THE ONLY WAY LEADERS

CAN WIN IN A WORLD

MOVING AT LIGHT SPEED

JM RYERSON

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• DEDICATION •

For Trey, TJ, and Lisa.

To those that choose to upgrade in life.

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Next Steps

· Introduction ·

You're on a trip. It's a family vacation, and you've been traveling all day. After long hours of waiting in lines, hauling luggage, corralling the kids, and handling temper tantrums, you're finally standing at your hotel's check-in desk, ready to enjoy your time away.

WAs the concierge looks up your reservation on the computer, you think about reaching your air-conditioned room at last and getting in a quick nap before heading out to the beach or hotel pool. The concierge looks up and says with a smile, "It looks like your room has been upgraded. You'll be in Suite 10A."

Suite?

"Here's your key card. It also gives you access to the rooftop pool and sauna. Enjoy!"

Rooftop pool? Sauna?

Suddenly, your entire image of your trip changes. You'd been plenty excited just to share a hotel room with your family and bounce between the pool, beach, and air conditioning all week, but suddenly, a luxurious tropical retreat awaits you.

Or, in a different scenario, you're having a terrible day. You're late to work, it's pouring rain, and you've just gotten soaked trying to take the dog out before you leave. When you come back in, you fuss with the finicky coffee machine and pour some into your to-go cup, grab your keys, and head for the door. On the way out, you catch sight of yourself in the mirror and notice your pants are flecked with mud. You put everything down on the coffee table and run to change.

When you return, now dry and clean but later than ever, you reach for a restorative sip of coffee only to find your dog has spilled it all over your cell phone.

Later, when you get a break from work, you stop in the Verizon store to see what can be done about your damaged phone. Not much, it turns out. But, as the salesperson tells you, you are eligible for a free upgrade.

An hour later, you return to the office with a brand new phone, three models newer than your last one, and suddenly the day doesn't seem so full of hassle. The rain gives the office a cozy atmosphere, your tasks for the afternoon are engaging, and your coworker's mutterings to himself are endearing rather than irritating.

We all love to upgrade. Whether it's the model of a car or a seat on an airplane, an upgrade is never met with resistance. We seek upgrades in countless ways throughout life. Think about it. You go from a bed in your parents' house, to a tiny apartment, to a home of your own; or, you go from an entry level job to a leadership position.

The prevalence of the word "upgrade" itself has increased exponentially from the 1950's, when it first started being used with its current meaning. We now upgrade everything from our cars to our computer software, eagerly awaiting the newest editions and groundbreaking features.

As I observed the way upgrades quickly became a regular part of our society, I couldn't help but question how this concept relates to people. Why is it so easy for us to upgrade our technology, but so difficult to upgrade our happiness, physical fitness, or daily habits?

If we can create software that upgrades at the tap of a screen, why do so many of us struggle to become the people we want to be?

I realized that the difference is semantic.

As humans, we never think about *upgrading* ourselves. We only think that we need to *change*. We know we should change our eating habits. We should change careers or homes. But people are extremely averse to change. Our bodies and minds will fight like hell to maintain homeostasis and keep things just as they are. We hear the word "change," and immediately see what we must leave behind in order to get what we want. To lose weight, we must skip our favorite foods. To get more done in the day we have to get up earlier, which means going to bed earlier and missing time spent with loved ones, or enjoying our favorite hobbies. This makes change feel like an impossible, unpleasant pursuit.

I've worked with dozens of individuals over the years, trying to help them change for the better. Over and over I'd see them struggle to become the people they wanted to be because they couldn't see past the idea of *change*.

Since then, I have changed my approach, inviting people instead to *upgrade*. Because after all, who doesn't love an upgrade?

We have everything in us we need to make these upgrades happen—no external hardware or software necessary. In the midst of infinite available upgrades, I implore you to focus your attention on these.

Upgrade your mindset. Upgrade your habits. Upgrade your life.

MINDSET

Everything we do is affected by our mindset, or the way we think about the world. When a mindset is embedded in us it can be difficult to see how it skews our vision, but once we open up and adjust that mindset, life appears different and full of possibilities.

HABITS

By upgrading your mindset, you gain a new power over your life. You can suddenly see that you've been in the driver's seat all along. You are capable of making changes and creating any life you want to. That all starts with habits. What habits will allow you to be the person you want to be and live the life you want to live?

