it's clear to me that there is little, if anything, that's not been studied or said before. There are precious few new ideas. Yet, in the face of this gob-smackingly huge collection of wisdom, much of humanity stumbles along, eternally yearning for a life it knows is possible, but having no idea how to find or create it.

The problem isn't that we don't have the answers. We've had them for thousands of years. It's that the things that work are either engulfed in a vast sea of noise or offered in a way that doesn't land. They're too hard to find and validate, too complicated, too theoretical, too mired in dogma, that war with the reality of our lives.

I'm not here to claim ownership of something profound and new, but rather to help you separate the wheat from the chaff. To identify the big levers, the things that work. And

then to share them in a way that preserves their potential but also goes down easy. A way that inspires not just understanding, but action and integration, without the need for blind faith, godlike willpower, or total disruption.

My role has been to live fiercely and study deeply. To walk through each day an eternal student. To wade into Joseph Campbell's disquieting abyss in search of our treasure. Hopefully the way I share my unique understanding and experience will somehow connect with the way you need to hear or see or feel something at this moment. Maybe some small piece will awaken a part of your story in a manner that helps you breathe a little easier, love a little more openly, or live a little more fully. That is my intention in writing this book.

But what about you? All I ask is this: Stay open. Hold on a little less tightly to the safety of a consistent yet failed past and to the perceived sanctity of truths that may or may not have served you and the way you dream of being in the world. As Mark Twain famously offered, "It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so."

## Where Do the Ideas I'm about to Share Come From?

In the next chapter, I'll offer a simple model that you can use to guide nearly every decision in life, something I call the Good Life Buckets. Where does it come from? In part, from

decades of study. Some at the feet of extraordinary thinkers and teachers, from Buddhist lamas to education reformers and grounded-theory researchers to neuroscientists. Other learning comes from thousands of hours and decades of quiet study and contemplation, devouring everything from Thomas Merton to the *Bhagavad Gita* to reams of academic studies and research reports.

Then there's the wisdom that can come only from some 50 years of life. Lessons learned through more than two decades building communities and companies, failing repeatedly and finding the will to step back into the arena until I got it right. Years teaching everything from yoga to entrepreneurship to thousands of students from around the world, speaking on stages large and small, working with everyone from soccer moms to CEOs and movie stars to moguls, leading retreats, writing books, and lecturing at universities. But without question, my deepest, most humbling growth has come from being a dad and a husband, and from my daily practice, one that cultivates a deepening stillness and continues to awaken me to the life-affirming truth of my own impermanence and the urgency that comes from accepting that on a day unknown to me, I and all those I love will be gone. Each of these experiences has shaped what Martha Graham would call my "unique" expression of life. My quickening. My channel. And they've all found an outlet in the venture that now commands a good part of my vocation, Good Life Project®.

In January 2012, I began to write what had normally been



an annual essay that inventoried and reflected on the year behind and set intentions for the year to come. That document rapidly grew into a 34-page Warren Buffet-style annual report that I published and shared on my blog. On the final two pages, entitled “2012 Reimagined,” I shared a story, and an invitation:

“What inspires you?”

That’s what an audience member asked during my keynote at a conference last summer.

Little did she know, I had something hidden . . . something the audience couldn’t see . . . a little piece of paper resting on the monitor next to my notes . . .

It was there to remind me what really mattered. I could crash and burn on stage, but this piece of paper would make it all okay.

It was a heart. Drawn for me by my 10-year old daughter before I left. No matter how my keynote went, she’d still be there to place her hands on my cheeks when I walked in the door and share a few butterfly kisses and a hug that said, “You’re everything I need.”

I held up the heart in response to the question and said, “This. My daughter,” then explained what it was. Standing there, with the piece of paper raised high in the air before 500 people, I nearly burst into tears. So did many in the audience.

That piece of paper with the hastily drawn heart comes with me when I travel. If I’m on stage, it’s there with me. But

there was more. An invitation bundled with an announcement. Ten ideas, a different approach to building not just a living, but a life. And a new venture, one that would take my (until then) very personal exploration of life well lived and turn it far more public than I'd ever planned.

*What if I shared my quest*, I thought. Sitting down with teachers, known and unknown, filming and recording the conversations, then not only learning but offering these people and ideas up to the world. What if I made it my full-time pursuit to find, learn from, and share people with pieces of the puzzle? People like the ephemerally wise and wickedly funny Brené Brown. People like polio survivor and education revolutionary Sir Ken Robinson. People like Shambhala Buddhist lama Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, a fiftysomething Tibetan lama whose name literally translates to “Earth Protector.” People like iconic graphic designer Milton Glaser, who, when I sat down with him at the age of 85 remained stunningly prolific, deeply committed, creating, teaching, and playing with his wife of some 60 years. People like acclaimed illustrator Lisa Congdon, who stumbled into art in her 30s and made it her life. Or famed behavioral economist and psychologist Dan Ariely, whose fascination with human nature and subsequent vocation were triggered by a three-year stint as a patient in an Israeli burn ward at the age of 18. What if I could travel the world, visit with these beacons of life-earned wisdom and light, learn at their feet, integrate what I learned with my own experience of life, my own unique view, voice, and channel, and then share it all with the

world?

With that, Good Life Project<sup>®</sup> was born. And without intention, the very early seeds of this book were planted. Now years into this quest, those seeds of an idea that began as a deep yearning to learn and share have grown into a media and education venture with a global community, an acclaimed web series and podcast with hundreds of thousands of listeners and viewers in more than 150 countries. We've also grown a catalog of courses, gatherings, events, and even an annual celebration, Camp GLP, where "GLeePers" from all over the world converge on a summer camp for three and a half days of pure magic.

Along the way, the incredible access to extraordinary minds and gorgeous souls began to cross-pollinate with my own experiences, and something profound began to emerge, a simple model I began to call the Good Life Buckets. This easy-to-digest framework offers a way to look at the life you're living, quickly and easily assess what's working and what's not, and instantly know where to focus your energy to make things better; then it tells you what to do. I began to share the Good Life Buckets with increasingly large groups and within our courses and gatherings. The response took my breath away.

Mel Charbonneau, a married mother of two young kids and cofounder of the emerging women's movement Fellow Flowers, was one of the first to learn about the buckets. In the middle of one of our intensive seven-month training programs, she shared some great news. She was pregnant

with her third child. And, much to my surprise, the Good Life Buckets played a major role in both her decision to have another child and how she would completely reconfigure her life to continue to flourish as a mom and an entrepreneur and live a great life. In her words:

Having another child was a big deal. I'm in major start-up mode with my business, giving it a ton of my time, creativity, and energy. And I already have two little girls, ages 7 and 4, who get all my love and attention when I'm not in biz mode. My husband and I had just figured out our groove with family and business when I realized something big—I really wanted to have another baby. How do you have that conversation?

How do you discuss those big pieces of your life that will have to once again get reacclimatized? Enter the buckets. When I returned home from Costa Rica, it was like I had a whole new dialogue to share with my husband, which helped guide our decision and reaffirm what was most important to us. It gave us context for questions and conversation. . . . It actually became really good motivation to pause, prioritize, and let go of a few things. For our marriage, it brought us closer because connection (family relationships) is the MOST important part of our life, and now our goal is to make a contribution and vitality support plan and nurture that, leaving room for the fun, chaos, and adventures of life.

