

The Young Adult's Guide to Making Choices

The Uncensored Truth About Life, Drugs, and Alcohol



By Leonard Clinton Williams III

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Foreword

A long time ago, when I was a very young man, I wanted everything. It is not uncommon to want everything. People want all the success that life has to offer. I was still a little unusual, because I was absolutely certain that I would have everything. The problem for me at that time, which I could not see then, was that I didn't know much about life. I didn't know how the world worked. And because I didn't understand how the world worked, I didn't know how to make good choices.

I did make some good choices, but I also made some really bad choices. One choice I made was to use recreational drugs. When I look back at my life, and the lives of others, it seems clear to me that the choice between using drugs and alcohol or abstaining is the biggest choice that young people have to make. It will affect your life and your chance at success more than anything.

I would like to share with you what I have learned about life, about making choices, and about recreational drugs. I have no motive other than to tell you the truth. You may be confused about what direction you would like to take in life. You may wonder what is possible for you. You may be unsure of how to make friends or be successful. You may also hear a whole lot of conflicting information about using drugs and alcohol. I am here to help you with all of this. If you are reading this, then you have come to the right place.

This book is divided into 4 main sections. The first section is about our current society and the nature of life in it. These are the lessons I learned the hard way. The second section is about making choices. This is the logical next step because once you understand life you can begin to make better choices. The third section is about that biggest of choices- the choice of using recreational drugs or not. In the third section I will dissect the topic of recreational drugs from many angles. I will tell you the truth. I will show you why you can be certain that what I write is true. I will tell you what happens to people who use drugs.

I will explain to you why you hear so many conflicting opinions on drug use from adults, the media, and your peers. I won't cover all of the demographics of who is using drugs, what they are using, and whatever trends there may be. I don't want to just fill your head with statistics. This book looks at drugs from the viewpoint of whether you should use them, and if they are a good choice for you. The rest of that stuff doesn't really matter in your life.

The final section is for people who decide against using drugs and alcohol. It is about what you can have in the place of drug use. One of the things you will learn in this book is that every door you open in life closes another. If you decide to keep the door to drug use closed, that will leave other doors open. I will show you how to get all of the benefits that await you behind those other doors.

You are brave to be reading this. This book aims at telling you the truth. Many people are scared of the truth. Those who embrace reality show their courage in doing so.

Thank you for taking the time to read this book. I'm confident that it has much to offer you.

The Young Adult's Guide to Making Choices

Introduction

This book is about you. This book is about you because your life is important. And because your life is important, this book is about choices. How your life turns out, and whether you ever achieve your dreams, will be determined by the choices you make more than anything else.

One of the major choices you will have to make is whether or not to experiment with or use drugs. Drugs are rampant in today's culture, and everyday young people are introduced to or given the opportunity to take illegal drugs.

How to make the wisest choice when you encounter this situation will be a major topic in this book.

We will not focus just on various drugs and their effects and side effects. Rather, we will incorporate this information into a whole life perspective. As you will soon learn, every choice you make has an effect on your whole life. Understanding this is the key to making the best choice in any situation.

Our journey into understanding how to make the best choices will take us into the very nature of life, and into the workings of the human mind. By the end, you will have tools and an understanding that can get you on the way to having everything you have ever dreamed of.

Continue reading. In just a few weeks you'll have learned the undeniable truth about drugs. What's more, you'll be prepared to make better choices every day, and you'll have a better sense of what you want in life, and more importantly, how to get it. I feel really excited about taking this journey with you, and I want you to get excited too. What you are about to read will change your life forever!

Chapter 1: You Won the Lottery!



Were you born a lottery winner? It may sound crazy, but you've already won the lottery more than once. In fact, you won the lottery the day you were born. I am not talking about the state lottery. I am talking about the lottery of life. You're probably a little confused, so let me explain what I mean. You may not know this, but human beings have been around for tens of thousands of years. During these millennia we have inhabited all corners of the world. With this in mind, let me ask you a question-

given the choice, in which period of our history would you like to have been born?

Would you like to be among the generation of say 25000 BC? Or maybe more recently, like 1850 or 1910? How about this- where would you live? Africa, Asia, Europe, North America? What time and place would you most like to live in? Do you have an answer yet? Let me give you a few facts:

- A little less than 12,000 years ago, the average human life expectancy was 20 years.
- If that sounds bad, consider that by the year 1900 the average had only increased to 30-45 years
- Before 1844, there was no use of anesthetics for medical or dental procedures. (OUCH!!)
- In our current world, over 1 out of 3 people live on less than \$2 a day.
- Of those people, roughly 1 out of every 2 live on less than \$1 a day.

Ok, ok I know you've heard enough. These facts may not seem exciting, but I am making a point. That point is- The time and place you are living in now offer the best conditions that have ever existed! OURS is the golden age!

Of all of the people who have ever existed, those born into advanced, industrialized nations are born in the most affluent, freest, and most privileged societies in history! You didn't choose to be this lucky, and you didn't have to buy a ticket either. You and I have been handed a gift. There are tremendous things to hope for in our future. We owe it to, among many other things, thousands of hours of hard work and frustration in the laboratory, millions upon millions of soldiers dying, entrepreneurial risk and failure, and the brave men and women who sacrificed their lives to fight for the equality and rights of all people. The collective effort of millions of people who have cared deeply about the world has paid the price for our unparalleled opportunity and standard of living. I have dreams. I believe you have dreams. We are somewhat alone in our place and time. Having dreams is a luxury. To live in a place where it is possible to fulfill them is a precious blessing only a scarce few have or will ever know. All of this leads me to the final point of this chapter: It is a BIG deal whether you ever achieve all or some

measure of your dreams! Your life is a BIG deal. The rare opportunity you have makes it the biggest thing going on planet earth! Take it seriously!

Chapter 2: What Do You Want?



Now that you realize that you live in a world of opportunity, it's time to ask yourself a question, namely- what do you want? You may wonder how it is that some people become wealthy or famous. Maybe you would like to do that. Or maybe you would like to devote your life to charity and helping others. Or, if you're really ambitious, maybe you would like to do both. While we are on the subject, let me bring up an interesting point. Have you ever visited a fortune teller? If you haven't that's ok. In fact, I advise you to stay away from such people, particularly if they charge for their services. While we're at it, I'll tell you what you are likely to find if you do visit one. That is- They will tell you some very accurate things about your life! They will know details about your personality that baffle you and they will seem to understand many of your most personal issues!

How is it that they do this? Well, it has absolutely nothing to do with their crystal ball and everything to do with a carefully designed bag of tricks. One trick in particular fascinates me. You see, there is a big shortcut to knowing what someone is thinking about. It turns out that almost 100% of human concerns fall into three neat categories- finances, health, and relationships. All the fortune teller has to do is make a rough guess as to what stage of life you are in, and then start talking about finances, health, and relationships.

Let's use me as an example. Right now, my main goals are developing my career, losing some weight, and finding a girl worth keeping. I want to help my family members and be of good service to my friends. For the long term, I would like to have some investments, a secure retirement, and to contribute some of my resources and some of the things I have learned to humanity.

Now, look back at what I just wrote. Is there anything that doesn't fall into the categories of health, relationships, or finances? Not really huh? Understand that I did not just think of what health, financial, and relationship goals I have. I simply began rattling off what came to mind when I asked myself the question "what do I want." If you do the same, you'll likely find that your goals and concerns also fall into those categories.

So, what is the point of all of this? Why does this fascinate me so much? I like the idea that our concerns are so narrow. This makes it easy for us to think about what we can do to improve our lives. We can identify what we want in each of these categories and then make plans to achieve them. Despite the opportunity they have been given, many people in our society have never really decided what they want. It is kind of hard to hit a target you can't see; wouldn't you think? Later in the book, I'll give you advice on how to get anything you want. For now, let's just look at these three categories in a little more detail. You may start to have an idea of what you want after you read this.

Health: Health is the foundation of a good life. You want to take better care of your body and mind than you do all of your possessions, even if you own a \$100,000 car and a \$1,000,000 house. Your body and mind are priceless. The following are some questions you may want to ask yourself about health.

How much do you want to make health a priority in your life?

Do you want to be an athlete, or have an athlete's level of fitness?

What would you like to do to make your body and appearance look healthier?

What kind of foods do you like?

Which foods that you currently eat should you eliminate or cut down?

Is it worth it to you to study nutrition and develop an optimal diet to have more energy, and make your life longer and more enjoyable?

What are your favorite exercises?

If you haven't started exercising yet, what exercises would you like to try?

How much better would you feel with more strength and better cardiovascular fitness? You can think of many other questions like this, which will help you determine what it is that you want in terms of physical health.

Relationships:

Relationships with others are essential to happiness in life. Humans are a social species. We have lived in groups as long as we have walked the earth. With very few exceptions, all people who have enjoyed long-term happiness and fulfillment in life have done so largely by having healthy relationships with family, friends, society, and the world. Relationships in your life may include relationships with your family, your significant other, your friends, a higher power you believe in, your relationship to society, those in need, or your relationship to the world. Think about what kind of relationships you would like to have in your life and what role relationships will play in your life.

Finances:

If you haven't already, you'll soon learn that life is very expensive. Success is not measured in terms of how much money you make (at least not for most people). However, you have to have money to satisfy basic needs like food, shelter, and clothing. Beyond that, most people want to live a lifestyle that includes things above the bare necessities. It is nice to have some luxuries, to be able to enjoy vacations and other leisure time, and have a comfortable retirement when you're older. Funding these things is far from easy. It takes working very hard and

having the discipline to spend sparingly and save and invest wisely. The fact is you are a slave to money from the first day you venture out on your own. The things you would like to do and the dreams you have beyond just working everyday must constantly be put aside so that you can earn the money you must have to survive. There are two ways to deal with your indentured servitude to money, and I suggest you do both. The first is to get into a profession that you enjoy doing. If you can fuse your work and play, then you won't always mind having to work to pay your bills and fund your social and family life. The second is to free yourself from your slavery to money. How do you do that? I'll give you a hint- it is really ironic. Here it is- You free yourself from slavery to money by accumulating so much of it that you don't need anymore! I have often heard people judge those who have accumulated great wealth as only caring about money. The fact may be that they don't care about money. Maybe they have larger goals they would like to pursue. You'll never be able to escape the demands of money as long as you are in need of it. Don't get ahead of yourself. Building wealth takes a lot of time. You don't need to have a million dollars tomorrow or next year or even 20 years from now. If you make the decision that financial freedom is something you will go after, and something you will ultimately have, and you practice the discipline to achieve it, you're almost certain to get there.

So, in conclusion we can use these 3 areas to define what we want. Thinking of it like a game, the things you want for your health, relationships, and finances are the object of the game; they are some of the major keys to living a happy, fulfilling life. We know the kinds of things we want. Now, let's go to the next step. In the next chapter, we will look at what most people get. After that, we'll look at the field on which we play this game called life.

Chapter 3: What Most People Get



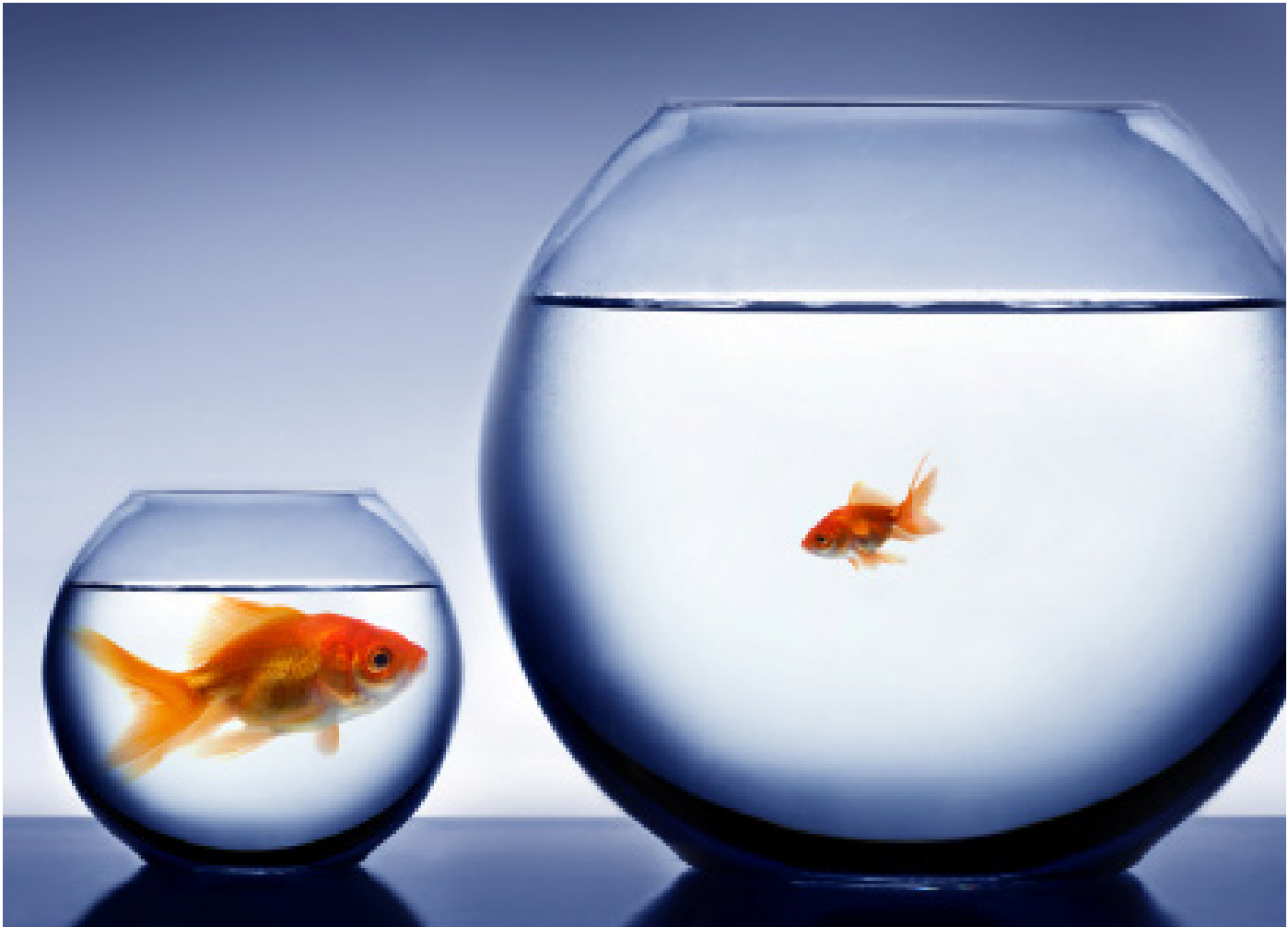
What did you want to be when you were 5? I'll tell you what I wanted to be. I wanted to be a movie star. Then I wanted to be a doctor. Then I wanted to fly airplanes or maybe fly spaceships. Whatever I wanted to do, I was certain that I would succeed. I would live in a mansion and I would buy whatever I wanted.