Upgrading both your mindset and your habits will be the foundation of **changing your life,** no matter what that looks like for you. These are two keystone upgrades that can create a domino effect. By starting with just these, both of which are completely within your power, you unlock your own potential and elevate your quality of life immediately. Not only that, but you

are suddenly able to offer the world your best self. When you do, you are able to make your greatest impact.

When I realized the impact of these simple—but certainly not easy—upgrades, I was able to take on my goals like never before and bring my best to everything I did.

These upgrades are not temporary, and they are not quick. They are a fundamental leveling up that allows you to reach your full potential. If you're looking for quick tips to "be more productive" or "be happier," then you should stop reading here. If you're looking for a 30, 90, or even 365 day fix, there are plenty of books out there for you, but this isn't one of them.

However, if you're ready once and for all to upgrade your mindset, your habits, and, therefore, your life, I invite you to read on.

"Look around you.
Everything changes.
Everything on this earth is in a continuous state of evolving, refining, improving, adapting, enhancing, and changing.
You were not put on this earth to remain stagnant."

DR. STEVE MARABOLI

· One ·

DO YOU NEED A MINDSET UPGRADE?

A s the old adage goes, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," right? If you are getting along fine with your current mindset, why upgrade?

In my experience, the flaws in our mindsets show up in small and sneaky ways that don't make themselves obvious right off the bat. It is not like losing a tooth or breaking a bone, after all. You won't just wake up one morning to find a gaping hole in your mouth or searing pain in your foot. The manifestations of a poor mindset can start out subtle at first, but if you don't catch them, you'll never reach your full potential.

So how do we know if our mindset is working against us? In this chapter, I'll give you four signs that you may be in need of a mindset

upgrade. But first, I want to address the important tool you'll need to recognize these signs in yourself.

HUMILITY

The power of humility does more than just opening doors—it sets the entire stage for our character and shapes who we are. Without this key quality, you'll be unable to benefit from the lessons I have to share, so pay attention.

We as humans all possess this fascinating thing called an ego. For years I prided myself on not having an ego, but that was simply a delusion. We all have an ego, and we all need an ego. Being able to recognize our egos and keep them under control, however, is crucial to success in business and life. This is a never-ending battle of using our egos to provide us with strength and confidence, while never allowing arrogance to destroy what we have built or plan to build. Humility is the necessary medicine to keep us in check. The definition of humility, according to Merriam-Webster is "freedom from pride or arrogance," and it opens doors that your ego would have otherwise shut.

OPEN TO LEARN

The best leaders around the globe brim with confidence, but they also possess an ability to learn from their mistakes. They recognize that they do not have all the answers and are secure with that. In fact, their goal is to surround themselves with people smarter and more gifted

than they are. Humility sets the foundation to check our egos at the door and be open to ideas around us. It allows us to improve and grow in every area of life, because it's rare that the first idea we come up with is the best and only idea to consider.

OPEN TO CONNECT

The acclaimed British writer C.S. Lewis said, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less." In terms of connecting with other human beings in this world, I don't know if there is any better advice. The fastest way to connect with someone is to ask questions and find something that you either relate to or find interesting. Learning how to control your ego in a relationship will solidify this connection, even if it isn't fully clear at first. In due time it will be reciprocal, and then you can feed your ego by answering questions about yourself as well.

OPEN TO OPPORTUNITIES

The area in which I personally have to check my ego the most is being open to new opportunities. Having a growth mindset is something that I strive for daily, but there are moments that—because of my perception of someone else's ego or bravado—I shut down and close myself off. The truth is that even if I don't agree with that person's attitude, I can still learn from them. Giving that other person grace and being open to their thoughts and ideas has led to some amazing opportunities in my life. Embracing everyone's different perspectives on life is enriching and educational, and that in itself is why being humble leads to success.

As you can see, humility is essential for making any upgrade in life, big or small. Without it, you'll live in a bubble of your own delusions and never experience any growth or true connection. You'll forfeit any new opportunities. Therefore, to move forward, you'll need to cultivate humility within yourself. It can be tough, I know, but it will always be worth it.

Keep this in mind as you read on, and be honest as you evaluate yourself for the following qualities and determine mindset upgrade is in order.

You need a mindset upgrade if you are constantly negative and complain a lot.

