

A man with a mustache, wearing a dark blue suit, white shirt, and a red tie with white polka dots, stands in front of a building with large windows. He has his hands in his pockets and is smiling slightly.

IDENTITY

YOUR PASSPORT TO SUCCESS

STEDMAN GRAHAM

New York Times Bestselling Author and Educator

WITH STEWART EMERY AND RUSS HALL

Praise for *Identity: Your Passport to Success*

“I wish someone like him [Stedman Graham] had been around to enlighten me at an age when finding myself and a career change or decision was within easy reach...all I needed, as he formulated, was a ‘process.’”

—**Janice Jones**, Junior Achievement of Chicago

“Stedman Graham learned years ago that the secret to a successful life was to not let other people define him, but rather to define himself. As his thought-provoking book shows, finding your true identity is not as easy as it seems. Filled with inspiring real-life stories and life-changing insights, this page-turner of a book will snap you out of your complacency and make you think: Who are you, deep-down? What do you value, seriously? And what do you really want to do with your life? Don’t miss this outstanding book.”

—**Ken Blanchard**, coauthor of *The One Minute Manager*[®]
and *Leading at a Higher Level*

“Get clear on who you are and live according to your own definition of success. Stedman Graham’s *Identity* offers thought-provoking questions, strategies, and stories to expedite your journey to success. This is a must-read!”

—**Stuart Johnson**, Founder & CEO, VideoPlus
and SUCCESS Partners

“Stedman Graham is a man who stands tall and speaks from the heart. His insights and advice have provided a road map for success, which I have found invaluable.”

—**Chas Edelstein**, Co-CEO, Apollo Group, Inc.
(owner of University of Phoenix)

“*Identity* is an inspirational, honest, and clearly written book about how you can understand and make choices in your life where you matter and fit in a world full of personal challenges. It is a book of illuminating stories—Stedman’s practical wisdom and process for personal success to get you to make your own way. This is a book everyone can use.”

—**Elliott Washor**, Cofounder, Codirector, Big Picture Learning

“Stedman’s book is once again delightful and insightful. The personal stories that are shared are so impactful. This kind of book takes us by the hand and brings to light the importance of knowing who we are and how our identity influences our lives and those around us. An insightful, inspirational, and much-needed book.”

—**Laura Stansberry**, Senior VP, Wells Fargo
Wealth Management Group

“In *Identity*, Stedman Graham skillfully walks you through a journey of self-discovery, at the end of which your purpose, path, and genius will be brilliantly obvious to you. In fact, this book could change your life. Descartes said: ‘Know thyself.’ I believe the best investment you can make is in growing and evolving your inner world; your outer world then becomes a perfect reflection of that evolved inner world. If you’re ready to step up into a whole new level of your life’s genius, *Identity* is an absolute must-read. Stedman’s writing style is captivating; the personal stories and thoughtful questions and exercises in each chapter make this a book you’ll go back to time and again!”

—**Mari Smith**, social media thought leader,
author of *The New Relationship Marketing*

“It is often assumed, by ourselves and others, that we will just know what to do in life and how to do it, and that we have a clear picture of who we are. In *Identity*, Stedman Graham gives us a well-defined process for discovering the most important thing to know and understand about ourselves—our authentic identity. Even if we think we know a lot about ourselves, this book has the power to bring our knowledge to a level that will significantly shift our lives. Stedman includes engaging stories and thought-provoking questions that bring clarity and understanding to his transformational process.”

—**Bobbi DePorter**, President, Quantum Learning Network /
SuperCamp; author of *Quantum Success*, *Quantum Teaching*,
and *8 Keys of Excellence*

“Stedman put into words what we have long held true at Gulfstream: There is no such thing as the status quo. To be successful, you need to have a vision and a road map to get you there. This book can serve as a blueprint for anyone looking to gain control of their life, both personally and professionally.”

