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ON THE PLAYING FIELD
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KEVIN ELKO

THE #1 BUSINESS PERFORMANCE COACH

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“Just as one individual makes a difference, so can one book make a difference. If you follow what it teaches, you will be in a much higher place and get what you deserve, which is victory.”

Butch Davis, former Head Coach of the NCAA Champion University of Miami and current Head Coach of the University of North Carolina

“Kevin Elko played a huge part of putting Rutgers Football on the map. We use what he has taught us every day in our coaching. We owe him for teaching us ‘The Chop.’”

Greg Schiano, Head Coach, Rutgers University Football

“Dr. Elko taught me ‘You have to dream it to achieve it’ and that before championships and pro bowls happen, they have already occurred in your mind. From the moment I learned it I have not only played that way, I have led that way.”

Ed Reed, All Pro Safety, Baltimore Ravens

“Over my career at the University of Miami, I learned a lot of lessons from Kevin that helped lift myself and my teammates to a higher level. His creativity with his teachings, and the fact that what he taught us worked, was a major reason I still believe in what he taught me to this day.”

Ken Dorsey, Quarterback, Cleveland Browns, and former Quarterback of 2001 University of Miami National Champions

“Over the course of my career, the principles that Dr. Elko taught were instrumental in me being a starter in the NFL. These principles are now still what I teach to my athletes in the weight room.”

Tom Myslinski, MS, CSCS, Head Strength & Conditioning Coach, the Cleveland Browns Football Club

“If I had one choice for someone to work with my firm, I would pick Kevin Elko. He has a unique way to touch people to become the kind of person they were meant to be. When I need a plan for growth, Kevin is my first call.”

Andy Kalbaugh, CEO, Mutual Services (LPL Financial)

“What Kevin has taught us, and you will learn from this book, is that attitude is a muscle, not a gene. Most people do not recognize that a positive attitude needs to be exercised and strengthened every day, so use this book like a gym. I am an optimist—and as they say, there has never been a statue erected for a cynic, and I have never seen anybody drown in their own sweat. This book will teach you how to exercise your way to a positive attitude and work your way to what you desire.”

Phil Casparius, Head of Sales and Distribution,
Morgan Stanley Wealth Management

“Kevin’s message says two things loud and clear: (1) The best way to predict your future is to create it, and (2) You can have anything you want as long as you pay for it. Understand those two concepts, and you can win.”

Wayne Chopus, Vice President, National Sales Director,
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“Success starts with a dream, no matter how outrageous it seems at the time. If you are going to dream, why not dream Only Big Dreams.”

Steve Pederson, Athletic Director, University of Pittsburgh

“Kevin has taught our team at Pitt how to keep their eyes open to small opportunities—he calls it ‘looking for crumbs.’ This book will open your eyes to the opportunities in your life.”

Dave Wannstedt, Head Football Coach, University of Pittsburgh

“Every time Dr. Elko talked to us, we stood up and sang, ‘This Little Light of Mine.’ Imagine an entire football team singing and dancing to that song—that is how we started every time he visited us at North Carolina. Inside me there is a light as well as those around me. If you understand you must bring the light out that is in you and help others bring it out of them, then you will know the recipe for victory—that is the message Doc delivers.”

Kentwan Balmer, Defensive Tackle, First Round Draft Pick,
San Francisco 49ers

“Kevin’s ability to connect through stories, logic, and humor moves individuals to confront what’s right in front of them. Having a clear picture is the first step to taking action. Truly, a master of communication!”

Jeffrey McGregor, President, RiverSource Distributors

Touchdown!

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Kevin Elko

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Associate Publisher and Director of Marketing: Amy Neidlinger
Editorial Assistant: Pamela Boland
Development Editors: Russ Hall, Zachary Moore
Operations Manager: Gina Kanouse
Senior Marketing Manager: Julie Phifer
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*This book is dedicated to my children,
Claire and Jared.*

*I had a vision of what you two would be, but
you both are so much more.
Thanks for all you taught me.*

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Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>About the Author</i> | <i>xi</i> |
| <i>Foreword by Butch Davis</i> | <i>xiii</i> |
| <i>Foreword by Jon Dorenbos</i> | <i>xviii</i> |
| <i>Preface</i> | <i>xxvii</i> |
| Introduction | 1 |

ONE

| | |
|-----------------------|----------|
| Growing Up | 7 |
| Therapy | 11 |
| Economics | 12 |
| Lessons from a Pencil | 15 |

TWO

| | |
|---|-----------|
| You Do Not Have to Carry More Than You Can Hold | 21 |
| Your Right to Be Offended (Instead, Ease Up; Do Not Judge) | 27 |
| That Was Awful (Instead, Save the Label “Awful” for the Big Stuff) | 30 |

THREE

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Cutting the Internal Mental Clutter | 35 |
| The Need to Be Liked (Instead, Say It’s Nice to Be Liked, But I Don’t Need It) | 37 |

- Expecting Too Hard and Not Bringing
the Best You to Every Event 41
- Not Forgiving—the Ultimate Mind Clutter 46

FOUR

- Just One Last Play** 51
- Make the Last Play Count 54
- Let Your Light Shine 57
- Make a Good Choice with
Your Last Play of a Season 59
- Security 60

FIVE

- Seasons of Life** 63
- Preparation—The Preseason 67
- Action—The Season 70
- The Bye Week 72
- Maintain and Accelerate—
The Playoffs 72
- Rest—The Off-Season 74

