

IT ALL MATTERS

**125 STRATEGIES
TO ACHIEVE MAXIMUM
CONFIDENCE,
CLARITY,
CERTAINTY
AND CREATIVITY**

PAUL CUMMINGS

WILEY

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INTRODUCTION

A Moment in Time

While sitting at a picnic table with my grandfather, George W. Cummings Sr., in Conway, Arkansas, on a beautiful summer day, one conversation completely changed the course of my life. As a young teenager, it would have been unnatural for me to think in those terms. However, looking back four decades later, that conversation was truly a defining moment in my journey that would set in motion a decision that would ultimately impact the rest of my life. It's stunning to think of it in those terms, but that one single moment in time was a tipping point. A statement, a story, a quip, a quote, a conversation, or an unexpected experience in life can be that moment, when "It" all changes for you. This was the beginning of my road to a life of confidence, clarity, certainty, and creativity.

Growing up, my grandfather was my mentor, confidant, fishing buddy, and best friend. He was a man who possessed immense knowledge, a sidesplitting sense of humor, and a multitude of life experiences that he was willing to share with his eager grandson. I loved every second that I was able to spend with my grandfather.

He shared a multitude of life lessons with me standing by the fencepost at his farm that still are present in my mind today—lessons such as "enthusiasm is an inside game with an outside reflection" or "you can't get a positive charge off a dead battery no matter how hard you try." I will never forget the day when he told me that the age-old saying, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink," was a lie. He explained, "If you salt their oats and make them thirsty, they will drink all day long." I was fortunate to be able to plug into this type of wisdom at such a young age. Each one of these lessons was wrapped up in a compelling story that kept me engaged for hours.

His bigger-than-life personality, wisdom, and laughter made an indelible impression on me that I still cherish today. Unfortunately, you will never have

the pleasure of his time. However, you will have the benefit of understanding all of his profound wisdom as you read this book. I refer fondly to his life lessons as “golden nuggets” that can lead you to a life filled with meaningful experiences and monumental victories.

I believe the art of storytelling is one of the most compelling skills anyone can learn. For this reason, I made the decision to base this book on a real-life story that began in May of 1975. I believe that we all have a story that’s important to us for a multitude of reasons.

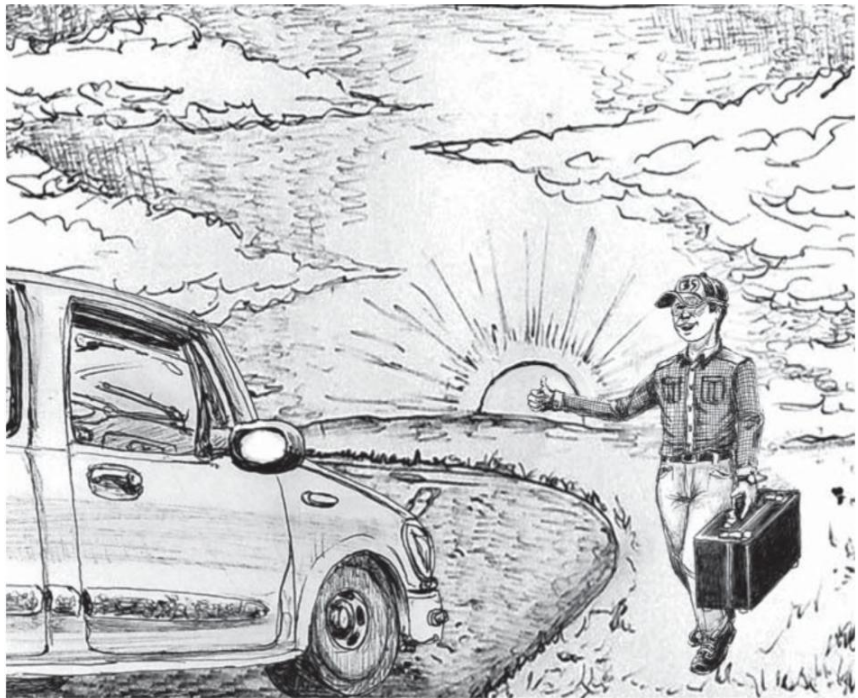
Truth be told, you were never intended to run from conflict or to play small in the world. You were never designed to participate in the frenzy of life, solely based on other’s opinions of your worth or your value. Life has offered you unlimited freedom and the power to choose your own path. You were intended to be bold, powerful, unique, determined, and immensely successful. Life is not a dress rehearsal, and my goal is to provide you with the life lessons, toolkits, strategies, and action plans you need to live a compelling life.