When I was 16, my ambitions had become a little more in line with reality. I still was certain that I would have great things in life, and in a very short time, but I had realized that it might take more work than I had thought in kindergarten. I was also aware that the chance that all of my fellow students would become fabulously wealthy was very slim, because few people ever do. Still, I was sure to have everything. I wanted it too bad and would do whatever it takes.

Does any of this sound like you? Overall, it is typical of many young people growing up. Many of my peers had also thought they would be actors and actresses before they could tie their shoes. In their teenage years, many of them had the feeling that they were going to make it very big in life. They wanted it really badly too.

Here is the reality- very few people achieve such massive success. I am not talking just about financial success, I am talking about any kind of success- making a big impact on the world, helping the poor, mastering a difficult sport or skill- you name it. Of course, it's not necessary to be a revolutionary, hero, or a billionaire to live a good and respectable life. Most people would be happy with less than that. I know I don't need a billion dollars to be happy. But this does raise a question- why is it that so many people end up with far less than they actually wanted in life? Apparently, this game called life is much harder than most of us believe when we're young. To understand why, let's look deeper and examine the nature of life, and how the world REALLY works.

Chapter 4: Life is Unfair



Let me ask you a question- do you think that good things happen to good people? You probably answer yes to that question. I answer yes too. Of course good things happen to good people. People get promotions and raises at work. They make new and exciting friendships. They marry their longtime sweethearts. There are more examples of good things happening to good people than I could write about in 100 years. However, is it a law that only good things happen to good people? No it isn't. In fact, bad things happen to good people all of the time. Why is this? Well, one big reason is that life is full of random events. Random means that we can't predict or foresee these events and therefore cannot stop them from happening. Natural disasters strike. Drunk drivers run into unsuspecting drivers head on. Companies suddenly go bankrupt, leaving committed employees left without a job and investors losing large sums of money. These events happen with complete indifference as to whether the people affected by them deserve them to happen or not.

To a certain extent, how much we have in life is determined by the luck of the draw, by not being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The chances are pretty low that you will get ran over by a drunk driver in front of your doorstep or be struck by lightning, but you will certainly face unforeseen challenges and setbacks as you try to make it in life. So we understand that bad things, be they big or small, are bound to happen to us as we progress through life.

Now let's look at two other characteristics of life- its brevity (life's short), and its difficulty (life's hard). You will see that these two are related.

Chapter 5: Life is Short and Hard



We've all heard the phrase "life is short." I myself heard this phrase over and over as I was growing up. Truthfully, I didn't understand it. Depending on our gender and which nation we live in, statistics say people today can expect to live upwards of 70 or even 80 years. That sure sounded like a long time to me. Plenty of time to achieve all of my goals, explore the world, have leisure, and make friends.

Well, that was then, and now I do agree with the statement "life is short." In fact, it is incredibly short. 80 years is nowhere near as long as I had previously thought. Why? Well, let's think about what we need in life. We need food, clothing, and shelter, relationships with others, and some time and resources for leisure and entertainment. How do we achieve these things? We achieve these things by having a career where we can earn enough money to get them. So we need a career. On top of that, most of us don't want to be miserable 8 to 10 hours a day, 5 to 7 days a week, so we want a career we enjoy.

The typical first step to establishing a good career is to go to college. Now there are many good careers that you can get into without an extensive education, but for the majority of good paying jobs, you need a degree to get your foot in the door. Some fields require more education, and a higher education quite often leads to a far better income.

So, we start out as an adult entering college. Most of us will be there for 4 years or more. Now, does this 4 or more year education make us a complete expert in our field? No, it doesn't. Your degree only prepares you for an entry level position in your chosen field. That's right- you go to school for 4 years to earn the right to be a beginner!

Of course, compared to everyone else you may be an expert. If you get a degree in a particular field you will know far more than the average person without an education in that field. So if I get a degree in finance, I will know far more about finance than a person with a degree in history, and that person will know far more about history than I do. But the fact remains that an education merely gets you started in your career.

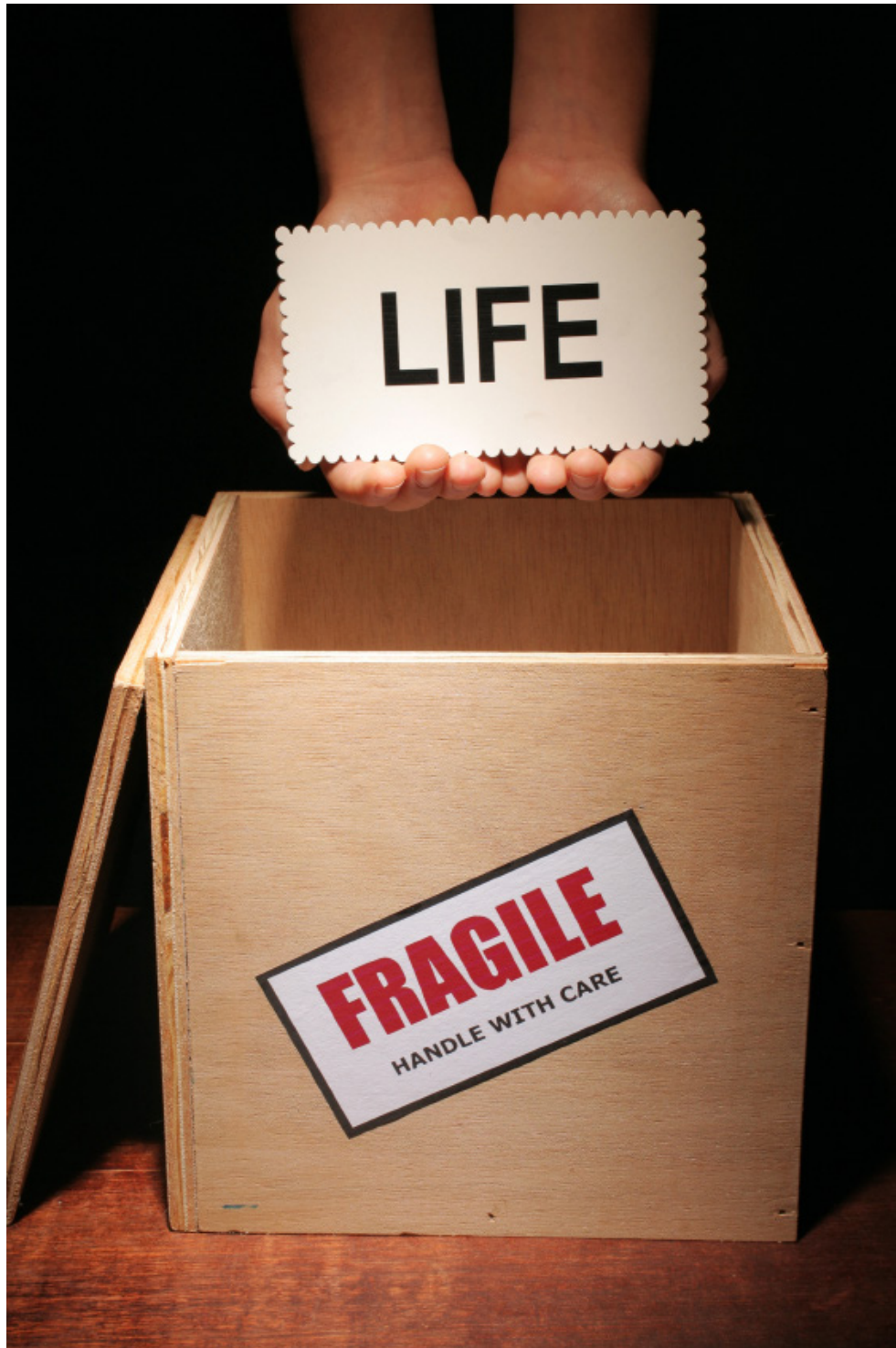
So, you get your education and hopefully find a job so that you can start your career. Now the question becomes "what's next." One of my favorite quotes to come from someone who gave me career advice is "it's called practice for a reason." What that means is that when you begin to "practice" real estate or "practice" law, you embark on a journey to progressively get better over time. Just like you can't learn to play the piano or play baseball

overnight, you can't master your career overnight. The human mind, regardless of individual talent, can only learn so fast. The harsh reality is that it takes at least 5 to 10 years to attain a high level of mastery in a particular field. And this is assuming you put in the extra effort of studying and learning your profession, even in your off time. In any case, it will be a while before you make the high end earnings of those in your profession. So let's review. You get out of high school at 18, and then you go to college until you are at least 22. After that, you spend 10 years of hard work to get really good at what you do. Your life is only getting started and you're already in your 30s! I have also made some very optimistic assumptions. I have assumed that you will know exactly what you want to do as soon as you finish high school. I have also assumed that you will finish college in as little time as possible. Fact is, most people have to go through a process of trial and error in order to find out what they really want to do. In addition, college usually takes longer than 4 years. For instance, you may get sick one semester. Or you may not be able to take all of the classes you need because of your work schedule or because those classes get full too quickly. There are all kinds of things to get in your way. In the middle of all of this hard work, you must find time to spend with your family and friends. There will be problems to be resolved in your relationships, and this will take time.

We are getting a little long winded here, but my point is that I was very wrong when I thought that 70 or 80 years was a long time to live. The reality is that we are not drenched in time which we can use to lazily enjoy life. We spend the majority of our time struggling trying to make it, so that we can savor the scarce minutes, hours, and days we have to enjoy the fruits of our very hard work.

I understand that all of this may seem very overwhelming to you. Don't worry; I promise you can handle it, and later in the book I'll give you some great advice on how to get whatever you want. Before we conclude this section, let's look at one more unalterable feature of life- its fragility.

Chapter 6: Life is Fragile



What do you think of when you hear the word fragile? I think of eggs, or maybe boxes being delivered to my house with the words “fragile, handle with care” written on them. In this sense, fragile means that a certain thing is very delicate, and can easily be injured, broken, or destroyed. So how does this relate to life? Let me tell you a short story.

Jim started out in the construction industry when he was 16. He really enjoyed building houses and aspired to be a great success one day. After graduating high school at 18, he immediately went full time at his summer job with a local construction company. Shortly after this, on a bright sunny morning, Jim was up on a roof installing some shingles. He didn't worry about wearing any kind of harness. He had been on higher roofs and felt comfortable working on them. Jim had brought a large bottle of water to drink throughout what would surely be a hot day. While Jim was nailing down some shingles near the edge of the roof, he accidentally tipped over his bottle of water and it began rolling down the roof. Without thinking Jim reached quickly to grab it, lost his balance, and fell off the roof. To make his luck worse, as he landed, his head struck a large rock on the ground. Jim was by himself at the time, and it was another hour before someone else came and noticed him lying on the ground. In a rare event, Jim's fall had caused a swelling of his brain, and, due to the time that had passed before he got help, he was left with a permanent disability which required him to be placed in a nursing facility where he would have constant care available.

Now, let's look at another story, one which started out similarly but ended quite differently.