SIX

- The Preseason: It Happens Before It Happens** 77
- Against the Odds 82
- The Four Legs of a Chair 85
- The Wheel of Fortune 88

Radio Waves 91

Thankful on Credit 95

Journaling 96

SEVEN

**The Action Season: You Do Not Get What
You Want—You Get What You Deserve 97**

This Is the Season of Action 100

Start with the Process 101

Start Making Your Move 103

Now Stay on the Process 105

Set Up an Internal Vocabulary of
Encouragement 106

Too Hard to Play Hard 108

A Focus 109

What Is Determination? 111

A Great Example of a Life of Process 113

EIGHT

The Playoffs 115

Claim It 118

NINE

The Off-Season 123

My Wish 129

TEN

Speaking Out:**Heart Song Catalogue of Catchphrases 131**

- Anti-Fear Heart Songs 136
- Anti-Worry Heart Songs 137
- Phrases to Fend off Anger 138
- Phrases to Ease the Hard 139
- Anti-Rejection Phrases 141
- Songs to Prevent
Laziness and Passivity 143
- Phrases for Patience 145
- Phrases Against Watering Down
Your Dream 147

Index 149

About the Author

Dr. Kevin Elko is a nationally renowned performance consultant and motivational speaker. He has consulted with dozens of professional and collegiate athletic teams, including LSU, Miami, Nebraska, the Pittsburgh Steelers, and the Dallas Cowboys.

He has also worked with companies including Travelers Insurance, Smith Kline Beecham, Prudential Securities, and Tyson Foods. In 2005, he was the top-rated speaker at the Million Dollar Roundtable, a meeting of the insurance industry's highest achievers.

Dr. Elko's books include *Nerves of Steel* and *Winning the NFL Way*. Elko holds a Doctorate in Education with emphasis in Sports and Counseling.

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Foreword by Butch Davis

I once read that most people can be changed from a relationship with one person. This is exactly what happened in my relationship with Kevin Elko. I had heard about him from several people in the National Football League, specifically his work with the Pittsburgh Steelers. He was known as someone who could help you identify and select players with a great attitude and leadership ability. When I took over as the head coach of the University of Miami Football program, having players with a great attitude and leadership abilities was exactly what we needed; in fact, the program was in such disarray that year that there was a *Sports Illustrated* cover article calling for the University of Miami to drop football. All the way around, we had many challenges—and if we did not have a plan to overcome these challenges, we were doomed.

We decided our problem at Miami was culture. We had inherited a culture that was producing ineffective results, so we quickly decided to rid ourselves of that culture and to develop another.

Whether you realize it or not, every team—and for that matter, every business, family, and individual—has a set of attitudes that they live by, and that collection of attitudes is the culture, and that culture brings whatever “results” you are getting. It is not something “out there,” such as the environmental conditions that give or take away, but rather something “in there” or in *you*, that brings about the quality of your life. Therefore, at Miami we developed a vision and mission statements of what we wanted those attitudes to be; and our day-to-day operation was not to win, because winning is a by-product, and winning would take care of itself. Our vision was to keep moving toward that culture with the attitudes we had set for ourselves and to be relentless in focusing on those desired attitudes that positively added to the desired culture. It was that simple.

Now more than ever before, this is an important concept. Today there is a belief out there that is becoming more and more popular that *someone else* is going to do it for you, and this entitlement is going to be spread around. In the short term that idea may happen, but to buy in to this

kind of thinking over the long term will hurt the believer of this idea. One concept Kevin has repeatedly taught our teams is, “You never get what you want, but you always get what you deserve.” If you work hard and develop your gifts that were given you, and you have a vision of serving and helping others, then what do you deserve? But if you do not work hard on yourself and are not concerned about those around you, then what do you deserve? America was founded on hard work and serving others. This vision and mission will help you receive more. Not only did this way of thinking help the University of Miami win more than 30 straight games and bring respectability back to the program, it developed a record number of first-round draft picks for the National Football League.

Another winning culture-developing concept Kevin brought to us was to “Keep planting grass, and don’t pull weeds.” We had our share of weeds. We were also faced with a limited number of college scholarships and we were on probation, so it was very important that we made wise choices in the selection of our players. We constantly reminded ourselves, “Keep planting

grass.” In other words, we knew we had to stay focused on what we wanted and keep doing the things that would bring positive results instead of focusing on what was wrong and the negatives. It took some time, but our players and staff completely bought into this concept. This overall culture eventually became one of the longest winning streaks in college football history. If you’re not careful, it’s easy to focus on the negatives and all the things you don’t have instead of the opportunities that you do have. Another name for this way of thinking is fear. Individuals who think this way need to understand they are helping to bring about that fear. As Job 3:25 states: “For the things I greatly fear come upon me, and that of which I am afraid befalls me.” If you focus on what you do not want, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and manifests itself in your world. When we started at Miami, it would have been easy to focus on the things that we did not want.

There were other culture-developing concepts that Kevin taught us, such as, “Never look at the scoreboard”; “Accept accountability”; “If you trust you may be disappointed, but if you

do not trust, you will lose”; and one of my favorites, “Sipping on battery acid, chopping down trees.” These things, repeated over and over and then reinforced by me and my staff, became the eventual winning culture of my teams in Miami. These same concepts are taking hold and having a huge positive effect for myself, our staff, and our players at the University of North Carolina.