—**Larry Flynn**, President, Gulfstream Aerospace Corporation

“Most people acquiesce to mediocrity—not for the lack of God-given potential, but primarily because they value the camaraderie of the average beyond the uniqueness of excellence! Stedman Graham’s *Identity* breaks rank and liberates us to set sail beyond our borders. All aboard!”

—**Bishop T.D. Jakes**, Senior Pastor, The Potter’s
House of Dallas, Inc.

“Stedman has nailed it! Your potential as a human being is based not on how the world defines you, but on how you define yourself. If you want your life to lead to true success, you first must find your true identity. This book will do exactly that. It will provide you with the tools, steps, and vision you need to impact your life and the lives around you. It’s never too late to discover who you are!”

—**Randy Garn**, Chief Relations Officer, Prosper

“Stedman Graham shows us the importance of self identity and how living an authentic life gives you freedom. His process will guide you every step of the way.”

—**Judge Greg Mathis**

“Stedman Graham teaches that you can transform your life through having a clear and defined understanding of who you are. When your identity is crystallized, so is your vision for the life you choose to lead, and that vision becomes your future. *Identity* is truly your passport to success—and significance! Thank you, Stedman, for being such a profound pathfinder.”

—**Kevin Hall**, bestselling author of *Aspire* (the highest reader-rated book in personal development in 30 years)

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WITH

STEWART EMERY AND RUSS HALL

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I dedicate this book to Oprah, who is where she is because she's always known who she was. Thank you for being a teacher in my life. You have made it possible for me to transform and to make a difference in other people's lives throughout the world.

To my daughter Wendy—I appreciate your insights, personal feedback, and support of your dad.

To my sister Anita, the Grahams, the Jacobs, and to the Spaulding Family descendants—Your leadership and support have given me the strength to keep on keeping on.

I dedicate this book to the people who are too many to name, who have impacted my life, and who I have learned from. I am grateful and thankful. This book on identity is the cornerstone and foundation of my potential. It is my vision to share this message and philosophy with people all over the world.

God is love.

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About the Author

Stedman Graham is Chairman and CEO of S. Graham & Associates, a management, marketing, and consulting firm based in Chicago, Illinois. Graham speaks, conducts seminars, and develops programs for businesses and educational organizations worldwide. He is the author of ten books, including two *New York Times* bestsellers, *You Can Make It Happen—A Nine-Step Plan for Success* and *Teens Can Make It Happen—Nine Steps to Success*, which illustrate his proprietary Nine-Step Success Process™, a life management and learning system that teaches you how to organize your personal and professional life around your identity.

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Foreword

by John C. Maxwell

I have been a student of personal growth, leadership, and success for more than forty years. I believe that having a learner's mindset is very important to that process. You're never too old or too experienced to learn something new. And one of the most important truths about personal growth and success is that you must change yourself first if you want to change your world.

When I met Stedman Graham, I could tell he had a similar outlook. He is a learner. Over the course of time, he has developed a way of approaching life and profession that he has distilled into his Nine-Step Success Process™. It has helped him, and now he is sharing it because he believes it can also help you.

Stedman and I share many of the same approaches to growth and success. You must know yourself to get on the right track. You need strong values, such as integrity, a positive attitude, and a strong work ethic. You must build a team. And you must be willing to keep changing and growing.

In this book, Stedman includes many wonderful stories and insights gained from talking to successful people. These will help you greatly. But what I like most is Stedman's desire to encourage you and to tell you that you can do this! It doesn't

matter what your background was. It doesn't matter what your circumstances are. You can do things to positively influence what your future will be.

So enjoy this book. And may it be a passport for your continuing journey of success.

John C. Maxwell,
New York Times Bestselling Author and Leadership Expert

Introduction

*“Your time is limited,
so don’t waste it living someone else’s life.”
—Steve Jobs*

Have you ever thought about the connection between knowing who you are and achieving success? Have you ever felt unsure of where you fit in the world? Or maybe you were never sure to begin with.