Like Jim, Eric started out working construction when he was young. He also stayed in the industry after graduating high school. Just the same as Jim, Eric could be a little careless on the job site during the early years of his career. He was lucky, however, and never sustained any serious injury. The construction industry would boom sometimes, and then go into a period of recession when jobs were hard to come by. During one of these recessions, Eric became frustrated and decided that if he was going to make it, he would have to have some sort of competitive advantage. Seeing higher education as a great source of such an advantage, Eric enrolled in college.

When he entered college, Eric noticed that many of the students were too focused on their social life, and that their grades suffered as a result. Eric was determined to do well in school, so he never went out before all of his studying was done.

As his curriculum became more and more difficult, he eventually got to the point that he was alone in his dorm studying for almost all the time he wasn't in class. Eric's hard work paid off, and he graduated after 9 semesters

with highest honors and a degree in Architectural Design. Eric's credentials earned him a job with a very well-known and high paying construction firm. After working at this firm for 10 years, Eric felt that he had learned the industry well enough to start his own business.

Before he could go out on his own, he would have to get a contractor's license, which meant he would have to go back to school. It took Eric 6 more months of schooling and studying to prepare for the state license test. Eric passed the test on his first try. He was excited and his family was very proud of him.

Because he had lived modestly while in school, Eric had some funds put away. After he had spent almost all of his money on advertising, business finally started to come in. In the beginning, he would only be able to do small jobs. The state he worked in required that he have \$150,000 in liquid assets before he could do the larger jobs that paid the most money. Over time Eric accumulated the money he needed to satisfy that requirement. He decided to expand his business, so he hired several more employees and did even more advertising. Business started to pour in for Eric, and he found himself working 70 to 80 hour weeks on a regular basis. His employees could be irresponsible and he often found himself picking up their slack. He also had a few employees who stole expensive equipment from him. With these employees, he cut his losses and didn't bother filing charges. His wife and kids hardly ever got to see him as it was; he didn't have time to attend court hearings. Eric soon found himself making more money than he ever would have guessed when he started his business. He wasn't sure what to do with it all, so he made an appointment with a financial planner. His planner helped him calculate what kinds of returns he could get on his money. Eric was amazed at how much his money could grow over time.

After talking to his wife, he made a plan to retire early at 50. If he was going to do this, it meant that he would not be buying \$100,000 cars like others who had the kind of success he did. Instead, Eric and his family lived modestly and well below their means. They bought used cars that ran well and wore clothes that were nice but that didn't cost a fortune. Eric invested over 60% of his income each year. He wanted desperately to meet his goal of retiring at 50. His work had consumed his life, and he wanted some time to enjoy the things that really mattered to him, like time with his wife and kids. Eric's investments lagged for a few years, and it looked like he wouldn't meet his goal. Then, when he was 52, the stock market hit a major boom. 3 years later, Eric sold his construction company for a handsome sum and was able to retire at 55 as a multi-millionaire, a very exceptional feat no doubt. He spent the remainder of his life making up for all the time he had lost while building his business.

So- how did you like those two stories? You may be wondering- what on earth was the purpose of you reading that? Well, first things first. As you may have guessed, I made both of those stories up. However, they are very realistic and contain a lesson about how the real world works. Look at them closely. You have one man who gets critically injured at an early age, and must live in nursing home for the remainder of his life. You have another who starts out at about the same place and ends up a very wealthy man. Eric achieved what most people only

dream of. Now, here is the important question- who made more effort? Does it take more effort to lose something or to gain something? Did the first guy, Jim, have to really try hard to do something totally insane to mess up his life? No, he didn't. He just lost his focus for a brief second. Can't you imagine other people making similar mistakes? How about the second guy, Eric? Quite different for him, wasn't it? He had to make many good choices, sacrifice time, and put in an enormous effort for a very long time. The point is this- you can ruin your entire life in a minute, or even in a second. The world will punish those who make even the most minor and understandable mistakes. On the other hand, if you are going to have great success in life, there is no way around it; you will have to work very hard for a very long time. So, do you see how this works? These stories are made up, brief, and simplified, but I promise you, they are not far-fetched at all. Life really is this much of a challenge.

Now, some of you are probably thinking that this isn't the whole picture. For instance, some people win the state lottery, and they get really rich really quick without working. Well that's true. However, it very likely won't happen to you. If I were a betting man, I would give you just about any odds you want that it won't happen. To underscore just how fragile life is, most people who win the lottery end up with less money than they had before they won in a very short time.

Summing it Up:

I told you that life is fragile and to say something is fragile is to say it is very delicate, and can easily be injured, broken, or destroyed. In that spirit, I want to end this chapter by briefly summing it up. Here is the reality I am trying to communicate- You must struggle to get everything you will ever have. Nothing comes without a price. Once you have something, you often have to fight to keep it. We all share the same ultimate fate. Everything you have can and will be taken from you. How much you have and how long you keep it is largely dependent on you. Play it smart and you can live a long and wonderful life. On the other hand, make the wrong choices and you can find yourself in misery you never knew was possible in a very short time.

Epilogue for Section 1:

We have just finished a section of the book that may have intimidated you a little. I'll warn you that things may seem even more difficult very shortly. Stick with me; I promise that the next few portions of the book will have you learning very exciting things. By the time you have finished this entire book I am confident you will be filled with hope about the kinds of things you can have. I have studied many aspects of life very deeply, and I know that this learning experience will change your life. So, why do I tell you things that may have the potential to scare or intimidate you a bit? Because it's the truth! The facts of life I am explaining to you are unavoidable whether you know about them or not. If I don't teach you this, the world certainly will. It's called "learning the hard way", something I've done far too much of. You may have heard the phrase "sobering reality." It is an interesting phrase. People use it to describe the way the world shatters their illusions. It is human nature to think pleasant thoughts. Things like- "That boy or girl across the room likes me." "I will make 100 on my next math test." "I can get rich quick." In our minds, we all have a tendency to make things better than they may actually be. We get our hopes up and then, THWAP! We find out that things aren't nearly that easy. I have described the rather intimidating nature of life because I want you to be "sober" before you go out into the world on your own. Recognize the challenge life presents and respect it. Stick with me to the end and I'll have you believing in yourself and certain that you have enormous potential. Congratulations on making it this far! You have really learned some tremendous lessons about life. Let's continue to the next section of the book and learn how to make the best choices you can. You are on your way to getting everything you want!

Chapter 7: Filling Life's Order



Now it's time to learn how to make choices. I mentioned before that the main areas of concern we all share are health, finances, and relationships. So, before we dive into how to make the best choices, we will need to have some idea of what we seek to attain as a result of those choices. Let's start with health then proceed to relationships and finances.

Health-

FACT: Your mind and body are priceless. When they go, you go with them. If you don't pay special attention to your health, you are likely to have a very difficult life. Let me give you an example from my own life-

My grandfather smoked cigarettes for many years. As a consequence he developed lung cancer in his late 50s. I watched his health deteriorate until he finally passed away. He could not walk 3 feet without being out of breath. This man, who had been a driven workaholic, determined to achieve all that he was able, was confined to sitting in a chair with an oxygen tank by his side nearly all day in his last years. Let me ask you a question- how much was his health worth in those last years? Do you think that, had he been given the choice, he would have rather had \$1 billion or have his health back? I'll give you the answer. He would have taken his health over all of the money in the world in an instant. I use this example to help you understand that any enjoyment you have in life depends on having the best health you can.

So, what will you have to do to maintain your health? I am no doctor, so don't take this as advice, but here are a few things many people do to maintain health-

Eat a good diet.

Exercise a minimum of 30 minutes a day, 4-6 days per week.

Practice good hygiene.

Get regular checkups with your doctor.

Again, these are just a few of the things most healthy people do. The point of all this is for you is to understand 2 things-

1) It is necessary to devote time and attention to the health of your mind and body.

2) Causing unnecessary permanent damage to your mind and body is too big a price to pay for ANY-THING! YOUR BODY AND MIND ARE PRICELESS!

So that was health. Next we will look at relationships-

Relationships in your life can include relationships with your friends, your significant other, your relationship with society or the world, and your relationship to a higher power that you believe in. You can probably think of others.

So, what will it take to have fulfilling relationships? Well, the first thing it will take is time. You must invest time in your relationships in order for them to be fulfilling. The second thing relationships will take is interpersonal skills. No two human beings can get along with one another 100% of the time. This means you will have to learn to handle conflict. You also will have to learn many, many communication skills. You will have to iron out your personality quirks, and learn how to overlook the flaws of others. You will have to learn to be assertive, to stand up for your rights. You will have to learn how to handle the grief that occurs when relationships are ended by death or for other reasons. You will have to learn to set boundaries. You will have to learn to not be manipulated by others, and to know when to take your losses and get out of a relationship. There are many more skills you will have to learn. I won't list them all here. Once again, there is a point to this- **Relationships demand our time. They also demand a long list of interpersonal skills. These skills, like all skills, are learned only with effort over time. Just like health, relationships require a lot of work.**

Let's move on to finances. I'll go ahead and warn you that this section contains a lot of numbers which I have calculated. Don't worry about how I have gotten them. The purpose is to give you an idea of the type of financial demands life makes of you. Let's get started-

Right now, the average income for an American is around \$50,000 per year. Let's keep with the average and see what you will have to do to live an average lifestyle for the rest of your life. In order to do these calculations, we have to consider a few things and make a few assumptions. The first thing we must consider is something called *inflation*. Inflation simply refers to things getting more expensive over time. This means that \$50,000 a year 10 years from now isn't as much as \$50,000 right now. So if we want to live the same lifestyle over our lives, we will have to make more and more money as time goes on. The next thing I am assuming is that you want to retire at some point, meaning you no longer work and live off of money you had previously invested. I will assume you

retire at 65. I will also assume that you live to be 80. Why did I pick 80? Because I have to have something to put in my calculator in order to do this! I hope you live to be 120! I'll also assume a 5% rate of inflation and that your investments earn 8%. So, we will say you are 16 now and that you start investing some of your income when you are 25, and continue to invest until you retire at 65. Ok, here you go. When you retire, you will need to have.....\$3,253,966.20 in your bank account! Pretty big number, isn't it. Why will you need so much? Well, just as an example, using the above assumptions, a gallon of gas will cost around \$27.00 by the time you're 65. If that sounds crazy, I am sorry. It is quite realistic. My grandfather used to get gas for \$0.20 a gallon. That is a pretty overwhelming thought for you, but it's actually not as bad as you think. Remember that we assumed that your invested money will earn 8% per year. We will skip the math, but that means you will need to invest \$932.10 per month, every month from the ages of 25 to 65. So, unless we want to cut back our lifestyles in our golden years, we need to invest over 900 bucks a month.

Let's see what else we can do with our money. Remember that we are assuming that we make \$50,000 a year. This doesn't mean that we keep \$50,000, because we have to pay income tax. For the sake of this, we will assume that you pay \$10,000 a year in taxes. That leaves you with \$40,000 per year or \$3333 per month. From that \$3333, we are going to invest \$932 a month, so that leaves us with \$2401 per month. Now of course we want a house. The average cost of a home in the US is around \$273,000. That amounts to a payment of around \$1,550. Now we're down to 841 bucks to pay our car payment, groceries, entertainment expenses,.....this list goes on. Now, if you want to make more and have more, you have a few options.

You could-

- 1) Change careers,
- 2) Learn more about your current job and get a promotion,
- 3) Work more hours.....

I won't bore you with all of the options, but look at the 3 I listed. They all involve extra effort, either learning new skills or putting in more time. Ok, so I am going on and on and on with all of these numbers and facts. There are many, many things that affect how all of this turns out. Let me give you the point. The point I want you to understand is-

Life is extremely expensive! It will take much effort to meet the financial demands that life puts on you.

Summing it all up:

So, what have we learned? We have learned that it takes daily effort to maintain our health. We have learned that having relationships requires time and energy, as well as skills that take time and effort to learn. And finally,

we have learned that life is expensive, and that we must put in hard effort over time to meet our financial goals. You can see that living life to the fullest is a big order to fill! Now let's look out how our choices affect our chances of getting all we want out of these three key areas of life.

Chapter 8: You Will Pay the Price



We have all heard the saying “he will pay the price.” When I have heard this, it is usually when someone is talking about a bad decision someone has made. Like maybe a robber who gets caught and then goes to jail. They say that he “paid the price” for his crime. I certainly agree that the robber did pay the price. However, I think we miss something when we only speak of “paying the price” for bad decisions.

Here is reality- You have a limited amount of time on earth. This means that you cannot, under any circumstances, have everything. You must pick and choose how and where you spend your time and resources. Each decision you make closes off all other options available at that time. If there are ten restaurants in your town, and you go to one of them to eat dinner, that means that you will not have dinner at any of the other nine tonight, or at your house, or at any of your friends’ houses.

Looking at it this way, paying a price is neither good nor bad in and of itself. Paying a price is merely an inescapable fact of life. Let’s look at an example of this new way of thinking. Let’s say you went to school today. The price you paid was that you didn’t get to stay home and watch TV, or go to the mall and play in the game arcade, or go to the library. You can think of plenty of other things you could have done other than going to school. So, that was the price you paid.