This book teaches those concepts of vision and serving in an enjoyable read. I have often told Kevin that, other than my wife and son, he has been one of the most influential individuals in my life. It is not just his lessons but also his friendship over the years. Just as one individual makes a difference, so can one book make a difference. If you follow what this book teaches, you will not need anything “spread around” to you, because you will earn what you deserve, which is victory.

Butch Davis
Head Football Coach
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Foreword by Jon Dorenbos

I grew up in a “Brady Bunch” kind of family. My mom volunteered at the school, and my dad was the president of the little league and a consultant for Microsoft. But life as I knew it would change drastically as I carpooled with the Harper family to a baseball camp on August 3, 1992. At lunch-time Coach Bill Stubbs told me I had to leave due a “family emergency.” The Harpers were there to pick me up and escort me to the police station. Officer Childs was at the station, waiting. He was the D.A.R.E. officer at my elementary school, and I overheard him say, “I know Jon; I want to be the one to tell him; I know him, and I knew his mom.” He walked over to me with his eyes watering and head slightly looking downward. As he approached me, he lifted his head and said, “Your parents had an argument and your mother didn’t make it. We’re not sure what happened, but we think she was pushed down the steps. Your father is in jail and being held for questioning.” The reality was that on August 2, my parents got into an argument that moved into the garage. There, my father beat my mother to death.

After my father was convicted of second-degree murder, my sister and I spent a year and a half in foster care before moving in with our family in southern California. My brother and I went months and sometimes what felt like years without talking. In one night, life as I knew it was stripped away. I lost my mother and father, and everything in life I was sure of was destroyed and betrayed.

I have learned that there is only one way to overcome a nightmare, and that is with a dream. When I was 13, I saw a magician named Michael Groves. He was 16 and a friend of a friend's family. He taught me my first magic trick and bought me my first magic book, J.B. Bobo's *Modern Coin Magic*. Magic became an escape for me. It was something that I could practice and use to forget about my problems. Little did I know that learning magic as a kid would lead to believing in magic as an adult. I eventually met another magician, Ken Sands, who taught me never to be arrogant with magic, instead to cherish it and to use magic as a tool to create a relationship with your audience. I loved it.

Then I got another dream. I watched Ken Griffey, Jr., Jay Buhner, and Omar Vizquel play baseball for the Seattle Mariners as a kid. I always wanted to play for the Mariners. Sure enough, after moving in with my Aunt Susan, in California, I was going to attend Pacifica High School, home of the Pacifica Mariners. All I could dream about was playing professional ball. I played baseball, basketball, and football in high school. But after my senior year, I was determined to make it in football. I went to a junior college, and after my freshmen season...still no scholarship. So I decided to create an opportunity. I sent in someone else's "game-tape" to colleges, claiming the snapper was me. He was a 6'6" tight end who was a phenomenal long snapper. UTEP got the film and offered me a full ride. The only problem was I was only 6 feet tall and not a tight end or a long snapper. Being that I was recruited to snap, I quickly learned and started for UTEP for the next three seasons. I guess I figured it out well enough, because at the end of my senior season, I got a call from the Buffalo Bills, offering me a chance to try out. There, I met someone else who shaped my life.

Growing up watching the Seattle Mariners, I went to as many games as possible. After the games, I would wait by the players' parking lot, lean against the fence, and watch them drive away. They were "gods" to me. Eleven years later, against the St. Louis Rams, I would drive into the players' parking lot for the first time. As I got out of my car, I noticed a little boy leaning against the barricade. It was then and there that my entire life flashed before me. I was running late and had to head to the locker room. After the game the little boy was in the same spot. So I walked over and introduced myself, "Hi, I'm Jon. What's your name?" He looked at me with his hands in his pockets and said shyly, "I know; you're the magician. I'm Joey." I smiled and asked if he had ever been on the field. He hadn't, so I snuck him and his dad down on the field at Ralph Wilson Stadium. As his father watched him run around, the father started to cry. He explained that Joey had a rare form of cancer and three months prior was given only six months to live.

Joey and I became friends and I tried to include him in Bills' events. One day he asked me if

I wanted to go to the Super Bowl. The Bills weren't that good that year and I told him, "Of course, but it ain't lookin' good this season." He laughed and told me he had tickets and wanted to invite me. I was thinking the Make a Wish Foundation. Instead, Joey reached into his backpack and pulled out two tickets made out of construction paper—one for me and one for him. About a month later I got a call from his dad, asking if I could head to hospital because Joey wasn't doing too well. He told me to bring the tickets. Sure enough, when I got to the hospital and looked at the tickets, in crayon was written the date October 18. As I walked into his room, he smiled, looked up at me and said, "You made it. Today is the Super Bowl." October 18th was six months and one day. Joey dreamed of that day, the day that the doctors didn't think he'd be alive, and to Joey, that day was his Super Bowl. That is what I call having a dream to overcome a nightmare. He had a lot to do with teaching me what is in this book; the child is father to the man.

While I was with the Bills, I met Dr. Elko, who reiterated to me something I already knew, but

something I needed to continue learning and continue to cherish. It is something I need to hear over and over. First, we must dream again and again, outrageous dreams, and when we do, nightmares fade. This book opened my eyes, reminding me to stay focused, to stay determined and to stay on top of my game. Reading Dr. Elko's inspiring words are a reminder that dreams don't happen over night. They take hard work and sacrifice. But dreams are worth the work; they are worth the sacrifice, the blood, the sweat, and the tears. Nothing "worth it" comes easy. This book also teaches us that "giving back" is the best way to say "thank you" to all those who have helped us achieve our dreams.