We have all met that person who seems to have a black cloud over their head, or who always has something bad to say. Something always happens to go wrong for them, no matter what they do. Is this person simply unlucky? I would argue that no, it is not a matter of luck. They are simply creating a negative cycle for themselves.

The opposite is also true. You've probably met someone for whom things always go their way. No matter what, they seem to come out on top. This isn't luck either, and it isn't an accident.

My business partner, Chris, is one of these people. If you'd met him, you'd swear he'd never had a bad day in his life, that things had just always gone right for him, over and over. But that's not the case. From our time working together, I can assure you that Chris has had his fair share of difficulties. But he makes the intentional decision every day to approach life with a positive attitude, and that's what makes the difference. We all have the choice to be positive or negative, and we

make that choice every single day.

I firmly believe we can make the choice of whether to experience our world as positive or negative. Does that mean life will always be rainbows and sunshine? Of course not. There will always be challenges, but I do believe that negative energy feeds off negative energy, and positive off positive energy. The energy that you put into the world is what will surround you. That energy comes down to your thoughts, attitude, and actions. So, in the words of Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, "Watch your thoughts, they become your words; watch your words, they become your actions; watch your actions, they become your habits; watch your habits, they become your character; watch your character, it becomes your destiny."

One of the easiest ways to learn how to live your best life now is to understand these principles. As I mentioned earlier, you attract what you bring to the table. Misery loves company, after all.

You need a mindset upgrade if you are surrounded with people who don't bring value to your life.

One of the hardest, yet most valuable exercises you can do is to look around at your 5 closest friends and recognize that they are a direct reflection of you. Are you proud of that reflection? Or is it time to make a change and find a more positive group of people who will inspire and encourage you to live your best life? This doesn't mean you can't keep your current friends around, but it may be time to make a group decision to lift one another up. This includes you! You can't expect your friends to positively influence you if you aren't doing the same for them. To address both, I constantly ask these two questions:

1. Do they lift me up or bring me down?

2. How am I showing up for them?

About fifteen years ago, I realized the painful truth of this in my own life. I looked in the mirror and I didn't like what I saw. If this was a reflection of the five people I was closest to, then I would have to make some changes within my circle of friends.

So that's what I did. Today, when I look in the mirror or glance around at the people I spend time with, I am proud of what I see.

You need a mindset upgrade if you are not taking care of your mind, body and soul.

It is extremely difficult to eat right, sleep enough, exercise, meditate, read, or maintain any other healthy habit when you are questioning your inspiration and excitement about life. You don't feel great, so you don't treat yourself great. One of the fundamental principles of improving is recognizing the ties between all of these things.

Your body, mind, and soul are not separate entities, but deeply connected elements of the same machine. Therefore, anything you do by or for one, impacts the other. Many people end up in a cycle of self-sabotage by failing to realize this.

Consider the following as you evaluate how well you're taking care of your whole self.

1. What am I doing for my mind today?

Listening to a podcast, playing some brain games, or reading ten pages are great examples of exercising the mind regularly.

2. What am I doing for my body today?

Exercising, preparing healthy meals, and even wearing supportive shoes are important ways to honor your body.

3. What am I doing to fill my soul today?

Do not overlook this one, because without it, you'll quickly lose your grip on the others. Pay attention to what fills your soul. Are you prioritizing it and doing it on a regular basis? Meditate daily, journal each morning, or attend church service each week.

You need a mindset upgrade if you are failing to take responsibility and blaming others.

There are plenty of moments in our daily lives where we get to choose whether to play the victim or take responsibility. Someone cuts you off on the highway. Your spouse is not helping you around the house as much as you want them to. Your food comes out overcooked at the restaurant. You are passed up for a promotion at work. Your friend calls you out for something you said. All of these situations challenge us to examine our roles in them. Sometimes it feels good to be the victim and place the blame on that inconsiderate driver or the rude server at the restaurant...but it will also lead you down a path of negative and cynical thoughts. It's a sign that your mindset is working against you. Conversely, taking responsibility for your actions is freeing, powerful, and puts you in total control of having positive and optimistic thoughts.

This point cannot be overstated. It's so important, in fact, that another chapter will be dedicated entirely to addressing it. If you are unsure of where you stand with this, pay close attention to the exercise in the next chapter.