Now, here is the key question- what did you get in return? Statistics have shown that high school graduates earn over \$500,000 more than do dropouts over their working life. Getting a diploma means you can go to college, which will mean you have a chance at an even more rewarding and fulfilling career. Furthermore, in our society, the more education you have the higher you are regarded by others. So, if you went to school today, even though you paid a price, you made a great decision. This is the way I think we should look at every choice we make. We should ask not only what we are getting, but also what we are giving up. We should always remember this inescapable aspect of life. We pay a price for everything.

Chapter 9: Our Very Worst Habit



Virtually every commentator on human nature I have encountered has noted that human beings are dysfunctional. You can find references to this in writings about history, philosophical works, and religious and spiritual texts. When looked at as a group, the most obvious feature of humans is how screwed up we all are. It appears that our basic impulses, the things we are naturally drawn to do, are often not in our best interest. Why is it that so many people make horrible choices? Why do the choices of many people lead to misery? There is one bad habit most of us have, which I feel causes much of our grief. The worst habit of almost all of us is making decisions based only on how we feel right now and what we want right now. Most of the problems people face today can be traced to bad choices they made in the past. They usually made those choices by focusing mainly on their circumstances at that time.

I have had many, many problems for this very reason. I am not alone in this. Although I hate to see the terrible results that come from these “in the moment” choices, I can certainly sympathize with those who make them.

The fact is the present moment feels overwhelming. If you or I are unhappy or bored right now, we want to do whatever we can to feel good. It is quite unnatural to look ten years or even ten days ahead when we can't stand our current circumstances.

There is a big, big problem with this. The problem is that the future becomes the present. If we make choices that help us today but hurt us tomorrow, or next week, or five years from now, then, sooner than we think (tomorrow, one week from today, and five years from today to be exact) we find ourselves dealing with the consequences of those choices. When you arrive at the future, the moment in which you made those choices has disappeared. It no longer feels overwhelming and the fun you got out of doing whatever it was doesn't matter now. What does matter to you is that you now have a big mess to clean up *today*.

If we only think about the present moment, and make too many bad choices, we can end up with a future so riddled with problems that it will take years or even decades to fix them all.

An easy to understand example of this is debt. When you become an adult and have credit, you can buy all kinds of things you can't afford. You can have a wide screen TV, five video game systems, a new wardrobe, and some exercise equipment TODAY! Wouldn't that be a blast? While you're at it, you can get a loan for a brand new car, and some of those “rent to own” magazines. Of course you can see the problem with this. Those debts will come due one day. When that future becomes the present, you may have to take on a second or third job, and you'll

really wish that you hadn't had all of that fun "back then". The point I am getting to is this- it is a mistake to only make choices that benefit you right now. All of us must always invest some of our present time and resources into things that benefit us in the future, so that when the future becomes the present we are prepared for it.

You probably have had many adults telling you about the importance of doing your homework, getting a job, going to college, eating healthy food, saving money, and other things. They tell you these things because they are feeling the effects of the decisions that they made in the past. When are they feeling them? Right now! They wish they would have put more effort into preparing for the future when they were your age, so that they would be better off today. I am certain that most of the adults you talk to believe that you should also have fun. However, because of what they have learned about life, they may seem to only talk about doing things that benefit the future when they give you advice. What we all must do is compromise. We must focus on enjoying the present to an extent, but we must also work hard to prepare for the future. We need to maximize the happiness and fulfillment we experience throughout our lives, and not just focus on how much fun we can have today.

Chapter 10: We Do What Other People Do



When I was a young child and I did something wrong, my excuse was often “but everyone was doing it.” And, of course, the response I got was always something along the lines of “if everyone else jumped off of a cliff, would you?” I’ll give my mother and my grade school teachers some credit. They made a very good point. A bad choice is a bad choice no matter how many people are making it. Perhaps it would make sense to completely ignore what everyone else is doing. But if that is the case, why do we see so many ads with headlines like “the #1 selling car in America” or “more people use this brand of toothpaste than any other”? What are they trying to tell us? It’s simple. They are trying to tell us that this is what everyone else is doing! Everyone else is buying this car and everyone else uses this brand of toothpaste, so you should too.

Ads like these have been running for years. If these ads didn’t work, then all of those sharp marketers would have figured that out a long time ago. Why do they work? Because all people have a tendency to do what other people are doing. This includes me, and my mom, and every single one of the grade school teachers who asked me if I would jump off of a cliff!

Which car do they drive? Which toothpaste do they use?

Psychologists think of this tendency as a sort of behavioral shortcut. It serves us well in many situations. For instance, if you are in a building and all of the sudden you see everyone else start to scream and run out of the door, your best bet is probably to run with them. People don’t usually do things like that unless there is a danger nearby. Say, for instance, they are running from a gunman. It would probably not be in your best interest to stand there and analyze the situation. You don’t think; you just run right with them. You can wait till later to find out why they are running.

What I am driving down to in this chapter is that we all seem to be programmed to want to do what everyone else does. If we see other people all doing the same thing, then we have a gut feeling that what they are doing must be good. If we are going to make good choices, then we must be aware of this aspect of our emotions. We must also realize that other people will often do things that *are not* good for them. If our peers do something that is a mistake, we must override our tendency to want to do what everyone else does.

Interlude:

In the next section, I will present facts about drugs, drug use, and the consequences drug users face. These are not my opinions. These are real facts and I would like share with you how I determined these facts.

If you wanted to find out about the health and life consequences of drugs, who do you think would be most qualified to answer your questions? When I was young most of the people I knew asked other people who had used whatever drug they were interested in. This might seem logical at first, but if you think about it, you'll realize that people who use drugs are no more qualified to answer your questions than those who don't. At least this is the case for people without specialized training.

To give you an example, let's think about those little cartons of milk we get in the lunchroom. Now, you've probably had thousands of these over your life; I know I have had much more than that. Now let me ask you a few questions. Don't cheat; just answer these while you have this in front of you.



Question 1: How many calories are in 8oz of milk?

Question 2: Is this too many, just right, or not enough?

Question 3: How much fat is in 8oz of milk?

Question 4: Does an 8oz carton of milk have enough protein for one day?

Question 5: How many would you have to drink in a day to get a healthy daily amount of protein?

Question 6: Is there such a thing as drinking too much milk?

Question 7: If so, how much milk is too much? Is this the same for everyone, or just some people?

Question 8: What are the health benefits of drinking skim milk versus 1% or regular milk?

Ok, I'll stop there. I could have given you a much longer list of questions, but I don't need to in order to get to the point. How many of these questions did you get right? Are you sure you are right? Would you bet your entire future and your life that you are right? If you're like me, you couldn't answer most of these questions, even though you have been drinking milk your entire life.

The lesson to be learned from this is that someone does not become an expert on the consequences of some substance just from consuming it. I asked you if you would bet your future and life on being right about the facts about milk. Well,

if you take someone's advice on drug use just because they have used them, you are betting your life on their credibility. As we will later learn, this is not a good bet.

Who you can listen to are doctors who have years of specialized training and decades of experience researching the short and long-term effects of drugs and treating people who have used drugs. Those doctors are qualified to tell you the consequences of using drugs. Further, the findings of the research those doctors conduct and study are based on evidence. Going to the evidence is the ultimate short cut to getting at the truth. All people have pre-conceived feelings about any given subject, as well as their own agendas. This is called having a bias. Evidence, on the other hand, is exempt from personal biases.

To get this idea, think of it like a court case. Say you are on a jury for a murder trial, and for some reason you happen to really like the defendant. Maybe he wears a unique piece of jewelry similar to one you own. As the prosecution presents the case, you find out that the defendant's footprints, blood, and fingerprints were all found at the crime scene, although he claims to have never been there. Suppose they also found a bloody knife in the defendant's vehicle, and that DNA testing shows that the blood is that of the victim. Now, even though you liked the defendant in the beginning, it's kind of hard to deny that he committed the crime. Your bias doesn't matter; the evidence is undeniable.

This is the type of mindset I used in preparing the information I am about to give you. I am not a doctor, but I have talked to many about the effects of drug use. I have also done research in preparing this. Further, over my life, I have known many people who have used drugs. I have seen the effects drugs have had on their lives. Not surprisingly, those effects match up with the evidence and facts I present in the next chapter.

The information I give in the next is available to anyone. These are not just my words; these are what real experts know about drug use.

Chapter 11: Drugs- What They Get You



Now that we know a few things about how to make choices, we can look at that really big choice all of us have to make- whether or not to use recreational drugs. This section of the book focuses on recreational drugs, that is, the drugs people take for pleasure. This includes alcohol (which is illegal for teenagers), marijuana, LSD, psilocybin (found in hallucinogenic mushrooms), mescaline, cocaine, crack cocaine, MDMA (also called ecstasy), ketamine, morphine, heroine, amphetamines, PCP, GHB, inhalants, and essentially all other drugs people use recreationally. The things I will say next apply to all of these drugs generally, though some more than others. Later, we will look at individual drugs and their unique effects and consequences.

Now, if you go around asking people or just listen to enough of them for long enough, you'll hear many different opinions on why you should or shouldn't use drugs. Some people say that drugs are good for you and that nothing bad will happen as a result of using them. Other people say that drugs will cause great harm to your life, and that once you start using them, you may not be able to quit. So, who is right? Is anyone? If you ask 10 people and get 10 different answers, does that mean that each has a 10% chance of being right? The answer is a big NO! Either drugs are bad for your health or they are not. Either they help you get what you want in life or they don't. They cannot be both.

There is a way to determine the truth about drugs. First, we look at what exactly drugs are. We find out what effects they produce, and how they do it. Then we look at what the evidence says happens as a result. If those people who say that drugs are a good thing are right, then we should see people who use drugs living happy, healthy, productive lives. If we see something different, then we will conclude that those people are wrong. Now that you have learned about life, and about making choices, we have a context to put this in. We know that life is short, hard, unfair, and fragile. We know that the things we want for our health, relationships, and finances will take enormous time and effort to achieve. And we also know that we must pay a price for every choice we make, whether it is a good or bad choice. So let's keep all of this in mind as we look at what we get when we use drugs, and what price we pay in return.

There are millions of people who use drugs. Surely, it would seem that they would not be using them if they didn't get something out of them. No one is going to do something if it doesn't benefit their life in some way, right? To understand what benefit might come out of using drugs, it is best to first understand what drugs are. The drugs I have listed are chemicals, or plants that contain chemicals which interact with your brain and/or body when you consume them. These drugs affect neurotransmitters, which are chemical messengers in your brain. It is important to understand that these chemical messengers exist in your brain naturally. They have many functions as a part of your brain chemistry. When some of these are released, it makes you feel good. So, for example, when you ride a roller coaster, some of these chemical messengers are released in your brain and you feel good as a

result. Other pleasurable activities like eating a delicious meal cause a release of these chemical messengers. If you think about it, this makes perfect sense. If people didn't enjoy eating then they wouldn't be able to live.

So, we can see that these neurotransmitters are important, and exist for a reason. Besides regulating the functions of our brain, they reward us for doing things (such as eating) that are necessary for our survival. Drugs interact with these chemical messengers, sometimes causing releases of them, other times causing them to build up in the brain by preventing receptors in the brain from reabsorbing them. The result is that you may feel very, very good while under their influence. This state of being "high" is called euphoria. Users of different drugs describe this euphoria in different ways. Some say they feel in touch with nature or emotionally closer to their friends. Others just describe it as by far the best physically pleasurable feeling they have ever had. Different drugs cause euphoria in different ways. Some interact with chemicals in the brain which cause you to feel more aware and awake. Others affect different chemicals which make you feel relaxed and at ease.

There are a few things we have to note about this feeling of euphoria. The first is that it is not guaranteed to happen. Most drugs have an unpredictable effect on the brain and body. One person may feel wonderful, while another feels like she is living her ultimate nightmare. Drugs can cause feelings of intense paranoia, frightening hallucinations, uncontrollable anxiety, or physical pain and vomiting. In addition many drugs have the potential to kill you, even on your first dose. Here I am speaking of the drug itself directly causing your death.

Drug use also causes an increased risk of death from external events. This is because drugs alter your senses, and may prevent you from reacting appropriately to dangers in your environment. If, for example, someone gets injured while at a gathering where everyone is on drugs, those people might not have the mental awareness to know how to seek proper medical care for that person. Another obvious example is fatal car accidents resulting from intoxicated drivers. So, the first thing we can say about taking drugs in order to experience this euphoria is that we are taking a huge gamble. We are rolling the dice hoping for a good feeling, with the risk that we may have a miserable, terrifying experience or even die. That sounds like a huge risk to take just for a good feeling, but let's look at this euphoria a little closer. We learned that many people describe this euphoria as a state of being more "connected" with nature or "closer" to their friends. So is this true? Are those people really closer to friends and nature? The answer is NO! They are not closer, they are farther away. In order to understand why, we need to learn something about how we experience the world. Everything you experience in life, the sights, sounds, tastes, feelings, smells, is ultimately produced by your brain. Light, sounds, and other sensory data are processed by your brain, and the result is what you see or hear or touch or taste or smell. Looking at it this way, our brain creates a model of the world, which we in turn experience.