I deliver my speeches, blogs, and stories with what I call southern ease. Growing up in Arkansas and then Louisiana, I was dipped in the age-old wisdom of my grandfather and bathed in the South Louisiana culture and the celebration of life by my mother, Shirley Cummings. All of these experiences are combined with the lessons I have learned over my 40-year business career as an entrepreneur, teacher, and owner of a global business enterprise. *It All Matters* is void of theory and overflowing with lessons learned through both moments of immense struggle and mind-boggling successes.

I have invited five of my great clients—Robert Forrester, Andy Heck, Wade von Bibra, Brad Mugg, and Charlie Collins—to author the introductions for each part of the narrative. I am confident you will gain great insight from their words of wisdom.

Over the course of my career, I have been influenced and inspired by many great teachers. Og Mandino and his great book, *The Greatest Salesman in the World*, inspired me to believe in myself and pursue my most important goals and dreams. I have been honored to speak on platforms with Dr. Ken Blanchard, Harvey Mackay, Brian Tracy, Tony Robbins, Terry Bradshaw, Dale Brown, and many other great speakers whose work has continued to play an important role in my life. As a student I was inspired from a young age by the words of Tom Hopkins, who taught me that success is comprised of thousands of hours of hard work, dedication, and practice.

I was inspired to become a public speaker, teacher, and author by Spencer Hays, Mort Utley, David Dean, Art Williams, Les Brown, Zig Ziglar, and Jackie B. Cooper, whose amazing presentation abilities captivated me at a young age. I would like to acknowledge and thank these individuals for their commitment to improving the lives of others through their work. Join me now as I share a personal story with you, which was written with the pen of my own experience, a sense of humor, and an appreciation of life all in hand.



Where It All Began – Confidence

Part One – Confidence

A Special Message from Charlie Collins

As a Man Thinketh was written by James Allen in 1902, and remains to this day a book filled with timeless wisdom. That very same year, George W. Cummings Sr. was born and, other than his family, friends, and the local community, his birth received very little notice. But that would all change, as he, too, would leave behind a legacy of timeless truths and wisdom to encourage and inspire many future generations.

I met Paul Cummings for the very first time in the spring of 1975. At age 23, after selling books with Southwestern for five summers myself, I was a sales manager of a hundred people who were a lot like Paul ... or so I had thought.

Check that: There are very few people like Paul. When I first met him, he was a brash, talented, and passionate young man. And yes, over the past 40 years he has changed some, but only in the refining and maturing that all men need. He has never lost his passion, and is still committed to making a difference in this world. If you will take these timeless truths to heart, and act on them, you will benefit more than you know.

Paul was blessed to have such a wise grandfather, who took the time to impart his experience and wisdom to his beloved grandson. In this book, Paul, now a grandfather himself, will give you the opportunity to accelerate your own life at the speed of light. This is George's legacy, but it is also a part of Paul's legacy too. Now, you can benefit from almost 100 years of combined life experiences from both of these incredibly wise gentlemen.

Success involves principles that are universally true, as clear and certain as the laws of gravity. For example, the Internet is not free; someone pays the bill. I believe that success involves some of these exact same universally true principles. Paul has simply outlined these principles in a manner that gives anyone who will choose to follow them a road to travel on which to create success in any area of their life. These truths will help you whether they are applied at your place of business or if you apply them within your family.