If you have noticed that any of these points ring true for you, then you're not living your best life. You are carrying around some anger or resentment or simply feeling cheated. Even if you don't see it, chances are you're still not at your full potential. You have much more to give the world, and for that reason, you need a mindset upgrade.

"The price of greatness is responsibility."

WINSTON CHURCHILL

· Two ·

PLAYING THE VICTIM VS. TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

To really learn some of the most important lessons in life, we often have to keep nudging ourselves towards different ways of thinking and behaving. But guarding against old habits that don't serve us well can sometimes be a frustrating process of trying to remind ourselves each day not to fall into certain traps. A prime example of this is the classic debate between playing the victim and taking personal responsibility.

It comes into play in the workplace, in relationships, and in personal lives, so if you don't have a handle on it, it can quickly steer your life in a direction that doesn't serve you. Sometimes, in the moment, it feels good to be the victim and place the blame on that inconsiderate driver, or the rude server at the restaurant, but it will also lead you down a

path of negative and cynical thoughts that leave you feeling helpless. Conversely, taking responsibility for your actions is freeing, powerful, and puts you in total control of having positive and optimistic thoughts.

Unfortunately, it can be easy to convince ourselves that we are the victims, and to take on that story without even realizing it. So much of the media we consume is founded on the idea of victimhood. Just take a look at reality television. *Extreme Makeover, What Not to Wear, Real Housewives*. All of these shows are predicated on the idea that their subjects have been wronged in some way and are therefore deserving of something to make up for it. We are conditioned to buy into that narrative and seek it out in our own lives. And if you're looking, it's not hard to find.

Fortunately, we do have some examples in our culture of great individuals who have said no to playing the victim and instead stepped into responsibility.

Take a look at one of the most famous people in the United States and beyond: Oprah Winfrey. Oprah had an incredibly difficult upbringing, surviving what appeared to be insurmountable adversity. She was born into a poor family in Mississippi to young parents who were separated. In her early years she was moved around a lot, from her grandmother, to her father, to her mother and then back. She was sexually abused by multiple family members and eventually ended up pregnant at fourteen. After trying to hide the pregnancy, she was eventually discovered and kicked out. She gave birth prematurely and her child died a few weeks later.

In this situation, it would have been incredibly easy for Oprah to slip into the role of the victim. And who could have blamed her? She faced more trauma and tragedy before the age of fifteen than many people do in their entire lives. Yet, after losing her child and moving back in with her father, she decided that she had a second chance and she would turn her life around. By age 17, she was a beauty pageant winner. By age 19, she was a news anchor. By 31 she had her own talk show. I could go on detailing her activism, her TV network, her financial and social success, but you know the rest of the story. Oprah is a household name— all because she decided to take responsibility. She couldn't control what the first few chapters of her life looked like, but once she took responsibility over her story, there was no stopping her. She transformed her life and maximized her positive impact on others as well.

She's certainly not the only example of someone changing the narrative away from victimhood and towards responsibility. Many others are literally changing our conceptions of what is possible.

In fact, this is the mission of athlete Chris Waddell. At 20 years old, Chris was a promising ski racer at Middlebury College when a skiing accident left him paralyzed from the waist down. By all means, this could have spelled the end of Waddell's young athletic career, but he had other ideas. Within a year, Chris was back on the slopes, now on what is called a "monoski."

When he graduated from Middlebury, he did it on a ski, dressed in a cap and gown. Soon after, he made the US paralympic team. In addition to competing in the 1992, 1994, 1998, and 2002 Winter Paralympics as a mono skier, he also represented the U.S. in the 1996, 2000, and 2004 Summer Paralympics as a wheelchair track athlete.

As if medals, world records, and Hall-of-Fame inductions weren't enough, Waddell then went on to become the first paraplegic to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro, the highest free-standing mountain in the world.

Chris often says, "It's not what happens to you. It's what you do with it." This sense of perspective is key to handling life's challenges, and it's sorely lacking in today's world. We could all benefit from this ability to take a step back and assess our situations from an outside lens, to see not what we lack, but what we have. Waddell credits his post-accident success to this outlook, and he's even created a foundation called One Revolution based on the very idea. Their mission is to turn the perception of disability upside down. Who could be more emblematic of the power of a mindset upgrade? In the face of incredible challenge and intimidating odds, Waddell decided to upgrade his mindset and continue striving. In doing so, he has rewritten the global understanding of what is possible for people with disabilities.