Charbonneau is just one of so many examples. As more

people learned about the Good Life Buckets, I noticed something wonderful. They began speaking in “the language” of the buckets—“I’m feeling like this one bucket needs filling today”—and using it to guide their decisions, big and small. The outcomes were better than I ever imagined, and with its application in the real world, I’ve been able to refine the model. This book is your window into this seemingly simple yet transformational tool, explaining how you can tap the buckets to guide your decisions and actions in the quest to live a great life.

## Let’s Get Your Good Life Going!

It’s time to set in motion your personal Good Life Project. To discover a new way to get from where you are now to where you know in your bones you’re capable of being.

Before we dive in, one last thought: This book is your road map. The approach, ideas, and many invitations to act, to play, to connect, and to embody what you’re learning on a daily basis will serve as a hybrid good-life manifesto and a practical yet powerful guide. One that allows you to ease into a process of awakening and becoming in a way that feels right to you.

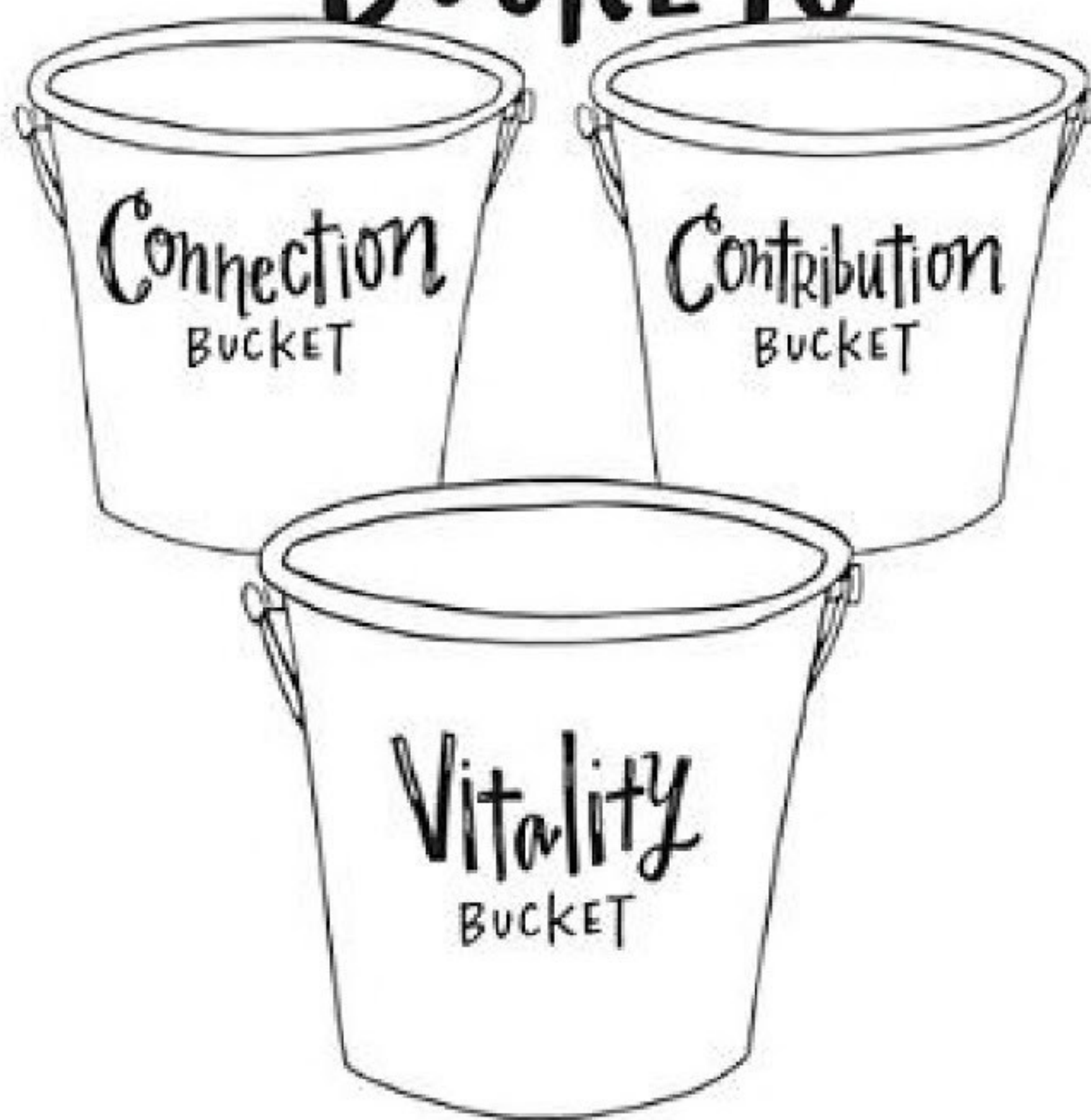
At the same time, the real magic happens when you put down the book and start doing the work. So I’ve created a set of additional resources not only to ensure you stay supported, feel inspired, and are held while you’re “doing” the book, but also to help you carry the learning and doing into the rest of

your life.

Throughout the book, you'll see references to a web page called [goodlifeproject.com/bookinsider](http://goodlifeproject.com/bookinsider). Here, I'll share a wide range of free resources, links, downloadable files, worksheets, guided audio, and more, all in one place. You'll also find an invitation to join our beautiful, supportive, and private Good Life Project online community, crafted around an ethos of generosity, compassion, nonjudgment, and elevation. There you'll find a place to share your experiences, ask questions, find accountability partners and support, and more. Oh, and don't be surprised if you also end up making a bunch of friends along the way. Our "GLeePer" family has been known to be a pretty friendly lot!

Onward then—to the buckets we go!

# the Good Life BUCKETS







Think of your life as three buckets.

The first bucket is called Vitality, and it's about the state of your mind and body. The second is Connection; this one is about relationships. The third, Contribution, is about how you contribute to the world.

The fuller your buckets, the better your life. When all simultaneously bubble over, life soars. That's what we're aiming for. But the flip side is also true. If any single bucket runs dry, you feel pain. If two go empty, a world of hurt awaits. If all three bottom out, you don't have a life. Figuratively and, in short order, literally.

There are likely hundreds if not thousands of ways to fill your Good Life Buckets. But, as promised, this simple framework and book are about making your life easier. For all three buckets, we'll keep our focus on a very small number of what I call bucket-filling "big levers." These are the little things that will fill your buckets most powerfully. In the chapters that follow, you'll discover 10 ways to fill each bucket.

Before we get there, let's go a bit deeper into each bucket. Then we'll take a quick snapshot that will tell you how full each of *your* buckets is right now (don't worry, no judgments). After that, you'll learn the three "laws of the buckets." That'll give you everything you need to start your own Good Life Project and dive into the chapters that follow.

Let's start with your Vitality Bucket.

## Your Vitality Bucket

*“None of the other stuff is going to work if the animal that you live in is just a broke-down mess.” — Elizabeth Gilbert*

If you don't have your health, we've all heard, you don't have anything. You can't buy your way out of a tumor. Or depression. Or illness. Or pain. You can't feel alive, happy, and joyful when your body is abandoning you. And you can't drink in all that life has to offer when your body is limited in its capabilities. Not only that, but a vital body is the vessel for that three-pound bundle of consciousness called your brain, the thing that processes whether you're living a good life or not. The thing that feels and chooses, that controls your organs, systems, and movements. There is a powerful feedback loop between your mind and body.