Paul had an advantage of the heritage of loving parents and grandparents. Unfortunately, many of us do not. Look around and you will see that dysfunctional and broken families abound everywhere. If you see yourself as a grasshopper, you will be regarded as one. If you will take hold of the truths that Paul Cummings has given, recognize that the lies of your environment are simply that, only lies, you can then begin to see the beauty of your creation. This book can be your guide to reorder your life.

If you are as young as Paul was, when he was first introduced to these life principles, then congratulations. However, if you've traveled further along on your journey in life, this book can still be a springboard to encourage you toward a greater future for all of your tomorrows.

If you are in transition, or think life has passed you by, I have a news flash for you. It is never too late. You can have the life you desire. These principles work and they *will* work for you. If you are in your 60s or 70s, you may be nearing retirement, but remember, you aren't dead. Living intentionally has no expiration date. Passion is not only for the young.

Have the courage to live, *really* live. You have far greater value than you think. You have been created for greatness. Experience it by living intentionally every day that you have left. Paul has given you an organized form and an excellent path towards greatness. Take it!

—Charles V. Collins

1 Where It All Began

The Power of a Single Decision

As I packed my bags on the morning of May 26, 1975, I had no idea that a summer opportunity would change the direction of my life forever, nor did I know this single decision would affect the lives of thousands of people that I would meet in the future. A high school buddy of mine, Richard Svetlecic, had convinced me to give up summer baseball, which was a big deal to me at the time, with the promise of making \$2,000 working for the Southwestern Publishing Company, now known as Southwestern Advantage.

Richard had worked with the company the previous summer and already had something I did not have—*wheels*. That's right, a car! A car purchased with the money he made last summer while I played baseball. With college staring me straight in the face, the thought of buying my own car was the number-one reason that I finally decided to accept the position.

Preparing to leave on my journey, I replayed the conversation with Richard from two weeks earlier, as I sat down with my parents, to sell them on the idea. After all, Richard may have convinced *me*, but I now had to persuade my mom and dad.

Needless to say, it was not an easy sale.

George and Shirley Cummings were full of questions, concerns, and, of course, some very serious doubts. Today, as the father of five children, all of whom share my adventurous and relentless spirit, I fully understand all of my parents' concerns.

Some of the questions that they were asking me were easy to answer; however, others had required some creativity, as this was not an ordinary summer opportunity by *any* stretch of the imagination.

Southwestern Advantage, out of Nashville, Tennessee, offers college students an opportunity to sell an array of publications, including bible libraries, cookbooks,

I will never forget the look of horror in my mother's eyes. "You are *not* doing that, Son!" My heart sank. I wanted this opportunity more than anything. In a moment of either total desperation or teenage lunacy, I dropped the big bomb on Mom and Dad, thinking that it might help. "Mom, don't worry. Richard said they will teach us how to hitchhike, so I *will* have a ride every day."

Needless to say, this last revelation did not help me win over my parent's support. My dream of earning \$2,000 and a car of my very own were evaporating more quickly than a raindrop on a hot summer day. Luckily for me, my parents had taught all of their children to fight for what they believed in.

In fact, they had provided us with examples of strength, courage, and perseverance regularly around our home through everyday situations. As I looked at my parents, my two best friends on earth, I then realized that I simply couldn't just give up this easily.

With all of the enthusiasm that I could possibly muster, I said, "Mom and Dad, I *have* to go. First, you taught me to honor my commitments, and I have already committed to Richard that I would be a part of his team. Second, you also taught me that I shouldn't follow the common path in life, but that it was important to take risks and to create my own path. I want this opportunity because I believe that this experience will be right for me. Most important, I *really* want to buy my own car." There was still no response, so I continued.

"You have supported me throughout all of my athletics in baseball, football, and basketball. You have always encouraged me to do my best and to work hard in both school and sports. And I want to do this more than anything else that I have ever wanted to do in my entire life. I promise that I will not fail or let you down. *Please let me go.*"

I just took a deep breath and waited for their answer. My parents sat there in almost a stunned silence, trying to grasp what I had just said to them. They looked at each other for what seemed like an eternity, communicating silently as only parents know how to do.