You might think you have a pretty good handle on who you are, your identity. But here’s the thing: Most people really don’t. And even if you do, your identity can change, evolve, and transform. It’s up to you to fully grasp your identity and use it to your advantage to succeed.

If you ask a lot of people who they are, you’ll get a host of answers: “I’m a student.” “I’m a future CEO in the making.” “I’m a single mom.” “I’m a Chicago Bulls fan.” Others might

say, “I like the Yankees.” “I’m a Pisces.” “I’m a caring, giving person.” Some might even admit, “I’m a taker.” Whatever the snapshot, it’s not a fully developed picture for most people, so you and I are going to take a journey to find out more about identity, and why knowing yours better can be a huge asset.

Although the pages that follow include stories about other people’s journeys to success and offer different points of view on how to go about it, this book is really all about you.

As you read, I ask that you think about how what you read applies to you and the life you are creating. Consider how you can put what you read to work for you. Putting the principles you learn into practice will help you build a wonderful life for yourself. As you get further along in this book, you will deeply examine what being successful means, especially for you. For the moment, think of success as the end result of becoming clear about your identity, discovering what you love to do, and learning how to do it really well so you create value in the world.

The core idea of the book is this: Your happiness and success in life flow from becoming clear about who you are and establishing your authentic identity—first inside yourself and then externally in the world.

There is a distinction between the reality of knowing yourself and that of having created a fully functional identity. Knowing yourself is the foundation for building identity. Knowing yourself—being comfortable in your own skin—is an inner process that’s not readily observable by others.

Interestingly, however, other people often experience the process because they feel more at ease in the company of a person who is comfortable in his or her own skin. As you become comfortable with who you are, other people will be drawn to you and bring you great opportunity.

You can also think of identity as your personal brand. When painters sign paintings, they are establishing their personal brand; it's their way of saying that what they've done matters. The same goes for authors. My name is on this book. It's there not as a boast—lots of people have written books—but as a sign that part of my identity includes the willingness to reach out and help others. That's something about which I can feel a healthy pride.

*You can also think of identity
as your personal brand.*

In this sense, being clear about your identity is a significant next step beyond knowing who you are and being comfortable in your own skin. Building your identity is about knowing what your calling is, learning how to do it well, and creating value in the world. I've learned that, for the most part, extraordinary people are simply ordinary people doing extraordinary things that matter to them. They relentlessly align all the elements of their life to support their pursuit of what has deep meaning to them. The message here is that you have the ability within you to live an extraordinary life. You have the choice to embrace a personally meaningful journey, integrating your personal and

Building your identity is about knowing what your calling is, learning how to do it well, and creating value in the world.

professional life in ways that make a lasting difference to you and the people around you.

I started to make real progress in my own life when I realized that the American free enterprise system was

relevant to every single person. I was five years into my own change process when I realized, “Wow, this is the greatest gift somebody can get as a human being—it doesn’t get any better.” I said, “Oh, my goodness, that’s the freedom.” I realized that, everywhere in the world, there are 24 hours in the day, and the process for becoming successful is the same for everybody. It doesn’t make any difference what your race is, what your family circumstances are, where you came from, what you look like, what your religion is, what your gender is—the process works the same way. And then I started to buy into the process. I said, “There is a process I can learn and use to build my identity and become successful!” And you can learn it, too. Use your 24 hours wisely. I’ll show you how.

In my years of supporting people in their quest for success and freedom, I’ve also learned that relying on information can be a trap. In a totally connected world, there’s no shortage of information. Anyone with an Internet-enabled device has universal access to information overload. But do you feel any clearer about your identity as a result? Most of the people I ask answer, “Not so much.” When you’ve established your

identity, you'll be able to sift through information to select the golden nuggets that support you in the pursuit of your dream.