Today I play in the National Football League, and I am about to marry the woman of my dreams. Most importantly, I work to help W.I.N., a foundation that assists abused woman, and many other charities helping children. I love going to orphanages and hospitals to perform magic. It is there that the true magic of life comes out. It's the magic of helping, the magic of lending a hand to those who need it, just like friends and family did for me when I needed it most.

One day I asked my position coach what time it was, and when he looked at his wrist, he screamed, “My watch is gone”; then I handed him back his watch (an old magician’s trick). My coach didn’t find that trick as amusing as I did. In fact, he looked at me and said, “You think that trick was good? If you screw up on the field, I will make you disappear David Copperfield style.”

Sometimes the truth hurts, but once you accept it, the truth can be your friend, and that truth keeps me improving and keeps me focused everyday. And believe me, as soon as I lose focus and stop doing what I’m suppose to do, they will make me disappear. And I’m not talking about my coaches; I’m talking about life.

I have heard Dr. Elko speak a number of times, so today I am delivering this message. Every time I hear him speak, I say to myself, “Yes.” The message in this book is one that hits the heart and soul. Live to love, love to dream, and give joy and inspiration back to world. I love Dr. Elko’s message. As the commercial says, “Try it; you’ll like it.” THE DOC ROCKS!

Jon Dorenbos
#46, Philadelphia Eagles

Preface

This is a terrific book. My hope is that you read it, practice the principles you find here, and make a great life for yourself. The world needs you to be successful. *Touchdown!* can help a lot. I'd like to tell you how and why. So please take a few moments and read on.

I used to be an ad man in Australia. My mother and father had been artists—of the mostly starving variety, as I liked to quip. Before I was born, my dad went off to the Second World War where he was injured. He was shipped back to Australia, and after a little while he died. My mom did the best she could, but I didn't have to be psychic to know we were poor.

Being a reasonably bright lad, I figured that the solution to being poor was to make money, which as far as I could tell back then, was the only reason to get an education and endure going to high school and then on to college. The thing about going to college, as compared to going to high school, was that dropping out was less of a big deal in the 60s. So I dropped out and put my creative genes to work as an advertising photographer and creative director. Turned out I loved

it and was really good at it. Which was just as well—in today’s world, not graduating from college is a seriously bad idea.

Since I’d convinced myself that the secret to being happy was to acquire and consume the right stuff, being a creative type in advertising seemed like the perfect career choice. Basically, I became the guy telling you that if you wanted to have a great life, you pretty much had to acquire and consume the right stuff—and that would be our client’s stuff. I was the guy telling you that things actually went better with Coke, that if your deodorant failed your life would, and that if you didn’t use my client’s toothpaste you wouldn’t even get kissed, let alone have a chance for anything else you were hoping for later on.

Then one morning I woke up and realized I had solved the problem of being poor. I had enough stuff to start my own world. Next I reasoned that if having enough stuff was going to make me feel successful and happy on the inside, it would’ve worked by now. It hadn’t. And it didn’t seem like more stuff would work any better. So I dusted off my college philosophy and psychology textbooks and began to realize that living

successfully had to happen on the inside before it could happen on the outside. Then one day I came across a copy of *Look* magazine. The issue editor, George Leonard, was talking about a thing called the Human Potential Movement happening in California. It was about people transforming their lives. Sounded like just what I needed. He reported that San Francisco was Ground Zero. In Australia it was the summer of '70. I made plans.

I got on a Qantas jet in Sydney and got off in San Francisco. I found myself standing on the corner of Haight and Ashbury. I said to myself, "Self, you are definitely not in Sydney anymore." I got involved with the kind of ideas and practices Kevin is offering you in this book. I became the first CEO of a transformational training company known in those days as **est**. Tens of thousands of people participated. Today the company lives on as Landmark Education. I moved on to co-found an international training company called Actualizations and became a successful partner in a corporate consulting firm. I have written four books—all bestsellers. It's been a wonder-filled adventure.

I know that you really can make it happen for yourself on the playing field of business (and life) if you really want to. First, as Kevin will show, you make it happen on the inside—in your heart and in your imagination—then you make it happen on the outside and become a success in the world. This is one of the core ideas of this book—that it all happens before it happens: First you create a vision for your life, then you take skilled, spirited action. Sometimes this can take awhile. And then suddenly it happens for you in the world. People may even think you're an overnight success. As Kevin likes to say, "It all happens over a long period of time all of a sudden."

A problem with many so-called self-improvement books is that while they might make sense on some level, how to actually take the words off the printed page and put them to work is not terribly clear. Not so with *Touchdown!* The printed pages that follow are filled with Dr. Kevin Elko's crystal-clear messaging and step-by-step "how to." You will be able to do what he suggests and make a rich difference in your life. In the lives of others, too.

As you read this book, you will learn that extreme makeovers start inside your head. Kevin tells you exactly how you accomplish all this. Now, I don't mean to suggest you need an extreme makeover the way I did way back in the early 70s. However, each and every one of us has the opportunity to be more tomorrow than we were yesterday; and the world really needs that from us right now. Always has.

I have learned that the happiest and most successful people in the world have this in common: They discovered what they love to do and learned how to get really good at it. They create tremendous value in the world. Become one of them. If you are already one of them, this book will help you to help others become one of them. This is important work.

I wish you a wonder-filled life.