There were no words, just a series of facial expressions, which I am certain, contained all types of nonverbal meanings that most teenagers would not understand. What would they finally say? How were they going to respond? Had I made a huge mistake with my passionate outburst? Would my parents even give me an answer now, or would I have to wait for one of their famous "private discussions" while my summer's fate remained hanging in the balance?

“Son, I think this is a *great* opportunity,” my father finally said. “Do you realize how challenging this is going to be? You will not have the same support system out there that you have here in our home. Do you understand that you will have to carefully manage your money and your own expenses every single day?” he asked.

“Yes, sir,” I answered quickly and confidently to each question my father asked.

The questions started coming faster and I began to realize that my dad was challenging my level of commitment. He was letting me know that if I did go, that I would have to stay the entire summer and that I would be required to finish what I had started. There would be no quitting if I got homesick or if I was struggling with my sales. It was a classic George Cummings talk that was straight to the point, tough and fair.

When his barrage had finally ended, my dad just smiled and looked at my mom. Now it was Shirley’s turn. She said, “Son, how do I know you will be safe? And how do I know that the people that you will be working with are the right kind of individuals?”

It was another series of questions. Unlike my dad, my mom simply asked for reassurance. She needed to believe that I could take care of myself and that I knew how to stay out of danger. I responded with a lot of smiles, reassuring hugs, and some far-reaching promises.

Finally, I felt the momentum shifting my way. Then, my parents asked me to leave the room so that they could talk privately. After what was only 15 minutes, but which seemed like several hours to me, they opened the door and invited me back into the two-person jury room for the final verdict.

“Son, we have decided that you can go.” You can imagine my screams of joy and hugs of thanks. There were lots of expectations, rules, and then more rules, mostly from my mother, of course. In hindsight, I now know that agreeing to all their rules was easy, compared to all the tests, trials, and tribulations that would be awaiting me over the upcoming 14 weeks of summer.

While I had thought that I was signing up for a “sales position,” in fact, I was about to learn more about *life* over the course of a summer than I could ever possibly put into words. I left my home with hope and would ultimately return with a higher amount of self-esteem and self-worth than I had previously ever experienced. The lessons learned over the 14 weeks prepared me to approach life with a deep sense of purpose and a clear vision for my future.

I was literally provided with a “Manifesto for Life” that I have successfully utilized for over four decades. I discovered how to think in terms of the possibilities that life can offer me and not focus on the impossibilities of life generated by negative thinking. I learned how to redirect my negative circumstances into a positive reason to be more diligent in my planning and actions.

These life lessons are sprinkled throughout the fabric of my life’s work. I know these experiences are substantive and real because I have lived by and in accordance with them for more than 40 years. More important, I have shared these same lessons with individuals all over the globe who have in turn found their own successes through their adoption and implementation of these ideas and strategies.

When you internalize and consistently apply these lessons, they have the potential to change your life. As you progress through the book, I hope you become engrossed with the subject and begin to take action to apply these lessons to your own personal journey. This personal story is brimming with optimism and knowledge, passion and skill, questions and answers, struggle and triumph.

As you read, you will discern that every chapter of the book features an action plan for your study, review, and personal use. You will not be left alone to navigate these plans. I will serve as your personal guide to offer clear instructions. In addition, these pages contain “125 Life Changing Lessons” along with an array of tool-kits and strategies that will support you as you pursue your own goals and dreams.

I think the pursuit of real freedom in life is something we all think about but rarely act upon. We need to adamantly express that we genuinely crave a different kind of freedom, peace of mind, and true happiness. I have great news for you today. I am providing you with the tools and strategies that you will need, to craft a life that is lived on your own terms.

The questions you ask yourself, the thoughts that you process, the decisions that you make and the actions that you take have always mattered. After our journey together, you will truly understand why the book is entitled *It All Matters*. You will discover your *All*, and therefore you will be enabled to clarify with specificity the many *Its* in your life that must be embraced and acted upon.

You will think bigger, you will live with more intensity, and you will no longer wonder whether your highest ideals and most inspiring dreams are actually possible. You will be able to develop sustainable confidence, clarity, certainty, and creativity, which will ultimately move you forward in life, with a higher level of enthusiasm, excitement, and energy.