If you don't have an identity, you don't have a choice. You're like a jukebox in the corner. Somebody strolls over, drops in a few quarters, presses a button, and you play their tune. You have no choice. But it doesn't have to be that way. I offer you a gift: the freedom of choice.

Personal growth requires inspirational experiences that move your heart. Way, way back before the Internet began—before there were books, even—the kind of experiences I am talking about began at the feet of the storyteller. With this in mind as I prepared to write this book, I talked to people and collected true stories about them and their journeys to know themselves, to sort out their values, define their identity, and express their voice in the world. Some of them struggled—sometimes a lot.

A number of folks I talked with asked that I not use their names or the names of the people they mentioned, out of respect for other people's privacy. My publisher, Tim Moore, suggested that we engage a writer he knew to turn these particular conversations into short stories, and that is what we have done.

In the following chapters, you will meet a man named Rob and a collection of his friends who all live in a Midwestern town we called Blakenfield. The stories are true. Only the names and location have been changed to protect people's privacy.

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C H A P T E R 1

You Have a Choice

When I was growing up as one of six children (two of whom were disabled) in Whitesboro, New Jersey, a small black community surrounded by a predominately white community, the catch-phrase was, “Nothing good ever comes out of Whitesboro.”

My childhood was tough at times. My two disabled brothers seemed to get all the attention, and as a kid, I didn’t know how to deal with that. I was also teased, and my family was called names. I felt a lot of shame through all of this. People put labels on me and called me by those labels—some linked to my disabled brothers, some race-based. So, I had this internal fight going on as I resisted labeling myself, but still wondered, “What if I am?” That led to negative feelings, and I found myself struggling with another fight as I wrestled with my negativity and my anger. That’s how my low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence kicked in: I was trying to deal with my feelings but I didn’t know how. Thinking about race started to take up a lot of space in my head and left me trying to function with a race-based consciousness, which is what I had.

With a race-based consciousness, every day I woke up thinking I couldn't make it because of the color of my skin. This was tied directly to my self-esteem, my belief systems, my habits, my vision, and my hopes and dreams. It was also directly linked to what I thought my talent was and what skills I thought I could develop. I had a totally self-limiting consciousness.

Picture this: I was a young 6-foot-6 black guy. What did everyone say I was? A basketball player. Label. So I was that.

*I was a young 6-foot-6
black guy. What did
everyone say I was?
A basketball player.
So I was that.
I lived the label.*

I lived the label. I went on to Abilene, Texas, where I played basketball for Hardin-Simmons University, and then to Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, for grad school. There I was exposed to many good people, but I also bought into what others said and how others acted

instead of getting better in-tune with my own soul. My self-esteem was too low for me to appreciate life. As I once told Mike Kiley of the *Chicago Tribune*, "I was an angry person. I was angry at the system, and I felt a victim in my own right. It was almost as if I had a hole in my heart."

Then one day, it hit me. It wasn't about race; it was about me not knowing who I was and not having a process for becoming successful. I didn't know how successful people

think and act. I'd been told it was about race. I suddenly realized that somebody had fed me a bill of goods, and I had bought into it. And if I'd bought into the notion that it was about race, there was no way out—I would be trying to solve what the problem wasn't.

Later in life, I faced the issue of being Oprah Winfrey's partner. I heard myself referred to as "Oprah's boyfriend" and saw the handiwork of the tabloid media on display at the newsstands. It would have been easy for me to feel like I was really a nobody by having to live in the shadow of the lies they printed. I don't like being in that kind of limelight.

I didn't know how to deal with all of this. And I would never have known how to deal with it had I not learned something else that could replace it—a knowledge of how the free enterprise system worked and a process for becoming successful. I realized that other people had become successful in the system, that they were making money and creating opportunities and making things happen. I knew I didn't know how to do this. I didn't even know how to define it, or what it looked like, or what it consisted of, or how much work was involved. So I had to learn to cope, and I studied and I discussed; I watched and I learned. Now I know how much work is involved, because after my time in the U.S. Army and work in the prison system, I've been in business or running a business. Working in the prison system, I saw what happens to people who don't have a healthy identity or a process for success.