To give an example, if you hold your hand in front of you in the light, light reflects off of your hand and enters your eyes. Then your brain processes the light that reflects off of your hand and creates the image that you see. So

when we navigate the world, we are navigating a model produced by our brain. Now, what can we say about this model? Well, the first thing is that this model must be extremely accurate. Since our decisions are based on this mental model and the consequences are determined by the external world, it follows that the model produced by our brain must match the actual world to an extreme level of precision. To illustrate, imagine you walk to the edge of a cliff. If your brain misinterprets where you are at and what your surroundings are, you are going to be in serious danger. It is examples like this that make it obvious that, in order for humans to have survived for tens of thousands of years, our brains must be designed to be very in touch with the actual nature of reality. The model your brain produces matches the real world. So, in effect, you are experiencing the real world.

So, what role do drugs have in all of this? Drugs do not open up new or previously unused parts of the brain; they merely distort what is already there. Because our brains are so fine tuned to experience reality, these distortions are handicaps. Those people do genuinely feel closer to their friends, but this feeling is a distorted lie. What's more, is that because their brains are being distorted while they are on drugs, the pleasant feelings they experience cannot be accessed at any other time.

So, here we have it. What do we get when we use drugs? We get a temporary pleasurable experience. The feelings and insights produced by this experience are false and have no role in the rest of our lives. They cannot make our relationships with others better in any lasting way. And, of course, we always face the chance that we will not have a good experience. It is always possible that we will have a miserable and/or terrifying experience.

Now, let's move on to the second half of the equation. We know that for everything we will ever do, we will pay a price. Let's see what price we will pay for these temporary good feelings and fun times.

Chapter 12: Drugs- The Price You Pay



In this section, I will describe the price you pay for the temporary high and the temporary good times drugs can offer. When I scroll through the internet, looking at the questions young people ask about the consequences of using drugs, I am amazed. Over and over questions such as “can MDMA cause brain damage?” or “can you die from cocaine use?” are asked. It appears many young people are under the impression that there is a debate on whether taking drugs is risky and dangerous, or whether drugs can cause damage to your mind and body.

Make no mistake about it, it is absolutely true that drug use is dangerous and that drug use damages your mind and body! To clarify, there is some controversy as to what specific damage different drugs do. This is because the scientists who study this don’t yet have complete information. Further, they are always gathering new evidence, evidence which they must take into account. Even though the evidence they have so far doesn’t provide a *complete* picture, it is known with 100% certainty that drug use has definite dangers and definite health consequences.

When I try to understand why there is a perceived controversy when an actual controversy does not exist, I believe it has to do with the huge number of opinions and “facts” young people will hear about drugs from their peers, the media, and even concerned adults. Right now, I will again make the point that not everyone’s opinion has the same chance of being right. Later I will show you why most people are quite likely to tell you things that are blatantly not true. Next in this section, I will talk about the consequences of drug use in general. Just like the last chapter, not everything I describe will apply equally to all drugs. After this initial overlook, I will provide specific consequences of individual drugs. Once again, I must repeat that the risks, associations, and consequences I describe are true, based on evidence, and accepted without controversy by medical professionals.

The first thing you must realize about recreational drugs is that our body and minds are not designed to interact with them. To put it another way, they are unnatural for us. This applies equally to both recreational drugs that are made in labs (note: for some drug dealers the “lab” is often a bathtub where household chemicals are mixed) and recreational drugs that are found out in nature. In the sense I am describing, a drug can be grown naturally, but still not be natural for us. So, when our brain is tricked into releasing huge quantities of neurotransmitters, it is something that the brain isn’t designed to cope with. Our brain usually releases these in smaller quantities when we engage in rewarding activities. The result is that the natural functions of our brains become damaged and impaired. The receptors that receive and transmit those important chemical messengers can wither and die, potentially permanently. When this type of damage is done to our brains, we can feel depressed or confused for long periods of time, even after the drug has left our system. Drugs have been proven to cause damage to memory, concentration, and mood. Once again, at some point, this damage can become permanent and irreversible. Drugs can precipitate or worsen a whole range of mental problems. These include depression (feeling extremely

sad, tired, and hopeless almost all of the time, regardless of how good or bad your life actually is), bipolar disorder, anxiety, panic attacks, and schizophrenia. Many people think that such things only happen to drug users who are “weak.” They think that it is a matter of will power.

Let me talk about that for a moment. It is clear that humans do have some sort of will that makes us unique. Inanimate objects like rocks blindly obey physical laws. If you throw one up, it comes right back down in a predictable fashion. Other living things seem to respond to their environment based on instinct and fixed mental patterns. Humans seem unique among all creatures in that we make our own decisions, sometimes looking far into the future. We don’t mechanically respond to the outside world like rocks, or blindly obey our instincts like wild animals. Instead, we have the capacity to be our own cause, to exert our will on the environment. This is called free will, and it has puzzled philosophers for centuries. It is suggestive to many of an immaterial component of our being. In this line of thought, human beings are composed of more than a brain and a body. While this may be true, for the purposes of your basic mental and physical functions, you do not *have* a brain and a body, you *are* a brain and a body.

Just as you can’t run with two broken legs, you cannot be happy if the basic mental equipment responsible for controlling your mood is injured. The same applies to your other mental functions. Words like “weak” have no meaning in this context. Your body and mind’s reaction to drug use has nothing to do with will power.

Over time, drug use will cause you to enter into a prolonged mental state where you are incapable of experiencing pleasure. The technical term for this is anhedonia. With hard drugs like methamphetamine, this anhedonia can last for several years. Once it sets in, using more drugs becomes the only way to be happy. You can understand why it is so hard for many people to stop taking drugs, once they have started.

Another consequence of using drugs is changes in our personality. As we get older, all humans progress through stages of development, where our goals and motivations change. For example, when I was 5, I only wanted to play with other boys on the playground; I didn’t like girls. My parents would tell me that one day I would rather play with girls. I told them they were crazy, I would never want to play with girls. But sure enough, when I became a young adult, I became very interested in girls.

This is a good analogy. Just as I could not see how my development would take place in the future, it is hard for people who use drugs to see how drugs will change their personality over time.

The truth is the normal process of development is distorted by drugs. Remember that the release of chemicals in the brain induced by drugs is far more intense than can be achieved through any normal activity. As a result, the brain’s functions are altered and seeking that pleasurable experience can become the primary motivation. Often, procuring more drugs takes precedence over maintaining relationships with friends and family. There are plenty

of stories of people who have stolen from and lied to loved ones to fund their drug habit.

The consequences I have described are long-term, and tend to worsen over time. There are also plenty of immediate consequences for using drugs. Many young people who use drugs lose interest in their passions for sports and hobbies. These may be things they have participated in for most of their lives, which have given them great pleasure and purpose. Weekend drug and alcohol parties have resulted in terrible outcomes more times than can be mentioned. The truth is that the majority of these parties don't end in deaths, rapes, or serious injuries. On the other hand, many of them do, and this is a risk that users take every time they use drugs.

Stop and think about it for a moment. How would you feel if you killed one of your best friends in a car accident because you were "high?" What if you wrecked into someone and burned their entire body? What if you gave your friend some drugs and he or she died as result? I am not trying to bring you down. I am trying to help you get in touch with the reality of what may happen as the result of using drugs. The tendency is to think that it won't happen to you. The reality is that it has happened to thousands upon thousands of people, and they most likely never thought it would happen to them either.

Almost all recreational drugs also have the potential to be addicting. Addiction is now recognized as a medical disease. It is similar to other diseases in that certain people have a genetic predisposition to becoming addicted. For these people, the chemical reactions drugs cause in the brain alter the way the brain works in such a way that getting high becomes the overriding motivation in their lives. Addicts will steal, lie, and engage in prostitution, in short, do almost anything they can to get more drugs. In the last chapter I posed this question- "No one is going to do something if it doesn't benefit their life in some way, right?" In actuality, such people do exist. Addicts are the people who will destroy their lives with drugs, even when they know that is what they are doing.

Untreated addiction is a potentially fatal disease. When it comes to using drugs, addicts don't have a choice in the ordinary sense of the word. I am describing the basics of addiction because I want you to know all of the possible consequences of drug use. Not everyone has the potential to become an addict. It has a genetic component. In addition, childhood trauma seems to make some people more susceptible than others. No matter what your life has been like, there is no real way to know for certain if you have the potential to become an addict. The only way to make sure you never become an addict is to stay away from drugs and alcohol completely.

On top of all of this, drugs drain us of our money and hamper our careers. They are expensive, and the time we spend feeling their effects could be spent learning more about our careers and interests. Getting caught possessing or selling drugs can get you put in jail and result in a criminal record. For many people, getting a criminal record means losing their job. Legal trouble is something you want to stay far away from, period.

In this chapter, I have revealed consequence after consequence of using drugs. There is one more thing to con-

sider. That is- drugs are lethal. In almost all cases, prolonged drug abuse will result in your death. This adds an additional factor that must be considered. That is- we cannot use drugs forever. If we start, we have two choices, we either stop or we die. Knowing ahead of time that we have to stop, we must ask ourselves- what will we have to show for the time and money we have invested in using drugs? The answer is damaged relationships, a damaged mind, and a damaged body. Adding this all together means that the price we pay to use drugs is enormous. I mentioned before that it is important to invest some of your time and resources into preparing for the future. I used the example of debt, and how we can borrow money and live well today, and then have to pay for it in the future. Drug use is the ultimate example of investing all we have into today, and ruining our future. You spend your brain cells, your bodily health, your money, and your time, and have nothing to show for it in the end.

So, I'll finish this chapter by starting all over again. We know that with every choice we make, we must ask ourselves what we get and what we give up in return. I have shown that the sole benefit of using drugs is a temporary good feeling and a temporary good time, which come at the cost of the long-term destruction of our minds, bodies, finances, and relationships. This is pretty simple, and you may not have heard it put that way before. If you ask around, many people will tell you something quite different. In the next section, we'll learn a little about how humans think, and why they say the things they do about drugs. Before we go on, as I have promised, the next pages of this chapter will give a detailed summary of the risks and consequences of specific, commonly used recreational drugs.

Note about the following information: I am not qualified to give medical advice and make professional judgments on the implications of medical research. What I can do is summarize or state nearly verbatim what other professionals have determined. This material was taken from medical textbooks, The Center of Disease Control Website, or is a quote from a medical professional obtained from an external website. You can find references at the end of the book.

Supplemental Information about specific drugs-

Alcohol- The fact that alcohol is legal for adults aged 21 and above may lead some to believe that alcohol is a harmless drug. Alcohol abuse without question has definite risks and health consequences. In fact, it has been estimated that alcohol related deaths totaled 79,000 per year in the United States from 2001-2005.¹

Alcohol:²

- Is a leading cause of liver disease and liver related mortality.
- When consumed 3 or more times per day, increases the risk of esophageal cancer tenfold, when compared to drinking less than 1 drink per day.
- Increases the risk of heart disease with chronic use.³
- Alcohol is addictive and has withdrawal symptoms, including nausea, shaking, and anxiety. Many people who drink alcohol develop alcoholism, which is a deadly disease.

Stimulants- Amphetamine, Methamphetamine, and Cocaine

Stimulants have the following potential short-term and long-term effects on health-⁴

- headaches
- reduced appetite
- weight loss
- damage to brain cells that contain dopamine and serotonin⁵ (neurotransmitters which regulate mood, movement, and feelings of pleasure- this effect was indicated for methamphetamine in my research)
- the depletion of dopamine resulting from this can cause symptoms similar to Parkinson's disease, a severe and debilitating movement disorder
- malnourishment
- visual and auditory hallucinations
- sensations of bugs crawling under the skin (again, attributed to methamphetamine)
- nausea
- abdominal pain
- kidney damage
- liver damage
- tissue damage
- respiratory failure
- chest pain
- depression
- psychosis (this is the technical term for losing your mind)
- heart failure
- paranoia
- strokes

- seizures
- severe dental problems

Marijuana- The idea that marijuana is a harmless drug is a myth. Look at what addiction specialist Dr. Drew Pinsky said in an online discussion with Good Morning America-

“There is absolutely no doubt that ongoing marijuana use creates depression, memory problems and functional impairment. I am of the opinion that this is all reversible with sustained abstinence. This has not been specifically established in the medical literature.”⁶

Here are some more facts about marijuana-

Marijuana contains up to 50% more carcinogens (chemicals that cause cancer) than tobacco smoke. In addition, because most users do not smoke marijuana through filtered cigarettes, tend to inhale more smoke than tobacco users, and hold the smoke in their lungs longer, smoking marijuana results in substantially greater tar deposits in lungs than in the lungs than smoking filtered tobacco cigarettes.⁷

Although the medical field does not yet have a complete picture, chronic marijuana use has been associated with the following-⁸

- Increased risk of respiratory illness
- Increased risk of heart attack
- Respiratory cancer
- Impaired immune system
- Lower performance on tests of various aspects of mental performance, including selective attention, short-term memory, verbal learning, complex reason, and complex reaction time
- Lower academic performance
- Potential for lasting memory loss⁹

It is important to note that the effects listed have been associated with marijuana use, meaning that studies suggest that someone who smokes marijuana has a higher probability of experiencing these effects than someone who doesn't. It has not been established whether marijuana is the sole cause of all or any of these.