What exactly is vitality, then? For our purposes, vitality is an optimal state of body and mind. When you think about the state of your body and mindset, you want to feel:

- Energized
- Fit, strong, and flexible enough to participate in life
- As free from pain, disease, and disability as possible
- Aware of and capable of being in the moment
- Optimistic about the future and what it holds
- Peaceful and calm, able to dissipate stress

- Able to bounce back from adversity
- Immersed in a process of growth
- Grateful for what's right in life
- Fueled by a sense of meaning
- Happy

Notice that vitality isn't just about our bodies. It's about our minds. Why is that? Because, in truth, there is no distinction. Your mind and body serve as seamless feedback mechanisms, chemically and electrically. They are so hopelessly intertwined that it's silly to speak of them as separate. The state of your body—its health, strength, disease, ability, or disability —has a profound effect on your mind. If your body is in pain, so is your brain. We get that. Less intuitive, though, is that if your mind is in pain, so is your body. Depression, anxiety, sadness, stress, and heartbreak all create real, measurable physical symptoms in our bodies, ranging from pain to inflammation and disease. By the same token, joy, love, belonging, meaning, peace, and ease create a cascade of positive effects that we feel equally. When we head into the daily explorations to fill your Vitality Bucket, we'll explore things that elevate both mind and body.

Okay, let's head on over to your Connection Bucket.

## Your Connection Bucket

*“There is nothing I would not do for those who are really my friends. I have no notion of loving people by halves, it is not my nature.” — Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey*

Our Connection Bucket is about nourishing relationships. It's about intimate partners, family, close friends, colleagues, coconspirators, and like-minded community. It's about love and lust, passion and compassion, resonance and belonging. It's also about how well we know and relate to ourselves. And for some, it's also about our relationship with the experience of something greater than ourselves, whether we define that as God, source, spirit, consciousness, nature, the divine, field, or anything else.

We are innately social beasts, born to be with others. When we're with the right others, in the right way, magic happens. We come alive and our world, our capacity to flourish and grow and engage with life and joy, expands. When we're with the wrong people, in the wrong way, or isolated from the right people, everything shrinks. Our ability to drink in all life has to offer crumbles. When we're completely alone, isolated from humanity, we first lose our minds, then wither and die. Yes, even the rare professed diehard mega-introverts among us.

In order to fill our Connection Buckets, we need to find and be with “our people.” Those we can love and those who'll love us back. Those we can befriend and play and laugh with. Those who will serve as a source of acceptance, allegiance, and belonging. In other words, those who just plain get us.

When we think about the relationships in our lives, we

want to feel like:

- We give love and receive love, without condition
- We belong—we're seen, understood, and embraced by friends with shared values, interests, and aspirations (and sometimes culture)
- We are connected to something bigger than ourselves, be it natural or ethereal

How do you cultivate these connections and relationships and the luscious, bucket-filling feelings that ride along with them? You'll discover 10 powerful ways in our Connection Bucket daily explorations.

That brings us to the final bucket.

## Your Contribution Bucket

*“Imagine immensities. Pick yourself up from rejection and plow ahead. Don't compromise. Start now. Start now, every single day.” — Debbie Millman*

Your Contribution Bucket is about how you bring your gifts to the world. It's the answer to the poet Mary Oliver's gorgeous question, “Tell, me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”

It's about contributing to the world, even if that world is a single person, in a way that is meaningful, in a way that

matters and allows you to feel like you matter. It's about that deep knowing that you're doing the thing you're here to do. There's a sense of calling that's pulling you from ahead, rather than pushing you from behind. It's about being lit up along the way, absorbed in that semi-trance state beyond emotion, where time ceases to exist and you feel like you're channeling pure consciousness. It's about feeling like you're accessing your full potential, your strengths, your gifts, the deepest parts of your humanity, leaving nothing unrealized or untapped. You are fully expressed, seen, and heard.

To fill our Contribution Buckets, we need to cultivate these feelings. How? As with our Vitality and Connection Buckets, the universe of possible contributors is large. We'll focus on 10 big filling levers for our Contribution Buckets in the daily explorations that follow.

That brings us to the Three Laws of the Buckets.

## The Three Laws of the Buckets

### **Bucket Law #1: The buckets leak.**

In the early days, our buckets are new and shiny. No dents or cracks, no rust or tarnish. But over time they get a bit dinged, the paint wears thin, and the seams that held together so tightly begin to separate just a bit. Then they begin to leak. Not a ton, but enough so that we can't just fill them once and know they'll stay topped off for life. Left alone, our buckets eventually run dry. And so does life. Our

job, then, is to keep circling around, filling them as needed, and never ignoring any one long enough for it to run dry.

## **Bucket Law #2: Your emptiest bucket will drag the others down with it.**

Intuitively we know this. Let our Vitality Buckets run dry and it'll be impossible to contribute anywhere near the level of our true potential or sustain relationships in a way that fills our Connection Buckets effectively. Let our Connection Buckets run dry and it becomes brutally hard to muster the energy needed to do the things that fill our Vitality and Contribution Buckets. Let our Contribution Buckets run dry, spending all our energies on things that devour our time but empty our souls, and we'll have trouble finding the reserves needed to cultivate rewarding relationships and a vital mind and body. All the buckets are connected. We cannot fill any one to its full capacity unless the others fill along with it. Put another way, we can abandon one in the name of filling the others for only so long, before we need to circle back and do all our buckets right.

## **Bucket Law #3: The buckets never lie.**

We often bring a certain amount of well-intended delusion to the assessment of how full or empty our buckets are. We like to think they're fuller and easier to fill than they are. Think what you want, but the buckets don't lie. If you let one run dry, all the delusion and excuse in the world won't help.

Empty is empty. You can't think it full. Be optimistic about the future but honest about the present.

Now we have a new tool to guide our decisions and actions. And we've learned a simple set of rules to help get us on our way. It's great new information. But as author and visionary thinker Derek Sivers offers, "If information was the answer, then we'd all be billionaires with perfect abs." Knowledge is meaningless without action. It's time to move from knowing to doing, to start filling our Good Life Buckets!





How to  
FILL your  
GOOD LIFE  
BUCKETS



The Good Life Buckets offer a simple framework that is easy to understand. It's intuitive, straightforward, and readily remembered. You may even find yourself, at any given moment, asking, "Which bucket needs filling right now?" That's awesome. This simple question gives you so much power. It tells you immediately where to focus your energy to build your best moment, your best day, and, over time, your best life.

That said, I want to make it as easy as possible to not only learn but take action on what you're learning and get started right away. The rest of this chapter will set you up to do just that. Here are the steps:

- Take your 60-second snapshot
- Draft your team
- Join our virtual family
- Choose your path
- Rock it out!

Let's start with your snapshot.

## Take Your 60-Second Snapshot

Your 60-second snapshot tells you how full or empty each of your buckets is right now. It gives you a starting point that helps you decide which bucket to start filling first, and it provides a reference point for comparing future snapshots

and tracking progress over time. To complete your 60-second snapshot, answer these three questions:

- *For your Vitality Bucket, “At this moment in time, how satisfied am I with my current level of physical ability, energy, appearance, and well-being, my ability to weather adversity, and my capacity to feel calm, aware, present, in charge, optimistic, and joyful?”*
- *For your Connection Bucket, “At this moment in time, how satisfied am I with the depth and quality of my loving relationships, friendships, and sense of genuine belonging?”*
- *For your Contribution Bucket, “At this moment in time, how satisfied am I with the level of meaning that I feel from the way I’m bringing my gifts to the world?”*

For each of these questions, assign a number from 0 to 10, 0 being terribly unsatisfied and 10 being the most satisfied possible. Then write down your answer to this question: “What is making this the number I chose?” For example, what is making my level of energy or my love or sense of meaning a two?” Finally, ask yourself what a 10 would look and feel like, then write that down.