But how do you know if you are stuck in the victim mindset? As I said, it's easy to slip into, and even easier to overlook when you don't know the signs.

¹ Kelly, Tom. "Chris Waddell: Tragedy to Opportunity." *SkiUtah.com*, 8 Dec. 2020, https://www.skiutah.com/blog/authors/tom-kelly/chris-waddell-tragedy-to. Accessed 11 May 2022. "Our Story: One Revolution." *CWI*, 4 Nov. 2022 https://onerevolution.org/our-story/.

That's why I've developed a simple exercise to help you determine if you are playing the victim or taking responsibility. I invite you to try it yourself.

- 1. Take out a piece of paper and draw a line down the center.
- 2. On one side of the line, write "victim," and below it, list all the emotions you associate with being a victim.
- 3. On the other side, write "responsible," and write out all the emotions you associate with taking responsibility.

You'll find that each side has both positive and negative emotions and associations, but the "victim" side is much more heavily skewed towards the negative.

That should be plenty of evidence to demonstrate that while playing the victim may temporarily serve you, in the bigger scheme of things, it is not the positive choice.

So how do you stop? How do you upgrade your mindset from that of a victim to that of someone who takes responsibility? It's not easy, I'll tell you that right now. Playing the victim is a habit— it takes intention to break it and form a new, healthier way to operate. But it can be done. The tips below will help you take the first steps away from your bad habits and towards better ones.

SEEK ACCOUNTABILITY

It helps to have someone holding you accountable. For me, it's my wife. We now call each other out on instances of playing the victim throughout the day. This method definitely requires you to put aside your pride, but it is so worth it. You'll likely find, as I did when my wife began calling me out, that your accountability partner is right every time. That's because it's so easy to fall into the victim trap. I'm blessed to have my wife around to not allow me to play the victim card—even if I don't immediately feel that way.

This message of taking responsibility is one I believe we should all be sharing. This is an unparalleled opportunity to help yourself and those around you upgrade their mindsets and their lives. Look around your own life—see if you can give someone permission to take full responsibility and stop playing the victim in times where bettering themselves is the right option.

AUDIT YOUR VOCABULARY

Words are powerful, especially the ones we use to speak to and about ourselves. Certain words can indicate that we aren't taking responsibility and are blaming others. Keep an ear out for language that focuses on the actions of others, or on actions done *to* you. Here are some examples:

- "...is working against me."
- "...just wouldn't work for me."

- "My parents never gave me...growing up."
- "Their mistake ruined my..."
- "...always happens to me."
- 'You're making me feel..."

If you catch yourself thinking or saying phrases like this regularly, turn them around to take responsibility for your feelings and situations. For example, try reframing these thoughts in the following ways:

- "I'm struggling with..."
- "I'm going to try..."
- "I feel....when you..."

These may seem like small shifts, but remember the Lao Tzu quote from the last chapter. "Your words become your thoughts, your thoughts become your actions." Try these exercises for a few weeks and see if you notice how your thoughts, words and actions can take a more positive direction.

CLARIFY WHAT YOU WANT AND WHAT YOU DON'T

When you aren't sure what you want, it can be tempting to float through your days and wait for someone to give it to you. If you are instead given something you don't want, you might feel victimized. The solution is to be crystal clear on what you want and take action for yourself to get there. If, on your way, you encounter something you don't want, you'll have the momentum to bypass it and keep going towards what you do.

It's also important to set boundaries around what you don't want. We live in a world containing an infinite number of ways to spend our time and energy. However, as humans, we are painfully finite. Without taking the time to note what we don't want and put the necessary boundaries up around it, we're setting ourselves up for a very unhappy run on a hamster wheel. Intentionality, on the other hand, is how we combat this mindlessness. In every situation, you get to make a choice about how to handle it.

In that sense, you're never really the victim. Regardless of what happens, you can always take control of your thoughts, your reactions, and your next steps.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

I challenge everyone to stop and ask themselves if they are being the victim or taking responsibility. This is not easy, but it will serve you well for a long time to come.

As human beings, we thrive on challenges. There is something enticing about having a problem to solve or a test to triumph over. Why else would newspapers contain crossword puzzles and word searches? Why would bookstores have entire sections of sudokus and puzzles? And how else would *The New York Times's* Wordle have taken the nation by storm so quickly? We are built to take on challenges and solve problems. In fact, we grow bored when things are too easy.