On a final note, marijuana can be addictive and there is a high risk of suicide associated with marijuana withdrawal.¹⁰

Hallucinogens (LSD, Psilocybin, and Mescaline)

Hallucinogens cause a change in the perception of reality¹¹. Users become disoriented, and may become confused, terrified, or think they are dying. The latter effects are referred to as “a bad trip.” The following are risks of a LSD “bad trip”, which doctors refer to as an acute panic episode¹²

- frightening illusions and hallucinations
- overwhelming anxiety
- depression
- being suicidal
- paranoid delusions (false beliefs such as “people are out to get me”)
- LSD can cause damage to the brain's serotonin system, which can lead to depression.¹³
- Psilocybin, which is found in hallucinogenic mushrooms, and mescaline, which is contained

in the buttons of a peyote cactus act similarly to LSD on the brain in producing their hallucinogenic effects. They detach users from reality and can invoke confusion and perceptual distortion.¹⁴

MDMA (known as ecstasy to users)

MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine) is a chemical relative to methamphetamine. It has been shown to be toxic to the nervous system (which includes the brain) and to cause impairment of memory, attention span, and verbal reasoning.¹⁵

MDMA damages the brain's serotonin system, which can lead to depression.¹⁶ There is also a small risk of death from MDMA intoxication.

Opiates (Heroin, Codeine, Morphine, and others)

Long-term and short-term health consequences include:¹⁷

- Tolerance
- nausea
- confusion
- constipation
- sedation
- respiratory depression and arrest
- weight loss,
- reduction in sex hormone levels
- frequent infections
- unconsciousness
- coma
- hostility
- paranoia
- kidney and liver damage

In addition, the risk of death from overdose of opiates is high.

Tobacco

Tobacco is a drug, and although it is legal, it has very severe consequences for your health. Because of this, I will give some details about the dangers of tobacco.

Here are some quick facts-

- Tobacco is known to increase the risk of over 25 fatal diseases¹⁸
- Tobacco smoking has been estimated to cause around 400,000 premature deaths per year in the United States, and 4.9 million deaths per year worldwide.¹⁹
- The main active ingredient in tobacco is nicotine; nicotine is highly addictive.

There are too many drugs to give a full description of the effects of them all. The drugs I have covered are some of the most frequently used recreational drugs. The point of this is to give you specific information showing that recreational drug use has definite risks and consequences, and also to demonstrate that I have used factual information in preparing this chapter.

Chapter 13: What The Media Say About Drugs



Let's compare what we have just learned about drugs with the way they are presented in movies, television, and other forms of entertainment. Actually.....let's not. Movies, television sitcoms, fiction books, and music have absolutely nothing to do with reality. It is all make believe. The only rational thing to do is to completely ignore the way drugs (or anything for that matter) are presented in made up entertainment.

Movies can have flashy special effects and portray characters as heroes with exaggerated qualities that no real person can match up to. They are entertaining and can serve as an escape from the real world. What you must understand is that when you leave the theater, flip the channel, or turn off your mp3 player, you are right back in the real world. The consequences of your choices will be determined by the way things *really* are, and not by how they were presented in made up entertainment. Fictitious notions of life should be given zero weight in making real world choices.

Let's move on to the way real people are presented in the media. Many famous people are notorious for using drugs. Some of them even promote getting high as a good way to live. The first thing to understand about these people is that using drugs had nothing to do with their success. No one is going to pay you to drink, smoke, snort, or inject illegal substances.

It is true that some of them promote drugs in their music. Promoting drug use will get you an audience. But these records sell because there is a market for that music, not as a result of the artist using drugs.

Hollywood often portrays stars who use drugs in a very glamorous fashion. Superstars seem to have the life we all dream of. However, if you look a little closer, you may see that it is not all it's cracked out to be. Making role models out of famous people is a risky business. Psychological studies have shown that people who are driven to be in the limelight often have personality dysfunctions. These include narcissism and other self-centered personality orientations. The effect of these dysfunctions is that they often make unhealthy choices and experience unnecessary hardship in their lives (not to mention causing their family and friends untold grief). If you examine these superstar's lives, you will see that drug and alcohol abuse messes up their lives just the same as it does those of laypeople. I remember when Paris Hilton was arrested and charged with a DUI. She seemed to receive more news coverage for this incident than did the D.C. snipers for killing innocent people. She also ended up spending a little time in jail. I can tell you for certain, that a "little time" being locked up is a whole lot more time than you think. It may be desirable to have the money and fame of a Paris Hilton, but being in jail equals misery no matter who you are or how much money you have. History is also full of stars that have ended up in hospitals, became suicidal, ruined their health, or died prematurely as a result of drug use. Do your homework and you'll find that drug use and abuse virtually always causes problems for the rich and famous. We must keep their

financial success and their self-destructive habits separate in our minds. The work ethic of many famous people is worth emulating, as is their ambition. Their bad habits, on the other hand, definitely are something we should stay away from.

One final topic for this chapter is the cases of famous people who regularly use soft drugs like marijuana, and still maintain their wealth and fame. The thing you must understand about these people is that they are a dramatic exception to the rule. For every star that makes it super huge while still using drugs and alcohol, there are thousands of people you never see who have squandered their minds, bodies, and life's ambitions for the sake of temporary good feelings and short lived good times. In this chapter we have learned that entertainment has nothing to do with reality. We learned that we should ignore the way things are presented in made up movies, books, and music. We also learned that the famous and wealthy are not immune to the consequences of using drugs. Next, we will look at what other people will tell us about drugs, and why they do.

Chapter 14: What Other People Say About Drugs



So, the only benefit of using drugs is a temporary good feeling and/or temporary good times that come at the cost of the long-term destruction of our bodies, minds, relationships, and careers. This is true for virtually everyone from everyday people to the rich and famous. Why then, do we hear so many different viewpoints? Why doesn't everyone we talk to about drugs tell us this? Well, first, let me repeat a few things. Number one is that the facts I have presented about drugs' risks and long-term effects are true. These are supported by research and accepted by medical professionals trained and experienced in treating drug users. Second, the basics I gave you about the way drugs interact with a user's brain, and how they produce the good feelings they do are also true. I do not have the training, education, or technical skills to fully understand exactly how the brain works, but anyone who does their own research will find that I have captured the gist of it very accurately.

So when a drug user says something other than "I use drugs to get a temporary good feeling and/or have a temporary good time at the cost of damaging my body and mind" they are telling you something that doesn't reflect the facts. Our task then, is to find out what is behind the things they do say, and why what they say doesn't reflect reality.

Now, if you go and ask someone who uses drugs why it is that they do, do you think they'll have an answer? I will tell you that they almost certainly will. In fact, people will have a "reason" for why they do anything. Notice I put reason in quotation marks. This is because people's so called reasons for doing things are often not based on reason at all.

You see, we humans have a peculiar habit called *rationalization*. Rationalization is simply a process where we engage in a certain behavior, and then make up a reason why our behavior was logical *after we have engaged in the behavior*. We also frequently rationalize why we should do things we want to do in the future. This is because we, as humans, want our choices to make sense; we want to be logical. If we don't have a logical reason for doing something our tendency is to make up a reason for why doing that thing makes sense, most often without even knowing what we are doing! For example, a bank robber might say "bankers are greedy; they rip off people every day. I shouldn't feel bad about stealing from them." If you begin to look for it, you can see people rationalizing their behavior all of the time. You will also find yourself doing it. I know I do it all of the time. So, understand that anytime anyone does anything, they will have a "reason" for why they do it, and, at least on the surface, that reason will seem to be logical.

A very interesting thing about the rationalizations people use for taking drugs is that, when thought about carefully, they don't make any sense at all. Let's look at a few of these rationalizations-

“I am not hurting anyone but myself.”

??? Since when did deliberately hurting yourself make any sense at all?

“I have been taking MDMA for years, and it hasn’t hurt my health at all.”

??? This is called denying reality. Would you believe someone who tells you “I have smoked 3 packs of cigarettes every day for 10 years, and my lungs are in perfect shape”? In both cases the subject is saying something that cannot be true.

“You only live once.”

??? And therefore you should deliberately swallow poison? You should make choices that ensure you will have ample misery in your only life?

“There is nothing else to do in my town.”

??? Does such a place exist in the Western world? You don’t have any games to play, hobbies, books, people to converse with, outdoor activities, anything other than self-destructive habits that ruin your life?

“Drugs help me get into an alternate reality.”

??? There is no such thing as an “alternate reality.” No matter what you smoke, drink, snort, or otherwise ingest, gravity still exists, Mike Pence is still a republican, and the earth still revolves around the sun. The outside world is the exact same place it has always been.

The list goes on and on. I won’t debunk every single drug user’s rationalization, but I do want to focus on one more in detail. Many people use drugs because they think it will help them overcome certain social problems. Let me assure you that nearly every single person who has ever lived has at some point dealt with one or more of the following:

Being shy

Having low self-esteem

Not knowing what to say to members of the opposite sex

Self-consciousness

Being overweight

Lack of confidence

Feeling worthless

Self-doubt

Not being popular

Feeling like others don't understand them

Not knowing how to handle conflict

Not sticking up for themselves

Feeling overwhelmed by life

I could probably add more to that list if I wanted, but I am getting to a point. Challenges like those described above can be dealt with in two ways- either constructively or destructively. Using drugs to overcome these is destructive, the harm caused to your body and mind far outweighs any supposed benefit you may get. Notice I said "supposed benefit." I see no reason whatsoever why using drugs can help with any of these in any lasting way.

Over the years I have heard people say things like "I used to be so shy, but after I started smoking weed I became a really social person." Another variation of this is "I used to pick on other kids in school. Doing MDMA changed that. Now I am kind to everyone." People probably say these types of things because they genuinely believe using drugs changed them in some positive way. Their beliefs are based on faulty logic.

To illustrate, read the following sentence- "When I was 10, I couldn't lift 50 pounds. Then when I was 18, I started smoking cigarettes. Now, I can lift 200 pounds. Smoking cigarettes made me stronger." See how this works? The logical structure of this sentence is "x happened before y, therefore x caused y." This is an example of something called a *logical fallacy*. Of course, smoking cigarettes doesn't make anyone stronger. The person in the third sentence got stronger because he grew up. Virtually all adults are stronger at 18 than they were at 10. It is the same for the quotes from drug users I gave you above.

The mere process of maturing and gaining more social skills through experience will help you overcome problems such as shyness or picking on others. This will happen whether you use drugs or not. It is a mistake to attempt to solve these problems by using drugs. Our world is full of people who have overcome their interpersonal difficulties and live wonderful lives without the use of drugs. You can do the same. It is also true that you don't have to get high to have the same good interactions and experiences that people claim to have as a result of using drugs. What's more, because your mind isn't being temporarily distorted, the relationships you have and the connections you develop can have continued significance throughout your life. You can do all of the following without using drugs-

Laugh

Have a good time

Meet new people

Have parties

Express your feelings openly

Get closer to your loved ones

Meet your dream boy or girlfriend

Enjoy the sunset

Have religious experiences

Ponder existence and the universe

Be kind to others

Help the less fortunate

Concentrate on your school work

Have a social life

Be creative

The list goes on and on. People have performed basic life tasks and had life experiences such as these for millennia without the aid of drugs. There is no reason to use drugs in an attempt to have artificial feelings and relationships when you can have genuine feelings and relationships stone cold sober.

Chapter 15: A Note About People- Be Skeptical



The last chapter was enjoyable. I find the way people work to be a fascinating topic. In that spirit, let's look at some other aspects of human psychology and see what they can help us understand. What do you think it takes to make someone believe something? What are the qualities of an idea or "fact" that has the potential to become a widespread belief? You may think of many.

One in particular stands out for me. That is- People tend to believe things that feel good to believe. On the contrary, people often won't accept facts that are unpleasant, even if others can easily see that they are in denial.

To give you an example, I was taking classes to get my real estate license in 2005. This was right in the peak of the housing boom. There were a few commentators in the media who were warning that the bubble would burst. I laughed at them. I was sure it would go on for a very long time, and so were many of my classmates. Now, here is the question- why did we think it would continue? I didn't even have anything beyond a high school education at that point, and I was predicting the future economy with certainty. Does that sound a little odd, like maybe I wasn't quite qualified to say what would happen? Remember, I was in school planning on selling real estate in the near future. I thought the market would get better because I wanted it to. It felt so good to think about all of the money I would be making, that I couldn't help but believe that.

When I went to work a few years later, I reassured people who were worried because no one was coming to look at their house. The season is just coming a little late, I said. People will show up; they always have. I was being perfectly honest with my clients. I told them exactly what I believed. The problem was I had deceived myself. It is important to understand that I am not unique in my ability to deceive myself. All people are capable of deceiving themselves. Be aware of this when people tell you things about drugs. Most long-term drug users have deceived themselves, and a person who has deceived himself cannot tell you the truth.