What I came up with is something that has helped me a great deal—and it can help you, too. It's a process for developing your identity, improving your life, and becoming successful.

The usual case is that you're not in a position to be able to improve your life because you haven't been taught a process for doing this. You don't know what to build or don't even realize that you have to build a foundation for your life. You don't have a starting process for living and improving and developing your life because you were taught to go to school, memorize, take tests, repeat the information, and forget it. Then you were stuck in a box doing the same thing over and over every single day. So you had no identity workshop development opportunities. Nobody came to you and said, "Let's work on your identity today." Instead, the external world just kind of took over and said, "Well, if you're not going to spend time on yourself and invest in yourself to develop some self-awareness about your own identity, I'll just take over. I'm going to supply you with music, games, food, chores, a job, and all the other things that take up your life—especially labels for pigeon-holing you." You felt that life was acting upon you instead of feeling like you were in control. You became a worker instead of a thinker. You became a follower instead of a leader—a slave, actually.

If you look at the seven billion people in the world, just 1% understand that they are the thinkers—and therefore, they run everything. This is the problem with our society and our country. We have too many people who are not innovative, too many people who are dropping out of school, too many

people who have given up their lives, too many people who don't have the skills to reinvent themselves, too many people looking for jobs who aren't able to control their own destinies. They feel that life is controlling them and that they have no control over it.

You may feel the same. Look, it's not just you. When I started to figure out that a key piece was missing in my own life, I was about 32 or 33. That's when I realized that I didn't know who I was, and I didn't understand the value of an education. I thought, "Man, you need a new education—and you need to wake up!"

*I didn't know who I was,
and I didn't understand the
value of an education.*

Just as you may be, I got very frustrated and built up a lot of anger—a lot of rage. The thing that saved me in high school was basketball. Being a 1,000-point scorer on the high school team was a boost. Basketball helped me develop enough confidence in myself not to destroy myself with all of the negative energy I had built up inside. You've got two sides of the equation: assets and liabilities. Your success is based on your assets versus your liabilities. Now, how many liabilities do you have standing in the way of assets that you can create in your life? Positive versus negative, good versus bad, love versus hate. It's all the same stuff.

What tipped the switch for me was the fact that, by my early thirties, I had a pretty good base. I'd played basketball in

Europe and I'd traveled around. I'd been in the U.S. Army, which helped me create some structure. I was building strength. I was looking for the structure because it was structure I needed. Then I worked in the prison system for five years, and that also provided structure. Some of us rebel against any form of structure, but that doesn't mean we don't need it. It was my good fortune to understand that I needed it.

As I think back to my time in high school again, I realize I was pretty active. I was a drum major in the band, I played basketball, and I was active in a lot of clubs. I had a great support system in church and little league baseball—all that kind of stuff. So to be fair, I had a lot of strength coming in, despite the fact that I was dealing with a lot of other stuff I felt to be negative. It was like an internal contest of good thinking versus bad thinking. I had to weigh all of that. I didn't have a process for doing this—to get out of my own bad dream.

If you feel you have no control over your life, you need to come to the same epiphany I did, that, "Oh, I'm not alone." Millions of women buy into the belief that they can't make it because they're a woman. Where I came from, people of color buy into the belief that they can't make it because of the color of their skin. That's their label. I'm not alone. Folks who think that they're entitled because they're a certain race, that because they're white they're better than somebody else, they are labeled. They buy into that. Or maybe you think that you can't succeed because your mother or father told you that you're nothing and that you're never going to be anything.

So you've got all these labels. I realized that I'm not the only person around here with a label. And I realized that the secret to unlabeled yourself is not to let other people define you. You need to define yourself—and you can, *if you know how*.