My personal story begins with, “Once upon a time a teenager from Louisiana went to a sales school in the foothills of Tennessee. The experience changed his life

forever.” Maybe, just maybe, these same lessons will change your life, too. I learned a vital lesson as a teenager that I still value today: We *each* have the power to change our life in a positive way—so let’s get started.

My Action Plan (MAP)

Each chapter ends with an MAP (My Action Plan) that is designed as a guide to assist you, the reader, in taking meaningful and massive action on the ideas, strategies, and concepts contained in that chapter. My goal is to take you step by step through each process so that you can maximize every opportunity for personal development and growth. I believe that planning is one of those 1 percent factors we will discuss in the book that will separate the “high achievers” from the “low achievers”. There is a thin line that exists between winning and losing that is indeed determined by the level of action taken on a consistent basis. Top achievers do everything the achiever does, plus a little bit more. The top 2 percent in every field do everything the high achiever does, and then some. Do you want to be in the top 2 percent? Let’s begin now, by completing the first MAP, which will lead you to the destiny that you so ardently desire.

It All Matters

My Action Plan 1

The level of action taken immediately after opportunity is recognized determines the level of success achieved. . . . Take massive action now.

The Proper Planning “State”

In order to get the most out of any planning session, use these affirmations to develop the progressive mindset required in order to develop total clarity.

The “I Will” Affirmations

I will operate with maximum *confidence* while planning today.

I will think in positive terms and operate with *clarity* while planning today.

I will ask great questions to achieve a state of *certainty* while planning today.

I will *create* a proactive plan that produces the results I desire today.

The Process

- Write these affirmations in your It All Matters Planning Guide, and then sign and date each statement, further reinforcing your commitment to this process.
- Please recite each affirmation out loud, with enthusiasm, in order to frame your thoughts in *possibility thinking* mode.
- Set aside a specific time each day to plan and prioritize the actions you must take to have a successful day.
- Now create one daily affirmation of your own.

leaders of Southwestern that I was obsessed with becoming a top producer. I loved the competitive environment that was created during the summer.

About the competition, I would become an expert at winning the Sunday afternoon “pie in the eye” sales contest held at our weekly performance review gatherings.

These meetings took place at the state parks located in our territory and each Sunday afternoon was a fun experience. Delivering those pies would become my summer drug of choice and winning those competitions would be the only mood enhancer I needed to inspire the next week’s performance.

The legendary Southwestern “pie in the eye” contest was used as a way of motivating and inspiring every member of our little fraternity of bookmen and book women. Each week, you were paired with another member of your division in a six-day contest based on the amount of revenue earned. I don’t know how the other young people viewed this contest, but for me, considering my athletic background, losing did not seem like an acceptable option.

This empowering belief got me up a little earlier, and it kept me out a bit later than most of the people that I was competing against. Every Sunday afternoon, the tension would build and our leader, Charlie Collins, would call out the different levels of sales performance. Last man standing in the one-on-one battles was called on to deliver a “pie to the eye” to their defeated competitor. How sweet.

The Power of Possibility Thinking

We tend to get what we expect.

—Norman Vincent Peale

Arriving at our introduction meeting, I was overwhelmed by the positive energy in the room. It seemed to me that everyone associated with Southwestern had taken a happy pill. People were laughing, smiling, and hugging one another as if this meeting were a long-awaited family reunion. I realized later that it *was* like a family reunion. There was, and remains today, a unique and close bond among all the young people who sell educational study systems for Southwestern Advantage.

Everyone who had previous experience at Southwestern possessed a deep level of respect and admiration for one another. At first, I felt out of my element and nervous. At this point in my life, the only sale I had made was convincing my

parents to allow me come on this journey. I only knew one person there: my buddy Richard. Suddenly, I was beginning to wonder what exactly I had just gotten myself into. In a room full of strangers, I felt alone, and the realization that I was a very long way from home ran through my mind.