Another thing I have noticed that makes me feel very skeptical when talking with others is that, for some reason, people don't seem to jive with the concept of "I don't know." Most women seem to think they are relationship experts. Many men seem to think they know everything about everything. In my judgment, if you ask someone a question about a topic that requires specialized knowledge, 95% or more of the time their answer will be completely false nonsense.

People will assume the posture of an expert and speak with a confident tone when they haven't done any research or study into the topic they are speaking about. The best route to finding out the truth is to speak to qualified experts and do your own research into credible sources. This is the reason that if you ask 100 everyday people about the consequences and risks of using drugs, you may get dozens of very different answers. It is safe to assume that almost all of these answers are crap. However, if you ask 100 addiction specialists about the

consequences of using drugs, you will get 100 very close or identical answers. There is only one truth about any given situation, and people who have systematically studied drug use will come to very similar conclusions because they have zeroed in on that one truth.

Chapter 16: Be Prepared



If you have come to the conclusion that the price you pay to use drugs is excessive, and that you would rather have life-long fulfillment, then this chapter should help you. I want to talk about being prepared for situations where others offer you drugs. A person who offers you drugs may be a friend, or someone you would like to be friends with. You may be at an event where lots of other people are using drugs. In situations like this, there can be a great temptation to try drugs just to fit in. It is hard to stand out from a crowd or tell a friend no.

I fully understand this feeling. It is natural to want to be a part of a group. But you must remember that life is fragile and unfair, and that life will punish you for making bad choices. It doesn't matter if the pressure you face is understandable or not. You must also understand that compromising your values to get others to like you will cause them to lose respect for you in the long run. What people respect is someone who sticks up for what they believe in no matter what. Peer acceptance can also be used to manipulate you into making bad choices. There is absolutely nothing to gain by letting this affect you. Many young people say to themselves that they will "only try it just this once." This is almost never the case.

From what I saw when I was young, almost every single person who ended up a career drug user said the exact same thing. Doctors will tell you that the release of pleasure creating chemicals resulting from using drugs has an effect on your brain. Your brain will want to recreate that experience and you will find it harder to resist drugs that second time. The absolute best way to ensure that you don't end up facing serious consequences from drug use is to never try drugs in the first place, not even once.

Chapter 17: What Can You Be, Do, or Have?



Most young people are in a stage of their life where they want to decide what they want to do with their life. Before you decide what you want to do, you must determine what your options are. There are many different career paths to take. For instance, some people are doctors, others are accountants, missionaries, actors, musicians, investors, athletes, artists, restaurant managers, business owners, physicists, biologists, mechanics, engineers, race car drivers, business executives, pilots, construction workers, and the list goes on.

So, the next question is, out of all of the options, which are available to you? What could you be? What could you have? Many people think that to have the really exciting careers, you have to be some sort of genius. This isn't true. The reality is there are not enough geniuses to go around. The whole world is run by average people. But while we are on the subject, there have been many geniuses who have made extraordinary achievements in their lives. Maybe there is something we can learn from them. Let's look at an example.

One of the most legendary artists of all time is Vincent van Gogh. His paintings have sold for as much as \$82.5 million. What was his secret to creating such masterpieces? If you look closely, one clue sticks out. From 1880 to 1890 van Gogh produced 1100 paintings and 900 sketches. That equals 2000 pieces of artwork. That averages to 4 pieces of artwork every single week for 10 years! Sounds like he was busy, doesn't it? Remember that he was in his mid to late twenties at the beginning of this time period. Van Gogh had been studying and creating art since he was a child.

If we look at others who have great achievements, we find a similar obsessive work ethic. Nobel Prize winning writer Ernest Hemingway believed in writing and rewriting his novels and short stories dozens or even hundreds of times before publishing them. Legendary escape artist Harry Houdini studied the mechanics and workings of locks day and night. World champion billiards players have admitted to playing 12 to 20 hours a day over a period of several years. Albert Einstein revolutionized physics, and his is regarded as one of the greatest minds of all time. This is what he said about his achievements- "It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer." Was he being modest? I think so, but maybe he knew that an extreme work ethic had a role in his greatness too.

It is likely that Albert Einstein was much smarter than you or I, but the gap between his and our intelligence is probably smaller than the gap between his and our work ethic.

If you are in a store and you see someone walk in, and they have arms bigger than your legs, a huge muscular chest, and veins popping out all over their body, you intuitively know that that person has spent much more time in the gym than you have. Understand that the process of learning and developing skills is very similar to growing muscles.

Scientists say that when we intensely focus on learning or repetitively practice skills, our brains establish new connections and become more efficient at executing what we have learned. So when you see someone who is far better than you at something, understand that they have without a doubt practiced that skill far more than you have. It follows that you could replicate their success and abilities if you too put in intense practice and effort over time. It appears putting in enormous effort over time is the big secret to having great success.

Now, it may very well be the case that you and I don't have the mental ability to revolutionize physics the way Einstein did, regardless of how much we work at it (of course, the opposite could also be true!). I still passionately believe that the average person can do anything she wants if she works at it. And if you do have a dream of being a famous scientist or accomplishing and huge intellectual feat, then I would take your desire itself as evidence that you have the ability to do that. All of us have strengths and weaknesses. The thing is our weaknesses don't really matter, because the things we are drawn to and interested in almost always involve our strong points. For instance, I am the absolute worst at basketball. In the past 2 decades my lack of skill at basketball hasn't caused me a nanosecond of distress. Basketball isn't something that interests me. I like books, calculators, and computers, and I am very good with those.

So, the conclusion of this chapter is that you can be, do, and have whatever you want. Your dreams and the things you are interested in are reflections of your strengths, and there is no obstacle that you cannot overcome by an intense work ethic. The greatest men and women to ever exist were made of the same stuff you are. Think big, dream big, and work hard!

Chapter 18: Deciding What to Do



Now that we know we can do anything, it's time to decide what we want to do. Some people know what they want to do from a very early age, and stick with one career goal from very early on. To give an example, legendary pop star Michael Jackson started his career as an entertainer when he was eight. People such as Jackson, who follow one path for their entire lives, are the exception. Jackson himself, of course, was a dramatic exception and a very rare individual in many ways.

Many of us are unsure of what we want to do when we are young. This chapter will help you decide what you want to do. If you are somewhat or completely unsure of what you want to do, I think a good way to find out is to look at many different things and start trying some out.

You see, we tend to really like things that we are good at, and the better we are at something the better we like it. Some people are lucky and have parents or friends who introduce them to certain interests or hobbies at a very early age. Since they started so young, they are usually quite good at them by the time they are a young adult. On the other hand, if something is new to you, it will present a challenge. This means that you will have to accept being a beginner at something.

Some people don't like being a beginner. It can be boring, because we want to do the flashy things that others with more experience can do. Those few who stick with something learn a secret. They learn that just around the corner from being a beginner is a whole lot of fun. If you can stick it out through the initial clumsiness of being a beginner, you will find that a whole new world opens up to you. You get better and better at certain skills and make connections you previously didn't see. You occasionally have peak experiences, where you perform well outside of your ordinary abilities. You begin to sense the mastery that lies ahead. If you have yet to have this experience of becoming skilled at something, you are in for a wonderful treat. Once you do, you may well find your life's calling.

It will likely take some trial and error to determine what you really enjoy. To get a better idea, there are a few things that can point the way. One is our unique strengths. In comparison with others with equal experience you may-

Be good with numbers

Understand people

Be exceptionally athletic

Be a good writer

Be good at taking things apart or putting things together

Have good communication skills

Have a knack for computers

Have excellent reading comprehension

Have exceptional endurance

Learn different games quickly

Have a very logical mind

This is just a list to get you started. You may want to write down your strengths. You can pick from the list above or make your own. Once you've determined your strengths, look at your values. Your values are the things that you believe are important. They motivate or inspire you. Here are some examples of some of the values you may have-

Excellence

Mastery

Love

Justice

Social harmony

Compassion

Equality

Wealth

Security

Freedom

Knowledge

Helping others

Health of the environment

Faith

Charity

Discovery

Prestige

Exploration

Kindness

Peak experiences

Learning

Resourcefulness

Self-reliance

Entrepreneurship

Self-improvement

Challenge

Once again, you can add to the list. The last thing we will look at is the kinds of activities you are drawn to.

These are things that fascinate you or that you do for fun. If you can find a profession or life mission that incorporates the things you like to do, you are definitely on the right path. Maybe you like to-

Give relationship advice

Play mentally challenging games

Exercise

Learn about people

Play a certain sport

Draw

Paint

Be creative in decorating or adorning your home or bedroom

Study philosophy

Debate issues

Crunch numbers

Learn about fashion or beauty

Meet people

Organize social events

Build

Learn about other cultures

Learn new languages

Learn about history

Solve difficult math problems

Work with your hands

Add of course, just like the previous lists, you can add your own. Putting your strengths, values, and interests together can give you a good idea of what you want to do or what you would like to try or explore. I must restate the point- if you don't know what you want to do, make it your goal to find out. If you don't know right now, you still won't know in 10 years if you don't do something about it. Start trying different things. You have plenty of time for trial and error. Don't get caught up in picking the perfect right thing either. If you try several different things and you like them all, pick the best one or just pick one period. The process of learning and developing your skills is what is so enjoyable. There are many paths on which you can experience this process.

Chapter 19: Four Master Keys to Getting Everything You Want



“What the mind of man can conceive and believe, it can achieve.”~ Napoleon Hill

In the last chapter, I encouraged you to dream big. In this and the following chapters, I will give you tips on how to get anything you want in life. Your dreams are real, as real as the sun rising up tomorrow. We live in a universe governed by law. If I drive to a certain location and you know the roads I took to get there, then you can simply go down the same roads and take the same turns as did I. You will end up exactly where I am every time.

Similarly, if you study what others have done to succeed in life, and practice their habits and skills, then you can be successful too. Right now your dreams may only exist in your mind. All dreams of all great thinkers and achievers began in their minds as well. Understand that what you want can be yours and will be yours if you only take the right steps to get it. The things I am going to talk about in the next few chapters take time to understand and implement. These are not skills and concepts just for next week or next month. These are things that will help you throughout your entire life.

Don't expect to understand everything I say immediately. If something doesn't seem relative to your life right now, don't worry about it. It will be relevant down the road. I will present four keys to getting everything you want. These keys work for virtually everyone in almost all situations. The four keys I present will help you get what you want in all areas of your life. These keys are related to one another.

Key #1: Mastery

To have success we must develop mastery. Mastery is a concept I was introduced to by a book by George Leonard. I define mastery as the life-long process of getting better at certain skills, and learning more about certain subjects. It is a road that you stay on forever, not a place you arrive at.

In his wonderful book *Mastery*, author George Leonard describes the universal process of mastering anything. He explains that if you break down any skill to its fundamental level, the process of mastery is exactly the same. It doesn't matter if it's flying an airplane, writing a poem, or playing basketball.

The biggest lesson I learned from Leonard's book is that developing mastery always takes time. You must stay with the same skill or subject for an extended period of time, possibly your entire life. You will get better as a result of practice and daily effort.

Leonard describes how we will practice a certain skill for weeks or months, and not believe we are improving. Then, one day, we open our word processor and begin typing, or go to the basketball court, and we discover that we have gotten better. Even though we didn't realize it, we had been learning the whole time, and our increased ability was a result of that learning.

You will not get better at things by huge leaps of skill, but by small, incremental advances. This is like taking steps up a mountain. We put one foot in front of the other, one at a time, and eventually, after our steps have accumulated, we reach the top. Of course, our lifetimes aren't long enough to truly reach the top of any difficult skill. This is why mastery is a process and not a destination. Next, I will describe the concept of undivided attention, which is fundamental to mastery.

Key #2 Undivided Attention

Undivided attention means putting your focus on one thing at a time. Perhaps the best way of understanding undivided attention is to look at divided attention. There are two types of divided attention, which I will call macro and micro divided attention.

Macro divided attention is when we set out to do too many things with our life. This is a long-term type of divided attention. Any complex subject you wish to learn is going to have an enormous depth of knowledge that has already been accumulated by others. Any difficult skill will require many years of practice to develop a high level of ability. Because learning one thing well requires so much time, we cannot aspire to becoming a master of several different things. There are very few exceptions to this general rule. You must pick one subject or skill and devote the majority of your time to it.

Of course, you can have many, many interests. For instance, you may be a lawyer but study history in your spare time (if you have any). The point is that you must accept that you will not be an expert in all of the things that interest you and resolve to becoming really good at one thing.

Micro divided attention is short-term divided attention. This is a daily bad habit for many people, and many people cannot escape it due to the requirements of their job or family role. To the greatest extent we can, and whenever we can, we should avoid micro divided attention. Micro divided attention is commonly referred to as multitasking- trying to focus our immediate attention on several things at once. The result is that our efforts are much less effective. For you, this may be trying to watch TV and do your homework at the same time. You have probably found that you don't get your homework done very fast doing this, and that you aren't very entertained either. When we do one thing at a time, and focus extended periods of time on a single task, our mind and body begin to calibrate to that specific task. We enter a state of mind where we are more efficient at doing that specific task. The result is we learn more, become better, and get more done in far less time, and with greater satisfaction. Let's move on to the next key.