And I realized that the secret to unlabeled yourself is not to let other people define you. You need to define yourself—and you can, if you know how.

That's why I created the Nine-Step Success Process, a structure that you can follow in everything you do. It will get you results and performance in business as well as personal life. But you've got to be clear—you've got to have clarity, you've got to have focus, you've got to have alignment, you've got to have repetition, you've got to have skills, you've got to have information, and you've got to have improvement in your own internal life so that you can build your foundation. Then you'll be able to expand that into the larger world and pull out what you need in order to succeed on a larger scale.

Traditional learning in this world works the opposite of how you actually should learn. You've basically learned to be a worker. The world wants workers. So the educational system teaches you how to be a worker, how to get a job, and how to prepare yourself so you can go out and do the work. You're programmed to basically do the same thing over and over every day. If you buy into this, you get trapped because you get comfortable with the status quo. Without intervention or without some consciousness telling you that you need to

do more than what you're doing, you're not going to do it. It's impossible. You're certainly not going to do it if you're trained not to do it—or if you don't train yourself.

You need intervention, and that's what I'm providing through this book. I'm coming into your life and saying, "You need to wake up. You've been sleeping." The majority of people in many communities just loll along and act as if they've been hypnotized. They don't have any kind of goals; they don't have a vision. They may have a daily goal that they want to achieve today, but it's the same goal they had yesterday. Same thing, same thing, same thing. There's no process for continuous improvement. There's no journey. Where are you going? Where are you going to be in five years? Where are you going to be in ten years? What are you going to create in your life?

Most people don't know they can do that. They don't even know they can create a vision. They don't even know what a vision is. Why? Because schools don't teach vision. So I created a process that I could follow to reinvent myself, brand myself, and rebrand myself consistently. I needed a structure because I work best through structure, and I work through processes. When I discovered the benefit of process, I realized, "Oh, we have all of these things we don't do because there's no process for getting them done." So I started to organize every part of my life and put that into a process, to build value. I realized, "This is about talent and skills. This is about performance. It's about creating value." And that's way beyond the entitlement mentality of, "What is the world going to do for me?" The

structure I'm talking about is, "How can I go out there and create value?"

You want value. That's the key. It doesn't matter whether you're living in an affluent section of Chicago or you're living in poverty in a Chicago housing project. The question is, how do you get beyond where you are? How do you do something more than what you're doing? What kind of process can you develop? What can you do to enhance your value as a human being?

You have the potential to find value if you understand the process. I had to figure it out. I watched Oprah and what she's accomplished and realized that what she has comes from an internal base. She had a different kind of thinking. We were searching for the same thing, but she found it early. She knew there was a difference. She was also smarter, brighter. She was able to process. I didn't have the process. I probably could have gotten it earlier if I'd been a different kind of a thinker, but I didn't understand the value of process and good thinking. I just wasn't as good a thinker.

So, what's a thinker? A thinker is someone who is conscious. A thinker is someone who has intent—someone who has a methodology to put things together. A thinker has been taught to think and also has self-awareness. A thinker is inquisitive, thinks in detail, and can actually put things together based on how things work. Who's taught that—who's trained to think? We don't teach people to think. But I'm going to try to help you do just that.

One of the key points I stress in this book is your understanding of the difference between the internal world and the external one. As I've said, this book is all about you. You're going to make your own discoveries, aided by your observations from the stories I present. I use stories because people are moved by other people's experiences. There's no transformation in mere information, though.

You have to focus if you are to get sustainable benefits from this. Focus is huge. Once you lose your focus, it's tough. You're all over the place. You have no focus? You'd better get some focus, and then figure out what you're going to do repeatedly over a period of time. That's the only way you can create excellence. You can't create excellence any other way—and if you don't create excellence, how are you going to be an independent learner or thinker? How are you going to get beyond the system if you don't have some brand, if you don't have some base, if you don't have some foundation that separates you from everybody else? It all goes back to what I was talking about, which is value. How in the world is somebody going to give you value or respect if you don't stand for something? The most important point is that you have a choice. You can decide to be a leader or be a victim. It's all up to you.