Hobbies and activities that come easy to us are often entertaining and enjoyable at first, but they don't fulfill us in the same way that solving a complicated problem does, so we eventually grow bored and abandon them. Getting outside of our comfort zones is far more stimulating and fulfilling.

Embrace challenges and you'll spend your days feeling empowered and capable rather than indignant and helpless. You'll be in the driver's seat of your life, ready to take on whatever the road has in store.

"You cannot have a positive life and a negative mind."

JOYCE MEYER

· Three ·



So you've read through the last two chapters and determined that, yes, according to those signs, a mindset upgrade is in order. But why should you do it?

After all, upgrading your mindset isn't an easy task. It will involve rethinking the way you live your life, the stories you hold about yourself, and what got you to where you are today. You'll need self-reflection and a healthy dose of self-honesty to make it happen.

But, of course, it is so worth it.

MINDSET DETERMINES WHAT WE CAN DO

The definition of mindset according to Merriam-Webster is "a mental attitude or inclination." I believe that if we do not embrace a winning mindset, then we have already lost. Henry Ford, who founded Ford Motor Company and created the assembly line, is credited with saying

the quote, "Think you can or can't, you're right." Here is a man who literally changed the world, and it all started with his ability to think differently. There is no question that he had other abilities such as intelligence and work ethic, but it all started with his ability to believe that he could. We are all motivated differently, but regardless of what inspires you, it starts with belief in yourself.

MINDSET LETS YOU ENJOY YOUR LIFE NOW

Furthermore, I want you to consider the fact that upgrading your mindset doesn't just put you on the path to a better future. It also allows you to enjoy the present.

I have been exposed to many of the "influencers" of today's world, and by getting to meet and spend significant time around them, I have found some inconsistencies. One of the biggest ones is that it's all about where you are going. Get up, grind, compromise anything at the cost of attaining your dreams. The problem with that is that the quality of life you have once you obtain your "dream" is often not what you hoped for, and no amount of money can make up for that. Let's be clear, I love to make money, but it's not the only thing that matters. The wealthiest people I know have been able to navigate these waters because they remembered this cardinal rule: "The joy is in the journey, not the destination".

The words "balance" and "harmony" often come up in the description of how they were able to achieve their dreams, enjoy the ride, and not sacrifice what they love along the way. There are compromises, and the journey is not all sunshine and rainbows, that is guaranteed. But a positive mindset will allow you to see the value of the compromises and how they will serve you down the road. In that way, you'll be able to "embrace the suck."

This phrase is most used in the military. It means "to consciously accept or appreciate something that is extremely unpleasant but unavoidable." I know it must sound odd to say "joy is in the journey" and "embrace the suck" simultaneously, but when you're in the right mindset, it's crystal clear. Any time that you are growing, it's going to be uncomfortable, but this phrase can help you find joy in that discomfort. This most often happens to me as leg day at the gym approaches. If I think about all the pain I'm about to endure, it can be overwhelming and makes me want to avoid the gym altogether. Instead, I tell myself what an opportunity it is to feel that pain, because feeling it means I'm alive and breathing. Adversity and pain are inevitable, but learning to "embrace the suck" can help you find joy in tough times.

HAVE AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

A key tenant of a mindset upgrade is practicing gratitude. This alone comes with incredible benefits that cannot be overstated. A 2010 issue of the *The Clinical Psychology Review* examined the existing body of research on gratitude and well-being, which "led to a consistent picture of gratitude being important for well-being." This review took into account psychopathology, adaptive personality characteristics, positive

social relationships, and physical health in its definition of wellbeing, demonstrating the many layers of benefits that gratitude elicits.²

Gratitude improves social well-being by taking your conversations and interactions beyond the surface level complaining that has become the norm. Plus, how amazing does it feel when someone says "I appreciate you" or "you make my life better"? We all want to feel connected and valued. It also has a major positive impact on physical health. Recognizing what we are grateful for reduces stress and that helps with decreasing inflammation. Decreasing inflammation in the body enhances sleep, strengthens our immune system, reduces aches and pains and lowers blood pressure. This in turn allows you to be more active and exercise more. When your body is not in pain, you want to move more.