To make this easier to complete and to enable you to take new snapshots over time, so you can both track your progress and reassess where to focus your bucket-filling energies, I’ve

created a free, downloadable 60-Second Snapshot Worksheet for you. Or, if you want to create the most powerful snapshot possible, check out the free Snapshot360™ online quiz. It'll walk you through a series of detailed questions that will give a far more thorough snapshot than can be created with the 60-second overview. The 60-second worksheet and online quiz are available at [goodlifeproject.com/bookinsider](http://goodlifeproject.com/bookinsider).

Remember, the snapshot is just a freeze-frame. It is not a judgment about where we've been or how we got here. Our job, now, is not to judge what brought us to this place, but to own where we are and use this new set of tools to make different decisions, take different actions, and plot a course to the best life we're capable of living.

## Draft Your Good Life Project Team

*“If you want to go fast, travel alone. If you want to go far, travel together.” — African proverb*

If we go it alone, our chances of sticking with almost anything are pretty awful. This is especially true of things we may not perceive as enjoyable or things that require a certain amount of skill before they become fun. These things often require a solid chunk of willpower, especially in the early days.

What may be more surprising, though, is that this also applies to things we love to do. Think about it. You take a yoga class or an art class and love it. You want to do more, so

you start to do it three times a week. Then life happens. You have to travel, or maybe you get a cold, you have a big, crazy deadline, or your demanding relatives hit town and want to play with you all day, every day. Your routine goes out the window, and despite how much you were loving it, you struggle to get back into it. The longer it takes, the more shame you feel and the more you fear that first day back. Eventually you just pretend the whole thing never happened. Must've been a dream.

This is one of the reasons so many of us, well intended and with good information, still fail at doing things we not only hold dear but really enjoy. There is no magic to awesome outcomes. Whether we're looking to build a great career, a great relationship, great health, or a great life, it's all about consistent action over time. It's about coming back after things blow up, over and over and over. Because they will, and we'll need a way to reclaim our daily routine. Books are great for learning, but they're terrible for action, accountability, and celebration. We can't hug a page or get a check-in from a footnote.

The single most powerful driver of action and success is social support. Put another way, we need people to keep us accountable to even the most enjoyable actions in life. And not just any people; we want people who are along for the ride, on the same great adventure as us. People who get what we're doing because they're doing it, too. Together we provide love, support, accountability, celebration, insight, and belonging.

Take a few minutes and think about who else might want to join you in this adventure. Who else could really use a good life intervention right now? Who would you love to play with as you co-create your big, beautiful lives? See if you can think of at least two others, then reach out to them and tell them what you're about to do. Invite them to be on your own Team Good Life and offer to be on theirs.

If only one person comes to mind, start with that person. One is better than none. But see if you can line up at least two. Why? Because at any given time, one of your people may be unavailable. Having three (five at most) on your Team Good Life makes it much more likely that at least two of you will be there to keep your personal Good Life Project on track. If you can find those potential teammates where you are, fantastic. If not, as I said earlier, we've created a global virtual community to help you out.

## Join Our Virtual Family

If it's easy to find people to be on your Team Good Life in your community, that's great. I'd also love to invite you to become a member of our private Good Life Project online community at [GoodLifeProject.com/community](http://GoodLifeProject.com/community). There, you'll discover a warm and supportive virtual family and benefit from the connection, celebration, friendship and accountability that fuels consistent action and lifechanging outcomes.

Now you have a good sense of your starting point and



understand which buckets are most in need of filling. You have your people to help support you and celebrate along with you. That leaves us with one final question.

What is the best way to “do” the rest of this book?

The chapters that follow are divided into three sections. The first focuses on filling your Vitality Bucket. The next is about filling your Connection Bucket. The last one discusses filling your Contribution Bucket. Within each section, you’ll find 10 short and sweet chapters. These are your daily explorations. Each focuses on a single bucket-filling idea and then offers a daily exploration. Some explorations are one-time actions or things to think about. Others are practices to begin and then deepen over time.

What’s the best way to move through the sections and chapters? Here are two suggestions. Choose the one that feels most right to you.

## **Two Paths: Deep Dive or 30-Day Challenge**

### **Path #1: The Bucket-by-Bucket Deep Dive**

This approach works well when our snapshot shows that one specific bucket is in need of a lot more love than the other two. If that’s you, flip to the section that covers your emptiest bucket. You’ll find 10 chapters, each with a single idea and daily exploration designed to help you refill that particular bucket a bit more. Read one chapter a day, then do the daily exploration at the end of each chapter.

For example, if your Connection Bucket is low, head over to the section entitled Fill Your Connection Bucket and do a deep dive. Work through the chapters, one per day, if that fits into your life, or on any other schedule that honors your life's demands but also keeps you accountable and engaged. Once done, move onto the next-emptiest bucket and do the same until you've eventually completed your deep dive into each bucket.

In the final chapter of the book I'll talk more about how to keep the growth going after this deep dive.

## **Path #2: The 30-Day Good Life Bucket Challenge**

If your snapshot showed that all of your buckets were in need of love and there wasn't a clear "winner," a fun alternative to the bucket-by-bucket deep dive is the 30-day challenge.

Here's how it works. For the next 30 days, read one chapter a day and complete the daily exploration at the end of that chapter. On Day 1, read and do the first chapter under Vitality. On Day 2, read and do the first chapter under Connection. On Day 3, read and do the first chapter under Contribution. Then keep circling through the buckets every day for 30 days until you reach the end.

This is, no doubt, a pretty fierce approach, but it is incredibly powerful to commit to something for 30 days. It's a short enough amount of time to keep your commitment, but also long enough to experience a real shift in the way you experience your life.