Think you're not worthy? That's the biggest bunch of hogwash in the world. You've got the same opportunity I have. You just don't believe that you have it. You just don't believe enough in yourself to be able to take advantage of it. You're afraid you might succeed, and then you can't live with that

because you've been beating yourself up all your life. You may be conditioned based on that mindset, but you can break free from it.

I want you to understand that this is an internal journey. Once you go external, you'd

better know what you're doing. Once you get out in the world, the world will hurt you if you're not prepared. So I'm trying to help you transform your thinking from weakness to strength. You've got to become strong. You've got to believe in yourself, to be motivated about you. You've got to focus on you. Without you, nothing works. Don't worry about whether or not somebody cares about you. Instead, say, "I'm going to take charge of my own life, because if I wait on the world to do it for me, I'm in trouble."

The first step in the journey to freedom and success is to check your ID. That's not as easy as it sounds, but it's doable. If I defined it formally, I would say your identity is based on your passions, on what you love. It includes being clear about your values and how you personally define success for yourself. It's worthwhile to ask about your personal definition of identity. It's different for everyone, but you may already have some idea about what it is. You may not know how to make the most of it or how to use it in a way that empowers you. Or you may feel that you have a weak or not fully formed identity. Or maybe you'd like to trade in the identity you

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have for a different one. Even when you've established your understanding of your identity, your job isn't done. You have to redefine yourself constantly. It's the constant reinvention of yourself that determines how you begin to create your image or brand. It's about constant improvement, constant revision, constant learning.

I've been teaching and writing about a Nine-Step Success Process for a long time. Along the way, I've come to see that, unless the person taking these nine steps is well on the way to knowing who he or she is and possesses an identity driven by vision and defined by values, the journey to success usually doesn't end well. Nonetheless, these steps are important, and you can follow them with confidence as you start doing the work to know yourself and define your identity.

I refer back to these steps throughout the book.

NINE-STEP SUCCESS PROCESS

- Step 1. Check Your ID**—Explore your identity. Find out who you really are. Success depends upon self-awareness.
- Step 2. Create Your Vision**—A well-defined vision enables you to make meaningful, realistic goals for your business or personal life.
- Step 3. Develop Your Travel Plan**—Create a plan of action that allows you to work toward your goals.
- Step 4. Master the Rules of the Road**—You need guidelines to keep you on track, such characteristics as honesty, trust, hard work, determination, and a positive attitude.
- Step 5. Step into the Outer Limits**—Make the leap. To grow, you have to leave your comfort zone. Remember, risk is a natural part of life; staying the same is standing still, and change (growth) means risk.
- Step 6. Pilot the Seasons of Change**—If you keep doing what you've always done, you'll get the same results.
- Step 7. Build Your Dream Team**—Build supportive relationships with mentors and peers who can help you toward your goals.
- Step 8. Win by a Decision**—What you are in this world is the result of the decisions you've made so far in your life. The choices you make now will be one of your greatest challenges. Consider carefully how they will impact your personal life, family, profession and career, and, of course, your long-term vision.
- Step 9. Commit to Your Vision**—Put all your energy and effort into achieving your goals. Enthusiasm and commitment generate excellence, and that leads to success. The challenge is to develop the ability to coexist with the world as it changes, never giving in and never giving up.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

You might ask how it can be possible to know more about yourself than you already do, but in truth very few people know themselves as they might. This probably includes you. When Socrates said, “The unexamined life isn’t worth living,” this is what he was talking about. Take a deep, hard look at fascinating you. Examine your life. So, where to start?