Key # 3- The Accelerated Learning Curve

In our current society, we are at a very advanced state of understanding of most subjects. There has been a huge amount of knowledge accumulated about virtually every sport, hobby, career, you name it. When we make

use of this knowledge rather than trying to start from scratch, we progress at a much faster rate. This is like taking a big short cut in life. The accumulated knowledge on any given subject is the result of thousands of hours of hard work and frustration. We are quite lucky because the people who work so hard leave behind their understanding. We can buy the fruits of their labor online or at the book store. We can take advantage of what these people have learned while skipping all of that hard work! The lesson is that, whatever you want to learn or do, study what has been learned in the past and present about it. You will get to where you want to be at a dramatically faster rate.

Key # 4- Hard Work

This may not be what you wanted to see, but stick with me. Most people don't even want to hear the phrase "hard work"; they hate it. At one time, so did I. Nowadays, I love hard work. I look forward to working hard for the rest of my life. Why? Because hard work is like magic! It can get you anywhere you want and anything you want. It works every time!

Many people try to get around hard work and somehow beat the system. They are aided in this quest by pseudo self-help programs which fail to mention that all great achievements are the result of very hard work over a long period of time. If you give up the notion that life will be easy, and accept that the things you want will be hard to get, you start to have power that others don't have. While most people are on a futile quest to find the easy way out, you will be getting ahead. It is very exciting to make plans for our lives. We can feel a rush by thinking of the great things we will accomplish. However, once the original excitement wears off, many people fail to follow through with their plans. The implementation of our plans usually means putting in effort day after day. The tasks that will get us where we want to be aren't always fun. We must do them anyway.

Accept that the road to success in any area of life isn't going to be easy. Learn to do things you don't like doing in service of a big vision. If you combine hard work with the previous three keys, it will get you almost anything you want. By staying on the path of mastery and incrementally getting better at skills, you will ensure that the day will come when you are where you want to be in every area of your life. By practicing undivided attention, you will get far more done in both the short and long-term. By making use of an accelerated learning curve, you will be working harder AND smarter, and nothing will be able to stop you!

So there you have it. The four keys I have presented here are simple to understand. They are also extremely powerful and can change your life. Put them to use! We are nearing the end of the book. In the next few chapters I will give some tips on health, relationships, and finances.

Chapter 20: Tips on Health



This chapter will be brief. If you want to get medical advice, you have to seek a doctor. I will just make a few comments and share a few of my thoughts on health. Everyone is different and you must consult a doctor anytime you change your diet or exercise regimen. With this in mind, here are a few things I have observed about maintaining health.

#1 Food- There is an old saying that goes- “you are what you eat.” This is not something that most of our society has taken heed to. Our bodies are designed to crave salts, fats, and sugars. At some point, we discovered that if we load our food up with unnaturally high concentrations of these ingredients, it will taste really, really good. This was the birth of unhealthy food. Because most people buy food based on what tastes good, grocery stores shelves and restaurant menus are replete with foods that, if eaten in excess, can cause serious health problems.

#2 Exercise- That there exists such a thing as a multistory gym facility is a testament to the dramatically increased standard of living our society has experienced over the past few centuries. For much of our history, life meant hard physical labor for most people. The challenge for them was finding time to take a break. In contrast, our challenge is to make time to not take a break. Our whole lives look like a break when compared to the way most people throughout history have lived. We must compensate for the lack of exertion required in our daily lives by exercising several times a week.

#3 Rest- Doctors say that most people need 7-9 hours of sleep per night. Statistics say that most people get less. Doing nothing with your life is a waste. On the other end of the extreme are people who do far too much. Success and work can become addictive. Those who respect their bodies will find time to take a break and get proper rest. Again, these are just a few of my observations and opinions. Do not take this as medical advice. Talk to your doctor.

Chapter 21: Tips on Relationships



For almost all people, an essential part of a happy life is having relationships with others. Having healthy relationships starts from the inside out. They are largely the result of understanding people, having certain skills, and of certain internal beliefs about oneself. Let me give you some of my thoughts on people and relationships. There is much more to learn than what I cover here, but this will get you started.

#1 Understanding People- If we understand people, we have a far better chance of having good relationships with them. One thing to understand is that virtually all people are vain. When I say vain, I mean that people generally tend to have a high opinion of themselves. For example, most people will use such words as loyal, hardworking, intelligent, friendly, and/or a good leader to describe themselves. Of course, they may be all of things. The point is that even if they are not above average leaders or workers, they still will think such things of themselves. Some people have low self-esteem, but when I talk to them they too seem to have a high opinion of themselves. They usually feel like they are very desirable people but cannot get others to recognize that. People also tend to be somewhat selfish. Let me qualify that and make it clear that most people care about others and also do things for others. Few people are so completely self-centered that they neglect everyone in their life.

However, in general, a given person's problems and goals in life tend to overwhelm him much more so than do the concerns of others. So when you have relationships with people, be aware that they tend to care very much about their own lives and priorities. Martyrs are very few and very far between. Also understand that virtually all people, me included, have a view of themselves that tends to be higher than how others perceive them. My advice is just to accept this vanity. Don't feel threatened by it or ask people who in the world they think they are. Also realize you most likely do the same thing.

#2 Skills- Many things that help us have relationships are skills that we must learn over time. Like all skills, they may feel awkward when we are beginners. Here are a few skills you may want to work on.

Communication- It is important to be able to clearly express our feelings and needs. It is also important to understand what others mean when they communicate. Often what a person tries to communicate is very different than the technical definition of the words they use. For instance, if your girlfriend says "you never listen to me", what she may mean is "I am frustrated that you aren't listening to me *right now*."

Assertiveness- There are three styles of interacting with people, passive, aggressive, and assertive. People who use the passive style tend to put other's needs before their own. People who use the aggressive style often try to get their needs met at the expense of others. As you may have guessed, the assertive style falls in the middle. Being assertive means not being afraid to ask for what you need or voice your own opinion. It also means not letting others take advantage of you. Two things are worth noting. One is that assertiveness is a skill that must be

learned over time. Second is that most of us use all three styles some of the time.

Setting boundaries- Setting boundaries means putting limits as to what kinds of behaviors you will accept from others, as well as what you will do for others. Picture a blind folded person placed in a rubber room. How does this person know where the walls are? Well, he knows where they are when he runs into them. Your role in your relationships is to let people know when they hit a wall. They may be making romantic advances you aren't comfortable with or using language that makes you uncomfortable. Whatever it is, you have the right to determine what kinds of behavior you will tolerate from others. If they don't like it, they can find someone else.

There is also an element of flexibility in setting boundaries. Sometimes we set boundaries but then provide exceptions. For example, you may not normally like it when others use harsh language, but may choose to tolerate it from a friend when she is upset. I have a boundary that I don't give all of my money to people I don't know. However, if they have a gun in my face, I might make an exception.

#3- The Core Belief There are many beliefs that help us have good relationships. I can't go into all of them, but there is one main belief that I think plays the biggest role of all. That belief is "I am worth just as much as any other person on earth." Think about it. Right now, I live in an apartment that has plenty of comforts. I have nice appliances, an air conditioner, and running water. At this very same time, someone far away from me in some third world country is facing starvation and misery on a daily basis. Why is this? Does God love me more than he loves them? Am I more entitled to what I have than that person? The answer is that I happened to have been born in a wealthy country. I am lucky. There is nothing wrong with that person. There is nothing special about me.

This is the mentality you must have to have good relationships. In my life, I have known girls who stay with partners that abuse them. The thing that I always notice is how the girl treats her partner. She would never think of hitting him, but for some reason she doesn't feel entitled to the same respect. Now, what if you are really poor, bad at math, physically uncoordinated, or have something else others consider a flaw? What does that mean? The answer is absolutely nothing. Our worth as human beings is not determined by what we have or can do; our worth is determined by the fact that we are human. Either all of us deserve everything or none of us deserve anything. You are absolutely as entitled to receive as much respect and concern as every other person who has ever lived!

Chapter 22: Tips on Finances



Right now, you are probably trying to determine what to do with your life. You need a career. One of the main functions of a career is to provide you with income. How do we do that? My best advice for just about every young person is- get an education. If you're already in high school or college, you are doing the right thing. Some people try to say that getting an education is pointless. You'll notice that this mostly comes from people without an education. They say things like "all you get is a piece of paper" or "so and so went to college and it didn't help him." This reeks of rationalization. People say these things to make themselves feel better about not doing what they should have. It may be true that all you get is a piece of paper. But if the job you want requires that piece of paper before you can work there, then it's still worth it. If you have a 0% chance of getting that job without a degree and a 10% chance of getting it with one, then your odds are literally infinitely better with a degree.

Why would employers care who has a piece of paper and who doesn't? Well, think about it. Say there is a job that pays \$60,000 dollars a year. The company offering that job needs someone with discipline, time-management skills, and ability. Two people apply for the job. One person says- "I can manage my time extremely well. I have good math and writing skills, and many abilities relevant to this job." The other person says- "I have a college degree." If both people are the same in every other regard, who will be hired? The answer is the person with the degree.

The first person merely claims to have the necessary characteristics to perform the job. The second person has a college degree, and completing a college degree requires discipline, time-management, and math and writing skills. The second person has proof that he has those characteristics. I contest that all an education gets you is a piece of paper. If you put time and effort in it, you can learn things that will benefit you for life. You have to go in with your eyes open and knowing what kinds of careers are available for people with your degree. You must also put in effort. In my view it is one of the best things you can do.

To conclude this chapter, I'll give you some information about investing your money. This is something you will certainly want to do in the future, if you haven't already. Investing money means putting it away in some sort of asset. Assets are things that are worth money. When you invest, you want to invest in a particular kind of asset, called an appreciating asset. Appreciating assets have the potential to grow in value over time. Two of the major types of assets most investors choose are stocks and real estate.

Stocks are shares of ownership in a business. Buying stock is sometimes called buying shares. When you buy shares in Microsoft, you become a part owner of that company. The same is true for buying shares of any other company. There are many factors that determine how much a given stock is worth at any time. The basic idea is that if the company does well, then the price of its stock will increase. So if you own shares of Apple Computer

and Apple reports high earnings, the value of your shares will go up. The nice thing about stocks is that they can be sold easily. There is always a buyer. Anytime your stock goes up, you can sell it and take your profit. The flip-side of this is that if the company does poorly, your stock will lose value. It is possible to lose every single dollar you invested if the company goes bankrupt. So, how do you avoid the risk of losing some or all of your money? The answer is something called diversification.

Diversifying means that you don't just buy one company's stock. Instead, you spread your money out over 20-30 different companies' stock. This eliminates some of the risk of losing money because if you have 20-30 different companies' stock, it is extremely unlikely that they will all lose money. If one stock goes down, there will be others that go up. Many stocks also pay a dividend. A dividend is cash payment made to you out of the company's profits. You can spend your dividends, or you can invest them.

Types of real estate include shopping centers, apartment buildings, land, warehouses, office complexes, and medical facilities. There are two main ways to make money investing in real estate. One is through price appreciation; the other is through rent payments. Although our current real estate market is slow and real estate values have dropped, the long-term trend is that real estate goes up in value. So you can buy a piece of land and hold onto it, and then sell it 5 or 10 years down the road for a profit. Most real estate investors don't just rely on price appreciation, they usually rent out their properties. Say for instance, you buy a house through the bank and the monthly payment is \$900. If you can rent that property out for \$1,000 a month, then you will make a profit of \$100 every month. Over time, you will use the monthly rent payments from your tenants to pay off the house. After that, the entire \$1,000 is profit for you. The key to making money investing is to continually invest over a long period of time. If you only invest money for a year or two, you won't make much, but if you invest for 20 or 30 years, you can get very wealthy. I have described stocks and real estate. There are other kinds of investments, like bonds and precious metals. Bonds are a very common investment, and precious metals are popular with some people. The purpose of all this is to give you an idea of how investing works. You must study whatever you plan to invest in. There are plenty of books on stocks, real estate, bonds, precious metals, or any other type of investment. You must also be aware that investing always has a risk that you will lose money. If this all sounds complicated to you, don't worry. You have plenty of time to learn. In my view, investing is very important and I wanted to get you started in understanding how it works.

This is the last chapter in the book. Before we go, I want to give one final tidbit of advice on life. If you have some big dream that you would like to accomplish, there are two things I have to say about that dream.

Number 1- it is harder to accomplish your dream than you think. When we make plans, our minds make things seem easier than they actually are when we set out to implement them. You must be prepared to sacrifice more than you originally intended.

Number 2- whatever your dream is, you absolutely can do it. It will be harder than you think, but that doesn't matter in the end. You have more potential than you imagine. In fact, you have more potential than you can imagine.



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