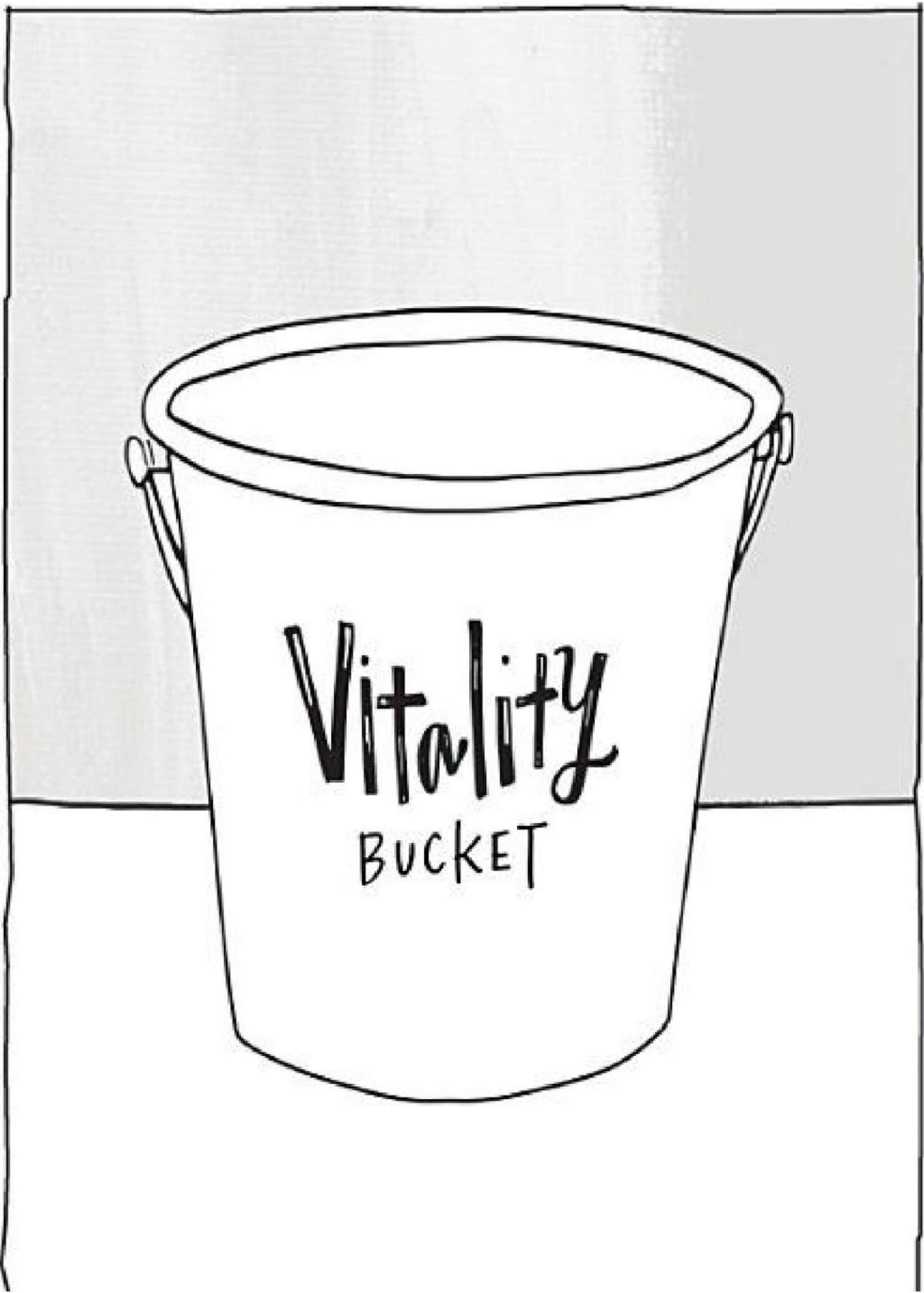
## Let's Make It Happen

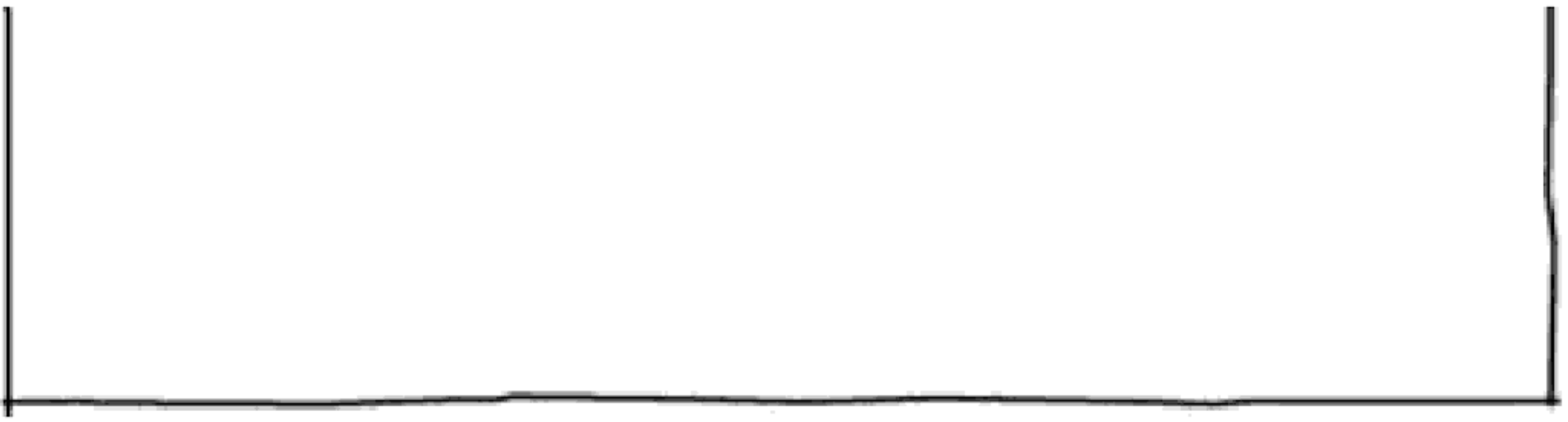
Annie Dillard wrote, "A good life is made of a series of good days, starting with today." Our job is not so much to go from here to there, but to wake up. To own our current reality. To see it. Feel it. Accept it. Then take action to start living the life we dream of living. One breath, one step, one day at a time. Not later. Not tomorrow. But today. Right now.

Grab my hand.

Everything will be okay.

We'll do it together.





DAY 1

# WAKE UP

---

## *Take One—Autopilot and Reactive*

It's 6:30 A.M. The sound of a loud, buzzing alarm on your iPhone gets you to crack open your eyes. You fumble for the device and turn it off. For all intents and purposes, that is the last intentional act you'll take until you lay your head down to sleep some 16 hours later. Every moment in between will be spent reacting to other people's plans for your day. Before getting out of bed or even acknowledging anyone sharing it, you check your e-mail to see who will be setting your agenda, based on their needs, followed by Facebook, Twitter,

Instagram, Snapchat, and voice mail. Ten seconds in, and already you've lost control over how you spend your day.

By the time you leave the house, your to-do list exceeds the day's capacity and you're living in a future set by someone else's agenda. Every step along the way, your mind is somewhere else. Reacting to prompts, things other people tell you are important without ever stopping to ask whether they matter to you. It's gorgeous out, but you don't notice. Your kid, partner, lover, or parent smells great, terrible, or fruity, but you don't pick it up. You stop for a coffee. Waiting in line, you check again. And it's not just you. All heads are buried up their collective apps. A twentysomething woman sits at a corner table sketching, and her work is beautiful. Nobody sees it. You drive to work and spend the next nine hours responding to e-mail in real time, checking to-dos off your list, rifling through Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat again, and again, and again. Checking voice mail and calling people back. Check, check, check. By the time you land home, you've checked a lot of boxes. You've been busy, so busy, you really must be important. You've gotten so much done. But you can't remember a thing you've accomplished. You feel like your checklist for tomorrow is already longer than what you started with today. And very little of it is meaningfully connected to anything you care about. Your only intention is to survive, and if that means embracing what was good in your day and proactively creating your tomorrow, you've failed mightily.