And, of course, your mental health benefits from the mental upgrade of gratitude as well. Studies show that gratitude increases happiness and reduces depression. Having an attitude of gratitude strengthens our feelings of joy, optimism and overall contentment. Even while writing this I can't help but smile and feel so blessed to have a computer, and the ability to share this with people all around the world.

Every morning I send out a text to my loved ones with a quote in hopes of making their day better. This morning the quote was from Marcus Aurelius, "When you arise in the morning, think of what a

² Geraghty, A.W.A., et al. "Gratitude and Well-Being: A Review and Theoretical Integration." *Clinical Psychology Review*, Pergamon, 20 Mar. 2010, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272735810000450.

privilege it is to be alive, to think, to enjoy, to love." Simple advice, but so good!

MINDSET HELPS YOU FIND MEANING

At some point in all our lives, we will ask the question "What is the meaning of all of this?" I don't believe it's meant to be a deep philosophical question, but rather a way to determine why we are going through a tough time, or what really makes us tick. Often, we come back from our speculation empty-handed, and with more questions than answers. I have asked myself and thousands of people around the world that same question, "What is the meaning of life?" There have been far too many answers to possibly document, but the overwhelming categories have always come back to the following concepts:

1. Fun

If you were looking for something more academic, I apologize, but even Aristotle, one of the most famous philosophers of all time, said, "Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence." We all want to be happy, and I don't ever recall being unhappy while having fun. That doesn't mean that I don't have unhappy moments and that life is all "fun and games" but I certainly aim to always inject fun into my life. I want you to ask yourself a simple question: Do I want to be happy, or unhappy? It almost sounds silly saying it aloud, but it's a stark reminder to enjoy your time on Earth. Find ways to have fun daily to enhance your life.

2. Love

Is there a better emotion in the world than love? Whether it is applied to a being or an activity, finding what you love is paramount in the search for meaning in this life. Love can make you feel whole, and it can transcend any logic that you try to apply to it. As Wayne Dyer said, "Doing what you love is the cornerstone of having abundance in your life." There is another quote by Thomas Merton that is more applicable to finding love with another person, "Love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone, we find it with another." Perhaps you are lucky enough to find love in both regards but if not, continue to search, as you are worthy of both.

3. Purpose

"The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away," said Pablo Picasso, who is regarded as one of the greatest artists of the 20th century. He found his gift early on and spent 80 of his 91 years devoted to artistic production. Not everyone will find their gift at the age of 11, while some might find it even earlier than that. Each of us has a gift, and my hope is that you continue to search for that gift until you have found it. The level of fulfillment and energy you get to experience and share once you have is challenging to describe.

Upgrading your mindset will allow you to make fun, love, and purpose part of your everyday life, therefore filling it with meaning. Check in with yourself and make sure you are filling these three buckets. If you

are not, then pursue them with vigor and don't quit until you have them.

IT ALLOWS YOU TO SHARE YOUR GIFTS WITH THE WORLD

When it comes down to it, upgrading your mindset helps you to fully embody your best self. When you do that, not only will your life benefit, but you'll be able to use your unique strengths and talents to improve the lives of others as well. Often, you may inspire others to do the same.

Watching someone do something they are uniquely gifted at or truly enjoy is amazing. Think of how the world changed because Martin Luther King shared his dream, Ludwig van Beethoven shared his love of music, and Steve Jobs shared his ability to think differently. Our talents and gifts are meant to be shared with others. If someone sees you sharing your gift or using your God-given talents, then they may choose to do the same, creating a domino effect of positive change.

You'll also build better relationships, new and old. Sharing your gifts means sharing a deep part of you. It's more than just surface-level sharing. You are more than "Bob the accountant," and instead show the world that you are "Bob the guy that is insane on the drums." It opens up the opportunity to find a like-minded group of people that you can bond with and truly relate to. It's also certainly more exciting for your buddies to talk about the drum solo you played versus a spreadsheet created at work (no offense, accountants).

Ultimately, sharing your gifts leads you to living your best life.

Studies have shown remarkable improvement when people utilize their strengths, including a boost in self-confidence, increased energy and overall improved health and wellness. I believe greatly in having a growth mindset and improving our weaknesses.

Lastly, it is fun to show the world your gifts, and we all need more fun in our life! It has taken me a long time to understand that keeping these gifts hidden from the world is selfish. Choose to share your talents and empower others to do the same. It will help make the world a better place, which is always a good thing.