Stewart Emery
San Francisco, California
April 2009

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Introduction

*“Self-trust is the first
secret of success.”*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

I was finishing my internship with the United States Olympic Committee when I got a phone call from Tom Donahoe, the head of player personnel for the Pittsburgh Steelers. He wanted me to meet with Dick Haley, Tom Modrak, and him, all three of whom were working in personnel for the Steelers—and would go on to have fabulous careers in the NFL. I flew into Pittsburgh and we met on Christmas Eve. The occasion marked the end of head coach Chuck Noll's distinguished career with the Steelers, which had resulted in four Super Bowl championships. This also marked the beginning of NFL free agency, which would alter football and the way things were done.

In the discussion that day, the decision was made that the Steelers would start to draft and select free agents by strongly considering their attitude as part of the process. Don't get me wrong—you cannot win without great athletes, but you surely can also lose with them. If you look at the team that wins the Super Bowl, you will see athletes with big arms, built-up chests, and supernatural speed; but if you take a good look at a team that did not qualify for the playoffs, you will see exactly the same characteristics!

Furthermore, teams have a collective attitude that eventually becomes clear and then becomes that team's culture. Once the culture has formed, inherent strengths and challenges will show up in a pattern of wins and losses.

Shortly after that meeting, the Steelers hired a new head coach, Bill Cowher, who also was very much into attitude—and now was the time to get his input. So when the two of us sat down to talk, I asked him what he thought about bringing in new players. He said he wanted to have players who were able to overcome any sort of adversity—that the “good” players have gone through “something” difficult in their life they were able not only to handle but also to transcend, rising to a higher level of accomplishment.

Chuck Noll, who was Coach Cowher's predecessor, had a saying: “Panic is something you feel when you do not know what you are doing.” Cowher, too, wanted to know that his players had confidence even when they faced tough times—to have proof positive from their past that they had confidence even facing adversity.

I personally felt that the ability to trust was a hugely important characteristic in the men recruited and that it translated into their being able to be coached, take instruction, and grow as professionals. Many, if not most of these young athletes, seemed to come from broken families where they had very little contact with a father and were not trusting by nature. Many people believe that trust is an issue in every relationship, but trust, or the unwillingness to trust, is actually an attitude that is shaped from early interactions. An untrusting attitude leaves athletes unconsciously hunting for something to happen to make this attitude “right.” They then bring this predominantly untrusting attitude to the game and to life. I believe what Abraham Lincoln said is true: “It is better to trust all the time and sometimes be disappointed than to trust none of the time and be miserable.” I would just add four words to the quote: “It is better to trust all the time...than to trust none of the time and be miserable *and be a failure.*” Teammates must trust each other to perform at their peak at all times.

Teammates must trust each other to perform at their peak at all times.

From those early conversations with the Steelers, I developed interview techniques and tests that looked at internal concepts of individuals, realizing that all people have a way they view the world. They have their own set of “eyes” from which they view everything, and success and happiness are the byproducts of those eyes. Furthermore, those eyes have compartments. In other words, there are different ways we see ourselves—in a family setting, spiritual setting, physical setting, and so forth, and we become that vision in each of those settings. Since then I have gone on to work with teams that have had some success: the University of Miami football team (headlined in a cover story in *Sports Illustrated* that showed how the team evolved from one where people said the school should discontinue playing football to a team with a 30-game-plus winning streak and two National Championships), the Rutgers football team (which went from never playing in a bowl game to participating in four straight),

the LSU football team (which won the National Championship), and the Alabama football team (whose surprisingly quick rise in one year made it a contender for the National Championship).

*Your happiness or success will, in a sense,
“happen before it happens”—first in
the mind and then in the real world.*

Going for what we want in our own lives is very similar: We want success or happiness, perhaps without knowing these two things are simply byproducts of the way our minds are arranged. If we can identify the way we think and practice thinking differently, then the things we want will in many instances show up. Just like an athlete, you will not be a success if you do not have the specific skills you need within your field of endeavor—and with faulty ways of thinking, you definitely can be a failure. Your happiness or success will, in a sense, “happen before it happens”—first in the mind and then in the real world.

CHAPTER 4

Just One Last Play

*“Man cannot discover new oceans
unless he has the courage to
lose sight of the shore.”*

—Andre Gide

When I was working for the Dallas Cowboys, we had a big game against our arch rivals, the Washington Redskins. During the week-long buildup before the game, Redskins player Albert Connell, in an ESPN interview, made some cutting comments about Deion Sanders, saying that he was an old man who was washed up and should no longer be playing.

In the game, while Deion was trying to disprove these remarks, he caught a punt early in the first quarter and was immediately hit by a number of Redskins. They hit him so hard that Deion suffered such a concussion that the medical staff had to help him off the field. At least for that day, it *did* look like Deion was done. He stayed on the sideline for most of the rest of the game with an ice pack on his spinal cord.

Throughout the game, Deion pleaded with the staff to let him back in. But they said the results could be catastrophic. Later, the stand-in Cowboy punt returner, Jeff Ogden, went onto the field in place of the injured Sanders to receive a punt. Deion suddenly sprinted out, physically removed Ogden's helmet, put it on himself, and ordered Ogden off the field. The doctors were screaming, "Call time out; he's going to kill himself!" But it was too late. Deion caught that punt, broke into a run up the sideline, stiff-armed a player, juked past another, and sprinted into the end zone for a touchdown.

Still it wasn't over. Deion walked to the Redskins sideline. "Hey, Connell," he said, "It isn't any fun hunting rabbits when the rabbit has a gun, too." Then he went to the Dallas sideline, returned Ogden's helmet, and proceeded to the locker room to shower.