Welcome to your autopilot reactive life. If you're like the

average person, you will check your smartphone more than 150 times. You'll lose more than three hours in the process and end up on Facebook without even thinking about it.<sup>2</sup>

### *Take Two—Aware and Intentional*

7:30 A.M. You awaken to the sound of One Republic's "Good Life," which you've chosen as the first track on your wake-up Spotify playlist because it makes you smile. You listen for a minute with your eyes closed. Placing both hands over your heart, eyes still closed, you set an intention for the day, to approach every interaction from a place of loving-kindness and mutual benefit. Still in a semi-alert state, you rise into a sitting position in bed as your playlist rolls into a 15-minute guided meditation. Your mind feels calm and focused. You ease into the shower, where you notice how good the warm, pulsing water feels on your back. Drying off, you slide back to the bedroom and hit PLAY. Marvin Gaye takes over. You want to dance, but instead you dress and make breakfast. Sitting over coffee, for the first time, you check your e-mail, but only to scan and ensure there is no true emergency that requires an immediate response, remembering that someone else's procrastination or engineered neurosis is not your emergency. You do not reply or delete or file anything. You close your device and open your Moleskine to a simple, lined page where last night you wrote out the single most important thing that must be accomplished today. The one that will be the biggest lever in the area of deepest meaning.



You then revisit the two supporting actions written below and confirm all three are still today's priorities.

You head to work, and your phone remains tucked away. At your office, nothing happens until your one big thing and two supporting actions are complete. Everyone and everything else can wait. And if they cannot, which is almost never a reflection of true need, but rather an expectation you've trained into others, you process them quickly, without distraction, having made an intentional decision, then move back to your big thing and two supporters. You check e-mail, texts, and any other work-related communications only during a preset late-morning communications batch time, say 11 A.M., then again after lunch and once more at 4 P.M. People may call or text or e-mail or update or want to chat. You don't reply until you are ready.

You work at a deliberate pace and pause regularly to notice the day around you. You take in the sunshine pouring across your desk, the smell of coffee, and the little swirls of heat wafting into the air. You notice the state of your body, its position and how it feels. Throughout the day you'll change positions, walk, go outside, and constantly intersperse movement with work. You look around and see the partner who helped you start this company, your team whose members have been with you for years, and you're flooded with gratitude.

As the day unfolds, you quickly complete your one big thing and two supporting things, leaving everything else as bonus items that make you feel great. Problems arise, but you

expect that and have cultivated a personal practice that allows you to stay calm and search for the solution from that intention of loving-kindness and mutual benefit. And though you'd rather not have had the problem, you find the possibility that would have stayed hidden had the problem never presented itself.

Wrapping up your day, you head home, phone again tucked away. You feel like you're ahead of the eight ball, aware of the moments that make up your day and proactively creating your life, rather than racing to respond on autopilot to other people's agendas, unaware of the vast amount of life's gifts that seem to race by before you can grasp them. You go out for a run, then ease into the evening with your family. You are not only physically but emotionally present. Checked in, on all levels. After dinner, you get a voice mail from the office with a true immediate need for response. You step away from your family, deal with it, then put your phone down, close your computer, and reengage. Before you doze off that night, you journal, revisiting the day, what went right, what went wrong, what you can learn from each, what you're grateful for, and what your big thing and two supporting things will be for tomorrow. You close your eyes. Life. Is. Good.



So, which is closer to your life? Which scenario would you rather live, the reactive and unaware life or the intentional and aware? Your ability to live Scene Two is an outgrowth of

three things:

- Awareness
- Intention
- Action

Awareness, waking up to what's in front of you, is the master key. By the time we reach adulthood, we're so distracted by the pull of speed, connectivity, expectations, and rules, we lose the ability to see and experience what's right in front of us. We become 99 percent unaware, and in doing so we lose the ability to choose and to act rather than react. By the way, those who tap into that 1 percent, who are awake and aware, not only tend to own their own lives but end up running the world.

Before you can make intelligent decisions, before you can stop reacting and start acting, you need to cultivate the ability to hit pause. To slow down just a bit, reconnect with who and what matters, to see what is really happening in the moment, to consider whose agenda you're responding to, then deliberately choose your actions based on that awareness and intention. So we need to begin cultivating your ability to turn off your autopilot.

The question is how. My awareness tool of choice is mindfulness, a word that it seems you can't get away from these days. It's the next big thing that's been around for thousands of years. Why the explosion in interest? Because the fallout of a global crash to live as mindlessly as possible

has yielded astonishing levels of pain, and people are looking for a way out. In an odd irony, most of us spend our lives in the mindless pursuit of a state we've chosen to abandon and can return to at will. As Søren Kierkegaard lamented, "Most men pursue pleasure with such breathless haste that they hurry past it."

Mindfulness is about slowing down, noticing and seeing what is really happening in front of you in this moment, without the anxiety of expectation or the haze of regret. In this way, it is both a gateway to embracing the grace of each moment and the precursor to nearly every desired state, action, or experience that leads to a life well lived. Awareness is the seed of more aligned being and doing, which is why we explore it on Day 1.

It's also incredibly well researched. Turns out, beyond its impact on your ability to more readily see, choose, and create the life you want to live, a mindfulness practice can also improve memory, cognitive function, decision making, sleep, mood, and your ability to handle stress.

So how do you train the average Western mind, now boasting a shorter attention span than that of a goldfish, to focus and become more persistently aware?

Here are the basic instructions:

1. Find a comfortable place to sit where you won't be disturbed or distracted. Be sure to turn off all devices that might call you into "checking" mode. If you use a timer app on a device (I recommend the Insight Timer), be sure to put the device into

“Do not disturb” mode.

2. Sit with your spine erect but not rigid, and your head sitting gently in a neutral position.
3. Your eyes may be closed or slightly open.
4. Take a few long, slow breaths to settle in and bring your attention to your breathing.
5. Notice the sensation of your breath as it enters your body. Feel it entering your nostrils. Feel your chest and belly gently expand as you inhale and relax down as you exhale.
6. After a few breaths, notice where it is easier to hold your attention, the sensation of breath as it enters your nose or the sensation of your body expanding and relaxing as you breathe. Then focus your awareness on whichever sensation is an easier anchor.
7. Breathe gently and relax, holding your attention to the sensation of your breath.
8. At a certain point, maybe after just a few seconds, your mind will wander to thoughts or emotions. That’s perfectly natural. Notice that, too. Then, with your next exhalation, silently say, “Thinking,” and let that thought ride out with the breath as you refocus your attention on the breath. This may happen hundreds of times,

especially in the beginning, and it's all fine.

9. Just keep coming back to your breath, without judgment or expectation.

For many people, it's much easier to begin this practice with someone else guiding them. In fact, that simple shift can turn it from something you "have" to do into something you "love" to do and look forward to. So I've created a 5-, 10-, 15-, and 20-minute guided audio mindfulness practice for you to download and listen to at [GoodLifeProject.com/bookinsider](http://GoodLifeProject.com/bookinsider).

All you need to do is download it to your chosen device and then, first thing in the morning, sit gently and listen. In fairly short order, you'll notice the effect. It will set up your day in a very different way. Over time, you'll find the calming and focusing effect will increase. You'll become more aware of the moment, less reactive, and more capable of pausing, seeing, intending, and choosing the actions that will put you back in charge of your life.

### **Daily Exploration:**

Each day's exploration is designed to let you experience something that will fill one or more of your Good Life Buckets in a meaningful way. They are challenges that also provide specific ways to learn more about yourself and become more intentional about the way you live.

For today's exploration, I invite you to download to your phone or computer the guided mindfulness practices I've recorded for you. Remember, for the rest of this book, any

time I offer you the opportunity to download or discover something online, unless I tell you otherwise, you'll find it at [goodlifeproject.com/bookinsider](http://goodlifeproject.com/bookinsider).