1. You can often learn a lot about a character in a book or movie by what he or she wants. What do you want, desire, or crave in your life? Do you have a passion that drives you? Are you a fan? Do you have hobbies? What’s on your bucket list? What dream makes you, well, you?

2. Consider where you are on any number of sliding scales—at the left, at the right, or somewhere in the middle. Are you an introvert or extrovert, quiet or loud, humorous or humorless, class clown or A student, a dog person or a cat person, a giver or a taker, honest or devious, a self-starter or someone who needs direction, a listener or a talker, a leader or a follower, a spiritual person or a secular one, and on and on.

3. Take a hard look at your personal values. Write them down. How do they look on paper? Do you value honesty, reliability, patience, or something else?

4. Get close but candid friends to give you an honest assessment. How do they picture your identity? What do they perceive your values to be? Is there a difference between the way you perceive yourself and the way others perceive you?

5. Consider your history and setting. Where did you grow up? How are your family members and friends part of your identity? Are you content with the way you are and where you're headed, or is this a starting place toward somewhere else?

6. Think about whether knowing more about your identity helps you focus on the people you want to be around, where you want to go in your life, what you desire, and what you value most. Has this process changed any of your goals or modified your understanding of what success and a richer life means for you?

7. Are there any labels you have for yourself? Do others know you by certain labels? Are they fair, proper, and do you deserve them, or are they like shackles from which you should shake free?

Afterword

By Stephen R. Covey

I have tremendous admiration for Stedman Graham and for the mission he has chosen. He personifies the message he has presented in this book and is a powerful example of someone who has actually defined his identity and created an enduringly successful life that is a gift to the world. I also know how genuine, deeply genuine, Stedman is about helping people discover who they are and achieve their highest potential for success.

Stedman Graham cares about the individual. He understands how someone's vision can have greater impact than their baggage, for Stedman has not allowed the challenges of his past circumstances to dictate his future. This book's important message is to live out of your imagination and not your history—to hold a vision of the possibility of a better life for you and the people you care about—and to exercise the faith and power you have within you to create that better life. Stedman is an important spokesperson for this message because, in addition to the traditional credentials of advanced educational degrees and significant national leadership positions, he brings the “street” credibility of having faced and conquered the challenges of which he speaks firsthand. Men and women, boys and girls, of all cultures and circumstances throughout the world can take heart in his example. He is a rare mentor who walks his talk.

Stedman, like many, was born into a host of troubling circumstances and emotional hardships that could have easily left him a bitter and resentful victim. How many of us would be able to sing a similar tune when uncontrollable conditions threaten to kill our hopes and dreams? It becomes easy to excuse our failures and get into a blaming mode, using our past as a hitching post, and condemning most everything around us. We may seek out friends, or even “experts,” who would agree and give us more ammunition to justify our plight as we proceed to attribute every mistake and misfortune in our lives to poor environment, disturbed upbringing, or genetics. We then sink deeper and deeper into the quicksand of self-pity and victimization. Some of us might have had a father who deserted us when we were young, or an uncle who viciously abused us. Perhaps we continually had to scratch and scrape together whatever we could to survive in the face of grinding poverty. Each one of us has a story to tell—a story that is very real. In fact, such injustices and dehumanizing experiences do take their toll, sometimes a *tremendous* toll, in our lives. Yet, the difference between being influenced by and determined by is 180 degrees. The point becomes whether or not you will allow yourself to remain victimized for the rest of your life. As Stedman so eloquently teaches, “It matters not how other people define you, it matters how you define yourself.”

By doing the work that only you can do for you, learning who you really are and following Stedman’s “Nine-Step Success Process” for a better life, you will learn how to create a vision for your future that will, in return, produce the needed antidote for conquering the difficulties of life.

The best way to predict your future is to create it. As you apply the powerful principles Stedman has shared in this insightful book, you will create the future of your dreams. May we each follow Stedman's lead and define our identity, and in so doing create a personal passport to success.

Stephen R. Covey

Author of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People