What if you had just one play in you, one opportunity? What would it be? Think about it in light of your career, your health, your family and friends. Here is your starting point. Say to yourself, “I have one shot, one season, and this is the way I will manage it. My time has come. I’m making my plan to grow, getting my vision clear—now.”

*What if you had just one play in you,
one opportunity? What would it be?*

MAKE THE LAST PLAY COUNT

Paul “Bear” Bryant, the legendary head football coach of the University of Alabama, knew the value of thinking about the last play, and demonstrated that when doing a television commercial for AT&T the week before Mother’s Day. As he settled into the studio, those doing the filming said the ad would be easy. They told him just to read the script they held next to the camera, so they practiced while he read, “This is Paul Bryant, the head coach of Alabama, and this weekend is Mother’s Day. Call your mama.”

The Bear told the studio staff he was ready and that he didn't need a script. Uneasy, the producers decided to go ahead and try it. The Bear said, "This is Paul Bear Bryant, the head coach of the University of Alabama. Roll, Tide, roll," he began. "This weekend is Mother's Day; call your mama," he said. But then he added one more line of his own: "I wish I could...."

*Think as if every play is your last
and seize your moments.*

I'm talking about thinking as if every play is your last and seizing your moments. Sometimes they are as dramatic as The Bear's, but there are many, and their lengths vary: the high-school season; then, the four-years-in-college season; the dating season; the starting-out-on-your-own season; the just-married season; and on and on. Each season of your life calls you to make something of it. After each season, you do not want to say, "Why didn't I enjoy that more, give it more, be in less of a hurry? There was something I was called to do there, and I missed it."

Why not ask, “What are my gifts? What makes me feel alive? Where will my opportunities lead me?” If you feel it is your season to become rich, then ask yourself, “What is rich?” Is it more money so you can bless others with your wealth? Is rich being a better father, mother, or friend? Does being rich mean you reach the top spot in your field? Figure out the answer to this question and others in the same vein concerning your vision during your “preseason.” This is a time to try out new ideas and new ways of showing up before the next season—or chapter—of your life gets into full swing.

*Each season of your life calls you
to make something of it.*

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

Maybe your last play comes to you as a gift that only you can give. Then grab that gift.

Since coach Butch Davis has been at the University of North Carolina, I have spoken to the team every month, starting with an excerpt from Nelson Mandela's inaugural speech: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. Our playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so other people do not feel insecure around us. We were all made to shine as children do. It is not just in some of us. It is in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." Then, the entire team stands and sings a simple song: "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine; these are my brothers here, I'm gonna help them shine."

That's all there is: Shine your light, and in the process, help others shine theirs. That's how you make that play count. Do your work, make your play, give your donation, and help others give theirs. This shining is showing off your personal gift. There's nothing wrong with shining. However, people do sometimes make mistakes in two different ways when assessing their personal gifts: (1) they think they have no gifts, or (2) they think they have many. The fact is we all have at least one, and sometimes maybe two. But we must quit wasting time developing too many gifts—or worse, wasting time developing none. Find that one definitive special gift, work it into your vision, develop your plan, and grow it in its season to shine. And shine as brightly as you can.

Find that one definitive special gift, work it into your vision, develop your plan, and grow it in its season to shine.

MAKE A GOOD CHOICE WITH YOUR LAST PLAY OF A SEASON

A woman stood alongside a river, carrying a sack. Walking by her, a very hungry man asked if she had any food. “Yes,” she said and opened the sack. When she did, the man spotted a precious stone inside and he asked her if he could have the stone instead. “Certainly,” she said and easily gave it to him. He walked away, thinking, “I will never be hungry again. This stone is worth the kind of money that will allow me to eat for the rest of my life.” But then, he turned around and returned the stone to the woman. He said, “I do not want the stone. I want what is in you that enabled you to give me that stone.”

The precious secret, just like the one this woman had, starts inside—and you find it by realizing what you love to spend your time with. Match that love with your one gift you are developing, the thing you do better than anything else, and then time is irrelevant; it just flies by. Time flying means you are in your “sweet spot.” Match those two things—love and your gift with your time—and you bring out your best. Get your thoughts, actions and spoken words aligned and congruent to bring out of you in that season what is in you, not only to do more, but to be more and to bring to you what you now deserve.

SECURITY

A lot of people hesitate when it comes to grabbing life as if every play were their last. To leap seems risky, and they want security.

Recently a long-time friend called me, complaining of a sleeping problem. He also told me that he was soon acquiring a company of which he would be its president. He planned to pay for the company at a rate of ten percent a year for ten years; after that time he would own it outright. He said that he and his family needed security, and that would be his sole focus for the next ten years. He confessed that something in the plan was keeping him up at night; I asked if he loved what he was doing. Silence ensued for about ten seconds. I don't remember his response because the long pause *was* the answer.

My friend believes he is secure with this plan, but he can't sleep, and chances are his health will soon deteriorate. If he follows this path, he may not even be around to *see* the future he's sacrificing himself for. Helen Keller once said, "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing. Security does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure." Security, especially today, is a myth. You must do what you love; if your body is telling you something is not working, know that you need to rethink your vision. That may involve risk, but think of it as your last play.

You must do what you love; if your body is telling you something is not working, know that you need to rethink your vision.