Negative thinking can rear its ugly head quickly. Doubts and thoughts of failure immediately began to flood into my mind. What if I can't sell? What if I don't like what I have to do? What if I hate the area that they give me? What if I get horrible roommates? How am I going to survive with so little money? Questions, questions, and more questions, all containing a powerful life lesson, continued to flood through my thoughts.

This life-changing lesson would be disclosed to me in the weeks to come, by our team leader, Charlie Collins. Charlie was a bundle of energy and intensity. He had years of experience with Southwestern and had begun his career years earlier, when he was a wide-eyed and eager student, just like me. He taught me how important it was to have a business coach and a mentor in your life.

He emphasized the importance of having a leader in your life whom you can count on for advice and wise counsel. During the summer, Charlie would step in and play that role for all of us, who were privileged enough to have been a part of the Og Mandino division. Charlie was a possibility thinker, and his outlook on life would be impactful over the course of the summer.

Life Lesson 1

Regardless of your level of experience in any field, you need a coach.

As the meeting was called to order, we took our seats in the huge auditorium. High-energy music was blasting through the sound system, and you could feel the effect it had on everyone in the room. I wondered the very same thing that some of my clients think when they attend my seminars: *Is this a training meeting or a rock concert?* I would soon realize the power that music has to motivate others, and I would make this dynamic concept an integral part of my life's work. What I learned from the volume of the music I applied later to my own life. When doubt consumes you, you just turn "it" up—always up, never down.

Life Lesson 2

You can think yourself to greatness if you take action.

Years ago, my grandfather shared a concept with me that was immensely powerful: He said “Life has volume.” Oliver Wendell Holmes said, “Many people die with their music still in them.” Music is actually a metaphor for any individual’s unique gift. Your volume relates to the enthusiasm, excitement, effort, and energy you bring to your life. In 1978, I created the “Level 10 Experience” program based on this premise. If your life were measured on a dial that went from 1 to 10, then why would you ever set your dial below “10”?

Operating within the “Power of 10” concept provides each individual with the opportunity to maximize his or her personal capacity. If you set your dial to only seven, then you have already chosen to deny yourself 30 percent of your capacity. This concept applies to every role that you will play in your life. If you make a choice to set your dial to “10” today, this has the power to affect all your actions and future outcomes. If you apply daily effort to the “Power of 10” concept, you will shorten your goal-related timelines and you will then amplify your overall results.

Life Lesson 3

Determine what your music is, and then turn up your personal volume.

Over the next five days, we would meet the legends of Southwestern. David Dean was a powerhouse with a smile that could light up a dark room. His charisma put me on the edge of my seat with excitement and anticipation. “Double D,” as he was known, was about to become a center of influence in my young life.

He would become a difference-maker to everyone who was exposed to his positive mindset. In fact, without David’s encouragement and support over the course of the summer, I believe that I probably would have quit and gone home. I am still thankful today that he was willing to listen and provide advice when I needed him most.

Chapter 5

Life Lesson 26

*Imagination is more powerful than reality.
Imagine yourself successful, and successful you will be.*

Life Lesson 27

To win in life, you must think bigger.

Life Lesson 28

Look at life with childlike enthusiasm.

Life Lesson 29

Believe in yourself and anything is possible.

Life Lesson 30

No one can believe in you more than you believe in yourself.

Life Lesson 31

Belief allows you to power your life with the pure spirit of intent.

Chapter 6

Life Lesson 32

You must know where the finish line is before you begin the race.

Life Lesson 33

Goals must have a starting date and a completion date.

Life Lesson 34

“Someday” never gets here until it’s too late.

Life Lesson 35

Deadlines = Pressure = Energy = Excitement = Enthusiasm = Edge

Life Lesson 75

There is gold at the end of effort.

Life Lesson 76

Uncommon rewards require uncommon efforts.

Life Lesson 77

*Practicing every day will improve your performance and level of certainty,
regardless of your chosen profession.*

Life Lesson 78

The road to success is paved with challenges.

Chapter 13

Life Lesson 79

Preparation and effort will control both production and results.

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