Start with the five-minute version, first thing in the morning. All you need to do is follow the instructions. The practice is a great setup for a more aware and intentional day. Over time, you may find yourself wanting to organically move into the longer versions. You can make that shift if and when you're ready. It's also important to know that you're still doing fine if you never shift. If you choose to continue to listen each morning (can't recommend this enough) and grow into a longer practice, it'll begin to deliver more sustained benefits that will seep into nearly every area of your life.

At the end of the day, check in with your Good Life teammates to share your success and support one another. If inclined, share online, too. The more accountability you create, both privately and publicly, the more likely you'll be to stay with the practice long enough for it to become habit, and for you to feel the deepening effect of this beautiful practice.

Now, for those type A awareness challengers, here are a few more extras you might want to explore to reclaim awareness, intention, and choice:

1. **Go “push free” for 24 hours.** There's a good chance you have your computer, phone, watch, and any other wired device set to automatically “push” notifications to you every time someone else wants to take control of your life via e-mail,

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and more. Here's your challenge: for a single day, turn off all automatic notifications on all devices. The more the thought of that gives you hives, the more reactive your life has become and the bigger the need to take it back. To become aware and choose.

- 2. Set awareness triggers.** Set your watch, fitness tracker, smart watch, or smartphone to trigger a vibration alert mid-morning, just after lunch, mid-afternoon, and late afternoon. For phones, this can often be done by setting an alarm and choosing a vibration pattern instead of a sound. Whenever you feel the vibration alert, take a slow breath in and a slow breath out. You don't even have to stop what you're doing, but notice where your awareness is. Is your attention spinning into the future or trapped in the past? If so, take a few seconds to guide it gently back to the moment. Notice what's going on around you, what you're doing, who you're doing it with, and why. Notice whether your attention and your actions are placed on what truly matters most. If so, smile gently and take another slow breath. If not, guide it back to now, then do the same. The more you practice with these mini awareness interventions, the more they become baked into the day and the easier it becomes to reclaim intention and take more deliberate action.



DAY 2  
make  
EXERCISE  
more fun than  
SEX

---

When I first shared this idea, one comment made me giggle. “Dude, if exercise is more fun than sex, your sex life must suck.” For most of us, the idea that exercise might be something that not only hones our bodies but also flips on our brains, arouses our senses, and connects us with others is just plain beyond belief. The notion that it might be something we crave rather than dread is downright absurd. No human, we think, actually *wants* to exercise. It’s awful. It’s hard, it hurts, it’s humiliating, it’s boring, it’s isolating, and it’s time out of the day that we just don’t have. And the places to do it, ugh! Big, cold, scary, intimidating, unfriendly,

ineffective, cliquy, and judgmental. This is what we've come to believe exercise is all about.

At the same time, the science is crystal clear. If we want to live good lives, we need to move our bodies. Nearly every marker of vitality—from reduced risk of heart disease, cancer, and diabetes to enhanced brain function, elevated mood, better ability to deal with stress, reduced anxiety and depression, and amped cognitive and physical abilities—is made better by exercise. Exercise is powerful medicine.

Problem is, most of us have come to believe exercise is something to be endured rather than embraced. That is tragic. Exercise done right adds to your life. Not just because of its many benefits, but because the very experience of it can be deeply enjoyable—when you do it right. Why the negative frame, then? Because much of the industry has been built around solutions that work for the industry, but not for the people it seeks to serve. Rows and rows of machines lock you into repetitive and astonishingly boring movement. Screens adorn every machine to distract you from how mind-numbing the experience is. To access your personal misery-distraction device, you need to put on headphones, further isolating you from the community and eliminating the possibility of conversation, friendship, and a sense of belonging. This all translates to dismal levels of long-term participation, terrible results beyond a small number of hardcore gym rats, and feelings of defeat, futility, self-loathing, boredom, and isolation.

It doesn't have to be this way. When we were kids, we ran

around all day, climbed, danced, rolled, threw, caught, wiggled, jumped, cartwheeled, and kicked our way through the day. We worked hard, really hard, and loved it. The only reason we stopped is because we *had* to. Homework or dinner called us in. For those who played sports, there was the added experience of camaraderie, collaboration, shared effort, friendship, and belonging. We didn't call it exercise back then; we called it play, and we couldn't get enough. Our job today is to turn exercise back into play. To change repetition and boredom into novelty and engagement. To turn isolation and intimidation into friendship and belonging. To turn forced participation and futility into craved activity and transformative results.

Some in the industry have started to get it. They've realized the old way is broken and offered up activities, settings, and experiences that let us reclaim a sense of play, engagement, and community. SoulCycle turned indoor cycling into a near-addictive physical and cultural experience exploding across the country. CrossFit has become the fastest-growing phenomenon in the history of the fitness industry, reclaiming novelty, getting back to basics, cultivating a fierce commitment to community and progress. Its biggest challenge is likely not getting people to show up but stopping people from coming too often and pushing too hard.

There are, I'm sure, many other examples. You don't have to join a facility to bring joyful exercise back into your life. Get outside, if that's your style. Hike, ride, surf, trail run,

Hula-Hoop. Join a group, team, or club. Take different classes. Whatever it is that makes you want to do more, find it, then do it. Look for things that demand not just physical effort but also mental focus and attention. When you engage your mind, time stops and effort becomes play. Even better, do it with others. Find a partner, group or community or rally a bunch of friends and create your own group or challenge to do together. This adds the element of friendship and accountability, especially in the early days when you're still getting fit enough to make it truly fun and desirable. Do this right and exercise becomes something you no longer fear and avoid. Much to your surprise, it becomes something you enjoy, then crave, even lust after and lament when you miss a day! You find yourself doing what, before, was unthinkable, reworking your day to include more of it, even sneaking out at lunch for an "exercise quickie!"

Don't stop there. Exercise is great. But truth is, it's not enough.

You may have seen all the headlines about sitting over the past few years. Sitting is the new smoking. It is now listed as a major risk factor for a wide variety of diseases. Even worse, *exercising for 30 to 60 minutes does not come close to making up for the damage done by sitting*. Actually, it's not really sitting that is taking us down. It's the act of remaining static and inactive for long periods of time in any position. We are built for motion. Nearly every beneficial mind and body system is optimized when we move and slowly shuts down when we don't. The only way to counter this is to bring movement

back into our days. Not in one intense burst, but woven throughout. We can do this any number of ways.

Set a vibration alarm to go off on your watch or phone every 50 minutes, then get up and walk around or move for 10. Grab a headset and turn every phone call into a walking or stretching call. Turn all meetings into standing meetings. This will have the added benefit of forcing people to get to the point faster. My friend Emiliya Zhivotovskaya, founder of The Flourishing Center and the Certificate in Applied Positive Psychology, switched to a standing desk. That wasn't enough. She bought a cheap mini treadmill, took off the side rails, and walks on it while working. She takes every call on a headset while moving and regularly takes mini breaks to stretch and to do light calisthenics, yoga, and dare I say, even a bit of pole dancing! Point is, it's not that hard to bring gentle movement back into your day if you choose to make it a priority.

Exercise and movement. There are perhaps no better therapies for nearly everything that ails us. These two elixirs are powerful Vitality Bucket fillers. Done with intention, they can also be joyful, life-affirming, connection-driven parts of life that prime many of the same neurological and chemical responses unleashed by, you guessed it, sex.