Playwright August Wilson wrote about three men working in a grocery store before Thanksgiving. They are all promised hams, which they never receive. One man chants the entire play, “I want my ham.” The second man says to the third, “He’s crazy! That’s all he chants all day.” The third replies, “Maybe we are not crazy enough. Maybe we became sane and settled for what we did not get, but he refused to settle; in some cases sanity is overrated. He wanted more and he wanted what he deserved.”

If you risk and want more than what is safe, others often think something is “wrong” with you. But do not settle for safe. Listen, risk, match your gifts with what makes you feel alive, and then win, hands down. Act as if each moment is the last play.

Do not settle for safe. Listen, risk, match your gifts with what makes you feel alive

Index

A

- acceleration stage
 - (seasons of life), 72-73, 116-117, 120, 122
 - claim your reward, 116, 118-122
- action stage (seasons of life), 70-71, 98, 101, 103, 106, 109, 111, 114
 - consistent processes, 101, 103
 - determination, 111-112
 - discouragement, avoiding, 105-108
 - drowned child
 - example, 113-114
 - ease and grace in, 108-109
 - focus, 109, 111
 - master your move, 103, 105
 - running to the action, 99
 - value of work, 100-101
- Actualizations, xxix
- adversity, confidence during, 3
- America's Cup example, imagination and belief, 84
- anti-anger phrases, 138-139
- anti-fear phrases, 136-137
- anti-rejection phrases, 141, 143

- anti-worry phrases,
137-138
- anxiety. *See* fear; worry
- Apollo 13 flight example,
preparation, 67
- approval seeking, 37, 41
- attitude, effect of, 2, 5-6
- Augustine (saint), 87
- Australian yachting team
example, imagination
and belief, 84
- “awful” label, 30, 33-34
- B**
- belief, imagination and,
82, 85
- Bono, 105
- Bradshaw, Terry, 98
- Buffalo Bills, xxii
- “bye week” (recuperation
stage), 72
- C**
- catchphrases. *See* positive
self-talk
- change, role in growing
up, 8, 10, 12, 16-17, 20
- circumstance, vision
versus, 79, 82, 137
- claim your reward, 116,
118-122
- Cleveland Browns
example, rest stage
(seasons of life), 74
- clutter. *See* mental clutter
- Coker, Larry, 117
- comfort, as barrier to
change, 19
- compromise, 147
- confidence during
adversity, 3
- consistency, 101, 103
- Cosby, Bill, 40
- Cousins, Norman, 86
- Cowher, Bill, 3
- culture, developing,
xv, xix
- cycles. *See* seasons of life
- D**
- Dallas Cowboys example,
living your vision, 90
- Davis, Butch, xv, xix
- determination, 111-112
- difficulty
expectation of, 41, 45
facing, 139, 141
- discipline, 102
- discouragement,
avoiding, 105-106, 108
- Donahoe, Tom, 2
- Dorenbos, Jon, xx, xxvi

- dreams, overcoming
 nightmares with,
 xxi, xxv
- drowned child example,
 focus on process, 113-114
- E**
- ease in process
 accomplishment,
 108-109
- Emery, Stewart, xxxi
- encouragement, language
 of, 106, 108, 132, 135
 anti-anger phrases,
 138-139
 anti-fear phrases,
 136-137
 anti-rejection phrases,
 141, 143
 anti-worry phrases,
 137-138
 difficulty, facing,
 139, 141
 laziness prevention,
 143-144
 patience, 145-146
 vision realization, 147
- entitlement, xv
- est (transformational
 training company), xxix
- expectation of difficulty,
 41, 45
- external mental clutter,
 26-27, 30, 33-34
 “awful” label, 30, 33-34
 offended attitude,
 27, 30
- Eysenck, Hans, 11
- F**
- failure to try, 41, 45
- faith, 82, 85
- fear, 34
 anti-fear phrases,
 136-137
- feedback, 142
- Fiedler, Jay, 118
- focus, 109, 111, 113-114
- focused thinking, 91, 94
- forgiveness, 46, 49
- frog and scorpion
 example, human
 nature, 17
- G**
- Gonzalez, Joaquin, 41
- Griffey, Ken, xxii
- Grove, Andy, 12
- growing up
 maturity versus, 8
 role of change in, 8, 10,
 12, 16-17, 20
- growth cycles. *See*
 seasons of life

H

Hackett, Buddy, 48
Haley, Dick, 2
Hambrick, Troy, 90
Harris, Franco, 98
heart songs. *See* positive self-talk
Hoffman, Dustin, 34
Holcomb, Kelly, 80
human nature, 17
Human Potential Movement, xxix
Hundt, Linda, 91

I

imagination, belief and, 82, 85
immaturity, maturity versus, 8
improvement, measuring, 11
Intel example, change and growing up, 12
internal mental clutter, 36-37, 41-42, 44-46, 49
approval seeking, 37, 41
expectation of difficulty, 41, 45
resentment, 46, 49

J-K

Jágr, Jaromír, 72
Jackson, Reggie, 109
journaling, 96
Keller, Helen, 61

L

Landmark Education, xxix
“last play” (risk-taking), 60, 62
laziness prevention phrases, 143-144
learning to change, 13
Leonard, George, xxix
Lincoln, Abraham, 4
living your vision, 88, 91
Lovell, James, 67

M

Mandela, Nelson, 81
master your move, 103, 105
maturity, growing up versus, 8
McVey, Timothy, 10
measuring progress, 11
meditation, 74-75, 124, 127, 130

- mental clutter, 23, 26
external mental
clutter, 26-27, 30,
33-34
 "awful" label, 30,
 33-34
 offended attitude,
 27, 30
internal mental clutter,
36-37, 41-46, 49
 approval seeking,
 37, 41
 expectation of, 41, 45
 resentment, 46, 49
- mind, power of, 85, 87
- Modrak, Tom, 2
- Mother Teresa, 96
- Muste, A.J., 25
- N**
- negative, avoiding
focusing on, xviii. *See*
also mental clutter
- nightmares, overcoming,
xxi, xxv
- 9/11 example, removing
unnecessary clutter,
22-23
- Noll, Chuck, 2, 3, 45
- O**
- offended attitude, 27, 30
- "off-season" (rest stage),
74-75, 124, 127, 130
- Olympic hockey
example, acceleration
stage (seasons of life), 72
- overcoming nightmares,
xxi, xxv
- P**
- Pascal, Blaise, 126
- passivity prevention
phrases, 143-144
- patience phrases, 145-146
- pencil example, 15
- perseverance, 41, 45
- Pittsburgh Steelers
example
attitude, effect of, 2
running to the
action, 98
- planning, role in change,
16-17
- "playoffs" (acceleration
stage), 72-73, 116-117,
120, 122
claim your reward, 116,
118, 122

- positive, focusing on, xviii
- positive self-talk, 106, 108, 132, 135
- anti-anger phrases, 138-139
 - anti-fear phrases, 136-137
 - anti-rejection phrases, 141, 143
 - anti-worry phrases, 137-138
 - difficulty, facing, 139, 141
 - laziness prevention, 143-144
 - patience, 145-146
 - vision realization, 147
- power of the mind, 85, 87
- preparation stage (seasons of life), 67, 69, 78, 81, 84, 87, 90, 93, 96
- focused thinking, 91, 94
 - imagination and belief, 82, 85
 - journaling, 96
 - living your vision, 88, 91
 - power of the mind, 85, 87
- “thankful on credit,” 95
- vision versus circumstance, 78, 82
- “preseason” (preparation stage), 67, 69, 78, 81, 84, 87, 90, 93, 96
- focused thinking, 91, 94
 - imagination and belief, 82, 85
 - journaling, 96
 - living your vision, 88, 91
 - power of the mind, 85, 87
 - “thankful on credit,” 95
 - vision versus circumstance, 78, 82
- process development, 101, 103, 113-114
- progress, measuring, 11
- Q-R**
- recuperation stage (seasons of life), 72
- rejection, anti-rejection phrases, 141, 143
- resentment, 46, 49

rest stage (seasons of life),
74-75, 124, 127, 130
rhythm of life. *See*
seasons of life
risk-taking, 60, 62
Rotter, Damian, 24
Rutgers University
example, focus, 109

S

Saban, Nick, 13-14
scorpion and frog
example, human
nature, 17
“season” (action stage),
70-71, 98, 101, 103, 106,
109, 111, 114
consistent processes,
101, 103
determination, 111-112
discouragement,
avoiding, 105-106, 108
drowned child
example, 113-114
ease and grace in,
108-109
focus, 109, 111
master your move,
103, 105
running to the
action, 99
value of work, 100-101
seasons of life, 64, 66-67,
69, 72, 75
acceleration stage,
72-73, 116-117, 120, 122
claim your reward,
116, 118-122
action stage, 70-71,
98, 101, 103, 106, 109,
111, 114
consistent processes,
101, 103
determination,
111-112
discouragement,
avoiding, 105-108
drowned child
example, 113-114
easy and grace in,
108-109
focus, 109, 111
master your move,
103, 105
running to the
action, 99
value of work,
100-101

- preparation stage, 67,
69, 78, 81, 84, 87, 90,
93, 96
 focused thinking,
 91, 94
 *imagination and
 belief*, 82, 85
 journaling, 96
 living your vision,
 88, 91
 power of the mind,
 85, 87
 “*thankful on
 credit*,” 95
 *vision versus
 circumstance*,
 78, 82
recuperation stage, 72
rest stage, 74-75, 124,
127, 130
security, risk-taking
 versus, 60, 62
“seizing the moment”
 (risk-taking), 60, 62
self-pity, 140
self-talk. *See* positive
 self-talk
self-worth, 20, 141
 approval seeking and,
 37, 41
Sievers, Todd, 45
sleep, 74-75, 124, 127, 130
Smith, Emmitt, 90
spoken words. *See*
 positive self-talk
Strahan, Michael, 132
- T**
Teresa, Mother, 96
“thankful on credit,” 95
therapy, measuring
 progress in, 11
thinking. *See* mental
 clutter; world view
thoughts, focusing, 91, 94
trust, 4, 136
 in your abilities, 41, 45
truth, aligning with facts,
30, 33-34
- U-V**
University of Miami, xv,
xix
 claim your reward, 117
University of North
 Carolina, xix
Vietnam War example,
 forgiveness, 46
vision, 17, 136-137
 belief in, 82, 85
 circumstance versus,
 79, 82, 137
 effect of mental clutter
 on, 23, 26

focused thinking,
91, 94
living your vision,
88, 91
power of the mind,
85, 87
risk-taking, 60, 62
“thankful on
credit,” 95
vision realization
phrases, 147

W-Z

Wells, David, 111-112
*What You Think of Me Is
None of My Business*, 37
Wheel of Fortune
metaphor, 88, 91
Whitaker, Terri Cole, 37
Williams, Venus, 36
Wilson, August, 62
work, value of, 100-101
world view, 5
worry, anti-worry
phrases, 137-138
Wyche, Sam, 124