Before we wrap this conversation, we should probably address the elephant in the bedroom. Can you really make exercise more fun than sex? C'mon, I know you've been wondering. Even more intriguing, could sex actually count as exercise? A 2013 study published in the journal *PLOS One* looked at the question. Strapping armbands on 21 couples

that averaged 22 years old, researchers measured energy expenditure during sex and running (not at the same time). On average, participants burned about 85 calories, or 3.6 calories per minute, during moderate-intensity sex. The same participants burned about 244 calories over 30 minutes of running. What does that tell us? It certainly counts as vigorous movement, and maybe even moderate exercise. With care and the right intention, both sex and exercise can be a lot of fun, involve other people, and have mood and health-elevating effects. But, it's probably a good idea to bring them into your life as separate good life interventions.

## **Daily Exploration:**

### *Step 1—Add movement.*

Think about your average day. If no day is average, think about today. What can you do to bring more gentle movement into it? Can you walk at an easy pace while doing anything? Can you take breaks every hour to get up and move and stretch a little? You don't have to exert yourself much or sweat; you just have to move. For today, at a bare minimum, challenge yourself to move at least 10 minutes out of every hour. Set a vibration alarm to remind yourself, in case you get lost in some activity. Decide what you'll do in advance so you don't have to waste time choosing.

### *Step 2—Add exercise.*

If you loathe the thought of going to the gym, then don't. There are now many options to explore. Search your area to

see if you can find a place that offers activities that (a) sound like they could be fun; (b) engage your mind, along with your body; (c) involve a fair amount of novelty and change, not just sustained repetition; and (d) integrate a sense of community. Look online, ask friends, read the local paper, whatever you need to do to start the process of discovery. It may take a little time to find the activity and community that makes you want to come back. That's okay. If you can't find anything local, then check out some of the growing online offerings, with wonderful streaming class options. I have included a bunch of resources and links at [goodlifeproject.com/bookinsider](http://goodlifeproject.com/bookinsider) to get you started. Choose one, put your first "trial run" on your calendar, and make it happen. Then journal about the experience.

DAY 3

SNOOZE  
to  
LIVE

---

Sleep. Ugh. Do we really have to go there? Short answer: yes. It is one of the most effective Vitality Bucket fillers (and also killers). Plus, it's one of the things that flow most powerfully into both your Contribution and Connection Buckets. When we sleep, everything gets better. Our health, energy, strength, ability to think and create, mood, resilience, ability to handle adversity, cultivate relationships, do great work, and radiate light and calm all dramatically increase. When we don't sleep, every one of these decreases.

Sleep disruption is a massive problem. According to the



## National Sleep Foundation:

- 40 million people in the United States alone have a chronic sleep disorder.
- 62 percent of U.S. adults have trouble sleeping at least a few nights a week.
- 30 percent of the general population experience insomnia at some point over the course of a year.

Thing is, poor sleep doesn't just make us cranky and tired; it also wreaks havoc on nearly every system in the body. When we're sleep deprived, our risk of chronic diseases like hypertension, diabetes, depression, obesity, and cancer skyrocket. Sleep loss is associated with a 200 percent rise in cancer and a 100 percent rise in heart disease. It also decreases our memory and ability to think. A recent study revealed sleeping less than six hours a day for two weeks has an effect on your brain similar to blowing a 0.10 on an alcohol test, which would make you too drunk to drive. We see this impairment across all ages.

Dr. Avi Sadeh of Tel Aviv University studied the effects of a slightly shortened sleep period in fourth and sixth graders. After three days of getting just 30 minutes less sleep, the average sixth grader's abilities plummeted to that of a fourth grader.<sup>3</sup> A second study from the University of Minnesota revealed that the average A student slept 36 minutes more than the average D student.<sup>4</sup> Moved by this and other

evidence, a high school in Edina, Minnesota, pushed its start time from 7:25 A.M. to 8:30 A.M. and saw a stunning jump in SAT scores from the top 10 percent of students, from 1288 to 1500.

It's not just our brains and overall health that take a hit. When we don't sleep enough, we get fatter. Sleep disruption drops our metabolism and ramps up food cravings, likely due to their effect on the hormones ghrelin and leptin. Ghrelin tells us to eat, and leptin tells us to stop. When we're sleep deprived, we're all ghrelin and not enough leptin. Translation: we'll eat pretty much anything that's not glued down, including the stuff in the far corner of the top shelf that we can only reach from the stepladder! Add that to a metabolism that slows when you're sleep deprived and dysregulation of fat cells and insulin, and you end up with the perfect fat-heaping, inflammation-loading, vitality-killing storm.

Many people look to medication to "treat" their sleep disturbances because it seems like the quick and easy way to fix the problem. While that may be the appropriate path for some, medication comes with potential risks that include drowsiness, amnesia, headache, mental impairment, uncontrollable shaking, weakness, cancer, falling, tinnitus, increased risk of dementia, addiction, and death. Many medications also actually put you into more of a hypnotic state than a true deep sleep. That may leave you feeling like you've been out cold, but there is increasing doubt about whether it really provides anywhere near the restorative

benefit true sleep delivers.

Which brings us to an interesting question. Actually, two.

First, how much sleep do we really need?

The National Institutes of Health suggest that school-age children need at least ten hours of sleep daily, teens need nine to ten hours, and adults need seven to eight hours.<sup>5</sup> Research shows us that people who sleep either less than five hours or more than nine hours a night fare worse than those who average seven to eight hours. Are some people outliers? Of course. Are you one? Maybe. But do you really want to take that chance? If you assume you are an exception to the rule but you're wrong, the price you pay could be catastrophic over time. Better to start with the assumption that, with regard to sleep needs, you are typical. Then do everything needed to optimize your sleep before accepting that you may be an outlier. I have friends who slept five to six hours a night for years and just assumed that was all they needed. After optimizing their sleep and bumping it up to seven to eight hours, though, they realized how wrong they were. That brings us to the second question.

What's the best way to get it? There are four steps:

- Rule out/take care of sleep apnea
- Build your sleep hygiene
- Track and hack
- Train your brain

Today's daily exploration is all about these four steps.

We're going to walk through exactly what to do to optimize your sleep and, hopefully, minimize your need for medication.

## Daily Exploration:

First, find out if the reason you're sleeping poorly is because you have something called sleep apnea. It's when we stop breathing while we sleep, and about 5 percent of us have it. If you really want a definitive answer, you can be tested in a sleep lab or use a home detection device. You can also get a good sense for whether you might have the most common form, obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) by completing the Berlin questionnaire for OSA.<sup>6</sup> The questionnaire isn't definitive, though, so if you have any doubts, see a health care professional specializing in sleep. I've included links to sleep lab resources and also a downloadable version of the Berlin assessment at [goodlifeproject.com/bookinsider](http://goodlifeproject.com/bookinsider).

If you do have OSA or either of the less common forms of apnea, don't rely only on the ideas that follow. Work with a professional. You may also discover that you have apnea only when sleeping on your back, so a simple change in position may go a long way toward helping. Once you've ruled out or accommodated for apnea, focus on the sleep hygiene basics.

1. **Keep a consistent sleeping and waking time, even on the weekends.** Your body has an internal clock. When you constantly change sleep and wake times, the clock gets screwy and has trouble